Deck Building 101

Session #1

This course is intended for beginners. If you have experience in building decks for other CCGs but not Highlander, there are concepts in this course that you will still find helpful. If you have played Highlander, but feel your decks are lacking something, you may find this helpful. I will be speaking as if you have never played the game before, so don't be offended if some of these concepts are things you already know.

The first step in building a deck is deciding on a concept. The concept is the building blocks upon which the deck is built. I will detail some of the more popular concepts in Highlander, but by no means is this a comprehensive list.

The Attack Triplets : There are three types of Attack Decks, I fondly refer to them as the Attack Triplets.
Attack Deck – This is the elder brother. An Attack Deck is one that makes 1-2 attacks per turn on a consistent basis. It sounds pretty vanilla, but the key is to make attacks that are tricky to defend using cards and/or card effects. The downside is that as a rule these decks are slow and often take a long time to wear down their opponent.
Multiple Attack Deck – The middle child. Multiple Attack Decks make 3 or more attacks per turn on a consistent basis. The idea is to force your opponent to use all their defenses until they run out and are at your mercy. The downside is that these decks run fairly quick and so exhaust their Endurance quicker.
Hyper Attack Deck – The baby brother. Hyper Attack Decks are ones that make 12 or more attacks per turn on a consistent basis. The idea is similar to his middle brother, but it works on a much faster timetable. The downside is these decks often exhaust on the first or second turn.

Plot Decks : These decks rely on the effects of Plots to weaken their opponent and open holes in their strategy to take advantage of. The downside is these decks are relatively difficult to play and slow to work.

Stall Decks (You Cant Touch Me): These decks play a lot of defense in an attempt to outlast their opponent until time is called and End Game begins. These decks often have an advantage in End Game because they are at full Ability and often their opponent isn't. The downside is these decks have almost no way to damage their opponent.

Cheese Decks : These decks rely on cards that do damage and/or Ability loss to their opponent to win the game. Often these decks are merged with Stall Decks to give an extra advantage. The downside is these decks have little room for defense cards, which is why they are often merged with Stall Decks.

Denial Decks : These are decks designed to keep your opponent from doing a specific thing. Popular targets are Special Cards or Attacks. The opposite of this is the Punishment Deck, which damages or otherwise harms your opponent whenever they play certain cards.

Disarm Decks : The main goal of these decks are to Disarm their opponent so that they are easier to attack. These decks are built to quickly disarm and are usually able to disarm their

opponent several times over the course of a game.

Exhaust Deck: These decks are designed to cause their opponent to Exhaust their Endurance, causing Ability Loss and getting the cards their opponent needs into the Discard Pile so that their opponent cannot use their deck theme.

Not every deck fits into a preconceived mold, so don't use the above as anything more than a guide. Often a deck concept is simply a card combination that you have discovered, or an idea for doing something you saw another deck do. At any rate, having at least a BASIC concept for the deck is vital.

Now that you have decided on a concept, the real work begins. The next step is to determine the best persona to play to execute that concept. This is where research becomes vitally important. Look at all the persona's and their support cards and determine which one you think fits your concept. It often helps to make a list of persona's you are considering and list their pros and cons.

Session #2

Now that you have a concept and have a persona(s) in mind, lets get to work. The first question that has to be answered is : HOW.

The HOW is "How are you going to accomplish your concept?" What you need to do is get an idea of what cards you need to do this task. This is where your research is vital. Make a list of the cards, group them by card combination if possible. Now decide on how many times you feel you will need to put those cards into play over the course of a game. This will give you a base number for how many cards you need in your deck just to accomplish your concept.

When determining how many cards make up your combination, make sure that if your combination involves attacking, count in the number of attack cards.

Now that you have a baseline of how many cards make up your combo, its time to add in the remaining cards to make your deck legal. Make sure that you have included the 9 basic attack cards and 6 basic defense cards, or their equivalent if you have cards that allow their replacement. The next step is to consider defense. If your concept does not involve defense, then you most likely have only the 6 basic defenses in your deck right now. Think back to how many times you feel you need to play your concept, now compare this to how many defense cards you have in your deck. A good rule of thumb for beginners decks is to have at least 1 defense card for each turn before you plan to exhaust your Endurance. What defense cards you choose depends on your concept. If your concept centers around attacks, you may not want to include a lot of Dodge cards as they restrict your ability to attack. This can be offset by a Weapon Of Choice or other effects, so keep these factors in mind.

Once you have added your defense cards, and you have your basic attack cards along with any attack cards that involve your theme, you have the first draft of your deck. Count the total number of cards. There has to be at least 50 cards (unless you are using Lean & Mean). Ideally the deck should be between 40 and 60 cards at this point. The next step is called the ToolBox step.

The ToolBox step is very important and is often overlooked by beginning players. This step involves first looking very carefully at your deck and what it does. Think about the weaknesses your deck may have. Can it defend an unblockable or undodgeable attack? What if your opponent plays a permanent card that restricts or harms you, can you do something to remove it? What if they play a card that restricts you in other ways, do you have the ability to get around such restrictions? These are what toolbox cards are for.

Here is a short list of common toolbox cards.
Focus
Recon
Police
Investigation
Misfortune
Alertness

They may not be needed for every deck, but are the most commonly used cards. This list is by no means complete and every player has cards they prefer over others. Experience is the best factor in building a good toolbox, so don't be discouraged if you are caught off guard by an opponents strategy. Learn from this and be ready for the next time.

Now that you have decided on toolbox cards, the question is how many of each to use. This answer also comes from experience and your local opponents and what they tend to play. Experiment with different toolbox cards until you find the combination that works best for you.

The last step is applicable only for Type Two decks. This step involves counting up your gems and comparing that count to what is allowed by your persona. If you have gone over that count, you will need to eliminate some cards so that you fall into compliance. If a few of those cards are ones you need for your concept, then adjust the number of times your concept plays until you exhaust, and then adjust other cards in your deck accordingly. Once you have your deck in line with your gem count, you have finished the first part of deck building.

Next step is testing your deck.

Session #3

Now that you have a deck, its time to try it out. A deck is almost NEVER done on its first draft, so this step is very important in the evolution of the deck.

I will detail the method I use in testing my decks. This is by no means the best way or the only way, but its the way that works for me. What I hope to impart is the need for this step and maybe the spark of an idea for how you might test your own decks.

After assembling all of the cards, I deal them out into a dozen separate piles, and then randomly stack those piles up and then start shuffling the deck. After I am satisfied that the deck is well shuffled, I will deal out a hand. I don't rearrange the cards in the hand (in an effort to keep the randomness for future test draws), but simply look at the cards I have now and analyze them. Here is what I look for :

Do I have the cards I need to execute my concept?

Do I have adequate defense cards?
Do I have adequate tool box cards?

If these criteria are met, I will then count how many cards I might conceivably play in a game and then draw that many cards and reanalyze the deck. This simulates the second turn of a game. I now ask myself the same questions as above.

If I get the answers I am looking for, I will return all the cards to the top of the deck and reshuffle the deck several times. I now repeat this process over again. What I am looking for is consistency. You want a deck that you can count on being consistent, that you can be sure of what cards you are going to get. If your deck is not performing as you would like, make note of what cards you ARE getting in your hand. Look for a pattern , you may have too many of those cards in your deck. If your deck is a little large, try removing a few of them and see how the deck works afterwords. If you aren't that close to the deck limit, maybe try adding a few of the cards you aren't getting in your hand. This process can be very hit and miss, but the more you do it the more you get a feel for the formula your deck style uses.

If your deck is performing as you had planned, you are done. You might then get somebody to play in a mock game with you. Choose someone you trust, preferably someone who isn't a regular opponent.

Before closing this session I will touch on one final aspect of deck building : Personal Deck Style.

Everyone has a style when they build a deck. Each person is different, depending on the type of decks they like to play and the speed of decks they prefer. Once you have found your personal style, you can begin applying that as a formula to assist in your deck building. This formula will most often give you the ratio of defense cards you prefer, ratio of tool box cards, etc etc. Finding your personal style is a big step in deck building and often leads to more successful decks as you get a feel for how you like to play.