

what is scratch: draw the line?

Scratch: Draw the Line (or just **Scratch**) is a strategic card game for two players. A deck, small enough to fit in your wallet, can be built in under a minute and the game board and tokens are just scratch paper and spare change. **Scratch** relies on a minimum of rules, making it easy to learn but still hard to master. Set-up is almost instant and a typical game takes 5-10 minutes depending on how long you spend scheming.

thanks for giving it a try!

We posted this to forums where we tend to hangout because we figured people like us would be the most likely to enjoy it. If you got it somewhere else, that's awesome! Feel free to contact us at runewardgames@gmail.com with feedback or just to share your thoughts!

just what are we doing here?

We've been having fun with **Scratch** for a while and wanted to see if other folks liked it too. This is a quick introduction to the game, some background, and enough cards to build some different decks. We're hoping for constructive feedback. Do the rules make sense? What would make it more fun? Did you catch something we missed? That type of stuff. If people generally seem to like it, we'll follow up with more cards and continue the play test. If people really like it, we'll see if it is worth developing into a real game.

useful answers to unasked questions

can you quick summarize game play?

Each player has a deck of 10 cards, five of which make up the hand at any time. Players take turns playing a single card from their hand in a 3x3 grid (think tic-tac-toe). When a card is first played, you compare the values on any side that touches a card you don't already control. If your card is greater, you gain control of that card. If you ever control three cards in a row (horizontal or vertical, but not diagonal), you win. Some cards have powers that affect the game, there are some other ways to win, and a handful of other miscellaneous rules, but that really is the gist.

what about the game board and tokens?

It turns out that a 3x3 grid for a card is about exactly the size of a piece of paper, magazine, or RPG book. The 'grid' is simple enough that it is clear where someone intends to play without lines. We use spare change to note who controls a card at any given time; one player is heads and the other tails. You could also make it pennies vs. silver or gummy bears vs. chocolate or whatever. The game is named after its use of scratch paper and spare change (aka scratch).

where'd scratch come from?

I wanted a game that could be inserted into an RPG session that was quick, strategic, and didn't break the fourth wall. I also liked the idea of building a deck of cards throughout a campaign (like FF8's Triple Triad®) but where a novice deck actually had a reasonable chance against a veteran because strategy mattered more than raw cards. Those goals evolved into **Scratch** but it fairly quickly became clear that **Scratch** was fun enough to play on its own. What we found is that every time we removed a rule or made a card simpler, the game actually got more strategic (like chess) and less random (like Triple Triad®).

what does the rest of scratch look like?

Cards are divided into four factions: Monster, Wild, Kingdom, and Undead. Each faction has a *tendency* or one side of the card that tends to have higher numbers. Cards are also common, rare, or unique. There are seven common, five rare, and five uniques in each faction. (As an aside, if **Scratch** does ever become a saleable game, it'll be sold as a complete set, not randomized packs.)

what you need



Grab yourself a friend, a paper-shaped object, and some tokens. You can use pennies vs. silver, color one side of a quarter and flip it, use bottle caps, or any other handy token. The point of it is to designate who controls the card, so you want something that is visually distinct and easy to pick up or flip over.

the deck



A deck is 10 cards with at least half being commons. There are no other restrictions, but some additional rules will shape your strategy. Namely, only one unique from each faction can be in play at any time so building a deck with 5 unique Kingdoms is a pretty narrow strategy since you can only ever use one. Similarly, only one instance of each rare (e.g. 'Griffin') can be in play at a time. Beyond that, freely mix factions, rarity, and powers to achieve whatever theme you want. Even a randomly built deck of 5 common and 5 non-common is competitive, so have fun with it.

the setup

Shuffle and draw five cards for your hand. These are the cards you are eligible to play during your turn. You will refill your hand to five at the end of your turn. Flip a coin to determine who decides who goes first. Whoever wins makes the determination with full knowledge of their hand—there are plenty of strategies where you want to go second.

game vs. match

A typical game takes 5-10 minutes (or less!) and that is with considerable time to strategize. A common variant is to play a match instead of a single game. The rules are identical except that whoever is behind on points (see **match scoring**) gets to decide who goes first. If tied, flip a coin. You cannot change your deck during a match but return all discarded cards to your deck between games. The winner of the match is the first to 5 points.

game play

- Players take turns playing a single card. The first card may be played in any square, but every card after that must share a side with a card already in play.
- The first card played cannot be a unique.
- Whenever you play a card, place a token on it indicating you control it.
- When a card is first played, compare the value of every side shared with a card you do not already control. If your card is greater than your opponent's card, gain control of opponent's card. If multiple sides of your card share sides with opposing cards, compare all sides. Gain control of any card where your shared side is greater than your opponent's shared side. You can gain control of multiple cards in one play.
- Only newly played cards have the potential to gain control of cards. Cards played in prior rounds do not "attack back."
- Many cards have powers. If a card has a power, apply it as soon as the conditions of the power are met. A power that says 'may' does not have to be applied.
- At the end of your turn, refill your hand to five cards.
- You may discard cards at any time. Most often you'll discard a card because it cannot be played (e.g. a unique Monster when one has already been played). When a card is discarded, set it aside until the end of the game. If you play multiple games, you'll shuffle discarded cards back into your deck between games.

victory conditions



- Most games are won by controlling three cards in a line (vertical or horizontal).
- If no one controls three in a row, the game is decided by the final card. If the final card captures a card, the final card's owner wins. If the final card does not capture a card, the final card's owner loses.
- In rare instances, a player might not have an eligible card to play. In that instance, that player loses.

match scoring

- **2 points:** You control three in a row.
- **3 points:** You control three in a row and control every card in play.
- **2 points:** Your opponent plays the last card and does not capture a card.
- **3 points:** You play the last card and capture a card.
- **2 points:** Your opponent has no eligible card to play.

example of play (game one)

set-up and turn one of game one

- Both players make a deck of 10 cards with at least half being commons. Beyond that there are no limitations; they freely mix factions, card rarity, and even have duplicates of some cards they especially like.
- At the start of play (and anytime the score is tied in a match), they flip a coin. Player One (P1) wins and chooses to go first.
- P1 plays Captain of the Guard in the middle left. He expects to lose it, but figures it will be easy to get back because of **Loyal to the end!**
- Since Captain shares no sides with other cards, P1 fills his hand to five and ends his turn.



Where space permits, we'll blowup cards to make them easier to read like this. Where space doesn't permit, you can reference the full-size, printer-friendly versions in the back (or just squint).

turn two of game one

- Player Two (P2) plays Chancellor in the upper left corner. Chancellor's 7 easily defeats Captain's 5 and so P2 now controls both cards.
- Defeating Captain triggers Chancellor's **Insult to injury!** power. P2 draws a card at random from P1's hand to discard. He draws Goblin and it is set aside.
- Because Chancellor is a unique Kingdom card, it blocks all other unique Kingdom cards while Chancellor is in play. P1 has Queen (another unique Kingdom) in his hand and so discards it. P1 will have to play the next round with only three cards because he will not have an opportunity to refill his hand until the end of his turn.
- P2 fills his hand to five and ends his turn.



example of play (game one)

turn three of game one

- P1 has few options because he only has three cards. He cannot defeat Chancellor's 7 so he focuses on Captain. P1 can defeat Captain on either side, but wants to play in the lower left corner to be cautious. If he played in the center square, P2 might be able to retake Captain from the bottom and win the game.
- P1 plays Drake in the lower left and defeats Captain because of the **Loyal to the end!** power. Since P1 was the original player, Captain decreases all stats by 1.
- P1 refills his hand to five (drawing three cards!) and ends his turn. While refilling his hand, P1 draws King (another unique Kingdom). He must wait until he is done refilling his hand to discard it and spend yet another turn with less than a full hand.



turn four of game one

- P2 plays Ranger. Ranger has **The over under!** power which allows the card to be flipped when first played. P2 flips Ranger so that Ranger's 6 defeats Drake's 5, capturing Drake.
- P2 feels smug, fills his hand to five, and ends his turn.



the 'flip' mechanic

When you flip a card the values don't change, just their orientation. Even though that '6' now looks like a '9', it is still a '6.'

example of play (game one)

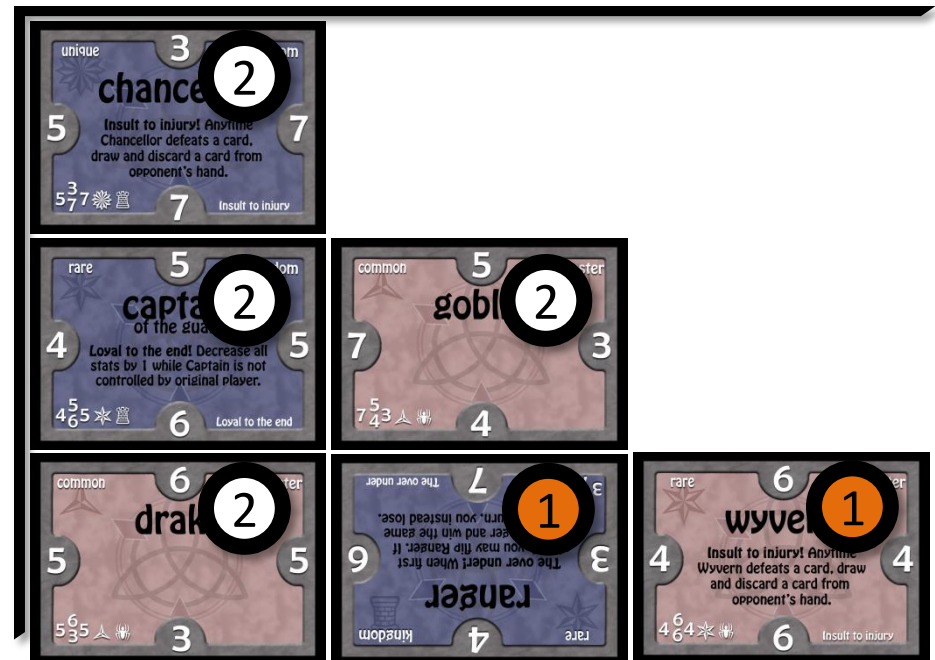
turn five of game one

- P1 is in bad shape. He clearly has to block in the lower right corner, but if P2 can defeat Captain he will win the game.
- P1 decides his best bet is to play Wyvern to block and hope he forces P2 to discard something important. Griffin is selected at random and discarded.
- P1 fills his hand to five and ends his turn.



turn six of game one

- P2 plays the lowly Goblin, defeating the Captain of the Guard and gaining control of the entire left side.
- Because P2 controls three in a vertical row, he wins and is awarded 2 points towards the match.



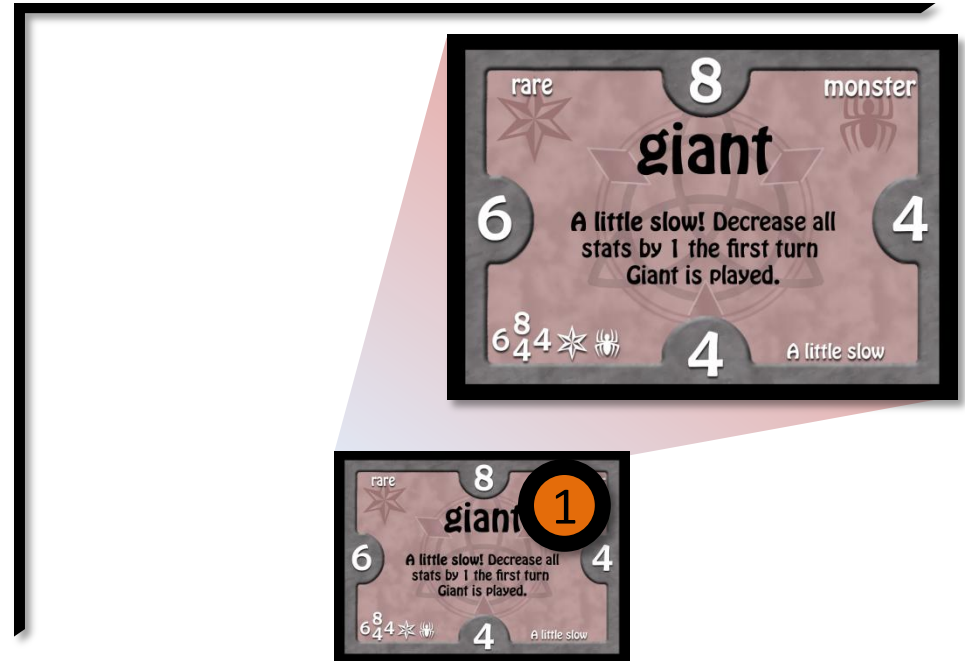
scoring and winning

Sometimes you just want to play a quick game. The winner is whoever first achieves any of the victory conditions. Playing multiple games in a row (called a 'match') introduces an opportunity for more strategy because whoever is behind in points gets to decide who goes first, you'll learn your opponent's deck, and you can shape your strategy to try for victory conditions that award more points.

example of play (game two)

set-up and turn one of game two

- Both players reshuffle their same deck, returning all discarded and used cards back into the 10-card deck. They'll do this after each game until someone reaches 5 points to win the match. Between matches, you can (and should!) try to build new decks.
- P1 is behind on points and so it is his decision who goes first. He looks at his cards and decides he wants to start.
- P1 plays Giant in the bottom middle. This is a smart first play because Giant's **A little slow!** ability will end with his turn. (The rest of Giant's stats are extra high to balance this disadvantage.)
- P1 fills his hand to five and ends his turn.



turn two of game two

- P2 again decides to flip Ranger and play it in the bottom right corner. He defeats Giant and controls every card on the board.
- P2 fills his hand to five and ends his turn.

so why can't you 'flip' as the last card played?

It was just too powerful. Every card is built with a formula and the stats were selected to be as powerful as possible. That means that most **The over under!** cards have two strong adjacent sides. Being able to flip the card means you really have four strong adjacent sides. The dominant play was to always hold onto a **The over under!** card and use it to win the game. That wasn't fun, so we shut it down, and now you're encouraged to make aggressive moves with them early on. That leads to more action.



example of play (game two)

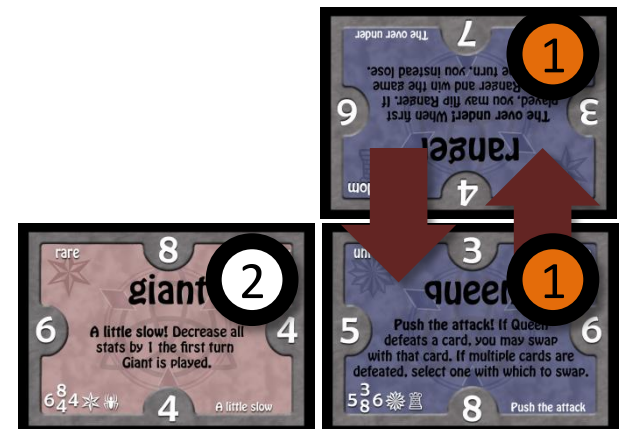
turn three of game two

- P1 decides to play Queen in the middle-right. Queen's 8 defeats Ranger's flipped 7 and so P1 gains control.
- Because Queen is a unique Kingdom, P1 immediately discards his King card. P2 notices the discard and is reminded to discard his Chancellor card as well.



turn three of game two (continued)

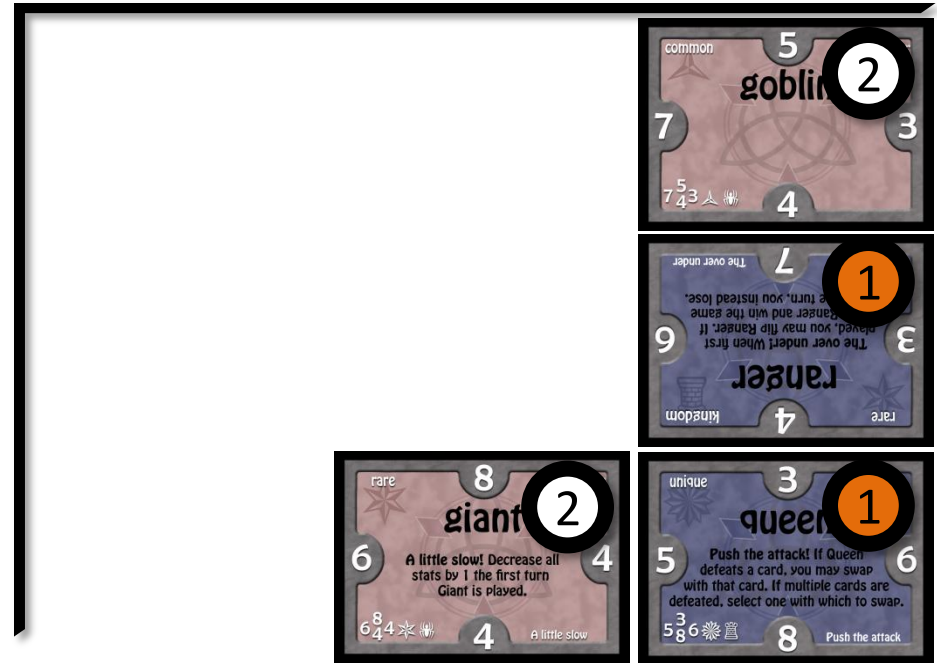
- P1 decides to use the **Push the attack!** ability to swap the positions of Queen and Ranger. P1's logic is that this will bury Queen's 3 and instead expose Ranger's 7.
- Even though Queen's 5 now shares a side with Giant's 4, we do not compare these sides. You only compare sides when a card is first played and Queen did not share this side until later.
- P1 draws two cards (one for the card he played and one for the King he discarded), fills his hand to five, and ends his turn.



example of play (game two)

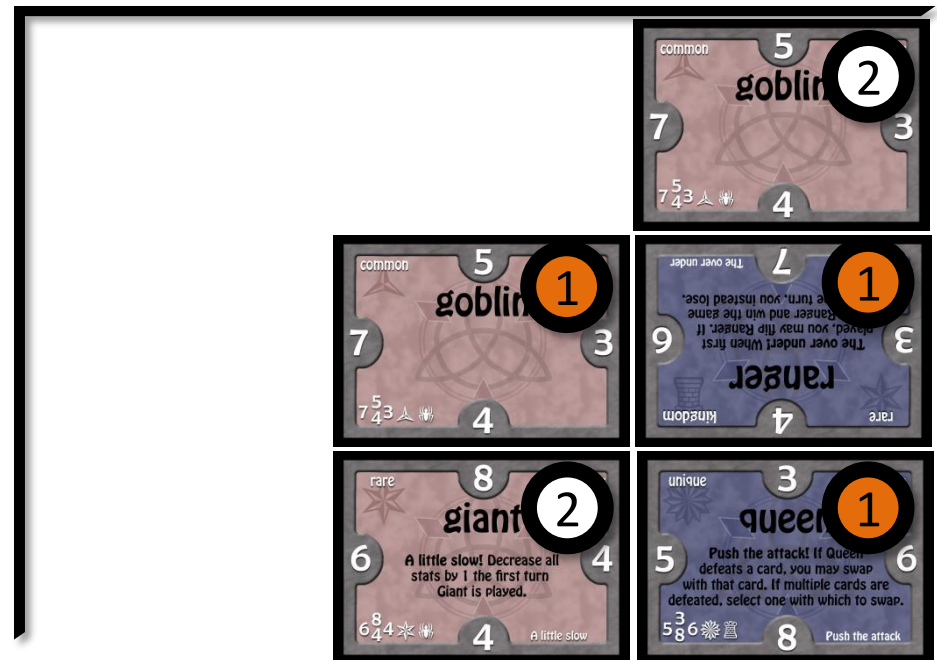
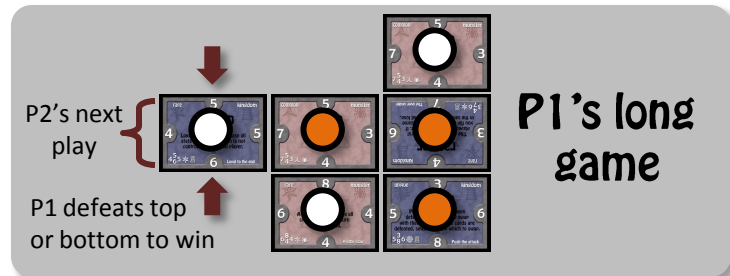
turn four of game two

- P2 cannot defeat Ranger and so plans to just block. P2 needs to make sure that P1 cannot defeat whatever he plays to block, and so once again the humble Goblin is played.
- P2 draws two cards (one for Goblin and one for Chancellor which he discarded last turn) to refill his hand to five and ends his turn.



turn five of game two

- P1 cannot defeat any card in play and so must strategize his long game. He does not want to play in the top middle because then he would lose the game if P2 could defeat any exposed side of whatever he played there.
- P1 also plays Goblin (which is fine since Goblin is a common) in the middle square. His hope is that P2 will have to block by playing on the left-middle and then P1 can win by defeating either the top or bottom of that card. See below.



example of play (game two)

turn six of game two

- It is not meant to be.
- P2 plays Griffin which, because P1 just played a second Monster card, increases all stats by 1 due to its **Champion!** power. Griffin defeats Goblin and P2 wins an additional 2 points towards the match. It is now 4 to 0 but because a match is played to 5 points, P1 still has a chance.



so what's left to be seen?

- Three more powers that weren't used in the sample games: **Stand your ground!**, **Against all odds!**, and **First strike!**
- Two additional factions, Wild and Undead, that further balance the game by rounding out all four *tendencies*.
- Each faction also introduces a power unique to that faction. In the current set, **First strike!** and **Loyal to the end!** are the Monster and Kingdom uniques, respectively. The faction unique powers for Wild and Undead remain secret.
- A game that fills the board. Sometimes no one can control three in a row. In those games, the final card determines the outcome. If the final card defeats a card, the player wins 3 points. If it doesn't defeat a card, the other player wins 2 points.
- The complexities of deck building. Decks are just 10 cards (about the size of 2-3 credit cards) but there are millions of combinations, and every one plays different.



rule card cribsheet

the deck and the hand

- 10 cards (5+ common).
- Draw 5 cards for your hand.
- Refill hand to 5 at the end of your turn.
- May discard cards at any time for any reason.

start of game

- Flip a coin (or whoever is behind in points) decides who goes first.

restrictions

- First card can be played in any square; every card after must share a side with a card in play.
- First card cannot be a unique.
- Only one unique of each faction in play at a time.
- Only one instance of each rare (e.g. 'Griffin') in play at a time.

1 of 2

unique



7

monster



hydra

6

Against all odds! Increase all stats by 1 if adjacent to 2+ cards controlled by OPPOSING player.

3

6⁷3
6



6

Against all odds

rare



6

monster



griffin

4

Champion! Increase all stats by 1 if adjacent to 2+ Monster cards.

5

4⁶5
5



5

Champion

unique



8

monster



nightmare

6

6

6⁸6
3



3

rare



7

monster



owlbear

4

Stand your ground! Attempts to swap with Owlbear fail.

4

4⁷4
5



5

Stand your ground

rare



6

monster



wyvern

4

4

Insult to injury! Anytime Wyvern defeats a card, draw and discard a card from opponent's hand.

4⁶4
6



6

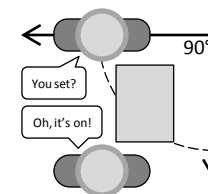
Insult to injury

factoid!

The next six pages contain one copy of every card from both the Monster and Kingdom factions. They are delivered in delightful grayscale so you can print them out and give the game a try without wasting too much ink if you find out you hate it.

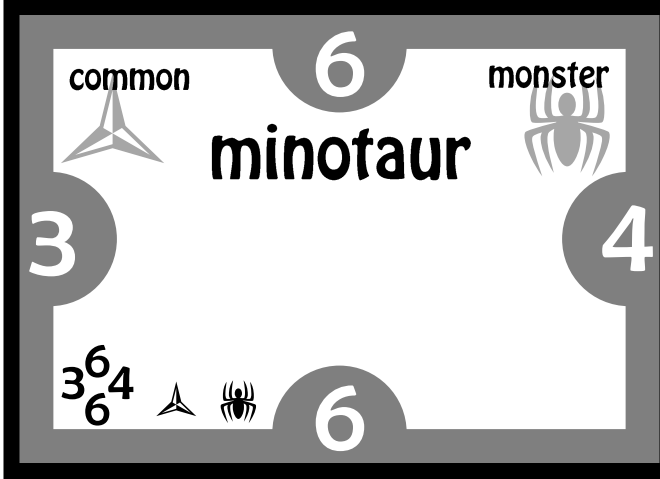
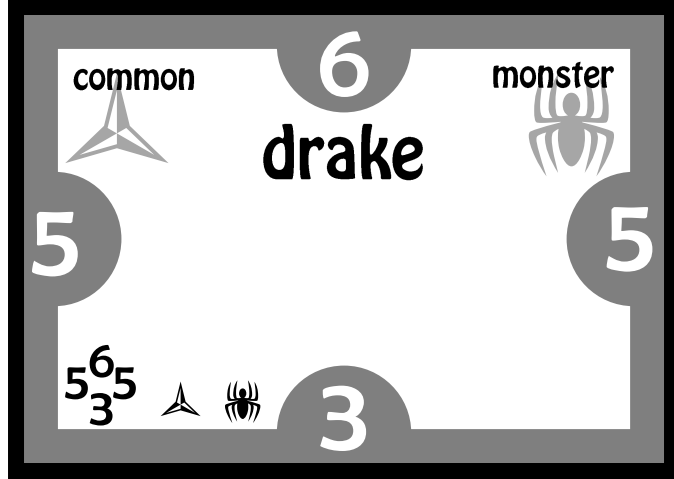
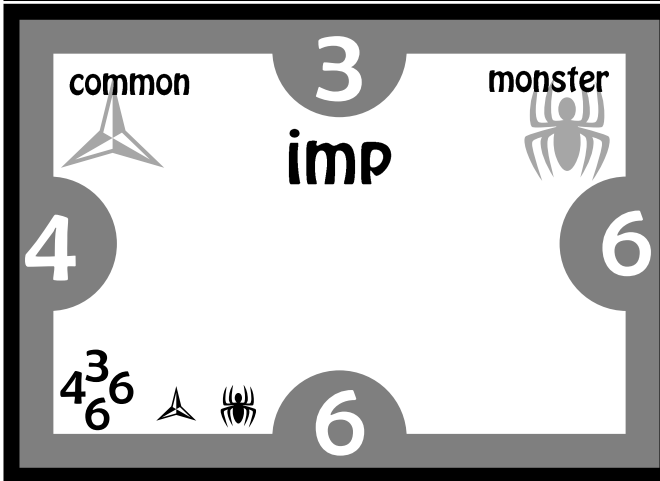
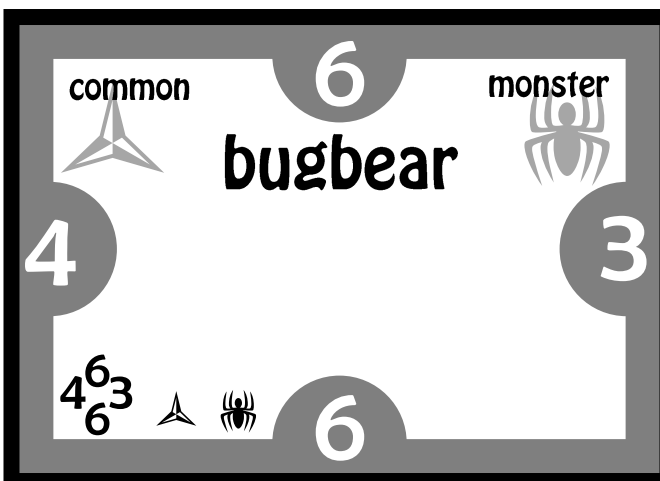
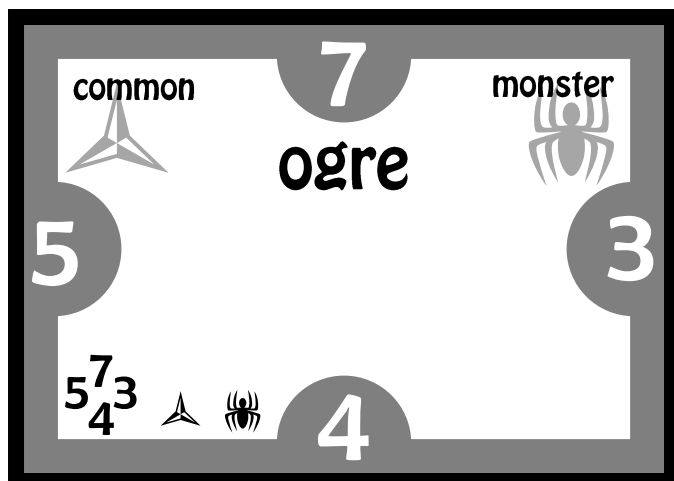
tip!

When you set up to play, rotate the scratch paper so that you are both 90-degrees from the grid. You'd be surprised how many people try to play with one person upside down. Unless you prefer it that way, I guess, then just have fun.



factoid!

The cards are designed to be as easy to read as possible during play. We don't want you to have to endure your buddy's victory dance just because you misread a card.



tip!

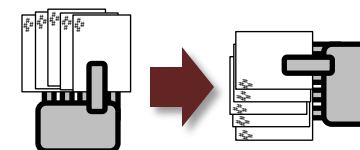
This page has six of the seven Monster commons. If you are so inclined, you could print it multiple times since you can use duplicates of commons in the same game.

strategy!

Most games that go to the final, ninth card tend to begin in a corner. Since the person who plays first tends to be the person who must play last, keep a wary eye throughout the game if you choose to start in a corner. If it goes to the end, you'll want to have planned ahead since defeating that last card is a challenge.

tip!

The bottom of the cards has shorthand for the important stats of the card. This helps you arrange the cards more comfortably and still evaluate your options.



rare 6 monster

gargoyle

4 6

First strike! Increase all stats by 1 the first turn Gargoyle is played.

4⁶₄ ★ (spider) 4 First strike

unique 7 monster

dragon

6 3

First strike! Increase all stats by 1 the first turn Dragon is played.

6⁷₆3 ★ (spider) 6 First strike

rare 8 monster

giant

6 4

A little slow! Decrease all stats by 1 the first turn Giant is played.

6⁸₄ ★ (spider) 4 A little slow

unique 8 monster

chimera

6 3

The over under! When first played, you may flip Chimera. If you flip Chimera and win the game the same turn, you instead lose.

6⁸₅3 ★ (spider) 5 The over under

common 5 monster

worg

6 5

6⁵₃5 ★ (spider) 3

unique 8 monster

troll

5 6

Push the attack! If Troll defeats a card, you may swap with that card. If multiple cards are defeated, select one with which to swap.

5⁸₃6 ★ (spider) 3 Push the attack

strategy!

Remember that your turn ends when you fill your hand back to five. Powers like **First strike!** and **A little slow!** end with your turn.

factoid!

Each factions has a unique power. Monster's is **First strike!** And Kingdom's is **Loyal to the end!** The faction unique powers tend to be more powerful than the shared powers. There are eight shared powers (including 'no power' which confers +1 stat point). **A little slow!**, the only power that is a hindrance, confers +2 stat points.

strategy!

You can discard cards at any time (like a unique Monster if one is already in play) and should do so before you fill your hand to five. If you draw a card that you want to discard, you'll have to wait until the end of your next turn to fill your hand again.

rule card cribsheet

game play

- Play one card per turn.
- When first played, compare values on any shared side(s). Where new card is greater, gain control of old card. A single new card can gain control of multiple cards.
- Apply powers when conditions are met. If a power says may, it is optional to apply.

victory conditions (pts)

- Control 3-in-a-row (2 pts).
- Control 3-in-a-row and every card in play (3 pts).
- Your opponent plays the last card and does not capture a card (2 pts).
- You play the last card and capture a card (3 pts).
- Your opponent has no eligible card to play (2 pts).

2 of 2

unique

3

kingdom



high priest



7

A little slow! Decrease all stats by 1 the first turn High Priest is played.

7

7³
7



7

A little slow

rare

4

kingdom



ranger



3

The over under! When first played, you may flip Ranger. If you flip Ranger and win the game the same turn, you instead lose.

6

3⁴
7⁶



7

The over under

unique

3

kingdom



queen



5

Push the attack! If Queen defeats a card, you may swap with that card. If multiple cards are defeated, select one with which to swap.

6

5³
8⁶



8

Push the attack

rare

4

kingdom



mysterious stranger in the corner of the bar



4

6

4⁴
7⁶



7

rare

4

kingdom



knight



4

Stand your ground! Attempts to swap with Knight fail.

5

4⁴
7⁵



7

Stand your ground

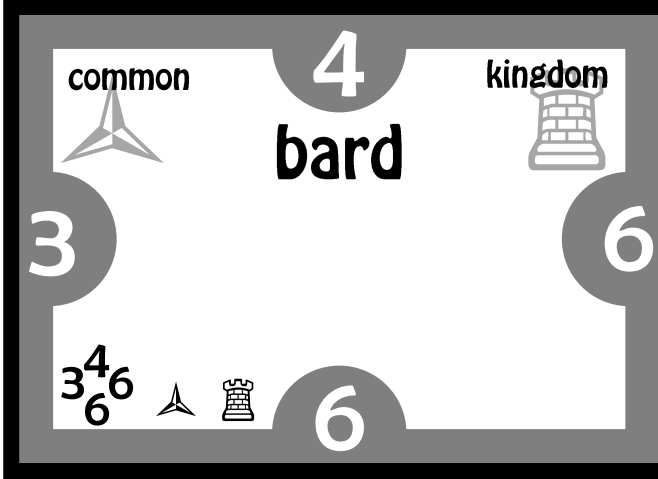
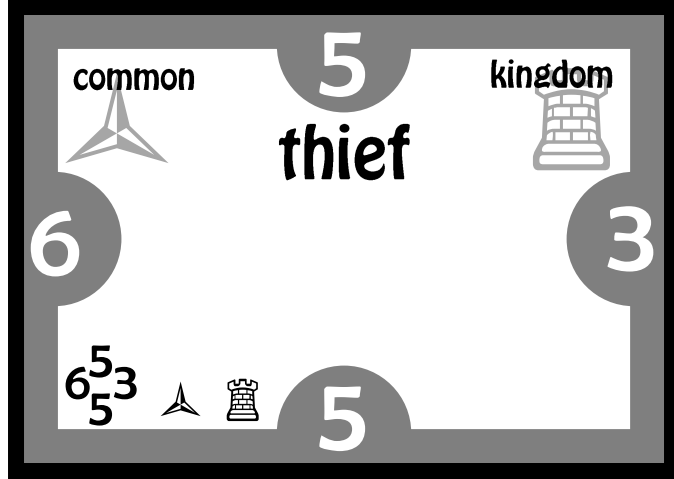
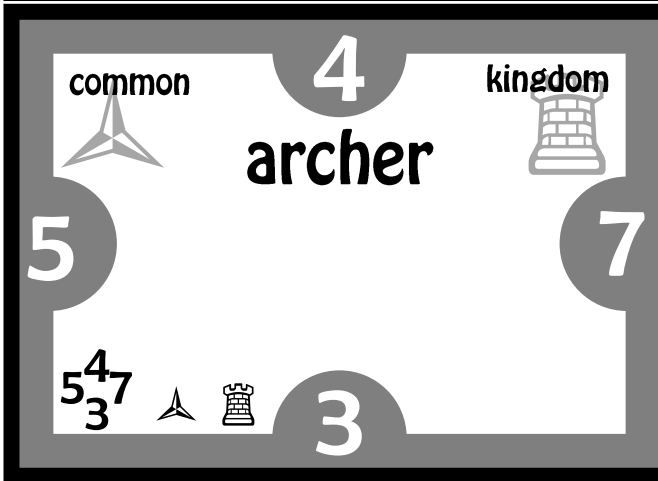
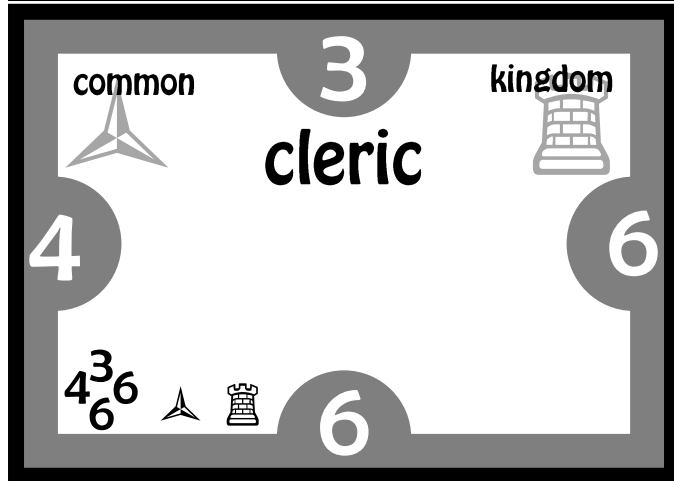
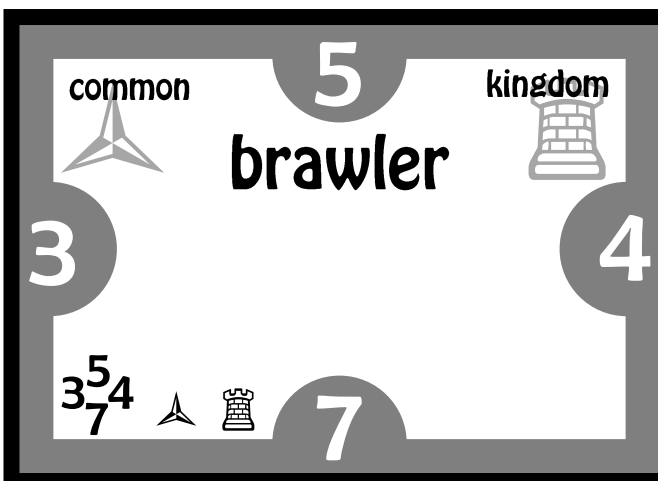
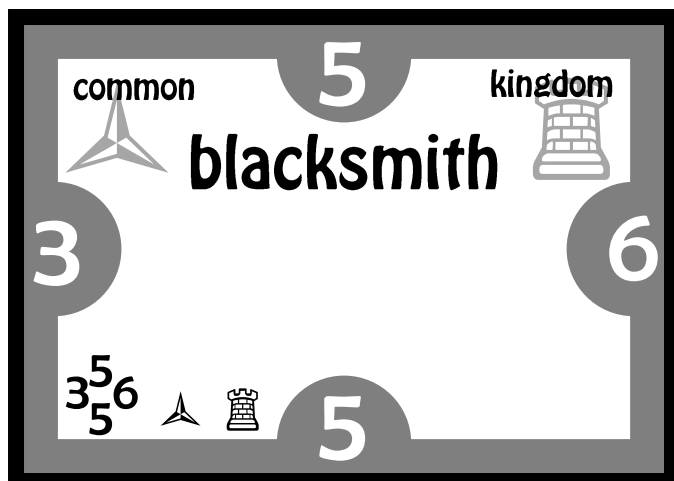
tip!

Want to introduce a handicap? One mechanism is to increase the size of the hand to provide an advantage. The handicap allows you to have more possible strategies and suffer less from powers like **A little slow!** or ineffective deck design resulting in blocked cards.

super tip!

If you use Scratch in an RPG, you can reward higher intelligence characters with a larger hand. This would represent strategy, foresight, and quick thinking. In a d20 system, you might allow them to hold an extra card for every point of Intelligence. This would mean a 20 Intelligence character would have access to his entire deck from the get-go!

The great thing about this method is that they are advantaged but still remain challenged. A great deck or a great strategy could very well beat them, but they have a clear and decisive edge—their intellect.



tip!

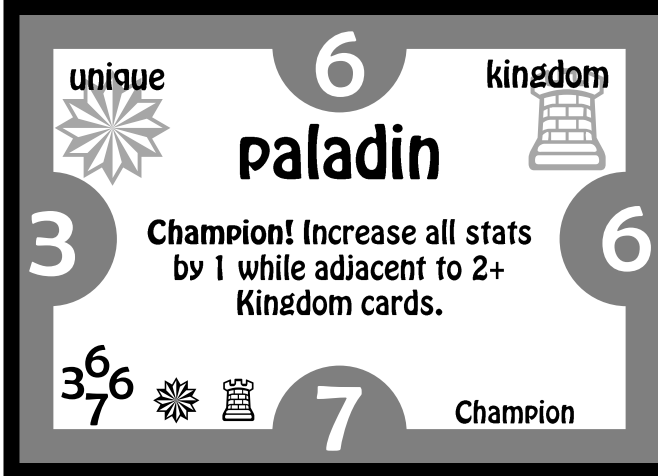
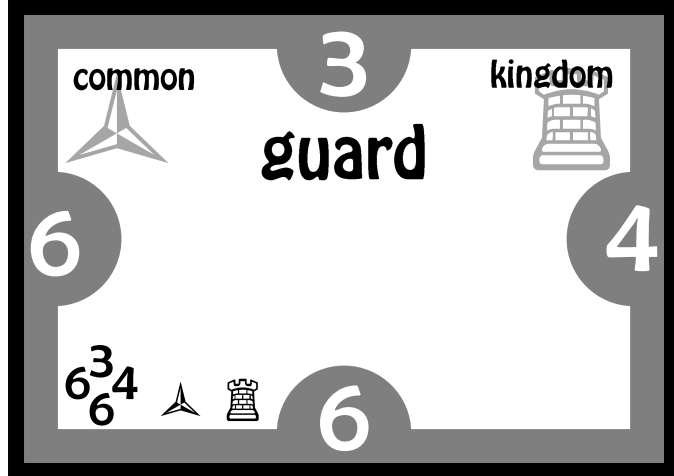
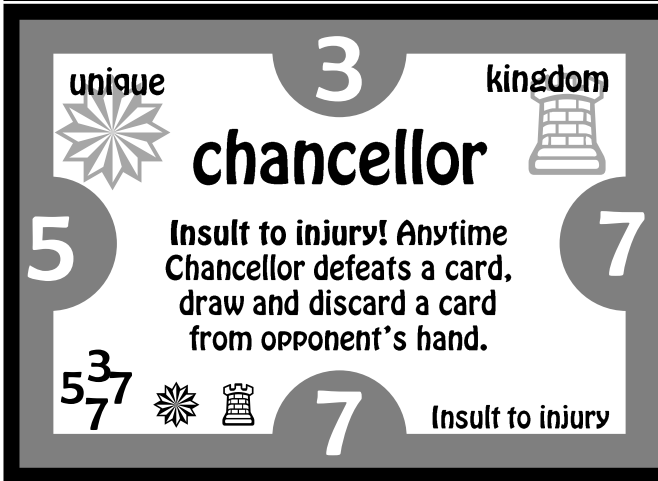
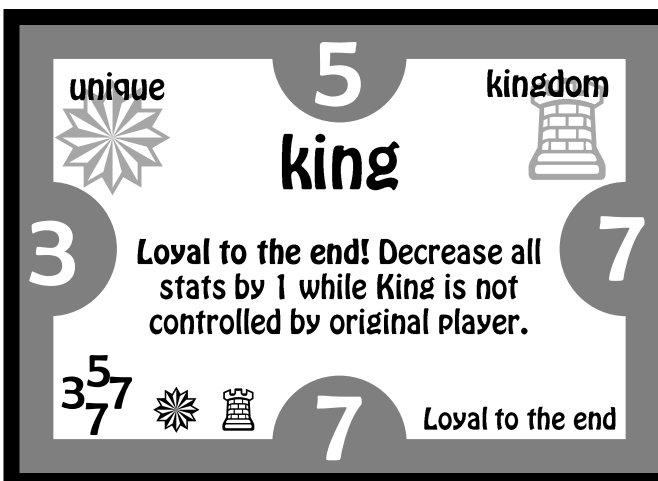
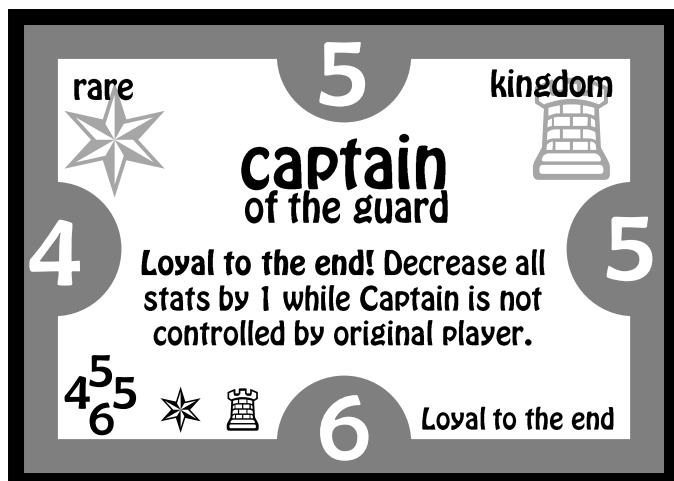
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factoid!

The typical scratch experience tends to be that it is easy to learn and immediately fun. Pretty quickly you think you figured out some dominant strategy and fear it will get repetitive like tic-tac-toe. Then you realize a different strategy beats your dominant strategy and spend the next few weeks constantly devising new dominant strategies you quickly learn to defeat.

factoid!

Common, rare, and uniques are each built with their own formula. Once the rules of the formula were devised, we sat down and tried to make each card the absolute strongest within the rules and given its powers. The result is well balanced cards.



factoid!

We've got a lot of potential designs floating around. You can see one design in the sample games and below is another. Feedback and input is always appreciated.



I guess you'll have to go grayscale to dodge this color... sorry.

factoid!

Each faction is assigned a color to make powers like **Champion!** easier to notice at a glance. Colors also add a little flair to the game board, and that is never a bad thing.

Once more, thanks for giving it a try!