

HOW TO PLAY

OCEANS

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THE OCEANS ARE TEEMING WITH LIFE!

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 unknown.

LEARN THE COMPONENTS

200 POPULATION TOKENS

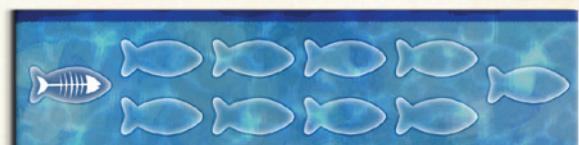
Population is central to this game. You'll want the population of your species to thrive because each token, regardless of color, is worth 1 point at the end of the game.



24 SPECIES BOARDS

Each species board 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 may feed upon the population of another species by using the attack icon:



1 REEF

The population in the Reef is limited, which means it'll stay empty when it runs out of population unless something brings more population into it.

A species may feed on population in the Reef by using the forage icon:



3 OCEAN BOARDS

These boards make up the Ocean. The population in the Ocean is unlimited. When the first Ocean board runs out of population, take population from the next Ocean board. The last round of the game triggers when someone must take population from the "reserve" section of the final Ocean board.

A species feeds on population in the Ocean when a gains icon is triggered:



1st Ocean board

2nd Ocean board

Final Ocean board

25 SCENARIO CARDS

Two random Scenario Cards will be placed on the first two Ocean boards 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 bring consistency to the game's ecosystem.



100 DEEP CARDS

Every card in the Deep is unique. These are powerful cards that bring excitement and variety into the game.



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 period. You'll remove the Cambrian Explosion card from the bottom of the 1st Ocean board to remind you that the Cambrian Explosion has started.



The Cambrian Explosion card goes at the bottom of the 1st Ocean board.

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

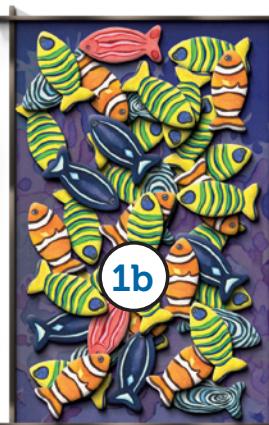


Reef Variant

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

1. Place the Reef (1a), the 2 small Ocean boards (1b), and the large Ocean board (1c) in a row in the center of the play area. Stack the species boards nearby. Place the Cambrian Explosion card in the first Ocean board.
2. Shuffle the Scenario cards and put 1 random Scenario card on the 1st and 2nd Ocean board. Return the rest of the Scenario cards to the box.
3. Shuffle the Surface deck and deal 6 cards to each player, then place the deck face-down next to the Reef.
4. Shuffle the Deep deck and place two random cards face-up to form the Gene Pool.
5. Place the 60 reserve population tokens in the "reserve" section of the Final Ocean board. These will be used in the last round of the game.

8



1b



1c



2

2nd Ocean Board

Final Ocean Board



4

1

3

Gene Pool



Deep deck

6. 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)
7. Roughly divide the supply of population tokens into 4 piles and place each pile onto the 4 available boards: the Reef and the 3 Ocean boards. These piles do not need to be exact.
8. Reveal the top card from the Surface deck, and place it in the face-up discard pile. Look at the Migrate number on the bottom left of the card, and remove that number of population from the Reef, and also that number of population from the 1st Ocean board. Place the removed population onto the final Ocean board (but not in the reserve).
9. Give each player a Player Screen (or a Player Bag if you have the upgrade).
10. 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.

OVERVIEW

The goal of Oceans is to thrive in an ever-changing ecosystem where food is scarce and predators lurk. Cultivate the population of your species and evolve them to 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.

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 (see page 12), you will play 2 cards during this phase; Surface and/or Deep (see page 13). Cards may be played to **evolve** a species, or to **migrate** population.

In addition, you may remove traits from your species during this phase. Surface cards are placed face-up in the discard pile and Deep cards are removed from the game.

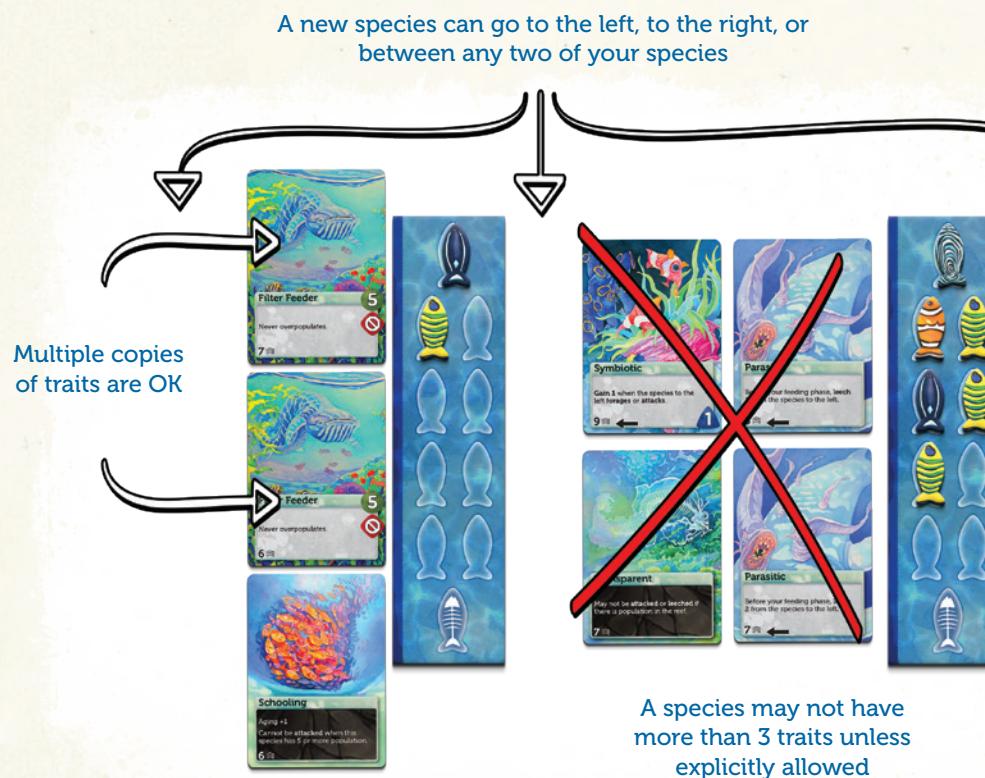
EVOLVE: Most of your cards will be played as *traits* to **evolve** one of your species. You may play the trait on a new species or on an existing species.

PLAYING THE 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 trait is now active.

PLAYING THE 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 may not have more than 3 traits cards in total.



PLAYING THE GAME (CONTINUED)

MIGRATE: Sometimes you will **migrate** population to the Reef to feed a species. Other times you may **migrate** population to an Ocean board to deactivate a Scenario card (page 11). You may not **migrate** to or from the reserve (except during the last round of the game). The population of fish you **migrate** is equal to the **migrate** number on the bottom left of the card you play.

Choose a location; either the Reef board or an Ocean board. Discard a card from your hand to move population to the chosen location from any 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** population from the Reef, or **attack** the population of another species.

Important Feeding Rules

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

2

FORAGE: Add up the green icons on the traits of the feeding species to get its **forage** value. Move that number of population from the Reef to its species board. A species that does not have any green icons automatically gets a **forage** value of 1.

2

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

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

Remove 1 population from each of your species and place it behind your player screen in your score pile. A species goes extinct if it is not able to Age the full amount (sometimes a species will Age more than 1 population). 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 by another player, you will have an opportunity to feed it during your turn before it goes extinct.

Phase 4: Drawing Cards

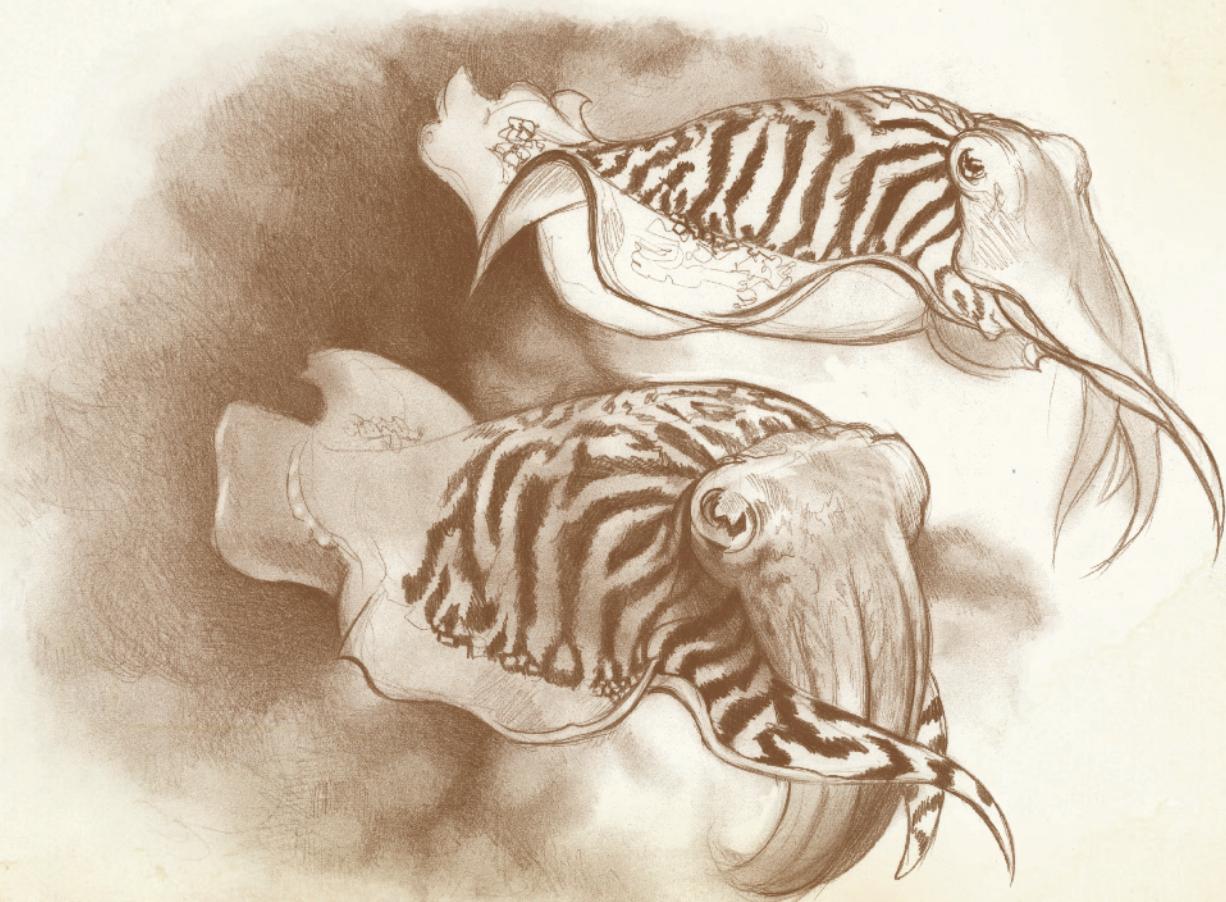
1. You may draw 1 Deep card:

- 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.

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.



CORE CONCEPTS

2

Defensive Traits

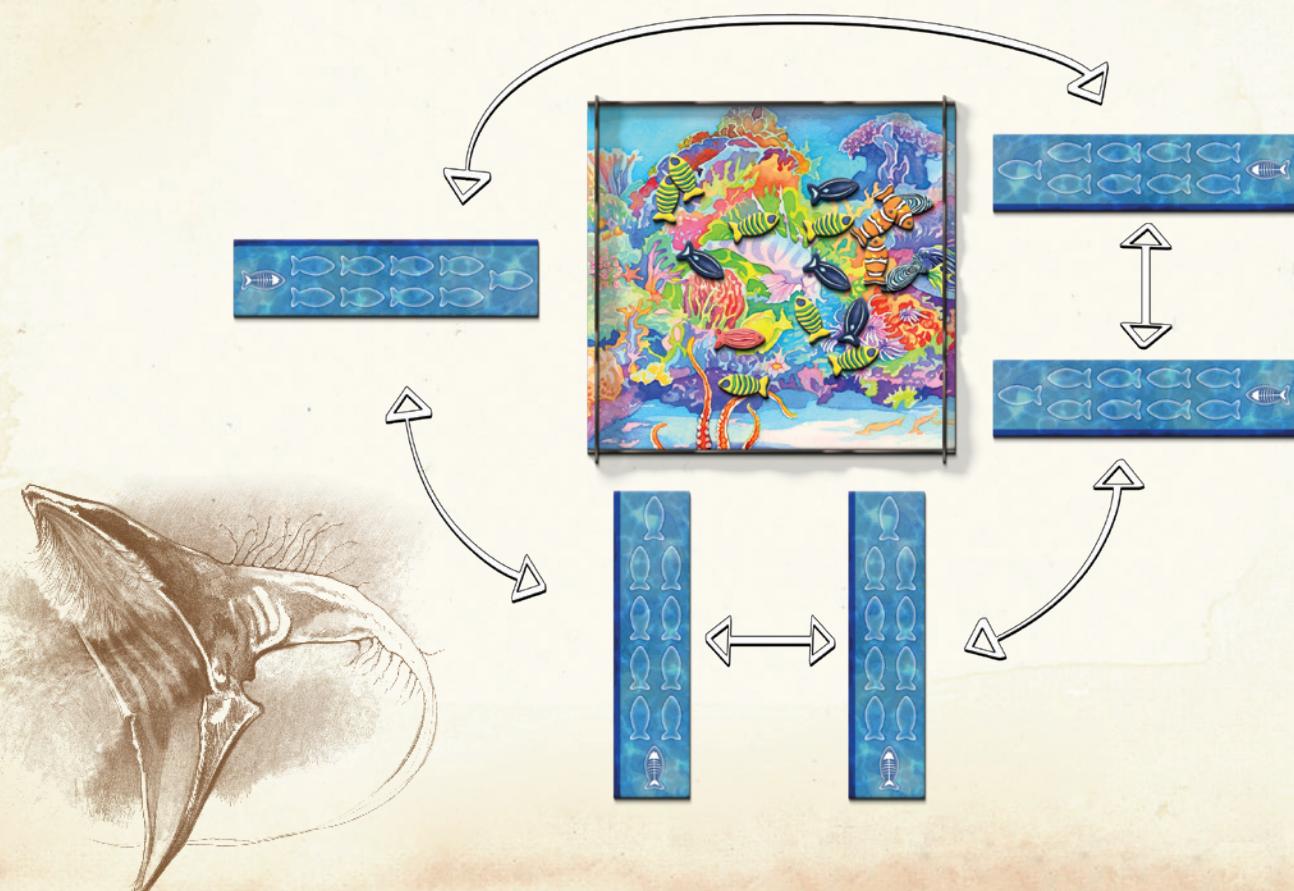
Traits with black textboxes are defensive traits that may prevent a species from **attacking** it. Some defensive traits have a shell icon. Each shell icon reduces the number of population taken from an **attack** by the number in the shell icon. Shell icons don't reduce the **attack** value of the attacking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

Species take 8 less population 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 actions of an adjacent species. The arrow icon at the bottom of a trait refers to the species directly adjacent to that side.



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 board. If the 1st Ocean board is empty (or becomes empty), continue taking population from the 2nd Ocean board, and from the 3rd Ocean board if the 2nd becomes empty. If there is no population on any Ocean board, continue taking population from the reserve. This will trigger the last round of the game.



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 all of the events that were 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 on any Ocean board (but not in the reserve).

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 ones with ongoing effects, and purple ones with a triggered event. The purple Scenario cards have a lightning bolt icon next to the card's title to remind you that it has a triggered event instead of an ongoing effect.

A Scenario card activates when the last population is removed from its Ocean board. This will usually happen because of a feeding, so make sure to resolve all of the triggered events caused by that feeding (like gains and overpopulating) before activating the Scenario card.

Each Scenario card is either:

- an ongoing effect that remains active until population is placed back onto its Ocean board.
- or-
- an event () that is triggered each time the Ocean board is emptied. This might happen multiple times during a game if population is **migrated** back onto the Ocean board with 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 Scenarios card to help you tailor your game. During set-up, 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. These scenarios generally lead to more complicated gameplay.

CAMBRIAN EXPLOSION

The Cambrian Explosion is a period in Earth's history when an explosion 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 was likely due to an increase in oceanic oxygen levels.

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

During the Cambrian Explosion:

- You play 2 cards per turn 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 Deep card is unique. We tried to make them self explanatory, but there is a list of common phrases and terms in the Reference Guide to help you figure out the nuances. Most cards in the Deep are traits just like the Surface cards, but several of them are events. Events have a purple textbox and an event icon: 

Deep cards may be used to **migrate** population as normal, but you must pay population equal to the migrate number if you use a Deep card as an **event**, or to **evolve** a species. Before playing the Deep card, move population equal to the migrate number from your score pile to one location: the Reef or any Ocean board (but not the reserve).

EVOLVE: Play a Deep card as a trait by paying its cost, then placing it on a new or existing species.

EVENTS: Play a Deep card as an event by paying its cost, then removing it from the game.

MIGRATE: You do not need to pay a cost when using a Deep card to **migrate** population.

Deep cards are never placed in the discard pile. Whether used to **migrate**, played as an **event**, or removed from a species, Deep cards are removed from the game instead of discarded.



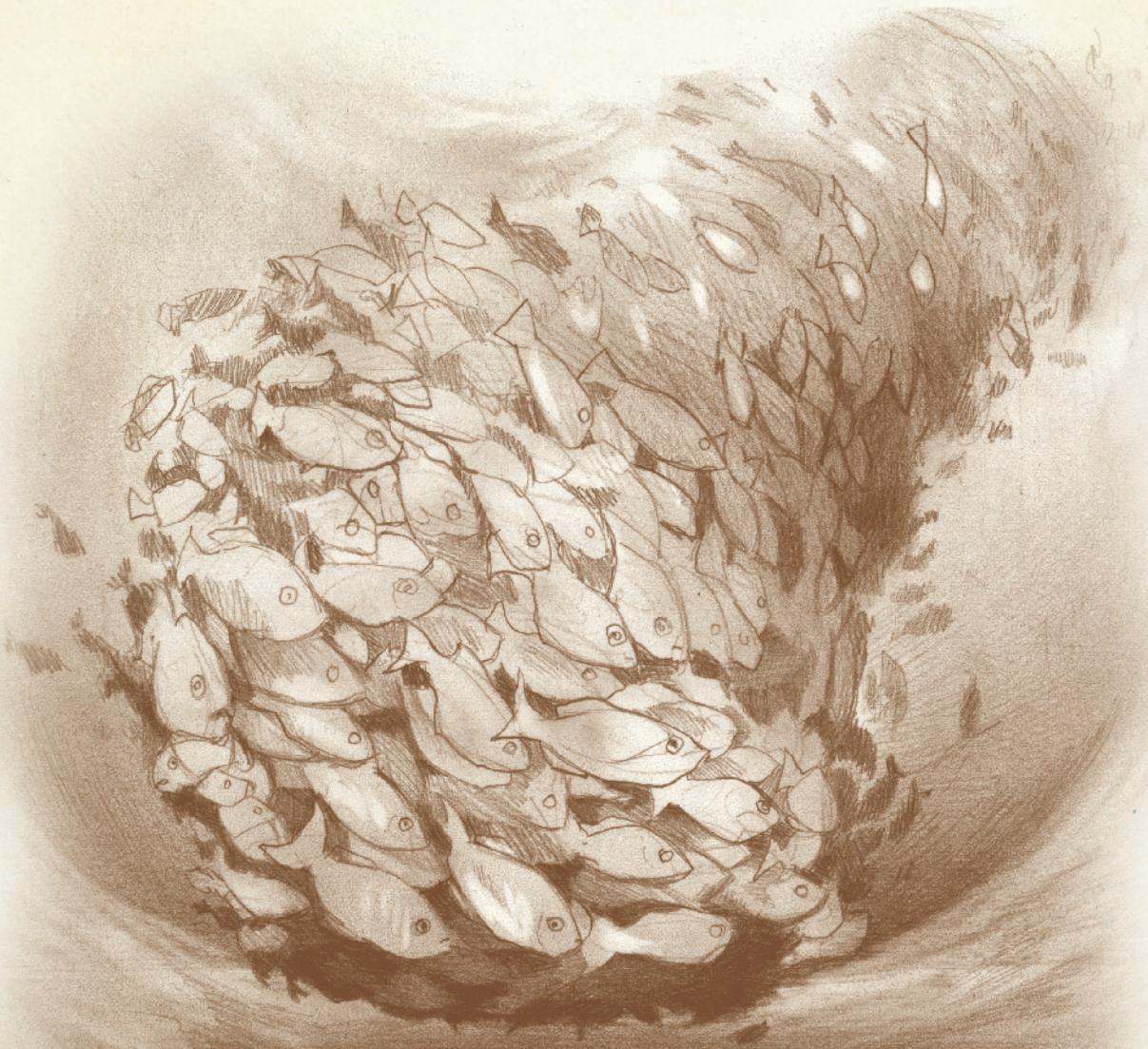
END OF GAME

The last round of the game is triggered when a species gains population but every Ocean board is depleted. Continue playing by taking (or **migrating**) population from the reserve. The game ends when the final player in the turn order completes their next turn, even if there is still population in the Reef.

Players get:

- 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 the following playtest groups.

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- Dog Might for a deluxe wooden card holder that can be purchased to upgrade Oceans.
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