

The Destiny action and managing your hand

By Greg Pinder

One of the more subtle talents in 7 Ages is managing the cards in your hand. This is something it might take you a little while to become fully aware of, so let me give you a head start with a few of the more obvious points.

In 7 Ages, you can have a hand of up to 6 cards (7 if you're playing with the technology rule – which I highly recommend by the way). To keep your hand at 6 cards, you have to take a lot of Destiny actions. Most players realise that right away and take a Destiny action at least every second turn or so. There's no real cost in doing so because it's one of the 2 actions commonly played in the empty space (the other being Civilise). [If 5 of you are playing, most players will set up 3 empires and not have an empty space. The temptation to take actions to advance each empire instead of filling your hand can be overwhelming for some people and they will run out of cards. That's an unusual situation though, so let's focus on the more normal case.]

There are 2 main Destiny strategies you can follow. My group uses both of them and they're pretty good players, so I think it's fair to conclude that both strategies are viable.

The cyclist

The first strategy is to cycle through your cards as quickly as possible. What's the point of that? The point is that it increases your chances of finding a good empire or that killer event that undoes your opponents. Cycling through the cards means taking a Destiny action every turn and tossing out all of your cards (or most of them anyway) before filling your hand. That gives you 4 or 5 new cards and a good chance of turning up a solid empire, an explosive event, or a key artefact every 3 turns or so.

The main weakness of this strategy is that you don't get to play cards as events or artefacts very often and you really can't hang onto cards you do want to play for very long without compromising the purpose of the strategy –cycling the cards quickly.

You have to play cards occasionally though or it's all pointless. So, when should you choose to play them? You can always play a few during normal actions (indeed, a sure sign that someone is using the cyclist strategy is when they start playing cards to interfere in other players' conflicts or to affect other players' Trade actions).

But mostly you would play cards in a Civilise action. To make it worthwhile, you will want to play 3 or 4 cards in the one action, so a good chance will only arise occasionally. Other things being equal, I recommend taking a Civilise action when the player to your left has the turn marker. That means you play last, so you can empty your hand without another player being able to retaliate while your hand's empty. By the time they can take a Civilise action against you, you will have taken a Destiny action and have a full hand that might well have the card you need to defend yourself.

The cyclist strategy works best when you are trailing well behind the leaders. There is less incentive to attack you, so you don't have a powerful reason to hang on to good defensive cards, allowing you to cycle through the cards faster.

The hoarder

The second main card-management strategy is to hold onto useful cards and toss out the others. The main object with this strategy is to hold onto cards that respond to likely threats, so it is best used when you are leading, or up with the leader, and a likely target of attack. However, you can also use it when you have some firm plans that need a little help.

What are the useful cards? A lot of this depends on your situation but here are some of the typical ones:

- Your award-winning empire is under attack from a powerful opponent or a combination of opponents and you think it's going under (or will soon be reduced to a level from which it can't recover). You're going to need a new empire soon and you have one ready to roll. Obviously, you should save that card. Even if you can't play it until the next age, it's still worth saving it if that age is coming soon (especially if you can usher in the new age yourself with a single trade action).
- You're fighting a war to the death with an opponent and you can see a big battle coming where your main army must either triumph or be destroyed. You should think about saving one or two cards with effective conflict events. A good one is the Mesmeriser on card no. 56. If you have several missile units, Barrage on card no. 61 can be useful and, if you have a big cavalry force, Charge! on card no. 52 can be decisive.
- You have an empire that earns glory by controlling sea areas or having the most naval units and you're worried about suffering a Storm. Hang on to the Drought on card no. 100 so that you can cancel a Storm.
- Your opponents are talking among themselves and you suspect they are going to add a little disorder to your empire and then follow up with something horrible like New dynasty (card no. 65), Rebellion (card no. 26) or Empire collapses (card no. 34). If you have Karma (card no. 60), you should save it to give you a chance to eliminate the disorder before they can strike.
- Your Frankish empire's going great and the only thing that would be a problem is if the Germans turned up in the middle of it and ruined the party. Luckily, you have the Germans in your hand. Why wouldn't you keep it? If you throw it back into the pack (or worse, trade it to another player), you're just inviting disaster.
- You have Bad augury on card no. 5 or 41, Blowback on card no. 110 or Rebels foiled on card no. 80. These are just great defensive cards because they are so flexible. If you are expecting aggressive card play from your opponents, always hang onto these.

- You're planning a big Manoeuvre action in a few turns but your opponent is dug in on a mountain or a fortified island somewhere. Treachery on card no. 30 can be devastating if your opponent can't retreat. If he can, how about coupling Treachery with Rout (card no. 55) so that his retreating force dies anyway? These cards can turn a campaign, so save them if you're planning one.
- If you're playing a game with 7 players, Oi! It's my go on card no. 24 is one of the most commonly hoarded cards. In the 7 player configuration, only one player has 3 empires; everyone else only gets 2. A lot of the game revolves around trying to make that player fold the third empire, so that someone else can start it. Of course, that player will try to fold it in the turn before the turn marker passes to them so they can start the new third empire. Imagine their annoyance when they fold the empire only to have you play Oi! It's my go and steal the third empire from under their nose.

Taking Destiny actions with an empire

Although I seldom do it, there are a few cases where it's a good idea to take a Destiny action with an empire rather than an empty space:

One I've already mentioned – where you're playing with 5 players and there are no empty spaces. An empire has to take the action or you will have an empty hand.

Another is when you're using the Technology optional rule and your empire is leading the pack. If it takes a Destiny action, you can fill your hand to 7 cards (you can't guarantee that it will still be leading when you get to that action but, hey, life is a risk).

A third case is if your empire has a religious leader. If it takes a Destiny action, you can take cards from the top of the discard pile. If you've been watching the discard closely (and you should be if you planned this action), you will know what cards you are going to pick up. That can be a big advantage in deciding how many to throw out.

If you have the Favour of the Gods (card no. 103), your empire can play cards as if its Destiny action were also a Civilise action. So, it's much better for an empire to take that Destiny action than to play it from the empty space.

Sometimes an empire has nothing better to do than take a Destiny action. One of my favourite empires – the Sumerians – fits nicely into this category. They turn up in a very crowded part of the world and if they spread out they will usually be crushed. What's good about this empire though is that it doesn't need to expand to earn glory points. It starts with 2 right away because its homeland is a wheat area and Sumeria earns glory for homeland and wheat. It can also earn glory for being among the most advanced empires and it has a good trade no. for its age, so has a good chance of getting some of that too. That means it can start earning 2+ glory points merely by setting up and defending its homeland. An empire like that doesn't need to do anything else, so might as well take your Destiny actions for you.