

Fletcheese's Challengers! Tierlist

I have been playing a lot of Challengers on BGA and managed to hit Rank 1 on Aug 24. I love thinking about game strategy and wanted to write a guide with my thoughts on the game. I will start with some general advice and then break the game down into rounds and what to look for in each round.

Note that almost all of the games I have played are 4-player so this advice is best applied to that format. Let's start with some general tips that may be obvious if you have played Challengers!

Constraints

Compared to other deck-builders, the constraints for Challengers are quite unique. The first thing that stood out to me is that I can remove however many cards as I want whenever I want. This would completely break a lot of other games, but it does not here because your deck's power ceiling *always* increases with more cards. Thus a second constraint is needed - the bench. Once 6 *unique* cards can be on the bench, trying to move the 7th causes you to lose. This leads to some important implications:

1. Limit your deck to 6 or 7 unique cards or you will lose to the bench before deckout
2. Getting duplicate copies of cards increases your deck's power level without constraining its size

Again, the above should be fairly obvious if you have played Challengers, but it's worth emphasizing. There are effectively only two exceptions to these rules:

1. Holding on to extra one-ofs to increase likelihood of hitting a duplicate in later drafts
 - a. This applies especially when playing UFO, but you have to weigh whether you can afford to lose midgame rounds or if you need the points now to make the finals. This is often a difficult skill-testing decision
2. Bench management cards i.e. Butler, Sorcerer, Vacuum Cleaner.
 - a. I am not a fan of relying on these cards. If you find duplicates of them it can *sometimes* work, but in general you're usually better off playing stronger cards.
 - b. Keep in mind that these effects are only actually useful if you run a lot of singles which you generally do not want to do. Clearing one copy of a card from your bench that you have a duplicate of in your deck does not help.
3. Deck ordering cards i.e. **Sailor**, Clairvoyant and to a lesser extent Juggler, Reporter, Navigator, Bumper Car
 - a. These cards *can* help you make sure your 7th unique card is at the bottom of your deck.

Rounds Overview

Pay attention to which set was removed. Some cards in other sets can shift in power level e.g. Mascot and Stable Boy get worse without Haunted House for Necromancer. Some more detail on these considerations has been put together by BGA user Andrewsmile:

Outer space: *No red means no UFO- you will have no chances to get duplicates of your A cards once you leave the A deck, and sailor also becomes even better than normal as it and UFO are the only cards that let you see your whole deck guaranteed while still getting 7 uniques. I will go into B deck on turn 3 if I have either 1 pair or 1 sailor. Additionally, stable boy becomes terrible because band and UFO are out of B so the only 3 power cards you will be able to find are A deck cards and cowboy (blacksmith and dog are bad cards in my opinion and I really caution against them). Additionally, you don't need to worry about hologram in the final so you can be greedier in your deckbuilding.*

Haunted house: *no butlers/vacuums, no necromancers, no ghosts. Duplicates become very important without the backup option of picking up butlers and vacuums, and my trade secret is that I 99% of the time go into C deck turn 6 and reroll for hologram. Hologram becomes the best card in the game by a wide margin when you are certain your opponent can't clear the card and I almost always win the lobby when I find one, and always when I find 2+. It is so good here in all situations- either your opponent has a lot of duplicates, and is running 6 cards so a hologram can bench them out before they even see their duplicates, or your opponent is running 7 cards with few duplicates so hologram benches them even earlier. Yes, sometimes hologram gives them a duplicate, but that's incredibly rare. The chance for that is (total B deck cards remaining that would be a duplicate/total B deck cards remaining) which is typically 15% or less.*

Film studio: *this one doesn't affect me as much as I never run MUA, but it's important to consider that decks will typically be tall in this format so finding bigger cards rather than utility cards is typically good. Cook becomes much better, and there are no heroines so you typically absolutely need to win round 6 and 7 and should be playing that way from the beginning.*

Shipwreck: *no sailors :(purple is the weakest set so there isn't too much affected, no sailors means I typically go B deck on turn 3 and reroll for UFO or clairvoyant.*

Funfair: *This set being out affects gameplay very little, these are typically the games where I go for stable boy the most since yellow has no 3s*

Castle: *Set B&C castle cards are bad so this one affects gameplay even less than funfair, any strategy except stable boy will work fine*

One principle holds throughout every round - picking a duplicate is *almost always* better than picking any new one-of. This rule does of course have exceptions:

1. A card is high power level or synergizes well with the rest of your deck
2. The duplicate's power level is low or synergizes poorly with the rest of your deck

These exceptions are poorly defined which is what makes Challengers interesting. It's often difficult to decide what to draft.

From the start of the game you should be drafting your deck to win the final, not to win early rounds. Depending on how the early rounds go, you may need to adapt your goal to just *making* the final. This is usually a decision you make at about R5. Often winning just rounds 6 and 7 (in a 4-player game) will get you into the final because of how the fans are skewed. At this point you can think harder about picking cards that have a chance of generating fans as a last ditch effort. On BGA even aiming for 3rd instead of last is valuable for ELO if that's your goal.

Some tips for Cutting Cards

1. Keep to 7 uniques if you have 1 or 2 duplicates; 6 if more than that barring exceptions mentioned previously
2. Talent should usually be removed before Newcomers. However cutting the Newcomers first helps your consistency of a 7 uniques deck and it reduces the consistency of opponents' Rescue Pods
3. Prioritize holding onto cards that you can still double or have more potential for future synergy. Examples:
 - a. You have 2 different A animals and a vanilla 3 is the weakest card in your deck. The color of which one to keep could be relevant for Mascot, Director, Band, Teenager, Sci-Fi Geek, or Vendor. Consider which one of those your deck is more likely to want and cut accordingly
 - b. A vanilla 4 is the weakest card in your deck and you're deciding whether to keep Champion or Clones. Ignoring other synergies, what round are you in and are you more likely to pick B or C for finding a duplicate?
4. Duplicate cards with X/2-power are similar in power level to one X-power card. But consider what you've seen opponents play. Multiple cards are typically better against decks that go wide (lots of small cards) where a single strong card is typically better against decks that go tall (fewer chances to over-win the flag)
 - a. E.g. your opponent's 5 holds the flag. If you reveal a 2 and then a 5, the 2 was wasted. Similarly if your opponent's 1 holds the flag and you reveal a 5, then a 2 would have done the same thing

Round 1 - 2A

Highest priority is to pick duplicates

If there are no duplicates, there are a few very strong synergy cards to pick with the aim of pairing one in the next round.

If none of these synergy cards appear either, redraw.

If you still have neither, then pick 2 suboptimal cards with the hopes of pairing one in the next round.

Round 2 - 2A

Looking to pair one-ofs from R1. Redraw if none. If still no pairs, try for cards that synergize with R1 picks.

Round 3 - 2A / 1B

If you have not hit any pairs yet, you should pick 2A to try to find them. However with one pair, I will almost always pick 1B for a stronger card to hopefully pair in R4/5/6. Seeing the B deck more times means higher probability of pairs.

Round 4 - 2A / 2B

Picking 2A feels very bad at this point, but if you have several strong one-ofs like AI/Vendor/MUA then you may have to try to pair one. None of the A cards are strong enough to keep as a one-of in your deck late in the game, but a pair often is. You almost always want to be picking 2B

Round 5 - 2B

Same as R4 but with no decision.

Round 6 - 2B / 1C

Basically the same decision as R3. If you've found your B pair(s) pick C else dig again for pairs, but increasing the probability of pairing a C card is also a strong consideration. If your goal is to climb ELO and you're in the middle of the pack, this may be the time to dig for C cards that give fans. But obviously winning R6/7 gives way more fans so consider how likely you are to do that with a stronger card

Round 7 - 2C

Not a lot to say here. Pairs are great. Otherwise you need to weigh replacing cards in your deck with singles from C. That's why I love Prince