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- Shane Laporte (mainshane)

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benjotron's "Wheel of Strategic Dominance"([↔ /thread/1451424/benjotrons-wheel-strategic-dominance](/thread/1451424/benjotrons-wheel-strategic-dominance))

[Star Realms – Amazon.com](#) **\$13.97** 

@greylag 

Oct 11, 2015 (edited)

It's always worth going back to basics. I'd like to draw SR players' attention to this concept, [coined by benjotron on reddit](#):

Quote:

Strategic Dominance: There are three fundamental archetypes in the game - life gain, scrap and damage. These are represented respectively by **Blue**, **Red** and **Green/Yellow**.

If you follow one of these archetypes (buying mostly cards of that archetypes color) and your opponent does the same, then >80% of the time: **Lifegain** will beat **Damage**, **Damage** will beat **Scrap**, **Scrap** will beat **Lifegain**.

So in general, if your opponent is buying mostly red cards, you can beat them by buying mostly green and yellow. If your opponent is unaware of how these archetypes interact, you can take advantage and beat them. This strategy is so powerful that I will often waste \$2 or more trade on a turn just to get a card that will dominate my opponents archetype.

(highlighting mine)

There's more at the link - please upvote benjotron's comment rather than thumbing this post, as it's not my writing!

Ben Gartner

@benjotron

Oct 11, 2015

I approve of this message. And of the highlighting 🤖

Ben Gartner

@benjotron

Oct 11, 2015

I'll go a step further and point out that I think this is the in the top three highest-yield concepts in Star Realms

1) Managing opponents bases

2) Building your economy to the appropriate size

3) Avoiding strategies that will be dominated by your opponents strategies.

Versus a high-level player, doing these three greatly increase your win percentage. Without them, your percentage might be as low as 10%. (This is an estimate of course.)

Scott Heise

Designer

@HomerJr

Oct 11, 2015 (edited)

I agree with the core of this, but I have a couple comments. I think Trade deserves to be considered an archetype as well because of it's overall importance to the game. Perhaps it could be considered a "meta-archetype" since it doesn't affect the game score at all, but the same could be said for scrap.

The way I look at it, there are four archetypes:

- **Attack** (combat, base kills)

- **Defense** (lifegain, base defense)

- **Economy** (trade, free aquiring)

- **Velocity** (scrap, card draws, recycling, topdecking)

https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/1451424/benjotrons-wheel-strategic-dominance

1/15

One of the reasons I lump different aspects into a single archtypes (e.g., scrap + card draws --> velocity) is because I think leads to a "colorblind" strategy. Each faction has cards that fit into each archetype (and some cards span multiple archetypes), so I think stereotyping the factions into a single archetype can lead to the "faction fallacy" (another key concept coined by benjotron).

EDIT: Love the new avatar, greylag. 😊

M M @Mat628 Oct 11, 2015

Hm.

In my experience an 80% Scrap strategy loses to everybody. There's so many turns that you can't do it effectively. Either it shows up in your first draw post-shuffle or in the shuffle draw itself. And maybe you need all of your cards to buy something. So it just gets a really slow start and by the time the deck is trimmed out you most likely have already lost.

And lifegain isn't as one-dimensional as you're representing. Most of the blue cards do fair damage. And you always, generally by necessity, have to work in something else if not all of the something elses.

I think there's 3 things which are much more important.

1: Be aware at the beginning of the game what scale of economy you should be looking for right away. If 1 of the 7 or 8 cost cards are out it's worthwhile to get the cards, especially bases, which you can sacrifice for 3-4 money. But if the highest is 5 or less you're better off going for the cheap and quick damage to get the early leap and hope that by the time the real expensive cards come out, it's too late for the guy who went big economy.

2: Similarly be aware of the economy/damage shifting point and when you should be shifting **out** of building economy. I don't think that it's a major mystery to know that in the beginning you want cards which let you buy more expensive cards with a couple of special case exceptions. But the trickier thing is knowing when to stop. In my experience it's generally around 32-35 life. At that point you really need to stop getting economy building cards, whatever you've gotten already, and focus on doing or healing damage. Or things like drawing or denying cards which are related but not quite the same. Because at that point the turnover of buying an economy card, waiting to shuffle it into your deck, and then having to wait to have shuffled in what you buy, is simply too long. The small exception is in a blue-heavy deck the cards which let you put a card on the top may still be worthwhile. If you're not aware of this shift point you might be going on merrily along looking at all the great money you're going to be able to generate and even buying these great and expensive cards and then look down and realize you just lost.

3: Know the bang-for-the-buck cards. Especially be aware of the ones which destroy bases as their own ability. Being able to add 4-7 damage on top of what are all good attack cards in their own right is huge. But this is probably the most obvious of the 3 and one you figure out with just some few-ish number of plays.

Those have been my experience and perspective anyway.

@greylag 🦋 Oct 11, 2015

I'll just note that this is an excerpt from a much longer post. It's rare that a deck actually is one of these. But the pattern above is a) just a pattern and b) may guide you by looking at to what extent your deck is each archetype, to what extent your opponent's is each, and hence what the balance of domination might be.

Ben Gartner @benjotron Oct 11, 2015

HomerJR, I think you've identified the biggest problem with the BT's WoSD (TM patent pending) is that it doesn't really take into account the role of economy. After all, knowing when to stop buying Trade Pod/Freighter and start buying Frigate/Destroyer has been the turning point of many many games I played.

And I completely agree that the strategies should be colorblind in general - in fact, it's a great tool for opponent's that have committed to much to a single strategy. Bases are considered blue, recycling station is considered red, discard valuation swings wildly as the game is pushed long. I haven't actually considered topping as being part of the velocity archetype, but eager to start considering it that way. It occurs to me now that its value goes way up in low-scrap games (though it tends to be married to faction synergy and is harder to proc in those games.)

I think you can throw combo cards like Yacht, Barge and Mega Mech into your velocity strategy as well. They don't enable velocity, but they reward you (and put your high-velocity deck against theres, all else being equal.)

However, I love the simplicity of the color model as a tool for beginning players. 3 simple tricks to mastering Star Realms 🤪. Or, if you are only ready to keep track of a few things, keep track of where you are in the wheel.

So HJR, I'm mulling over your comments, but I'll post now how I think about it now and trying to incorporate your idea into my theories.

My gut tells me that econ is not so much a 4th leg of the tripod so much as a a tool for enabling your strategies with in the wheel. Econ is only useful as it allows you to interact with the trade row. As such, I build my econ in response to the trade row and my opponents econ. Ideally I have just enough econ to have Superior Trade Row Interaction* than my opponent. So part of my econ is built to deal with the trade row as is, and part of it is to be better equipped than my opponent to deal with whatever flies up next. A lower impact trade row now increases my desire to invest in long

to be better equipped than my opponent to deal with whatever tips up next. A lower-impact trade row now increases my desire to invest in long-term econ, since high-impact cards are at a premium and are likely to dominate the current cards.

So my econ is in response to my opponents strategy, yes, (can't buy freighter when they have 5 yellow cards) but only to support whatever archetypal strategy I select in response to theirs based on 1) the Wheel and 2) what I can pull off given the Trade Row and my ability to interact. So in this example, my opponent is aggressive.

If I'm already aggressive, I can try to beat them by executing their strategy better - stay ahead on damage and maintain just enough econ to stay ahead in the race, either by buying bases/lifegain (Blue leg of Wheel) to slow them or attacking cards to hit the gas(Chartreuse leg of Wheel). In this game scrap is likely pointless because it is a dominated strategy. Econ may or may not be pointless if it supports my ability to enact either a matching strategy or a dominating strategy.

*STRI - based on topology of trade row, you may want Freighter (for trying to get a Mothership) Space Station (to guarantee a Brain World) Cutter/Trade Pod (to secure multiple 6-drop ships) or just some Battle Pod/Destroy/Screecher mechanism to support your strategy and hinder your opponents as needed. As such, it's a little more complex than just having more Average Trade per Hand than your opponent.

I'm finding it difficult to collect all my thoughts at the moment so I will continue later, (and present a more readable edited draft) but let me see if I can determine the order of dominance with your proposed archetypes. -> indicates dominance.

- Attack (combat, base kills)
- Defense (lifegain, base defense)
- Economy (trade, free acquiring)
- Velocity (scrap, card draws, recycling, topdecking)

Attack -> Velocity
Attack -> Economy
Velocity -> Defense
Economy -> Defense
Defense -> Attack
Velocity <> Economy? (I can't offhand figure out who wins here.)

Did you have a different chart in mind? At first glance, it seems like you can group econ into a strategy of similar speed for purposes of determining counter strategy.

In practice, I tend to associate econ with the Red or Blue strategy since they both tend to get econ cards attached with scrape or lifegain. Blue with more efficient econ, red getting more longterm benefit from econ by scrapping out the rest.

Also, my model is almost never used in the pure form. Almost always one or both players is taking cards from two archetypes - in which case you combine the two for a counter strategy. For example:

Blue/Red -> Blue/Green
Blue/Green -> Green/Red
Green/Red -> Blue/Red

All of these combos have good TRI cards that support their strategies either directly or through faction synergy. In each case, if you directly dominating, the build of your econ is not as important to me as the fact that you can interact and continue to dominate, and having a superior econ won't help you overcome your opponents strategy if they are dominating you.

I mean, I could be entirely wrong. Homer, do you agree with my dominance interpretation of your archetypes? Can you expand more on how the econ archetype looks and how it fares against other archetypes?

@greylag 🦋 [Oct 11, 2015 \(edited\)](#)

Enjoying this discussion! This just blew my mind:

Ben Gartner @benjotron wrote:

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Btw, I use the term "row control" or "trade row control" to talk about what benjotron, you've called SRTI(tm). Well, almost the same thing. I also group tactical buys (stealing a battle station which was the only thing they could afford) under row control. Basically it is the art of making the opponent absolutely certain that random numbers hate them and that you are hacking to rig your trade row flips. 😊

@greylag  [Oct 11, 2015](#)

M M @Mat628 wrote:

In my experience an 80% Scrap strategy loses to everybody. There's so many turns that you can't do it effectively. Either it shows up in your first draw post-shuffle or in the shuffle draw itself.

Have you thought about manipulating your deck so that your scrappers don't get buried (or have less of a chance to)? I go into detail on the process in my recent match reports ([good example here](#)), or here's an excerpt from one which summarises the process:

@greylag wrote:

... I try to take into account what size my next deck will be. At the moment my deck's a regular size, 15, which is cleanly divisible by 5 and means I'll never bottomdeck a scrapper. I've already done my scrapping this time around, and my discard pile is 5 (scrap one, buy one) which means that if I want my next deck to be regular as well, I either want to add 5 ships or stay at my current level. Adding just one would be the next best thing, as I'd only have 1 card bottom-decking...

Ben Gartner [@benjotron](#) [Oct 11, 2015](#)

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Hmm, yes Trade Row Control sounds more like your ability to limit your opponents Trade Row Interaction. Basically the most brutal thing you can do when already winning, short of chaining discard 5s. Destroys your opponents ability to get back in the game, also hope.

Ben Gartner [@benjotron](#) [Oct 11, 2015](#)

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Completely support greylag's comments on managing scrap. Recycling station is the king of deck manipulation and in a 12-13 card deck can almost guarantee you never "bottom-deck" or "wheel" your scrappers into the next deck. Corvette and Supply Ship can do similar, though not as effectively. Pay attention to deck size. Deck 2 will almost always be 12-13 cards, deck 3 can pretty easily be 15 or 16 and from there it's easier to maintain a 15 or 16 card deck size, which minimizes the risk of this. Subtract "cantrip/free draw" cards from this total for purposes of shuffling.

The scrap deck needs a balance of scrappers, a few Red faction bonuses and "business cards." In the high velocity deck, you want 1) anything that can draw a card 2) anything that can draw TWO cards 3) Battle Barge 4) lifegain if you are behind on life 5) discard 6) more importantly don't let THEM have discard.

Just thinning your deck is pretty beatable, you need to thin your deck to a core of quality cards, or a core of econ to grab those cards as they come up.

Scott Heise Designer [@HomerJr](#) [Oct 11, 2015](#)

Ben Gartner @benjotron wrote:

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Attack -> Velocity
Attack -> Economy
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Economy -> Defense
Defense -> Attack
Velocity <-> Economy? (I can't offhand figure out who wins here.)

Did you have a different chart in mind? At first glance, it seems like you can group econ into a strategy of similar speed for purposes of determining counter strategy.

I think it's tricky to determine the order of dominance. The best way I can think to visualize it is in a circle like this:

Economy -> Defense -> Attack -> Velocity -> Economy

This means that each archetype has one archetype that it dominates, another that is is dominated by, and a third that it is "neutral" to (whatever that means). So attack would be neutral to economy, and defense is neutral to velocity. Does this sound right to you?

Also, just to be clear, I don't mean to imply that when it comes to archetypes with multiple subtypes that each subtype is equal... for example, scrap 1 is generally better than draw 1 though both contribute to velocity.

Ben Gartner @benjotron wrote:

Also, my model is almost never used in the pure form. Almost always one or both players is taking cards from two archetypes - in which case you combine the two for a counter strategy. For example:

Blue/Red -> Blue/Green
Blue/Green -> Green/Red
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All of these combos have good TRI cards that support their strategies either directly or through faction synergy. In each case, if you directly dominating, the build of your econ is not as important to me as the fact that you can interact and continue to dominate, and having a superior econ won't help you overcome your opponents strategy if they are dominating you.

I mean, I could be entirely wrong. Homer, do you agree with my dominance interpretation of your archetypes? Can you expand more on how the econ archetype looks and how it fares against other archetypes?

Yes! I do agree with principle and especially the "two archetype" idea. However, I'm not sure I would look at the combos by color. For example, when you say blue, are you referring to the defense or trade aspect of blue (or both)? In the example of green/red -> blue/red, this makes sense per the order of domination above if blue = trade, but doesn't necessarily make sense if blue = life gain because we agreed that defense -> attack.

I think there is an inherent flaw/limitation to this concept though... one that I think may be obvious to experienced players but newer players may not recognize. That is, that these archetypes only really apply to the "deck construction" phase of the game. There comes a point in every game where trade/scrap become inconsequential and all that matters is pure combat and defense. At that point, it basically comes down to a numbers game, put simply as: [(total attack in your deck) - (total defense in their deck)] / (effective # of cards in your deck) relative to their amount of authority, and vise versa. We've both said it before, but a player that doesn't recognize this "turning point" will be doomed to failure even if they master the archetype concept.

Vidar Ambrosiani @Vidarr Oct 13, 2015

I think you will never have a "clean" economy deck so I think the attack-defense-velocity trio is enough. An eco-deck will simply transform into something else after decks 1-2 Then you can have eco-attack, eco-defense or eco-velocity (brain world!).

And that also shows both the big strength and the main danger with economy first,

Strength is that with eco-first you can buy power cards that counter your opponents ideas. They go velocity, hit'em with missile mech and battle blob, they go defense, hit'em with brain world and cantrips, they go attack, set up those big bases.

Big danger of course, the right cards might not be available. Eco-defense will still likely lose to plain velocity etc.

Really interesting discussion.

Ben Gartner @benjotron Oct 14, 2015

Preramble

Okay, first of all, I'm going to recoin my theory to "SWoRD" because that's really cool. Or at least keeps me from saying "s-wad" over and over in my head. R can be Relative. Or Red. Or Really. Whatever you prefer.

Second, I hope you like reading. You jerks deserve it since you made so many good arguments. I may edit until I reduce typos to below filthy percent. Feel free to point them out.

Colors are my Shorthand Only

Let's go on a Ride while I Backpedal

Scott Heise @HomerJr wrote:

I'm not sure I would look at the combos by color. For example, when you say blue, are you referring to the defense or trade aspect of blue (or both)? In the example of green/red -> blue/red, this makes sense per the order of domination above if blue = trade, but doesn't necessarily make sense if blue = life gain because we agreed that defense -> attack.

I mean, okay, fine, call them Defense, Velocity/Scrap/Combo and Attack if that makes it better for you, I kind of think it's semantics. I did say originally that the fundamental archetypes are *represented* by that color.

Ben Gartner @benjotron wrote:

Strategic Dominance: There are three fundamental archetypes in the game - life gain, scrap and damage. These are represented respectively by **Blue**, **Red** and **Green/Yellow**.

I was taken out of context! And talking to newbs!

In the original reddit thread, this was made in response to a comment from the OP. OP mentioned a takeaway "go full aggro with no economy" which I think is bad advice because it's way too conditional, so I was trying to backpedal from that a bit and give them something more reliable to hang their hat on. It's an oversimplification because I wanted to give them the most effective non-ramble advice possible.

And greylag picked the sum-uppance of what ended up being a pretty rambly post anyway. So if it weren't concise on some level, you wouldn't be reading it here anyway. 😊 Having said that, get ready for ever more ramble.

Only. The. Fundamentals.

In the end, I only claimed that:

Quote:

If you follow one of these archetypes (buying mostly cards of that archetypes color) and your opponent does the same, then >80% of the time: Lifegain will beat Damage Damage will beat Scrap Scrap will beat Lifegain

Which is generally true if your opponent is for some reason committed to one color and only that color, and the dominating color is available, and you buy only that color, you'll win 90% of the time. In fact, I think that is at heart of the "faction fallacy." You can't commit to a color, or even two colors, and ignore the rest, because then your opponent can big a dominating archetype, support it with a matching archetype and have a reliable recipe for beating your deck. They'll compete for some cards, give you the rest and take unfettered access to the cards you ignore and tromp you.

Component Theory/Archetypal Makeup

For a more complete theory, let's assign every card three components. I'm still going to call them Blue, Red and Green, but understand that what I mean is:

BLUE

Blue=Defense These cards slow the game down. Some of them also have **incidental damage**, which can beat an opponent without a longterm plan **incidental economy** which can purchase enough supporting cards to win, **incremental resource accumulation** - bases that provide econ, scrap, attack or other benefit which are overcosted if used only once, but undercosting if used in multiple turns after being played, and which can therefore threaten to compound that benefit into an impenetrable defense or huge recurring attacks or both, **incidental "combo"** such as Embassy Yacht or Megahauler - cards that slow the game and provide other, riskier benefits. **Blue cards** won't beat your opponent if they have a longer-term strategy than you, because **Blue decks** tend to trickle out damage and give your opponent lots of time to respond.

GREEN

Green=Attack For most or all of most games, this includes **Yellow**. Any card that has an attack symbol anywhere on the card, or can destroy an opponent's base, has some **green component**. These cards are the business cards and the business they are in is winning. I'd say more than half the cards in the game have some **green component** and that is by design so the games will end in a reasonable number of turns, and the lategame cards have some limiting factor to prevent them from taking over every game and making the game one-dimensional. For an example of what that would be like, you can tap the "Year 1 Promos" button on your phone 🤖.

Green/Yellow cards also serve an important balancing function in the early game by destroying bases and preventing **resource accumulation** from taking over the game. The interaction between **Green** and **Blue** components tends to set the **rythm** of the game. As one player threatens to **accumulate incremetnal resources** from bases the other is required to invest in **typically shorter-term cards** in order to contain the threat or amass their own superior **incremental accumulation** - difficult to do if starting from behind and risky if your opponent ends up with a superior base collection. If the availability of **Green** is limited, the player playing ahead in the **base game** can push their advantage. This interplay and the cascading effects are so prevalent and apparent that they categorize games and create a strategic axis completely separate to the **SWoRD** that I haven't seen much in-depth analysis of.

RED

Red kind of a catch all for cards that are particularly effective in the long term, or in concentrated amounts. Cards with scrap abilities are the primary factors here, but any card draw, recycling/deck filtering, or Blob World/Yacht/Barge-type card that can give multiple cards of value at a low probability become exponentially more effective in red. Red cards tend to magnify the effects of other cards without doing much themselves, so perhaps the combo cards and cantrips belong elsewhere and not in the pure archetype.

It's worth point out that I do not consider the **target opponent discards** effect to belong to a pure archetype by default. It's only associated with **green** because it is attached to so many attacking, aggressive cards. In most games it is not very reliable and therefore not a huge factor, but in it becomes particularly effective in concentrated decks - and particularly effective AGAINST those decks so it has the highest swing in value in long games and can be tricky to properly value when you are uncertain of the game length.

Examples

Cutter - A very blue card with a large ally bonus that makes it an effective finisher into the late game. The \$2 for 2 makes it an efficient economy card and a better card overall, but doesn't change its archetypal makeup.

Recycling Station - A card that filters through most decks and effectively makes any early to midgame deck one card smaller when purchase. Helps **control the shuffle**, making red more effective and has **4 defense** to slow the game down. The fact that it provides explicit **Yellow** synergy helps its **aggro nature** but a large part of its **Green component** comes from the fact that this card helps pair up faction cards and trigger everyone's bonuses. This is an argument that could be made for every **1+** or **2+** card (cards that draw or potentially draw one or two cards) but I will only mention it here because of how cheap and effective this card is. No card provides more benefit to all archetypes for so little investment than this card. The \$1 option makes this card better by not making it a dead when causing a shuffle is not desirable or the cards in hand are better than those in deck. Weaker than average against discard and unlike most cards, gets worse as a deck gets scrapped out. But at that point just scrap the fucking thing if it's so bad.

Missile Mech - a purely green card that only draws it's red essence from the fact that it will trigger ref faction AND has a supreme ally trigger of its own which happens to reward thin decks. This card shines against deck-based defense and seems to exist as a reward for the red players diligence at scrap by punching through annoying defense. Loses effectiveness against lifegain since it doesn't have scrap cards itself and is over costing if the opponent is unlikely to have a base to kill.

Freighter, Trade Pod, Explorer - The least factioned of any cards, these card provide little or no synergy, attack for little to none in limited circumstances. Explorer gets a bit of red by being the omnipresence econ card that can disappear from the deck on a shuffles notice. These cards are not bad per se, but derive most of their value from the availability of cards in the trade row.

Current Ally Synergy - Every card with a faction symbol has a small component based on the ally abilties it will trigger in the purchasers deck and the absence of the effects it would have triggered in the opponents (**someone coin a term for this I'm doing all the work**) - AND the **potential future cards** for both decks. Another highly variable factor. Starts small, increases as the game progresses, and drops off once ally triggers become more reliable in the late game.

Component Theory Takeaways

Every card has a different amount of each color, and those amounts tend to change as the gamestate, card availability and deck composition change. Don't assume a card's role will remain the same throughout a game, or will trend the same direction for an entire game, or while be remotely the same from game to game. Even a **Cutter** or **Missile Bot** in the trade row on the first turn changes component value in relation to the cards around it or likely future deck compositions.

Archetype Definition Rebuttal

Scott Heise @HomerJr wrote:
Trade deserves to be considered an archetype

Quote:
Perhaps it could be considered a "meta-archetype" since it doesn't affect the game score at all, but the same could be said for scrap.

Purpose of the SWo(r)D

I disagree. Or alternatively, I agree that it can be a "meta-archetype" but I think it's ultimately a very important set of decisions that exists orthogonally to my archetypes.

I'm not trying to incorporate all important parts of the game into my model. I'm only trying to quantify the most variable parts of the game - the parts of card evaluation that change the most *from game to game* not *within a game*.

Trade Pod almost always trends down as the game unfolds, **Frigate** almost always gets better. It's easy to evaluate cards when you know how many times you'll play it. But what is the value of each card BEFORE the end of the game when you have to draw the card multiple times? Or when you don't know how many times you'll draw it? Or when I don't know what my opponent will or could buy? That's the question I have to answer most often, the most in need of general guiding principles.

Scrap vs Econ - quit being such an A-type

Though scrap does not affect the score, it multiplies the cards the effectives of every other card, including themselves. A fully scrapped deck can win with almost any trade row, can keep scrapping its worse cards and more quickly change into any kind of deck. Scrap cards even make themselves better. (I don't believe overscrapping is a real problem - let's have that debate separately if you want.) A deck with economy is at the mercy of the trade row to provide high impact cards.

The pure **"Blue"** and **"Red"** don't exist and couldn't win if they did because it's not possible to win the game without damage. But the monor-colored or a 90% pure deck can and will dominate decks with incidental ally bonuses, on-color damage and off-color damage.

A 90% economy deck will lose to every other 90% archetype. Almost every deck needs some, but not too much economy. You almost always want to buy 2-3 of them on the first pass, 0-2 on the second pass, maybe another on-faction one on the third pass. They're not complicated, they're not interesting, I don't want them in my model, you can't tell me what to do and you're not my real dad.

You're Right Vidarr, I DO make some good Points.

Vidar Ambrosiani @Vidarr wrote:
I think you will never have a "clean" economy deck so I think the attack-defense-velocity trio is enough. An eco-deck will simply transform into something else after decks 1-2 Then you can have eco-attack, eco-defense or eco-velocity (brain world!).

And that also shows both the big strength and the main danger with economy first,

Strength is that with eco-first you can buy power cards that counter your opponents ideas. They go velocity, hit'em with missile mech and battle blob, they go defense, hit'em with brain world and cantrips, they go attack, set up those big bases.

Big danger of course, the right cards might not be available. Eco-defense will still likely lose to plain velocity etc.

Thanks Vidarr, and I agree. You hepled me boil down my thoughts to this:

Strategy vs Tactics

I use the Wheel only to select my high level strategic plan for the game. A dominated strategy will almost never win, so avoiding that strategy will dramatically increase my win rate. I can't really stress how much I think this one simple step will increase my odds

Strategy Informs desired game length: Who's the Beatdown?
Borrowing heavily from M:tG theory. One player's role is control: they want to stall or the game until their superior long-term strategy takes over. The other player's role is the beatdown: they want to end the game quicker before they lose their early advantage.

http://www.starcitygames.com/magic/fundamentals/3692_Whos_Th...

"Misassignment of Role = Game Loss"
The key takeaway is that, regardless of your deck speed, one deck will do better in the long term. If you misassign your role - by helping your opponent slow the game down when you are the beatdown, they will take over and win. This looks like not trashing your **Barter World** or buying a **base** over a **ship**.

Strateav only Sugaests Tactics

This strategy doesn't commit me to any specific tactic on a given turn. It tells me how desirable a turn result is (like **gaining 3** vs **attacking for 2**) but not how likely I am to get that result. It is up to me and my tactical judgement/experience to maybe specific decisions to their distribution of results and then judge the relative value of those results.

In fact, I fairly frequently buy a card like **Blob Destroyer** or an attacking ship to support my long-term **Blue/Red** strategy under some combo of the following circumstances:

- Aggrsive cards** are scarce due to the layout of trade row
- Trade row is "clogged" with cards too expensive or low impact otherwise
- Buying it **deprives my opponent of the opportunity to speed up the game**
- I judge that taking it from the trade row will **slow the game** down more than the other available options

Basekillers like BD or MM are the best example because they are particularly effective against a wide range of defensive strategies.

Economy: The Fundamental Tactic

The economic build of my deck is another tactical decision that supports my strategy. I don't need a certain economy strategy to enact a certain victory strategy. Instead it's a tactical decision - how do I get from point A (my \$4/turn deck) to point B (the dominating strat I want, or at least not the dominated strat I don't want.) Each strategy has cards of all costs and econ cards that support their tactics. There are cheap versions of the **Red** deck and the **Green** **Yellow** deck.

Sure, I probably know ten or more econ tactics I could list and incorporate based on their effectiveness with different victory strats, but ultimately those econ tactics matter way less than the tactics contributing to my overarching victory strategy. And suggesting a specific move misses the point - the most reliable way to win isn't to know all the best moves, it's to know when the moves you know are good and when they're not.

Example Tactic that Reprints my Larger Thought Process

Here's an example of one of those tactical decisions:

- They bought a **Cutter**
- I won't likely beat a **Cutter** if I buy a **Ram**
- I will likely beat a **Cutter** with a **Supply Bot**
- Buying an **Embassy Yacht** or **Barter World** will help me match my opponent and keep me in the game.

These are the decisions I make early. If the trade row encourages me to make larger purchase right away, I give more value to investing in economy early. If one card (BW or the Ark, etc) will control the whole game and the economy for it is there, I go all in for that. If the trade row looks like it will be scramble for the low-cost cards that will set me up to dominate, or to avoid being dominated, I walk through the next 1-4 turns and guess the best way to end up with a not-losing strategy.

(A not about the example: You can of course beat a Cutter by buying a Ram and then buying some other card later that does beat a Cutter, but that's not the point. *Why didn't you just buy that card first? And how do you know that card will be there later?*)

It's a framework for card evaluation, essentially.

- The three strategies change in effectiveness based on the two deck compositions
- The value of strategic components changed based on the corresponding strategic effectiveness, scarcity and economic builds
- The effectiveness of tactics used to aquire those components, either immediately or as the future payoff of an investment change based on the value of the strategic components
- Investing in your economy is just one of those tactics and is only as good or bad or risky as the distribution of outcomes of the tactic

Deck Construction and Game Length

Scott Heise @HomerJr wrote:

I think there is an inherent flaw/limitation to this concept though... one that I think may be obvious to experienced players but newer players may not recognize. That is, that these archetypes only really apply to the "deck construction" phase of the game. There comes a point in every game where trade/scrap become inconsequential and all that matters is pure combat and defense. At that point, it basically comes down to a numbers game, put simply as: [(total attack in your deck) - (total defense in their deck)] / (effective # of cards in your deck) relative to their amount of authority, and vise versa. We've both said it before, but a player that doesn't recognize this "turning point" will be doomed to failure even if they master the archetype concept.

SWoRD Scope: Predicting the Least Predictable

My strategy does not take into account the rapid plummet in value of **Scrap** and econ cards and the corresponding rise of attack and defense cards. I could say this is because my strategy system only speaks to strategies and not tactics.

But I think you are describing end game scenarios where there's so little time left, that there really aren't any good card purchases left. If we've left "deck construction" it's because one or more deck's **Greenness** has overcome the **Blueness** of its opponent's.

I Love You but Here's Where You're Wrong

I have massive respect for your analysis that the average game goes to 4.5 decks and that 90% or whatever are under 5 deck passes. I love blue/red and I love the high-velocity deck probably too much so it is a constant reminder to me to be pragmatic about my late-game investments.

But within a single game, I will never use your analysis to determine how many turns are left. We don't make the same decisions, we don't buy the same cards and I'm not playing the average deck. I have one deck and I'm playing one deck. If my deck gets weird, 4.5 decks can't help me. If we buy 70% bases, it won't tell me if we're in 7 deck territory or 10 decks or if the presence of **yellow bases** speeds up the game or if combo just scatters the turn distribution to the wind and I can't even predict what it will be.

Your analysis doesn't tell me what percentage of games entire the 4th deck GUARANTEED to end before the 5th deck. Nor does it tell me if my best chances of winning lie in ending the game faster (racing for damage in the 4th deck) as compared to drawing it out (surviving into the 5th deck or beyond). It only suggests that one game length is more likely. If I have a 10% of winning in one case and a 35% chance of the other, that changes things a lot. (If I could commission some analysis of my own games, this is where I would start! Do you have any interns I can borrow?)

You might be done with this game, but I'm still playing

Here's what it boils down to for me. Deck Construction is not a phase of the game, it is a phase of one player's strategy. Just because my **opponent's deck** has achieved it's final form, doesn't mean **mine has**. If my deck can't beat their's mathematically, why the hell would I stop constructing it just because my opponent stops?

Sure, **Frigate** is way better than un-allied **Freighter** if we're both at the end-game. But that's only because But in terms of actual win percentage delta? 3-5%? There's just no game left to affect, and if the game is as short as you describe, no guaranteed I'll draw either. That's not the big-picture question I'm trying to answer.

I think if **Frigate/Destroyer/Barter World** are great late game cards, it's because most games end up with decks where the attack distributions are greater than the defense distributions, where bases get stranded past the shuffle and ships get topped out of nowhere, and the odds of the game ending at any moment despite the life totals is going up just by virtue of the increasing concentration of power in both decks. The game kind of has to be designed this way, games have to end eventually. As such, the value swingy cards with large attack values, risky ally bonuses and trash abilities go up.

Would you like a pair? How do you like Despair?

If you are winning 70 to 10, should you buy a finishing card? I would argue, maybe not, even though we are past "deck-building." Don't you already have a 95% chance to finish them? Is their best chance to make up this huge deficit to deal 7-12 more damage to you next turn? This game is no longer a race. Or is it to snag a **Missile Bot** and just pray that their defense holds out until they can turn the game around?

I'd say it depends. It depends on how I'm winning this game. And I can remove their only hope of beating me. If my opponent has a thinner deck then fuck yes I want **Dreadnaught**. Opponent just needs enough defense to survive until their deck hits a few 20+ turns and I'm toast. If my opponent is behind on scrap? Give me **Missile Bot**. If I keep my deck thinner than theirs, then they can't win the long game OR the short game. If their deck has a huge **shield wall** or the **Flagship and Shuttles brigade** then they are most likely to win by drawing those cards together. In which case I have a real choice. Do I follow the strategy that beats that scenario (**scrap**) or the one that finishes the game before it happens (**death**)?

Lose by the SWORD, Try by the SWORD

I used to be in Remy's BGG League before I broke my phone, couldn't keep up with the matches, and largely took a break from the game (while all my friends who I got addicted played on on their phones, no longer making eye contact with me). In my first or second league group, I was with FlyingArrow. I remembered beating him. It was probably a year later when I realized he was actually a great player. He pointed out two things to me:

- 1) Federation Shuttle is garbage.
- 2) Lose the right way - make each likely loss a few percentage points less likely.

That is, if you're going to lose the game at least give yourself some small chance to win. After all, you need to win some of the games you were "supposed to" lose to make up for the games you are "supposed to" win but down due to dirty dirty luck.

Give Me Your Best Line?

Line - a poker and therefore Magic term. A strategy and the tactic or play intended to follow that strategy and achieve a desired result. Or something.

So how do you pick the best line given a certain game state? I assert that even in these late game scenarios, the wheel still gives you a framework to determine not how likely a tactic is to work, but rather how great the result of that tactic if it does work. They give you a possible roadmap to a small victory. And you get to use your judgement brain to probability stuff to it and guess for the best result.

Sometimes I even decide that the only way to win a game is to buy a big econ card when I'm at 10 life. Because I think my best shot at undoing my terrible luck or horrible decisions is to:

- a) buy a \$\$Trade Pod\$\$
- b) **survive** to shuffle
- c) buy a **Blob World (combo card)**
- d) **Survive** to shuffle again and then
- e) hope to rain **blobs** from the sky and not brick.

Yes it is unlikely, but it is more effective. Or it could be. It's really hard to know. But at least when I die, I'll know I had hope. If I'm behind in a race, am I really just hoping to survive to the shuffle and hit all my cards before my opponent hits his or hers?

The Wheel is Hope

So that's the wheel. Relevant at the end game as I use it and understand it.

Late games are filled with ridiculous combos, stupid **Needles**, absurd **Barges**, opponents bricking, **Bases absorbing 12 damage over 3 turns** etc, etc. They are not reliable strategies. But if my other options are dominated? I will take the small chance of hitting them 99% of the time, 50% of the time (because being dominated is only like 80% effective, every time, most of time so you don't have to never do it) But there is a lot of opportunity living that 1% of your best draws or the 1% of their worst draws. You probably won't get lucky. But if you need to get lucky, then assume you will and set yourself up to get really lucky.

The SWoRD gives me a framework to evaluate these options and a continuum or maybe a 3-dimensional space to plot games on. When I lose, if I've been paying attention, then I have an idea way. I can look at tradeoffs I made and correct those values if I think they were wrong.

Scott Heise Designer @HomerJr Oct 15, 2015

There's a ton of good stuff in what you're writing and I agree with 90% of what you're saying.

Where I disagree, and its probably just semantics (and I've already said it once already 😊), is in the assignment of a color to each archetype. If it's just for shorthand, I can sort of get that, but then why not just refer to them by their archetype instead rather than the color? I think the color/faction assignments really muddy the water and confuse the overall points about strategy that you're making, which are great and I think fundamental to advanced play.

Here's the issue the way I see if, if you look at each card in the game, there are very very few cards that have just one archetype. Almost every card spans two or even three archetypes. Yes, it is true that many cards have a "primary" archetype (scrappers, for example), but I think this oversimplification can lead to some misconceptions and missed opportunities. For example, Blue is generally considered to be the "defense" faction, but blue can also deal substantial damage under the right circumstances. Red, while classified the scrap faction, can be tanky and defensive as hell with all of their outposts.

Again, I'm only really taking exception to maybe 10% of your message. I totally agree with the core of your analysis. But I let me propose a different way of evaluating the cards and how they fit into your archetypes to try and avoid what I think is the 10% problem... **by being colorblind**. Treat each card like a RPG character or a race car in a racing game, and give each factor a "rating" in each of the archetype categories and use that to value the cards using your strategy guides. What I mean is something like this:



Basically, the point I'm trying to make is that I think your great strategic analysis is better served by emphasizing the archetype of the *individual cards* and demphasizing the archetype of the factions.

Ben Gartner @benjotron wrote:
I Love You but Here's Where You're Wrong

I have massive respect for your analysis that the average game goes to 4.5 decks and that 90% or whatever are under 5 deck passes. I love blue/red and I love the high-velocity deck probably too much so it is a constant reminder to me to be pragmatic about my late-game investments.

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This criticism is 100% fair within the context of this topic. The point of my 4.5 deck analysis was to provide a starting point to discuss the deeper strategy that you present here, and to provide context for a future article (which I haven't written yet) that goes into the details of using the "pace of the game" to influence intragame decision making.

My perception (perhaps unfair) of inexperienced or less advanced players is that they often don't recognize how few the turns a game can last and how the subdivision of the game into "decks" really affects the time-value of cards, so this was an attempt to wake up players to that fact. I also wanted to try to actually quantify the strategy rather than rely entirely on heuristics, which is difficult to do so for a game with as many moving parts as this so I decided to start the semi-quantitative analysis by taking the simplest approach and I hope to build from there.

[@greylag](#)  [Oct 15, 2015](#)

Sort of sorry for quoting you out of context, but not at all sorry for the wealth of analysis that has incited! This is a gift to the game.

[Sándor Kolok](#) [@kolok](#) [Oct 15, 2015](#)

Ben Gartner [@benjotron](#) wrote:
You probably won't get lucky. But if you need to get lucky, then assume you will and set yourself up to get really lucky.

This.

Sorry for picking out maybe one bit of the relatively less sophisticated stuff (I said relatively! 😊) from that impressive write-up (I mean there's a ton of stuff there I did not even understand when quickly reading through it). 😊

But this rang some bells for me.

Obviously I can only speak for myself, being a less-experienced/advanced player this is something - among loads of other things - I had (and still have) to pick up to improve my game, and it was also put into words by benjotron very nicely.

Otherwise I'd like to thank all participants for this discussion conducted in this altruistic manner. 😊

Ben Gartner [@benjotron](#) [Oct 15, 2015](#)

Scott Heise [@HomerJr](#) wrote:
If it's just for shorthand, I can sort of get that, but then why not just refer to them by their archetype instead rather than the color? I think the color/faction assignments really muddy the water and confuse the overall points about strategy that you're making, which are great and I think fundamental to advanced play.

I really don't consider this an advanced concept, and my target audience isn't really advanced players - it's beginning players. I see "Red beats Blue" as the easiest way to get players who only beat **gambitguru** only 20% up to 40% of the time.

I don't think those players really want to learn three new archetype terms. I want them to have a general guideline, one that they can use and see work, begin to understand. Then they can start worrying about how each card actually fits into each archetype.

When I try explaining the 10+ considerations I'm making with each purchase, most of my friend usually just stop listening. This is where I see missed opportunities. I'm guessing you're talking about more advanced discussions.

Oh and I love your pictures 😊

Quote:
Basically, the point I'm trying to make is that I think your great strategic analysis is better served by emphasizing the archetype of the individual cards and demphasizing the archetype of the factions.

Maybe you'd rather we use color names for new players and the other names for our more advance discussions? I think you can use the terms interchangeably and we'll all be fine.

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Oh! So it sounds like you simplified your model in order to address a specific mistake you saw people making for the benefit of new players. 😊
Exactly what I was trying to do.

@greylag wrote:
Sort of sorry for quoting you out of context, but not at all sorry for the wealth of analysis that has incited! This is a gift to the game.

Don't be sorry. I have carpal tunnel now, but my ego loved it.

Sándor Kolok @kolok wrote:
Sorry for picking out maybe one bit of the relatively less sophisticated stuff (I said relatively! 😊) from that impressive write-up (I mean there's a ton of stuff there I did not even understand when quickly reading through it). 😊

I'm glad you found something that was helpful! I wouldn't worry about trying to get it all at once. Playing from behind is a huge skill that can take you a long way.

Quote:
Otherwise I'd like to thank all participants for this discussion conducted in this altruistic manner. 😊

I firmly believe that a rising tide lifts all boats. And that I a am a hovercraft. 😊

Flying Arrow @FlyingArrow Oct 15, 2015

Great article!

Ben Gartner @benjotron wrote:
Lose by the SWoRD, Try by the SWoRD
I used to be in Remy's BGG League before I broke my phone, couldn't keep up with the matches, and largely took a break from the game (while all my friends who I got addicted played on on their phones, no longer making eye contact with me). In my first or second league group, I was with FlyingArrow. I remembered beating him. It was probably a year later when I realized he was actually a gerat player. He pointed out two things to me:
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That is, if you're going to lose the game at least give yourself some small chance to win. After all, you need to win some of the games you were "supposed to" lose to make up for the games you are "supposed to" win but down due to dirty dirty luck.

Federation Shuttle is a perfectly fine deck 1 purchase if you have exactly 1 trade leftover or later if you are very heavy blue. Beyond that, yes, it's garbage.

Trying to win games even when they seem lost is a good idea. If you can, you should even try to win games after they are already lost. 😊

Ben Gartner @benjotron Oct 15, 2015

Flying Arrow @FlyingArrow wrote:
or later if you are very heavy blue

This is my problem, I always believe that I'm heavy blue 😊

Quote:
already lost. 😊

Can't blame a guy for trying!

Scott Heise Designer @HomerJr Oct 15, 2015

Ben Gartner @benjotron wrote:

Scott Heise @HomerJr wrote:

If it's just for shorthand, I can sort of get that, but then why not just refer to them by their archetype instead rather than the color? I think the color/faction assignments really muddy the water and confuse the overall points about strategy that you're making, which are great and I think fundamental to advanced play.

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When I try explaining the 10+ considerations I'm making with each purchase, most of my friend usually just stop listening. This is where I see missed opportunities. I'm guessing you're talking about more advanced discussions.

Oh and I love your pictures 😊

Thanks! I guess it comes down to what route is the best way to resonate with the new player. I personally thing the "faction fallacy" is a very evil thing that leads to a lot of bad play, which is why I'm so hard on trying to separate the archetypes from the factions. But that's just my opinion, of course. 😊

You make a good point though that the colors/factions are definitely easier to visualize and connect with, so perhaps when I'm thinking of "new" players I'm actually thinking of "newish" players who have a few games under their belt already. Point taken. 😊

Quote:

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Basically, the point I'm trying to make is that I think your great strategic analysis is better served by emphasizing the archetype of the *individual cards* and demphasizing the archetype of the factions.

Maybe you'd rather we use color names for new players and the other names for our more advance discussions? I think you can use the terms interchangeably and we'll all be fine.

That would be fine by me. Per the above, you're probably right that jumping straight into archetypes is probably too much for a brand new player and colors is probably better. But I would hope that anyone who has 5-10 games under their belt and is interested in learning strategy would catch onto the archetype concept very quickly.

Quote:

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My perception (perhaps unfair) of inexperienced or less advanced players is that they often don't recognize how few the turns a game can last and how the subdivision of the game into "decks" really affects the time-value of cards, so this was an attempt to wake up players to that fact. I also wanted to try to actually quantify the strategy rather than rely entirely on heuristics, which is difficult to do so for a game with as many moving parts as this so I decided to start the semi-quantitative analysis by taking the simplest approach and I hope to build from there.

Oh! So it sounds like you simplified your model in order to address a specific mistake you saw people making for the benefit of new players. 😊 Exactly what I was trying to do.

Yeah, exactly. I tried to simplify it enough to illustrate a point about the pace of the game. But it was also simplified by what is possible to do without having access to big data and detailed post game reports.

But obviously a lot of different ways to analyze strategy in this game, and I think there is plenty of space for everyone to post their heuristics and analysis tools whatever they may be. 😊

Ben Gartner @benjotron [Oct 15, 2015](#)

Scott Heise @HomerJr wrote:

Thanks! I guess it comes down to what route is the best way to resonate with the new player. I personally thing the "faction fallacy" is a very evil thing that leads to a lot of bad play

Yes, many beginning players need to be broken of that habit. But I think that's a separate lesson for the most part.

And honestly, I think the biggest danger of marrying yourself to a faction is just ending up in that your opponent is dominating.

Alexander Klemp ⚡ @Klemp May 24, 2016

HomerJr, can you please make an RPG diagram for all of the cards in the game 😊

I often refer back to this thread whenever the strategy juices in my mind are flowing... And I just love this visual so much.

Scott Heise Designer @HomerJr May 24, 2016

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Heh,maybe... 😊 I've been meaning to put something like this together for a long while, but haven't had the time to do it. However, I going to be on leave from work for a while very soon (my wife may go into labor at any moment), so perhaps I'll get some free time to work on this when I'm awake at 2 am... and 4 am... and 5:30am... 🙄

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If for no other reason, do it for the sake of art! And I just really like scales/bar graphs...