

Examining an Advertisement for *Emerald Empire*:

A Sample Rhetorical Analysis for ENGL 112 at DeVry University in San Antonio

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The Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game centers on the fictional empire of Rokugan, itself based on feudal Japan with elements of Chinese, Mongolian, Korean, and other East and Southeast Asian cultures included. It was released in a new edition in 2018, with its core rules attracting no small amount of attention. A supplement to the game, *Emerald Empire: The Essential Guide to Rokugan*, was announced as coming swiftly afterwards, with details about its contents advertised on the website of its current owners, Fantasy Flight Games. The announcement of those details also met with no small attention; as a long-time player of the game, I join those interested in the product. I find that the detailed announcement does a reasonable job of convincing people already inclined to purchase roleplaying game products to spend their money on the forthcoming supplement.

The ad emerges from a company that owes its existence to both the innate need to play and the presence of significant populations with disposable income and free time. As an iteration of a long-standing intellectual property, it does work to address earlier audiences for similar products; it also works to bring in newer player who are less encumbered by the history of the intellectual property. Historically, this means the ad directs itself to a middle- or higher socioeconomic class, and, in the United States and Europe, this associates itself with white, professional populations. Target age ranges seem to be upper teens through early adulthood (generously low- to mid-30s, though even that generosity leaves me outside it), among which groups are found the most confluence of free time, available money, and focus on play. The audience is eminently desirable for a for-profit company to attract, as it is the audience most

likely to generate the profits for which such companies seek. It is helpful, then, that the supplement's advertisement seems likely to attract such an audience.

*Emerald Empire: The Essential Guide to Rokugan* is advertised on a static webpage. Leaving aside the framing links to other, related products and to the company's other online materials, it is formatted like a blog post, opening with a title banner and displaying an image of its subject: the forthcoming Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game supplement. Blocks of text interspersed with game art make up the remainder of the document, with the text dominating as it describes the contents of the advertised supplement. Major subject headings (Servants and Disciples, Castes and Customs, and Lands of Wonder) are given attention. A note is made that more materials are forthcoming. The ad concludes with a call to purchase the supplement that includes a link to do so online. Making the purchase easier makes it more likely that the purchase will happen, and the situation of the specific product in the broader context of the product line helps to justify that purchase; both help the advertisement to succeed.

The advertisement deploys logos, systematic development of argument, only tacitly. As a whole, it seeks to encourage purchase of the advertised product; if there is an argument it makes, it is "Buy this thing." But no system of reasoning is evidenced; no overt chain of argument appears. Rather, the advertisement appears to allow readers' minds to work on their own. Such work promotes engagement with the advertisement and its subject, making success in getting people into the game more likely.

The ethos, appeals to audience credulity, in the advertisement are several. One such deployment is in the images displayed. Those images are of high quality and exceptional detail. Their inclusion serves to connote a degree of professional polish in the game supplement, making it appear to be a more authoritative product. Additionally, the detail in the text, laying

out the contents, serves to provide additional information to the audience, allowing them to make better judgments; it is a commonplace to connect the provision of evidence to authority to speak on a topic, so the inclusion of detail speaks to ethos. Further, the tacit ethos appeal of ownership applies; the company producing the supplement is the current sole authority over its content, so it is necessarily authoritative. That authority joins the tacit logos appeal in making the advertisement more likely to succeed.

The advertisement makes substantial use of pathos, appealing to audience emotional responses. By taking an informal, second-person tone, it seeks to create a rapport between the audience and the product being described. The effect is enhanced by specific phrasing appearing throughout; it runs towards the evocative and florid (if, at times, bordering on the bombastic), its prosody and figuration working to invite consideration and engagement. Additionally, the many images embedded into the text serve to impress audiences, not only developing ethos as noted above, but also inviting an engagement that is ultimately affective, thus emotional, in nature. And the genre of the advertisement is one that typically relies on emotional appeals to make its case; by that very nature, the advertisement is itself a pathos appeal enfolding others. Roleplaying games are inherently narrative constructions, and most narratives attract attention because of how they make people feel. Promoting feeling through such pathos appeals as the advertisement makes thus increases the chances that people will engage with the gaming materials, themselves.

Taken together, the appeals to pathos and ethos join the tacit appeal to logos to produce a reasonably convincing case for those who will play roleplaying games to purchase *Emerald Empire: The Essential Guide to Rokugan*. I expect I will be among their number. More

importantly, I expect that many others who have yet to invest the time and effort into the overarching intellectual property will do so, as well.

The advertisement can be found at

<https://www.fantasyflightgames.com/en/news/2018/11/6/those-who-serve/>.