STANDARD GAME MODE (SGM) (TOURNAMENT-STYLE DRAFT)

This is the way Paragons: Age of Champions is meant to be played. It is balanced specifically for this format. Part of the allure of Paragons versus traditional TCGs is that your deck's strengths will be defined by the choices you make in the Draft Phase *not only based on the absolute strength of your cards, but also based on the relative knowledge of your opponent and their preferred style of play.*

Competitive format for the SGM is 1v1, but 3-for-alls are also a valid way to play. Read on to learn how to play Paragons the way we intended.

This format is best for veteran TCG and/or Paragons players, or tabletop gamers comfortable with the work needed to develop a broad understanding of rulesets. For your convenience, we have also included a pre-constructed variant of the game at the end of this rulebook as a tool to learn how the Game Phase is played without having to Draft.

Choose Your Paragon

A game of Paragons begins with each player choosing their Paragon class: the **Warrior** (Red), the **Mage** (Blue), or the **Ranger** (Green). They will take all of the corresponding set of class cards and, for now, set them aside.

If two or more players wish to play the same Paragon class, this is resolved with a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors (you may still play Rock, Paper, Scissors even if the players choose different Paragon Classes).

After the classes are chosen, players enter the **Draft Phase**, where the players draft cards from a common pool of **Neutral Mercenaries** to use in their decks.

Some General Notes for Context:

Mercenaries are soldiers that can be played for their mana cost onto their player's Combat Board to fight on behalf of that player.

A player's **Combat Board** is a 4x2 grid upon which one plays their mercenaries: two Rows, a front row and a back row, each 4 spaces across. It can also be described as four Columns of two spaces: first column, second, third, and fourth (from left to right.)

Neutral cards are cards that do not inherently belong to a specific class, but must either be drafted during the Draft Phase or Recruited from the Buying Pool during the **Game Phase**, which begins when the Draft Phase is completed.

Draft Phase

Drafting Order is always Ranger drafts before → Mage drafts before → Warrior.

There are 3 steps to the Draft Phase: First Greater Mercenaries are drafted, then Lesser Mercenaries, and then it's on to Deck Building.

Step One: Greater Mercenary Draft

Greater Mercenaries are mercenaries which cost 5, 6, or 7 mana to play. When neutral, these mercenaries have a slightly goldish color to them and are so labeled at the bottom of the card.

2 Player game: For the Greater Mercenary Draft, shuffle the Greater Mercenary cards and then lay out either 14 of them. Then, take turns choosing from them until all are taken, proceeding in the draft order laid out above at the start of the Draft Phase section.

3 Player game: If you are playing the more casual 3-for-all format, increase the number of cards laid out to 18.

Set aside all the undrafted Greater Mercenary cards into a separate pile called the **Neutral Mercenary Deck**. It will be used in the Game Phase.

Step Two: Lesser Mercenary Draft

Lesser Mercenaries are mercenaries which cost 4 or less mana to play. When neutral, these mercenaries have a darker, charcoal color to them and are so labeled at the bottom of the card.

2 Player game: lay out 18 lesser mercenaries for each of the two rounds of the Lesser Mercenary Draft.

3 Player game: lay out 14 lesser mercenaries for each of the three rounds of the Lesser Mercenary Draft.

For each round, take turns choosing from the cards until all are taken, proceeding in the draft order laid out above at the start of the Draft Phase section.

Add all the undrafted Lesser Mercenary cards into the Neutral Mercenary Deck to be used in the Game Phase.

Step Three: Assemble Your Deck

In 1v1, players will have acquired 7 Greater Mercenaries, 18 Lesser Mercenaries, and 30 class cards, for a total of 55 cards. From this, they must compile a deck of exactly 30 cards of their choice which they will use to try to defeat their opponent.

In a 3-for-all, players will have acquired 6 Greater Mercenaries, 14 Lesser Mercenaries, and 30 class cards, for a total of 50 cards. From this, they must compile a deck of 30 cards of their choice which they will use to try to survive and outlast against the two other players.

In either case, all cards not used in your deck are set aside as your **Reserve Pile**. There'll be more to learn about the Reserve Pile later in the "concluding a game" section. But for now, that's all you need to know!

When everyone's decks have been assembled, the Game Phase can begin :)

Game Phase

Setting up the Playing Field

Players each have a **Combat Board** where they can play up to 8 mercenaries: 2 deep and 4 across (referred to as Rows and Columns respectively). The front row (furthest from the player) is called the **Front Line**. The back row (closest to the player) is called the **Back Line**.

During the Game Phase, when players play cards with the **Hidden** keyword, they are put in a 'Hidden Pile' seperate from their player's Combat Board. Players may look at their own Hidden cards anytime, but not their opponent's.

In the shared playing space, a D10 die or mana counter can help track the Mana Threshold for a given round. The **Mana Threshold** is the amount of mana a player starts with on their turn which they can budget and spend until their next turn as they please.

Place the **Neutral Mercenary Deck** in the shared playing space as well, and put its top 5 cards face up Texas Hold'em Style. This is the **Mercenary Pool**: it is a shop where players will be able to **Recruit** new mercenaries for a price. The **Mercenary Pool** belongs to an area of the game space which can be referred to more generally as the **Buying Pool** (a fact that may be relevant in future expansions.)

When a mercenary is Recruited from the Buying Pool during play, replace that card with the top card from the Neutral Mercenary Deck.

Starting Play

Players start with 20 **Life**. You may keep track of this however you'd like. We recommend a D20. Whatever your method, life should always be visible to players at all times. Please also note that a player's **Life Total** can never exceed 20 points.

At the start of the game, players draw 5 cards from the top of their deck. They may also elect to **Mulligan** once: removing any number of cards from their hand and redrawing back up to 5 cards. Any cards discarded this way are then shuffled back into their decks.

Then play begins!

Play order is always Warrior→ plays before Mage→ Plays before Ranger.

Beginning Your Turn

At the start of a turn, you either draw until you have 5 cards or, if you have 5 or more cards already, you draw 1 card instead. You must always draw at least 1 card. There is no maximum hand size.

Players play cards with mana, a resource represented by a number 1 to 10 that corresponds with the round that is currently being played (1 mana on the 1st round, 2 on the second, and so on until the 10th round, whereafter mana is capped at 10.) This number is referred to as the **Mana Theshold**.

The amount of mana you can access at any moment can never be higher than the number of rounds entered (hence it is a 'theshold' that cannot be overcome). The amount of mana currently at your disposal is referred to as your **Mana Total**, which is carried over into enemy players' turns until the start of your next turn.

Please note that once mana is spent, it cannot be un-spent, even if players respond with cards that nullify a card's effects or prevent it from coming into play.

Turns are taken sequentially, and when spoken of collectively are referred to as the **Round** (Round 1 is when the Mana Threshold is set to 1, etc.) Therefore a Round starts with the Warrior, continues with the Mage, and ends with the Ranger.

Options During Your Turn (and during your opponents')

Generally speaking, there are five different types of **Voluntary Actions** you can take in Paragons:

1- You may play mercenary cards any time on your turn. Mercenaries can be played to any space on the Combat Board unless otherwise noted by the card. If that space is occupied by a mercenary already, the occupying mercenary can be "bumped" to any Surrounding space (left, right, up, or down) so long as that space is unoccupied.

Mercenaries typically resolve onto the Board instantly unless the spell played in response explicitly says otherwise (e.g. "When a mercenary would come into play, do _____ instead.")

Mercenaries cannot attack or use Voluntary Abilities on the turn that they are played unless the card explicitly says otherwise. **Voluntary Abilities** are mercenary abilities which depend upon player choice to come into effect. Mercenary abilities that have an effect whether or not you choose to do anything are called **Passive Abilities** and take effect immediately.

2- You may begin a Combat any time on your turn by initiating an attack.
Attacking occurs one mercenary at a time before damage resolves. *Please note that a mercenary can only attack once per turn unless the card explicitly says otherwise.* Using a mercenary, a player chooses whether they wish to target an enemy player directly or any targetable mercenary on their opponent's combat board.

If you target a player directly, that player may Defend with any one of their unexhausted mercenaries. A **Defending** mercenary trades their attack power and health with the attacking mercenary (numbers indicated on the bottom left and right of mercenary cards, respectively). If a player chooses not to Defend in this instance, they deduct the mercenary's total attack power from their Life Total.

If you wish to target a mercenary instead, you can choose from among the following: any **Frontline** mercenary on an enemy's Combat Board (as defined at the start of the Game Phase section), or any **Backline** mercenary on an enemy's Combat Board who is 'exposed', that is, one that does not have an allied mercenary in the Front Line of the column they inhabit.

The enemy player may then elect to Defend it with any unexhausted Adjacent mercenary. **Adjacent** mercenaries are mercenaries to the immediate left or right of the mercenary in question. If a player chooses not to Defend the mercenary, the attacking mercenary and its target exchange their attack power and health in the same manner as prescribed above.

If a mercenary survives combat, it remains damaged until the start of the next player's turn, at which point its health goes back to full. If a mercenary's health is reduced to zero or below, it is **Destroyed**. Cards that are Destroyed go into their player's discard pile (a player is the person who played the card, so for example, cards you play on your opponent's board that are destroyed still go to your own discard pile.)

Mercenaries become Exhausted when they attack, which is indicated by rotating the card 90 degrees. **Exhausted** mercenaries cannot attack, defend, or use Voluntary Abilities that require them to become Exhausted. Exhausted mercenaries **Recover** at the start of their players' turns, unexhuasting them.

Defending is a special class of Voluntary Action that only occurs when an attack has been declared.

A player may initiate more than one Combat during a turn. A Combat ends when a player plays a mercenary card or spell unrelated to the Combat.

3-You may use a Mercenary's Voluntary Ability any time on your turn unless the card explicitly describes otherwise. Cards that let you use their activated abilities on enemy turns and/or on the turn they're played always use the phrase 'anytime' in their ability description.

4-You may Recruit Lesser Mercenaries from the Buy Pool for 2 mana, or Greater Mercenaries for 3 mana, anytime during your turn. To **Recruit** a card, take it from the Buy Pool and put it into your hand.

5-You may play Spells any time on either your or your opponents' turns so long as you have enough mana to do so.

Advanced Notes on Voluntary Actions

Notes on Order of Operations

Whenever a player takes any Voluntary Action, their opponent always has the opportunity to React with any permitted Voluntary Actions of their own. This option goes both ways, with the underlying principle that whatever is played last in this card/action chain resolves first. When no one decides to add more to the chain, the chain begins resolving in the manner prescribed above.

If the resolution of this chain disrupts the permissability of actions that would resolve later, the initiative is handed to the player whose action it was to make a different choice utilizing the same card/action if possible in a way that is allowed by the ruleset. If that is impossible, the action is rescinded.

Notes on Card Activity Besides Voluntary Actions

Special cases regarding the Beginning and Ending of turns-

Drawing at the Beginning of your turn is not a Voluntary Action. Voluntary Actions are only ever available to you after the Beginning of a turn and before the Ending of one (that may seem obvious, but is important to note for competitive players trying to understand the precise limits of card abilities).

The most important consequence of this is that cards that describe abilities which occur on the beginning or end of a turn are therefore not 'Voluntary' in terms of the games' mechanics, even if they include an element of choice. It also means that abilities using this language do not invite the opportunity to provoke Reactions from enemy players.

Notes on Mercenary Types (Melee, Ranged, Caster)

Mercenaries have distinct combat types, indicated on the bottom left hand corner of the card where their attack power total is shown.

A Sword indicates that this mercenary is a Melee-type mercenary. Melee mercenaries are not able to attack from the Backline if they have an allied mercenary directly in front of them (it's hard to swing a sword at the enemy with a friend in the way!)

An Arrow indicates that this mercenary is a Ranged-type mercenary. Ranged mercenaries do not have the same limitation as Melee mercenaries. Other than that, the only difference between melee and ranged mercenaries is that ranged mercenaries also have a special ability that reads "when this card is dealt damage by a caster-type mercenary's casting ability, it does damage back equal to its attack power (as if it were in combat)."

A Staff indicates that this mercenary is a Caster-type mercenary. In addition to having all the traits of a Ranged-type mercenary, casters have their own special ability: "This ability reads as "Exhaust this card anytime on your turn to do X damage to a mercenary, where X is this card's Base Attack Power Stat."

This caster ability cannot be used on the same turn that the caster-type mercenary attacks (and vice versa), even if the mercenary becomes unexhausted.

Note: A mercenary's **Base Stats** are the physical numerals printed for its attack power and health values. Buffs and stat changes are temporary, Base Stats are forever <3

Notes on Spell Types

Spells are ordinarily single-use non-mercenary cards that can be played from your hand or revealed from among your Hidden cards at any time (when the reveal conditions are met) and are so labeled at the bottom of the card. These are played, have an effect, and then generally are Destroyed after resolving.

There are special spells called **Imbuements** that attach to mercenaries permanently and confer effects based on the spell's description. These live or die along with the mercenary they imbue, becoming Destroyed when the Mercenary they imbue is Bounced, Destroyed, or Banished.

There are also **Enchantment** spells that act like Imbuements, but attach to Combat Board spaces rather than the mercenaries that occupy them. Once played successfully onto a particular space, there they remain for the rest of the game unless replaced by a new Enchantment, in which case the old Enchantment is destroyed (there can only be one Enchantment occupying a space at a time.)

One final note: There are certain cards that will copy or duplicate your spells. Please remember that these copy 'cards' are completely removed from the game when they resolve and do not enter your Discard or Reserve Pile.

<u>Concluding the Game</u>

A player loses when their Life Total is reduced to or below 0, if they need to draw from their deck and are unable to do so, or if they at any point exhibit remarkably poor sportsmanship (yes, seriously). Keep it classy, folks.

Paragons is designed to be played as a 'best of 3' tournament-style TCG-like, where the losing player of a game may substitute any cards from their Reserve Pile (as defined in the 'Assemble your Deck' section) into their deck in an attempt to rebound their fortunes, knowing more now about their opponent's strategy. If they choose to do this, the resulting deck should be exactly 30 cards when they are done.

The 'best of 3' format is not mandatory, and card balance should allow for fun and relatively competitive experiences in 'best of 1' play, which may be more manageable

for players on a tight schedule. However, for the best experience, Authocracy recommends the 'best of 3' format as the most competitive, balanced, and enjoyable approach. If you are in a hurry, it may be a good idea to save the constructed decks for the next time you are able to play.

The game is also fine-tuned for 1-on-1 play. Three-for-alls can be a lot of fun and make for quite a slugfest, but the most balanced outcomes are going to come from 1-on-1 play in a B03 format. As a social game, however, nothing quite tops a 3-for-all casual game night between friends.

For larger affairs, we recommend having a Paragons set for every two players, enabling a Round Robin-style tournament.

Difficulty and Advice

The feedback we've consistently received from playtesters is that Paragons is 'fairly easy to learn, very hard to master'. To assist on your road to mastery, here are a few notes to help guide you in your first forrays into the game.

The Mage is the easiest class to learn. Direct damage spells and obvious buff/debuff effects have a very high value floor, with a modest but potent bevvy of tools in the Mercenary Pool to enhance and multiply the lethality of this class. The Mage is currently understood to have a slight advantage against the Ranger.

The Warrior is is a medium-difficulty class. It does not play exactly the same way that people familiar with other TCGs and RPGs expect. The warrior's core mechanic is recruitment, not buffing. The buffing mechanics are very much the icing on the cake for this class. Learning how to get the most value out of recruitment takes time, but when you've mastered it, the results can be overwhelming for the other classes to respond to adequately. The Warrior is currently understood to have a slight advantage against the Mage.

The Ranger is the highest-difficulty class. It has plenty of cards that are obviously good and strong, although individually they may not feel as strong as the other classes. The secret to the Ranger's power is that the class specializes in chaining Hidden cards and combo effects. To balance these mechanisms all the way to victory will take patience, foresight, and planning. The Ranger is currently understood to have a slight advantage against the Warrior.

The mana curve of your deck (the ratio of low-cost to high cost cards) and the mana-to-base stats ratio of mercenaries are both even more important in Paragons than in other TCGs. Combat is ruthless: be prepared to establish at least some

control early (in the first 4-7 turns, depending on the flow of play) or you will get beaten down by more experienced players.

Paragons is more like Chess than a traditional TCG–its strategy is more complex, and while there are good choices and bad choices that may be obvious–there will often be opportunities for great and even brilliant choices based on the board state. Take your time to find them. The converse is also true, and you may find that making 'just one' mistake quickly snowballs into catastrophe against a clever opponent. Stay sharp!

There are many choices available to players once the game is underway. Get into the habit of checking the Buying Pool, thinking about Hidden cards, and tracking the drawing and mana spending habits of your opponent. *Also, be sure to pay close attention to the mercenaries your opponents draft, as this will tell you about the realm of possibilities for your opponent.* Following this advice will open new avenues to victory and protect you from pitfalls which are otherwise hard to avoid.

And finally, the most important note for last. Paragons is, at its heart, a resource management game as much as it is a battler. 30 cards goes by quicker than you might think, and mana is a finite resource. The secret to victory is making sure the mana you spend maximizes its realized value on the board, and that you do so in such a way that if the game runs too late, you're not the one that loses by running out of cards to draw. If you can manage that, you'll win many games. Good luck!

Keyword Glossary

Adjacent- A space immediately to the left or right of the mercenary in question.

Surrounding- A space left, right, in front of, or behind the mercenary in question.

Exhaust- This mercenary cannot attack, defend, or use Voluntary Abilities until the start of your next turn. Exhaustion is indicated by rotating the card 90 degrees.

Recover- The mercenary becomes unexhausted. Note that all mercenaries recover at the start of their player's turn unless otherwise affected by a spell or ability (such as Pale Medusa, for example.)

Hidden- On your turn, you may pay this card's mana cost it put it into your 'Hidden Pile'. Cards in your Hidden Pile can then be revealed whenever the conditions described on the card are met (whether or not it is your turn). They are only considered to be 'played' when their owner chooses to reveal them in this way unless otherwise specified by another card (such as Eldritch Burrower, for example.)

Recruit- To acquire a mercenary card from the Buy Pool into your hand. Lesser Mercenaries can be Recruited for 2 mana, Greater Mercenaries for 3.

First Blood- When attacking, combat damage dealt by this mercenary resolves before its opponent's.

Reach- This mercenary's attacks against other mercenaries can't be defended against. Furthermore, these attacks can bypass a mercenary in the Front Line of the Enemy Combat Board to directly attack a mercenary in the backline (it still cannot attack over your own allied mercenaries if it is a melee unit.)

Garrison- Once per each of your turns, you may pay the cost of this card to put a 'Garrison' counter on it. For each Garrison counter, increase this card's attack power and health by the value of its base stats. If damage dealt to this card exceeds the base health, remove a Garrison counter for each increment over its base health (for example, a 2/2 with two Garison counters is treated as a 6/6, but would drop back to 2/2 if taking 4 or 5 damage, or 4/4 if taking 2 or 3, etc.)

Bounce- Return the target card to its owner's hand.

Critical Strike- This mercenary's attacks deal double damage (this ability does not apply when Defending.)

Banish- Return the targeted card to its owner's Reserve Pile (as defined in 'Draft Phase Step 3')

Fated- This spell resolves immediately upon playing. It cannot be countered, contradicted, or undermined in any way before resolving.

Concealed- this mercenary is not a valid target for enemy spells or Voluntary Abilities.

Glossary of Card Types

Paragon Class Cards- Cards which are unique to a certain Paragon class, as opposed to the neutral cards.

Neutral Cards- Cards which are available to any player during the Draft Phase or by Recruitment/purchase from the Buy Pool.

Lesser Mercenary- A mercenary that costs 4 or less mana to play.

Greater Mercenary- A mercenary that costs 5-7 mana to play.

Melee- A combat type for a mercenary, meaning that it can only attack from the Back Line if there are no allied mercenaries 'in the way' in front of it.

Ranged- A combat type for a mercenary meaning that it can attack even if there is an allied mercenary in front of it.

Caster- A special combat type for a mercenary. In combat, it behaves as if it were a Ranged mercenary. However, it also has the Voluntary Ability 'Exhaust this card on your turn to do X damage to a mercenary, where X is this card's base attack power stat.' This ability cannot be used on the same turn that the caster-type mercenary attacks, and vice versa in regards to attacking on a turn its Caster ability is used.

Spell- Cards that are not mercenaries and may be played at any time given the player has the mana to do so and that it is not a card with the keyword Hidden (in which case it can only be played into the Hidden pile on your turn).

Imbuement- Spells that are attached to mercenaries and confer certain effects or new abilities. If the mercenary is destroyed, bounced, Banished, or otherwise removed from the Combat Board, the spell resolves and is Destroyed.

Enchantment- Spells that are attached directly to Combat Board spaces and confer certain effects or new abilities to their occupying mercenaries. Enchantments are permanent and do not end when the occupying mercenary is Destroyed, and can only be removed through spell effects or by a new Enchantment targeting the same space.