

Stonekin 2.0



Introduction

Formed from the earth as the servants of the Giants, the living stones referred to as the Stonekin are a perfect reflection of their name and origin. From their aesthetic design to their gameplay design, the Stonekin appear and play as a faction as enduring and unmovable as the mountains. Stonekin are a superb example of a hybrid faction, harmoniously combining major elements from Nature and Frost into a new and unique unity. The faction passive, Adamant Skin and Adamant Alloy, for units and buildings respectfully, is a prime example of this fusion. The passive reflects the durability of stone by reducing all damage taken by 15%. Damage reduction is a key Frost trait which harmonizes perfectly with Nature's healing. Units and buildings with built-in damage reduction naturally benefit more from healing abilities, with each life point restored being worth more overall. This synergy between Frost and Nature permeates the whole of Stonekin.

In fact, Stonekin might be too perfect a fusion of its parent factions. With the singular exception of Matter Mastery, it is hard to find another mechanic in the faction which is uniquely Stonekin. An over prevalence of knock back effects characterize Stonekin T2 units and buildings, but it is difficult to call this a faction trait, especially when it is almost non-existent in T3 and T4. Large freeze interactions and synergizes are an inheritance of Frost while Stonekin's healing mechanics, even if fairly interesting mechanically such as Grinder's self-healing, share major corollaries in Nature. Even Earthkeeper's damage absorption is a shared trait between Nature (Revenge) and Frost (Dreadnought). This leaves Stonekin with little it can call its own.

Archetype:

- Catchphrase: Unmovable as the Mountains
- Damage through Units
- Survivability over Destruction
- Defense over Attack



Part 1: Analysis

Until our recent balance changes to Bandits, Stonekin was likely the only hybrid faction in the game whose players mostly or exclusively use Stonekin units as soon as they become available. With the odd exception of a Swamp Drake or a Stormsinger, the parent factions of Stonekin have little to offer the faction in terms of units. Most desirable Nature and Frost units either have too high of orb restrictions or directly compete with existing Stonekin units. While Frost units are well known to be stat sticks, Nature units are often not much better. In both cases, individual unit design is typically rather simple and unit abilities are straightforward, while complexity comes from spells and faction specific synergies. Stonekin continues the trend of simple to use units with straightforward play patterns with a high proclivity towards on-hit effects. True to their name, Stonekin tend to have higher life point values with correspondingly lower damage outputs. Even units which seem fairly balanced in terms of attack and defense are beefier due to Stonekin's innate damage reduction. This damage reduction, combined with strong passive effects, make up for Stonekin's seemingly low stat efficiencies.

Similar to Frost and Nature, Stonekin is inundated with crowd control effects. In T2, this is primarily in the form of knock back, but in higher tiers it strongly skews towards freeze effects with the occasional paralysis interaction. Unlike its Frost hybrid counterpart in Lost Souls, Stonekin possesses a large number of cards that interact with or apply freeze. A substantial portion of Stonekin's power budget is spent on sustain, both in terms of enemy disables and various forms of self-preservation. This leaves little in terms of damage, a weakness keenly felt by anyone wanting to complete maps quickly. At the same time, the plethora of sustain options makes Stonekin an ideal faction for new players and those who want to play with a safety net. While a Stonekin deck might not be quick, it is more than often reliable, regardless of the person piloting it.

One of the identities that lies latent in Stonekin though largely unutilized is building interactions. As the children of earth with an inherent connection to the building faction Frost, it stands to reason that Stonekin ought to be the "masters of stone" as Jorne has a habit of calling himself. Hints of this identity can be seen in cards like Matter Mastery, which can take over enemy buildings, as well as in Earthen Gift, which buffs all friendly buildings globally. Unfortunately, it stops there. It ought to be no surprise then that Earthen Gift, a card entirely dependent on buildings being useful to be viable itself, is one of the worst cards in the game.



Preferences & Tools

Preferences:

- **Outlast:** Stonekin win battles by slowly and steadily grinding enemies into dust while they try in vain to produce blood from a stone.
- **In Control:** Armed with an arsenal of knock back cards and with access to the most amounts of crowd control in the game, Stonekin rarely let their enemies move except when forced to by crowd control's built-in diminishing returns.
- **Vitalizing:** Healing, shielding, and damage reduction abound, highlighting Stonekin's preference to keep its own units alive and in the fight.
- **Grounded:** Stonekin prefer to stay close to the earth, with only one flying unit to their name.
- **Stronger Together:** Buffs spells are group based, and many effects scale based on the number of friendly units nearby. Most effects get more mileage when they affect more units.
- **Fortified:** Stonekin prefer to defend a fixed position with good towers and a plethora of unit and spell effects which reward staying in one place.




Tools:

- **Adamant Skin:** All Stonekin units and towers have a passive which reduces incoming damage dealt by 15%. This ability synergizes well with healing spells, making every life point worth more.
- **Disabling Effects:** As the child of Frost and Nature, Stonekin has access to the largest variety of crowd control of any faction in the game.
- **Built-in Sustain:** Passive regenerative effects and supportive abilities are a common sight among the Giant's servants.
- **Building Focused:** Matter Mastery allows Stonekin the unique ability to mind control buildings, while Earthen Gift is a rare example of a global buff spell oriented towards buildings.
- **Freeze Synergies:** Deepgorge, Rageflame, and Stone Warrior have built-in freeze synergies, while Gemeye's piercing can ignore a frozen target's normal damage reduction.
- **Long Range:** Stonekin units tend to be ranged with cards like Stone Tempest, Gemeye, Razorshard, and Hammerfall having higher than average fighting ranges.
- **Passive Effects:** Stonekin entities tend to have passive effects and auras. Most active effects are actually mode-changes, which often function like activatable passives.



Throughout the Tiers



T2

Card	Role
	Matter Mastery grants Stonekin the unit ability to take over enemy buildings and make them its own.
	Crystal Fiend plays an important role as a summon-and-forget supporter whose flying property helps keep it out of danger.
	Earthkeeper is able to intercept incoming damage and spread it among all friendly Stonekin, allowing Stonekin's sustain tools time to react.

T2 Stonekin is one of the more cohesive and complete T2s of any faction in the game. Stonekin provides multiple ways to approach a map, whether that be through mostly Stonekin cards or a heavier reliance on Frost and Nature cards with Stonekin support. Tied with Bandits for the most hybrid units in T2, all of Stonekin's T2 cards have use cases in PvE with the possible exception of Stone Shards. Matter Mastery gives Stonekin a unique way to flip the enemy's most dangerous threats into powerful and enduring allies.


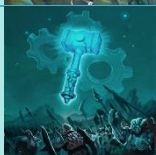

Plentiful sustain options and a heavy dose of knockback makes Stonekin's T2 strong and enduring. As a general rule, the faction lacks damage spells and therefore relies on units to be its damage dealers. Unfortunately, Stonekin cards have some of the lowest damage to power cost ratios in the game. Combined these traits make the faction forgiving to play but slow in execution.

T3

Card	Role
	Stone Warrior is a solid T3 XL-counter whose high-damage Shattered Lance ability acts as one of Stonekin's few burst damage options.
	Rageflame's auto-attack flamethrower is able to freeze large groups of enemies, giving Stone Warrior easy target selection.

Stonekin's T3 continues the trend of strong sustain options. Hammerfall helps fortify a location while protecting allied units, and Stone Shell can provide strong damage reduction anywhere on the map. The proclivity towards built-in effects remains with Rageflame, Stone Warrior, and Deepfang all possessing notable passives. Frost Shard and Thunderstorm finally give Stonekin some damage spells, but the majority of the faction's damage continues to occur through units.

T4

Card	Role
	Grinder is one of the most durable units in the game. Its taunt ability allows it to focus enemy attention onto itself.
	A global spell which buffs buildings, Earthen Gift shines in defensive scenarios. Upcoming changes to allow one affinity to buff elementals will give Stonekin access to one of the strongest group buffs in the game.
	Gemeye is a ranged unit with 50m range whose attack creates a poison effect in an area capable of either damaging or paralyzing.

Contrary to its T2, Stonekin's T4 is easily its least complete tier, and it is among the least cohesive factions in the game. Sustain and passive effects persist, but the existing options do not synergize together. Earthen Gift, its global support spell, has no viable targets to buff and heal. Grinder relies on allies to be nearby to heal, but Gemeye has a long range of 50m. Even within the cards themselves this disunity is clear to see; Grinder has 100% siege damage making it strong against buildings, but its active ability taunts an enemy, suggesting the card is supposed to be a duelist.

Structural Weaknesses

- **Low Damage:** Stonekin units and buildings have some of the lowest damage to power cost ratios in the game. This weakness is meant to be compensated for by the faction's innate sustain and crowd control abilities.
- **No Damage Spells:** Stonekin does not possess a single damage spell, and even active abilities with damage are rare. This makes it dependent on splash cards from Nature and Frost such as Thunderstorm, Noxious Cloud, Frost Shard, and Ice Tornado to make up for the faction's own deficiency.



- **Poor Synergy in Higher Tiers:** For a faction designed to be a group of collectivized stone servants, Stonekin cards feel oddly atomized. Outside rare exceptions like Earthkeeper's Backup ability and Rageflame's synergy with Stone Warrior's Shatter Lance, the player is left wondering how any of these units are supposed to play together. Effects do not specifically benefit other Stonekin or build in strength from their presence, while cards ostensibly designed to work together, such as Grinder and Gemeye, possess an intrinsic anti-synergy.
- **Weak Group Damage Buffs:** Despite being a faction dependent on units for damage, Stonekin notably lacks group damage buffs. Beyond Frost's Home Soil and Nature's Wheel of Gifts, there is nothing else to use. This is one of the most glaring omissions in the faction which, if rectified, could go a long way in improving its viability.
- **Lack of Piercing:** Several Stonekin cards have built-in freeze effects, and the faction relies on Frost spells like Maelstrom and Frost Shard to lockdown units and buildings alike. Even so, Stonekin as a faction fails to provide the player with the ability to play around freeze's built-in 50% damage reduction, making Stonekin's already low damage output even lower.
- **Lacking Unique Mechanics:** Outside of the singular exception of Matter Mastery, Stonekin as a faction is little more than Frost or Nature spell effects placed as built-in effects on unit and buildings in an alternating fashion. One Stonekin card has a Nature passive, while the next has a Frost passive. This leads to a situation where Stonekin units, such as Rageflame or Stone Warrior, could easily be retextured and copy-and-pasted almost exactly into a parent faction, in this case Frost, without any thematic disruptions occurring.

Part 2: Envisioned Playstyles

A major issue for Stonekin is that even though Stonekin cards are viable in themselves, playing a Stonekin deck often amounts to little more than playing a fusion of Nature and Frost cards. Hybrid factions should fuse aspects of their parent factions, but they should also be more than the sum of their parts by bringing unique interactions and mechanics to the table. While T2 Stonekin does feel unique when compared to T2 Frost and T2 Nature, this distinction breaks down in the higher tiers.

Our goal is to improve existing synergies within the faction to make them viable archetypes, like Rageflame and Stone Warrior, while also emphasizing those aspects which are uniquely Stonekin through new cards and reworked abilities.

For Tier 3 and Tier 4, we envision two distinct playstyles, one revolving primarily around an **army-based** strategy while the other utilizes **buildings offensively** to create a new unique archetype. Both playstyles should embody the feeling of controlling a slowly progressing mountain in their own way.

We do not expect these to be mutually exclusionary paths, and it would be a failure of design to cause such an outcome. Instead, we expect overlap between the decks, but with some cards finding their place more in one style than in the other.



Tier 3

Stonekin Army Deck

The Nature and Frost factions in T3 provide access to powerful unit-based global buffs, strong regeneration spells, and multiple different forms of area-based damage reduction. These characteristics lay the groundwork for a playstyle centered around robust and enduring armies. After its recent buffs allowing it to target air units and enabling allies to bypass the damage reduction of its built-in freeze, **Rageflame** is poised to serve as the focal point of Stonekin's T3 army due to its existing synergies.

Stone Warrior's Shatter Lance ability provides a powerful area nuke against enemies Rageflame has frozen, and our previous balance changes have enabled it to also shatter buildings frozen by the fire affinity of Rageflame and Frost Shard. Shrine of Martyrs' freeze-based void return feels made for Rageflame, with the two in combination able to provide strong void manipulation without additional input from the player.

Deepfang provides an alternative, but not mutually exclusive, basis for a T3 Stonekin army. We will be reworking Deepfang in two significant ways. First, we will give Deepfang **the ability to spawn more Stonekin Critters by killing enemy buildings**, reshaping the destroyed remains into new followers. Second, we will be changing Deepfang's Union ability to function as a mobile version of Earthkeeper's Backup. Fitting to its name, **Union will now transfer some damage between allied Stonekin**, preventing Deepfang's Critters from being easy focused down on the first encounter. These changes should make Deepfang both stronger and more interactive, putting it on par with other ranged XL options in the same tier.



Teleporting Building Deck



A theme that has been harped on over and over again in this document is that Stonekin lacks unique mechanics. As we dug deep into the faction, we found two candidates for unique Stonekin-specific interactions. The first candidate was found in Earthkeeper's Backup ability, which functions as a weaker Unity. As already mentioned above, we intend to export this ability to Deepfang in a weaker but mobile form. The second candidate, and the one relevant for our purposes here, was building interactions.

Two of Stonekin's 3 faction spells, Matter Mastery and Earthen Gift, interact with buildings. This seems to presage a building-based identity for the faction, which would fit the lore perfectly, as there is no solid dividing line between Stonekin buildings and Stonekin units. In fact, you can see from the faces on Stonekin buildings which match Stonekin units that the buildings seem to be just as alive as the units. Unfortunately, this latent identity was never realized and because of it, Stonekin as a faction feels incomplete. We intend to rectify this situation.

As part of this new deck archetype, we intend to introduce a new T3 spell, tentatively named **Tectonic Shift**. Similar to the way Infernal Chain works, **Tectonic Shift will give Stonekin buildings and buildings captured via Matter Mastery the ability to burrow through the ground to appear at a new location** provided the player has ground presence nearby. Alongside this new card, we will also be reworking **Stone Launcher** into a normal tower, able to target both air and ground targets, to give players another Stonekin building to enable their hitherto unknown tower rush fantasies.

Tier 4

Grinder - Gemeye Deck



Grinder should be the ultimate T4 melee tank, and in some ways it is. Innate damage reduction and a strong passive heal means that players can usually just click attack-move on a camp and watch their Grinders reduce the enemy base to rubble. Still, there is something off about the unit itself and its place in Stonekin's T4. While we think that a faction's apex unit, like Frost's Dreadnought and Nature's Forest Elder, can have multiple identities, these identities should not conflict with each other or with its faction. While Grinder's abilities do fit Stonekin as a faction, they conflict with themselves and with the way the card is played in conjunction with its partner Gemeye.

Even more so after its recent damage buff, **Gemeye** functions as a long-range artillery unit. The shadow affinity has the ability to pierce through all forms of damage reduction with a damage value of over 6000. These qualities make it the natural damage dealer in a Stonekin army, able to snipe priority targets in the enemy backline, with Grinder as its tank and protector.

To this purpose, Grinder has a taunt ability and a built-in heal that scales based on the amount of nearby friendly life points, encouraging Stonekin players to keep their units close together. Yet, it also has siege. To make use of siege's increased damage to buildings, a player has to walk Grinder past defending enemy units while also leaving the Gemeyes behind to be attacked. The question then arises why a unit with an ability to provoke enemy units into dueling it does not deal increased damage to said enemies. We also must ask how a single-target taunt ability could ever be useful in T4, where you face hordes of enemies. Taken all together, it feels like the original designer of Grinder tried to create a jack-of-all-trades unit in a faction that needed a tank enforcer.

We think Grinder fits more as a tank enforcer than with its current conflicted identity. To achieve this new identity, we are making **Grinder's Provoke into an area of effect taunt**, enabling Grinder to redirect the wrath of all enemies in a 10m radius towards itself. To keep the affinities reasonably equal, we will be increasing the self-damage buff the fire affinity applies to itself when activating provoke, since the damage debuff of the shadow affinity will apply to all taunted enemies. Additionally, **we are considering removing Grinder's Siege ability and replacing it with a new ability which increases damage dealt to small, medium, and large creatures**. This would improve Grinder's ability to duel enemy units and would fit its place in lore as the Giant's chosen instrument in keeping those pesky mortals in-line.



In addition to these unit changes, we will be changing **Earthen Gift**. As noted previously, Stonekin lacks viable and strong options for buffing unit damage, and Earthen Gift is one of the worst cards in the game. We realized we could fix both problems at once by changing one of Earthen Gift's affinities to work on elemental units. The new nature affinity of Earthen Gift **will provide a +50% damage buff and restore 5% of max life points every second to every friendly elemental unit in the game**. This will give Stonekin an apex faction spell worthy of the children of earth.

Tower Rush Deck



Continuing in the vein of its T3 predecessor, the T4 tower rush deck will rely on the new **Tectonic Shift** spell to move towers around the battlefield. These offensively utilized towers will be able to benefit from the **fire affinity of Earthen Gift**, which will **provide a +50% damage buff and restore 10% of each building's max life points per second** to every friendly building in the game. On top of these changes and additions, we also want to add a **new T4 Stonekin unit, likely a retextured Moloch tentatively named Bedrock**, with two primary abilities. The first ability will buff friendly towers in a large radius around the unit. The second ability will spawn a Stone Launcher out of the remains of enemy buildings it destroys, steadily adding to the player's arsenal of usable towers.

Besides these more straightforward combinations, due to its access to Frost's building arsenal and Nature's Enlightenment, Stonekin will be able to use some more exotic tactics in this new tower rush deck. Frost's T3 shrine **Frontier Keep** is having its **power cost drastically reduced from 250p to 125p**. This should allow players to utilize the shrine's building-based freeze effect, with buildings in the center of enemy camps taken over via Matterly Mastery or spawned in by Bedrock or Tectonic Shift. **Kobold Inc.**, which can be accessed via Enlightenment, will gain a global Construction Hut effect, **reducing building costs by 25% globally while active**. Another interesting option will be Fire's **Infernal Machine**, also accessible via Enlightenment, which will be able to melt down enemies just by having a sufficient mass of player buildings nearby. We are excited about these and other card combinations that players will discover to enable this new, uniquely Stonekin playstyle.



Past & Upcoming Changes Highlights

The changes below are an excerpt from all the changes which we plan to release in order to make Stonekin a more compelling choice and move closer to realizing their theme and vision. We want to highlight some of these changes and provide our reasoning for these changes.

Card	Suggestion
 <p>Grinder</p> <p>260</p> <p>1 Elemental Soldier</p> <p>Tainted Provoke</p> <p>Harmony</p> <p>Adamant Skin</p> <p>Siege</p> <p>5000 4500</p>	<p>Grinder Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provoke (both affinities): Now taunts all enemy units in a 10m radius. • Infused Provoke: Increased damage buff from 50% to 75% • Giant's Right Hand: Deals 75% more damage to all small, medium, and large units. <p>Grinder is a strong self-sufficient tank able to protect allies from the attacks of enemies which wash harmlessly over Grinder's stony exterior.</p>
 <p>Gemeye</p> <p>270</p> <p>1 Elemental Corruptor</p> <p>Gifted Spit</p> <p>Adamant Skin</p> <p>2250 4500</p>	<p>Gemeye Changes (already released):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gifted Spit: Increased total targets and time paralyzed. • Tainted Spit: All damage dealt by the unit now pierces. • Attack Increase: Increased damage over 20 seconds by 500. <p>Gemeye's damage increase and newfound universal pierce will synergize well with Frost spells like Maelstrom and any leftover Rageflames the player may have. The buffs to the nature affinity make it an option for other decks looking for an easy-to-handle control unit.</p>
 <p>Earthen Gift</p> <p>160</p> <p>1 Enchantment</p> <p>Infused Earth</p>	<p>Earthen Gift Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More Charges: 4 to 8 • Damage Buff Increase: 30% to 50% increased damage • New Affinities: Infused(r) buffs allied buildings, Gifted(g) buffs allied elementals. <p>Earthen Gift is now the ultimate Stonekin spell it was always meant to be, as each affinity enables its own specific deck archetype.</p> <p>The global nature of the effect will allow players to support attacking or defending multiple locations simultaneously, all with one spell.</p>
 <p>Deepfang</p> <p>250</p> <p>1 Elemental Dominator</p> <p>Icefire</p> <p>Infused Union</p> <p>Stonekin Critter</p> <p>Adamant Skin</p> <p>3000 2370</p>	<p>Deepfang Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union Rework: Now transfers damage between allied Stonekin • Stonekin Critter Spawns: New adherents can spawn out of the remains of enemy buildings attacked by Deepfang. • Stat Increase (already released): Both Deepfang and its Critters will receive general stat increases to both damage and life points. <p>These changes will make Deepfang and its Stonekin Critters finally feel like they are meant to exist together.</p>



Rageflame Changes (already released):

- **New Passive:** Both affinities now naturally pierce freeze's damage reduction.
- **New Frost affinity:** Enemies frozen by Rageflame receive normal damage from all sources.
- **Can now target air units.**

Rageflame synergizes well with Stone Warrior and Shrine of Martyrs due to its passive freeze effect. These changes make the synergy even stronger.

Earthkeeper Changes (already released):

- **Backup Duration:** 30s to infinite
- **Backup Cost:** 0p to 25p
- **Backup Health Sharing (future change):** Now includes Stonekin buildings.

Earthkeeper is able to fortify an area and lock it down. With good positioning, all damage will filter through the targeted ally, to be distributed through all Stonekin and then healed by regeneration effects like Crystal Fiend and Healing Well.

Matter Mastery Changes:

- **Increased Takeover ability:** The nature affinity can now take over T3 buildings with a power cost up to 140p.
- **Stonekin Assimilation:** Taken over buildings now count as Stonekin buildings for the sake of Tectonic Shift and Bedrock.

Matter Mastery is one of Stonekin's signature spells and fundamentally changes several campaign maps. As we fix the power and orb costs of buildings, we are buffing up Matter Mastery to ensure it is able to continue performing as strongly as it does currently.

Conclusion

We hope you have enjoyed this dive into the Stonekin faction and are excited about the many changes the children of earth will soon be receiving. It is our goal with documents such as these to give our players a glimpse into how we think about factions and where we are planning to take the game. We also hope that our deep dives give you a greater appreciation for how the various factions play and give you that final boost you might need to branch out of your comfort zone and try something new.

