

# **ethea**

The Rulebook

# The Charter

Every deck is designed under a charter. The charter sets the cards, the exact number of cards the deck must contain, and the complexity, the deck's total complexity that the summed complexity of its cards must fit within. A deck satisfies its charter only when both limits hold. A charter may also hold the manifest grant, an optional privilege stating a per-turn budget and the complexity one use of it accounts for.

## Resources

A resource is the standard currency of play, kept in a running pool that clears at the end of each player's turn. Every deck realizes its own resource identities. A card's resource price states named requirements, matched only by the named identity, and additional requirements, filled by a resource of any identity. One resource pays exactly one requirement, whatever its tier.

## Resource tiers

A tier is a property of a resource's design, chosen when the player creates the resource. A tier's weight doubles per step: tier 1 weighs 1, tier 2 weighs 2, tier 3 weighs 4, and so on. The combined weight of a card's named requirements is its resource value. Weight never converts in play; it measures balancing and restriction only.

## Commitment

Committing a card spends its readiness on a task — an attack, an ability price, or production — until it is released. A committed card cannot be committed again. A card arrives on the board released and may be committed once its placement resolves. Committed cards release automatically during their owner's release phase at the start of the owner's turn, restoring their readiness, unless an ability on the card withholds its release.

## Anchoring

Every card on the board is free or anchored to a host card. A card enters the anchored state only through the affix ability, which anchors it once as it resolves, or the attach ability, whose owner pays to anchor it or to move it to a new host. Ending an anchoring is the Free ability's alone. An anchored card moves with its host while both remain permanents. When the host leaves the board, or the anchoring otherwise ends, the card is immediately evaluated as free with whatever its type rule then does.

## Construction

Construction is the bond between a structure and the location it stands on, native to the structure type and distinct from anchoring. A structure is played constructed on one of its owner's locations and survives only while supported: constructed on a location whose extent carries its size. A location supports structures whose total size is within its extent; whenever the total exceeds the extent, the location's controller chooses which structures remain supported, and the rest are destroyed as unsupported.

## Locations

A location is placed freely and stands as its player's territory, and every location is a zone of its own, holding its structures and everything anchored within. Locations carry strength, resilience, and integrity — accumulating damage and striking back at unblocked attackers, though locations cannot attack — plus extent, which bounds how much construction the location supports. While a player controls at least one location, attacks against that player must be directed at their locations.

# Structures

A structure stands constructed on a location and is destroyed while not supported — constructed on a location whose extent carries its size. No ability rescues a structure from that rule. A structure carries strength, resilience, and integrity, accumulating damage exactly as entities and locations do, plus size, how much of a location's extent it occupies. A structure may block attackers attacking the location it is constructed on — and only those — and structures cannot attack.

# Objects

An object is placed freely and stands on its own: the game's small, portable things. Objects carry no attributes and do not accumulate damage; they are removed only by effects and their own type rules. An object has no native anchoring — it anchors only through an attach or affix ability its design carries — and when its host leaves the board it is evaluated as free and stands on its own again.

# Entities

An entity is placed freely and is the only card type with the native ability to participate in combat. Every entity carries three attributes: strength, the damage it deals in combat; resilience, the amount by which damage dealt to it is reduced; and integrity, the damage it withstands — damage counters beyond its integrity destroy it. An uncommitted entity may be committed to an attack during its owner's combat phase, and any entity may block without committing.

# Edicts

An edict performs its ability as it resolves and is destroyed while unanchored, so an edict that resolves and stands on no host goes straight to its owner's discard pile — one-time use by default. An edict with an affix ability anchors to a host chosen when it is played and persists there; when the host leaves the board the edict is evaluated as free, and the type rule destroys it.

# Combat

Combat proceeds in three atomic actions: attackers are declared, blockers are declared, and all combat damage resolves simultaneously. Players may respond between atomic actions, never inside one. Each card deals damage equal to its strength, reduced by the receiver's resilience; damage accumulates as damage counters, and a card whose damage counters exceed its integrity is destroyed. Strength is a pool, never a multiplier: a card deals its strength once per combat, divided among the cards it faces, and a blocked attacker's damage goes only to its blockers.

# Defense and defeat

While a player controls at least one location, every attack against that player is directed at one of their locations. Entities may block wherever the attack is aimed; a structure may block only attackers attacking the location it is constructed on. An unblocked attacker strikes the location, and a struck location with strength strikes back once per combat, divided among the unblocked attackers by the defending player. A player who controls no locations is exposed: attacks are directed at the player directly, and the moment any damage is dealt to an exposed player, that player is defeated.

# Turn structure

A turn runs six phases in order: release, draw, maintenance, action, combat, and end. The player whose turn it is acts in each phase; other players may act only through interrupt-speed cards and abilities. Committed cards release, the turn player draws one card, maintenance obligations are paid, cards are played freely during the action phase, and attacks are declared and resolve in combat. When the end

phase closes, every player's resource pool clears and the turn passes to the next player.

## Game setup

Each player shuffles their deck and draws a starting hand of seven cards. Before the game begins, a player may take as many mulligans as they wish: each mulligan returns the hand to the deck, reshuffles, and redraws with one fewer card, to a minimum hand of three. No player may attack during their own first turn of the game.

## Maintenance

Maintenance is a recurring cost: an obligation a card's player must pay during each of their maintenance phases for as long as the card remains on the board. An obligation states its price in any shape a cost can take, and the turn player pays each of their cards' obligations in an order of their choosing. An unpaid obligation triggers the card's stated consequence — destruction, unless the card states a different one.

## Resolution

A played card does not take effect at once: it goes onto the stack, where cards and abilities legal at the time may be added on top in response. The opportunity to respond begins with the player to the left of whoever played the card and passes clockwise; each new addition reopens the round, and the stack begins resolving only once every player has passed in succession. The stack resolves top to bottom, the last addition first, and a card that resolves successfully and remains on the board becomes a permanent.

## Zones

The board is divided into zones: each player has a free zone, where their free cards stand, and every location is a zone of its own, holding its structures and every card anchored within. A card's zone follows its bonds — a free card stands in its controller's free zone, a constructed structure in its location's zone, and an anchored card in its host's zone, wherever the host stands. A zone belongs to a player, and control of a card follows the zone it stands in, so a zone changing hands carries its contents with it.

## Control and ownership

The owner of a card is the player whose deck it originated from, and ownership never changes during a game: a card that leaves play goes to its owner's pile. The controller of a card is positional — the player who controls the zone it stands in as a permanent — so control flows downward along the board's bonds, and the board changes allegiance in whole pieces. An effect that instead takes control of an anchored card itself breaks the bond: the taken card is evaluated as free and stands in its new controller's free zone, with its type rule applying as ever.

## Triggered abilities

A triggered ability fires when its stated trigger happens: the player controls the card, not the moment — the trigger decides when. When its trigger happens, a triggered ability goes onto the stack and may be responded to like anything else. If several abilities trigger from the same event, their owners add them to the stack in turn order, beginning with the turn player.

## Activated abilities

An activated ability fires when its owner chooses to use it; its text states its price and its effect. Every activated ability has one of three speeds: standard, usable only during its owner's action phase while the stack is empty; interrupt, usable at any time, including in response to another card or ability on the stack; and reserve, the slow speed, paid up front but with its effect deferred until the card next releases. Used

abilities go onto the stack and resolve like anything else.

## Transactional abilities

A transactional ability performs its effect when the card it belongs to resolves — the effect is part of the card arriving, not something used afterward. A transactional ability does not enter the stack separately: it is part of its card's resolution, and answering it means answering the card, while the card is still on the stack.

## Static abilities

A static ability is always in force. It does not fire, is not used, and never enters the stack — it changes the nature of the card itself, and through it whatever the card touches: a standing fact about the card rather than an event. Because it is always in force there is no moment at which its controller chooses, so a term of a static ability that is not the card it is printed on names all the cards that match it and prints in the plural. Static is the only kind that cannot choose.

## Ability keywords

An ability keyword is the canonical name the rulebook gives a recurring ability: the card states the keyword, and the rulebook defines the behavior. The rulebook reserves a set of ability keywords, open to grow as canon defines more. An ability keyword may be of any kind and carries the complexity its behavior implies. Interrupt is static: the target card may be played at interrupt speed, the target defaulting to the card the ability is printed on and naming all the cards it matches where it does not. Affix is transactional: as the card resolves, it anchors to a host of the stated class, chosen when the card is played. Attach is activated: pay to anchor the card to a host of the stated class, or to move it to a new host; it never unanchors. Grant is static: while the card is anchored, its host has the stated ability. Free is activated: pay to evaluate a target anchored card as free, which is the only keyword that ends an anchoring.

## Ability traits

An ability's trait is a single mark shown in its icon gutter that signals a distinguishing characteristic. A transactional ability carries the transactional trait, a fixed mark setting it apart from the static, triggered, and activated kinds and sparing the card's text. An activated ability carries a speed trait when its speed departs from standard — interrupt or reserve. Every other ability — static, triggered, or standard-speed activated — carries no trait and shows an empty gutter. An ability carries at most one trait.

## Consume

To consume a card is to remove one of your own cards from the board and place it in your discard pile as a payment: the consumed card is spent the way a resource is spent, as part of paying for something else. A consume price qualifies what must be consumed, most commonly by a minimum resource value, and may qualify by card type or other stated criteria; the paying player chooses which qualifying card to consume.

## Manifest

Manifest is the first privilege: the right to place a card by right, a limited number of times per turn, each use accounting for the complexity the charter's grant states. A charter states its manifest grant in its format line. Using a manifest is playing the card — it enters the stack and resolves normally, and spending the manifest is part of the card's price; a manifest requirement and a resource price may be charged together, each accounting for part of the card's complexity.

# Privileges

A privilege is an inherent ability granted to every player by the charter. Every privilege defines its effect, what it lets its player do; its eligibility, what it may act on; and its allowance, how often it may be used. A privilege that plays cards is also a shape of cost: spending a use of it is part of the card's price, most often in place of a resource price, though a design may charge both together.