

# Domino Avatars, v0.5

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## **Abstract**

Domino Avatars is a fast-paced fighting game for two to six players. It is designed as an alternative to the numerous battle-focused, collectable card games on the market today. Instead of expensive cards, it uses components from games that you may already have in your bookshelf: a set of dominos for the Avatars, a deck of cards to introduce randomness, and pencil and paper to tally up points. The player with the highest score at the end of the game wins.

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## 1 Foreword

I have always been a fan of collectible card games like “Magic: The Gathering”<sup>1</sup> or “Babylon 5”<sup>2</sup>, but I have never enjoyed the high price associated with them. Inspired by the product line of Cheapass Games, I set out to design a game using pieces from other common games a player might already own.

It was clear that I had wanted to model an avatar style fighting game similar to “Magic: The Gathering”. Right from the start, I was hooked on the idea of using a dusty old set of dominos to represent avatars, warriors. Dominos is a tile-based game, where each piece is of uniform size and contains two sets of pips representing two numbers. This property makes it a perfect fit for an attack and defend style game, where one set of pips is used to signify the attack score, and the other signifies the defense score.

I was convinced that a deck of cards would make a perfect vehicle to introduce randomness and variety into the game. With this in mind, I created a game called Domino Knights. It was heavily influenced by “Magic: The Gathering” collectible card game, and therefore shared its design flaws. The game was slow, complicated, and required a cheat sheet to remember how to play.

After due diligence to fix the game, I realized that it was short of impossible. There had to be a better way of doing things. Inspired by the simplicity of the rules for Diplomacy, a board game published by Hasbro, Inc., and the sophisticated tactics and player interaction it somehow managed to generate, I wanted to build a better, faster, and more enjoyable game. I believe that Domino Avatars is that game.

## 2 Introduction

Domino Avatars is a fast-paced fighting game for two to six players. It is designed as an alternative to the numerous battle-focused, collectable card games on the market today. Instead of expensive cards, it uses components from games that you may already have in your bookshelf: a set of dominos for the Avatars, a deck of cards to introduce randomness, and pencil and paper to tally up points. The player with the highest score at the end of the game wins.

Domino sets come in many flavors, ranging in size, shape, and pip values. The dominos intended for this game are the standard rectangle-shaped tiles with two sets of pips separated by a line bisecting the tile. It does not matter for the purpose of this game, whether the dominos are a single color scheme or multi-colored. What does matter is the sum of the pips on the highest valued domino. Most common sets include “double nines”, “double twelves”, and “double fifteens”, the sum value of which are 18, 24, and 30. These values can be a factor in determining the game-ending conditions, such as the winning

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<sup>1</sup>“Magic: The Gathering” is a registered trademark by Wizards of the Coast.

<sup>2</sup>The “Babylon 5” collectable card game was published by Precedence Entertainment based on the science-fiction television series “Babylon 5”.

Player Score.<sup>3</sup>

A standard deck of Poker playing cards, minus the Jokers, is used to classify the attack or defense of an Avatar as either Red or Black, corresponding to the color of the card's suit. Additionally, cards are used to increase the strength of the Avatar's attack or defense scores, Aces having a value of one and Kings a value of 13. A single deck of cards can be used comfortably for two to four players, but a second deck should be added if playing with five or six players.

### 3 Terminology

Every new game comes with terminology to learn, and this one is no exception. The following list describes the most important terms to know for this game. For the sake of examples throughout this article, four players will be used: Alice, Bob, Charlie, and Dianne.

**Avatar** : a domino placed face-up in front of a player.

**Avatar Score** : the sum of all all pips on the Avatar domino

**Attack Base** : the sum of the pips on the half of the Avatar furthest away from the player.

**Attack Score** : the sum of an Avatar's Attack Base and the point total of like-colored cards played for that Avatar. Denoted as  $CNN$ , where  $C$  is the color and  $NN$  is the sum. i.e.  $R20$ .

**Capture Bonus** : for each Avatar a player captures/defeats, she is awarded  $1/2$  the sum of the greatest Avatar Score. i.e. *In a "double nines" domino set, each avatar is worth 9 points.*

**Counter-Attack** : after successfully defending against an attack, the defending Avatar may counter-attack its antagonist.

**Defense Base** : the sum of the pips on the half of the Avatar closest to the player.

**Defense Score** : the sum of an Avatar's Defense Base and the point total of like-colored cards played for that Avatar. Denoted as  $CNN$ , where  $C$  is the color and  $NN$  is the sum. i.e.  $B10$ .

**Pip** : a the dot on a domino.

**Player Score** : the sum of Avatar Scores that the player has defeated.

**Round** : the period in which all players have taken a turn.

**Turn** : the period in which a single player may use each of her avatars once to attack other avatars.

$X/Y$  : Nomenclature for an Avatar's Attack Base and Defense Base. i.e.  $6/4$ .

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<sup>3</sup>See section 6.

## 4 Setup

First order of business is to decide upon the winning conditions of the game. The following scenarios are possible examples:

- First player to reach  $P$  points.
- Player with the highest score after all dominos are exhausted.<sup>4</sup>
- Player with the highest score after  $M$  minutes.
- Player with the highest score after  $R$  rounds.

Any combination of these conditions could be used. For example, Alice, Bob, Charlie, and Dianne decide that they want to play at least 10 rounds, but only want to take 1 hour to do so. The winner of the game is decided as the person with the highest score after 60 minutes or 10 rounds, whichever is reached first.<sup>5</sup>

Setup for the game is relatively simple. Randomly sort, shake, and conceal the dominos from the players, who draw two and place them face-up in front of them. The pips furthest away from the player signify the Avatar's Attack Base, the closest signify its Defense Base. Once placed on the table, the Avatar cannot be moved unless it is defeated.

The player who owns the Avatar with the highest Avatar Score will attack first. The player just to the right will deal ten cards to everyone. The deal and first player moves to the left for each successive round.

## 5 Game Play

The flow of the game is designed to be fast paced. The first player declares both the attacking Avatar and the defending Avatar of an opposing player. The cards that were drawn are used to determine the type of attack, Red or Black, and to increase the Score of the attack. *Any player may play any number of cards from her hand at any time, but they all must be of the same color for both attack and defense.*

### 5.1 Attack and Defend

To attack with an Avatar, choose one or more cards of the same color to add to the Avatar's Attack Base. Place these cards face-up in front of you. The sum of the Attack Base and point value of the cards is called the Attack Score. Aces have a point value of one; Jacks, eleven; Queens, twelve; and Kings, thirteen. Consider the Attack Score you wish to use carefully, as you cannot add cards to the attack once the defender lays down his cards.

To defend against an attack, choose one or more cards of the same color as the attacking Avatar. The sum of these cards, when combined with the

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<sup>4</sup>See section 5.4.

<sup>5</sup>See section 6.

defending Avatar's Defense Base, is called the Defense Score. It must match or exceed the Attack Score to successfully defend.

If the attack succeeds, the attacking player is awarded the Avatar Score of the defeated Avatar and the Capture Bonus to her Player Score.<sup>6</sup>

*For example, Alice has a 9/2 Avatar. She challenges Bob's 7/4 Avatar. Alice lays down a five of hearts (5♥), which makes the Avatar's Attack Score Red 14 (R14). Since all ties go to the defender, Bob must build a Defense Score of R14 or greater to defeat the attack. He must use either hearts (♥) or diamonds (◇) to do so. Bob lays down a 7◇ + 3♥ for a Defense Score of R14.*

*Alice's attack has failed. If Bob had failed to defend the attack, Alice would have been awarded the Avatar Score of the fallen Avatar to her Player Score.*

Discard any cards played or Avatars defeated during this phase.

## 5.2 Optional Rule: Counter-Attack

A defending Avatar that has successfully repelled an attack may immediately counter-attack its antagonist. The same procedure is used as in the "Attack and Defend" section. If the counter-attack succeeds, the defeated Avatar's Score is added to the Player Score of the counter-attacker. A counter-attack can be waived, if the player chooses. A counter-attack does not forfeit a player's possible attacks during his or her turn.

*Now that Bob has successfully defended the attack, he has the option to counter-attack, which he can waive if he so chooses. He declares counter-attack, and lays down a K♠, giving him an Attack Score of Black 20 (B20). Alice has four cards left, but only two black cards: a 5♠ and a 10♠. She opts not to defend, knowing that she'll need those cards to either attack with her other Avatar or defend against attacks from other players' Avatars. Bob's Avatar defeats Alice's Avatar, so he adds her Avatar's Score to his Player Score.*

An optional restriction to the counter-attack is to require that the same color cards as the original attacker be used. This forces the original attacker to consider reserving cards of that color to repel the immediate counter-attack.<sup>7</sup>

Discard any cards played or Avatars defeated during this phase.

## 5.3 Aiding Others

As mentioned in the "Setup" section, aid can be given to any attacking or defending Avatar by any player. A player does not need permission of an attacking or defending player to give aid. No player is obligated to fulfill any promises made during the game in exchange for aid, nor should they be expected to. To give aid to an Avatar, simply declare "Aid Attack!" or "Aid Defense!", and place the card or cards face-up upon the defender or attacker's pile of cards. Aid to an attacker **must** be given **before** the defender lays down his cards. Aid for the defender **must** be given **before** the cards are discarded. The sum of

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<sup>6</sup>See section 6.

<sup>7</sup>In play-testing, this stipulation differentiated it significantly from simply giving the defending player a free "attack".

the cards' values will be added to the Avatar's Attack or Defense Score as you designated.

## 5.4 Turns and Rounds

A player may attack with each of her avatars once per round. She may waive an attack from one or both of the avatars at her choice. When the turn has ended, the player to the left begins her attacks. When each player has completed her turn, the round has ended.

*For example, Alice has now lost her first Avatar. Alice may decide to attack with her remaining Avatar or pass control to the next player to her left. She decides not to attack with her second avatar, a 1/6, and passes control to Bob.*

At the beginning of the next round, all cards are reshuffled and redealt. Each player replaces any lost Avatars by selecting them randomly from the unused dominos. If there isn't enough dominos for each player to have two Avatars each at the beginning of the round, they are said to be exhausted. If this is the pre-determined, game-ending condition, the player with the highest score wins. If not, the dominos are reshuffled, and game play continues until the ending condition is met.

## 6 Scoring

Scoring the game is relatively simple, though a little math intensive. The sum of the pips on a given Avatar is called the Avatar Score. This score is awarded to the player who defeated it. In addition, a Capture Bonus is also given, equal to half the greatest Avatar Score for the domino set. For example, in a "double-nines" set, the Capture Bonus would be 9 points.

To set a game-ending score, use the following formula.

$$1.5 * \textit{Highest Valued Domino} * \textit{Estimated Rounds to Complete} \quad (1)$$

For a 10 round game with a "double-nines" domino set, the game-ending score would be  $1.5 * 9 * 10 = 135$ .

## 7 Strategy Tips

Like any good card game, counting cards is a clear way to understand how well your opponents might do against you. Although you can play any number of cards in a single attack or defense, finding a balance between a strong attack and a solid defense is important for winning the game. Remember that you can help or hinder players at will, which may in turn advance you into a winning score. In the very least, it could prevent someone from winning outright.

## 8 Beta-Test Rules

The following sections contain beta-testing rules. These rules are being examined for inclusion as official to the game. Please test them out and submit your feedback regarding their playability.

### 8.1 One Attack Per Turn, Two Turns Per Round

One strategy that is emminantly clear within a round or two of play is that exhausting a player's cards makes it relatively simple to "cherry pick" avatars. One attempt at this "fixing" this was to spread out attacks by requiring only one attack per turn, but two turns per round. This did have the effect of preserving cards, but ultimately "cherry picking" was still a viable strategy.

### 8.2 One Avatar Per Round

Rather than start with two avatars per round, each player starts with one avatar and only five cards. This simplifies "book-keeping" concerns with respect to which Avatar can attack, which only surfaced when using "One Attack Per Turn, Two Turns Per Round".

### 8.3 One Avatar Per Turn, Draw up to Five

In addition to "One Avatar Per Round", at the end of her turn, a player is entitled to draw cards until she holds five in her hand. This has three effects. First, it eliminates the concept of a round; game play is continuous. Second, it encourages attacks to be more aggressive. Third, it guarantees that everyone has at least five cards to defend with at the end of the turn. This won't prevent "cherry picking", but it will spread it out amongst the players.

If this rule is used, cards must be reshuffled whenever two cards are left in the stock pile.

## A This Document

This document was created using L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X. If you find errors in this document or have suggestions on how to improve it, please send email to Chad C. Walstrom at <[chewie@wookimus.net](mailto:chewie@wookimus.net)>.

The latest version of this document can be found in PDF format or a tarball of the original source code at:

<http://wookimus.net/~chewie/domino-avatars/>

### A.1 Acknowledgements

A special thanks to the play-testers of this game, Christy and Brandon from work, who gave up their lunch hours to brain-storm.

## A.2 Changes

- v0.5 - Removed previous beta-test rules. New scoring option put in place. New beta-test rules added. Counter-Attack designated as an optional rule. New license version. Formatting changes to reduce the license's impact on overall document length.
- v0.4 - Typos fixed regarding “suit” v.s. “color”. Added Beta-Test Rules section with rules for double-blank dominos and alternative scoring.
- v0.3 - Added the Foreword. Tried to be clearer and more consistent with terminology.
- v0.2 - Clarifications. Made attack and defend “bids” a single action, rather than allowing players to incrementally defeat their opponents.
- v0.1 - Initial version.

## A.3 TODO

- Graphics anyone?
- Add a cheat-sheet (4 cards per page) with the rules

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