

# Introduction

We welcome the greatest Arcane Conjurers to The Arena! Here you will summon Gladiators to do battle, and cast spells to aid your teammate or thwart your opponents. After each round of battle, a winner will be declared, and the team that wins the most rounds will win the day.

## Setup

Required: 2 or 4 players, an Arcane Gladiator deck, and enough table space for 4 cards.

Suggested: An 8-sided die to keep track of Qualifying Level, and some means to keep track of how many rounds each team has won. Card racks may also be helpful, especially if you only have two players.

## Overview

At its heart, Arcane Gladiator is a trick-taking game, like Bridge or Hearts: Four cards enter the Arena in each round, a result is determined, and then the Arena is cleared

for the next round. Determining the result of a round in the Arena is a bit more interesting than those familiar games, but it's still often true that deciding what card to play when is the most important element of strategy.

Inside the Arena, there are 4 summoning Stations, each represented by a hand of cards. In each round, each Station selects a card, and then these cards do battle. A Station is always free to Select any card, but only cards that qualify for the round will participate. The Qualifying Level is similar to a weight class in a combat sport: only those at or below the level may participate. The Qualifying Level increases in each round, so the "heavyweights" will get their chance.

A game begins by shuffling the deck and dealing 11 cards to each of the 4 Stations. If playing with 2 players, each player controls two neighboring Stations and thus *two* hands. If you want, you can deal out 4

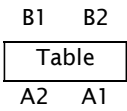
hands right away, and look over the cards while reading the rest of this introduction.

A game consists of 8 Rounds in the Arena. The Qualifying Level begins at 1, and increases in each round, finally reaching 8 in the final round. A full match consists of totaling the points scored in two games.

## An Example Round

As a motivating example, we jump right into a Round. Don't worry about understanding all the details yet - this is just to get a feel for what sorts of things happen in the Arena.

In this example, we have two players: A and B. (Creative, right?) Each player controls two Stations, so we'll name the Stations A1, A2, B1, B2, and they are on opposite side of the table as follows:



In this particular round, the Qualifying Level is 5. A2 is going first and plays Wyvern:



Next, we proceed clockwise to B1, who plays Force Mage, presumably with the intent to eventually shoot down the Wyvern. Then B2 plays Stone Mammoth. Finally, A1 plays Stoneskin. Thus, the Arena now looks like:

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Next, we enter the Spell Phase, and player A chooses to Stoneskin the Wyvern, altering it to 4/15.

In the Engagement phase, player A chooses for the (Flying) Wyvern to also Engage with those on the ground.

In the Target Phase, player B chooses the Force Mage to deal 6 damage to the Wyvern, but thanks to the Stoneskin, the Wyvern is still alive.

In the Battle Phase, all of the Gladiators deal their damage to all others. This kills the Force Mage, but both the Wyvern and the Stone Mammoth survive to the end of the Round.

By virtue of having the better Damage Rating (4 vs. 2), the Wyvern is declared the winner of the Round, and player A receives a point.

**Card Layout and Terminology**  
Gladiators do the fighting. **Spells** and **Instants** can do just about anything (but the base game contains no Instants). Only



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Gladiators can be declared the winner of a round - the purpose of other types of cards is to influence which Gladiator that is.

Every card has a name at the top and art in the middle. These help the game components to make thematic sense, but do not directly impact game play.

Every card has a Level, in the top left corner. Higher level cards are generally more powerful, but lower level cards can participate in more Rounds.

A **Gladiator** card has several attributes, in addition to its Level. Every Gladiator has a Damage Rating and a Defense Rating. These are in the top right corner in the format Damage/Defense. Gladiators survive the round if the Damage they take is less than their Defense Rating. Many Gladiators have only these three attributes: Level, Damage, and Defense. For example:



Some Gladiators have additional attributes. When present, these will be shown in the bottom center of the art. The exact rules of each attribute are described more precisely in the formal rules, but here we list them and offer an informal description.

**Flying.** This Gladiator can ... you guessed it ... fly. It will have the choice of whether to stay above the fray and only Engage with other fliers, or to Engage with everyone. Engagement is symmetric: if a flier Engages with the ground Gladiators, each of those is

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also considered Engaged with it (and can, for example, Target Strike the flier). Flying is also indicated by a blue sky border pattern.

**Range.** This Gladiator can damage other Gladiators that aren't Engaged with it. Thematically, this might be a bow, a spell, fire breath, a long tongue, a web-shooter, or other options. In game terms, all of these are called Range, which is indicated by a red molten border pattern.

**Target Strike.** This Gladiator can damage another Gladiator before the main battle has even begun. Thematically, this might be because of speed, stealth, or a weapon that can be used without moving. In game terms, all of these are called Target Strike, which is indicated by a dark smoke border pattern.

**Target Strike Only.** By default, all Gladiators deal damage during the final Battle Phase. But some Gladiators can *only* do a targeted strike. These are marked with "Only" after "Target Strike" to indicate they do not deal

damage during the Battle Phase. This is also shown by a white parchment border pattern.

The Fairy Assassin happens to have all of these attributes and displays four border patterns.



A **Spell** card has text at the bottom of the art that tells exactly what it does. It may directly damage or alter a Gladiator or Gladiators. It may even alter the rules for the round. A fairly straight-forward example is Hurricane, which removes all Gladiators

that have the Flying attribute from the Arena.



**Border Colors**

The colors on a card do not directly affect game play, but serve as a visual reminder of the attributes.

All Spell cards have a marble-to-smoke fade, and a rune stone in the top right corner. The runes are decorative and have no game impact.

For Gladiator cards, the border patterns match the attributes. Gladiators with no attributes have a wood pattern frame. Gladiators with one attribute have a border pattern representing that ability, such as seen previously on Wyvern. Gladiators with two or more attributes include the border patterns for all of their attributes.

Thus, an experienced player could see just the top line of Elder Fire Dragon, and immediately know it has Flying (blue sky), Range (molten red), and Target Strike (dark smoke):



**Basic Game Play**

In each Round, in turn order, each Station **Selects** exactly one card and places it face-up in the Arena (represented by the table).

In each Round, there is a Qualifying Level, which is a number between 1 and 8. In

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most cases, only cards whose Level is at or below the Qualifying Level will participate in the round, *but a player is always allowed to Select a card of any Level.* In some cases, something may happen during the round that allows a higher-level card to become Qualified! Or a player may realize the other team is certain to win this round, and choose to Select a higher level card with no intention of it participating.

Once the four cards have been selected, it's time to battle it out in the Arena. Firstly, **Spells** are resolved. Then Flying Gladiators have the choice either to remain in the air and only **Engage** with other Fliers, or to Engage with everyone. Gladiators with the **Target Strike** ability then have the *option* to attack a single target. And finally, any remaining Gladiators **Battle** it out, with each Gladiator dealing damage to all others that it can, *including those played by the same player or team.* (It's chaos in the Arena!)

Damage is cumulative throughout the Round, and any time the total damage dealt to a Gladiator matches or exceeds its Defense Rating, it is removed from the Arena.

After the Round ends, remove all cards from the Arena in preparation for the next Round.

**Select, Spell, Engage, Target, and Battle** are the fundamental phases of a round, and are defined more precisely in the formal rules.

Round 1 could look like this:



There are no Spells in the Arena, so nothing happens in the Spell phase. The Armored Greathawk is Level 2, so is not Qualified for a round with a Qualifying Level of 1. In the Engagement Phase, the Giant Butterfly chooses to remain in the air and not Engage with the Orc Barbarian and Goblin Warrior. No Gladiators have Target Strike, so nothing happens in the Target phase. In the Battle phase, the Orc deals 3 damage to the Goblin and the Goblin deals 1 damage to the Orc. This causes both to die. The Giant Butterfly isn't Engaged with anyone, and so takes no damage. As the only Qualified Gladiator to make it to the end, the Giant Butterfly wins the round!

**More Complicated Game Play**

Next, we consider an example that is still relatively simple, but that involves a Spell.

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During the Spell Phase, the Force Shield takes effect, so we buff the Orc Barbarian up to a 3/3. We have no Engagement or Target decisions, so we move on to the Battle Phase. The Firemage deals 2 to the Barbarian and the Snail, and the Orc deals 3 to the Bear and Firemage. This is enough to kill the Firemage (3 damage taken vs. 2 defense), but the Barbarian survives (2 damage taken vs. 3 buffed defense), and so does the Snail (5 damage taken vs. 9 defense). Because the Orc Barbarian has a higher Damage Rating, it wins the round.



Finally, we consider a more complex scenario, where some of the other attributes come into play. The Qualifying Level is also 1 in this scenario. The Elven Firemage is played first and then clockwise from there.



There are no Spells, so nothing happens in that phase. There are no Fliers, so no Engagement decisions. So we move to the Target Phase, and the first Target Strike Gladiator in the turn order is the Elf Rogue. Two options are worth considering:

1) Target the Goblin Warrior. But then the Elven Archer can shoot the Firemage, and then in the Battle Phase the Goblin Warrior will kill the Elf Rogue, leaving one entire team standing: The Warrior and Archer.

2) Target the Elven Archer. Since that kills the Archer, it never gets to do its Target Strike. Then we move on to the Battle Phase. The Elf Rogue says "Target Strike Only," so it doesn't deal any damage in this phase. But the Goblin deals 1 damage to the remaining elves and the Firemage deals 2 damage to the Goblin and the Rogue. In the end, everyone has been killed except the Goblin Warrior.

So the side with the Goblin is the winner in both cases, and what that really means is



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that when the Goblin Warrior was Selected as the 4<sup>th</sup> card, that was a winning play. With a bit of practice, the combat decisions are often somewhat straight-forward, and Rounds are often (effectively) won during Selection.

### Standard Format

Much of this has already been introduced, but here are all of the elements of the standard format:

Shuffle the deck and then deal 11 cards face down to each of 4 Stations. Two neighboring Stations, usually on the same side of a table, are a team, and the other two Stations are also a team. For a 1-on-1 game, each player controls two Stations and may look at either of those hands at any time. In a 2-on-2 game, each player controls a single Station and the players on the same team may communicate to any extent they wish.

The winner of a coin toss chooses two Stations, and then the other team chooses

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one of those Stations to act first in the first round. (Don't worry about this when learning; just pick any Station to act first in Round 1.) The turn order proceeds clockwise.

Players may then look at their hands. Before the first round begins, each teamed pair of Stations may exchange up to two pairs of cards between Stations. (Skip this when first learning the game.) This is the *only* time that cards can be moved from one Station to another.

In each Round, the Qualifying Level is simply equal to the round number – i.e., it begins at 1, then increases after each round to reach 8 for the 8<sup>th</sup> and final round of a game. One way to represent this is with an 8-sided die.

In each round, which player acts first moves clockwise. For example, if the first Station in Round 1 was a team's right Station, then in Round 2 that team's left Station will act 1<sup>st</sup> and the right Station on that team will act 4<sup>th</sup>. One way to represent this is to move the

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Qualifying-Level-tracking die to the Station that is going first in each round.

Since there are 8 rounds, each Station will act first twice over the course of a game.

Strategy Tip #1: There are advantages to acting early in a round, because your effects will resolve first. But there are also advantages to acting late in a round, because you can react to the cards that have been Selected ahead of you. Try to maximize each of these advantages.

Strategy Tip #2: Consider position carefully when choosing what cards to exchange before the first Round. One subtle consideration is that in Rounds that a Station will be acting 4<sup>th</sup>, it's great to have a few options at that level to be able to pick the one that wins the Round.

### Advanced Game Formats

**Single Hand, Large.** This variant is for a 1-on-1 game. Each player has a single hand, and chooses a card for each of their Stations

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from that hand. In this variant, each player begins with 17 cards. The turn sequence is still tied to Stations, however, so in some rounds a player acts consecutively, but in other rounds a player acts first and last.

**Single Hand, Small.** For this variant, split the deck into Level 1-4 cards and Level 5-8 cards (the Ancient Fire Dragon has to sit this one out). Each player starts with 11 cards from the low-level deck, and the Qualifying Level goes from 1 to 4 over four rounds. Then each player starts with 11 cards from the high-level deck, and the Qualifying Level goes from 5 to 8 over four rounds. (For an even faster game, just do one of these sets of four rounds.)

**Opposite Partner.** This variant is a 2-on-2 game, but played in the style of Bridge, where teammates sit opposite from each other and are not allowed to communicate during Selection, nor reveal anything about the contents of their hands at any time. They may still communicate about the

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current Round during the other Phases. Before Round 1, partners exchange *exactly* two cards.

**Free-for-all.** Four players each control a Station, but there are no teams. The individual player who accumulates the most points wins. This mode is as much political as it is strategic, and the cards aren't balanced for this mode. But it can still be fun, especially if a Game Master (see below) constructs a deck specifically for Free-for-all.

**Different Qualifying Level Methods.** Two obvious variants are to start at 8 and work backwards to 1, or to roll an 8-sided die for each round to determine the Qualifying Level. As noted above, you can also select a subset of cards and just play a range of level for e.g. 4 rounds. It's also possible to do four rounds with levels 1/3/5/7 or 2/4/6/8 for a faster game.

**Game Master Custom Deck.** If you have multiple Arcane Gladiator decks, a "Game Master" may choose to make a custom deck.

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This deck is shuffled, and all players receive hands from this deck. It is recommended that this deck have a similar size to the standard deck (63 cards). Also, a Game Master may choose a combination of a deck and a Qualifying Level method that makes sense with the distribution of levels in that deck.

**Competitive Custom Deck.** If you have multiple Arcane Gladiator decks, each player or team could design their own deck. Each deck is shuffled, but then Stations receive their hands from their own deck. Be sure to keep them separate during play, so cards end up back in their own deck after the game!

For this variant, a deck must contain at least 32 cards and there can be no duplicates (by name).

**Per-Station Custom Deck.** We actually do not recommend a dedicated deck for each Station, as this can end up with each Station playing a very narrow role and the game

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decisions being less interesting. But try it and see if you agree!

## Glossary of game terms

Game terms are capitalized to emphasize their special meaning vs. the words that must be used to describe any custom characteristics of a cards. This section is just for reference and does not replace or supersede the Formal Rules.

**Arena.** Where cards are played for each Round, usually represented by a table.

**Battle (Phase).** The fifth and final Phase, in which Gladiators simultaneously deal damage to all other Gladiators with which they are engaged, including those played by the same team.

**Damage.** Points that are assigned to Gladiators during the Target and Battle Phases, indicated how much damage taken from other Gladiators and Spells. Damage accumulates during all Phases of the Round, and a Gladiator is immediately removed from the Arena if it has accumulated

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Damage equal to or exceeding its Defense Rating.

**Damage Rating.** How much Damage the Gladiator can deal, indicated by the first number in the upper right corner.

**Defense Rating.** How much Damage it takes to remove the Gladiator from the Arena, indicated by the second number in the upper right corner.

**Engagement (Phase).** The third Phase, in which Gladiators with Flying choose, in turn order, whether to engage only with other Fliers or with all Gladiators.

**Engaged (state).** A Gladiator is automatically Engaged with all Gladiators that match its Flying or non-Flying status. In addition, each Gladiator with Flying may choose to Engage with those without. Engagement is symmetric: when a flier chooses to engage with non-fliers, each of the non-fliers is also engaged with it. A Gladiator is *not* considered Engaged with itself.

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**Gladiator.** A type of card that fights it out in the Arena.

**Instant.** A type of card whose effect resolves immediately when Selected, but cannot be declared the winner of a Round. (The base deck does not include this type.)

**Level.** A characteristic of each card indicated in the top left corner.

**Qualifying Level.** By default, cards with a Level at or below the Qualifying Level participate in a round.

**Range.** A Gladiator attribute that causes the Gladiator to ignore Engagement when dealing damage, during both the Target and Battle Phases.

**Round.** One cycle through all of the Phases: Select, Spell, Engage, Target, Battle.

**Selection (Phase).** The first phase, in which each Station places a card into the Arena, face-up.

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**Spell.** A type of card whose effect resolves during the Spell Phase, but cannot be declared the winner of a Round.

**Spell Phase.** The second phase, in which each Spell is resolved in turn order.

**Station.** One of the four locations where cards are played in the Arena.

**Target (Phase).** The fourth Phase, in which Gladiators that have Target Strike may choose to deal their Damage to a single target, in turn order.

**Target Strike.** A Gladiator attribute that allows that Gladiator to deal damage to a chosen target during the Target Phase.

**Target Strike Only.** A Gladiator attribute that grants Target Strike but also indicates that the Gladiator does *not* deal damage in the Battle Phase.

**Untargetable.** Cannot be selected as a target for Target Strike nor for a Spell effect that uses the word "target".

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