Deckbuilding Theory

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Ok, why I write this, is beyond me, but I'll explain my look on deckbuilding theory. You have to decide on a purpose for your deck. This consists of 2 obvious parts:

First and foremost, and the only truly required part, which should always be considered first: Ousting your Prey. This is divided in two different portions:

- Damage Portion (or payload) - what makes your deck better at ousting than midcaps bleeding for one? There are only two truly viable options:
    - Votes - Effective, hard to counter, but requires decent setup (actually having votes).
    - Bleed - Innate, card efficient, requires no initial setup, but needs more in the way of delivery system. Either a lot of vampires, or added bleed are good options.

- Effectiveness Portion (or delivery system) - what makes your deck difficult to hold back?
    - Overwhelming - Like bleed. Innate, requires little setup and is very card efficiently boosted by some very strong cards (anarch troublemaker, pentex subversion, mind numb, change of target). Relies on overwhelming your prey with more actions than they can block. Card efficiency is reduced by the need to play combat - either to ensure minion advantage by destroying your prey's minions, or to ensure you prevent yours from being destroyed. Is very safe to use in combination with heavy bleed (modifiers).
    - Stealth - Not very card efficient, but very very effective if not properly countered. Card efficiency is increased because acting vampires have no need for combat. Effectively countered by deflecting if coupled with bleed. Makes it tricky to play with bleed, or if you have to play combat for intercepting or self defensive reasons.

If your deck does not have one of these, in each category, no matter how slight, your deck needs looking at, and will 90% of the time do better if you add the cards to meet these requirements. Keep in mind there are many ways to interpret the 'overwhelming' delivery system.

The secondary part your deck should have some way to survive your Predator: You should strive to roughly include two of the following options (or like, one and a half of one, a half of the other. also you can pick twice - except for rush, which requires you to actually take out a vampire, which has generally adverse effects with the benefits):

- Light Intercept: Being able to relatively often generate 1 or 2 intercept (est. 10+ cards plus 5+ wakes).
- Bounce: Being able to redirect bleeds to your prey (est. 6+ cards plus 3+ wakes).
- Rush: Being able to selectively kill vampires controlled by your predator (est. innate or 5+ cards).
- Pool Gain: Being able to generate roughly 3+ pool/turn (differs too much to make an estimation)

If you cannot follow the above statement, it's my opinion your deck would be better off if it did. (ousting your prey midgame in ~ two turns counts as the last option). Of course, that's a rough estimation. You can also go by the following statement: Your deck should be able to handle two +1 stealth bleeds for 3, each turn, while making actions yourself. Count a rush with sufficient combat as preventing 2 bleeds.

Action equivalents: evaluating effectiveness and efficiency.

Optimally, for action/action modifier cards the following is true: 1 pool = 1 blood = 1 card = 1 action. Cards or effects that can be considered above averagely strong have one of the following traits:
- They give an increase of effect (either damage or gain) of more than 1 pool/blood per card, action, etc.
- The card gives two wholly different effects that are both likely to be useful (versatility).

Of course some cards do not follow this theory, but it is a reasonable basic assessment of card strength. Some examples of very strong cards by this theory are:
- Kindred Spirits / Intimidation / Restoration: 1 action + 1 card = 3 pool/blood
- Govern the Unaligned / Entrancement: Very different effects which are equally strong, but follow above structure (perhaps superior govern is a bit better, as it also provides additional transfers).

Similar comparisons can be made for other action equivalent cards (ie. J.S. Simmons: 3 actions + 1 card = 4 pool) - not too efficient without backup.

Action modifiers which pertain to these actions usually follow roughly the same principle. Some mechanics are not very translatable, but for most there's easily made a division between above average, and below average.

Combat:

Basically this advice follows the short chain combat, but not completely. You need combat that does roughly the following
- End combat and untap you - with a few maneuvers or ways to prevent damage.

Or the following:
- Hurt your opponent for more than 2.
- Give either: A maneuver with sometimes a dodge/prevent or prevent/dodge+additional with sometimes a maneuver
- Periodically gains you 2 or more blood.

Or if you choose for overwhelm by destroying your prey's minions, or rush combat:
- Hurt your opponent for more than 4 in a combat, while preventing yourself going to torpor, gaining blood, and having a counter to S:CE.

Card Usage:

To optimally play your cards (as many as you can, to good effect) there are a few things blocking your way. The big problem is, almost every card is only useable in very specific situations. This is why cards that are useable in multiple situations are so very strong. You will have cards in your hand that will not be useable in the situation you are in. Worse yet, a lot of your cards will be such. These cards prevent you from getting the cards that you can use.

There's three ways around these problems:

1. You reduce the size of your library. Although you will have less cards to play, that also means you will have less chance of having X specific cards for a different situation in your hands. This also includes removing very situational cards from your deck, no matter how good they could be at some time. - Limited, of course, by losing because you run out of cards. Best way to find out what size would be best is just to play games and get a feel for it.

2. You include handcyclers. The Barrens, Dreams of the Sphinx, etc. You name it, and it will be beneficial when you feel that it will let you play (cost+1) more cards effectively. I feel this is usually the case. This is also limited by losing because you run out of cards, and should be balanced carefully with decksize.

3. You find ways to increase your handsize. This is clearly the best option, as it dramatically decreases your chances of clumping, while at the same time letting you have the use of more cards at the same time, covering more eventualities, and increasing the general effectiveness of your cards, without reducing the amount of cards you play. This option is limited only by availability.

That's all for now. Comments are welcome!

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