

Dominant Species



The Card Game

Game Design by **Chad Jensen**

15,000 B.C. — A great ice age is ending. Another titanic struggle for global supremacy has unwittingly commenced between the animal species.

DOMINANT SPECIES: THE CARD GAME is a fast-playing game that abstractly recreates a tiny portion of ancient history: the ponderous rescinding of an ice age and what that entails for the living creatures trying to adapt to the slowly-changing earth.

Players will use six major animal classes – mammal, reptile, bird, amphibian, arachnid and insect – to further their goals in various terrain. Through wily card play, players will strive to become dominant at as many different terrestrial and sea biomes as possible in order to claim valuable victory points: It is survival of the fittest.

All of this leads to the end game – the final descent of the ice age – where the player having accumulated the most victory points wins the game.

But somebody better become dominant quickly, because it's getting mighty warm...



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Overview

DOMINANT SPECIES: THE CARD GAME (“DS:TCG”) is played in ten rounds of competition, each round occurring at a different **biome** card. The player who starts a competition must choose to either play one **action** card or pass. Action cards consist of **animals** played to the table as well as **events**. Play proceeds clockwise around the table in like fashion until every player has passed consecutively or when any one player has passed with an empty hand. At that point the current biome card is scored, with victorious players recording their gains on the **Victory Point Track**. The dominant player or players at that biome will also advance one space on the **Survival Track**. The current biome card is then put back in the box, all played action cards discarded from play, and the next biome card brought into play. Finally, each player draws new action cards, the pawn is moved one space along the **Time Track**, and a new competition round begins. Play proceeds from biome to biome in like fashion until the game ends and a winner is determined.

Prepare for Play

Place the track display off to the side where all players can see it. Place the black pawn on the “1” space of the Time Track. Have each player choose one of the six player colors: place a cube of that color in front of the player (which serves as an in-game reminder of what color he is playing), the other cube on the “0” space of the Victory Point Track, and the disc on the “0” space of the Survival Track. *On the track display, the pawn keeps track of the current round; the cubes mark a player’s accumulated victory points throughout the game; and the discs mark a player’s current Survival level.*

Place the “Sea” biome card face down to the side of the play area. Shuffle the eleven remaining biome cards together face down and randomly remove two of them, placing them back in the box (their identity should be kept secret from all players). Place the nine remaining biomes face down atop the Sea to form a ten-card draw pile. Draw the top card and place it face up in the center of the table—this biome will host the competition for the first round of play. Finally, flip the top card of the biome deck face up. *This allows players to plan ahead for the following round’s competition.*

Shuffle together all cards of the Action Deck and place them face down off to the side to form a draw pile. Deal seven cards to each player to form their starting hands. Cards in hand should be kept secret from opponents throughout the game. *During play, a discard pile will be formed next to the draw pile.*

Using any method desired, randomly choose a starting player. Give that player the white pawn as a reminder of this status. *The starting player will take the first turn in the first round of competition. The player seated to his left will become the starting player for the second round of competition; the player to their left will start the third round; and so on around the table until the tenth and final round.*

You are ready to play!

Objective

The game ends after the tenth “Sea” biome card has been scored. Players then gain or lose VPs based on their final position on the Survival Track, after which the player with the highest victory point total is declared the winner.

Sequence of Play

In each round, the current starting player takes a turn then each player in clockwise order around the table takes a turn until the round ends and the biome is scored. Each player on his turn must perform one of the following two actions:

- play one Action card from his hand; *or*
- pass.

A player who passes is not out of the current competition – previously played cards remain in play – though he must continue to choose “pass” on each of his turns for the remainder of the current round.

Play proceeds indefinitely around the table, ending immediately when:

- all players have passed; *or*
- any one player passes and that player has exactly zero cards in hand.

At that point the current biome is scored then replaced, new Action cards are drawn, the Time pawn advanced, the starting player pawn passed, and the next round begins.

The Biome Deck

The Biome deck will consist of ten of the twelve biome cards included with the game (two having been randomly removed during setup). The Sea is always the tenth and last biome, the other nine occurring in random order throughout the first nine rounds of play. The current round’s biome is always face up in the center of the table, with the next round’s biome card (if any) face up atop the draw pile. All biomes have two or more sets of elements. All biomes except the Sea will have one bonus as well as one penalty applied to two different animal classes.

*Example:
The Jungle biome has
three grub elements,
two seed elements
and one water element.*



*Each arachnid played
to this biome gets +1
food chain value.*

*Each reptile played
here suffers -1 food
chain value.*

The Action Deck

The Action deck consists of two types of cards: events and animals.

Events – such as Extinction shown at right – are generally self-explanatory (*but see the card clarifications on page 10*). Some are “one-time” events that are played, their effects executed, then immediately discarded. Other events are “ongoing.” Ongoing events have either: (1) a delayed effect; or (2) a persistent effect that is active throughout the round. Ongoing events are played to the table and are usually only discarded at the end of the round. *See page 7 for details.*



Each animal card (example below) is one of the six animal classes – mammal, reptile, bird, amphibian, arachnid or insect – as indicated by the illustration at the top and bottom of each card **[A]**. Animals are played to the table and contribute “food chain” points **[B]** for that player towards winning the Dominance VPs for the current biome (*explained on page 8*). Animal cards also have one or more element icons underneath their food chain value **[C]** which contribute toward the current biome’s matching element VPs, if any (*also on page 8*). Some animal cards also have a suppression icon underneath their elements **[D]** which indicates the ability of that card to suppress an animal of the indicated class when it enters play (*see page 6*). Animals enter play “healthy”—that is, with their black food chain number facing towards the biome in the center of the table. If a healthy animal later becomes suppressed, it is rotated 180 degrees so that its red “endangered” food chain value **[E]** – and correspondingly fewer element icons **[F]** – faces the center of the table. An endangered animal that becomes suppressed is discarded from play.

The animal card at right is a bird card.

It is worth 5 food chain points while healthy, 3 if it becomes endangered.

It is worth 2 sun elements while healthy, 1 if endangered.

When it enters play, it must suppress any one reptile card in play.



Playing Action Cards

During his turn, if a player doesn't "pass" he must play exactly one card from his hand. He may freely choose any card in hand to play, be it an animal or an event.

Playing Animals

When an animal card is played, it is placed in front of that player with its healthy (black) food chain value facing towards the biome in the center of the table. Each subsequent animal played by the same player should overlay previous animals but offset down and to the right. *In this way the card's current food chain value, element icons, Suppression icon and animal class are clearly visible to all players, like this:*



This player's current food chain value is 10 (3+5+2). He is contributing a total of 4 meat and 2 sun elements towards scoring this biome's meat and sun points (if any). The insect and bird are both healthy; the mammal has previously been suppressed and is now rotated to its endangered side.

All non-Sea biomes have along their right side two animal icons: the top icon indicates which of the six animal classes gains a +1 food chain bonus to each of its cards when in play at that biome; the bottom icon indicates which of the six animal classes suffers a -1 food chain penalty to each of its cards when in play at that biome.

If competing at the Mountain biome, the player above would have his total food chain value increased by 1 (to 11) due to the presence of the mammal (being healthy or endangered is irrelevant).

Each amphibian in play this round would be penalized -1 food chain point.



Suppressing Animals

Whenever an animal card is played and that animal has one of the six suppression icons underneath its elements, that player must immediately choose any one matching animal in play and suppress it. If there are no animals of that class in play at the time the card is laid, the suppression has no effect (*it will not trigger the next time an animal of that class enters play, for example*).

Some events can also cause one or more animals to become suppressed.

When a healthy animal becomes suppressed, rotate it 180 degrees so that its **red** food chain value faces toward the current biome: such an animal is no longer considered healthy and is now “endangered”—with a correspondingly smaller food chain value and fewer elements.

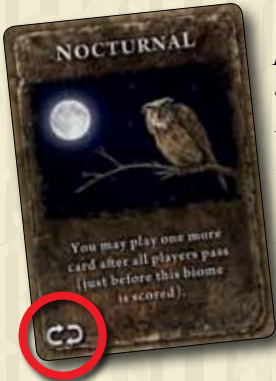


When an endangered animal becomes suppressed, it goes extinct: remove it from play, placing it in the discard pile.



Playing Events

ONGOING EVENTS—Events with the double-arrow icon (like **Nocturnal**, below) are termed “ongoing” Events. When an ongoing event is played, read it aloud, then place the card on the table in front of that player. The card’s text will inform you as to whether it has a continuous effect from that point forward, or if it has a delayed effect that will happen at a later point in the round.



Example: when Nocturnal is played, nothing happens at first. Only when all players have passed (or one player passes with an empty hand) does the card’s effect trigger, allowing the owner to play one final card from his hand before scoring occurs.

Example: when Annelids is played, each of that player’s animals in play (both healthy and endangered) immediately gain +1 food chain value. Since Annelids is an ongoing effect, animals played later the same round by that player will also gain the benefit.



ONE-TIME EVENTS—Events with the single-arrow icon (like **Extinction**, below) are termed “one-time” Events. When a one-time event is played, read it aloud, resolve that card’s effect(s), then place it in the discard pile.

If an event has more than one effect, perform those effects in the order they are written. If not all of an event’s effects can be fully executed given the current game situation, perform as much as you can and ignore the rest.

Example: when Extinction is played, it first suppresses all endangered animals. (You would ignore this first sentence if there were no endangered animals in play.) Next, the event suppresses all animals in play with elements that don’t match what is on the current biome. (Nothing would happen if they all matched an element on the biome.) If both sections were irrelevant, you would simply discard the card with no effect.



Scoring the Round

Once (a) every player passes *or* (b) any one player passes with exactly zero cards remaining in hand, card play for the current round ends and the scoring of the biome begins. Scoring consists of two parts:

- score dominance points based on players' food chain totals; *and*
- score element points based on players' matching elements.

Food Chain Scoring

DOMINANCE—First, the player or players with the highest sum total food chain value amongst their animals in play each score X victory points, where X is the current round (1 through 10, as marked by the position of the pawn on the Time Track).

The first biome card is always worth 1 VP to whomever has the most food chain points at the end of the first round. In case of a tie, all tied player receive 1 VP. The last (Sea) biome is always worth 10 VPs to each dominant player.

SURVIVAL—Then, each player that scored dominance points for the current biome moves their colored disk one space forward on the Survival Track.

Element Scoring

For each set of element icons (grass, grub, meat, seed, sun or water) present on the current biome, the player or players with the highest sum total of that element amongst their animals in play each score X victory points, where X is the number of those icons shown on the biome.

Scoring Example: It is the sixth round and three players are competing for the Mountain. Bob has 10 total food chain points, Kris 11 (with +1 for the mammal) and Alex 12 (also +1). Alex has the greatest total and so is awarded 6 victory points and a bump up the Survival Track.



Bob



Alex



Kris

Kris' animals have the most meat elements so she scores 3 victory points (there are 3 meat icons on the Mountain). All three players tie for most sun elements so all three score 2 victory points. Nobody has any seed in play so nobody scores that 1 victory point. Bob's water icon is irrelevant.

Ending the Round

ROUNDS 1-9

After scoring is completed for each of rounds 1 through 9, players prepare the play area for the next round as follows:

- place the current biome back in the box, out of play; *then*
- place the top (face up) card of the biome deck in the center of the table—this will be the biome players compete for next; *then*
- turn the top card of the biome deck (if any) face up; *then*
- place all animals and ongoing events currently in play into the discard pile; *then*
- if it is the end of the 3rd or 9th rounds (only), shuffle the discard pile back into the Action draw pile; *then*
- each player draws 2 new Action cards off the top of the draw pile; *then*
- advance the black pawn one space forward on the Time Track, indicating the new round. If this move is from space 9 to space 10 (competition for the Sea biome), each player draws X additional Action cards, where X is that player's position on the Survival Track; *then*
- the player in possession of the white pawn passes it to the player on his left—that player becomes the new starting player and begins play for the new round.

ROUND 10

After scoring is completed for round 10, the game ends.

Ending the Game

After ten rounds of play, the game ends. But before a winner is determined, final scoring occurs as follows:

- The player or players occupying the highest-numbered space of the Survival Track each score 5 bonus victory points.
- The player or players occupying the lowest-numbered space of the Survival Track each lose 5 victory points.

The winner of the game is then the player with the highest victory point total. In case of a tie, the tied player highest on the Survival Track is the winner. If this is also tied, the tied player with the most Action cards remaining in hand is the winner. In the unlikely event this is also a tie, the victory is shared.

Event Card Clarifications

ANNELIDS — It makes no difference if the animals are healthy or endangered.

AUTOTROPHS — For example, in the illustration on page 8, if Bob had played Autotrophs he would have 2 water and 4 sun (instead of 1 and 2, respectively) come scoring time.

BIODIVERSITY — It doesn't matter if the animals are healthy or endangered.

CATASTROPHE — All animals, including your own (if any).

DETRITIVORE — Basically, instead of the suppressed animal being put into the discard pile as normal, the animal is put into your hand and this event is put into the discard pile. It doesn't have to be one of your animals. If multiple endangered animals are suppressed simultaneously (via Catastrophe, for example) you choose which one to put in your hand.

DOMINATION — They choose what to discard, not you. This has no effect on a player with no cards in hand.

EVOLUTION — It doesn't have to be one of your animals.

EXTINCTION — The first ability suppresses all endangered animals, including your own (if any). Note that the second ability won't have any effect at the Sea biome.

HIBERNATION — It doesn't have to be one of your animals.

IMMIGRANTS — Note that animals entering play endangered will not trigger their suppression effect (since these are only shown on an animal's healthy side). This event does not retroactively affect animals already in play.

INSTINCT — For example, if you have 3 cards left in hand after playing this event, you would draw $3+1=4$ new cards.

METAMORPHOSE — This includes your opponents' endangered animals of the chosen class, not just your own.

NICHE HABITATS — Pass the cards face down. This is done simultaneously: you cannot look at your new card before choosing which you will give away. Players with empty hands when Niche Habitats is played will pass zero cards (but will likely gain one).

NOCTURNAL — You don't have to play a final card: Nocturnal's ability is optional. The extra card play occurs immediately after the last player passes (or when any player passes with an empty hand; or when Solar Flare is played) but before any scoring for the current round begins.

OMNIVORE — A healthy animal that later becomes endangered loses this bonus, and vice versa.

REGRESSION — All animals of the chosen class, including your own (if any).

SOLAR FLARE — When Solar Flare is played, if any player has Nocturnal in play, they may now play their extra card; then proceed directly to scoring the biome.

WANDERLUST — Swapped animals maintain their current healthy/endangered state. You don't have to control either of the swapped animals.

Glossary

ACTION DECK—The deck of 120 animal and event cards the players compete with.

ANIMAL—An Action card with a food chain value, one or more element icons, and possibly a suppression icon. Each animal card belongs to one of the six animal classes.

ANIMAL CLASS—Amphibian, arachnid, bird, insect, mammal and reptile.



BIOME—Tundra, Mountain, Desert, Forest, Jungle, Savannah, Wetland and Sea. Ten of the twelve included in the game make up the biome draw deck for each session. One biome at a time is drawn for the players to compete over, with the next round's biome always face-up atop the draw deck. The Sea biome is always last.

ELEMENT—Grass, grub, meat, seed, sun and water. Elements abstractly represent the resources the various animals require to thrive. Elements icons appear on animal cards to indicate “need” and on biome cards to show “supply.”



ENDANGERED—An animal in play with its red food chain value facing the current biome. While it is endangered, ignore an animal's healthy stats.

EVENT—An Action card with no inherent food chain value, and with a body of text at the bottom. One-time events are discarded when played; ongoing events are played to the table as reminder of their persistent or delayed effect.

FOOD CHAIN—The large numbers in the upper left (black: healthy) and lower right (red: endangered) corners of all animal cards. A player's total food chain points go towards winning the current round's dominance points and climbing the Survival Track.

HEALTHY—An animal in play with its black food chain value facing the current biome. As a default, animals enter play from a player's hand healthy. While it is healthy, ignore an animal's endangered stats.



SUPPRESS—Suppressing a healthy animal causes it to become endangered. Suppressing an endangered animal causes it to be discarded from play. Suppression is always mandatory, even if it means suppressing one of your own animals.

VICTORY POINT (VP)—Collected during the game by each player, usually during end-of-round scoring though some events provide for victory point gain during a round. Highest VP total at the end of the game determines the winner.

COMPONENTS

this 12-page rulebook

one track display

12 biome cards

120 action cards — 99 animals and 21 events

6 wood disks in six player colors — used on the Survival Track

12 wood cubes in six player colors — used on the Victory Point Track and to show who is playing what color

2 wood pawns — white for the starting player and black for the Time Track

CREDITS

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