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The Four Card Types and Deck Archetypes (Part 2)

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In the [first part](#) of this article I introduced the concept of the Four Card Types. Economy, Combat, Defense, and Card Advantage are types of cards found across all four factions and have different uses throughout the course of the game. Understanding the four types of cards are essential to understanding how they work together to form deck archetypes.

Deck Archetypes:

By changing the ways you combine the four different card types you can create different deck archetypes that work as a cohesive whole. If you only buy cards of a single faction they will all work well together since most of them work towards the same goal (and

provide factioning), but that doesn't mean you need to stick with just that color or just a second or even third color. Cards which draw and don't take up room in your deck don't necessarily need to fit with your archetype, and some cards are so good that you can buy out of type and even change archetypes for, otherwise you want to make purchases with the goal of putting one of these archetypes together. The four simplest archetypes

stick to just one of the four card types but others combine the elements of two or more card types to form a cohesive strategy.

Defensive Build:



Look familiar? The four card types can all be played as their own archetype.

Load up on Trade Fed cards that give you lifegain and a lot of bases that your opponent will have to spend combat on. Cards that are purely defensive such as a Battle Station or Defense Center are weak early but very good later in the game, whereas defensive cards that also give economy, such as a Cutter, Barter World, or Central Station are excellent starts. Your combat output will be low at first but you will be able to take a lot of punishment and eventually your combat will wear them down. The key word there is “eventually” – you are playing for the long game here, not trying to win in just a few turns, or even the average 24 turns. Scrap is key to this strategy, since the game will go long enough for you to scrap all the way down. Buy blue lifegain, red scrap, any color base and prioritize good bases even over great ships in some cases. Don’t feel the need to buy combat even if they have a lot, since they will be spending it on your bases and whatever gets through you can heal while you continue plinking at their authority level. A couple of big combat bombs will go a long way here though since you’re likely to play them more over a long game, and since your opponent may be so busy trying to get enough combat to take out your bases they’ve left themselves defenseless. A good counter against a defensive opponent is buying scrap since you will have time to scrap down with it, and buying a little defense yourself since their offensive output will be low. Just make sure to buy enough damage to take out their bases too.

Economy Build:



Economy cards have synergy with the trade row more than with themselves.

This is perhaps the trickiest build and one that I see newer players overcommit to most. The goal is to build up a massive economy lead early and just keep buying more and more cards until you simply get enough good cards to win. Your ten starter cards are really weak but if you buy enough good cards they will be a small percentage of your deck. It's not efficient but it has the ability to be really effective. Remember, economy has a delayed effect and needs time to pull off so be careful of your opponent loading up on combat while you're still getting into gear – prioritize defense at that point. Trade Fed is naturally good at this because they provide both economy and defense, but so are bases that provide economy. With this build the two main pitfalls to avoid are not keeping an eye on what your opponent is doing and responding in time (it may take a while to shift the focus of your deck with that many cards) and feeling the need to buy cards just because you have a massive amount of trade. Remember, the key maxim is still to buy cards that will be useful for their primary abilities in the phase of the game they'll be played in so don't be afraid to waste trade even though it's your primary focus. A lot of economy also leaves you a lot of flexibility to go into offense or defense so keep an eye on your opponent and work to counter them, since you will need to go for more offense and/or defense because economy alone can't win games. As always, economy which scraps itself (or other cards) or draws cards is preferable since economy is only useful in the early to midgame. The longer a game goes the more your early investment in economy will pay off, but this is a temporary archetype and you don't want to keep buying economy late. A good addition or counter to the economy build are Blob trade row control cards since you can dictate the relative price of the trade row. Remember, the economy player's main synergy is with the trade row itself so severing that connection can be brutal, as can failing to transition out of economy into combat or defense and developing synergies within your own deck.

Aggro/Rush Build:



If the opening row looks like this you probably don't need to invest in economy or defense.

If you see a lot of cheap combat on the row, start buying it all up as soon as possible. This can be an option even if there's a big bomb on the row if you believe your opponent is overextending themselves buying nothing but economy and you think you can undercut them before they get the bomb they're chasing after, or at least play it enough times to kill you. Cheap combat is the key since you will have limited economy. Good options for economy are cards that scrap and/or ones that have other functions such as a Ram or Patrol Mech. Scrap cards are good to get your combat to come together, especially combat scrap cards like Convoy Bot which further your primary goal. This build is gambling on you being able to force a shorter game. An opponent with a lot of

economy will ramp up their deck exponentially since they will be able to buy a ton of great cards, whereas if you are forgoing economy early for cheap combat you are only adding a few cards at a time and improving your deck linearly and will be overtaken in time. The key is to not allow your opponent the time for this to happen or to recognize if it's starting to happen and switch strategies, probably going into defense since it's likely your opponent is building up in that area. As long as your combat is greater than your opponent's defense keep it up, otherwise you'll have to quickly switch strategies or fall behind in a longer match. You must work quickly to counter this archetype with defense or whatever archetype you're building won't have time to come together.

Speed Build:



Playing your good cards more often is a recipe for success.

Scrap, draw, and cycling cards are very useful for any of the other archetypes but they can be their own archetype too. The goal is to build up a massive card advantage over your opponent that creates a deck too fast for almost any other deck to counter – if you have time to scrap down. This is best done when you're able to buy a couple of scrap cards early and commit to it by not buying cards that do not grant card advantage. A single Missile Bot and a Recycling Station can thin a deck dramatically if you don't buy any cards you don't need and you can only increase this effect by buying more card advantage cards and staying disciplined in your purchases. Prioritize economy cards that scrap themselves such as Explorers because this build is especially sensitive to getting clogged with unnecessary cards. You'll probably want to pick up at least some bases or lifegain to stay in the game long enough to scrap down, especially if your opponent has an aggro build. There's nothing like making your opponent spend all their combat to tear down your base wall just to cycle your entire deck and put them right back into play so they have to do it every turn. Combat cards are great alternative here too, especially ones that draw, since you'll be cycling them often. This is probably the best archetype in the game to start with because it's great on its own or it can quickly branch into aggro/scrap or defense/scrap and serve to maximize the other archetype you shift towards – don't feel like you have to stay locked into a speed deck but if you do shift, do it deliberately and quickly into combat or defense. If your opponent is building to this you need to counter it immediately by getting your own card advantage and/or loading up on combat to kill them before their deck comes together because once it does it will move too quickly to counter.

There are also other archetypes which are made possible by combining the different card types.

Base Build:



Bases and support ships offer a mix of defense and card advantage.

This is similar to the defensive build but with a few key differences. First, your main goal is to buy every base you can, especially bases that benefit from other bases (Central Station, Starbase Omega, Star Market, Breeding Site). Your secondary goal is buying base support ships (Embassy Yacht, Battle Barge, Mega Mech, Defense Bot). You don't necessarily need blue lifegain cards or even scrap as much as the defensive build (although it's always very useful in this build) since you can be pursuing an offensive base build that might force a shorter game, but scrap does synergize nicely since you're likely to go long. Bases are the fifth faction in the game because bases like other bases since your opponent is less likely to be able to take them out the more you have in play and so they start to build up and provide synergy just by having so many cards in play. They can also speed up your deck by staying out in play rather than clogging up your discard, and Central Station and Starbase Omega can greatly speed up your deck if you have enough bases. This inherit synergy between all bases, which builds up over time, and between their support ships forms the basis of their own archetype. A nice mix of outposts and non-outpost bases that can hide behind them goes a long way here, and even weaker bases are strong later in the game in this build. Watch out for opponents making an aggro rush build before your bases have time to pile up and for automatic base destruction though. For more info, read my [Bases and Bombs](#) article which was written about the 1B format but covered this build extensively. To counter this archetype, buy your own bases and load up on combat to take out your opponent's bases, especially free base destruction.

Offense/Defense Build:



Reduce your opponent's authority while increasing your own.

This is a balanced blend of combat and defense. You are making an effort to hammer away at your opponent but you're not leaving yourself completely open for their attack. In this build in particular bases which give combat (War World, Hive, Plasma Vent) shine, since they'll help you on your path to reducing your opponent's authority to zero while forcing them to spend combat on your bases. A few strong outposts in an otherwise aggro deck is perfectly fine for this build too. Also good are Trade Fed cards like Trade Escort or Peacekeeper that give offense and defense at the same time, although you can also take pure combat and pure defense cards as well. While this build is focused on its relatively equal combat and defense it can have economy and card advantage elements as well, although you want to avoid being a real jack of all trades and overloading too much on economy. The best economy cards to purchase in this deck are ones that also provide offense (like Patrol Mech or the Ram) or defense (like the Cutter). As with all strategies scrap is good, but in this build I would favor scrap that does damage like a Missile Bot or Convoy Bot instead of economy scrappers since that plays into the aggro half of your deck. The defensive half of your deck will make sure it will be able to pay off by getting a couple scraps too. Watch your opponent carefully to see if you need to buy more combat if they go bases or more defense if they go aggro. Avoid the trap of thinking your deck is unfocused or doesn't have an archetype – your main goal for any purchase is maximizing the total “swing” of your combined offense and defense each turn over the course of the game. This build is great for surviving an aggro rush and getting enough damage in before they realize they need to shift out of it, or of doing enough damage to take out the bases in a base or defensive build but being able to play the long game with them as well. It can have some trouble against a really fast deck though since ultimately an authority “swing” doesn't win you the game but combat does, so try to counter this archetype with a speed build.

Control Build:



Lockdown your opponent and decide what they are allowed to buy.

This is similar to the aggro build since the best aggro cards, Blob and Star Empire, are also the best at control. The Blobs give you control by wiping the trade row of any cards you don't want or ones your opponent wants. Usually the best purchases are cards that would help both you and your opponent, but this gives you the option of buying selfishly since you don't have to hate draft cards to keep them out of your opponent's hands, which is surprisingly good at building up your own synergy without leaving you open to being countered. The Empire provides important control by forcing discards, which often makes your opponent unable to buy good cards or perhaps fall short on combat to take out your bases. Remember, the more discards you can group together in one turn the more devastating it'll be since they'll often have one or two cards they don't mind letting go of but a third or fourth can be crucial – so here scrap and draw is key to get your discards to group

together. Discards also become more powerful the later the game goes since your opponent is likely scrapped down and is discarding much better cards, therefore control builds are better than aggro build for longer games, and discard cards are a great investment in any game you foresee going long (either with or against a base or defensive build). A late game discard combo can disrupt your opponent's entire strategy – causing them to have less combat or lifegain than they'd thought, disrupting draw cantrips, or discarding bases before they enter play and opening a hole in the base wall for you. With these two factions, you will be doing damage but unlike aggro you are prioritizing discards and/or trade row control over just damage, and perhaps even over card draw (a staple of both factions). One important aspect of trade row control is refraining from buying cards you don't need and leaving them for your opponent (great in any strategy). Another, when you have cards that scrap from the row, is dictating how cheap or expensive the trade row will be so control is good with or against an economy build. If your opponent has an economic advantage you can mitigate it by scrapping expensive cards so you are still able to buy cards that fit into your archetype, and by forcing discards which take away their economy. If you have an economic advantage you can clear the row of all the cheaper cards and, between that and/or your opponent having to discard cards, they can effectively be shut out and lose all synergy with the trade row. Do not play for economy against this build, but do prioritize combat and/or defense. Card draw is very good for countering discards, but cards that cycle by discarding and then drawing are very weak against discards, so favor draw and discard or just draw.

Rainbow Build:



You say unfocused. I say effective.

This is a deck that may look unfocused but has hidden levels of synergy your opponent might miss if they are analyzing it by its factions and not its card types. It's basically an anti-archetype that just mirrors your opponent and the trade row (Stealth Archetype?), and is probably the closest you can come to playing without a true archetype and winning. The key to this deck is prioritizing certain card types based on the stage of the game, the trade row, and your relative strengths and weaknesses to your opponent. First, in the opening row determine what type of game this might be. If it's cheap combat play an aggro deck, otherwise this deck starts out by prioritizing buying scrap first and economy second. If there are one or more big bombs on the trade row you can prioritize economy first though. Then see what your opponent does to see what direction you should shift to in the second deck if possible. If they have a scrap lead go aggro, if they have a combat lead go defense, and if they have bases buy combat. Scrap is always prioritized in the first and second decks unless they have a massive combat lead and you need defense or if you are both racing for an obvious bomb. In the third deck, you will prioritize cards which draw but you are mostly looking for more combat and for defense, prioritizing

combat if they have bases and/or lifegain, and defense if they are aggro. Throughout this process you want to not overinvest in economy (economy that scraps itself is best) and just maintain slightly more economy than your opponent if possible or play control with discards and trade row manipulation. Keep an eye on the row since your economy value is also based on the relative costs of the cards in the row, unless you have trade row manipulation. By the fourth deck you've scrapped out any of your economy cards you can unless they also provide an additional benefit. In the fourth deck if you do make any purchases they are to pick up cards that will finish your opponent or provide you enough defense to survive another turn or two. During all of your purchases you will buy cards of similar factions when possible but you will not take them if they don't conform to this basic strategy. More important than buying the right factions are buying the right card types for the game state that they'll enter and in buying cards to deny your opponent getting card types that benefit them. This deck archetype represents a better understanding of card types and their relation to the game state and the pace of the game. The strength of this build is being flexible and adaptive to what your opponent is buying, the changing trade row, and adjusting your tactics relative to the amount of turns left. All of the above archetypes benefit from this type of game play but this one is the most adaptable, and is usually my default setting that I will switch out of as soon as I see an opening to a more advantageous archetype based on what's happening in that specific game. The previous description is generic description of a "typical" game, however we all know the no game is ever typical, but the key to this archetype is always reacting to your opponent and the trade row and knowing when to increase your economy, card advantage, defense, and combat.

Conclusions

As you can see from the above archetypes, just as there is a lot of overlap between factions and even individual cards with the four types of things they do, so too is there a lot of overlap between deck archetypes and the types of cards that are useful to them. While some may want similar types of cards though, each has its own unique feel and functions differently than the others, however you can transition between one archetype and a similar one if you make deliberate purchases to do so. The key to building archetypes is to recognize which archetypes both you and your opponent can possibly build to as early as you can. Sometimes you can see this from the opening trade row before you even make your purchases – a bunch of cheap combat lends itself to an aggro build whereas expensive cards may lead towards an economy build. Oftentimes you won't know until you are in your second deck cycle though after making your opening buys. Your opening buys should be strong on their own and potentially give you multiple avenues towards archetypes. Patrol Mech, for example, is one of the strongest cards you can start with in your first deck because of its flexibility – it can give you economy or damage and potentially scrap – which are useful in several different archetypes. Buying it doesn't commit you to any one archetype but will be useful in whichever one you go into.

By your second deck you may not have cemented an archetype yet but you've probably ruled out a few archetypes that don't fit with the cards you've already bought, so you'll only want to buy cards that can fit with archetypes you can still go into. At every stage, you want to keep an eye on what archetypes your opponent can build to and either try to keep them from buying cards that would fit with their possible archetypes or try to find an archetype to cancel theirs. A defensive build with a lot of scrap will usually beat a straight aggro deck without scrap for example. Hopefully you've at least started building a cohesive deck and are heading towards one or two archetypes, because by the time you are in your third deck you need to have an archetype you are already improving on or you will probably lose. The game only lasts four and a half decks on average so whatever you buy in your third deck may possibly be the last purchases that you get to play, so therefore these

purchases must be able to cement your archetype into place so you can play out a proper deck in your fourth and possibly final deck. If you make purchases in your fourth deck they are just offense or defense or discard, whatever you need to win at that point.

When you are looking to counter your opponent's archetype by building one of the archetypes of your own, the key variable to consider is the length of the game. Will this be a longer or shorter game based on the amounts of combat and defense both players are taking and with what's available in the row? With that information in mind, would you like to force the game to go longer or shorter than it is currently going? An aggro build needs a short game to succeed while an economy build needs a long one. A defensive build will certainly force a long game, and a base build won't be defeated quickly although it can certainly win quickly. A speed deck can force a short game but is setup to get better and better the game goes on if it takes defense to survive, whereas the aggro deck which forces a short game can't survive the long game if your opponent has a defense and/or base build. Each and every archetype can be countered by responding to an archetype which either matches the requirement for a short or long game or forces the game length to be more compatible with their archetype. If you might win in a short game but will definitely win the long game force the game to go long by buying bases and defense. If you have no chance of winning the long game load up on combat and card advantage to try to force the short game, otherwise start shifting into defense and continue buying card advantage which will help improve your deck over time in the long game.

In summary, don't be fooled by a card's faction to thinking you know exactly what it can do. The four card types of combat, defense, economy, and card advantage are more important than a card's faction. Each of those four card types has various degrees of usefulness depending in the early, mid, and late game. The relative valuations of cards change depending on their usefulness to either deck archetype and to the state of the game, so think carefully before buying and don't be afraid to make unconventional plays if you believe it meets the criteria. Remember, every game is situational. As a general rule though, the key to success is buying cards for their primary ability in time to be useful in the game state in which they'll be played and for the archetype in which they'll be played. Factioning provides a useful and often powerful upgrade to cards but cannot be relied on as much as a card's primary ability and is less of a concern. What is of the most concern is getting the four card types to come together into a cohesive deck archetype and building an archetype that responds to what your opponent is building towards, the cards available, and the speed of that game. Whoever builds the deck archetype that synergizes best with their existing cards while adapting to the ever-changing gamestate will be more likely to win.

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