

Domino Avatars, v1.0

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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”¹ or “Babylon 5”², 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

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

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

Player Score.³

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.

Scoring Stack : Stack of captured Avatars

³See section 6.

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.

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.
- 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.⁴

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. Starting with the first player, everyone draws five cards to their hand and may look at them at any time.

1. Shuffle cards and dominos
2. Each player draws two dominos
3. The player with the highest Avatar Score draws five cards first, followed by the other players in clockwise order.

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.

⁴See section 6.

5.1 Attack and Defend

To attack with an Avatar, choose *up to two 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; Face cards, ten.*

To defend against an attack, choose *up to three cards* of the same color as the attacking Avatar. The sum of these cards, when combined with the 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 the defeated player's Avatar and places it in her Scoring Stack. At the end of the game, the Avatar Scores will be combined with the Capture Bonus for each Avatar to determine the final Player Score⁵

For example, Alice has a 9/2 Avatar. She challenges Bob's 7/4 Avatar. Alice lays down a five of hearts (5♥) and a ten of hearts (10♥), the maximum number of cards she can use during the attack. Her Avatar's Attack Score is now Red 24 (R24). Since all ties go to the defender, Bob must build a Defense Score of R24 or greater to defeat the attack. He must use either hearts (♥) or diamonds (♦) to do so. Bob lays down a jack of diamonds (J♦) and a three of hearts (3♥) and a seven of hearts (7♥) for a Defense Score of R24.

Alice's attack has failed. If Bob had failed to defend the attack, Alice would have moved Bob's avatar to her Scoring Stack to be counted at the end of the game.

5.2 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 is added to the Scoring Stack of the counter-attacking player. 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 king of clubs (K♣) and an eight of spades (8♠), giving him an Attack Score of Black 28 (B28). Alice has three cards left, but only two black cards: a five of spades (5♠) and a ten of spades (10♠). She decides to defend with only the five of spades in hopes that she'll draw a higher card at the end of her turn. Bob's Avatar defeats Alice's Avatar, so he adds her Avatar's Score to his Scoring Stack.

⁵See section 6.

5.3 Clean Up

Discard any cards played during the attack and defend and counter-attack phases of the player's turn. Each player draws up to five cards in their hand and replaces any defeated Avatars by drawing a new one just as in the Setup of the game.

5.4 Next Attack

Now that the Attacking player has completed her first attack, she may choose to attack with her remaining Avatar, or she may choose to waive the attack.

5.5 Next Player

Following the conclusion of a player's attacks, control of the game moves clockwise (to the right) to the next player.

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. Being limited to two cards on the attack, and being immediately vulnerable to a counter-attack should your attack fails makes for very interesting game-play. Finding a balance between a strong attack and a solid defense is important for winning the game.

A This Document

This document was created using L^AT_EX. 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>.

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

- v1.0 - All beta-test rules removed. Added card limits to attack and defend. Removed concept of rounds. The game has met its goals!
- 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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