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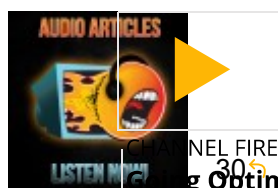
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Going Optimal on MTG Arena

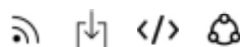
BY [RYAN SPAIN](#) / JANUARY 2, 2019



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A few months ago, Marshall Sutcliffe and I were discussing *Magic: The Gathering Arena*. “People want to know how to go infinite,” he concluded.

“Yeah, but *Arena* has a free-to-play path, so everyone is infinite in that respect, and it’s disingenuous to sell ‘going infinite’ to the average player anyway,” I replied. “It would be better to call it ‘going optimal.’”

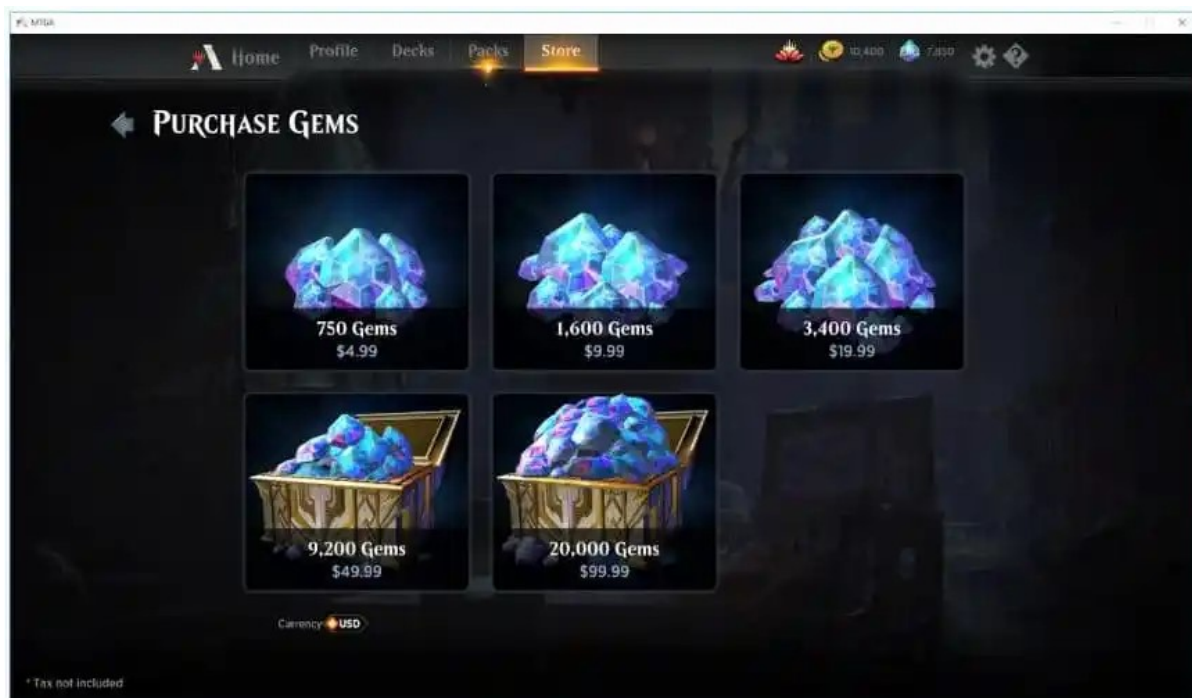
The phrase struck me as a nice summation of a simple philosophy: pursue high-value decisions in a balanced life. Everything we do involves an investment of time plus expenses, and [going optimal](#) is about the ongoing effort to improve on your returns in money, fun, happiness, safety, greater good, love, time, and all the inputs and outputs of life. As an entertainment proposition, going optimal on *MTG Arena* is mostly a calculus of time, money, and fun—but what does that mean for you?

That depends on what Magic fun is for you, but there are some universal aspects of going optimal on MTG *Arena* to understand first.

Optimizing the Currencies

There are two currencies on MTG *Arena*, gold and gems. You earn gold through quest rewards, event prizes, and winning games. Gold buys boosters and entry into a subset of events. You acquire gems through a store purchase or event prizes. Gems buy everything gold does plus entry into gem-only events.

The welcome bundle is a one-time purchase of 2,500 gems and some boosters for \$4.99. This is enough for a few Drafts and some boosters, so it's well worth it, even for intended F2P players. Make any further gem purchases in 20,000 gem increments, even if you have to save up to do it, as you get the most gems for your dollar at that \$100 price point.



Optimizing Wild Cards

MTG *Arena* uses a “wild card” system for acquiring singles. Wild cards have a rarity, and can be exchanged for any card on MTG *Arena* of that rarity. They randomly replace cards of that rarity in boosters, and you also earn them at a fixed rate as you open boosters and acquire copies of a card beyond four.

If you aren't expecting to spend a lot of money on *Arena*, consider building toward a mono-red aggro deck. It has the fewest high-rarity cards among top Standard decks, so it can be built quickly. It's easy to find low-rarity swaps for the rares you don't have yet, which lends itself to step-by-step improvement. It wins or loses quickly, and it's a flexible deck for quest optimization.

Regardless of what decks you craft, your biggest risk of crafting regret is around a set's release. You may end up opening cards you crafted as you play Limited with the new set, and the metagame will be most subject to change. Having a powerful deck right out of the gate of a new format might be worth it to you, but be aware of the risk.



Optimizing Seasons and Rank

MTG *Arena* recently introduced monthly seasons, where players earn rank-based gold and booster prizes in Constructed and Limited. Currently, the rewards for finishing the season with a high rank are nominal—less gold

than you earn from one day of grinding. Unless you care deeply about your rank, take whatever rank you get from playing in the events you enjoy, and from grinding wins and quests in “Find Match/Ranked” with a good deck.

Optimizing Win and Quest Rewards

Quests and the daily win rewards are how a free-to-play player of any skill level can earn currency to spend in the system, and how paying players subsidize their costs, so let’s be sure you’re doing it the right way.

Win Rewards

The most straightforward thing you can do to earn gold on MTG *Arena* is to play until you win four games each day. These wins can come from any form of play. There are rewards through the first 15 wins, including “individual card rewards” instead of gold for some, but the first four are the most important. Here is the pay table for your first 15 wins each day:

Win	Reward
1	250 Gold
2	100 Gold
3	100 Gold
4	100 Gold
5	ICR
6	50 Gold
7	ICR

8	50 Gold
9	ICR
10	50 Gold
11	ICR
12	25 Gold
13	ICR
14	25 Gold
15	ICR

How far down the win chart you want to go each day is part of your personal time/fun/money math, but on days when you have the time, it's going optimal to hop on and earn at least those first four wins.

Quest Rewards

A new quest appears each day on your home screen at the same time your daily wins reset. Each quest shows the requirements for completing it and the gold earned for doing so, either 500 or 750. You can have up to three active quests at a time.



The hourglass represents an empty quest slot. The system attempts to give you a new quest every 24 hours, but you don't get one if you don't have an

empty quest slot, so it's going optimal to end each day with at least one empty quest slot.

Once a day, you can swap an existing quest for a new one. Since every 500-gold swap represents a chance at getting 750 gold instead, every 500-gold quest swap is effectively clicking a "free gold" button! So not only should you cycle a 500-gold quest whenever there is one available, you should try to leave at least one 500-gold quest *incomplete* each day via deck selection. By leaving an incomplete 500, you will have a quest to cycle the next day even if your new quest is a 750.

These subtle quest-swapping and deck-selection choices can help increase your average gold per day. Take this scenario. If you aren't playing in events, what quest are you swapping, and how are you earning your four wins today?



You clearly want to swap that "play 25 lands" quest, as it will be impossible for you to complete your four wins without completing a play lands quest. Then you will use your best deck in the play queue that runs red spells but not blue or white spells. This will complete your 750 as you try for wins, and it will offer no progress on the blue-white quest. That way, you will have the white-blue quest to cycle tomorrow no matter what you cycle into today.

Sometimes playing in events prevents you from being able to optimize your quests, but making the effort when you can will produce extra gold in the long run. I've been [tracking my gold](#) along with wins and losses on my

“welcome bundle only” account, and I’ve earned a little over 1,250 gold a day by winning at least four times a day, cycling 500-gold quests every day, and making the effort to leave a 500-gold quest to cycle. That’s a free 5,000-gold Draft every four days!

Optimizing Your Play

OK, now that we understand how to manage the quests, what is the optimal play path on MTG *Arena*? That depends on your play goals, skill level, and budget. I’ll be referring to my [MTG Arena EV spreadsheet](#) as we consider those factors.

The Limited-Heavy Path

If all you want from MTG *Arena* is Limited, you’re in a funny situation. A Limited-only player doesn’t have any use for prize boosters, wild cards, or really their entire card collection. In fact, if all MTG *Arena* is to you is an arcade machine in which you are paying money for games of Limited, going optimal for you might involve creating N throwaway Gmail accounts, signing up for MTG *Arena* on them, skipping the tutorial, and buying welcome bundles. Cycle through the accounts so that you are always playing on one with quests to complete, and repeat the process when they are all depleted of gold and gems.

A 50% win rate with this approach leads to a [pre-grind cost as low as \\$0.14 per Draft game](#), so this could be worth it for you depending on how fast you can repeat the process and how you value that time.

This approach is too extreme for most Limited-focused players, though. If you play some occasional Constructed and enjoy having a growing digital collection, here is a more optimal approach:

- If you have 5,000 gold for a Draft in a format you enjoy, play that.
- If you don't have enough gold but have the the gems for a Draft in a format you enjoy, play that.
- If you don't have enough gold or gems, buy the \$100 gem bundle.
- If you don't have enough gold or gems and you don't have \$100 to spend on gems, enter gold grind mode using the optimal quest cycling and deck selection techniques described above until you have 5,000 gold for a Draft.

I would avoid Sealed if you are on a budget. While it has the best gem EV among Limited events, it has [a much higher gems per game cost](#) compared to Draft events, so it has to be about fun or practice to justify.

The Constructed-Heavy Path

If you don't care much for Limited and you aren't on a tight budget, then optimizing MTG *Arena* is just a question of how many decks you want and how fast you want them. Buy gems and use them on boosters. Buy the set you need the most rares and mythics from, although it won't move the needle much—you will end up crafting the vast majority of your rares and mythics.

If you aren't in a hurry for the perfect deck or you are on a budget, you can grind your way there.

- Use the optimal quest cycling and deck selection techniques described above to grind daily gold, and use that gold on packs.
- Spend wild cards on building the least rare-intensive deck you think you can win more than 55% of your matches with—usually mono-red aggro.
- Once you have a deck you can win more than 55% of your matches with, start grinding with it in the Constructed event queues.

If you don't feel that you can win 55%+ in Constructed events, just keep grinding via free play toward whatever deck you want.

The Mixed Path

If you enjoy a mix of Constructed and Limited, and you don't need to be on the cutting edge of Constructed, there is a nice cycle of play you can engage in from set to set:

- When a new set comes out, focus on Limited per the steps in the Limited-focused path. You will acquire lots of wild cards and singles from the new set while solving the new Limited format with the rest of the Magic community.
- When the Standard meta has settled down a bit and the new Draft format isn't so new-feeling anymore, commit your wild cards to a Standard deck you like, and start playing Constructed according to the Constructed-focused path.

While you don't have to adhere strictly to this separation, the general pattern of leaning on Limited early after a set release and leaning on Constructed late is an effective approach for the mixed-format planeswalker.

The TL;DR Top Ten

That's a lot of info, so let's close with some clean takeaways:

1. Everyone should buy the welcome bundle.
2. Spenders should buy gems in increments of 20,000.
3. Win four games a day.
4. Cycle a 500-gold quest every day.
5. Finish the day with an empty quest slot.

6. Try to finish the day with an incomplete 500-gold quest.
7. The shortest path to competitive Constructed is via mono-red aggro.
8. Draft offers a much better cost-per-game than Sealed.
9. Gold can only be converted to gems in Ranked Draft.
10. Seasons and ranks don't matter much yet.

And finally, watch for changes! *MTG Arena* is still in beta, and as the dev team iterates on the game, we have to iterate on what it means to be going optimal in it. See you on the battlefield!

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About The Author



[Ryan Spain](#)

Ryan Spain left co-hosting the Limited Resources podcast in 2011 to spend seven years at Wizards of the Coast as a game designer in Magic R&D and on the MTG Arena team. He's now streaming MTG Arena every weekday at [twitch.tv/goingoptimal](https://www.twitch.tv/goingoptimal).