RULEBOOK

GAME DESIGN by RICHARD GARFIELD



KEYFORGE™

CALL OF THE ARCHONS

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- Updates and changes from the previous version are detailed here.

KeyForge: Call of the Archons

RULEBOOK

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WELCOME TO THE CRUCIBLE...

You are an Archon. Hailed by some as a god, respected by others for your wisdom, you were born—or perhaps created—on the Crucible, a world in which anything is possible.

The Crucible is ancient, but ever renewed. An artificial planet hanging in the center of the universe, the Crucible's many layers remain constantly under construction by the enigmatic and mischievous Architects. For raw materials, the Architects have harvested countless worlds, blending them into a new whole both familiar and alien to the creatures that dwell there.

Whether lone specimens or entire cultures, the beings brought to the Crucible find themselves in a strange wonderland with no obvious means of returning to their former homes. Some thrive, building new societies and developing new technologies with the aid of the mysterious psychic substance known as Æmber. Some discard the trappings of their old lives, adopting the ways and customs of new tribes discovered in this new world. Others devolve, bodies and minds twisted beyond all recognition, incorporating Æmber into their very bodies.

As an Archon, you have gathered followers in your journeys throughout the Crucible, allies who find value in your ageless wisdom and your ability to speak to all creatures. With the aid of these allies, you seek out Vaults hidden throughout the Crucible by the cryptic Architects. Each Vault can only be unlocked by Æmber-forged keys. Once open, a Vault's contents—the power and knowledge of the Architects—can be consumed by only a single Archon.

When two Archons discover a Vault, only one can gain its knowledge. Only one can move one step closer to the secret of the Crucible…

OVERVIEW

KeyForge is a two-player card game in which each player takes the role of an Archon, and leads that Archon's deck against their opponent.

A player's deck represents a team that is attempting to gain Æmber and forge keys. The first player to gather three keys is able to unlock a Vault and win the game.

The defining feature of *KeyForge* is that no two decks are alike. This is not a trading card game—you cannot craft a deck. Rather, each deck is must remain as it is. Every deck in existence is unique!

USING THIS DOCUMENT

If you have never played a game of *KeyForge* before, start by using the Quickstart document included in the starter set to learn the basics of the game.

After playing a game using the Quickstart, players can read the full rules in this document and learn more about the *KeyForge* setting.

In addition to rules and setting information, this document includes a Glossary of important game concepts and terminology that will be useful while interpreting card abilities.

Rules . . . . . page 3

Glossary . . . . . page 9

Fiction and Setting Information . . . . . page 13

STARTER SET COMPONENTS

The components included in a *KeyForge: Call of the Archons* starter set are pictured here for identification purposes.



22 Damage Tokens



26 Æmber Tokens



Radiant Argus the Supreme Starter Deck



Miss "Onyx" Censorius Starter Deck







6 Key Tokens



10 Power Status Cards



10 Stun Status Cards



2 Unique KeyForge *Archon Decks*



2 Chain Tracker Cards and Tokens



KEY CONCEPTS

This section introduces a number of foundational concepts to keep in mind while playing the game.

THE GOLDEN RULE

If the text of a card directly contradicts the text of the rules, the text of the card takes precedence.

OBJECTIVE

During the game, players use their cards to collect Æmber. Players use Æmber to forge keys. The game ends immediately when a player forges their third key, and that player wins the game.

READY AND EXHAUSTED

Cards that are in play exist in one of two states.

Ready cards are oriented upright so that their text may be read from left to right. A ready card can be used during a player's turn, causing it to exhaust.

Exhausted cards are rotated 90 degrees to the side. An exhausted card is not able to be used until it is readied by a game step or card ability.

All creatures and artifacts enter play exhausted.



Ready



Exhausted

RUNNING OUT OF TOKENS OR STATUS CARDS

There is no limit to the number of damage tokens, Æmber tokens, or status cards that can be in the game area at a given time. If there is a shortage of the provided tokens or status cards, other tokens, counters, or coins may be used to track the game state.



GAME SETUP

To set up the game, perform the following steps, in order:

1. Place all damage tokens, Æmber tokens, and status cards in a common supply within easy reach of both players.
2. Each player places their identity card to the left or right side of their play area.
3. Each player places three key tokens, one of each color, with the unforged side faceup near their identity card.
4. Randomly determine who is the first player. That player takes the first turn when the game begins. (If players are playing a series of games between two decks, in each game after the first, the player who used the deck that was defeated in the previous game chooses who is the first player.)
5. Each player shuffles their deck and offers it to the opponent for additional shuffling and/or a final cut.
6. The first player draws a **starting hand of seven cards**. The other player draws a **starting hand of six cards**.
7. Each player, starting with the first player, has one opportunity to **mulligan** their starting hand by shuffling it back into their deck and drawing a new starting hand with one fewer card in it. (This step is skipped in the Quickstart game.)

The game is now ready to begin.



TURN SEQUENCE

The game is played over a series of turns. Players alternate taking turns until one player wins the game.

Each turn consists of five steps:

1. Forge a key.
2. Choose a house.
3. Play, discard, and use cards of the chosen house.
4. Ready cards.
5. Draw cards.

The player taking a turn is referred to as the **active player.** The active player is the only player that can perform actions or make decisions; a player does not make any decisions when it is not their turn.

Each step is described in the following sections.

STEP 1: FORGE A KEY

If the active player has enough Æmber to forge a key during this step, they must do so. To forge a key, the active player spends Æmber from the Æmber pool on their identity card, returning it to the common supply. Then, that player flips any one of their key tokens over to its forged side, indicating that the key has been forged.

- **The default cost to forge a key is six Æmber.** Some card abilities may increase or decrease this number.
- No more than one key can be forged during this step each turn, even if the active player has enough Æmber to forge multiple keys.

STEP 2: CHOOSE A HOUSE

Each *KeyForge* deck is composed of three different houses, which are shown on the identity card. During this step, the active player chooses one of those three houses to activate, making it the **active house** for the remainder of the turn. This active house determines which cards the active player can play, discard from their hand, and use this turn.

- After choosing a house, the active player has the option to take all cards in their archives and add them to their hand. (See "Archives" in the Glossary.)
- If a player controls a card that does not belong to one of the three houses in their deck, they may (if they desire) choose and activate that house during this step instead of one of the three houses in their deck.

STEP 3: PLAY, DISCARD, AND USE CARDS OF THE CHOSEN HOUSE

The active player may play or discard any number of cards of the active house from their hand and may use any number of cards of the active house that are in play under their control. Eligible cards may be played, used, or discarded in any order.

A card's house is determined by an icon in the upper-left corner. If the active house corresponds to a card's icon, that card is eligible to be played, used, or discarded.

Rules for playing, discarding, and using cards are described later.



A Brobnar Card

- **First Turn Rule**: During the first player's first turn of the game, that player may only play or discard one card from their hand.
- The active player may not play, use, or discard cards of other (non-active) houses unless specified by a card ability.

FACTIONS



STEP 4: READY CARDS

The active player readies each of their exhausted cards.

STEP 5: DRAW CARDS

The active player draws cards from the top of their deck until they have six cards in their hand. After a player completes this step, their turn ends.

- If the active player has more than six cards in hand, they do not discard down to six.
- If a player needs to draw cards (during this step or at any other time) and cannot because their deck is empty, that player shuffles their discard pile to reset their deck, and then continues to draw.
- When a player's turn ends, if that player has enough Æmber in their pool to afford a key, the player announces "Check!" so that their opponent knows the forging of a key at the start of that player's next turn is imminent.

PLAYING CARDS

The active player is permitted to play any number of cards that belong to the active house during step three of their turn.

ÆMBER BONUS

Many cards in the game have an Æmber bonus below the house icon. When a card with an Æmber bonus is played, the first thing the active player does is gain that much Æmber. Each time a player gains Æmber (for any reason), the Æmber is placed in that player's Æmber pool (on their identity card).



PLAY ABILITIES

Some cards have a bold "**Play:**" ability. Such abilities resolve after the card's Æmber bonus is collected, if it has any, and immediately after the card enters play.

CARD TYPES

There are four types of cards in the game: action cards, artifacts, creatures, and upgrades. There are different rules describing how each card type is played.

ACTION CARDS

When an action card is played, the active player resolves the card's "**Play:**" ability and, after resolving as much of the ability as possible, places the card in their discard pile.





ARTIFACTS

Artifacts enter play exhausted and are placed in a row in front of the player but behind that player's battleline, which is explained on the next page. Artifacts remain in play from turn to turn.

CREATURES

Creatures enter play exhausted and are placed in the front row of the active player's play area. This row is referred to as the battleline. Creatures remain in play from turn to turn, and they each have power and armor values that they use to resolve fights, which are described later.



Creature

Each time a creature enters play, it must be placed on a flank—at the far left or the far right of its controller's battleline. Each time a creature leaves play, shift the battleline inward to close the gap.



The Battleline



Creatures enter play on the flank of the battleline.



If a creature leaves play, the battleline is shifted inward.

UPGRADES

Upgrades enter play attached to (i.e., partially overlapped by) a creature chosen by the player who controls the upgrade. Each upgrade remains in play from turn to turn and modifies the card to which it is attached.

- If the card to which an upgrade is attached leaves play, the upgrade is discarded.
- If an upgrade cannot attach to a card in play, the upgrade cannot enter play.



The Protect the Weak upgrade is attached to the creature, Quixo the "Adventurer."

DISCARDING CARDS

The active player can discard from their hand any number of cards from the active house during step three of their turn. Cards are discarded one at a time, at any point throughout this step. This lets players remove cards that they do not want to play from their hand, freeing up space to draw more cards at the end of the turn.

USING CARDS

The active player can use any number of cards from the active house that they have in play during step three of their turn. Depending on a card's type, the active player is able to do different things when using that card.

UPGRADES

An upgrade modifies the creature it is attached to and is not used independently of that creature.

USING ARTIFACTS

There are two types of abilities that enable a player to use an artifact: "**Action:**" abilities and "**Omni:**" abilities.

- When a player uses an artifact, they exhaust the card and then resolve its abilities.
- A player can only resolve an "**Action:**" ability if it is on a card that belongs to the active house.
- A player can resolve an "**Omni:**" ability even if it is on a card that does **not** belong to the active house.
- Some artifacts require that they be sacrificed as part of the cost of using them. When an artifact is sacrificed, it is placed in its owner's discard pile. A player must still exhaust such an artifact when using it.
- Artifacts cannot be used to reap or to fight.

USING CREATURES

When a player uses a creature, that player must exhaust the creature, and the player has the option to reap, fight, or to trigger the creature's "**Action:**" ability.

REAP

Any ready creature of the active house may reap. When a creature is used to reap, its controller gains 1 Æmber for their Æmber pool. Then, all "**Reap:**" abilities the creature has, if it has any, resolve.

FIGHT

Any ready creature of the active house may fight. When a creature is used to fight, its controller chooses one eligible creature controlled by the opponent as the target of the attack. Each of the two creatures deals an amount of damage equal to its power (the value to the left of the card's title) to the other creature. All of this damage is dealt simultaneously. After the fight resolves, if the creature that is being used to fight survives, all "**Fight:**" abilities the creature has, if it has any, resolve.

A creature cannot fight if there is no enemy creature that can be chosen as the target of the attack.

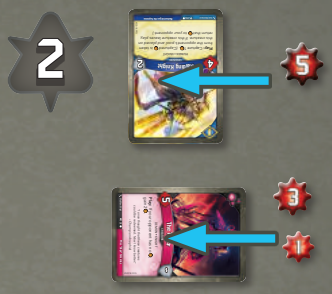
ACTION

Any ready creature of the active house may trigger its "Action:" ability, if it has one. When a creature is used to trigger its "**Action:**" ability, the creature exhausts and all "**Action:**" abilities the creature has resolve.

COMBAT EXAMPLE



Tom, who has activated House Dis this turn, exhausts the Terror to fight, and chooses to attack his opponent's Raiding Knight.



The Terror has a power of 5, and attempts to deal 5 damage to the Raiding Knight. The Raiding Knight has a power of 4, and attempts to deal 4 damage to The Terror.



Prevented damage is not placed on the creature, and is instead returned to the common supply.

The Raiding Knight has 2 armor, so 2 of the damage assigned to it is prevented. 3 damage is placed on the Raiding Knight, and 4 damage is placed on The Terror.

DAMAGE AND ARMOR

When a creature is dealt damage, place an amount of damage tokens equal to the amount of damage dealt on the creature. If a creature has as much or more damage on it as it has power, the creature is destroyed and placed on top of its owner's discard pile. If a creature has an armor value (to the right of the card's title), the armor prevents that much incoming damage each turn. (For more details, see "Armor" in the Glossary.)

- When a creature leaves play, any Æmber on that creature is gained by the opponent. (See "Capture" in the Glossary.)

CARD ABILITIES

When resolving a card ability, resolve as much of the ability as can be resolved, and ignore the rest. Unless otherwise specified by the ability, the active player makes all decisions while resolving an ability.

For details on specific terminology that can be found in card ability text, see the Glossary.

USING CARDS VIA OTHER CARD ABILITIES

If a card ability allows a player to play or use another card (or to fight or to reap with a card), the chosen card may belong to any house unless the ability specifically states otherwise.

- When using a card via a card ability, any other requirements of using the card (such as exhausting to reap, fight, or resolve its "**Action:**" ability) must be observed, or the card cannot be used.
- Players can only use cards they control, unless a card ability specifically states otherwise.

THE RULE OF SIX

Occasionally, a situation may emerge in which, through a combination of abilities, the same card may be played or used repeatedly during the same turn. A player cannot play and/or use the same card and/or other copies of that card (by title) more than **six times** during a given turn.

CONSTANT ABILITIES

If a card has an ability that does not have a boldfaced precursor, the ability is a constant ability that is active so long as the card remains in play and meets all conditions specified by the ability.

- Constant abilities on a card are active even while that card is exhausted.
- Applying the effects of a constant ability is not considered *using* a card and therefore does not cause the card to exhaust.

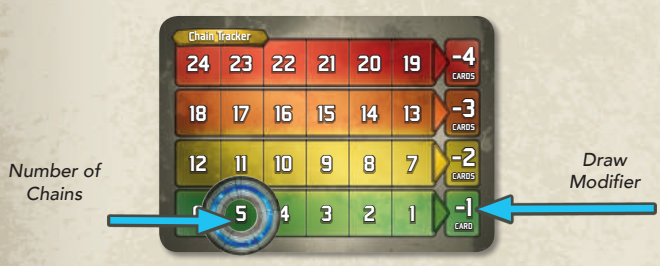


The game text on Mother is an example of a constant ability.

CHAINS

Chains represent supernatural bindings that are occasionally placed onto specific Archons by the Architects: sometimes in an effort to better challenge the Archon to grow and overcome greater adversity, and other times to penalize the Archon for breaking a rule or a piece of Crucible etiquette.

A player may gain chains through card abilities during a game. When a player gains chains, that player increases their chain tracker by the number of chains gained.



Each time (including during setup) a player with one or more chains would draw one or more cards to refill their hand, that player draws fewer cards (based on their current chain level, see below) and then sheds one chain by reducing their chain tracker by one.

The more chains a player has, the greater the card penalty becomes.

Chains 1–6: draw 1 fewer card.
Chains 7–12: draw 2 fewer cards.
Chains 13–18: draw 3 fewer cards.
Chains 19–24: draw 4 fewer cards.

***Example**: Tori has been assigned seven chains. During setup, Tori will draw two fewer cards and shed a chain. Then, the next six times Tori refills her hand, she will draw up to five cards and shed another chain. After all of her chains have been shed, Tori will draw to the standard hand size.*



CHAIN HANDICAPS (OPTIONAL)

When playing a game between a weaker deck and a stronger deck, players may use chains as a means to handicap the stronger deck. Chains are used when players want a fair game between two known decks rather than a potentially unfair competition between decks that aren't known. When playing with new decks, or competing in a tournament, players will not use this handicap.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ASSIGNING CHAINS

When the players have a sense that a particular deck is stronger than the opposing deck, start it with four chains. From then on, every time the chained deck wins three games in a row against that opposing deck, adjust the number of chains up by one, and if it loses three games in a row, adjust the number of chains down by one.

As a player plays more games with their collection, the number of chains assigned to a deck will fluctuate up and down based on the matchup and how well the deck has performed against the opposing deck.

CHAIN BIDDING

If players are reasonably familiar with two decks they can ignore the suggested number of chains, and instead bid a number of chains for the right to use a particular deck.

***Example**: Terry and Julie decide to play Mother Mahospot against Chancellor Fisher. Mother Mahospot is a deck that both players are very familiar with, feel is quite strong, and enjoy playing. Chancellor Fisher is a newer deck, that the players are not as comfortable playing. The above guidelines suggest they begin with four chains on Mother Mahospot. Julie looks at Fisher, considers a moment, and says, "I'll play Mother Mahospot at five." Terry raises to six. Julie goes to seven. Terry decides to let her play it at seven, and plays Chancellor Fisher.*

WHAT'S NEXT

You are now familiar with the basic rules of the game. The next section of this book contains a Glossary of advanced concepts that can be referenced while playing or interpreting card abilities.

An introduction to the *KeyForge* setting, with two short stories and an introduction to each of the houses in the game, can be found on page 13.

GLOSSARY

This Glossary includes a number of concepts and terms players may encounter while playing the game, in alphabetical order. Instead of reading this section from beginning to end, players are encouraged to only look up new concepts as they are encountered during play.

ABILITY, CARD ABILITY

An ability is the special game text a card contributes to the game.

Unless an ability explicitly references an out-of-play area (such as a hand, deck, archives, or discard pile), that ability can only interact with cards that are in play.

ACTION ABILITY

To use an "**Action:**" ability during their turn, the active player must exhaust the card. The ability then resolves.

ACTIVE HOUSE

The active house is the house that the active player has chosen for the current turn.

ACTIVE PLAYER

The active player is the player taking the current turn. The active player makes all necessary decisions for all card abilities or timing conflicts that need to resolve during their turn.

ÆMBER

Æmber is tracked by Æmber tokens, and is used to forge keys.



Æmber Token

See also: Capture, Keys, Reap, Steal.

ARCHIVES

A player's archives is a facedown game area in front of that player's identity card. Card abilities are the only means by which a player is permitted to add cards to their archives. During step 2 of a player's turn, after they select an active house, the active player is permitted to pick up all cards in their archives and add those cards to their hand.

Cards in a player's archives are considered out of play.

A player may look at their archives at any time. A player is not permitted to look at an opponent's archives.

If the ability instructing a player to archive a card does not specify where the card is archived from, the archived card comes from that player's hand.

ARMOR

Some creatures have an armor value to the right of the card title. Armor prevents an amount of damage equal to the armor value that the creature would take each turn. For example, if a creature has two armor and is dealt one damage, that damage is absorbed by the armor, leaving the creature with one armor for the rest of the turn. If the creature is later dealt three more damage during that turn, one damage is absorbed and the other two damage are dealt to that creature.

If a creature gains armor, the gains are additive and accumulate on top of the creature's printed armor value.

If a creature gains armor during a turn, the gained armor does not absorb damage already dealt that turn. If a creature loses armor during a turn, it is not retroactively dealt damage that was already absorbed by the armor.

If a creature has a "~" symbol in its armor field, the creature has no armor. Such creatures may gain armor through card effects.

ASSAULT (X)

When a creature with the assault (X) keyword attacks, it deals damage equal to its assault value (i.e., "X") to the creature it is fighting before the fight resolves. (The active player chooses whether this occurs before or after other "Before Fight" effects and keywords.) If this damage destroys the other creature, the rest of the fight does not occur.

If a creature with the assault (X) keyword gains another instance of the assault (X) keyword, the two X values are added together.

ATTACK, ATTACKER, ATTACKING

See "Fight" on page 10.

BATTLELINE

The battleline is the ordered line of creatures a player controls in play. See "Creatures" on page 6.

BEFORE

If the word "before" is used in an ability (for example, "**Before Reap:**" or "**Before Fight:**"), that ability resolves before resolving the game effect of the reap or fight (but after the card exhausts, if exhausting is required to use the card).

CAPTURE

Captured Æmber is taken from an opponent's Æmber pool and placed on a creature controlled by the capturing player. Players may not spend captured Æmber.

When a creature with Æmber on it leaves play, the Æmber is placed in the opponent's Æmber pool.

Unless otherwise specified, Æmber is placed on the creature that captured it.

CHAIN, CHAINS

Some card abilities cause a player to gain one or more chains. If a player gains chains, that player increases their chain tracker by the number of chains gained.

If a player has at least one chain when refilling their hand, they draw fewer cards according to the chart below. Then, they shed one chain by reducing the number on their chain tracker by one.

Chains 1-6: draw one fewer card.
Chains 7-12: draw two fewer cards.
Chains 13-18: draw three fewer cards.
Chains 19-24: draw four fewer cards.

See "Chains" on page 8.

CONTROL

A player owns the cards that begin the game in their deck. When a card enters play, it is under its owner's control.

A player can take control of an opponent's card. When this happens, that card is placed in the new controller's play area. If it is a creature, it is placed on a flank of the new controller's battleline.

If a player takes control of a card that belongs to a house not in the new controller's deck, they can make that house the active house during step 2 of their turn.

If a card that has changed control leaves play for any reason, it moves to its owner's appropriate out-of-play zone.

COST, AT CURRENT COST

The base cost to forge a key is six Æmber. This cost may be modified by card abilities. The modified cost is referred to as the current cost.

DAMAGE

Damage a creature has taken is tracked by placing damage tokens on the creature. If a creature has an amount of damage on it equal to or greater than its power, the creature is destroyed. Damage on a creature does not reduce its power.

For more details on damage and combat, see page 7.

DESTROYED

When a card is destroyed, it is placed in its owner's discard pile.

If a card has a "**Destroyed:**" ability, the effect resolves automatically when the card is destroyed, immediately before it leaves play.

DISCARD PILE

When a card is destroyed or discarded, it is placed on top of its owner's discard pile. The cards in each player's discard pile are open information, and may be referenced at any time.

The order of cards in a player's discard pile is maintained during play, unless a card ability causes this order to change.

When a player runs out of cards in their deck, they shuffle their discard pile to create a new deck.

ELUSIVE

The first time a creature with the elusive keyword is attacked each turn, it is dealt no damage and deals no damage to the attacker in the fight.

Elusive only stops damage that would be dealt by each creature's power; damage dealt by keywords or other abilities still applies.

END OF TURN

End of turn effects are resolved when a player's turn is over—after step 5, the "Draw Cards" step.

ENEMY

If a card ability refers to an "enemy" game element, it refers to an element currently controlled by the opponent.

FIGHT

When a player uses a creature to fight, the player exhausts the creature and chooses an opponent's creature. Both creatures deal an amount of damage equal to their power value to the opposing creature in the fight, and both are "fighting" for the purposes of card effects.

A creature used to fight is said to be "attacking" and can be referred to as "the attacker" during that fight.

If the attacker is not destroyed, all "**Fight:**" abilities on the attacking creature then resolve. If *either* creature in a fight has a constant ability referencing the end of the fight (*example: "after an enemy creature is destroyed fighting this creature…"*), the creature must survive the fight to resolve the ability. Only the attacker can trigger "**Fight**:" abilities.

"FIGHT WITH"

If an ability instructs a player to "fight with" or "ready and fight with" a creature, the ability is granting the player permission to use the designated creature to fight. The fight is resolved following the standard rules for fighting, against a creature controlled by the opponent.

FLANK

The creatures on the far right and far left of a player's battleline are on the flanks of the line. A creature in this position is referred to as a *flank creature*. Any time a creature enters play or changes control, the active player chooses which flank of its controller's battleine it is placed on.

FORGE

For details on forging keys, see page 4.

FRIENDLY

If a card ability refers to a "friendly" game element, it refers to an element currently under the control of the same player.

HAZARDOUS (X)

When a creature with the hazardous X keyword is attacked, it deals X damage to the attacking creature before the fight resolves. (The active player chooses whether this occurs before or after other "Before Fight" effects and keywords.) If this damage destroys the other creature, the rest of the fight does not occur.

If a creature with the hazardous (X) keyword gains another instance of the hazardous (X) keyword, the two X values are added together.

HEAL

If an ability "heals" a creature, remove the specified amount of damage from the creature.

If an ability "fully heals" a creature, remove all damage from the creature.

HOUSE CHOICE

Each turn, a player must choose one of the three houses indicated by their identity card, if able. Some card abilities may restrict a player's house choice.

If a player has gained control of a card that does not belong to one of their three houses, that card's house becomes an eligible choice for that player while the player retains control of the card.

If there is no legal choice of house, the player plays the turn with no active house.

If a player is faced with two (or more) "must choose" mandates, the player may choose either of those options.

"IF YOU DO" AND "IN ORDER TO"

If an ability includes the phrase "if you do" or "in order to," the player referenced by the ability must successfully and completely resolve the text that precedes that phrase before they can resolve or perform the text that follows that phrase. In other words, if the first part of the ability is not successfully and completely resolved, that which follows the phrase does not resolve or cannot be performed.

KEYS

The first player to forge all three of their keys immediately wins the game.

The color of a key has no impact on the game. Future card abilities may reference keys of a specific color.

For details on forging keys, see page 4.

LEAST POWERFUL

A reference to the "least powerful" creature refers to the creature in play with the lowest power. If there are multiple creatures that qualify, each is considered "least powerful."

If an ability requires the selection of a single least powerful creature, and multiple creatures are tied, the active player chooses one.

LEAVES PLAY

If a card that is in play leaves play (is returned to hand or deck, destroyed, discarded, archived, or purged), all non-Æmber tokens and status cards on the card are removed, all upgrades on the card are discarded, and all lasting effects applied to the card expire.

If a creature with Æmber on it leaves play, the Æmber is returned to the opponent's Æmber pool. If a non-creature card with Æmber on it leaves play, the Æmber is returned to the general token pool.

If a card has a "**Leaves Play:**" ability, the effect happens automatically immediately before the card leaves play.

MAVERICK



This symbol indicates that a card is a maverick. A maverick is an extremely rare instance of a card that has left its standard house and is now a part of a new house. For all game purposes, treat a maverick as belonging to the house printed on its graphic template.

MAY

If an ability includes the word "may," the text that follows "may" is optional. If a player chooses to resolve a "may" ability, the player must resolve as much of the ability as they are able.

MOST POWERFUL

A reference to the "most powerful" creature refers to the creature in play with the highest power. If there are multiple creatures that qualify, each is considered "most powerful."

If an ability requires the selection of a single most powerful creature, and multiple creatures are tied, the active player chooses among the tied creatures.

MULLIGAN

During setup, each player, starting with the first player, has one opportunity to mulligan their starting hand. This is done by shuffling the starting hand back into the deck and drawing a new starting hand with one fewer card in it.

After a player chooses to mulligan, that player must keep the new starting hand.

NEIGHBOR

The creatures to the immediate left and right of a creature in a player's battleline are its neighbors.

OMNI

The active player may trigger any "**Omni:**" abilities under their control during any of their turns, even if the card with the "**Omni:**" ability does not belong to the active house.

OFF HOUSE

An off house card is any card that belongs to a house that is not the active house.

OPPOSING

When a creature is involved in a fight (either because it was used to fight, or because it was attacked by another creature), the other creature in the fight is the opposing creature.

PAY

If a player must pay Æmber to an opponent, the Æmber is removed from the paying player's pool and added to the opponent's pool.

PLAY

When a card has a "**Play:**" ability, the effect occurs any time the card is played. For creatures, artifacts, and upgrades, the ability resolves immediately after the card enters play. For action cards, the ability resolves, and then the card is placed in its owner's discard pile.

If an ability "plays" a card from a source other than hand, "**Play:**" abilities on the card resolve. If an ability "puts" a card "into play," "**Play:**" abilities on the card do not resolve.

POISON

Any damage dealt via the power of a creature with the poison keyword during a fight destroys the damaged creature. This occurs when the damage is successfully applied to the opposing creature.

Poison has no effect if all of the damage is absorbed by armor or prevented by another ability—poison only resolves when one or more damage is successfully dealt.

Poison refers only to damage that would be dealt by the creature's power, not by damage that is dealt by keywords or other card abilities.

POWER COUNTER +1, POWER STATUS CARD

When a creature is given a "+1 power counter," one such status card is placed on the creature. For each of these cards that is on a creature, that creature's power is increased by one.

PRECEEDING, REPEAT THE PRECEEDING

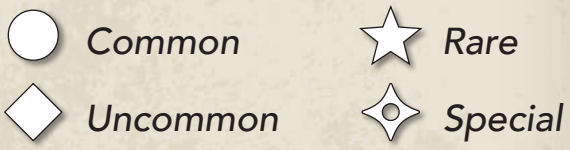
If card text instructs players to repeat a preceeding effect, the entirety of the effect before the text providing the instruction to repeat resolves again.

PURGE

When a card is purged, it is removed from the game and placed facedown beneath its owner's identity card. Purged cards no longer interact with the game state in any manner.

RARITY

A card's rarity symbol can be found at the bottom of the card, near the collector number. A card's rarity (common, uncommon, rare, or special) is used by the deck-generation algorithm to determine how frequently it will appear in decks. Special cards have a different type of distribution and do not obey the game's standard rarity rules.



REAP

When a player uses a creature to reap, the player exhausts the creature, gains 1 Æmber for their Æmber pool, and then all "**Reap:**" abilities on the creature resolve.

RETURN

When captured Æmber is returned, it is placed in the opponent's Æmber pool.

SACRIFICE

When a player is instructed to sacrifice a card, that player must discard that card from play.

When a card is sacrificed, that card is considered to have been destroyed, and any "**Destroyed:**" abilities the card has resolve.

SEARCH

When a player searches a game area (such as a deck), that player looks at all the cards in the specified area without showing those cards to the opponent. A player may choose to fail to find the object of a search.

If an entire deck is searched, the deck must be adequately shuffled upon completion of the search.

If a discard pile is searched, the cards are kept in the same order.

SELF-REFERENTIAL TEXT

If a card's ability refers to its own title, that reference is only to itself and not to other copies of the card.

SKIRMISH

When a creature with the skirmish keyword is used to fight, it takes no damage from the opposing creature when the damage from the fight is dealt.

This applies only to damage that would be dealt by the opposing creature's power, not by damage that is dealt by keywords or other card abilities.

SPLASH

When an ability deals damage to a creature "with splash damage," the splash damage is dealt to each of the target creature's neighbors.

STEAL

When an ability steals Æmber, the stolen Æmber is removed from the opponent's Æmber pool and added to the Æmber pool of the player resolving the steal ability.

If an ability steals more Æmber than a player has remaining in their pool, the ability steals only the amount remaining in the pool.

STUN, STUN STATUS CARD

When a creature becomes stunned, place a stun status card on it. The next time the creature is used, the only thing that happens is the creature exhausts and the stun card is removed. It does not reap or fight, and any "**Reap:**," "**Fight:**," or "**Action:**" abilities on the creature do not resolve.

Constant abilities and abilities that do not require the creature to reap, fight, or be used are still active.

If a stunned creature is attacked, it still deals damage to the attacking creature during the fight.

While a creature is stunned, it cannot become stunned again.

SWAP

If two game elements are swapped, they exchange places with one another.

When two creatures are swapped, they exchange positions. This means that each takes the position in the battleline of the other. The two creatures swapped must always be controlled by the same player.

If cards from two distinct game areas are swapped (such as a card in play and a card in hand), the cards switch game areas.

TAUNT

If a creature has the taunt keyword, any of its neighbors that do not have the taunt keyword cannot be attacked by an enemy creature that is being used to fight.

In the battleline, taunt creatures are slid slightly forward to indicate their presence to the opponent.



Champion Anaphiel (center) has the taunt keyword, and is pushed slightly forward in the battleline.



"THIS WAY"

If an ability refers to an effect that occurred "this way," it is referring to an effect that was produced by the same resolution of that same ability.

TURN

A turn consists of one player performing the five steps detailed in the game's turn sequence, which are:

1. Forge a key.
2. Choose a house.
3. Play, discard, and use cards of the chosen house.
4. Ready cards.
5. Draw cards.

TRAITS

Traits are descriptive attributes (such as "Knight" or "Specter") that may be referenced by other cards. Traits are listed at the top center of a card's text box.

Traits have no inherent game effect, but may be referenced by card abilities.

UNFORGE

If a previously forged key is "unforged," flip the key token to its unforged side. The key no longer counts toward its controller's victory condition and must be forged again to win the game.

USE

See "Using Cards" on page 6.

THE ORIGIN OF KEYFORGE

In the early days of trading card games, they were played in many ways – and some of my favorite ways disappeared over time. Among those were sealed deck and league play. Both were awkward to manage because cards had a tendency to get lost in one's collection. Also, players could only play with trusted friends because it was easy to cheat by improving one's deck surreptitiously.

I have often wondered if I could get back some of that really exciting play, which was characterized by tools that weren't universal. Each player had treasures no other player had, but also had less powerful cards that needed to be used in clever ways to get the most value. One's sealed or league deck was never ideal – but it was unique, and there was a great deal of skill in getting the most out of it.

While I enjoy constructing or drafting decks, I am often longing to play cards that are not powerful enough to compete within these formats. When playing with sealed or limited decks, these cards often become viable, since you can't just replace them with top tier cards. I find special pleasure in winning a game using cards that many people ignored or overlooked.

I have always been attached to good procedurally generated content. Game worlds generated in this way really feel as if they belong to me, the player – I am discovering them as I play; the designer didn't even know they existed. Often games without such content are extremely managed experiences; everyone goes through the same story lines and can experience the same gameplay by making the same decisions. Everything they experience feels planned. The contrast feels to me like the difference between exploring a jungle and walking in an amusement park. When trading card games first came out the feeling was like exploring a jungle – and as the cards became more like commodities, it became more and more like an amusement park.

In the amusement park there are experts telling you how to play the game, the safest strategies, what net decks to use. In the jungle you have the tools you have. There is every chance that you are going to be the best in the world at playing your decks – you can't just look up what the synergies are or the weaknesses; you will only find out by playing.

Welcome to the jungle!

Richard Garfield
April 2018



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