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## The Four Card Types and Deck Archetypes (Part 1)

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*These four cards are good in almost any deck, regardless of factions.*

Everyone knows factioning is good. If you can stick to buying one or two colors you are more likely to play them together and get their faction bonuses, thereby increasing the efficiency of your cards and the effectiveness of each turn. In an ideal world, you can choose which cards would be available for you to buy ahead of time to maximize this strategy, while keeping your opponent from maximizing theirs. In this world, however, the trade row and your opponent don't always cooperate with you so you must think more flexibly and adapt to changing circumstances and create cohesive decks not just based around factions but around what the cards actually do and when they will be played. While factioning can provide useful bonuses throughout the game, the real key to victory is purchasing cards for their primary ability in time to be played in the phase of the game where that ability is most useful and by purchasing cards that fit your deck archetype and counter your opponent's archetype.

This article is expanding on the concepts introduced by Benjamin Gartner (Benjotron) in [The Faction Fallacy](#) and his Strategic Wheel of Relative Dominance (SWORD). There are also several references to the works of Scott Heise (HomerJr) that I link to as I mention them. I would like to thank both of them for the brilliant work they've put into the game that has changed our collective understanding of it, and for letting me use their work here, and my thanks to Robert Dixon (Kinkade) for his coaching and feedback of this article.

In this article, I hope not to steer people away from factioning but to broaden the thought process to leave room for cards which may not faction but still work together to form a cohesive deck. One note is that I am not

discussing Events or Heroes here since they mess with the balance of factioning and timing of the game. I'll leave that for someone else to go into.

First let's look at the classical model of the four types of cards based on factions:

**Blob/Green:** High damage, good card draw, trade row manipulation.

**Machine Cult/Red:** Scraps away bad cards, strong defensive bases, decent all around.

**Star Empire/Yellow:** Force discards, good card draw, good damage.

**Trade Federation/Blue:** Life gain and economy.

Factioning within these colors can either improve what they're already good at or can sometimes fill holes in that color's game. It can sometimes give incidental bonuses like two damage or powerful ally abilities like a scrap or a draw or even base destruction. Going for a second color is usually a good idea but is often done out of necessity since the trade row or your opponent are not letting you get a monopoly on a certain color. Both colors are usually bought with trying to get one or both of their ally abilities to come together. People often think buying into a third or fourth color is undesirable since you are less likely to faction and they are less likely to go for the rainbow deck unless there is a really good card to sway them into it, or if the card draws to replace itself and therefore doesn't clog your deck to prevent factioning.

Now let's look at four types of things cards do, irrespective of faction:

**Economy:** Gives you resources to buy other cards.

**Defense:** Life gain and any base or outpost (unless they have auto base destruction).

**Combat:** Provide combat to damage your opponent and their bases, including base destruction.

**Card Advantage:** Draws a card, causes discards, cycles or scraps your bad cards.

The fifth thing a card can do is trade row manipulation but I'm not going to include it as a unique card type since it's only found in a few Blob cards and these concepts are meant to be more universal. It is an important aspect of the game warranting more discussion later though.

As you can see under this definition, each of the four factions all do more than one of these four things and even individual cards will fall into more than one of these categories. Let's explore each of these concepts individually.

**Trade/Economy:**



*Dense trade is a great way to get big cards and ramp up your deck.*

Trade or Economy gives you money to purchase other cards. It is very effective when purchased early but has diminishing returns later in the game, or if your opponent forces a short game by buying combat and you do not respond with defense. For every card you purchase there is usually a one-deck delay in when you can play it (unless you can topdeck it or acquire it into play like some Colony Wars cards), and therefore there is a two-deck delay from the time you purchase the economy card to the time you play a card you purchase with that economy. In a game with an average of only four and a half decks that delay represents a serious investment of time, and economy therefore needs time to pull off. Scott Heise (HomerJr) wrote about this in great detail in his seminal Pace of the Game two part series so I will not go into further detail since he pretty much nailed it.

### Defense:



*Lifegain and bases extend the game in your favor.*

Defense cards are any Trade Federation card which gives lifegain and every single base in the game that your opponent must spend combat on to remove, thereby granting you an extension on your authority every time you play that base. Note, bases which are safe for your opponent to ignore (a non-outpost base which does not advance your game such as a Breeding Site or Star Market if you have no other bases) do not fall under this definition. If your opponent has automatic base removal such as a Missile Mech or Leviathan, or a factioned Command Ship or Blob Destroyer, your base will not count for defense either since they are not spending combat to remove it. Be especially wary of this late game when factioning is more likely to happen with those cards and when they are more likely to scrap their Battle Cruiser, Port of Call, or Plasma Vent to automatically destroy your base. Defense is usually best reserved in the mid to late game since scrap and economy pay off

more in the early game, with the exception for Trade Federation cards which give you both lifegain and economy where the extra lifegain throughout the game really pays off.

### Card Advantage:



*Speeding up your deck more than your opponent's helps you win.*

Card Advantage is any card which draws a card, forces your opponent to discard a card, or cycles or scraps your deck – basically anything that improves the overall effectiveness of your cards or diminishes your opponent's. The cards you start with are the worst cards in the game. After a few turns they're not worth the card slot they take up when drawing five cards at the end of your turn. The ability to draw cards so you're not limited to five cards, cycle the starter cards out of your hand for new ones, or scrap them out of your deck entirely will greatly increase the efficiency of the cards you play and the overall effectiveness of each hand. Forcing your opponent to discard will give them the opposite effect, card disadvantage, and the more discards you can group into a single turn the more it hurts their turn, sometimes exponentially. Note that a card that draws one card basically just replaces itself, but it still grants card advantage by letting you play more cards than just the five you start with, and the ability to draw two (even if you have to discard to do so) is exceptionally strong card advantage. Card draw also provides more opportunities to faction and helps you play cards you topdeck and control the shuffle of your deck, since you can choose not to play a card which will [bottom deck](#) your good cards and ruin your next [deck](#). Scrap grants you a delayed card advantage: the first round you play a scrap card it only gives you its primary ability (economy or combat) but the deck after scrapping you will be down one starter card, thereby gaining card advantage by essentially automatically discarding that card for a better one. For this reason, scrap has a two-deck delay just like economy does, and is more useful the earlier you play it. Avoid purchasing scrap late unless it also generates more combat than you can expect to get with another card in your deck you would draw instead of it. When debating between scrap and draw, scrap is better earlier because of this delay and because scrapping cards has a long-term effect whereas drawing cards is more of a short-term advantage. Also, early in the game you have a high chance of drawing into a starter card whereas draw gains more of an advantage over scrap the later the game goes since you have a higher degree of drawing into more powerful cards. Cards that allow you topdeck other cards or acquire them directly into play also fit into this category since they give you more plays of a card and speed up your deck, but be aware that except for Factory World and Megahauler most are conditional on ally abilities. Card advantage through scrap and draw usually help any strategy and are often the "engine" upon which most strategies are built, cycling your deck and getting powerful cards in play quickly.

### Combat:





*You can't win without combat. Base destruction is the most efficient combat.*

The only way to win the game is to reduce your opponent's authority to zero, so you will need combat cards to win no matter what strategy you are playing. Everything else is just either giving you the ability to buy more combat (economy), buying time for your combat to pay off (defense), or making your combat more effective (card advantage). You always need enough combat to take out your opponent's bases or they will stay in play and they will have a huge head start on every single turn, so for this reason it's important to mirror your opponent's bases with combat equal to or greater than their defense. The most efficient combat destroys bases – the bonus damage for taking out a base for free is much stronger than any other type of faction bonus. I wrote about the relation between combat and bases in my first article [Bases and Bombs](#). You can compare how much damage you are doing compared to your opponent by adding the damage in each of your decks and subtracting the other deck's defense. Combat can be necessary early if your opponent has bases, otherwise it's usually best to wait until midgame to purchase unless there is a lot of cheap combat readily available early. Don't hesitate and buy combat too late if your opponent has a combat advantage unless you have defense which is vastly superior to their combat. The game is won and lost on combat so if you're passing up the opportunity to purchase combat you must always have a good reason why.

### Getting the four card types to come together:

Under this model of the four card types, it's usually better to buy economy and scrap early since they have a delayed effect and then transition into combat and defense (unless you can forgo economy to get a big combat jump early), and gaining card advantage helps you increase your efficiency in all aspects and phases of the game (except for scrap in the late game since it has a delayed advantage). **The key to victory is purchasing cards for their primary ability in time to be played in the phase of the game where that ability is most useful and by purchasing cards that fit your deck archetype and counter your opponent's archetype.** Factioning, while potentially providing an extremely useful increase in a card's effectiveness, is more affected by the variance of cards coming together and therefore not as reliable as a card's primary ability. It is therefore a secondary or even tertiary decision when purchasing cards, since you also have to consider purchasing something simply so your opponent can't get it (hate drafting). In other words, if you come across two cards that are both useful for you, either go for the one that you think will give you the highest chance of factioning or buy the one you think your opponent would want more, but either way buy it for its primary ability and its usefulness in the game state when it enters play.

Thinking in these terms it becomes easier to see the relationship each card has to game state. A good example of this is Scott Heise's [card rankings](#) which have different tiers for opening, mid, and late game. Prioritizing purchasing cards for their primary abilities during each of those game states will get you a lot farther than buying them because of their color. For example, Battle Station is great late but not good early whereas the reverse is true of Trade Pod. Even though traditionally red scrappers are bought early and green aggro cards are needed in the late game you don't want to buy an early Battle Station or a late Trade Pod just because they go with the factions you already have in your deck. Notice in his rankings that there are cards of all colors in the Must Buys and Good Buys sections for all three game states. If you are highly likely to faction a card then you can probably move it up the tier list in specific scenarios, but generally cards should be chosen for their primary abilities and game state.

Some cards of course have more than one primary ability and are therefore more flexible and useful in multiple game states and deck archetypes. Cutter for example gives defense and economy, whereas Trade Pod only gives economy; Patrol Mech can provide combat or economy whereas Freighter is just economy. A Ram is a good way to boost your economy, and while that's not its primary ability, it's often used for that purposes and is therefore a much better card earlier in the game than an Imperial Frigate even though it's comparable in damage. Those cards are not necessarily better in every circumstance than their counterparts that I mentioned but because they are better in different game states they are usually the safer pick in most decks. Be especially wary of overbuying economy cards which you cannot self-scrap since economy is usually only useful in the early to midgame – those cards are not useful in the later stages of the game and therefore just get in the way of your deck.

Now that we have a better understanding of card types we can start to explore how to mix and match them throughout different stages of the game to create different deck archetypes. Archetypes are powerful synergies between the card types that each have their own function and feel to play. Playing in an archetype is far more effective than not playing in one, and some archetypes can be used to counter the one that your opponent is in.

Stay tuned for the conclusion of **The Four Card Types** with Part 2: **Deck Archetypes**.

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1 thought on “The Four Card Types and Deck Archetypes (Part 1)”

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