

Deck Divinations: Advanced Strategy for 7th Sea CCG by Mike Mullins

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Deck Divination 113: Make Them Bleed

The Vesten are a faction with obvious strengths and weaknesses. A quick look over their Crew and Boat show that the Vesten are gifted in the art of Boarding. Delve a little deeper, and strategies such as Dueling and Laerdom/Weather harbor paths to victory. The Vesten are easily the masters of the weather through their sorcery, Laerdom; they excel in the arena of Boarding with a number of Crew which can sail their Ships or have advantages during a boarding; and, they have a cunning Vendel capable of whittling away an opposing Ship's Crew through duels. In order to examine these strengths of the Vesten, this article will focus on:

- 1) The Vesten Crew that makes each of these strategies possible,
- 2) The cards which can make a deck based on these strategies successful, and
- 3) Why the Vesten are not so good at some of the other strategies in the game.

Vesten/Vendel of Unusual Significance

Let's begin by looking at the Vesten in relation to the Boarding strategy. In this area, the Vesten have a number of Crew that are beneficial in a Boarding, including:

Eisen Mercs (2 Swashbuckling, inflict 2 extra Hits per other Eisen Mercs),
Erich Carlberg (3 Swashbuckling, Swordsman +1, enables to Eisen Mercs to absorb extra Hits),
Hoskuld Hardrada (3 Swashbuckling, Swordsman +1),
Hoskuld Hardrada (3 Swashbuckling, Swordsman +2),
Iken of Venderheim (4 Swashbuckling),
Orm Greybeard (4 Swashbuckling, Swordsman +1, absorbs 1 extra when tacking or sinking),
Red Thorfield (3 Swashbuckling, Swordsman +2, inflicts Hits on opposing Ship even when he loses the Boarding Encounter),
Red Thorfield Exp. (4 Swashbuckling, Swordsman +2, capable of inflicting 9 hits through a Boarding Attack),
Sigvaldi Sveinson (3 Swashbuckling, capable of inflicting 6 Hits in a Boarding Attack), and
Thordis Bjerregaard (untacks upon entering a Boarding).

These Crew provide a number of advantages in a Boarding including the ability to inflict large amounts of damage on the opposing Ship. Thordis Bjerregaard helps ensure that if you can successfully initiate a Boarding, you will have someone to step up for a Boarding Attack. Finally Eisen Mercs (with Erich Carlberg in play) and Orm Greybeard help ensure that you can soak enough Hits to survive until you are ready to initiate a Boarding.

Next, let's look at the Vesten Crew which support a Laerdom/Weather deck. Like Boarding, the Vesten have a number of Crew which are beneficial in this area, including:

Gris Hallisdottir (Laerdom 1),
Gris Hallisdottir Exp. (Laerdom 2),
Svein Hegge Hjermstad (Laerdom 1),
Yngvild Olafsdottir (Laerdom 1, reduces Weather costs by 3), and
Yr Hagin Bronsson (Laerdom 1).

A Captain with a sorcery Knack is an incredible benefit. This provides a reservoir for all of your Laerdom Knacks without the worry that the Crew will be targeted with cards like "Listen!" or Challenge to a Duel. Also, a Crew with an inherent Laerdom 2 trait makes it so much easier to play with Laerdom 2 knacks.

Finally, the Vesten have a single Crew (though two versions of that Crew are available) who supports the Dueling deck type:

Orf Helfir (initiates duel on Ship less than 2 Seas away, 3 Swashbuckling, Swordsman +2), and Orf Helfir Exp. (initiates a duel with Crew in the same Sea as they are hired, 3 Swashbuckling, Swordsman +2).

The original Orf can help whittle down opposing Crews. He is not full proof, and without enhancements, can be stymied by a Scurvy Dogs. Once he starts eliminating opposing Crew, Orf Helfir Exp. can be used to keep an opponent from replenishing.

As Yngvild Olafsdottir provides a unique addition to a deck, the same can be said for Captain Jorund Guttormson. First of all, Captain Jorund Guttormson is Villainous, allowing for the use of cards such as Flogging, Black Heart, and Cat O' Nine Tails. Secondly, Captain Guttormson provides the ability to inflict hits based on Influence production once per turn (half of the Influence produced rounded up in Hits). Like Hits caused by Laerdom/Weather, Hits from Captain Jorund Guttormson's ability are neither Cannon nor Boarding Hits (see the Laerdom/Weather description below for the advantages of inflicting hits in this manner); unlike Weather Hits, there are even fewer cards which react to Captain Guttormson's ability.

Simply put, with the other Crew available, Captain Jorund Guttormson can be used to support any of these strategies (though not as well as Yngvild Olafsdottir can in the area of Weather).

I Have Not Seen It's Equal

There are quite a few cards which can help each of these strategies. While a deck purely based on the Weather theme requires a lot of cards useful to only such a deck, the Boarding and Dueling strategies share a large commonality of cards.

Laerdom/Weather decks typically include cards such as Villskap, Nod, Sterk, Ice Storm, Lightning Flash, The Spear of the West Wind, Into the Fog and Becalmed. These cards can provide a Vesten player with both offensive and defensive capabilities.

Villskap is a repeatable source of damage, inflicting 2 Hits to a Ship in the same Sea for a cost of 1 Adventuring. Each Nod you have in play can be tacked to increase this damage by 2. Ice Storm (4 Hits) and The Spear of the West Wind (either 2 or 4 Hits depending on the Sea) also are capable of inflicting Hits, this time at the cost of tacking one of your Crew with the Laerdom trait. Like Villskap, damage inflicted from these two cards can be raised with Nod.

Lightning Flash is an Action that removes low-cost Crew from your opponent's Ship. This is an efficient method of getting rid of an opponent's Scurvy Dogs, which are quite adept at taking Hits. Lightning Flash also works as a good counter to Posh Quarters, removing even more valuable Crew from your opponent's Ship.

Two cards that work well with the damage inflicted through Laerdom/Weather are Undead Ambush and Dust to Dust. Many of the Hits produced through Weather or Laerdom are done in increments of 2. When inflicting exactly 2 Hits, Undead Ambush raises the number of Hits inflicted by 2. Dust to Dust also raises Hits inflicted by 2, but triggers off of inflicting exactly 4 Hits. These two cards work well together and with Nod (which raises the Hits inflicted through Laerdom by 2).

For defensive purposes, Laerdom and Weather provide cards like Becalmed (an Action which stops another Ship from moving closer to you), Sterk (an Attachment which may be discarded to absorb 3 Hits), and Into the Fog (an Action which reduces one attack to zero Hits).

One card that can be used efficiently in a Laerdom deck that provides benefits for just about any strategy is Reise. Reise moves your Ship to an adjacent Sea, allowing you to keep Crew untacked. This allows you more opportunities to initiate a Boarding or to keep out of reach of your opponent. Also, Reis does not produce Sailing in order to move your Ship, and thus cannot be reacted to with Back It Up.

Cards that are beneficial to both Boarding and Dueling include the various schools (Aldana School in particular), Riposte, Fancy Swordplay, and Desperate Move. Stolen Sword can also be quite beneficial as it is easy complete with its low Adventuring cost (for duels, Stolen Sword is more valuable than Leegstra School because you will need to put card-drawing schools on Orf and leave damage increasing attachments to other cards). These cards help win both Duels and Boarding Attacks. For Dueling decks in particular, Actions and Attachments which allow you to draw cards during the Duel can be especially effective as Crew do not draw cards at the end of the Duel (in contrast to a Boarding Attack).

Of course there are other cards which are more supportive of a straightforward Boarding deck (Grappling Gun, Grappling Cannon, Cheap Sails, and Ambush Boarding). Grappling Gun, in conjunction with Crew like Thordis Bjerregard, can allow the Vesten to tack a lot of Crew in an effort to initiate a Boarding while still having quite a few Crew available to participate in the Boarding. Grappling Cannon and Cheap Sails can initiate a Boarding without requiring a player to tack Crew. Finally, Ambush Boarding helps get on board another Ship that has as many Sailors as you do.

In addition to Orf, the Vesten are capable of initiating duels using Challenge to a Duel and/or Vile Duel (or even Dashing Duel). These Action cards initiate duels under different circumstances than Orf, but always target a specific Crew (either a Heroic Crew in the case of Vile Duel or a Crew with two or more Attachments using Challenge to a Duel) rather than letting the opponent choose which Crew will step up for the Duel. When a player attempts to defend against one of Orf's duels and ends up losing a lot of cards in their hand, this is the best opportunity to hit them with a Challenge to a Duel or Vile Duel, removing a Crew from play with minimal risk of losing Orf or another high Swashbuckling Crew.

Get Used To Disappointment

The Vesten definitely have some strategies for which they are not well suited. Among their skill selection, the Vesten have frailties in Cannon and Influence and a slight shortcoming in Adventuring.

Without going heavily out of faction or to the ranks of unaligned Crew (such as Mark Scars or Morgause Mercuri), the Vesten are just not going to perform well (at least at a tournament level) using Cannon. Though they can use some neat tricks such as Shot Across the Bow, they are overall not well suited to Cannon.

Because they lack low cost Crew with high Adventuring, the Vesten are not able to build up quickly through Adventures. Crew like Iken of Venderheim and Orm Greybeard have good Adventuring skills, but their Influence cost can provide a difficulty in getting them into play (especially when using Yngvild Olafsdottir as your Captain). Yngvild herself has a nice Adventuring skill, but her Influence is normally far more valuable.

The Vesten do have solutions to their Influence problems, but they are not very speedy. Of course, Captain Jorund Guttormson can use Cat O' Nine Tails, but that option is not so easily implemented with Yngvild. Master Allen Trel provides Influence, but reduces you Captain's Influence production (this may actually be more beneficial for Yngvild who has a decent level of Adventuring to use in support of deck development). Rognvald Branson can also be used to boost Influence production (especially for Captain Jorund Guttormson's Captain ability), but he is risky to include in starting Crew because he requires Adventures to be effective.

At this time, the low Influence and the presence of Adventuring in Crew that are better used in other areas limits the Vesten's ability to use Sea Attachments or Allies at a high level of efficiency. This does not mean that they cannot use them at all, just that a Vesten player must be selective. Cafe of Broken Dreams, in particular, works well in a Boarding or Dueling deck. Cafe of Broken Dreams can reduce your opponent's Sailing and ability to negate your Boarding attempts. In a Dueling deck, the cost to remove Cafe of Broken Dreams can be prohibitive as Off removes the rest of their Crew one by one.

In two weeks, I will discuss Foul Weather Jack's Maps.

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

<https://web.archive.org/web/20020217172921/http://7thsea.com/ccg/deckdiv112.html>

Deck Divination 112 : Selecting Your Starting Crew

Your Captain has a Wealth of 9, what are you going to do with it? Do you play a set Crew with that Wealth or are you going to vary your starting Crew based on your opponent's Captain and Ship? How quickly do you need your Captain's ability activated? Do you have space on your Ship for Crew that take up two slots?

Before I get any further, I would like to thank Chris Carpinello for suggesting this subject for the Deck Divination articles.

These are just some of the questions that you will face during deck construction as you try to determine the best starting Crew for your deck. This issue of Deck Divination will explore what makes a good starting Crew and will touch on building a deck around those starting Crew.

There are quite a few factors which go into selecting a starting Crew for your Ship, including your Ship's Crew Maximum, your Captain's Wealth, your deck's skill needs, and the strengths/weaknesses of the faction you are playing. Your Captain's skills as well as his/her traits (such as Villainous) are also likely to affect your starting Crew.

Most decks, though not all, include one or more Unaligned Crew among their starting Crew. Marketeers, Brutes, Scurvy Dogs, and Riggers are commonly found among the starting Crew of many Ships.

Imagine your deck needs help taking an early hit and you decide to devote some of your Captain's Wealth to filling this need. There are a few damage absorbers available at a low cost, including Brutes, Scurvy Dogs, Bully Boys, and Cutthroats. Each of these four Crew have valid places in certain decks, and none are wholly superior to any of the others.

For a more detailed example, let's look at Brutes vs. Bully Boys. For 2 Wealth, you can start with two Brutes or one Bully Boy. There are advantages to each option. A Brute tacks to absorb two extra hits and has a Swashbuckling of 1 (sinking to absorb 1 hit), thus two Brutes can tack to absorb 6 hits and/or sink to absorb 2 more hits. Bully Boys can tack to absorb two extra hits as well, but have a swashbuckling of 2, thus one Bully Boy can tack to soak 4 hits and sink to absorb 2 more hits. From a pure damage absorption perspective, two Brutes are better than 1 Bully Boy. However, the Brutes take up two of your Ship's crew slots which is especially important on the small Ships (the Grenouille du Grace has a particularly rough time accommodating two Brutes). In addition, Bully Boys have a higher Swashbuckling,

reducing how much they are affected by Skull Shot in comparison to a single Brutes (a single Brutes is being compared because there will be a period when you discard one of the Brutes to make way for better Crew) and allowing them to pay for more cards than a single Brutes (such as Merchant Ship and "Repel Boarders"). The Brutes provide flexibility while the Bully Boys are likely to stay on board longer. Overall, the Brutes are more commonly used, but cards such as Bully Boys do have their place in certain decks.

A Sea Dog deck which hopes to keep the damage absorbing Crew around for a few turns might choose to go with Bully Boys because they only take one Crew slot. A Brotherhood deck may choose to go with two Brutes for the added flexibility. A Castille player may choose to go with two Scurvy Dogs for maximum protection and because they have plenty of Crew space to do so. A Montaigne player may choose to go with Cutthroats because they expect to only need the Crew's services for absorbing one attack (at most).

When choosing between starting Crew, especially low-cost Crew (such as Fancy Dans/Marketeers, or Brutes/Scurvy Dogs), take into account how quickly your deck builds. For instance if you have five starting Crew on the Grenouille du Grace and you can typically bring out two Crew on the first turn, it means you will be discarding one of your starting Crew on the first turn. You may be better off only having four starting Crew.

For Villainous decks which use Flogging, Black Heart, and/or Cat o' Nine Tails, your starting Crew should reflect a high turnover of those Crew. If you will be getting rid of Crew through these sorts of cards, you are better off starting with sufficient low-cost Crew (Marketeers, Blacktooth Bill, Brutes, etc.) rather than two faction Crew and one low-cost Crew.

Your starting Crew is a great place to address any weaknesses of your faction (though not always possible). For instance, the Montaigne are poor in Adventuring, but three unaligned Crew do quite well in this area (Wilhelm Dunst, Red the Adventurer, and Scott Jay); inclusion of one of these Crew in your starting Crew should provide you the Adventuring you need. If you do not include one of these Crew in your starting Crew, you would need to include three or more copies of a similar Crew with 3+ Adventuring in your deck just to give you a decent chance to draw the Crew early enough in the game to be useful.

Of course, there is no reason to include a Crew that fills a void in your faction if you do not need that void filled. For the Montaigne example above, if you have no cards in your deck that cost more than 2 Adventuring, there is no reason to include an unaligned Crew in your starting Crew to fill the void (the Montaigne have Crew with Adventuring skills of 2, such as Gilles Aliais du Creiux).

Unfortunately some weaknesses are easier to fill than others. Sailing is one of the easiest, with Unaligned Crew available to sail Ships with Move Costs of 2 (Riggers, Oar Team), 3 (Li'l Jim, Solomon Sails), and 4 (Grousin' George, Whalers). Influence is more difficult with many low cost Crew available, but most have the No Attachment trait. There are few Unaligned Crew with Cannon, but those available tend to cover the range of low, medium, and high-cost. Swashbuckling is also difficult to find among Unaligned Crew, but the ability to absorb hits is quite prevalent in Crew such as Brutes, Cutthroats, and Scurvy Dogs.

Like Crew which address a weakness of a deck, it is important to have Crew which focus the strength of a deck. Crew crucial to the success of a deck should be included in the starting Crew when feasible. Topman can be critical to the success of a Brotherhood deck using the Falcon's Roost. Rather than risking not drawing a Topman Crew, this type of deck should start with a Topman in play at the start of the game. Many Montaigne decks begin with Pepin in play because of his crucial role in a game, and many Castillian decks begin with Padre Alfonso in play because of his ability during a boarding.

As with filling in weaknesses, starting with a strength already in play prevents a deck from building without a critical Crew.

Many decks have difficulties with certain other types of decks. This is another type of weakness that can be dealt with by the selection of your starting Crew. This is a little more difficult than ensuring you cover your weakness with a certain set of starting Crew. For instance, you have a Sea Dog deck that takes a little while to build up and take a hit. You, however, build up faster with a mobile Ship. In this case you may design your deck with two different starting Crew in mind. If your opponent is one or two Seas away, you use one Celedoine, one Riggers, and one Brutes. If your opponent is four or five Seas away, you start with one Celedoine and two Riggers. When your opponent starts three Seas away you make your decision based on the faction being played.

Having a variety of options available for your starting Crew can provide some advantages in your games. However, these advantages come with a cost. For quite a few decks, the starting Crew you do not use will not be Crew you desire drawing during the course of a game. In addition, having a variety of starting Crew for a deck requires understanding the abilities of different Ship/Captain combinations and how your deck fares against them.

This should give you some general ideas on how to design a starting Crew. Some players follow very strict rules in their starting Crew (always begin play with only 2 Crew slots open), but I tend to find each Captain/Ship combination and strategy has its own guidelines.

For the remainder of this article, I will go through some examples of potential starting Crew and point out strengths and weakness of the Crew listed. All of these are starting Crew combinations I have used or seen used.

Berek on the Black Dawn

1 x William Toss, 1 x Dorf Klinderhoff, 1 x Fancy Dans

This combination of Crew provides plenty of Influence (Berek, Toss, Dans) and a sailor (Dorf). In addition, starting Dorf guarantees this Ship will be able to hire an eighth Crew. On the down side, it's primary damage absorption is tied to some of it's major Influence production in William Toss.

Reis on the Scarlet Roger

3 x Marketeers, 2 Fancy Dans, 1 x Scurvy Dogs

This combination of Crew provides tons of influence and an ability to absorb hits. However, none of the starting Crew can Sail the ship. A truly fast deck can give this starting Crew some grave difficulties. In addition, a speed boarder deck packing No Survivors! Can wipe out the entire Crew (except Reis) on the first action of the game.

Yngvild Olafsdottir on the Revensj

1 x Brawny Rowers, 1 x Rognvald Branson, 1 x Billy "Bilge Rat" Bones

This is a risky start, but one with a high upside. This starting Crew will be unable to absorb a 5+ hit on the first turn and revolves around drawing an Influence Adventure on the first turn.

Ernesto Castillus on the Freedom's Key

1 x Dunti, 1 x Marketeers, 1 x Cutthroats

The quality of this start is greatly determined by the proximity of the opponent. This start can build fast and take an early hit. Since Ernesto and Dunti will most likely be hiring Crew able to sail the Freedom's Key, mobility will evolve quickly. Fast decks may cause a threat to this deck, but the biggest threat is a first turn Log of the Black Freighter when facing a Black Freighter deck.

The General on teh Grenouille du Grace

1 x Wilhelm Dunst, 1 x Sidney, 1 x Aimon Riche du Pourisse

Wilhelm Dunst provides the Montaigne with Adventuring. Sidney is available from turn one to provide a target for Porte knacks. Aimon provides Sailing. Both Aimon and Wilhelm can take to soak three or more hits. This is a flexible start, but probably limits you to only bringing out one new Crew per turn.

I hope this helps you evaluate your starting Crew. As a general rule, having a higher number of low cost Crew as starters tends to provide early flexibility, while having higher cost starting Crew means you do not have to search for the Crew you want. The more of starting Crew you plan to replace during the course of a game, the more Crew you will need to include in your deck.

In two weeks, I will discuss the Boarding, Dueling, and Laerdom (i.e. the Vesten).

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

<http://members.aol.com/PugoCrydee/index.html>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20020217164444/http://7thsea.com/ccg/deckdiv111.html>

Deck Divination 111 : Montaigne Fast Cannon Deck

You cut to see who goes first. After drawing your seven cards and seeing your opponent's starting Crew (The General, Pepin, and 2 Riggers), you have about one turn before being hit with a 14 point Cannon attack that has been reacted to with a Skull Shot, making your Scurvy Dogs virtually useless. Game Over.

Welcome to the wonderful world of the Montaigne Fast Cannon Deck (MFCD). It strikes hard and fast, and games rarely last past the third turn when an MFCD is involved. This week's Deck Divination will take a look at this deck and examine why it is successful, what makes the Montaigne so good at it, how it is constructed, and how to defeat it.

Why is the MFCD successful?

The MFCD does two things in conjunction which make it successful. First, it builds at a very rapid pace. Secondly, it can hit for quite a bit of damage before an opponent has the opportunity to build.

The MFCD hits hard and fast. A 2 move cost Ship offers opportunities not found in 3 and 4 move cost Ships. First, Riggers are cheap starting Crew who can move the Ship or tack to absorb 2 Hits.

Build-up is designed to be quick and purposeful. It does not take long to get sufficient Crew to attack an opponent nor are a large number of Adventures needed to make those Crew deadly. With your starting Crew, and perhaps, a couple new Crew, you can chase down any vessel and unleash a single Cannon attack that will devastate your opponent.

With such a heavy leaning to the early game, the MFCD strikes while your opponent is still building and is at his weakest. The Gosse probably do not have four Gosse Crew in play yet, and thus do not have their +1 Swashbuckling. The Corsairs probably do not have Kheired-Din's Secret in play. Factions with poor Hit absorption have not built up to absorb the Hits of a large Cannon attack. Opponents have seen the fewest cards they will ever see, thus increasing the odds that they will not have drawn a Last Second Escape! or Betrayal.

Basically, the MFCD strikes before opponents can build, activate Captain abilities, or draw their much needed defensive cards.

What makes the Montaigne ideal for fast cannon?

There are four factors that make the Montaigne ideal for fast cannon. Before I get to far, let's qualify the Montaigne as primarily referring to The General. The General is ideal for fast cannon and far exceeds the capability of Admiral Valvoix in this area (primarily due to the difference in Wealth).

First, The General has a starting Wealth of 10. This provides the General with the ability to start a very nice Crew. Only Berek matches The General's Wealth. Of all these factors, this is the least important (a Wealth of 10 for The General is primarily important because of Pepin, a Crew only the Montaigne have access to); other factions are not prevented from succeeding at fast cannon do to the lack of Wealth alone.

Second, The General has an Influence skill of 5. No other faction has a Captain with this much Influence. This allows The General to be the driving force behind the deck. In addition, The General has an Adventuring skill of 3 which is sufficient to play "Take It Like A Man!". While the 5 Influence helps drive the MFCD, similar decks can be constructed for other factions using Crew who cost less than or equal to the Influence of their Captain or another starting Crew.

Third, The General has Pepin. Pepin's cost of 6 Influence allows him to fit within The General's starting Crew, and Pepin's ability makes any other Crew the MFCD has in play (including The General) doubly effective. This allows The General to hire two Crew on the first turn. Only the Montaigne can use Pepin (he's Loyal), but the Die Seevogel can help any faction untack non-Captain Crew (though Die Seevogel's ability is unusable when the Ship's Free Move ability is used to hunt down an opposing Ship).

Fourth, the Montaigne have a large number of Crew with good Cannon skills (Francois Gaulle dul Motte, Galafre Flaubert du Dore, and Louis Sices du Sices, for example). No other faction in the game has the luxury of so many Crew with a Cannon skill greater than 2 with such manageable costs. In addition these Crew, often have another skill which can be used in conjunction with the fast cannon strategy (Galafre has 2 Sailing, sufficient Sailing to move the Ship; Gilles has 2 Influence and 2 Adventuring, sufficient to pay for Cheap Cannons or to complete Fresh Powder).

The final important factor in the fast cannon deck is a Ship with a move cost of 2 (or less). In Fate's Debt, this became available to all factions through the Die Seevogel (which is superior to the Grenouille du Grace and even provides the effects of Pepin to other factions in a limited manner).

What is in the MFCD?

There can be a bit of variation among the existing MFCD's out there. So here is a deck list of a version of then MFCD. Following the deck list, some of the variations to the MFCD will be discussed.

Captain

1 x The General

Ship

1 x Die Seevogel (or Grenouille du Grace)

Starting Crew

1 x Pepin

2 x Riggers

Crew

3 x Galafre Flaubert du Dore, 3 x Louis Sices du Sices,

3 x Isabeau Dubois du Arrent, 3 x Gilles Allais du Crioux,

3 x Francois Gaulle dul Motte, 3 Maureen Leveque

1 x Billy "Bilge Rat" Bones

Attachments

3 x Cheap Cannons, 2 x Hammocks,
1 x Seal of the Sun King

Adventures

3 x The Finest Cannons, 3 x Fresh Powder,
3 x Their Captain's Will

Actions

3 x Hiding in the Reefs, 3 x Last Second Escape!,
3 x Speed Isn't Everything, 3 x Gunnery at Its Finest
3 x Good Shot!, 3 x Skull Shot, 3 x Crescent Fire

There are a number of variations among starting Crew. Some players prefer to use an Aimon Riche du Pourisse over a Riggers and replace the second Riggers with a Brutes or Cutthroats. This provides some damage absorption, allowing for the replacement of Last Second Escape with a damage inflicting card (such as Castillian Gunpowder). With only needing one more Montaigne Crew to activate The General's ability, this option also provides more leeway for including non-Montaigne Crew in your deck (Jack Trades instead of Maureen Leveque, for instance).

Also, this version of the MFCD is a bit more defensive than many others. Some decks will reduce the number of defensive cards (Last Second Escape!, Hiding in the Reefs, Speed Isn't Everything) in favor of some offensive cards ("Target Their Powder Room!" or Castillian Gunpowder). Last Second Escape! is probably the most disposable of the three (while it can target Cannon attacks or boarding attempts, it is easily cancelled and it moves you away from your target, which is usually works against the MFCD). Hiding in the Reefs is too valuable against speed boarders, and a Cannon attack from an average gunner could cause major problems for this deck without Speed Isn't Everything.

Finally some players go solely for the fast strike. In this case, the Hammocks and Seal of the Sun King are not really necessary. A decent substitution is "Take It Like A Man!" which The General can pay for and helps ensure your opponent takes the big Cannon attack.

How do you defeat the MFCD?

The MFCD is not equipped to last for a long game. The MFCD listed above is one of the versions that is more equipped to be capable of winning in a long game (though the inclusion of "Take It Like A Man!" would make it more so). Basically, the key to defeating the MFCD is to stay alive until you have some Crew available that can soak a pretty good size hit, quickly attacking the MFCD before it gets rolling (speed cannon or speed boarding can be devastating, of course the MFCD can be equally as deadly to these decks), or reversing the fortunes of the game through Purple Heaves or Betrayal.

In the early game, Scurvy Dogs and Brutes work well to absorb hits unless an opponent plays Skull Shot. Defensive cards such as Evasive Course, Quick Tack, and Last Second Escape also can help eliminate an opponent's large Cannon attack. The Falcon's Roost in particular can cause a serious hindrance for the MFCD, as the Ship can eliminate a Cannon attack and that effect cannot be canceled with "Take it Like a Man!" (though "Will Do You No Good!" does cancel The Falcon's Roost ability).

After hiring a few Crew, you need one or two Crew that are good at taking hits to remain untacked in order to fend off the MFCD. Orm Greybeard and The Kire are extremely good at soaking hits.

The MFCD often tends to have a problem with taking damage early in a game. Though some starting Crew variations include Cutthroats or Brutes, the MFCD often cannot take more than one hit early. A Brotherhood deck on the Homeward Arrow which includes Geno as a starting Crew has a pretty good chance of tearing apart an MFCD.

The use of Betrayal can also wreak an MFCD. The MFCD typically deals out more damage than it can soak and often does not include "Take it Like a Man!" or does not have the Adventuring to pay for it (The General often gets tacked to play Crescent Fire).

Finally, the MFCD relies on untacking Crew to gain its speed and produce multiple cannon attacks. Purple Heaves is an Action card which can disrupt this strategy quite effectively by resulting in the untacked Crew to be discarded or the Ship to take five hits. Purple Heaves is a rare, costs 3 Adventuring, and is not effective against a large number of decks out there. This means that acquiring three copies of Purple Heaves can be difficult, some factions have difficulty paying for Purple Heaves, and that many decks will not include Purple Heaves because of its uselessness against many decks.

In two weeks, I will discuss the selection of a starting Crew.

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

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Deck Divination 110 : Villainy

"The worth of a hero is measured by the quality of the hero's villains." - bastardization of about a dozen different quotes by more prominent people than myself.

This Deck Divination will plunge into the murky waters of the Forbidden Sea and try to gain a better grasp of the Villains on the high seas. Sure, there are villains in all of the seas (especially Frothing and the Mirror), but Reis is the standard by which all other villains are measured, and if you disagree with that, there's a gibbet hanging from the yardarm that hasn't been used in the last few hours.

Now, this article will not discuss how villainous any of the particular Captains are inherently, but will look out how villainous you can portray them within your deck. And, there may even be a smattering of strategy tips included as well.

All you worthless scum have two choices in your path to villainy. For them evil and miserable souls with a fondness for murder, mayhem, and pillaging, only four factions encourage a level of depravity to which you have sunk: the Rogers, Corsairs, Black Freighter, and Montaigne. You pansies with a little extra youthful exuberance, any faction, however, is capable of committing such displays of corruption as petty theft, slander, criminal negligence, and drunk sailing.

Now, listen up or I'll let the sirens munch on your spleen!

Nothing grates on my nerves like a screeching cabin boy who's been impaled on the figurehead, except, of course, a villain who doesn't have a Black Heart. Anyone with a cold, dark pit for a heart should have no problem tossing his Crew to the depths of the ocean, leaving the mermaids and Legion to sort out who gets what. A Black Heart provides the satisfaction of sacrificing one of your Crew, who is probably a useless wretch anyway (for this you get to draw four cards). True villains will make sure and disembowel some innocent and weak fellow such as that pansy Blacktooth Bill. Reveling in your Black Heart so that rumors of your misdeeds spread throughout Theah shows a true dedication to the tenets of villainy, as well as providing space on your Ship for a more qualified Crew (and some cards in your hand).

Some days the sun shines too bright, the clouds are too white and fluffy, and the birds sing a bit too pleasantly. This disrupts a villain's entire day, at least until the villain has the opportunity to make someone suffer. Flogging works well to bring that suffering to a Crew. Such pain can only be inflicted personally, as there's no reason to give that pleasure to an undeserving underling. While Flogging tends to leave the punished Crew unable to work for the remainder of the day, the rest of the Crew really get into their work. Hell, some of the Crew even come up with new tasks (Flogging allows you to draw two cards) that can help your Ship. A couple of Floggings in a single morning can work wonders in motivating the wretches that think they can get a relaxing journey on your Ship. Of course, Flogging works best when you strike at those least able to handle anything but the simplest of jobs, such as Brutes and Marketeers. The less important the Crew flogged, the less the loss of production and the greater the potential gain from the rest of the Crew.

Now, between ensuring everyone knows you have a Black Heart and enjoying the cries of pain from a good Flogging, there is often not enough time to use the Cat o' Nine Tails (which can often be found in certain Montaigne brothels, showing what a beautifully decadent society the Montaigne have). This task can be given to subordinates, though a Captain worthy of the title Villain will make time to use this prized possession. For the less than villainous Captains out there who don't want to dirty their hands, this task can be given to a Crew who delights in the suffering of others. Outside of those brothels, there is nothing that makes a putrid waste of flesh that's stuffing his face with gruel work a little harder. Need more speed so you can ram that fleeing Avalon namby-pamby? Beat your Crew until they trim the sails a little faster. Your Marketeers hoarding some of your gold? Whip them until they cough it up on some new Crew. The Shellbacks scared of the monster on the island with your treasure chest? Make them more scared of you. A Cat o' Nine Tails works wonders to bring out the greatest production (+3 skill points of whatever skill they are tacking to produce) in your Crew. Unfortunately, a Crew whipped with a Cat o' Nine Tails often finds themselves in the infirmary of the nearest port (the Crew gets discarded). So once again, it's best to display your displeasure through the lowest maggots that have connived their way onto your Ship.

The mission of any villain worth his salt is to turn the heroes into shark bait. While cannon and boardings can accomplish this, there's something heartwarming about sending one of your crew to assassinate some righteous hero through a Vile Duel (starts a duel with an opposing Heroic Crew at the cost of tacking your Villainous Crew). First, even the non-villainous Captains out there can ignore their morals for just a moment while sending one of their less scrupulous Crew to kill off an opposing hero. Is the mere existence of Melinda Gosse bothering you? Well just turn to one of your stronger villainous Crew, and send them over to pound Melinda into chum. Now, if your assassin fails, they are most likely to be feed to the sharks themselves, unless you go to a great deal of effort to save them, but failure has its own rewards and no one wants a mate who can't handle a little girl. Finally, sending a subordinate to perform the assassination is far better than dueling some hero yourself, you need to stay on the ship and make sure the suffering of your crew continues.

Poison, blackmail, bribery, and subterfuge are the weapons of those without morals, you know, villains. When sending your Crew to backstab some heroic fool, there is a great advantage in equipping your thugs with a Hidden Knife (increases a Villainous Crew's damage during a Boarding Attack by 2). The heroes, their sense of right and wrong must really cloud their minds, somehow never suspect that their attacker will have a Hidden Knife. So, equip your most worthy ruffians with secreted knives and let them take down your opposition. The gleam of their silver blades reflecting the moon through a thin film of blood is enough to draw a sly grin from the evilest wretch to sail the five seas.

Monkey's Fist is not exactly limited to villains; them weakling heroes can also use it. As heroes are supposed to get rid of us villains, Monkey Fist does the job right fine. However, in a deck with a villainous Captain, Monkey's Fist is representative of a main villain, such as that bastard Reis, getting rid of the competition, say someone like Javier de Bejarno. This can be counter-productive. A better analogy might be the main villain getting rid of some freaking upstart (comparable to a Mafia don getting rid of a bruiser that freelances too often). Following this analogy, Monkey's Fist would be appropriate for getting rid of Slippery Sal or Michael Fitzhugh. The benefits here (drawing three cards and discarding a Crew to make

way for a better Crew) are useful, but finding another reason to allow Slippery Sal or Michael Fitzhugh on your Ship is difficult.

At times, infamy is all about reputation, and only the harshest, most reprehensible villains ever gain that infamy. Once you gain that infamy and fear, you will no longer be forced to remind lesser men (everyone else but you), "Don't Mess with Me, Boy!" Until then, this reminder, which works best in a deep feral voice with a snarl on your face, will help remind them who's in charge. In the eyes of others, this phrase, "Don't Mess with Me, Boy!" (increases all skills of a targeted Crew by one per hand/eye/leg/face Attachment the Crew has attached), makes you seem larger than life. When attempting to make gains through bravado, timing is important. When do you look more like you could conquer Theah, when you have some fancy boots, or when you have an Eyepatch, a Hook, a scar, and some fancy boots. The latter of course; the more you look like you have survived the impossible and come out on top, the more you can accomplish simply on reputation. Reputation, however, is fleeting, and thus reminding others of your invincibility loses its luster before long. So the best way to keep everyone fearing you, is to get rid of those who don't.

On occasion, you may find your Ship catching a fast moving current, yet for some reason your Ship does not seem to take full advantage of the opportunity. This is often due to some lousy, lazy roustabout who is only helping your Ship displace more water. When Lightening the Load (discards a non-Captain Crew to move your Ship to an adjacent Sea), you get rid of the fool who tried your patience one too many times, allow your boat to take advantage of that current, and free up a bunk so you can hire new Crew (hard working, Captain-fearing Crew) when you next reach port. Lightening the Load also serves as a reminder to the rest of your Crew that anyone not pulling his or her weight will be shark bait. Finally, getting rid of Crew often enough can attract a school of sharks to follow your Ship. This means that anyone jumping off a Ship you are boarding will find themselves in a world of pain as your pet sharks devour them.

There are many other ways to show your villainy, such as leaving one of your Crew whose become entranced with heroic notions Marooned on a volcanic island, letting the gang of cutthroats you've hired run down the poor innocents of a peaceful seaside village, or even providing someone with some irresistible Dark Temptations. Should a patron such as Giovanni Villanova take notice of your misdeeds, you may find yourself a powerful patron who can help inspire your crew to greater exploits of degradation and wickedness.

Next week I will discuss the Montaigne and speed cannon.

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

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Deck Divination 109 : Card Advantage

This week's Deck Divination addresses the importance of card advantage within a game of 7th Sea.

Card advantage can be gained in four distinct methods. These varieties can be achieved independently, but are not mutually exclusive. In many instances, the use of two or more card advantage techniques can be symbiotic, gaining a player an even greater benefit than the individual methods provide. The four varieties of card advantage are (1) drawing more cards, (2) holding more cards, (3) acquiring specific cards (henceforward referred to as "delving"), and (4) removing unwanted cards from the deck (henceforward referred to as "culling").

One special note about card advantage, card advantage typically only becomes an important factor between opponents when the two decks are of similar quality. If you are playing a deck capable of doing well at a large tournament (such as Origins or GenCon) and your opponent is using a deck that performs poorly in friendly play, even if the poorly built deck draws tons of cards in a turn, it is unlikely that it will be able to beat the superior deck. In short, card advantage gives you just that, an advantage, it does not provide a miracle cure for an otherwise poorly built deck.

Drawing

Axiom 1: The more cards you draw, the more cards you can play.

Axiom 2: The more cards you draw, the more likely you are to draw a card you need.

Before getting to far ahead of ourselves, let's break down each of these axioms.

Axiom 1 is the most basic premise in this article. In an extreme case, let's say your hand is empty and you only get to draw one card next turn; in this case, you only have one card that you can play next turn. Simply put, you must draw a card in order to play it, and thus the more cards you draw the more cards available to be played. There are some limitations on this. First, your hand size may not allow you to keep all of the cards you have drawn, but you can choose to keep those cards that you can afford to play. Secondly, many cards have a cost to play, and thus, with limited resources, you may not have the ability to play all of the cards you have drawn.

Axiom 2 makes a presumption. That presumption is that there is a card you need left in your deck. No matter how many cards you draw, if there is nothing in your deck that will help you, you won't get to it. If, however, your deck still contains useful cards, the more cards you draw the more likely you are to draw the useful card. For example, you have twelve cards left in your deck and you need that Betrayal (you still have one in your deck) before next turn, or your opponent will win. If you are drawing three cards, you have a 25% chance of drawing the Betrayal; if you are drawing four cards, you have a 33% chance of drawing it; and if you are drawing six cards, you have a 50% chance of drawing the Betrayal. The odds improve dramatically.

Now, a question that is very important to ask at this point is, "what is card advantage in relation to drawing more cards?" Is card advantage drawing four cards a turn rather than the three defined in the rulebook? What if your opponent is drawing five cards a turn?

Having an advantage in drawing cards means drawing more cards than your opponent. In drawing more cards, you get to your useful cards before your opponent gets to their useful cards. In a large cannon exchange, this means you are likely to have more Take it Like a Man cards in your hand than your opponent has Betrayals. When you draw more cards than your opponent, you can play the odds and usually you can come out on top. It is important to be aware of how many cards your opponent is drawing per turn in relation to you. If you are simply use to playing the odds because your deck often draws five cards a turn, and your play does not change when you play an opponent who is drawing six cards per turn, then you are likely to have troubles.

Another question that must be addressed in the area of drawing more cards is value. Value is determined through a comparison of benefit and cost. Benefit is how many cards you get to draw. Cost is, well, what gaining that benefit costs you. Some costs are near nothing, while other costs can be quite steep. In some cases, the cost of using a card has an obscure cost. Briefly, let's examine the value of cards such as Berek, Ancient Maps, Flogging, and Monkey's Fist.

Berek allows you to draw one extra card during the draw phase under two conditions. First, you must have three other Sea Dog Crew in play. Secondly, you cannot use this trait if one of your Crew has been sunk this turn. Well as Berek is a Sea Dog Captain, it should not be too difficult getting three Sea Dog Crew out in a Sea Dog deck. As for the second limitation of the trait, most decks generally have a goal of not sinking Crew (of course this phrase makes cards like Solomon Sails and Mad Mario less useful in a Sea Dog deck). In summary, the benefit for drawing an extra card each turn comes at the cost of playing the Sea Dogs and not absorbing damage by sinking Crew. This is a great value if you like the Sea Dogs and a terrible value if you hate the Sea Dogs

Ancient Maps is an Artifact Adventure that is played three Seas away and has a cheap completion cost of 10 Adventuring (won't even get into the expensive completion cost). The completion cost of 10 Adventuring is rather steep, and for some decks, may even be considered unattainable. Outside the rather significant completion cost, you must spend an action playing Ancient Maps, move your Ship three Seas, and an action completing it (non-Adventure cards only require one action to play). Granted, you can take more than one turn to accomplish these tasks, but time is also a cost. The longer it takes you to complete Ancient Maps, more opportunities will arise where another card could have had a greater impact on winning the game. Ancient Maps can be a great value for a fun deck and may even work in some serious decks (such as Brotherhood which always allows for the cheap completion cost), but in most decks its high cost of tacking Crew, spending two actions, and moving makes Ancient Maps a poor value.

Flogging requires you to tack a Crew. Early in a game, this often will mean tacking a one Influence cost Crew. Later in the game, this will often require tacking a more significant Crew. Flogging allows you to draw two cards, but costs you one card (the Flogging) in exchange for the two new cards. For the benefit of one card you must tack one Crew. Flogging's value is primarily determined through your selection of Crew. If you have Crew you do not mind tacking, then Flogging has a great value, but if you use larger more expensive Crew the value lessens. Also, the smaller the Ship, the higher the cost of tacking a single Crew (tacking one Crew when you have ten in play is less costly than tacking one Crew when you only have six in play).

Monkey's Fist requires you to discard a Villainous Crew in order to draw three cards. In exchange for drawing cards, you must discard a Crew and include Villainous Crew in your deck. On the up side, you can discard a tacked Crew. Unlike other beneficial cards (such as Cat 'o Nine Tails) that discard Crew, Monkey's fist does not allow for the discarding of Marketeers or Brutes (which often get discarded anyway). Instead, faction aligned Crew, more expensive Crew such its Michael Fitzhugh, or Crew with other disadvantages such as Slippery Sal must be used. For many decks, Monkey's Fist is not cost effective as it requires the inclusion of Crew that would not otherwise fit in the deck or it requires the discard of relatively useful Crew.

Holding

Axiom 1: The more cards in your hand, the more options you have to play for a given action or in reaction to an opponent's action.

There are a number of cards that allow you to increase your hand size. It is important to know that an increase in your hand size does not equate to holding more cards. How many cards you keep in your hand is dependent on how many cards you can hold and the percentage of cards that you play per turn in relation to the number of cards you draw per turn.

Before developing your deck to allow you to hold more cards, you should evaluate whether there is a reason to increase your hand size. If you play three or four cards a turn (and only draw three per turn), there is no reason (except during a boarding) to increase your hand size as you will never have more

than seven cards in your hand anyway. Decks that do not normally need larger hand sizes include speed boarding and quick cannon decks.

There are quite a large number of cards that provide an increase of hand size, but few of them are cheap. These cards include Ivory Spyglass, Tight-Knit Crew, Joern Keitelson, and Howls of Vengeance (though there are quite a few others, these are representative of the costs/limitations on most of them).

Ivory Spyglass increases your hand size by two at all times. It is an Adventure with a high completion cost (8 Adventuring in La Boca, 15 Adventuring elsewhere), and is placed two Seas away. This requires a significant effort to complete (1 Action to play, moving two Seas, an Action complete with at least 8 Adventuring). Ivory Spyglass, however, provides the greatest benefit with the fewest limitations.

Tight-Knit Crew is a low cost Captain Attachment that increases your hand size by one. However, Tight-Knit Crew only provides a benefit while your Ship's crew maximum is less than 9. For some factions, this is not even an option (Castille, Rogers, Vesten do not have Ships with crew maximums below 9). For almost every combination of Captain and Ship (except l'Amiral and the Grenouille du Grace), this means that you cannot play Hammocks. Tight-Knit Crew may be considered a decent substitution for Hammocks, but more Crew is almost universally better than more cards (though with enough cards that react to a small Ship, it may be advantageous to play Tight-Knit Crew over Hammocks, assuming you have that choice).

Joern Keitelson is the Rogers first mate. While in play, Joern provides an increase of one card to your hand size. Joern is an expensive Crew who is loyal to the Rogers. Since many Rogers decks use Cat 'o Nine Tails to discard Crew (such as Marketeers) to bring out more expensive Crew, Joern's high cost can be accounted for. With the frequent use of Flogging and Black Heart, many Rogers decks often end up discarding cards. With Joern in play, the frequency of discarding is greatly reduced. In decks that use the boarding Action cards (Canister Shot, Point Blank Cannon Volley, etc.) or the cannon volleys (especially 12 and 16 pound), a Rogers player may very well need to hold more than seven cards in order to ensure they can do sufficient damage to sink some of the opposing Crew.

Howls of Vengeance is one of the more limited methods of increasing the number of cards you can hold in your hand. First, Howls of Vengeance is usable only during a boarding. Secondly, during the boarding it has a cost of 1 Swashbuckling and replaces a Boarding Attack. There are occasions when this card can be used to keep a boarding going (making it where you do not have to pass), but the cost of 1 Swashbuckling may defeat the purpose in doing so (unless you can pay the 1 Swashbuckling without tacking a Crew). For most decks, however, this card is just not that valuable.

Delving

Axiom 1: Nothing is more useful than having the card you need to play available to be played.

Ever hit an opponent a thirty-seven point cannon attack and watch him use Betrayal to send it right back at you? What card did you need? A copy of Take it Like a Man could have prevented the suffering, but only if you had it in your hand. Delving provides the ability to get a much-needed card into your hand.

There are only a limited number of ways to get a needed card into your hand, and only one way to get the needed card into your hand. Three options of delving are limited by faction (Gosse, Black Freighter, Explorers), one by deck strategy (the Control cards), and another is usable by all factions (Sailing Under the Jolly Roger).

First, the Gosse provide the only unlimited form of delving in the game. The Gosse letter of marque provides the ability to retrieve any one card from your deck. Granted, you must show it to your opponent, but that is a limitation of every form of delving in 7th Sea. The Influence cost of 3 is quite doable for the Gosse, and the requirement when playing The Unwritten Rules of having the most Heroic Crew in play is not difficult either. The only other limitation on The Unwritten Rules is that it is sunk after use, but the Gosse are not great at cycling a deck so the difference between discarded and sunk is minimal.

The Black Freighter has the ability to place a Skeletal Crew on the top of your deck, so that one of the cards you draw during the Draw phase is a Crew. A card effect that allows you to draw cards during the Action phase could also be used to get the Crew card into your hand. The cost to move the Skeletal Crew to your deck is playing with the Black Freighter, Skeletal Crew, and having a Skeletal Crew in your discard pile (basically, the ability is free as long as you are using the Black Freighter). The cost to draw the Skeletal Crew is playing another action (such as Flogging) or the Skeletal Crew will be one of the three cards you draw during the Draw Phase. The cost of having to draw cards to get the Crew into your hand is different than the other delving cards (The Unwritten Rules, Sailing Under the Jolly Roger, etc.) that put the card immediately in your hand. That delay of getting the retrieved card is not significant, but it should be accounted for (plan ahead, and you can get the Skeletal Crew in your hand when you need them, rather than a turn too late).

The other delving cards are variations/combinations of the Black Freighter and Gosse abilities. Sailing Under the Jolly Roger can be used by any faction, and lets a player retrieve any Adventure from their deck. Guy McCormick's ability allows for the retrieval of any Item or Artifact Adventure once per turn, and has no cost except having three other Explorers Crew in play. Each Control card allows its controller to delve for another Control card by tacking the Control card in play (this is a minimal cost, mainly the action to delve for the Control card as most Control cards do not have another special ability that requires the Control card to tack). Of course, for the Control card delving ability, you must have already paid the rather high cost of putting the Control card into play.

Culling

Axiom 1: Having fewer useless cards in your deck allows you to draw useful cards at a more efficient rate.

What's worse than going to the 7th Sea, drawing your three cards at the end of a turn, and seeing three Adventures when you know you still have three Quick Tacks in your deck? Culling a deck allows you to remove cards from your deck when they become useless (or even less important than the other cards in your deck).

There are only a few methods of culling a deck at this point, and most of these are very limited. The current methods of culling a deck involve the use of specific factions, Ships, or the use of Control cards.

Two factions are suited to deck culling: the Explorers and the Corsairs. The Explorers have Guy McCormick's ability to retrieve an Item or Artifact Adventure. While you are still in need of specific Adventures, Guy's ability qualifies as delving, but once you only have useless Artifacts and Items (such as an unneeded Franzini's Lost Notebooks) in your deck, the retrieval (and thus removal) of them from your deck qualifies as culling. With the number of useful Items and Artifacts in the game, this makes for a late game strategy. The Corsairs have their Figurehead that allows a player to look at the top card of their deck and either return it there or discard it. This allows Corsairs to cull the top of their deck at any point in the game. This is a great ability for culling a deck (hopefully the number of useless cards in your deck makes it unlikely that you would have two useless cards in a row), but many players think of it more as a delving tool. The other problem with the Corsairs Figurehead is that it requires the completion of three Adventures, which is not a strong point of Corsairs decks.

The Fair Weather Friend allows for the immediate culling of a deck before a game begins. This can be a risky ability if the nature of your opponent's deck is not obvious from their Ship, Captain, and starting Crew (if you cannot ascertain which cards in your deck will be useless, you can't remove the useless cards). The Fair Weather Friend in many ways requires a slightly different mentality in deck building, as well as a good understanding of the game, to use successfully. While any faction can use the Fair Weather Friend, its eight Crew capacity is less than most other Ships. Also, the Fair Weather Friend was a promotional card distributed through the Crow's Nest to fan club members. This makes the Fair Weather Friend expensive to acquire, and at times, difficult to find.

Finally, the Control cards are similar to Guy McCormick's ability. Early in a game, the Control cards can be used to delve for other Control cards. When a Control victory becomes unattainable or achieved, the Control cards can be used to cull the remaining Control cards out of your deck. This is far more likely to be useful when you have determined a Control victory is unattainable (as opposed to achieved). The only way this strategy can be used when a Control victory has been achieved is if you have a way to draw cards after culling the remaining Control cards from your deck (i.e., Flogging, Black Heart, or Letter of Marque).

Next week I will discuss villainy.

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

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Deck Divination 108 : La Boca

The domination of a Sea can provide a number of advantages during a game. This Deck Divination article will focus on asserting dominance over La Boca. The concepts discussed here can be used in other Seas with similar benefits.

Dominance of a Sea is gained through Sea Attachments which provide a negative impact on an opposing Ship that remains in the Sea. The most obvious of these are Sea Attachments which inflict hits (such as Cannons of La Boca, Vengeful Serpent, or Armed Brig). Sea Attachments which can tack opposing Crew can also act as deterrents (Flashing Swords Inn, for example). Finally, Sea Attachments which negatively impact Crew skills also work (e.g. Cafe of Broken Dreams or Rough Waters).

Let's assume you have La Boca filled with nasty Sea Attachments sufficient to make your opponent hesitant about staying in La Boca. What advantage does this gain you?

First, your authority over La Boca lessens your opponent's ability to enhance his Ship and Crew through Adventures. Completing Adventures that require placement two or three seas away will require the Adventure to be played such that:

- 1) The Adventure is played while in La Boca,
- 2) The Adventure is completed in La Boca, or
- 3) He must move his Ship through La Boca in order to complete the Adventure.

Options 1 and 2 ensure that your Sea Attachments will get the opportunity to affect your opponent. Option 3 means that your opponent will either use his Ship's Free Move ability and pay his move cost to sail through La Boca or that he will move into La Boca before proceeding to the Frothing or Forbidden sea.

For Adventures that are only played one Sea away, your opponent may have to choose whether it is better to go through La Boca (or even into La Boca) to complete the Adventure at low cost, or if it is best to simply pay the higher Adventuring cost. Some powerful 2 Sea Away Adventures become very costly for your opponent when you are dominating La Boca (such as Synchron Powder).

While keeping your Ship in La Boca can provide similar difficulties for your opponent, it does not allow you to build up through Adventures. The Sea Attachments make life more difficult for your opponent while freeing your Ship to pursue its own goals.

Sea Attachments can also help you hunt down your opponent. Domination of La Boca reduces the number of Seas your opponent can use to safely escape from you.

Controlling La Boca makes it more difficult for your opponent to flee. His Ship's Free Move ability in conjunction with a sailor can move the Ship through La Boca once per turn. Thereafter, your opponent is limited to two Seas and will be forced to face your Sea Attachments.

If planning to use Sea Attachments in order to help hunting down your opponent, there are cards which will aid you. Barnacles prevents a Ship's use of its Free Move ability, preventing them from moving through La Boca. The General's Tactics allow you to hit them with a cannon attack a Sea away. Finally, No Escape! allows you to move and perform a cannon attack as a single action without using your Ship's Free Move ability.

La Boca, when dominated by your Sea Attachments, can also provide a safe haven or a line of defense. A La Boca with Sea Attachments can be used to defend your Ship by hitting your opponent with cannon volleys when forced to pause in La Boca.

For instance you have filled La Boca with a Blockade, a Cannons of La Boca, and a Small Fortress. Your Ship is in Frothing and your opponent's ship is in Forbidden.

For your opponent to perform a cannon attack or attempt a boarding, he will need to move through La Boca. Forcing your opponent to move through La Boca provides a number of options which will allow you to maintain a solid defense.

Should your opponent pay his Ship's move cost and simply move into La Boca, you have the opportunity to use one of your Sea Attachments (such as Cannons of La Boca) to tack some of his Crew.

Should your opponent move from Forbidden to Frothing (where your Ship is) using a sailor and his Ship's Free Move ability, you have two choices. You can either move to La Boca using a sailor, or you can use your Free Move and a sailor to move to Forbidden. Either way, your opponent will be forced to move into La Boca to continue pursuit.

Finally, domination of a Sea can be used to disrupt a Control victory. Playing a Control card is dangerous enough, but paying for a Control card and surviving a handful of Sea Attachments can be very difficult.

Lastly, I would like to discuss methods of dealing with an opponent who asserts his dominion over a Sea.

A devastating card to this strategy is Sails of Wind which, combined with a Ship's Free Move, allows a player to move his Ship two Seas and then perform another action. No Escape! can be used in a similar manner (Free Move + No Escape! + perform cannon attack). The General's Tactics will allow an opponent to perform a cannon attack against someone taking refuge in a Sea with a lot of Attachments.

Cards which remove Sea Attachments from play, such as When All Else Fails and Michel Rois et Reines, can be devastating. It's a Trap and To Fight Another Day can, however, be used to counter these. Michel Rois et Reines is the most dangerous due to his reusability.

Two decks designed to assert dominance over the same or adjacent Seas will cause significant problems for one another. Some of the strategies described above will still work, but the offensive benefits of Sea domination can be harder to maintain.

Next week I will discuss card advantage.

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

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Deck Divination 107 : Surviving The 7th Sea

This issue of Deck Divination focuses on a tournament rule, "the 7th Sea". Tournament games are played with a time limit of 45 minutes, after which, if a winner has not been determined, the still surviving players move to the 7th Sea.

The 7th Sea is a much different environment than the five seas the game is normally played in. The strategies for success in the 7th Sea can be very different than those used during a regular game. This is because a few significant rule changes take effect when time is called:

- 1) Players may not move out of the 7th Sea.
- 2) All Seas, Sea Attachments, and uncompleted Adventures are removed from play.
- 3) Crew may not tack to absorb damage.
- 4) New Crew, Adventures, and Attachments may no longer be brought directly into play.

This article will take each of these alterations to the normal rules and address how it affects the game.

First, "Players may not move out of the 7th Sea." This rule is a dramatic departure from one of the paradigms of 7th Sea. Often, games include a bit of chase as the stronger deck attempts to chase down the opposing deck. Of course, who is chasing whom will change as the course of a game continues (as the hunted deck gains strength and goes on the offensive). In the 7th Sea, a Ship may no longer flee. Sailing, except to initiate/cancel boardings has very little usefulness in the 7th Sea (though cards such as Crossing the T can use Sailing).

"All Seas, Sea Attachments, and uncompleted Adventures are removed from play." The import of removing the the Seas is covered above, as players may not move out of the 7th Sea. The removal of Sea Attachments can be a severe blow to certain deck strategies - Control and Ally decks. This rule of the 7th Sea virtually guarantees a loss for decks that are heavily weighted towards winning through Control or destroying the opposing Ship with Allies. For decks crippled by this rule, the 45 minute time limit should be viewed as the time you have to win the game. Finally, the loss of Adventures should not be a huge detriment to players aware of the clock. As the time limit nears, it is more and more unlikely that you will be able to complete Adventures. Also, after 45 minutes of game play, many of your Adventures should already be completed and you Crew should be pretty built up.

"Crew may not tack to absorb damage." This is a dramatic shift from the standard rules. This change to the rules downgrades many of the Crew in the game (Scurvy Dogs, many topman, Brutes, etc.). Crew which tack to absorb extra hits no longer receive this bonus, but Crew which absorb extra hits when they sink to absorb hits still do (Solomon Sails, Lowly Captives, Mad Mario). Cards which reduce hits (such as Quick Tack, Into the Fog, Eyepatch, etc.) become even more valuable in the 7th Sea. Betrayal is double devastating, not only does it save your Crew, it sinks the opposing Crew. Finally, cards which produce Swashbuckling can still be used to absorb hits and this can become game savers in the 7th Sea (Carousing, Tools of the Trade, Call to Duty, etc.).

Outside of the manner in which hits are absorbed, the strategy for winning a game alters. Taking an action to do something other than inflict hits can be devastating in the 7th Sea. I watched a game where two players were evenly matched in the 7th Sea. For his first action, Fred tacked his biggest cannoneer to inflict eight hits. George then inflicted a seven point cannon attack in return. As his second action, Fred used Wneching to untack his largest cannoneer. This gave George a distinct edge in inflicting hits through cannon volleys and George ended up winning the game. If Fred had instead inflicted a smaller cannon attack, he may have stopped one of Georges later cannon attacks. All this means, is that under normal circumstances, any action that does not inflict hits on the opposing Crew is somewhat of a wasted action.

Boarding takes a serious turn for the worse in the 7th Sea. If you attempt a boarding, and the attempt fails, all you have accomplished is tacking one of the opposing players sailors, who can still sink to absorb damage and is probably not worth very much in the 7th Sea.

Finally, "New Crew, Adventures, and Attachments may no longer be brought directly into play." This last rule change is a killer. All those Crew sunk in the 7th Sea, cannot be replaced. No longer can you play that Attachment which will lead you to victory. The inability to play Adventures is pretty much covered by other rules changes (no Seas to play it in and the inability to move to another sea).

There are a few ways to play Crew and Attachments in the 7th Sea. One of these is Press Gang which "puts" a cheap Crew into play. Cutthroats are cheap and highly useful in the 7th Sea, so Press Gang can be used to great advantage. The Traitor's Scream allows a Black Freighter deck to put a skeletal Crew into play when an opposing Crew is sunk during a boarding. With the difficulty to initiate a Boarding in the 7th Sea (at least without an Ambush Boarding), this is useful but problematic. Rita del Zepeda can tack to attach a Musket to herself. This may find some use in a Castille boarding deck, but I wouldn't count on it too often.

Next week I will discuss La Boca.

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

Deck Divination 106 : Doing Things Cheap

There are five Cheap Items, one for each of the skills (Cannon, Sailing, Adventuring, Influence, and Swashbuckling). These are Cheap Cannons, Cheap Sails, Cheap Tools, Pocket Money, and Cheap Cutlass.

The Cheap Items are Attachments which provide a one time benefit. This benefit is provided at a loss of surprise versus equivalent Action cards, at a lower price to permanent Attachments that provide similar benefits, a similar to price to permanent Attachments with lesser benefits, and a similar price to Adventures which require a Ship move into adjacent Seas. The benefits of the Cheap Items should be weighed against other options before choosing which cards are most suited for a deck.

Cheap Cannons

Crew Attachment - Item - Cheap

Cost : 2 Influence

Discard this card when this Crew is producing Cannon. This Crew produces 3 extra Cannon.

For examining Cheap Cannons, I will compare Cheap Cannons with Good Shot, Direct Hit!, Crescent Fire, High Seas Cannoning, Master Gunner, and Eisen Cannons. Good Shot and Direct hit! are Action cards without cost. Crescent Fire is an Action Card with a cost of 4 Influence. Master Gunner provides a permanent +1 Cannon at a similar cost while High Seas Cannoning provides a permanent +3 Cannon at a significantly higher cost (6 Adventuring). Eisen Cannons is an Adventure which provides a permanent +3 Cannon at a similar cost, but also requires the Ship to move to an adjacent Sea.

What makes any of these cards better than Cheap Cannons? All of these Action cards allow for an element of surprise while Cheap Cannons is attached to a Crew for all the world to see. Good Shot and Direct Hit are also free. These Action cards also provide a benefit in flexibility; while Cheap Cannons can only be used to increase the Cannon produced by a specific Crew, the Action cards can be played for any Crew. Finally, Crescent Fire produces one more Cannon skill point than Cheap Cannons.

What makes any of these cards worse than Cheap Cannons? Good Shot only provides +1 Cannon, 2 less than Cheap Cannons. Direct Hit! can only be played when a single Crew with a Cannon skill higher than 6 performs a Cannon attack. Direct Hit only increases the number of hits inflicted, and thus can not be used when a Cannon cost is being paid. Canister Shot has a cost of 4 Influence (a higher cost than Cheap Cannons). Another disadvantage of Action cards versus Attachments is that Action cards take up space in your hand while Attachments allow you to hold other cards in hand.

The comparison between Cheap Cannons and other Attachments (Master Gunner and High Seas Cannoning) is simple. Obviously the permanence of Master Gunner and High Seas Cannoning has long term benefits over Cheap Cannons. In the case of Master Gunner, however, a one time effect of +3 Cannon can often have a greater impact on a game than a permanent +1 Cannon skill. High Seas Cannoning gives the large bonus of Cheap Cannons and permanence of Master Gunner, but the price can be difficult for many decks to pay.

Eisen Cannons has a lot of upsides over Cheap Cannons, but there are significant (and not so obvious) costs to Eisen Cannons. First, there are a few actions involved in getting Eisen Cannons attached to one of your Crew. To attach Cheap Cannons, you simply pay the cost and attach it to a Crew (one action). For Eisen Cannons you spend an action placing the Adventure in an adjacent Sea, an Action to move to that Sea (or you can use your Ship's tack/react ability), and an action to complete the Adventure, for a total of 3 (or 2) actions. In addition, to do this all in one turn, you will tack 2 Crew or your Ship and a Crew as

opposed to paying for the Cheap Cannons with a single Crew. Another aspect of Adventures is that it may not always be convenient to move your Ship, either towards or away from your opponent.

All of the Cheap Items have both Attachment, Action, and Adventure counterparts. The example of Cheap Cannons can be used when evaluating another Cheap Item with its counterparts. For example, Pocket Money has near equivalents in Courtly Manner, Montaigne Valet, and Boatload of Jennys.

A distinction between all Cheap Items and corresponding Action cards is the surprise factor. The ability to ambush one's opponent with a new Crew (through Gold Only Buys Obedience, for example) or inflict extra hits in a Boarding attack (with Run 'im Through, for example) can lead to a shift in the balance of power in a game. Cheap Items, in and of themselves, provide no element of surprise. However, an Action card from Scarlet Seas brings that potential for surprise to the Cheap Items. Down to the Nub is an Action which keeps a Cheap Item from being discarded after use.

In a game between Dawn and Gary, Gary has a Cheap Sails attached to his Ship, the Hanged Man. Dawn has kept one topman untacked in order to prevent Gary from boarding her (Gary has plenty of Crew, but no other means to produce Sailing). Gary, however, has a trick up his sleeve, a High Seas Boarding and a Down to the Nub. Gary announces he will play High Seas Boarding and uses the Cheap Sails to produce 3 Sailing and reacts with Down to the Nub to prevent the Cheap Sails from being discarded. Since Gary is still in the 'pay' phase of playing an Action, Gary discards Cheap Sails a second time to produce 3 additional Sailing. Gary succeeds in boarding Dawn.

A key to Down to the Nub is how it can be used in the middle of paying a cost to allow the Cheap Item to be used twice in the same payment. With a Cheap Cannons in play, Down to the Nub becomes equivalent to a Direct Hit! when that Crew tacks for a Cannon attack. With more than one Cheap Item in play, the uses of Down to the Nub grow in flexibility. With a Cheap Sails in play, Down to the Nub gains the ability to move your Ship one Sea without tacking a single Crew. In conjunction with Pocket Money, a Down to the Nub allows you to hire a 4 Influence cost Crew.

As a quick note, at the time this article is written not all of the Cheap Items are worded as reacts, which is what allows the timing mechanism described above to work. However, Erik Yapple has stated that when the Cheap Items are reprinted, the MRP'd versions will all work as reacts.

Down to the Nub fixes one of the faults of the Cheap Items and returns an element of surprise to their use. With a little subterfuge, you can disrupt an opponent by making him take into account a Down to the Nub you do not have or lull an opponent into a false sense of security with what you have on the table, springing the Down to the Nub on him at the most opportune time.

Next week I will discuss going to the 7th Sea (endgame).

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

Deck Divination 105 : Untacking Your Cards

This is a subject near and dear to my heart and play style. Within all card games (at least the dozen or so I have played), two concepts have always increased a player's chance to win. One of these is card advantage, which I will discuss soon. The second is the reuse of your available resources. This week's Deck Divination will focus on resource reusability, and will specifically address the ability to untack your cards during the Action Phase.

A great portion of winning a collectible card game is determined by which player best uses their available resources. Except for a limited number of deck archetypes (primarily speed boarding), this requires a build up of resources (whether that's Crew, Adventures, Attachments, or cards in hand). To great extent it is far easier to build up a limited number of resources than it is to build up a large number of resources. Which is easier, getting a single Crew to have a Cannon skill of 10 or getting three Crew to a Cannon skill of 10? Obviously, a single Crew is easier to enhance to this level. Now, which is more effective, inflicting three 10 point Cannon attacks with 3 different Crew or with the same Crew?

Both are equally effective.

Crew in 7th Sea are the ultimate resource. Without Crew, a player loses the game. Crew are the resources which allow players to bring additional Crew into play, pay for Action cards, soak hits, and inflict hits through Cannon and Boarding attacks. Crew also complete Adventures, pay for Attachments, and pay Sailing to move your Ship and to initiate/cancel a boarding.

The use of an enhanced Crew more than one time per turn can greatly improve the efficient use of a player's resources.

While most cards that untack cards affect Crew, there are a few notable exceptions. First Watch can be used to untack your Ship while Michel Rois et Reines can be used to untack two Allies. First Watch can be used to provide you with multiple opportunities to use your Ship's tack/react capability. This can help a player inflict hits through Cannon attacks and limit an opponent's ability to flee. Tired of only being able to initiate a boarding when using the tack/react capability of your Ship, First Watch can give you multiple opportunities in one turn to do this. Michel Rois et Reines permits Allies to use their abilities twice in one turn. Instead of getting two Cannon attacks out of your two Armed Frigates in one turn, Michel allows those Armed Frigates to Cannon twice per turn. While using the Predator de la Mers, two Rum Runners in the proper Sea could each be used twice, giving your entire Crew +4 Swashbuckling.

The rest of the untack cards provide the ability to untack Crew in a variety of situations with a variety of costs and permitted targets.

For simplicity, I am going to break the cards that untack Crew into three subcategories.

First, there are cards which allow you to untack Crew after meeting specific guidelines. These cards basically reduce the cost of an action by one Crew. Cards in this category include "Man the Bilge Pumps!", Sea Chantey, Ship's Boat, Lemons, and Petruccio Garibaldi. Petruccio is a Crew card that untacks himself, Ship's Boat is a Ship Attachment that untacks a Crew after the Crew completes an Adventure, and the other three cards in this category are Actions that untack a single Crew after they are used to perform a specific Action. In essence, these cards produce the Skill required to complete that action. For instance, If you tack The Kire to absorb 6 hits and untack him with "Man the Bilge Pumps!", you have basically played "Man the Bilge Pumps!" to soak 6 hits. Also included in this category is Thomas Gosse who can tack to untack another non-Captain Crew when a Ship enters your Sea. This ability has a number of useful combinations (Maureen Leveque being the most commonly used).

Secondly, there are cards that untack your Crew as you enter a boarding or during a boarding. These cards allow you to either soak or inflict more hits during the boarding. One of these cards, Bjornsson's Horn is often a game breaker (Bjornsson's Horn allows you to tack your Captain and discard the Horn to untack your entire Crew in place of performing a Boarding attack). Angus McCloud Exp., Thordis Bjerregaard, and Grappling Gun allow a Crew to untack as it enters a boarding. For Angus McCloud, this is done at the expense of tacking another of your Crew. Andrei Levovich is similar in that he can untack as you enter a boarding, but the boarding must be initiated by your opponent. The Few, the Proud is similar to Andrei in that it can only be used when your opponent initiates a boarding, but the ability to untack two Crew can shift the balance of power during a boarding (plus The Few, the Proud has no cost, making it an excellent defensive card against a boarding). Finally, Backs to the Wall allows you to untack two Crew when your all of you Crew are tacked and your opponent steps up a Crew for a Boarding Attack (this card was discussed in more detail during last week's Deck Divination).

The third category is made up of those abilities (from Actions, Crew, and Attachment cards) that allow a player to untack a Crew as an action during the Action Phase. Within this category are included cards that allow you to untack a Gunner, a Topman, a First Mate, a Rower, a Captain, a Captive, any Crew with an Influence cost less than 3, any crew with the No Attachments trait, or even any Crew. Rather than go through all of the cards in this category, I will highlight the advantages of some of these cards.

"Stroke, Stroke has a cost of 1 Adventuring and can untack a Crew with the Rower trait. This is easily payable with a Narrow Escape or a Carousing. Thus, "Stroke, Stroke can untack a Rower without tacking another Crew. That Sailing can be used to initiate a Boarding, pay for another card, or to avoid a Boarding. With a Crew like Andre Donovan, "Stroke, Stroke can provide you with a wide variety of skills. Gustolph Hirsh can be used in a similar manner. Other cards like "Stroke, Stroke include Quick Reload, First Mate's Watch, and Quick Sailing (though Quick Reload and Quick Sailing have higher costs).

Port Master is a Brotherhood Captain Attachment that allows Allende (and eventually Berek) to tack in order to untack any of your other Crew. With the lack of quality Brotherhood Crew and the existing advantages of stacking enhancements (Attachments and Adventures) on your Captain, this card should be useless in most Brotherhood decks. There are certainly combinations where this card might work, but they are not common yet.

Scarlet Hook of Madness and Javier de Bejarano can untack at the cost of sinking another of your Crew. While not intuitively a good idea, these card can be used to make Crew space on your Ship and gain some benefit (as opposed to discarding a Brutes which you will never bring into play again). Also, these cards can provide for powerful end game gambits.

Stirring Speech can untack any Crew except a Captain at the cost of tacking a holy Crew. This can allow you to tack a Crew that serves little purpose (you don't need his ability/skills this turn) to untack a Crew which can be extremely useful this turn. Wenching is similar but has a cost of 3 Influence rather than the requirement to tack a holy Crew. For the Explorers, this is a significant difference as Wneching can be paid for by Only Two Came Out. Pepin is similar to both of these in that he can tack to untack any Crew including the Captain. Pepin's only disadvantage is that he takes up crew space.

One of the more intriguing cards in this category is "Butcher" Pinchot. He can tack to untack any Crew with the No Attachment traits and the Butcher does not count towards your Ship's Crew maximum. In essence, the Butcher gives a player extra uses of a Fancy Dans (to produce additional Influence), a Scurvy Dogs (to absorb tons of hits), or any other such card.

Finally, Tempting the Portal may be the worst of the untack cards. As a Porte 2 Attachment, this card can be difficult to get in play. While it can result in untacking your Captain, a random draw can send the Crew to which Tempting the Portal is attached to the sunk pile. There are much better uses of Prte 2 Crew with far less potential for disaster.

There is one card which can cause a great deal of difficulty for decks using an untack strategy. Purple Heaves, which has a cost of 3 Adventuring, can discard the untacked Crew or inflict 5 hits if the Crew untacking is your Captain. When untacking a heavily built up Crew, this can be catastrophic.

Next week I will discuss doing things Cheap.

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

<https://web.archive.org/web/20020217170721/http://7thsea.com/ccg/deckdiv104.html>

Deck Divination 104 : Boarding Prevention & Escape

Most decks fall into one of two categories, pro-boarding or anti-boarding. Some decks fall into both categories as they seek to control the conditions under which a boarding occurs. This installment of Deck Divination will focus on the anti-Boarding decks. Cards that cancel a Boarding before it begins, cards that end a Boarding that is in progress, and cards that make the Boarding less likely to occur.

The cards which specifically focus on canceling a boarding include Last Second Escape, Last Second Cannon Volley, Steering Clear, Hiding in the Reefs, Sabine Montjoy, Secrets of the Wind, and the Scarlet Roger. Each of these cards have advantages over the other cards in the list. I will detail each card, describing strengths and weaknesses.

Last Second Cannon Volley

Cost: 6 Cannon

This card inflicts 3 hits and cancels a Boarding attempt without providing your opponent a built in cancel cost. However, the cost of 6 Cannon is steep and can be difficult for many decks to pay. Also, by using 6 Cannon to pay for this card, that is 6 Cannon not being used to inflict hits. In comparison to Hiding in the Reefs, the cost to effect ratio is terrible. This card is probably most useful for a deck with few sailors and plenty of Cannon. The Captain Reis makes this card far more playable, but the Scarlet Roger's innate ability makes Last Second Cannon Volley redundant.

Secrets of the Winds

Cost: 11 Sailing Discard Cost: 14 Adventuring

This Control card is available to every faction. It also has a repetitive ability that will cancel any Boarding (including Ambush Boarding). The effect is equivalent to Sabine Montjoy's special ability, but does not require any crew space.

On the down side, the cost to put Secrets of the Winds in play is prohibitive. For most decks that do not stack Sailing Adventures, this card will require three to four sailors being tacked to bring Secrets of the Wind into play. Even decks that gear up for Betrayal will need two of those 6-Sailing crew to bring this Control card into play.

In addition to being difficult to play, Secrets of the Winds has a built in discard cost of 14 Adventuring. This discard cost plus the assortment of cards which can get rid of Sea Attachments (When All Else Fails, Michel Rois et Reines, etc.), make the permanency of Secrets of the Winds questionable.

Scarlet Roger

Cost: 4 Cannon

This Ship's ability may be the most impressive of all the examined cards (for canceling a Boarding). Use of this Ship pretty much eliminates Reis' need for other Boarding stoppers. In addition to the use of Sailing to cancel a normal Boarding, the Scarlet Roger allows any Boarding (even those initiated by a Common Pier or Ambush Boarding) to be canceled for the low cost of 4 Cannon.

The Scarlet Roger's greatest detractor is that its ability is available to exactly one faction. In requiring four Cannon to cancel a Boarding, the Scarlet Roger is more suited to stop a Boarding after round two or three (when the Crimson Roger player has more gunners and fewer Marketeers in play). Typically, this ability is not very useful against speed boarders.

Steering Clear

Cost: 0, Cancel Cost: 2 Sailing

Steering Clear is a single purpose card to stop a Boarding. The upside of Steering Clear is its free cost. In many ways, Steering Clear is designed to limit your opponent's untacked crew more than to prevent a Boarding. The 0 cost means that you tack no crew to play it (giving you an additional untacked crew should the boarding take place). This also allows a fully tacked crew to potentially cancel a Boarding or at least limit the effectiveness of the Boarding.

The downside of Steering Clear is that it has a cancel cost of 2 Sailing. Granted against the Grenouille du Grace and The Black Dawn, that cancel cost is the same as your opponent's Ship's Move Cost (making the boarding aspect of Last Second Escape equivalent to Steering Clear).

Sabine Montjoy

Cost: 2 Influence

Sabine Montjoy is a fabulous little unaligned Crew with the ability to tack to cancel a Boarding. With an Influence cost of 2, Sabine is easy to begin play as a member of your starting Crew. In addition, she lacks the dreaded No Attachment trait. Like the Scarlet Roger, Sabine is capable of stopping any Boarding. Unlike the Scarlet Roger, her ability is only usable once per turn. She is however good at stopping speed boarders. Most importantly, Sabine may be used by any faction.

Sabine's only negative is that she takes up a Crew slot on a Ship. For some decks, this is not a problem, but the Grenouille du Grace and Black Dawn may have more problems with this due to their low Crew maximums.

Hiding in the Reefs

Cost: Ship Move Cost

For decks weak against boarders, Hiding in the Reefs is a necessary card (except for possibly a Scarlet Rogers deck). With a cost equal to your Ship's Move Cost, Hiding in the Reefs is easily played as everyone uses sailors in their decks. In addition to canceling a Boarding without a cancel cost, Hiding in the Reefs deals three hits, tacking some of your opponent's Crew.

Against a non-Boarding deck Hiding in the Reefs becomes a junk card in your deck. This is really the only negative for the card, and a relatively minor one at that.

Last Second Escape

Cost: 0, Cancel Cost: Opponent's Ship Move Cost

Last Second Escape is basically a super Steering Clear. Cancel cost is raised from 2 to your opponent's Ship Move Cost (granted this is no change if your opponent is using the Grenouille du Grace or the Black Dawn). The greatest strength of Last Second Escape is the card's flexibility. Just as it can cancel a Boarding, it can also cancel a Cannon attack as well. With the likelihood that one of these acts will be performed against you, Last Second Escape is certain to be used at some point during a game.

A byproduct of avoiding the hits is that your ship moves to an adjacent Sea if Last Second Escape is not canceled. Depending upon your situation, this can either be positive or negative.

In addition to cards which can prevent a Boarding, other cards force an end to the Boarding. These cards include Phelan Cole, Phelan Cole Experienced, Repel Boarders, Backs to the Wall, and Cut the Ropes. Again, I will discuss each of these cards in terms of usefulness, beginning with the least useful.

Backs to the Wall

Cost: 0

This card provides your opponent an opportunity to end the Boarding or allow you to untack 2 Crew of your choosing. Either choice should help you survive the Boarding. Backs to the Wall, unlike any other card that ends a Boarding in progress, has no cost.

The negatives to Backs to the Wall are many. First, it may or may not allow you to escape the Boarding (the choice remains with your opponent). Secondly, it provides no benefit if your opponent is using Pistols or Muskets to finish off your Crew (no Crew is stepping up to trigger the react). Finally, by the time you gain the opportunity to play Backs to the Wall, you may have already lost a few Crew.

Phelan Cole Exp.

Cost: 7 Influence

Instead of performing a Boarding Attack, Phelan Cole can tack to end a Boarding and inflict 3 hits. With no cancel cost and by inflicting 3 hits, Phelan Cole may be the best card to end a Boarding.

Phelan Cole, however, is Loyal and may only be used by a Sea Dogs player. In addition to his limited availability to many decks, Phelan Cole can be prevented from ending a Boarding by your opponent playing a Drop a Boarding Net (which is a commonly found card in many Boarding decks).

Cut the Ropes

Cost: 1 Swashbuckling, Cancel Cost: 3 Swashbuckling

Cut the Ropes has a low cost and is an Action card that can be played by any faction. It's low cost allows it to be played through a Carousing or Panache as well as any Crew member (including Marketeers and other Crew that are otherwise useless during a Boarding).

However, Cut The Ropes has extremely cheap cancel cost. Cut the Ropes will often be insufficient to end a Boarding, but it can be used to tack one of your opponent's Crew at the cost of tacking one of your lesser Crew. The other flaw Cut the Ropes has is that it requires you to suffer damage before you can end the boarding. At times, this can mean that you will lose a Crew or tack many Crew before being able to end the Boarding.

Phelan Cole

Cost: 5 Influence

Phelan Cole can tack to end a Boarding after you have absorbed hits. His ability can be canceled by your opponent paying 4 Swashbuckling. The difference between the 3 Swashbuckling cancel cost of Cut the

Ropes and Phelan's cancel cost is significant. The increase from 3 to 4 Swashbuckling breaks a threshold. While 3 Swashbuckling can often be paid by a single Crew, many decks will have to tack a far more meaningful Crew to produce 4 Swashbuckling or will need to tack two Crew to produce that much Swashbuckling.

Phelan does take up space on your Ship, but with 3 Sailing and 1 Cannon, Phelan should be an acceptable Crew member for any Ship except Ships with a Move Cost of 4. He is a well rounded and easily used Crew for any faction with a move cost of 3 Sailing. Like the experienced Phelan, Phelan Cole's ability can be preempted by a Drop a Boarding Net. Like Cut the Ropes, Phelan Cole requires you to take hits before his ability can be activated and it also prevents your from tacking Phelan to absorb any of that damage (this can leave you with too many Crew tacked or sunk before escaping the Boarding).

Repel Boarders

Cost: 2 Swashbuckling, Cancel Cost: 6 Swashbuckling

Repel Boarders is basically a heavy duty Cut the Ropes. Like Cut the Ropes, Repel Boarders is playable by any faction. The cost to play Repel Boarders is easily paid, but the cancel cost can be difficult to pay (either requiring one heck of a boarder or multiple Crew).

Like Cut the Ropes, Repel Boarders is not playable until you suffer damage and this can be a fatal flaw during a Boarding where your Crew is tacked before any damage is inflicted or where a massive amount of damage is inflicted during a Boarding Attack.

Finally, there are other cards which, while not explicitly designed to cancel a Boarding, are rather effective at preventing them.

Sabotaged Sails

Cost: 1 Adventuring, Cancel Cost: 2 Swashbuckling

Sabotaged Sails cancels the production of Sailing. Because Sailing is an essential ingredient to successfully initiating a Boarding, cancellation of produced Sailing can prevent a Boarding. Unlike other Boarding cancel cards, Sabotaged Sails is very flexible. It can be used to stop a ship from moving closer, to stop a ship from running away, or to prevent the discard cost of a Control Card from being paid. In addition, the low cost of 1 Adventuring can be paid with a Topaz Pendant, "Captain", Carousing, or Narrow Escape.

The low cancel cost is easily paid by most decks, but will usually require your opponent to tack at least one Crew.

Confusion

Cost: 0, Requires Glamour 1

When a Boarding is initiated by a player paying their Ship's Move Cost in Sailing. Confusion forces that player to tack one additional Crew with Sailing to tack.

While this can make a Boarding more costly to a player, there is no element of surprise and Confusion is discarded. This makes for a one time use with little chance that it will stop the Boarding. In addition, this attachment can only be attached to a Crew with Glamour (one of the most rare traits among Crew).

Cafe of Broken Dreams

Cost: 4 Adventuring

This card can reduce one stat on all Crew in the same sea as this Attachment. When Sailing is named, it can usually force your opponent tack two Crew to initiate a Boarding. This will quickly move the Crew advantage in a Boarding to you. The discard cost for Cafe of Broken Dreams is one of your opponent's Crew, this tends to keep Cafe of Broken Dreams in play as that cost can be very high. As this card can be used against any stat, there are plenty of uses if your opponent is not playing a Boarding deck.

As a Sea Attachment, there are many cards that can get rid of Cafe of Broken Dreams. Also, this card can hurt you as well as your opponent. finally, this card requires your opponent to be in the same Sea as the Attachment (something which can often be easily avoided).

Red Skies at Morning

Cost: 3 Adventuring, Cancel Cost: 3 Sailing

This card has great potential to make life difficult for your opponent. Unlike similar cards which increase your opponent's move cost, Red Skies at Morning increases all Sailing costs by 2. No longer are Phantom Topman or Grappling Cannon able to initiate a Boarding. This card can also be a help to a Boarding deck by making it more difficult for you opponent to cancel your Boarding attempts.

The cancel cost is not significant, except for players using ships with Ship Move Costs less than 3, and most players will choose to pay the cancel cost rather than suffer the effects.

Below the Waterline

This card is easy to play for a Cannon deck and does not even require that your Cannon attacks inflict hits. By hitting an opponent and increasing their Ship Move Cost, you inflict damage and make it more difficult for them to initiate a Boarding.

This does not affect the use of a Grappling Cannon or Phantom Topman in initiating a Boarding. Also, use of this card usually requires you to be in the same Sea as your opponent (sort of like going into the lion's den to make sure the lion doesn't bite you) and may increase the risk of getting boarded.

Rough Waters

Cost: 2 Adventuring

Rough Waters increases the Move Cost of any Ship in or leaving a particular Sea. To be useful, this card needs to be between your ship and you opponent's ship. With some effort in deck construction, this card can be made to work while you are in the same sea as Rough Waters (assuming all of your sailors have Sailing stats one above your Ship's Move Cost).

Rough Waters is relatively simple to get rid of with a discard cost of 4 Adventuring and does not affect cards which produce Sailing based on a Ship's Move Cost (Secrets of the Tops, Castillian Pride, Grappling Cannon, etc.). As Rough Waters effects all players, placement of this card either requires great care or very specialized deck construction.

Becalmed

Cost: 3 Adventuring

Becalmed is a card that is easily playable by most factions and a couple of unaligned Crew can play it as well (Wilhelm Dunst and Red the Adventurer, for example). This card forces a player to pass before they move. Once they pass, you can end the turn by passing as well.

Becalmed can basically be used to end a turn in which you feel you could be vulnerable to a Boarding. Becalmed also does not cost you an action to play it (it allows you to immediately perform another action).

This allows you to move out of your opponent's Sea or bring in a Crew with Sailing (or any other action). This also allows you to draw 3 new cards before your opponent can attempt another Boarding (maybe allowing you to draw another anti-Boarding card).

While, Becalmed permits your opponent to continue performing actions, it does prevent them from initiating a Boarding as long as you are not in the same Sea (though there ways around this such as Off Course and Wake of Estallo which could move your ship back into the same Sea as your opponent).

Wild Party!

Cost: 4 Influence

Wild Party is similar to Becalmed in that it ends a turn and allows you to draw 3 new cards. Wild Party, however, is only playable by the Gosse and does not provide you with an additional action. For the Gosse, the 4 Influence is probably easier to come by, but the loss of the opportunity to bring out additional Crew (or perform any action) can be costly While Becalmed let's you escape and rebuild, Wild Party simply allows the Gosse to escape.

Bjornsson's Horn

Cost: 17 Adventuring (10 if completed in the Trade Sea)

Bjornsson's Horn allows a player to tack their Captain and discard the Horn to untack all of their Crew (including the Captain). In essence, this allows a player to tack a large number of their crew to soak damage and then untack them later in the boarding. This can be a deterrent because it makes almost any faction solid in a Boarding.

Bjornsson's Horn has two downsides. First, the Horn is expensive to attach to your Captain. Tacking enough crew to complete the Horn can leave you extremely vulnerable to a Boarding (or Cannon attack for that matter). Secondly, If you Captain gets tacked (by something like Drop a Boarding Net), Bjornsson's Horn becomes useless.

Next week I will discuss untacking your cards during the Action phase.

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

<https://web.archive.org/web/20020217170214/http://7thsea.com/ccg/deckdiv103.html>

Deck Divination 103 : The Metagame

Most decks in 7th Sea breakdown as either cannon or boarding decks. These are not the only styles of decks, but they are the most prevalent. In addition to cannon and boarding decks, the 7th Sea environment includes control, ramming, ally, dueling, and adventuring archetypes.

Welcome back. This week I will be discussing a topic that is more important to tournament play than to casual play.

The metagame actually covers two aspects of card play. The first piece of metagaming is performed during deck construction. The second part of metagaming occurs during gameplay.

Deck construction and metagaming are essential to be successful in competitive play. Metagaming involves knowing many aspects of a game and implementing that knowledge in your deck construction and play. During deck construction, metagaming involves decision-making that is not based on the card pool, but on the current game environment (popular decks, popular factions, current themes, etc.).

First of all, deck construction is a process of evolution not a single event. When evolving a deck for a tournament, the following questions should be asked. 1) Does my deck strategy work? 2) What deck strategies can I defeat only through a good dose of luck? 2a) Am I likely to see this strategy in the tournament? 3) What deck strategies can I easily defeat? 3a) Am I likely to see this strategy in the tournament? 3b) Why is my deck so good against this strategy? 4) What deck strategies are difficult to defeat? 4a) Am I likely to see this strategy in the tournament? 5) What can I do to improve my deck against strategies I am likely to see?

Question 1, "Does my deck strategy work?" is the most important question. If the answer is no, start over without bothering with the other questions. Once you feel your deck strategy is capable of winning, move on to the other questions.

Question 2, "What deck strategies can I defeat only through a good dose of luck?", really means is there a strategy that will defeat my deck fifty percent (or more) of the time. If you can name such a strategy, you need to evaluate how likely you are to encounter that deck archetype (see question 2a). If you feel the risk is minimum, you can ignore question 2. If, however, you are worried about a deck type which will be present in sufficient quantity, you need to adjust the deck until you have better than even odds of winning.

Now, after every adjustment to a deck, you need to playtest the deck again and restart your deck analysis with question 1.

Question 3, "What deck strategies can I easily defeat?" deals with your deck's strength. Being able to beat a deck archetype is not always important; the two corollary questions are used to determine the value of being able to handily defeat that archetype.

What good is it to be able to easily crush a deck style you do not expect to see at the tournament? It's useless. Alone, being able to defeat a deck you will not see at a tournament is worthless but not a negative for your deck. If, however, your deck is victorious against this deck type because you have added a handful of cards designed to crush this deck type, your deck would be better if those cards were replaced with cards more suitable to a variety of opposing strategies.

Question 4, "What deck strategies are difficult to defeat?", is the antithesis to Question 3. Any changes made to a deck based on your answer to this question should be proportional to the likelihood of facing that deck at the tournament.

For example, if you think your deck is strong against boarders and plinking cannon decks, and you expect those two deck archetypes to make up a large percentage of the field, you may not want to change your deck further. If, however, you expect to see a majority of control decks, you may want to gear your deck to crush control decks and make your deck only capable of defeating other deck types.

Question 5, "What can I do to improve my deck against strategies I am likely to see?" opens the opportunity to improve your deck against those decks you are expecting to face. Your deck may not be weak against these decks, but if you can improve your deck against the most common archetypes without weakening it too much against the other archetypes you expect to see, then you will have a better chance to pull off some tournament victories.

When considering your deck's viability against deck archetypes, compare your deck to well constructed, rare-heavy decks. Unlike friendly decks at the local store, these decks will be geared to crush their

opponents and will be packed with rare cards. If you meet an opponent who doesn't have a deck constructed like this, consider yourself lucky.

Metagaming during deck construction boils down to making decisions based on questions 2a, 3a, 4a, and 5. These questions are geared more towards analysis of the game environment than the actual solid construction of a deck. Metagaming will usually result in a weakening of a deck in certain areas while making it far superior in other areas. Let's say on a scale of 1 to 10, you rate your deck a 7 against Boarding, 6 against Control, 5 against Ally, and 6 against Cannon decks. Based on the current strategies and strengths on the 7th Sea list and in your local environment, you feel you will face a larger percentage of cannon decks at a tournament, and thus you add Into the Fog to your deck and this may cost you 6 deck slots (3 Into the Fog, 3 Sailing Adventures to make it playable). After tweaking the deck to include Into the Fog, your deck is 6 against Boarding, 5 against Control, 5 against Ally, and 9 against Cannon decks. Based strictly on odds (and your guessing correctly about the number of Cannon decks present), your deck should perform better in the tournament.

In addition to metagaming during deck construction, players metagame during gameplay.

For example, if you change your starting crew based on the Ship and Captain revealed by your opponent, you are metagaming. Basically this means you're making a decision based on expectations of how that deck will work against yours and are solving a problem by altering your starting crew. One crew used commonly in this manner is Sabine Montjoy who is hard for speed boarders to deal with.

Metagaming is a process of outthinking your opponent, or making your opponent outthink themselves. Once in a game, I faced a ship with two beefy gunners (each had cannon of 10+). I had eight cards in my hand and I needed to discard one before ending the Draw Phase. My hand included numerous crew which I needed as well as an Avalon Noble (+3 Adventuring Adventure) that would allow me to complete many of my adventures that were spread throughout the seas. I also had one Into the Fog in my hand (and none in my discard pile) and two crew capable of playing Into the Fog. I discarded the Into the Fog. My opponent believed I would not have discarded the Into the Fog if I didn't have other defensive cards ready to play and decided to hold off until he had a Take It Like A Man in his hand. This allowed me to get back into the game.

In another ccg, I knew a player who would "accidentally" allow cards to fall face up onto the table. He dropped cards letting his opponent know he had a method of dealing with a problem or that he had a potential advantage. Opponents would alter their game play and he would cruise to victory.

Metagaming is based on the knowledge a player has of the card game. This includes knowing:

1) What archetypes work with which Captain/Ship combinations. 2) What deck strategies are popular and proven effective. 3) What cards exist in the game (including their costs, their cancel costs, and their effects).

Deception and bluffing are included in the metagame. Let's go back to the topic of starting crew. Many players have a set starting crew and either show them at the same time as their Ship and Captain or place them face down until the Ship and Captain's are revealed. An excellent bluff would be to reveal your Ship and Captain (let's say Allende and The Hanged Man) and have seven face down cards waiting. Your opponent is likely to assume these seven cards are your starting crew and may assume that you are playing a speed boarder. When starting crew are revealed, simply show your three true starting crew and shuffle the other cards back into your deck. To prevent accusations of cheating, I suggest using non-crew as the excess facedown cards. Now your opponent has his less than ideal starting crew in play and you are sitting pretty.

Next week I will discuss the cards available for defending against a boarding.

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

<https://web.archive.org/web/20020217180636/http://7thsea.com/ccg/deckdiv102.html>

Deck Divination 102 : Decks & Personalities

Welcome to the second installment of Deck Divination. This article is a bit more disjointed than the previous one, so please bear with me.

Many players scan the 7th Sea list, Azrael Online, or 7th Sea World to find the latest power deck. Heck, this might even happen on team evil's list server. There are two problems with this. One, you may not own the cards necessary to construct this week's power deck. Two, you may hate playing the deck style that is currently the "in" thing. I'll get to the former some other time, but today I will focus on the latter.

Let's make an example of Pug. Pug is a talented mega-cannon player who enjoys packing his decks with anti-boarding cards (such as Steering Clear and Repel Boarders) and shove-the-damage-down-their-throats cards (such as Take it Like a Man and The Better Part Of Valor). Unfortunately the latest hot deck is an Explorer's control deck. This deck is tearing up the national tournament scene as well as Broadsides leagues across the country. So Pug goes online, gets the deck list, and learns everything he can about how to play the deck. After making a few tweaks to deal with his local environment, Pug grins ear-to-ear and shows up to his store's tournament ready to kick butt. After five rounds of swiss, Pug has 0 wins and doesn't understand what happened. Heck, even the newbie who only bought the two Sea Dogs starter decks trounced him.

In the above example, Pug lost because he did not have the personality to play a control deck. Pug may have not had the patience to only play one control card a turn, or maybe he failed to search for new control cards because he didn't want to discard cards from his hand. Pug played a deck which did not operate in a manner even close to his mega-cannon decks and lost because he was incapable of adapting to his new deck.

Certain decks require a great deal of patience and this is not attribute held by all ccger's. Other decks require bluffing, and a lot of us fail to bring our poker faces to game night at the local shop. Speed boarding decks, for example, tend to not work well for players who enjoy longer games.

First I would like to discuss playing within the range of your personality. Then I will discuss why this will not always work.

Do you have cards which always stay in your hand? Cards that never seem to be played?

Let's take Decks Awash as an example (Decks Awash targets and discards an Attachment on a Crew with more than 2 Attachments). Let's say nearly every game you end up with a Decks Awash stuck in your hand when you lose. In one game in particular, your Castillian opponent's Captain had 3 attachments (a Passionate Duel, an Asprey, and a Sails of Wind), but none of these cards particularly scare you, so you decide not to use your Decks Awash. At the end of the game the Decks Awash is still in your hand because you are waiting for a Grappling Gun or Bjornsson's Horn to show up. If a card sufficient to bring forth some level of fear never surfaces, you are holding onto a worthless card and potentially discarding other more useful cards. Should you be including Decks Awash in your deck?

Another way to ask the previous question would be, are you worried that as soon as you use a powerful card (such as Decks Awash) that your opponent will make you regret it?

In the above example, hesitancy may cost you your ability to react to other stimulus. I, for example, only own one Decks Awash and have often found myself waiting to target the perfect Attachment, and then the time would come when I would have to choose between discarding a Last Second Escape or the Decks Awash. I would discard Decks Awash nine times out of ten. I rarely include Decks Awash in my decks now (though I may change this strategy if I acquire more of this card).

I changed my deck to fit my personality, replacing a worthless card with one that I would actually use during a game.

In small groups where players learn each others tendencies very well, players who want to win consistently must either vary their decks within the constraints of their personality or learn to overcome this psychological induced limitations. Both of these suggestions basically boil down to a player expanding their horizons.

If you are a plinking cannon player, vary your deck a bit or play different factions. Plinking cannon decks do not always need to be a dozen crew with a cannon skill of 3. Try getting eight crew to a cannon skill of 5 instead.

If you can vary a deck so that it is close to what you prefer to play, it should present different challenges for your opponents, but remain similar enough to your original playing style that you don't have difficulties. Another method to throw off opponents is to play the same type of deck, just with a different faction. While the nuances will affect both players, your opponent's expectations of how a faction operates should favor you.

In our local environment, very few players use crew outside their faction. This is a huge limitation and a purely psychological barrier (discounting Headed Out, which is never played locally). Other players will not play heroic cards in a villainous deck and vice versa. Gilles (the Montaigne villain) can use a Cat o' Nine Tails to great effect when paired with the General.

Now onto adjusting your personality to fit additional deck archetypes.

The one personality trait I most often see ruining a player's chance to win is a lack of patience. "All good things come to those who wait." For many of the more talented 7th Sea players out there, a game works like this: build & avoid, wait for error, crush. Average 7th Sea players work along the following paradigm: build until deck is set up, attack. Quite often the "build until deck set up" stage results in a player tacking too many crew; at this point, the more talented player has reached the "wait for error" stage. Other times, the "attack" step is deftly avoided by the talented player achieving the "wait for error" stage. In both cases the talented player moves to the "crush" stage. This does not always result in an immediate victory, but can lead the average player down a slippery slope from which the advanced player will not allow recovery.

Now many players do not have the killer instinct for the "crush" stage. Personally, I am very defensive in nature. If fully playing within my personal preferences, I secure my defenses and avoid risks. This does not work well for a game in which the object is to eliminate your opponent. The potential avenues to deal with this strategy include are (a) play a control deck or (b) learn to attack. I have taught myself how to follow both courses of action. I am still on the conservative side, but when the jugular is exposed (and I do not think I am being prepared for an ambush), I go for it.

So far, I have discussed how a player can analyze their own limitations and improve their game. Now I will touch on the fact that knowing the personality of your opponents can be used to your advantage. If

you never change, that means your regular opponents will learn how you play, and that can be used against you.

For instance, certain players in my area have preferences for deck construction. One local player prefers cannon over boarding, in fact I have never seen her play a boarding deck. When I play her in the Broadsides leagues, I know I can leave the Repel Boarders and Hiding In The Reefs cards out of my deck. Another player believes games should allow time for build up, and thus he will tack far more crew on turn three or four than is advisable. Another player, having had a bad experience at GenCon, fears Heroic Stand and the presence of a Heroic crew can be sufficient to dissuade him from pressing his advantage in a boarding.

In summary, understand your own playing style and vary it to keep your regular opponents unprepared for your strategies. Also, learn the play styles of your opponents and use that knowledge to defeat them.

Next week I will discuss the metagame.

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

<https://web.archive.org/web/20020217175057/http://7thsea.com/ccg/deckdiv101.html>

Deck Divination 101 : Deck Archetypes

Most decks in 7th Sea breakdown as either cannon or boarding decks. These are not the only styles of decks, but they are the most prevalent. In addition to cannon and boarding decks, the 7th Sea environment includes control, ramming, ally, dueling, and adventuring archetypes.

This, the first installment of Deck Divination, will briefly focus on each archetype.

Most players tend to view the cannon archetype as either "mega-cannon" or "plinking". "Mega-cannon" tends to revolve around one of two strategies: either (a) building up a Captain to have a huge cannon skill of 20+, or (b) using Crossing the T or tons of adventures to deliver a huge cannon attack.

"Plinking" is typically viewed as a bunch of crew with just a bit of cannon skill each. I tend to view "plinking" in more of a sliding scale. Ten crew with a bit (1 to 2 points) of cannon; seven crew with 4 to 5 points of cannon each; five crew with cannon skills around 8; each of these can deliver multiple cannon shots which tack enough of the opposing crew that the last one or two cannon shots can sink some of the opponent's crew. While "mega-cannon" seeks to finish the game in a single glorious strike, "plinking" seeks to win the game through attrition. Typically, "mega-cannon" requires more cards to ensure that the opponent takes the damage (such as Take It Like A Man). The "plinking" deck is engineered to keep frustrating an opponent until he/she runs out of denial cards.

Boarding may have the most styles of play within its archetype than any other. I will discuss boarding here in relation to "finesse", "masses", "shooters", "speed boarding", "thugs", and "boarding cannoneers". As a note, these categories are not mutually exclusive and many decks combine two of them.

"Finesse" may be the most difficult method of the boarding archetype. Simply put, the "finesse" style seeks to win each boarding attack and deal just enough damage to sink opposing crew. Little effort is spent to improve the swashbuckling of crew, but hand size is vital. Panzerhand and Riposte work well

with this strategy. Unfortunately, the "finesse" player only gets to choose the matchup between crew when their opponent steps up someone for a boarding attack. To turn matchups to the "finesse" player's way, cards such as Run 'im Through or Tagging can be used.

The "masses" simply seeks to defeat an opponent during a boarding by outnumbering them. Often the "masses" player will soak damage until the opponent is nearly tacked out and then begin dealing the hits to sink opposing crew. Into The Fray and other cards which keep a boarding going and only help the "masses" player are often used. Bjornsson's Horn and Grappling Guns are extremely useful for this style.

"Shooters" use Muskets, Pistols, and Belit to tack opposing crew without taking their own crew. When the opposing crew is mostly tacked, the "shooter" begins laying waste to the opposing crew by initiating boarding attacks which significantly more damage than their guns.

The strategy of "speed boarding" relies on a ship beginning with a full or nearly full crew complement. These decks attempt to board their opponent on the first run. Cards such as Drop a Boarding Net (in conjunction with Carousing) are used to tack out another player's crew. I Fights Better Drunk and other such cards keep the boarding going while the "speed boarder" recycles his deck. Reporting Drunk is also popular in these decks to further reduce the number of untacked crew an opponent has before the boarding begins. These decks tend to falter if the game lasts beyond the first turn or two.

I call boats filled with crew having high swashbuckling "thugs". "Thugs" attempt to get crew with extremely high swashbuckling scores in play. When these crew win a boarding attack, the opposing crew dies or a lot of crew get tacked. When the crew loses a boarding attack, soaking the hits is never a problem. Cards such as Death From Above work well with this strategy.

An existing strategy gained a great deal of momentum with the release of the Scarlet Rogers and Captain Reis. "Boarding cannonneers" use cards such a Point Blank Cannon Volley, Guns Blazing, and Canister Shot to deal hits without giving the opposing ship a chance to defend themselves through a boarding attack. These decks (especially those using Canister Shot) are a bit slow in developing, but become quite lethal with few defense cards available to their opponents once the boarding is underway.

The control archetype relies on getting a control card in each of the five seas. There are now two different control cards for each sea, one which has an ability and one which cannot be discarded by other card effects. Control decks are slow, but cards like Cutlass Of Command and Aether Compass can speed these decks up. Control is also a card intensive concept limiting a decks effectiveness in other areas. Cards such as To Fight Another Day and Gem Of Warning can help keep control cards in play while Becalmed and Wild Party! can be used to end before an opposing ship can discard a control card (this is especially effective after playing the fifth control).

The ramming deck archetype relies on such cards as Ramming Speed and Ramming Spike to inflict hits on opposing ships equal to the ramming ship's move cost. Minor Hull Damage and Major Hull Damage (which can be used to absorb hits at the cost of crew space and increasing your ship move cost) make ramming much more dangerous to the opponent. Cards like Cheap Sails and Secret of the Tops ensure that the rammer is able to pay his increased ship's move cost. By not being cannon or boarding hits, ramming damage is immune to many of the defensive cards in the game.

The ally deck uses Sea Attachments to inflict most of its damage. While some of these are actually allies (Armed Brig, Armed Frigate), others are not (Vengeful Serpent, Blockade). Typically these attachments are expensive, either Influence or Adventuring. This can be a very powerful deck concept but few factions are equipped to follow this strategy. The Montaigne with the Predator are the best at it for using cards with the "Ally" trait. A big problem with the ally deck is that, in tournaments at least, the Sea Attachments are sunk at the time limit and cannot be used in the 7th Sea.

With Scarlet Seas, the dueling deck became feasible. Challenge To A Duel already existed, but cards such as Vile Duel and Orf Helfir give the boost needed to this archetype. Duels allow a player to eliminate the opponent's crew one-by-one. Because players do not draw cards at the end of a duel, a dueling strategy also limits your opponents options by forcing them to use cards from their hand to defend the duel (or they can watch their crew sink). The lack of cards can also be a problem for the dueler, but Fancy Swordplay, Desperate Move, and the various schools can make you well prepared to continually fill your hand.

The adventuring archetype has not been fully realized yet. This strategy involves inflicting hits using action cards. Mermaids and Hole In The Hull are some of the cards which do this. Most of these cards deal too few hits or have cancel costs that are far too low. Often this archetype is used in conjunction with Sea Attachments that have adventuring costs. Simply put, this deck still needs AEG to release more cards to fill out the strategy, but the groundwork has been laid since No Quarter!

Next week I will discuss the relationship between player personalities and decks.

Until then, good luck and beware the mermaids.

-Mike Mullins

<https://web.archive.org/web/20050120095202/http://members.aol.com/PugoCrydee/strategy/glamour.html>

Sea Dogs & Glamour

Glamour is the natural magic of Avalon and the Sea Dogs. This is represented through Celedoine and Benny Gimble. In addition to these two Sea Dog Crew, the Sea Dogs have access to Glamour through Phineas Flynn and Emily de Galagos, two unaligned Crew.

Benny Gimble

Cost : 4 Influence

Cannon : 0, Sailing : 0, Adventuring : 2, Influence : 1, Swashbuckling : 1

Unique • Glamour 1

Benny's Influence and Swashbuckling may not be increased.

While Benny is untacked, you suffer 1 fewer Hit from each Boarding Attack during a Boarding (minimum 0).

Celedoine

Cost : 6 Influence

Cannon : 0, Sailing : 0, Adventuring : 0, Influence : 2, Swashbuckling : 1

Unique • Loyal • Glamour 1

When Celedoine tacks to produce Influence, you may discard a card from your hand to produce 2 extra influence.

Celedoine

Cost : 9 Influence

Cannon : 0, Sailing : 0, Adventuring : 0, Influence : 3, Swashbuckling : 1

Experienced • Unique • Loyal • First Mate • Glamour 2

React : Tack Celedoine when you are suffering hits. Reduce the Hits suffered to 0.

Emily de Gallegos

Cost : 4 Influence

Cannon : 0, Sailing : 0, Adventuring : 1, Influence : 0, Swashbuckling : 1

Glamour 1

React : Instead of performing a Boarding Attack, tack Emily to tack all non-Captain Crew on board the Ships in the Boarding with a printed Influence cost less than 2.

Phineas Flynn

Cost : 3 Influence

Cannon : 0, Sailing : 0, Adventuring : 0, Influence : 0, Swashbuckling : 2

Glamour 1

Glamour produces a wide range of benefits that can provide a direct boost to almost any strategy (except cannon decks). Indirectly, Glamour can aid any deck through the use of Persuasion, St. Roger's Blessing, Confusion, and even Queen Eleanor. "We're Doomed!", The Ogre, and Confusion can provide more direct support to specific deck archetypes. St. Roger's Spyglass can be beneficial in certain decks and against certain decks, but is the most limited of the Glamour Attachments.

"We're Doomed!"

Cost : 0

Crew Attachment

Glamour 1 Knack

React: Tack "We're Doomed!" when a Sea Attachment is inflicting Hits to a Ship. The Attachment inflicts 2 extra Hits.

Let's start with the Glamour knack which is most likely to have a direct impact on a game. "We're Doomed!" increases the amount of damage Sea Attachments inflict. With "Captain", the Sea Dogs can drop a Small Fortress or Blockade in any Sea without tacking a Crew and "We're Doomed!" can make the damage inflicted by that Sea Attachment prohibitive.

The Ogre

Cost : 0

Crew Attachment

Glamour 1 Knack

This Crew has +1 Swashbuckling during Boardings.

This card has limited usefulness in that it only provides a bonus during a Boarding. Granted that bonus can be used to inflict or absorb Hits, but overall, this card's effect is limited. This card is unlikely to turn the tide in a Boarding and should probably be left out of most decks.

Persuasion

Cost : 0

Crew Attachment

Glamour 1 Knack

React: Tack Persuasion when you tack a Crew to produce Influence. That Crew produces 1 extra Influence.

Confusion

Cost : 0

Crew Attachment

Glamour 1 Knack

React: Discard Confusion immediately after a player pays their Ship's Move Cost. Reduce the Sailing that player produced by one. That player may continue to produce Sailing. If the cost of the action is not paid, it is canceled.

These two cards can provide effective abilities to any deck. Persuasion is the easiest Glamour Knack to use. Who can't use a tad bit more Influence, especially in the early game. With one Persuasion, Berek can bring Phelan Cole into play by himself. Confusion has the potential to be even more useful than Persuasion, but only once per Confusion card brought into play. Confusion helps slow down an opponent. If things are getting tight and an opponent is Sailing towards you, Confusion can force him to tack an extra sailor providing you an opportunity for escape. From an offensive point of view, Confusion can make an opponent tack two Crew in order to prevent a Boarding attempt. Tacking an opponent's Crew at a two-to-one ratio should provide a great deal of benefit for the Sea Dogs.

Like the other sorceries, Glamour has an Attachment which ups a Crew's Glamour level by 1 (Glamour Knowledge). This knack can be played on Benny Gimble, Celedoine, Phineas Flynn, or Emily de Galagos to boost the Crew to Glamour 2. Celedoine Exp. has a trait of Glamour 2 to begin with. The Glamour 2 trait is required to attach Queen Elleanor, St. Roger's Blessing!, St. Roger's Spyglass.

Queen Eleanor

Cost : 0

Crew Attachment

Glamour 2 Knack

Act: If all your Crew are tacked, tack Queen Eleanor to move your Ship to the Trade Sea.

Queen Eleanor provides an escape mechanism for the Sea Dogs, but hopefully not one you would need to use often. The limitation on Queen Eleanor is that the card is of questionable usefulness while you are in the Frothing or La Boca Sea. This card is primarily used for defense against an opponent, allowing you to escape to many Seas away after all of your Crew are tacked. This movement will not help you unless it prevents your opponent from leveling some attacks at you. If you are playing a deck that constantly tacks out all of your Crew, this card may be of benefit. Of course, if you are constantly tacking all of your Crew, it may be more important for you to reevaluate the contents of your deck.

St. Roger's Blessing!

Cost : 0

Crew Attachment

Glamour 2 Knack

React: Tack this Crew when one of your Crew is sunk. That Crew is placed on the top of your deck, and all Attachments on that Crew are put into the discard pile.

This is a card with great potential that doesn't always live up to its billing. One reason for this is that the easiest way for the Sea Dogs to get a Crew with Glamour 2 is by using Celedoine, Exp. When using Celedoine Exp., if you are getting Crew sunk you probably cannot afford to tack Celedoine Exp. to put that Crew on top of your deck; instead, you should be using Celedoine's ability to prevent that Crew from being sunk. If you build up another Crew to be able to use this Knack, it might be more worth it, but it is probably more worth including other cards in your deck besides St. Roger's Blessing! and Glamour Knowledge (those other cards could prevent from ever needing St. Roger's Blessing!).

St. Roger's Spyglass

Cost : 0

Crew Attachment

Glamour 2 Knack

Unique • Item

Your ADventures may be placed 1 Sea closer or farther when brought into play (minimum 1 Sea Away).

This is a card which does not provide much benefit for the Sea Dogs. First, the Sea Dogs are rather adept at moving their boat, so they tend to have little difficulty getting to any Adventure they play. Secondly, the Sea Dogs have problems completing a lot of Adventures (except for "Captain" and "Brother" Mattias Brewer). The major advantage of this card is that it can help you avoid stopping in a Sea filled with your opponent's Sea Attachments in order to complete an Adventure that is vital to your deck.

Glamour provides a lot of benefits to the Sea Dogs. Combinations of "We're Doomed!", Small Fortress, and "Captain" can surprise opponents and help make up for the small Crew Maximum of The Black Dawn. Celedoine is used as a starter in many Berek decks, and with Persuasion, she provides a ready Influence machine for the Sea Dogs. Also, the ease of getting Glamour 2 by experiencing Celedoine is a great benefit to the Sea Dogs if you are using Glamour 2 Knacks.

-Mike Mullins