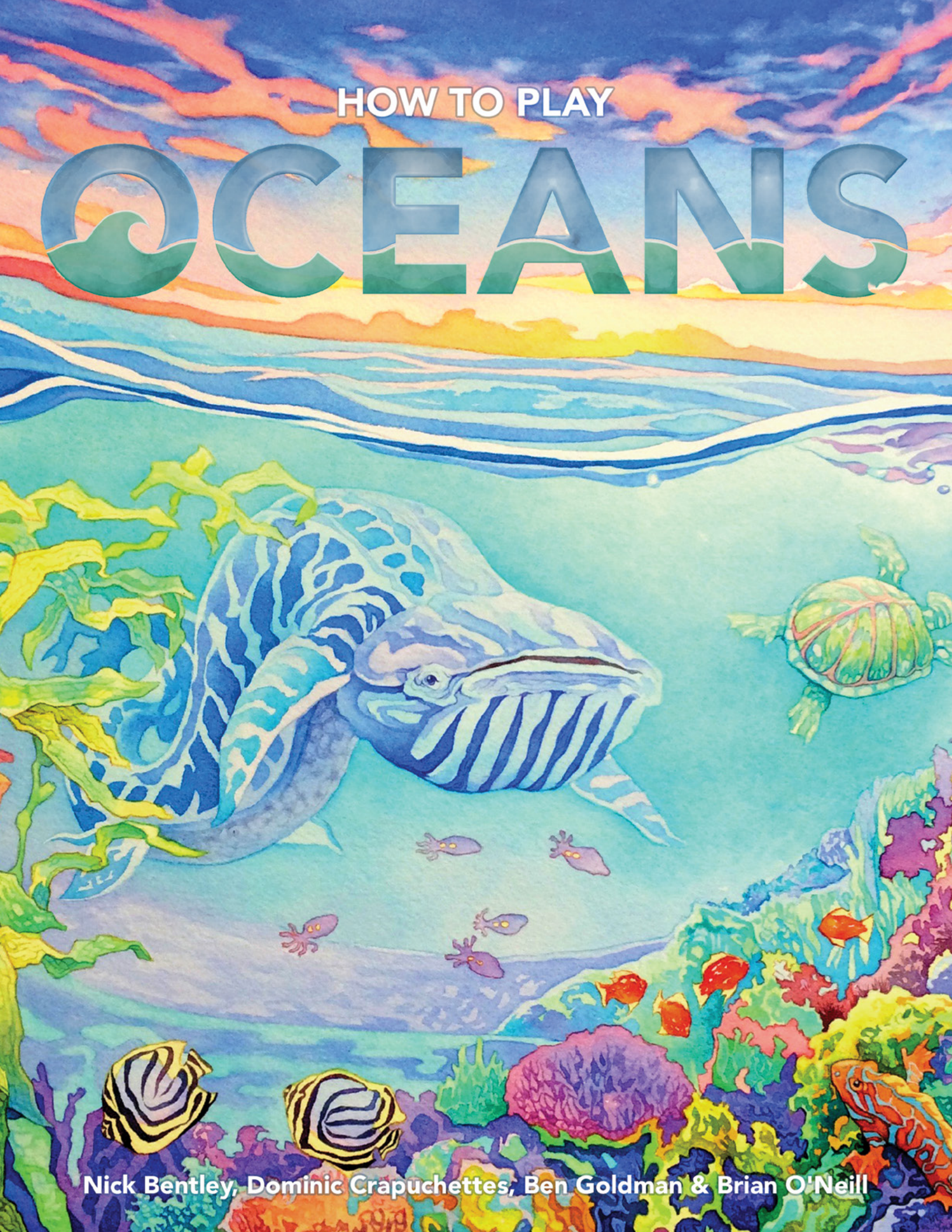
HOW TO PLAY

OCEANS



Nick Bentley, Dominic Crapuchettes, Ben Goldman & Brian O'Neill

Venture into the unknown!

Enter a vast, underwater cosmos: a mysterious interconnected world of tentacles, sharp teeth, and black ink, where your survival depends on your ability to adapt to the unexpected.

LEARN THE COMPONENTS

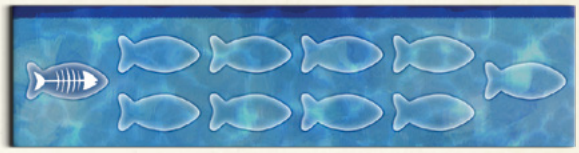
200 POPULATION TOKENS

Population is central to this game! You'll want the population of your species to thrive because each token, regardless of color, is worth 1 point at the end of the game.



24 SPECIES BOARDS

These boards represent your species. Each one has 10 spaces for population tokens, but the species will overpopulate if a population token must be placed on the space with the fishbones. Overpopulation leads to disease, which means a huge decrease of that species' population.



A species feeds on the population of another species by using the **attack** icons on their traits:



1 REEF

The Reef starts with population, but when it runs out, it will stay empty unless an event brings more population into it.



A species feeds on population in the Reef by using the **forage** icons on their traits:



1 OCEAN

The population in the Ocean is limitless. When the first Ocean zone runs out of population, take population from the next Ocean zone. The last round of the game triggers when the final Ocean zone runs out of population.



1st Ocean zone | 2nd Ocean zone | 3rd Ocean zone

A species eats population from the Ocean when a **gains** icon is triggered:



25 SCENARIO CARDS

Two random Scenario cards will be placed on the first two Ocean zones each game, encouraging players to explore a variety of playstyles.



120 SURFACE CARDS

There are 12 traits in the Surface deck, 10 copies of each. During the game, you will adapt your species with traits to help them thrive in an ever-changing environment.

The Surface traits represent the known world: things that have already been discovered by science. These traits bring consistency to the game's ecosystem.



89 DEEP CARDS

Every card in the Deep is unique and very powerful.

The Deep traits represent the unknown: things that have not yet been discovered by science. These traits bring excitement and variety into the game's ecosystem.



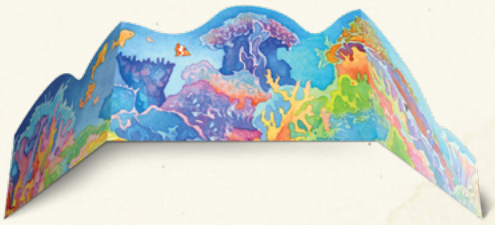
1 CAMBRIAN EXPLOSION CARD

The game is divided into two halves, split by the start of the Cambrian Explosion. The rate of evolution doubles once you've entered the Cambrian Explosion.



4 PLAYER SCREENS

The Player Screens keep the scores hidden. Each turn, you will score 1 population from each of your species and place them in a score pile behind your Player Screen.

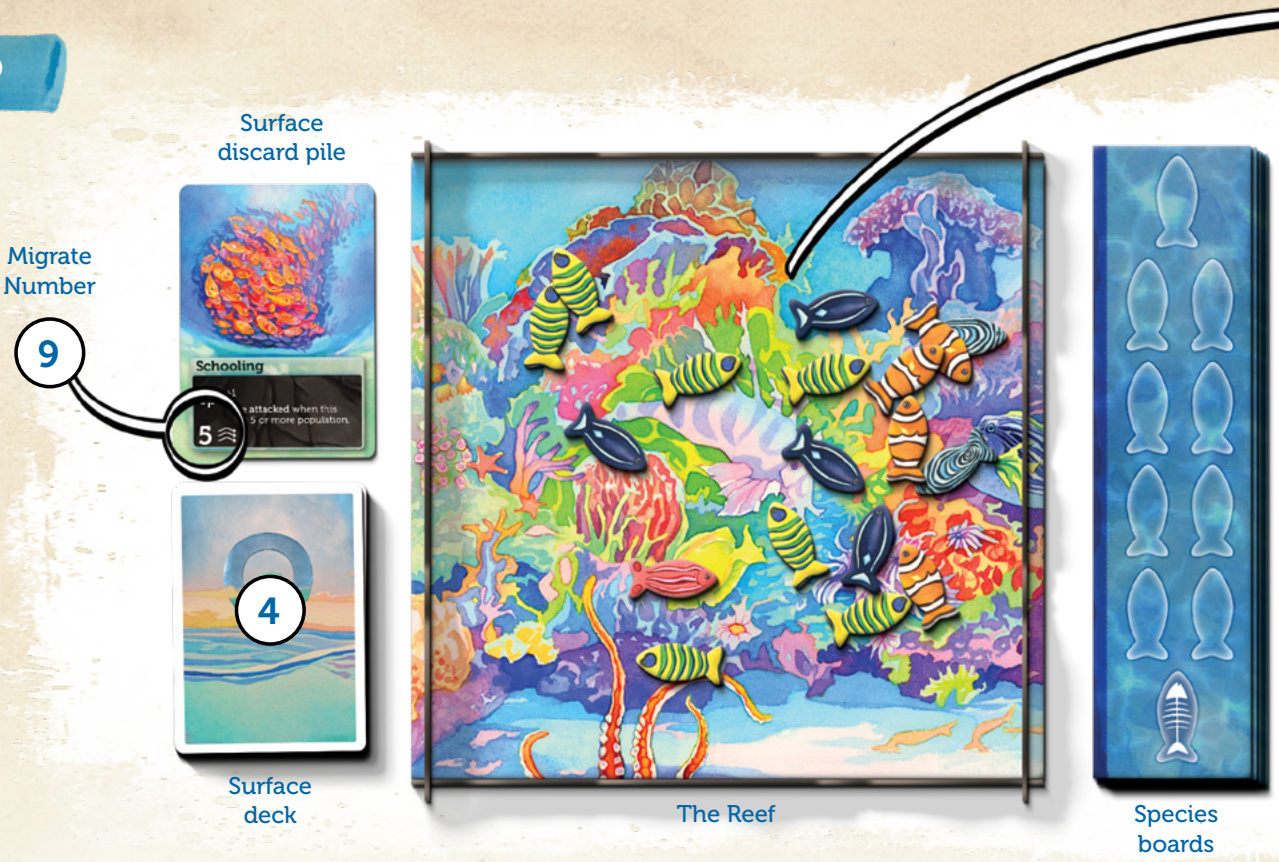


4 BONUS TOKENS

The Bonus Tokens are used during setup to offset the disadvantage of going early in the player order.



SETUP



Reef Variant

Oceans was originally designed to be played without Scenario cards and without the Deep. If anyone at the table has never played *Oceans*, we recommend playing the Reef Variant. Otherwise, prepare to venture into the Deep!

1. Place the Reef and the Ocean board in the center of the play area. Stack the species boards nearby.

2. Place the Cambrian Explosion card with the "Reef Variant" side face-down in the first Ocean zone.

   Reef Variant: Place the "Reef Variant" side face-up.

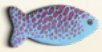
3. Shuffle the Scenario cards and put 1 random Scenario card on the shelf of the 1st and 2nd Ocean zone. Return the rest of the Scenario cards to the box.

   Reef Variant: Use *Abundance* and *Fertile* instead of 2 random Scenario cards.

4. Shuffle the Surface deck and deal 6 cards to each player, then place the deck face-down next to the Reef.

5. Shuffle the Deep deck and place two random cards face-up to form the Gene Pool.

   Reef Variant: Skip this step.

6. Place the 60 reserve population tokens  in the "reserve" zip-lock bag. These will get used in the last round of the game.



7. Create a supply of population tokens according to your player count (60 population + 20 population per player) and return any unused population tokens to the box.

   a. 2 players: use these tokens  (100 total)

   b. 3 players: use these tokens  (120 total)

   c. 4 players: use these tokens  (140 total)

8. Roughly divide the supply of population tokens into 4 piles and place each pile into the 4 available locations: the Reef and the 3 Ocean zones. These piles do not need to be exact.

9. Reveal the top card from the Surface deck, and place it face-up to form the discard pile. Look at the Migrate number on the bottom left of the card, and move that number of population from both the Reef and the 1st Ocean zone into the 3rd Ocean zone.

10. Give each player a Player Screen.

11. The start player is the person who can hold their breath the longest. Give each player the correct Bonus Token according to their place in turn order. Place the token behind your Player Screen to score at the end of the game.

	1st player	2nd player	3rd player	4th player
2 players	4 points	0 points		
3 players	6 points	4 points	0 points	
4 players	7 points	6 points	4 points	0 points

OVERVIEW

The goal of *Oceans* is to thrive in an ever-changing ecosystem where food is scarce and predators lurk. The population of your species can grow by **foraging** from the Reef, **attacking** other species, or passively **gaining** from the Ocean. So evolve your species to best ensure their survival. At the end of the game, you will score 1 point for each population token you accumulated over the course of the game.

The core rules of Oceans as explained in this booklet will get modified during the game.

- Scenario cards override the core rules and apply to every species in play.
- Trait cards override the core rules and the Scenario cards, but they only apply to the species on which they are played. Most traits have an understood "This species" at the start of the textbox.

PLAYING THE GAME

Players take turns in clockwise order, beginning with the start player.
Each player's turn consists of 4 phases:

1. **Playing Cards** - Play 1 card (or 2 if the Cambrian Explosion has started)
2. **Feeding** - Feed 1 species
3. **Aging** - Age all of your species
4. **Drawing Cards** - Discard & draw back up to 6 cards



Phase 1: Playing Cards

Play 1 Surface card during this phase if the Cambrian Explosion has not yet started. Once the Cambrian Explosion has started, you will play 2 cards (Surface and/or Deep). Cards may be played to **evolve** a species, or to **migrate** population.

In addition, you may remove traits from your species anytime during this phase. Surface cards are placed face-up in the discard pile and Deep cards are removed from the game. Check for anything that needs to be reevaluated now that the trait is no longer in play (Overpopulation, maximum trait count, etc).

EVOLVE: Most of your cards will be played as *traits* to **evolve** one of your species. You may play a trait on a new species or on an existing species.

PLAYING A TRAIT ON A NEW SPECIES:

1. Take a free species board from the supply and place it so that the fish are facing away from you. A new species may be placed on either side of your existing species, or in between any two of your existing species.
2. Place the trait along the dark-blue border on the left of the species board. The species is now in play and the trait is now active.

PLAYING A TRAIT ON AN EXISTING SPECIES:

1. Place the trait along the dark-blue border on the left of an existing species board. The trait is now active.
2. A species may have multiple copies of the same trait (trait effects are cumulative), but the maximum number of traits on any species is 3 unless a card explicitly allows for more.

An explanation of each of the 12 Surface traits can be found in the Reference Guide.



PLAYING THE GAME (CONTINUED)

MIGRATE: Instead of using a card to **evolve**, you will sometimes use a card to **migrate** population. The number of population tokens you **migrate** is equal to the migrate number on the bottom left of the card you play.

Choose a board location; either the Reef or an Ocean zone. Discard a card from your hand to move population to the chosen board location from one other board location. If the migrate number is greater than the available population, only move what is available.



This is the migrate number

Phase 2: Feeding

Choose 1 of your species to feed. It may either **forage** to take population from the Reef, or **attack** to take population from another species.

Important Feeding Rules

- A species may not **forage** or **attack** unless it would take at least 1 population.
- A species may not **forage** or **attack** unless it has an open space on its species board.
- A species may not take more population than open spaces on its species board.
- You may never place a population token on the space with the fishbones unless it is the only available space on the species board.
- Whenever possible, a species must take its total **forage** or **attack** value. You may not choose to take less to avoid overpopulation.

FORAGE: Add up the green icons on the traits of the feeding species to get its **forage** value. Take that number of population from the Reef and move them to the forager's species board. A species that does not have any green icons on any of its trait cards automatically gets a **forage** value of 1.

A species may never **forage** if it has regardless of whether it has other **forage** icons.

ATTACK: Choose any other species to target for an **attack** - including your own! Add up the red icons on the traits of the feeding species to get its **attack** value. Take that number of population from the target's species board and move them to the attacker's species board. A species that does not have any red icons on any of its trait cards automatically gets an **attack** value of 1.

A species may never **attack** if it has regardless of whether it has other **attack** icons.

There are several things that can happen during the feeding phase. They are covered under Core Concepts on page 9 & 10.



This species has an attack value of 8 (3+3+2).

Phase 3: Aging

If the Cambrian Explosion has not yet started, remove 1 population from each of your species and place it behind your player screen in your score pile. If the Cambrian Explosion has started, place 2 population from each of your species into your score pile. Score all of your population if you cannot score the full amount.

A species goes extinct if it is not able to age the full amount. When a species goes extinct, discard all of its traits and put the species board back into the communal supply.

Remember:

- Although only 1 of your species will feed each turn, all of your species age!
- If your species is reduced to 0 population on another player's turn, it does not go extinct. You will have an opportunity to feed it during your next turn before your aging phase.

Phase 4: Drawing Cards

Go through each of the following steps:

1. You may draw 1 Deep card:
   - Draw the top face-up card from a Gene Pool pile. If a Gene Pool pile is emptied, flip the top card of the Deep deck face-up to form a new pile.

   - or -

   - Draw 3 cards from the Deep deck. Choose 1 to keep in your hand, and place the others face-up on each Gene Pool pile.
2. You may discard any number of Surface cards from your hand. You may not discard Deep cards.
3. Draw from the Surface deck until you have a total of 6 cards in your hand (Surface and Deep). If the Surface deck runs out, shuffle the discard pile to form a new deck.

Your turn is now over, and play passes to the player to your left.





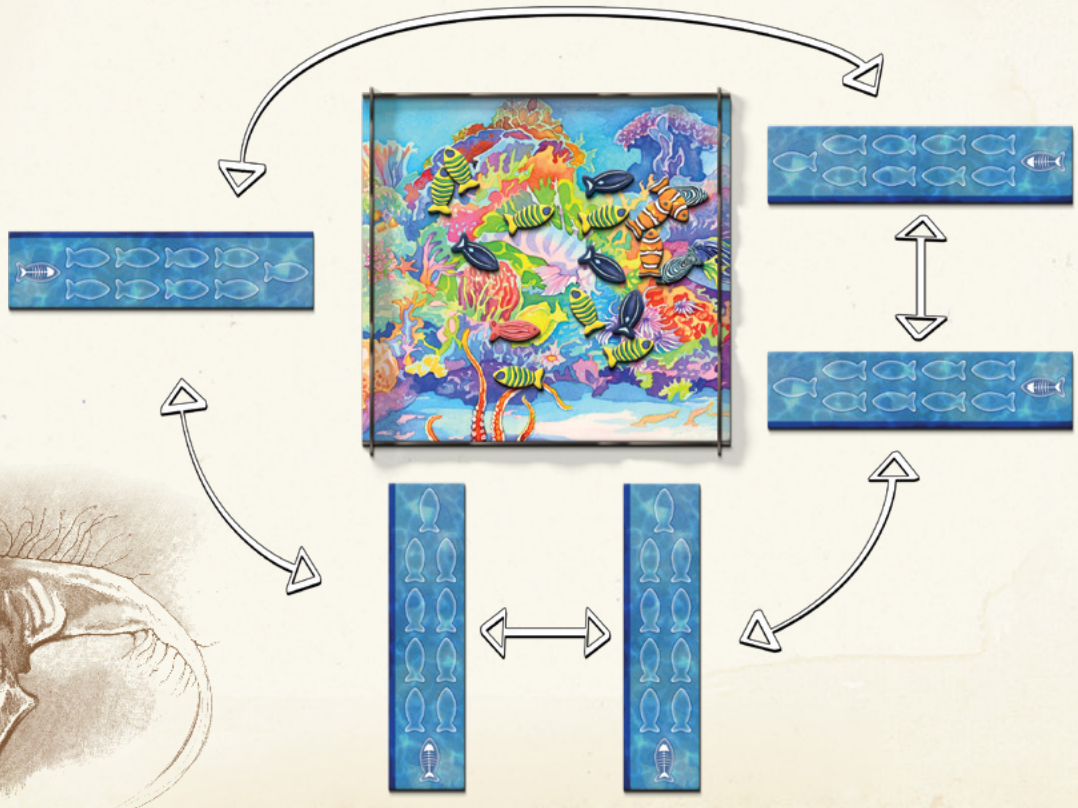
2 Defensive Traits

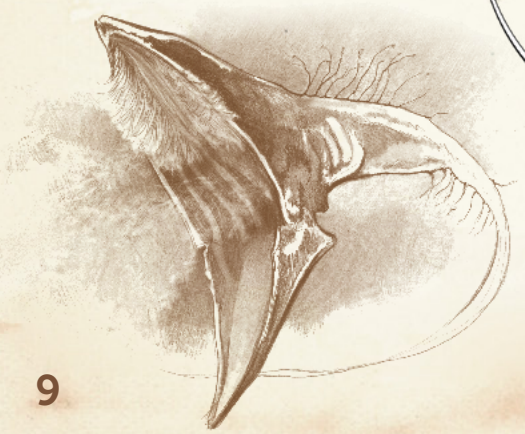
Traits with black textboxes are defensive traits that may prevent a species from **attacking** it. Some defensive traits have a shell icon. Each shell icon reduces the number of population taken from an **attack** by the number in the shell icon. Shell icons don't reduce the **attack** value of the attacking species, just the number of population it takes.

Species take 8 fewer population than their attack value when **attacking** this species

Adjacency Arrows

Every species in *Oceans* lives in the same environment: the left-most species of each player is adjacent to the right-most species of the next player. Many traits trigger based on the feeding of an adjacent species. The arrow icon at the bottom of a trait refers to the species immediately adjacent to that side.





2 Gains

Feeding may trigger a **gains** icon on another species, including a species belonging to another player. When a species **gains** population, it takes the number of population in the blue gains icon from the 1st Ocean zone. If the 1st Ocean zone is empty (or becomes empty), continue taking population from the 2nd Ocean zone, and from the 3rd Ocean zone if the 2nd becomes empty. If the 3rd Ocean zone becomes empty, place the 60 "reserve" population into the 3rd Ocean zone so that every triggered trait is able to take the proper amount of population.

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Feeding Example:

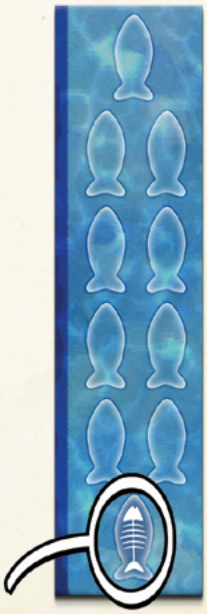
If the *Tentacled* species on the left attacks the *Filter Feeder* on the right, it will take 1 population from the *Filter Feeder's* species board. Additionally, the species in the middle will **gain** 1 population from the *Symbiotic* trait, and **gain** 2 population from each of the *Bottom Feeder* traits (for a total of 5 population). If the *Tentacled* species attacked again, it would take another population and the middle species would gain another 5 population (leading to overpopulation).

Overpopulation

After each feeding, resolve everything that was triggered from the feeding, then check for overpopulation.

Overpopulation occurs if any species has a population token on the space with the fishbones. Each species that overpopulates loses population until only 5 population remain on the species board. The owner of the species may put the lost population in the Reef or in any one Ocean zone.

If a species overpopulates when resolving its own feeding, it may not feed again this turn even if it has a trait such as *Tentacled* that would normally allow it to feed again. Triggering another species to overpopulate does not end your feeding.



A species will overpopulate if it has a token on the fishbones when you check for overpopulation

SCENARIO CARDS

Creatures must adapt for survival, not only to compete with other species in the ecosystem, but also in response to various environmental opportunities and threats that arise. These influences are represented by Scenario cards.

There are 2 types of Scenario cards. Blue Scenario cards have ongoing effects, and Purple Scenario cards have events that get triggered. Blue Scenario cards are active whenever there is no population in its Ocean zone. Purple Scenario cards get triggered each time the Ocean zone is emptied. This might happen multiple times during a game if population is **migrated** (or moved because of a Deep card cost) back onto its Ocean zone.

Scenario cards activate when the last population is removed from its Ocean zone. Make sure to resolve everything triggered (like gains and overpopulating) before activating the Scenario card.



Active Scenario Inactive Scenario

SCENARIO CARD ICONS

Scenario cards are designed to change the feel of the game. Some Scenarios make it more difficult for your species to thrive. Others lead to more aggressive gameplay between the players. We put icons on the Scenario card to help you tailor your game. During setup, make sure to remove any Scenario cards that might hinder your group's experience.

Scenario cards with the teeth icon create a more aggressive environment.

Scenario cards with the diamond icon are more complex.

Scenario cards with the lightning icon are events.

CAMBRIAN EXPLOSION

The Cambrian Explosion is a period in Earth's history when a proliferation of new species came into existence. It took place over 500 million years ago and lasted for about 25 million years. Scientists don't know what caused the Cambrian Explosion but it was likely due to an increase in oceanic oxygen levels.

The Cambrian Explosion starts when the 1st Ocean zone becomes empty, and continues until the end of the game. Remove the Cambrian Explosion card from the 1st Ocean zone as a reminder that it will never be deactivated. If the Cambrian Explosion begins during a player's playing cards phase, they may immediately play a second card (Surface or Deep). If it begins afterwards, they may not return to their playing cards phase to play a second card.

During the Cambrian Explosion:

- You play 2 cards per turn instead of 1.
- You score 2 population during aging instead of 1.
- You may play Deep cards as well as Surface cards. Deep cards have an extra cost (see page 13).



THE DEEP

Lurking deep below the surface lie mysteries so bizarre they seem unnatural when first discovered: massive predators, glowing horrors, and beautiful luminescent creatures. These species hardly seem possible in the realm of biology, and yet they turn out to be real. The Deep represents the wonder of scientific discovery, with traits ranging from actual marine biology to the fantastic. Venture into the deep at your own risk!

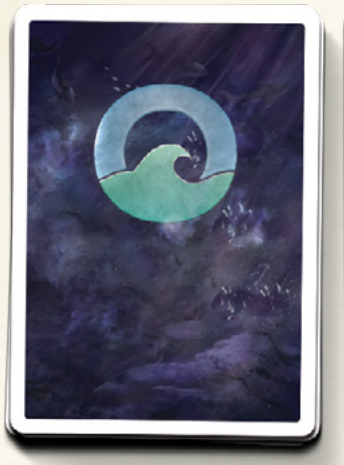
Every card in the Deep is unique, powerful, and has a cost if you use it to evolve a species! They may be played to **evolve** a species or to **migrate** population.

To **evolve** a species:

1) Pay the cost of the Deep card you are about to play by moving population equal to its migrate number from your score pile to the Reef or any one Ocean zone.
2) Place the Deep trait on a new or existing species.

To **migrate** population:

You do not need to pay a cost when using a Deep card to migrate population. Remove the card from the game after playing it.



The Deep Deck





Gene Pool

TAILORED FOR YOU

The Deep is unique in its design. You can tailor it to your personal tastes without hurting the balance of the game. After each game, we encourage you to remove any Deep cards you didn't like. Additionally, you can add cards (even multiple copies) that bring you joy. Over time, you can create a version of Oceans that will produce the experience most fun to your game group; a legacy of your adventures in the Deep!

Find additional cards, expansion cards, and promo cards to ***evolve*** your copy of the Deep at www.NorthStarGames.com/theDeep.

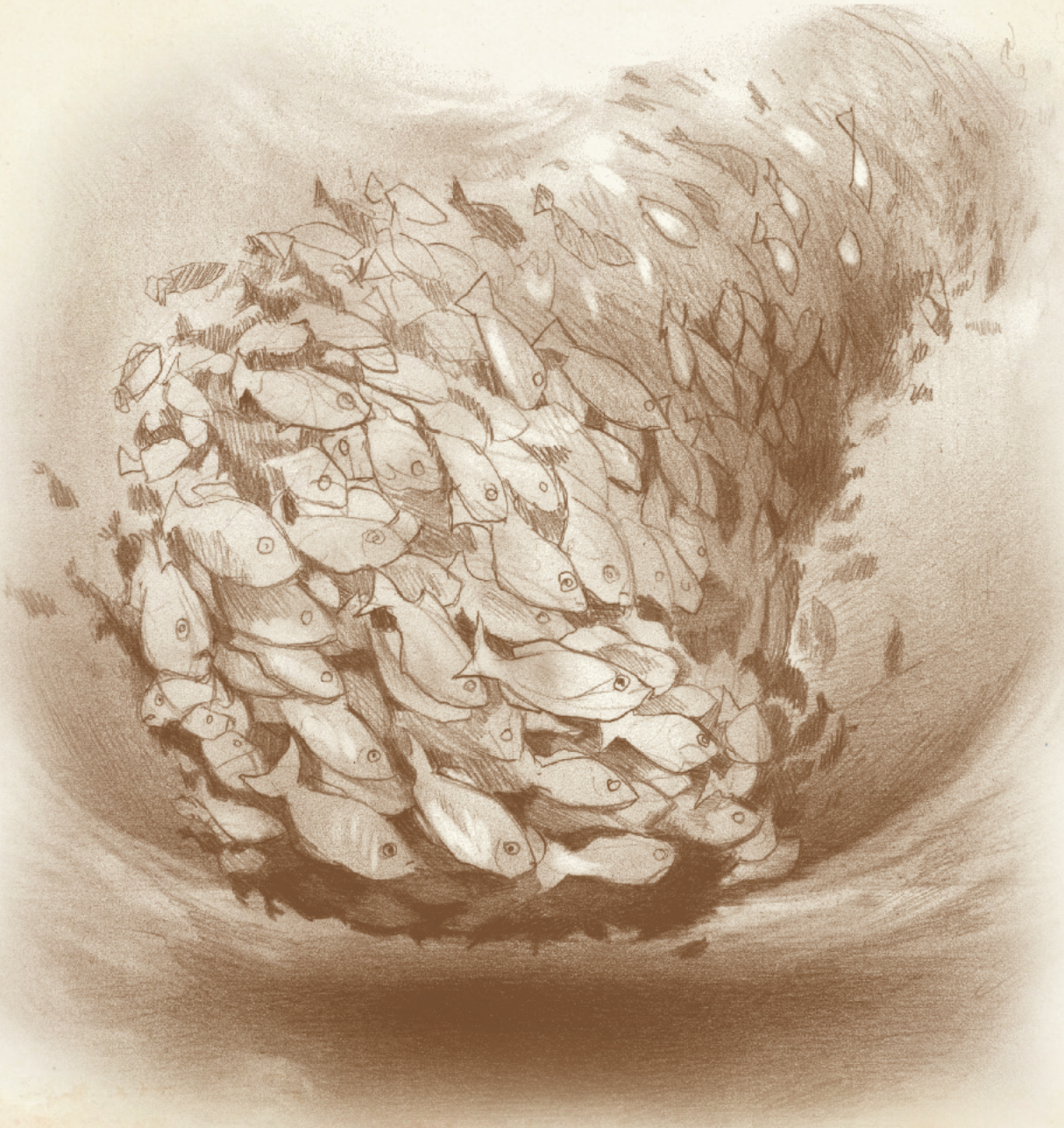
END OF GAME

The last round of the game is triggered immediately when every Ocean zone is completely empty of population. Place the 60 population tokens from the "reserve" zip-lock bag into the 3rd Ocean zone and continue playing as normal. The game ends when the final player in the turn order completes their turn, even if there is still population in the Reef.

Players score:

- 1 point for each population in their score pile.
- 1 point for each population on their surviving species.
- the points listed on their Bonus Token.

The player with the highest score wins. In case of a tie, the tied player with the most trait cards on their species wins. If there is still a tie, the first person to get a job on a fishing boat in Alaska is the winner!



CREDITS

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Each playtester logged 15 - 30 games, rated every card to make them more balanced and fun, and (in total) contributed over 10,000 game design comments on Discord. I also want to give a special thanks to the hundreds of other people who played games with these playtest groups.

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- Meeple Source for beautifully painted wooden fish that can be purchased to upgrade Oceans.
- Dog Might for a deluxe wooden card holder that can be purchased to upgrade Oceans.
- the community of avid board gamers on BoardGameGeek.

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