

Highlander: the Card Game

Advanced Deck Construction Guide

Does the card have a use?

The first question is easy. If a card has a desired effect, then it is useful. Depending on what kind of deck I'm making, though, various cards that have no use in one deck become immensely useful in another: Holy Ground: Avoid Attacks is one of those cards that is very useful, but even more useful with Nefertiri, for example. Plot cards, which I find useless in most decks, are perfect for Xavier. The temptation sometimes is to toss in a card that doesn't really enhance the deck, but does something interesting. I mean, I could put a Darius/Shooting Blade into all my decks, but it clashes with a lot of my deck themes: Amanda wouldn't use one, though Luther might. So, a lot of the thought I put into certain cards stems from the type of deck I want to play. I don't care if the deck wins, as long as it does what I want it to do.

Is there a better card that does the same thing?

Generally, I like to be able to play the cards I have in my hand whenever I want. Many of the Event cards, though, need targets (for example, the Police: Counter Event and Remove Situation cards) before you can play them. The Xavier cards are a lot better, when you are playing him: his Plan Ahead and Forethought cards are both Situations, and can be out of your hand immediately, just waiting to be used. There are also cards that need other cards to be useful: the plots, Darius, Power Blows, etc. In cases like these, I have to figure out if the benefits outweigh the cost in cards. For Darius, the benefit can be pretty good, but for most plots, the benefits are not worth the cards. Again, though, depending on what kind of deck I'm building, I might make exceptions. Some cards are more amorphous, depending on the Persona. For my Duncan deck, I had 4 Trips and 3 Combinations. Then I realized that the Combinations could essentially do the same thing the Trips could, AND more. Result, 6 Combinations, no Trips. Sure, I lose the ability to strip my opponent of standing defenses, but that's a small benefit to me. I'd rather have the extra hidden attack. Plus, I can be fairly certain of getting a Combination in my hand. Another good example of two cards that do about the same thing are Charlie and Renee Delaney. One card is better: Renee prevents your opponent from playing a special card his turn; Charlie prevents YOU and your opponent from playing special cards. If I needed a card like that, I'd use Renee.

What are the chances that I can actually play the card?

This third question is somewhat nebulous, but also very important: if you have a handful of card that you cannot play, then you are in trouble. I can usually play a Police: Counter Event during a game. I can play a Narrow Escape though, ONLY against one other card (and other cards can do the same job). Narrow escape will not have a place in my deck, but the Counter Event will. For the same reason, Guards are usually better than blocks: you can play guards without pending attacks, and they cover a larger area of effect. Plus, they can stay in play for multiple turns. Quality Blade is a good card, in terms of playability: you can play it at any time, and it gives you a good bonus. It is unlikely that your opponent can remove it from the game. Extra Weapon can be a good 'insurance' card, as well, since you can also play it at any time, and if your opponent plays with Disarms, you don't have to worry about them too much. Caught in the Act, to me, is a really great card: you can play it whenever during your turn, and it can hurt your opponent a lot. Optimally, the 3 CIAs can force your opponent to discard 9 attacks (usually, though, it catches about 6-7). Consider that most decks have about 24-30 attacks and you can see what I mean. The problem is that against non-attack decks, it isn't terribly useful. And against Monster Decks, it is just a drop in the bucket. On the other hand, I can still play them, and perhaps catch a Shooting Blade or a Stalk in some decks. There are many situations that are good for particular decks, too: Master, Avery Hoskins, Poison Gas, the Pedestrians.

How many do I have to have to make it useful?

This is one that many people will disagree with me about, but it is how I feel about some cards in the game. For Mugging to be useful, I have to have it in my hand, play it, AND roll a die. Though the 2 in 6 chance is fairly good, it means I should probably have 3 in my deck to beat the odds and get ONE Mugging to work. But I've already wasted three spaces in my deck for these cards. I'd rather have other cards that are a little less chancy. Also, there are other cards that will do 1 or 2 points of damage that are more of a sure thing: Street Punks, for one. Three of them will do 3 points of damage without rolling a die. I usually will use those cards instead. The Disarm cards, while powerful if they work, seem even less likely to be useful: the 1 in 6 chance is low; I'd have to have the full 6 cards to beat the odds. The payoff, though, is pretty good. Except that there are 2 common cards that can make your Disarms useless, even if they do work. Not good odds at all. I'm more likely to use a Extra Weapon card to fend off decks that Disarm than use Disarm myself. The 'Seduction of the Rares' effect can be terrible. The same Duncan deck I was working on had 2 of Duncan's Master's Attacks. Unfortunately, they really aren't that great. You can have two in the deck, and they do 1 point of damage and can't be blocked. However, they are attacks, which means I could play one and play a special, too. The ratio of usefulness seemed a little off, anyhow: it's really not a heck of a lot better than any other attack, except that it can't be blocked. Eh. I tossed them. Street Punks can do the same. The Watcher: Treatment card is nice, too, as are the Master's Advice. Anything that can give you more Ability is pretty good in my book, even if you can only have one or two in a deck. The plot cards are either very useful, or wasteful, depending on what Persona you play and what Persona you are playing against. Unholy Alliance is the most useful, I'd say.

The others are of varying use. The cons: you have to get all 3 cards into play, they can still be Police: Remove Situation'ed, Underworld Contacted, and you can only have 6 of each title. The pros: they can be devastating. Xavier is best with plots, but other decks can benefit from using some, at times. I'd avoid the Counterfeit plot, though: you can never tell how big a person's deck is, so 10 cards can be either nasty or merely an annoyance. Plus, you should always try to lower your opponent's Ability: those are the cards he can use immediately. Perhaps after some expansions, a discard deck might work, and Counterfeit will fit in with it, but Avery Hoskins or a few Power Blows can achieve the same effect with fewer cards.

What do I do after I find the right cards?

After deciding what cards are useful for a deck, it then becomes a matter of fine tuning the numbers: if your deck has cards that allow you extra attacks, then you should be sure that you have extra attacks to use: nothing is worse than having an Extra Shot or Combination in your hand, and no attacks to play with them. Adjust the ratio of attacks/blocks/specials until you get a good mix in your hand. Deck size is also important: the minimum size for a deck is 50 cards, and there is no practical upper limit. However, use common sense when making a deck: a 150 card deck may work some times, but it should probably be a mostly one card strategy deck: you cannot count on drawing the 3 plot cards out of 150 in a large deck. Nor should you count on drawing that one Master's Advice you put in. Most of the large decks also use Power Blows a lot, which can work, but will waste 5 cards every turn. My advice for large decks that rely on Power Blows is to use Master and Power Blow cards instead of increasing the size of the deck. Of course, as above, you may not draw that Master card... A good general deck size is 65-75 cards: with a deck within this range, you'll be pulling about 20% of it in your first draw. This should give you a good mix of the different kind of cards your deck uses. With a 150 card deck, you only see 10% of the deck in the first draw. I always do a lot of test draws after creating a deck, to be sure that I'm not getting a handful of attacks, or a handful of blocks. Depending on what kind of deck it is, I want to see equal numbers of things: about 5 blocks, 5 attacks, and 5 specials in my first draw (for a mainly attack deck). I also want to be sure I didn't toss any silly cards into the deck, like 6 Head Shots with only 3 upper attacks. Testing the deck is the hardest part. I can always find a partner with a variety of decks to test against: we've created a lot of decks to mess with. Usually, I like to test my deck against a similar deck: attack deck vs. attack deck, etc. I see what worked, what didn't, and what I didn't play. Many people, though, might not have too many people to play against. My advice in a case like that is to go to the card/comic/game store that you bought Highlander at, and see who else is playing: most shops will let you leave a sign up sheet for others interested in playing at a certain time. Or, you can go to a convention and see if there are any Highlander events planned. If worse comes to worse, you can make two decks and hijack your girlfriend/boyfriend/pet/ mother/friend and make them play.