Hard 30 – Beyond the First Five part I

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Flat Argiaia’er Theory

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It’s Not a Curve

Using a bell curve to optimize resources for card games has been around for over 30 years. The concept helps you play the most number of cards during a round based on increasing resources. Ashes is a different bird altogether because your resources are set. Instead of an ever-expanding curve, you have an average.

The first thing you want to figure out is how many repeatable effects do you want to trigger every round. Either from a phoenixborn’s ability or spellbooks already in play. Take the total cost of those effects minus ten. That is the amount of **open dice** available every round to spend on any other cards you may draw.

The second thing is deciding what you want your average cost of card to be in your deck. This is a drastically different approach than other games due to the set resources. Instead of your curve being dictated to you, you choose your average.

Five In, X Out Theory

Ideally, during round two you activate all your spellbooks, phoenixborn ability, and play all the cards you think are key to the deck concept. In most card games the goal is to play every single card you draw to the battlefield. So, if you draw five cards, you want to play five cards. Generally known as five in, five out.

Ashes present several barriers to that idea. First of all, there is a limit to your resources of ten dice. No less, no more. Second, phoenixborn have battlefield sizes. Even if you drew five allies they may not all fit within the limit. Finally, you just may not be able to. Some cards require a trigger for them to be useful. The caveat for the last point is if a particular card keeps being the last piece of cardboard in your hand… It might be time for a new card.

Each deck has an interesting balance for the number of cards it wants to play each turn based on the first five.

If a deck has a low number of open dice, like three, it makes sense to aim for three or fewer cards being played each turn. Your deck should have an incredibly low average cost of one. Interestingly, it makes cards with detrimental discards all the more palatable like Crescendo since you are going to be holding cards at the end of the turn.

Finding Your Average

Find your average by dividing the number of open dice by the number of cards you want to play each round.

Open Dice/X Out = Average Cost of Card

The average cost of a card is for the rest of the 25 in your deck. To make this easier to visualize, figure out the cost combination of each card in a five-card hand that meets or exceeds your X Out number. NOTE: I have not included zero-cost cards. They are not worth playing in a deck besides Call Upon the Realms. Royal Charm can be great but you need to be in charm or divine. The less said about Mass Heal* the better.

*Please prove me wrong! I love seeing underused cards rise to the occasion! Let’s chat in Discord!

Example 1: I have a deck with five open dice and I want to play three cards per round. Five divided by three is 1.66 repeating. What would that look like in a five-card hand? Remember, three cards have to add up to five or fewer die cost to meet our criteria.

Cost	1	2	3	4
Hand 1	3	0	0	0
Hand 2	4	0	0	0
Hand 3	5	0	0	0
Hand 4	2	2	0	0
Hand 5	3	1	0	0
Hand 6	1	2	0	0
Hand 7	2	0	1	0

There are a lot of options for different hands.

Example 2: Let’s take the same number of open dice, five. But, increase the number of cards I want to play each turn to five.

Cost	1	2	3	4
Hand 1	5	0	0	0

That’s it. No card can cost more than one.

How do you know how many cards you should play in a round? Well, that depends on your deck.

Choosing Your X Out

Here’s where you can flex your creativity. When picking a deck concept you usually have a couple of other cards you envision pairing with the first five. Make sure you can play those on any given turn without modifying your regular lines of play. If you have to sacrifice a repeatable effect you are relying on, rethink your supporting 25.

To make room for your supporting cards work them into the average. Let’s continue with the premise that your deck has five open dice and the supporting card is a cost three, Essence Druid. That leaves you with two open dice. The best you could do is play three total cards this round.

You are limited to only playing a possible three cards per turn on the round you want to play your best supporting card. The rest of the deck has to be one cost card with a couple of two

costs thrown in for the rounds you don’t draw Essence Druid. The deck is pretty much chosen for your X Out of three.

There is nothing wrong with picking a lower X Out number. It just means your spellbooks and phoenixborn are doing all the heavy lifting and you are cherry-picking the best one or two support cards to play each turn. Some of the best decks rely on four conjurations to hold down the battlefield with only a couple of support cards each round.

Pushing the boundaries of five in, x out can also reap interesting results. Without having a solid concept I was curious if I could make an effective five in, seven out deck. The deck was crammed with one cost allies, burn, and card draw. It has given me the highest win percentage of any new deck I have created. My next experiment is going to be five in, one out (probably has to be two). I think those may already exist with Koji Creepers and Meoni Snek.

The goal of choosing the right X Out number is to give you the most flexibility to play with a repeating first five. You can tell when it’s not working when you consistently have dice left unused and you skip using a repeatable ability or conjuration. One of your issues might be you don’t have the right dice. Next on Beyond the First Five. Until then heyo and gl!

About the Author

Jerod Leupold has been an avid gamer and advocate for over 30 years. He cut his teeth on the business side by founding and running Critical Hit Games in Iowa City for eight years before selling to excellent stewards. Now that he has time to take things like vacations he amuses himself by using his English degree and journalism background talking about game theory. He has been published under the Gamenomicon franchise for Party First RPG adventures and sourcebooks. As well as several articles about A Game of Thrones CCG and LCG back in the day. While he’s never hoisted a grand champion trophy he has been an innovator and bride’s maid an innumerable number of times.

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