

CORE RULES

THE
ARCHITECT

12-PAGE FIELD MANUAL / RULES v3.5

STEAL THE CODE. SURVIVE THE RETURN.

2-5 RUNNERS / 30-60 MINUTES / AGES 12+

1. THE MISSION

You are a Runner carrying illegal Exploits into the Architect's network. Move from the Edge through fourteen network layers, enter Root, steal a Payload, then return to the Edge.

Your route is part of the lock. The first time you enter a layer, you mark the other Node. Before you can escape, you must return and enter every marked Node.

The first Runner to reach the Edge with a Payload and no route markers left on the network wins.

THE NETWORK

Each layer contains two Nodes. Mainframe Nodes are red and normally cost 1 Bandwidth to enter. Undernet Nodes are blue and normally cost 2 Bandwidth. Printed costs and card instructions take priority.

Mainframe is faster but often adds Exposure. Undernet is slower but often helps you cool.

ENTRY -> 14 TWO-NODE LAYERS -> ROOT -> RETURN TO ENTRY

CORE COMPONENTS

28 Network Nodes, 42 Exploits, 24 Exposure cards, 5 Payload cards, Edge, Root, 5 Runner markers, 70 route markers in five player colors, and 2 six-sided dice.

2. SETUP

1. Put Edge at one end of the table and Root at the other.
2. Shuffle all 28 Network Nodes together. Deal them face up from Edge toward Root: Layer 1 top, Layer 1 bottom, then continue through Layer 14.
3. In a 2-player game, remove 8 Exploits at random without looking at them and return them to the box.
4. Shuffle the remaining Exploits. Deal 5 to each player. Put the deck nearby with room for a discard pile.
5. Put Exposure and Payload cards in separate face-up supplies.
6. Each player chooses a Runner color, puts their Runner on Edge, and takes the 14 matching route markers.
7. The player with the most questionable browsing history goes first. Turns proceed clockwise.

YOUR HAND

You have five hand slots shared by Exploits, Exposure, and a carried Payload. Exposure and Payload cards cannot be discarded to make room.

3. YOUR TURN

Complete these steps in order:

1 / MODIFY

Choose Run Exploits or Lay Low before drawing. You refill once through the chosen path and cannot switch after drawing.

2 / MOVE

Declare Safe or Sprint, roll for Bandwidth, optionally reroll one die, then move and choose where to stop. Leaving Root uses the special Root exit roll instead.

3 / MANIFEST

If you moved, apply blue cooling and your final Node's STOP effect. Reconcile your hand, check Exposure, then pass play.

LAY LOW

Reduce Exposure by up to 2. Discard every Exploit in your hand, keep a carried Payload, then draw until you have 5 total cards. Your turn ends without Move or Manifest.

Lay Low still counts as a turn for effect durations. LAG is used up, an unused Shadow Link benefit expires, and effects ending at the start of your turn end before Modify.

EXPOSURE TAKES HAND SPACE. SOMETIMES LOSING A TURN RESTORES YOUR OPTIONS.

4. RUN EXPLOITS

At the start of Modify, draw Exploits until you have 5 total cards. Exposure and a carried Payload count toward five.

Play any number of legal Exploits, one at a time. Follow each card's timing, target, cost, and play limits. A blocked play still counts toward its play limit. Playing cards does not refill your hand.

Pressure Exploits target a player ahead of you. A Payload carrier is ahead of every infiltrating Runner. When players share an objective, the Runner farther toward that objective is ahead. Players in the same position are tied. You cannot play Pressure if you are the sole leader.

BLOCKING

After you play an Exploit, other players may block in clockwise order starting to your left. A blocker discards 2 Exploits. Any player may block regardless of location or target.

Once someone blocks, only you and that blocker continue. You may counter by discarding 2 Exploits; the blocker may counter again. Alternate until one of you stops. If you stop, the Exploit is blocked. If the blocker stops, it resolves.

Discard resolved, blocked, and counter cards. Keep ongoing-effect cards face up outside the hand until they expire, then discard them. If the deck empties, shuffle the discard pile.

5. MOVE

While infiltrating, your objective is Root. With a Payload, your objective is Edge. You may move forward, backward, diagonally, or sideways to the other Node in your layer.

Choose a speed:

- **SAFE:** roll 1 die; no cost.
- **SPRINT:** roll 2 dice and immediately gain 2 Exposure.

You cannot Sprint at 4 or more Exposure, while LAG prevents it, or when a Root exit roll prevents it next turn.

The total rolled is your Bandwidth. Pay the entry cost of every Node entered: normally 1 for red and 2 for blue. From Edge, enter either Layer 1 Node. From Root, enter either Layer 14 Node. Some cards alter costs or movement.

You cannot enter the same Node twice in one turn. If you can afford a legal Node, you must enter at least one before stopping. After moving once, you may stop with Bandwidth left.

REROLL

After rolling but before moving, you may discard 2 Exploits to reroll one die. Replace that die's result. During a Sprint, choose only one die. You may reroll once per turn. It is not an Exploit play, cannot be blocked, and cannot be used on the Root exit roll.

6. ROUTE MARKERS

The first time you enter a layer, place one route marker beside the Node you did not enter: above the top Node or below the bottom Node. That marker means you still owe that Node.

Whenever you enter a Node beside one of your markers, take the marker back. You have now entered both Nodes in that layer.

Every Node entry counts, including a free entry such as BACKDOOR's move. Route markers belong to board positions, not Node cards. They do not move if an Exploit rearranges the network.

You may collect route markers in any order. You do not have to continue toward your objective every turn.

NODE TIMING

Resolve EXIT when leaving a Node, before the next Node's ENTER. Resolve ENTER immediately when entering. Resolve only the final Node's STOP during Manifest.

DEAD DROPS

Dead Drops are pass-through Nodes. Enter one only when you can immediately continue to another legal Node, Root, or Edge. A card effect that explicitly allows you to stop there overrides this rule.

MARK THE OPPOSITE NODE. RETURN THE MARKER WHEN YOU ENTER IT.

7. MANIFEST + EXPOSURE

When movement ends, complete Manifest in order.

1 / COOL

Only if you entered at least one Node: when you stop on a blue Node, reduce Exposure by 1 for every 2 unused Bandwidth.

2 / STOP

Only if you entered at least one Node: resolve the STOP instruction on the Node where you ended movement.

3 / RECONCILE

If you hold more than five cards, discard Exploits until you have five or no Exploits remain. Never discard Exposure or Payload. Do not refill during Manifest.

4 / CHECK EXPOSURE

At 0-4 Exposure, pass play. At 5 or more, resolve a crash.

Exposure does not crash you immediately when gained. Take every Exposure card, even above five, and finish the turn through Manifest. Exposure cannot be played, blocked with, voluntarily discarded, or reduced below zero. If the supply runs out, use tokens or a written tally; every point still occupies a hand slot.

COOL FIRST. RESOLVE STOP. RECONCILE THE HAND. THEN CHECK FOR A CRASH.

8. CRASH PROTOCOL

If you still have 5 or more Exposure at the end of Manifest, crash.

First wipe your hand: discard every Exploit and return every Exposure card. Keep route markers where they are. Then resolve the one result that applies.

EXFILTRATING WITH PAYLOAD

Return directly to Root and keep the Payload.

AT ROOT WITH PAYLOAD

Return the Payload to its supply. You are infiltrating again. Retreat through Layers 14, 13, and 12, then continue toward Edge to the first layer with a legal blue Node.

INFILTRATING WITHOUT PAYLOAD

Retreat 3 layers toward Edge. If you reach Edge, enter it. Otherwise continue toward Edge to the first layer with a legal blue Node.

Dead Drop cannot be a checkpoint. If both Nodes qualify, choose either. If no legal blue Node remains before Edge, enter Edge.

Crash movement ignores Node effects and does not place or return route markers. Your turn ends. Refill at the start of your next Modify.

9. ROOT + PAYLOAD

ENTER ROOT

While infiltrating from Layer 14, keep at least 1 Bandwidth. Spend it to enter Root. Cancel any Bandwidth left, end movement, and take one Payload face up into your hand.

The Payload occupies one of your five slots and cannot be discarded. You are now exfiltrating. Complete Manifest normally; Root has no STOP effect. A Dead Drop entry still requires enough Bandwidth to enter the Dead Drop and then spend 1 for Root.

LEAVE ROOT NEXT TURN

Take Modify normally. After Modify, roll 1 die for Bandwidth instead of choosing Safe or Sprint.

Compare the result with your current Exposure. If the roll is lower, gain 1 Exposure and you cannot Sprint on your next turn. Add any OVERCLOCK Bandwidth after this comparison.

Enter either Layer 14 Node at its normal cost. If neither is affordable, stay at Root and complete Manifest without cooling or STOP. The Root exit die cannot be rerolled.

WIN

While carrying the Payload, reach Layer 1 with no route markers left on the network and at least 2 Bandwidth remaining. Spend 2 Bandwidth to enter Edge, transmit the Payload, and win immediately.

10. FIELD REFERENCE

CARD TEXT WINS

Node and Exploit instructions can change normal rules. Follow the card when it is more specific. Printed Node costs override normal red and blue costs.

EFFECT ORDER

EXIT the old Node, pay and ENTER the new Node, continue moving, then COOL and STOP only at your final Node. Route markers update whenever you enter a Node unless crash movement says otherwise.

REMEMBER

- Plan before rolling. Check entry costs, STOP effects, and marked Nodes.
- Blue turns leftover Bandwidth into cooling. Stopping early can be safer.
- A reroll costs two Exploits, leaving fewer cards for blocking.
- Pressure targets the race leader, not necessarily the nearest player.
- Reaching Root is the turn. Winning still requires clearing every route marker and returning to Edge.

FULL RULES + SEARCH

The complete formatted rules, detailed card-reading references, and future clarifications live at:

playthearchitect.com/rules/

The printed booklet is self-contained for normal play. Use the site for fast search and unusual interactions.

QUICK SIGNAL

KEEP THIS SIDE FACE UP DURING YOUR FIRST GAME.

TURN

MODIFY -> MOVE -> MANIFEST

MOVE

SAFE 1 die / SPRINT 2 dice +2 Exposure

COST

RED 1 / BLUE 2 / ROW CHANGE has no extra cost

COOL

On blue, every 2 unused Bandwidth returns 1 Exposure

CRASH

5+ Exposure after Manifest

WIN

Payload + no route markers + Layer 1 + spend 2 to enter Edge



SCAN FOR FULL RULES + SEARCH

playthearchitect.com/rules/

ONLINE RULES

Search every rule, jump by section, and download this field manual.

RULES v3.5 / PLAYTEST EDITION

THE ARCHITECT