



A LIFE-CHANGING KICKSTARTER SUCCESS STORY

Kickstarter and Boardgames

It's not difficult to find stories of Kickstarter disasters. We've probably all seen projects seeking funding that were posted by some guy who lives in his mother's basement and hasn't seen daylight in the last 12 months, and thinks that the world needs to support his genius concept for a hand-drawn remake of Snakes and Ladders, which will require \$200,000 in funding, and for which the only remaining challenge is that while he has the idea at this point, he hasn't yet come up with any rules or artwork. We've also seen many a project get funded only to get delay after delay along the road towards fulfilment, with all the funds mysteriously disappearing in a blaze of glory, or the designer receiving a direct revelation by a solar entity commanding them to stop the project; in such cases backers are left with empty hands, and the game exists in no other way besides in the often-repeated stories of infamy told by frustrated supporters who never received anything. And then there are the projects that resulted in a sub-par product, or just failed to deliver the kind of quality they promised. We could spend hours exchanging horror stories about such disasters.

But how about stories about Kickstarter successes? And certainly there have been more than a few, with notable examples of boardgames that have exceeded expectations, or becoming bright and shining stars that served as beacons of hope and optimism to day-dreaming guys in their mother's basements around the world, and to hopeful game designers. There was the Exploding Kittens Kickstarter, which raised a cool \$8.8 million - at the time the biggest ever for a crowd-funded game, and the third biggest Kickstarter campaign of all time, although the fact that it climbed on the back of the hugely popular Oatmeal definitely helped. Other bright lights that have lit up the Kickstarter world as far as the gaming industry is concerned include Jamey Stegmaier, with hits like Viticulture and the Top 10 ranked Scythe.

There's no doubt that Kickstarter has had a massive impact on the game industry. Publishers have had to reinvent the way they do business, and the way they do marketing. Not only has the internet changed the whole way traditional business works, but Kickstarter in particular has transformed the way much of the industry works, with some big publishers using it as a 'pre-order' system, and small publishers often use it to produce games that would otherwise never see the light of day. And in some cases, it has enabled the small guy with a good idea to become a big star, and even make a thriving business.



Kickstarter and Playing Cards

Kickstarter has also had a tremendous influence on the playing card industry. Well-known companies like United States Playing Card Company (USPCC), which produces the familiar Bicycle branded decks of playing cards, have been around much longer than Kickstarter. In fact, USPCC has been around even much longer than the internet and computers, or any of the people reading this. It even pre-dates the world's first electricity supply (1881), being established in 1867! There has been competition, usually on a somewhat small scale, and in our modern era, the world of custom playing cards enjoyed popularity with companies like Ellusionist and Theory 11 establishing a name for themselves in producing high quality and luxurious decks of custom playing cards, mostly for magicians and card players. To a large extent, companies like these have cornered the custom playing card market in the first decade of the 2000s, and to keep a steady stream of income, they simply needed to keep reprinting their existing decks and occasionally add to the range.

That all changed with the arrival of Kickstarter, which has completely exploded the custom playing card industry. Today we live in an era where the market is flooded with all kinds of custom decks. Technology has reached a stage where the smart graphic designer can create a quality deck of playing cards from his desktop computer at home, then partner with quality printing companies, harness the marketing power of crowd-funding via Kickstarter, and produce a lovely deck of playing cards. The field of people doing this today, however, is crowded, and at any given moment there's at least 20 playing card projects on Kickstarter, all competing for attention. Today the challenge is how to find ways to stand out in this crowded field, and there's many a deserving project that fails or struggles to get funded, simply for this reason.

But before the current thriving Kickstarter landscape came to be, there were the pioneers, the people who paved the way by seeing the potential for success, and came out of nowhere to become a rising star. In the early days of Kickstarter, projects that today would get lost in the shuffle, instead attracted huge amounts of attention and enjoyed great popularity - and in some cases, massive funding. In some instances, they enabled the common man to even build a business around his Kickstarter success. The world of playing cards is a big one, because almost everybody has played a traditional card game of some sort, and can use a nice deck of cards. But it draws especially on a market populated by board gamers, magicians, and card collectors, so that already gives it the potential to received a broad based support from several sectors. It's not unusual for a very good deck of playing cards to be funded to a healthy figure topping \$100,000. One of these big successes in the early days of Kickstarter was Tyler Deeb, and his Misc Good Co deck of playing cards. It's hard to imagine a project like this being successful in today's crowded market, but providentially Tyler put out his project in the right place and the right time, and the result is that today he has a thriving business that's he's worked hard to establish on the foundation of his initial Kickstarter success. So let's find out more about what happened.



Kickstarter and the Misc Goods Playing Cards

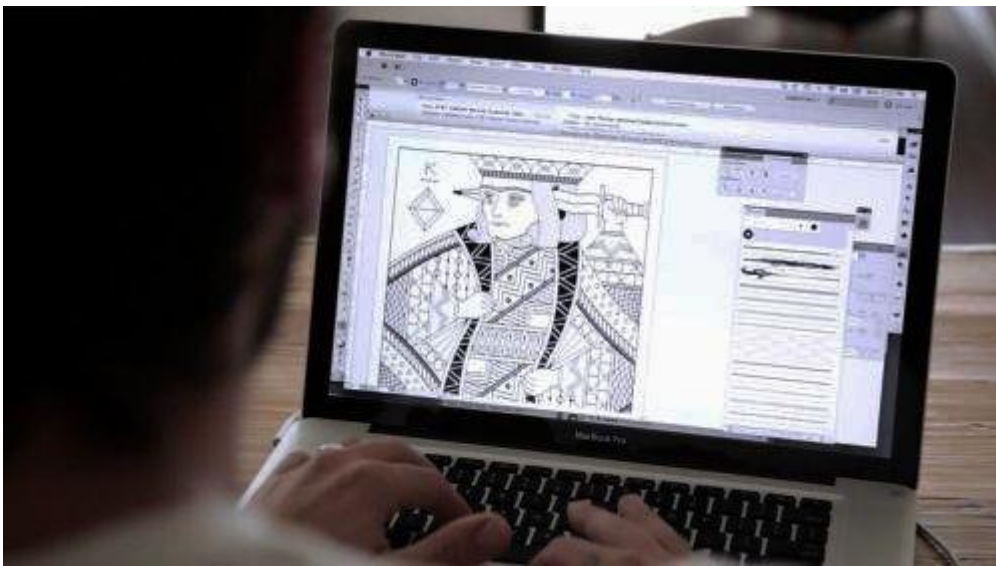
Tyler Deeb is the man behind [Pedale Design](#) (from the Italian word *pedale*, as in the bicycle part you use to create motion), which is the label under which he started doing graphic design in 2008. And [Misc Goods Co](#) is the name of his company which he started in 2012.



He tells his own story on his website [here](#), and I'm indebted to his account for much of this next section. His story begins as follows:

"I didn't intend to start a product company. I left my salary job as an in-house graphic designer to pursue the world of free-lance, jobs were coming in and I felt ready ... One day I showed up to my office and there was no work to do. And with a wife and two kids at home, I couldn't be idle – my conscience just wouldn't let me. So, as a discipline for the mind and an opportunity to sharpen my skills, I began designing a single playing card, the jack of spades. It turned out pretty well. The next day I showed up and still no work. So I designed the queen of spades. After three feverish months of this pattern, still workless, I had to my surprise finished designing an entire deck of playing cards."

"I was flat broke. Totally broke. Like, my friend lent me \$1,200 to keep my lights on and feed my family type of broke. I was a bit of a mess. I was working hard, but with no income to show for it. It was at this low point that I asked my officemates to help me put together a pitch video (which you can watch below) and launched a Kickstarter campaign to produce the playing cards I had illustrated by happen-stance."



And so having spent hours and sometimes days designing each card, the [Kickstarter](#) was launched around October 2012, with a modest funding goal of \$6,250. You can view the original promo video over on Vimeo [here](#). You can probably guess what happened next. The project exploded - positively that is! The initial goal was reached within 24 hours. And by the time the project ended, over 4,000 backers were on board, and an astonishing figure of \$146,596 had been raised to bring this project to life! It was the first ever playing card project to top the \$100k mark. But this was just the beginning for Tyler. He'd promised his backers a quick turn-around, and that he'd

deliver the decks before Christmas. He was determined to make good his word, so he built up a rag-tag team to help him, and worked long hours around the clock. But deliver he did!

And people were happy. Comments on the Kickstarter include enthusiastic praise like *"The quality is outstanding"; "The deck is the best I've seen"; "Brilliant quality, original art direction"; "Deck is awesome!" "Looks brilliant. Such a well ran project from start to finish!" "Loving them!!! Great job and i look forward to your future projects"; "Thanks for having such a well-organized project!"; "The best deck of cards I've seen so far. I'm looking forward for new projects!"*.



So what accounts for the big success? In today's crowded and competitive market, it's hard to understand how a project like this could raise these kinds of enormous figures. But there are some factors that do account for it. For many people, this would have been their first ever experience with a custom deck of playing cards, and so they were delighted to see and receive a beautiful custom deck in a quality edition. And while a deck like this might not stand out among the flood of today's custom decks, many of which have a much higher degree of customization, in its time this was one of the first of its kind, at least as far as Kickstarter was concerned. It also helped that Tyler made good his word about delivery before Christmas, and that he delivered a quality product. Card collectors today are used to getting a quality deck of custom playing cards for \$15, and might wonder why a deck like this is in a similar price range, but in the context of its time, it had made waves in the mass market, and that's what counted. Tyler himself would probably be one of the first to attribute this to God's providence and timing. He was truly in the right place at the right time, although let's not discount the hard work he put into making this work, and the fact that what he delivered was a quality product. And even by today's standards, his style of black-and-white artwork and court card design remains intriguing and compelling.

Kickstarter and the Misc Goods Company

Tyler's story doesn't end there. Because he continued to work hard, building on this success to produce Misc Goods Co, an actual company in the market place. He now had a solid base of customers who were interested in his future products, and he'd also received a lot of publicity and support. He began reinvesting his Kickstarter earnings into creating new products: second edition decks, a hard case, a wallet, and a flask. At that point it was still a hobby, and he was relying on free lance graphic design with Pedale Design for paying his bills. But after attending a commerce start-up conference towards the end of 2013, he had the ideas and impetus he needed to devote the attention and energy that Misc Goods Co needed to become truly successful.



Today his products can be found in boutique shops around the world. If you check out his magnificent website misc-goods-co.com, you'll see not only his signature playing cards, but a range of products that includes art and prints, flasks, wallets, and even cologne. These are not cheap products, but Misc Goods Co is quickly becoming a lifestyle brand, with this vision: *"We build products with practical purpose — keepsakes which are set apart. Manufactured in America, our goods are timeless in form and use, both for home and abroad."* While none of this comes easy, and they haven't hit a great stride yet, Misc Goods Co is growing, and on the way to success.



Here's how Tyler himself sums up his story, where Kickstarter plays a central role: *"Misc. Goods Co. was born out of circumstances. It wasn't the result of planning or dreaming or a conversation sparked among friends. I had simply positioned my professional life in such a way that it could bend and shift; changing as opportunity came and working hard when it did. My opportunity came in the form of a monstrously successful Kickstarter campaign. It changed my life and handed me a new set of responsibilities - to remain ethical in our manufacturing while staying thoughtful in our design, to push forward - ever-content, but never comfortable, to make Misc. Goods Co. a business I can be proud of for as long as I'm permitted to have pride."* He's a family man who wants to work hard, while remaining principled.

For Tyler, his Kickstarter experience was truly life-changing, although his own hard work and dedication certainly played a big role. All this has brought him to where he is today, owner of a company that has now put out the third edition of his signature Misc Goods Co decks of playing cards, including a delightful new version that is the result of a collaboration with artist Michael Cina. In the rest of this article, I'll showcase the deck of playing cards that is key to this whole story. The deck you'll see here is the 3rd edition, and was an improved edition, first released in 2014.

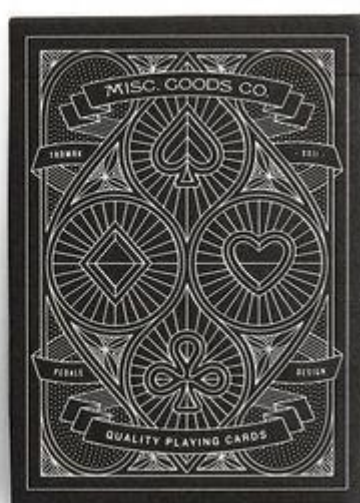


THE THIRD EDITION

Black deck (3rd edition)

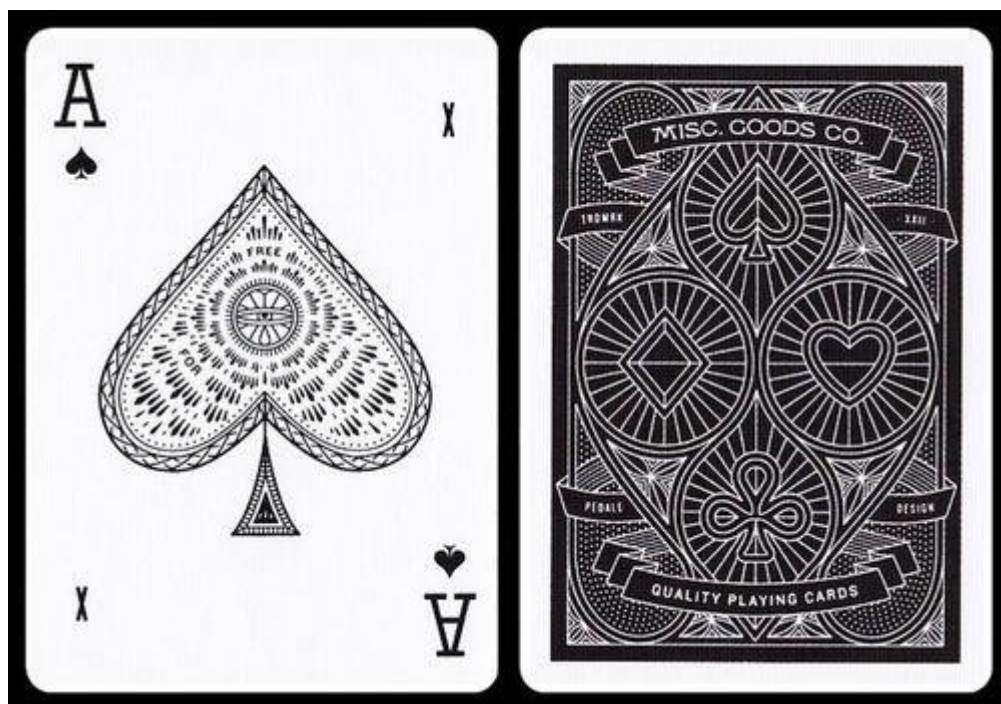
The tuck box of the **Black deck** is a dark charcoal black with embossing and silver foil.

First impressions are important, and with this deck you get an instant impression of class and style. The silver foil stands out beautifully against the matt black, and there's elegant decoration with borders and lines that adds a real touch of sophistication. Small additions all contribute to demonstrate that there has been close attention to the details of design, by including elements such as pips representing the four suits, words of wisdom like "*Here Today / Gone Today*", and intriguing practical life advice to reward the close observer who strains to read the tiniest text: "*Keep Your Nose Clean*". Finally, the tuck box cover has some additional text in blind embossing, which I'll get to later. It all adds up to a clear statement of intrigue, intelligence, and refinement.

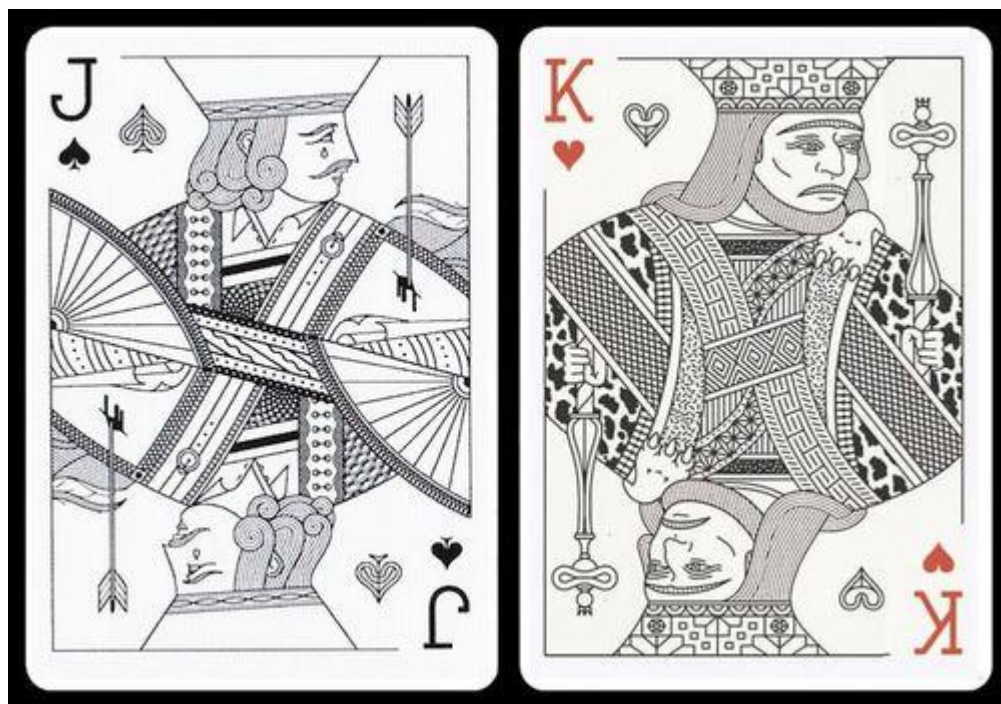


The backs of the cards are printed the same color as the tuck case, and feature large symbols of all four suits in a one-way design that also mentions the company name Misc Goods Co, and the design firm Pedale Design.

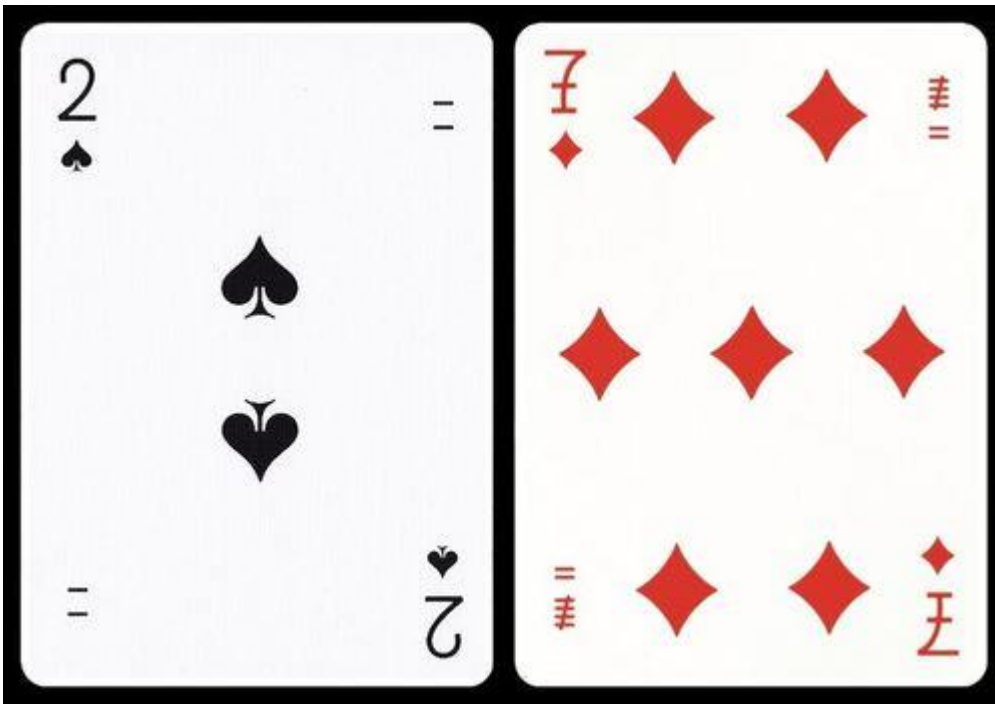
Meanwhile the over-sized Ace of Spades has the phrase "Free For Now" inside it. In the center of the card is an eye, which also appears on the top of the tuck box along with this friendly advice: "You're ever-seen. Cheaters beware." A reminder, I suspect, of the omniscient One to whom we must all give account.



The court cards feature minimalism in colour, while still having very clear indices to ensure functionality, combined with a very intricate and classy design that evokes elegance and symbolism.



The number cards continue this elegance, with diminutive pips used on the indices, customized and stylish shapes for the pips and numbers, and one unusual twist: the card value in a tally count in opposite corners.



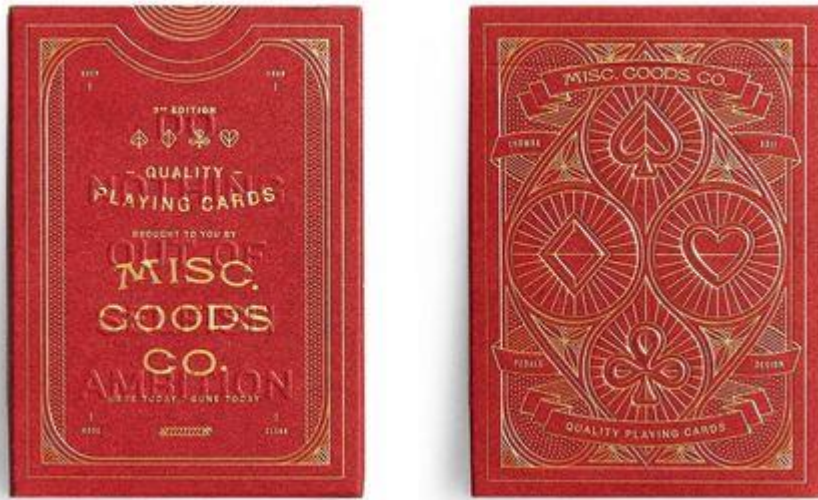
The understated colours makes this is a great all-purpose deck for playing card games.



Red deck (3rd edition)

The tuck box of the [Red deck](#) is as you'd expect: red.

You can also see that the tuck boxes have been cleverly embossed with the phrase "Do nothing out of selfish ambition", words of Biblical wisdom inspired by Philippians 2:3. It's blind embossing, which is a technique that means no printing or foiling is used; the embossing process creates the text in lieu of ink. This enables the tuck boxes to say multiple things at once, and is a delightful addition that will please the attentive observer who notices it.

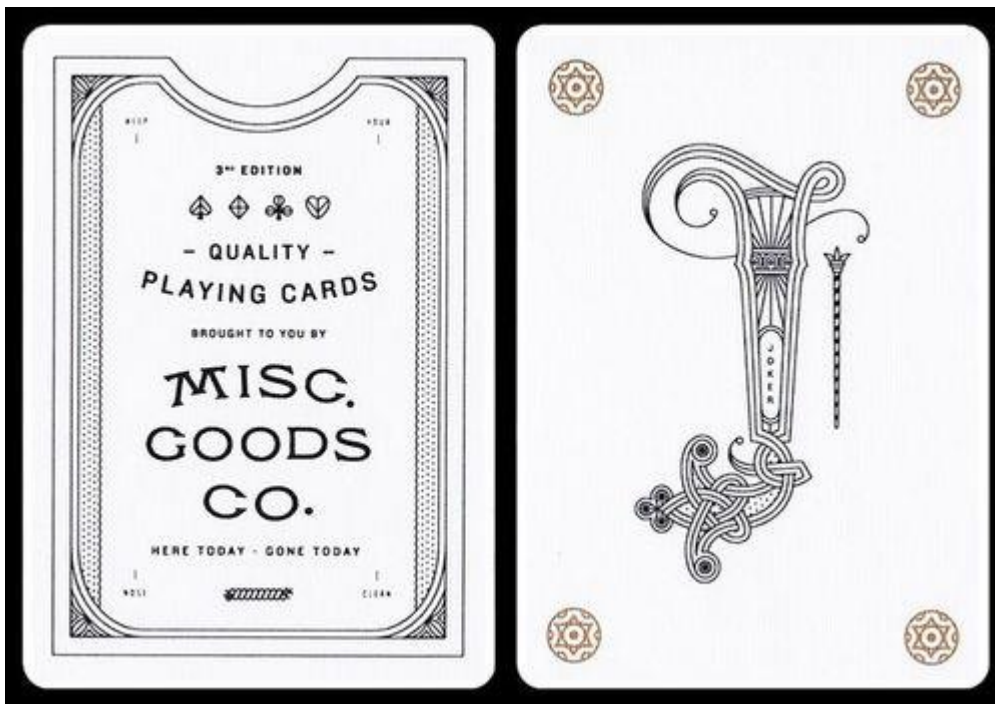


The backs of the cards are printed in a metallic gold style colour.

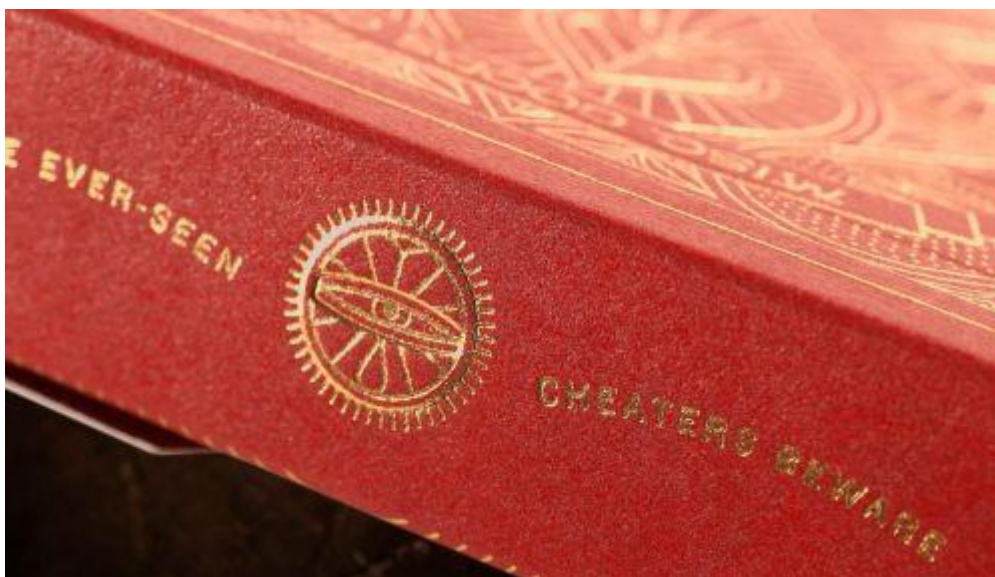
Once again the Ace contains some words of wisdom, with the text banners combining to say "*Love is watching someone, and watching someone die is hard.*" This somewhat cryptic message is perhaps confirmed by the artwork, where the ornate heart itself has been pierced by an arrow.



Pictured here on the right besides a promo card included in the deck is the ornate Joker, with flowing curves and stylish lines that further contribute to the sense of elegance and style.



Are you watching closely? Here's the all-seeing eye that we first saw already on the Ace of Spades:



The cumulative effect of the black line artwork that dominates and fills the court cards is impressive. Doesn't this hand of cards look classy?



Of all the five colours currently available in the 3rd edition, the Red deck is the only one where the card backs aren't the same colour as the tuck box. But given the gold accents on the box, the cards and tuck-box do complement each other beautifully.



Green deck (3rd edition)

The tuck box of the Green deck is printed in sea foam green, and has gold foil.



The card backs feature the same signature design, with a colour that matches the tuck box.

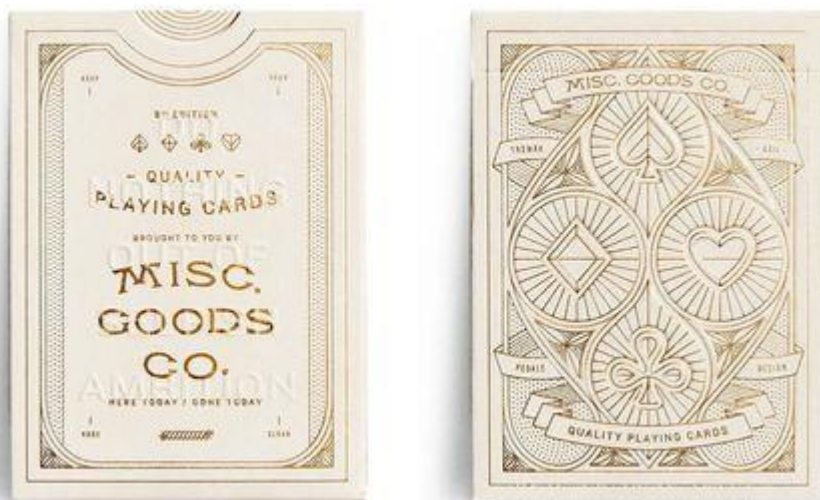


The Ace of Clubs gives some more wise advice: "You're going to die & all that you own will one day vanish" along with the following small addition: "Hard Facts. Deal With It". Indeed, life is very temporary, and you can't take anything with you!



Ivory deck (3rd edition)

The tuck box of the **Ivory deck** is an ivory off white, with gold foil. It is apparently named after Tyler's only daughter.



The backs of the cards are printed the same ivory color as the tuck case, giving this deck a less dark feel.



Once again an intricate Ace gives us sage advice about the transitory nature of life and possessions: "*Here Today. Gone Today*"



Cina deck (3rd edition)

The tuck box of the [Cina deck](#) has a lovely color collage, which was created by Tyler's artist friend Michael Cina (from the design agency Cina & Associates, which boasts top tier clients like Facebook, Disney, Coca-Cola, Fox Sports, and ESPN), hence the name of this deck.



The backs use the same swirling color collage, which some have compared with the aurora borealis.



Interestingly, the inside of the Cina tuck box is a bright electric yellow!



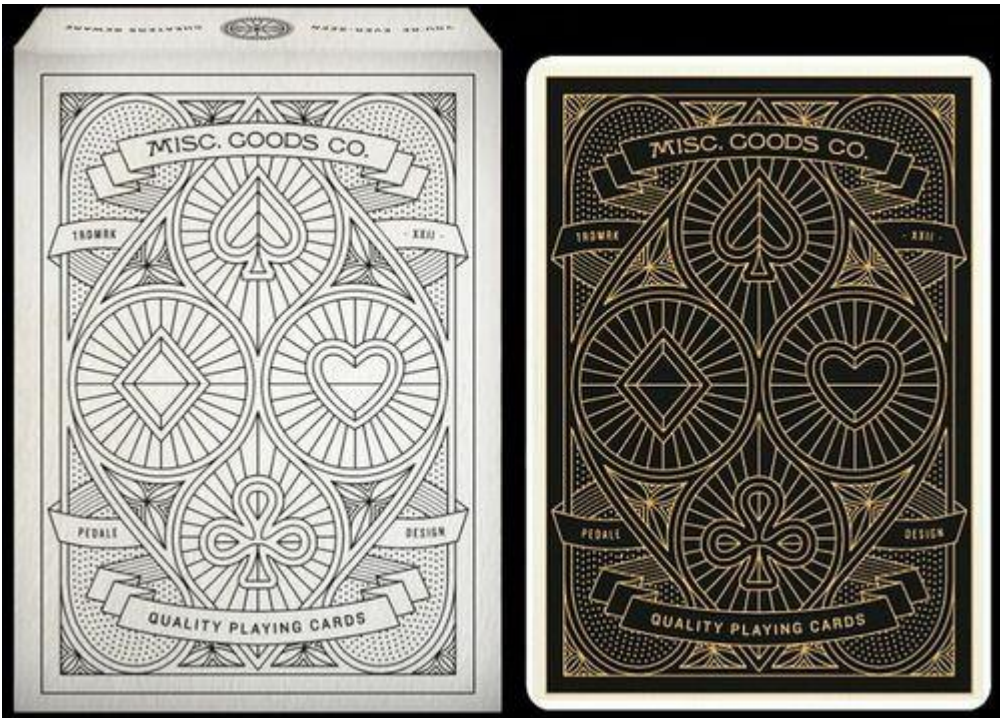
It's colourful and bright, and makes a splash from the moment the box appears and is opened.

EVOLUTION OF THE DECK

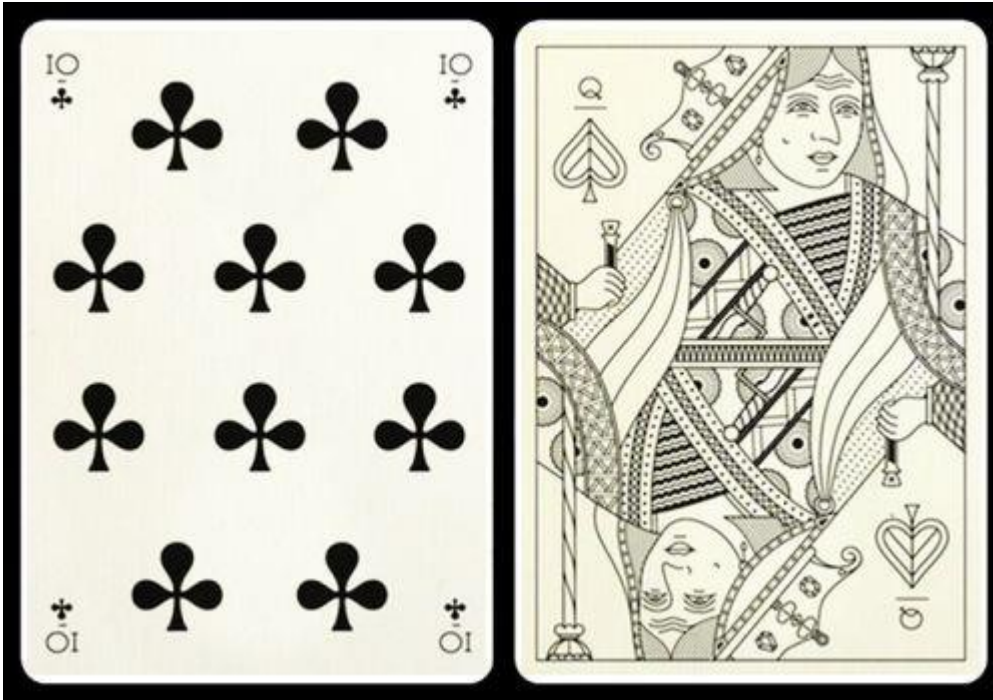
First edition

So how does the third edition of this deck compare with the original? The card backs have remained entirely unchanged over time. But quite a few other changes have been made since the first edition, mostly cosmetic and matters of refinement, but there's no doubt that the third edition is a big improvement over the very first deck Tyler produced with the glorious Kickstarter that started it all.

The original deck had a white box, and cards with the same back design, but featuring black and gold coloured accents.



Do you notice anything less than ideal about these cards?



Certainly Tyler did, and that's why he made the cards of the second edition even better.

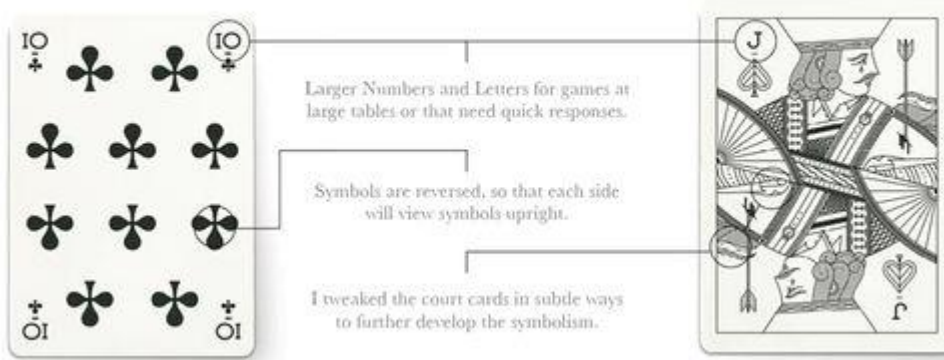
Second edition

First of all, the new decks of the second edition added a choice of colours, with a red tuck box, featuring cards with gold/grown backs, and a black tuck box featuring cards with black backs (with white instead of gold accents).



More importantly, there were larger indexes for ease of reading, reversed symbols on the lower half of the number cards so that the cards wouldn't look upside down depending on their orientation, and also adjustments to the artwork of the court cards.

2ND EDITION CARDS



The deck was already starting to look better and sharper!

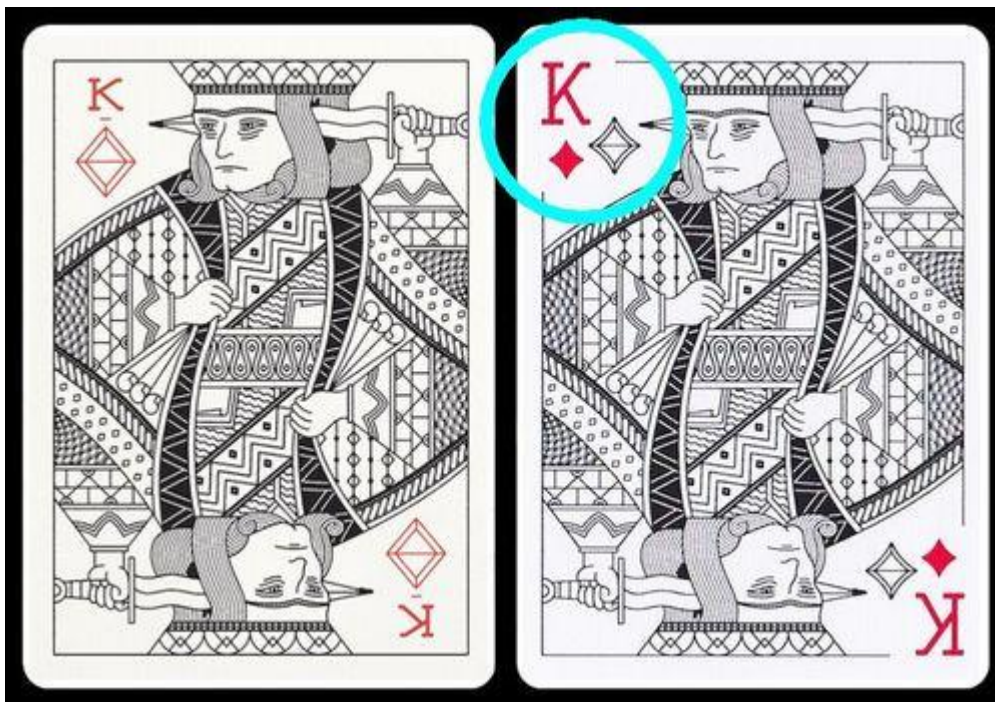


A green deck and a blue deck in the second edition followed as well: the green deck with matching mint-green card-backs, similar to what we've already seen in the 3rd edition; the blue deck with grey card-backs.

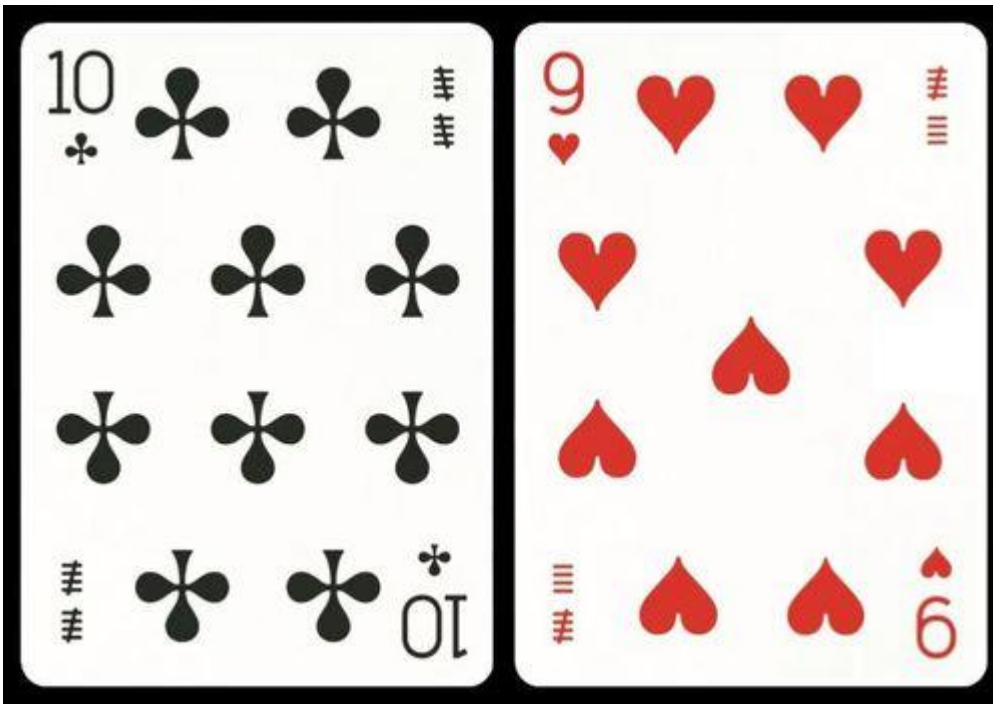


Third edition

But there was room for still further improvement, and that's where the third edition comes in. The indices are now 250% larger, along with a traditional suit pip as part of the index, to make the deck more playable and functional.



And instead of having indices on all four corners, the third edition card faces have indices on opposite corners only, as is typical for American playing cards, while the other corners don't have the expected white space, but a novel tally count corresponding to the card value.



With all these changes, that brings us to the deck as it is today - beautifully honed with the benefit of various revisions and refinement.



CONCLUSIONS

What do I think?

Pioneer: This project was outstanding in its time, and will always occupy a special place in the list of Kickstarter successes for playing cards, especially given its status as the first to go over the \$100,000 mark. As an owner of this deck, even in its 3rd edition, I feel as if I'm not just owning some playing cards, but a piece of history, and I own a set of playing cards that comes with its own remarkable story.

Company: Not only did this deck hit a surprising home-run, but it also kickstarted an entire company for designer Tyler Deeb. Today the Misc Goods Co brand represents far more than just a deck of playing cards, but also a luxury brand of other items as well. They already have added some deluxe playing card accessories and luxury products like cologne, and I'm told that other products like candles and more cologne are on the way. The company continues to grow slowly on an annual basis. It's not easy, and requires a lot of dedication and hard work, but Tyler deserves credit for what he's accomplished.



Stylish tuck-box: I love the stylish tuck boxes which have an understated elegance, particularly with the blind embossing - something I've not seen very often before. All the other elements of the tuck box - foil accents, ornate lines and patterns, interesting designs, curious text - all contributes to make it striking and impressive.

Different colours: The nice thing about having decks with different coloured backs is that you can play games that require more than one deck, and yet it's easy to sort the cards back into separate decks again afterwards. Plus it's just nice to be able to have a choice of colours, or even get a matching pair of decks in two different colours. The blue deck from the 2nd edition didn't prove that popular, so instead Misc Goods Co has opted to try some new colours. Different one-off colours may also be released in the future.

Cina deck: The most recent addition to the Misc Goods Co stable, the Cina Deck, is somewhat of a departure from the minimalism of the other versions of this deck. I love the fact that Tyler has collaborated with his artist friend to produce something that feels truly different in style from the other decks in this series. Future collaborative projects for Misc Goods Co aren't out of the question, and it will be interesting to see what this might produce.

Refined version: The first edition of this deck had a few weaker elements that could scrape by without too much criticism in 2012, but could prove to be a tough sell for a modern audience spoiled for choice in 2017. All these elements (e.g. small index numbers, non mirrored faces) have been updated and improved to make this third edition match the exacting standards of modern collectors and card players. Compared with the first edition especially, this is a real step up in quality as far as the actual design is concerned, to make it more functional and usable. The company feels good about the 3rd edition, and there are no plans to change the design from here; I really think they need to either, because they've really got things right.

Pure class: Everything about this deck of playing cards is stylish, and part of that is a result of the process of ongoing refinement since it first came out. The tuck box is stylish, the card backs are stylish, the court cards are stylish, the pips are stylish, the graphic design of the cards is stylish. As I said: *everything* is stylish. People I've shown this deck to have made the same comment, so it's not just me saying this! It's not over-the-top luxury consigned to become a museum piece, but it is very practical, and yet truly very classy.



Completely custom: The face of every card has been completely customized. So this is a unique deck, with custom pips, custom fonts, custom aces, and custom court cards. Everything about it makes it look different from a traditional deck, while at the same time retaining enough of a connection with the classic deck of cards, so that it's instantly recognizable and usable.

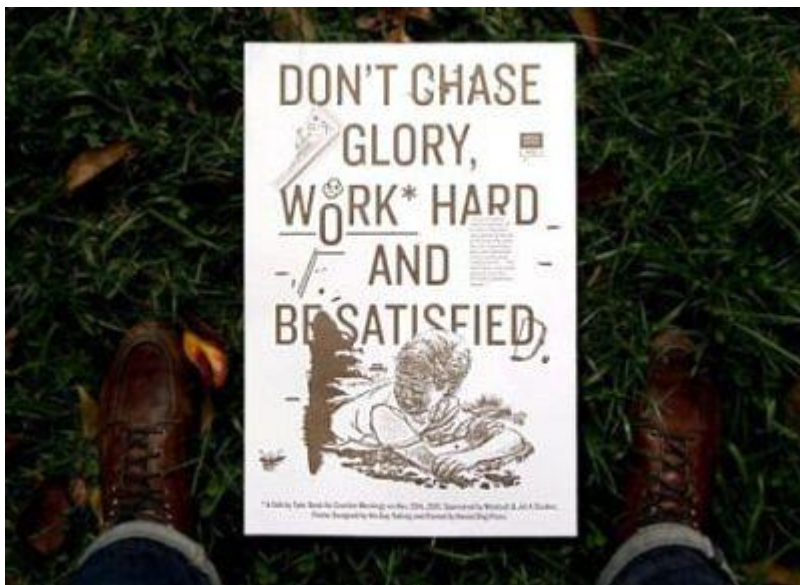
Ornate minimalism: This might seem to be an oxymoron, but unlike many other custom decks, this deck doesn't feature all kinds of different colours or elaborate images. Aside from the red pips for the Hearts and Diamonds, everything is black line work. This minimalist colour palette gives the deck a classic feel, and helps the line style drawings of the court cards stand out, and helps their ornate and decorative style become a real feature of this deck, while feeling very much within the bounds of what is traditional.

Card quality: All the Misc Goods Co decks are produced by United States Playing Card Company, using their highest quality Bee casino stock and Air Cushion finish. USPCC produced decks are renowned for their high quality card stock and finish that ensures both durability and good handling. These Misc Goods Co decks have exactly the kind of quality that most people will be familiar with from a quality Bicycle style deck.

Symbolism: There also appears to be some very real symbolism in the artwork. From the creator, I learned that each of the court families represents a different kingdom, and there are storylines between them. There is hint of much deeper meaning, although Tyler doesn't share details about this. But if you do want to try your hand at unravelling some of the symbolism, you might enjoy reading this article about the deck [here](#), although be aware that most of it is personal speculation!

Humour: A dash of humour in the right place can be like a breath of fresh air. Even though this is a very classy deck all round, there are some small doses of humour that have been injected in a way that is appropriate and refreshing. Of the two extra cards included, one is a promo card, while the second is a card that can be used as a replacement for a missing card, and it says the following on the face: "So. You lost a card. You either have kids, or are absent-minded. Either way ... fill in the blanks." Similarly, in the very tiniest of print, the tuck box says "Keep Your Nose Clean" - each word is on an opposite corner and barely noticeable, so it's very discrete, and yet it's good advice - and funny!

Words of wisdom: Another thing I love about this deck of playing cards are the words of wisdom that appear throughout, starting with the blind embossing ("Do Nothing Out of Selfish Ambition"), the top of the tuck box ("You Are Ever-Seen, Cheaters Beware"), and the Aces. Punctuating different elements of the website and other design works are phrases familiar from Ecclesiastes ("A chasing after wind"), and similar wisdom about life: "Don't lose yourself over things that will fade away", and "Here Today, Gone Today" and "All Things Must End". Even the tally count on the 3rd edition fits with the overall brand's emphasis on introspection and a fascination with the brevity of life. From what I've learned about Tyler, he's a man of principles, integrity, dedication, thoughtfulness, and godly character, and these words of wisdom show evidence of a depth of thought and wisdom that we can all learn from.



Recommendation

The story of Tyler Deeb and the Misc Goods Co Playing Cards is an amazing one. And in its current form, the 3rd edition, this remains an amazing and beautiful deck of cards. It has all the marks of sophistication and style, starting with the elegance of a classy tuck box, and it has the benefit of refinement over several editions. It's hard to think of ways it could be improved, and the current version has to be the definitive version of this deck. At the same time, it's not just a show piece, but is very functional and usable. If you want a custom deck of playing cards that makes a statement without being so customized that it becomes a miniature art gallery and is barely recognizable as a traditional deck, then this could be just the deck you are looking for. It's practical and stylish, and it has really enhanced my recent games of Cribbage, which have been all the more enjoyable for me when using this deck.

And it's also a great story. Although he was in the right place at the right time, Tyler's story isn't one of pure luck. The all-seeing eye of the One who determines the length of our short days also has an all-guiding hand. It is a story that includes providential timing and hard work. And that hard work has to continue for Tyler if Misc Goods Co is going to make it in today's competitive world of business. I wish Tyler the very best as he continues to forge ahead in building his company and to develop and expand his product line. And I invite my readers to check out his website, and consider whether you'd like to support him by purchasing his products. That may sound like an unashamed sales pitch, but the reality is that I've got no connection with Tyler other than the fact that I own some of his playing cards, have enjoyed learning his story, and have come to respect him for what he's accomplished, and for that reason I'd like to see him continue to succeed.

Tyler would be the first to say that even the miscellaneous goods he produces aren't exempt from the transience of life, and that we shouldn't be fixated on fleeting things that fade and perish. Even so, it's nice to have a quality deck of playing cards to enjoy over the years of our temporary sojourn here on planet earth. And in a world of so many Kickstarter misses, it's nice for once to be able to share a truly life-changing story of a genuine Kickstarter success.



Want to learn more?

Pedale Design: <http://www.pedaledesign.com>.

Misc Goods Co: <http://misc-goods-co.com>.



Direct links for the decks featured in this review:

- Misc Goods Playing Cards: [3rd edition Black](#)
- Misc Goods Playing Cards: [3rd edition Red](#)
- Misc Goods Playing Cards: [3rd edition Green](#)
- Misc Goods Playing Cards: [3rd edition Ivory](#)
- Misc Goods Playing Cards: [3rd edition Cinnamon](#)