Overview

Evolve your species and become the Apex carnivore!

Both players start with a common ancestor deck (from the *Miacidae* family) **and evolve it towards one or more of three carnivore families** (see p. 18):

- Felidae (cat-like)
- Ursidae (bear-like)
- Mustelidae (weasel-like)

After each evolution cycle of your deck, one card (trait) is removed by natural selection. Pass skill checks to gain and activate new traits that improve your survival skills: Only the fittest species will survive!

Goal of the Game
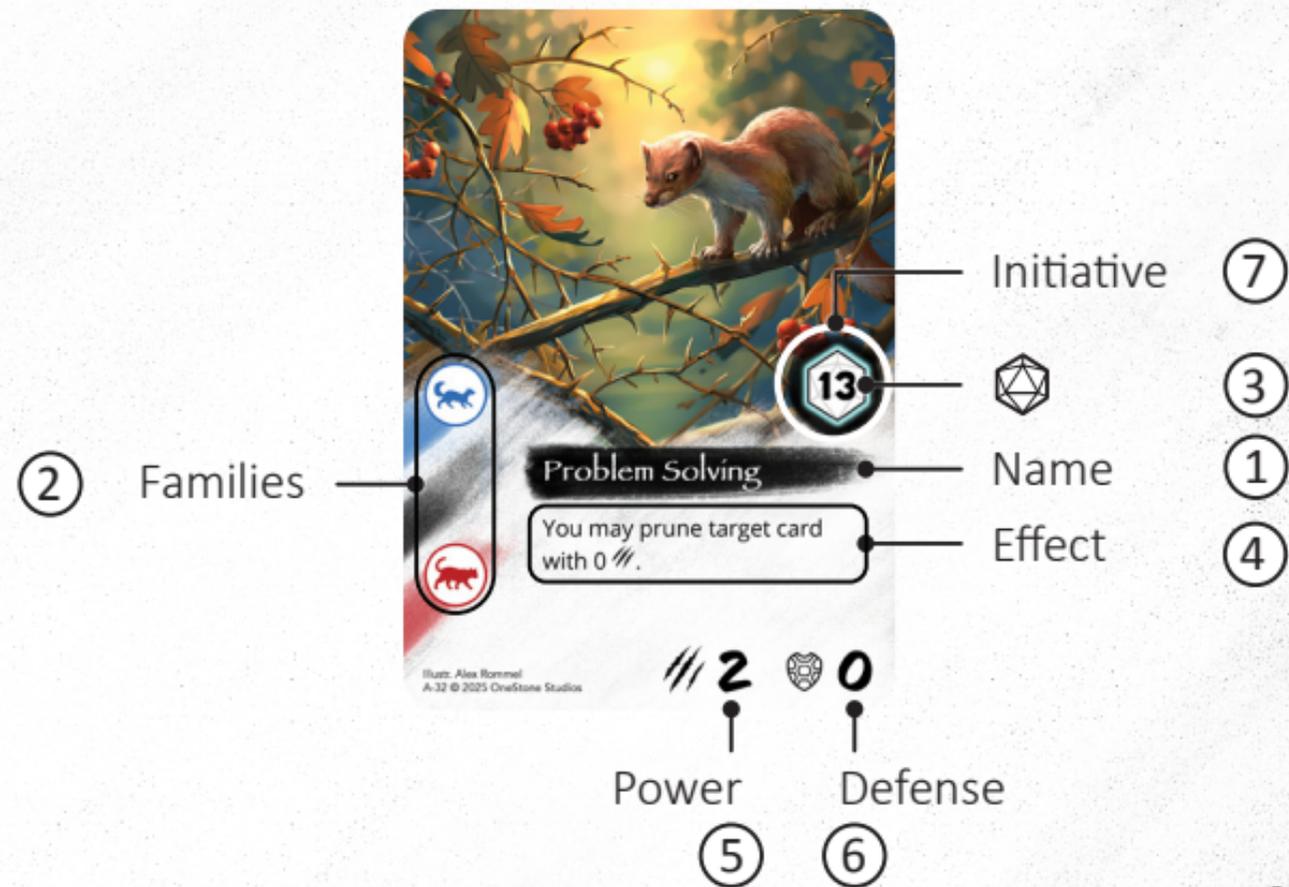
Reduce your opponent's life points down to 0!

Life points (0-20) represent your species population. Use the green die with 20 sides to track them!
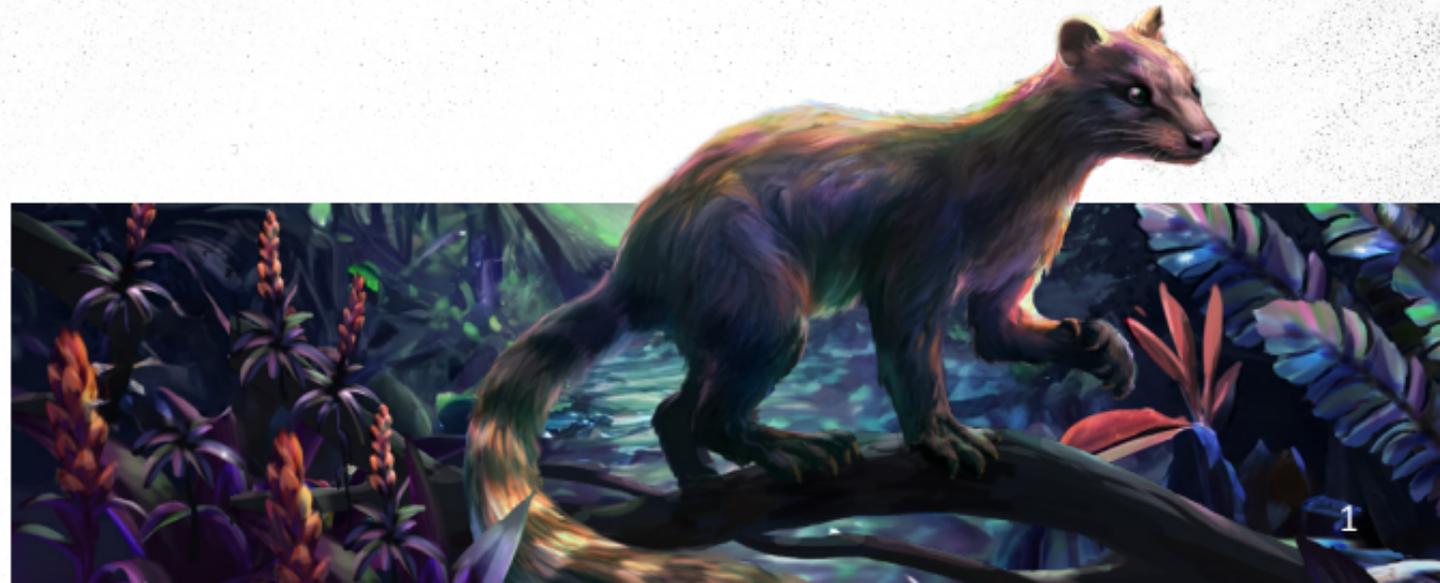
Card Anatomy

Cards represent evolutionary or behavioral traits of your species. Each card contains the following elements:

1. **Name** of the trait card
2. **Families** (🐻 , 🐱 , 🐈) the card belongs to
3. **Difficulty Class** (⬡): Minimum number to reach with a die roll to pass a skill check (bonuses apply, see p. 5).
4. **Effect** that activates when the skill check succeeds.
5. **Power** (⫻): Damage dealt to the opponent.
6. **Defense** (🛡): How much damage can be prevented.
7. A blue hue around the ⬡ gives you 1 point of **initiative**.

Families ②

Initiative ⑦

⬡ ③

Problem Solving — Name ①

You may prune target card with 0 ⫻. — Effect ④

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⫻ **2**   🛡 **0**

Power ⑤   Defense ⑥

Core Mechanics

APEX fuses the strategy of deckbuilding with the tension of dice rolls and skill checks, driving a fast-paced, high-stakes battle for survival!

DECKBUILDING & PRUNING

Each round, players draw 5 cards from their deck. Whenever you would draw a card and your deck is empty:

1. **Choose one card in your discard pile, then set it aside (PRUNE it)** for the rest of the game.
   Tip: A good tactic is to prune *Lineage* first!
2. Shuffle your discard pile and put it back as your new deck.
3. Draw a card from this new deck!

SKILL CHECKS

To activate or gain a new card, **perform a skill check as follows:**

1. Check its difficulty class (⬡)
2. Roll your white D20 die
3. If the result + modifiers meets or exceeds the ⬡, the skill check succeeds. Otherwise, turn the card sideways to signal that it failed for that round.
   Add up all bonuses; they apply to every card you try to activate (p. 10) and buy (p. 14) during a round!

Pass ✅

Fail ❌

Gain +2 for skill checks.

Setup & Game Areas

8x Lineage **2x** Instinct → Deck A

1. Each player gets an identical starter **deck** (marked by A/B in the top left card corner) and shuffles it facedown.
2. Shuffle all other trait cards into a face-down pile and place it within reach of both players. This is the **trait deck**.
3. **Reveal 5 cards** from the trait deck and place them face up so everyone can reach them. This is the **trait pool**.
   Whenever the trait pool has less than 5 cards, refill it immediately with cards from the trait deck.
4. Each player takes a green D20 die as a life counter and sets it to 20, then takes a white D20 die for skill checks.
5. Each player saves space for a **discard pile** and **play area**.

Discard pile
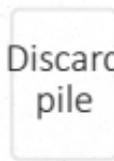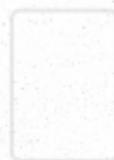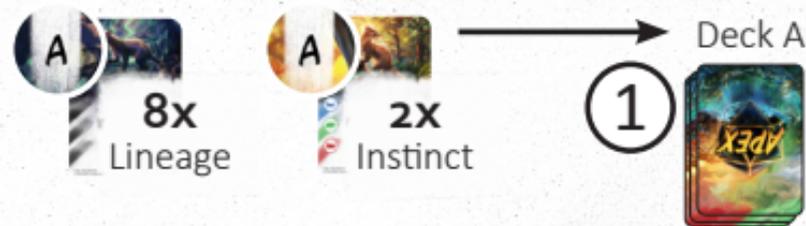
Deck B
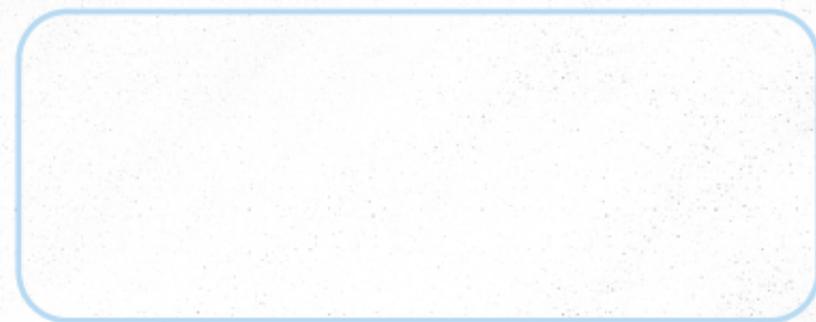
Play area

Gameplay

During a game, players evolve their deck in shared rounds until one player wins. Every round consists of 5 phases:

(1/5) DRAW PHASE

1. **Each player draws 5 cards** from their deck and immediately **plays them face-up** in their play area.

2. Each player counts 1 **initiative** point for each card with a blue-hued ⬡. **The player with the highest total becomes First Player** for the round.
   If tied, players roll their white D20s; highest roll wins initiative.
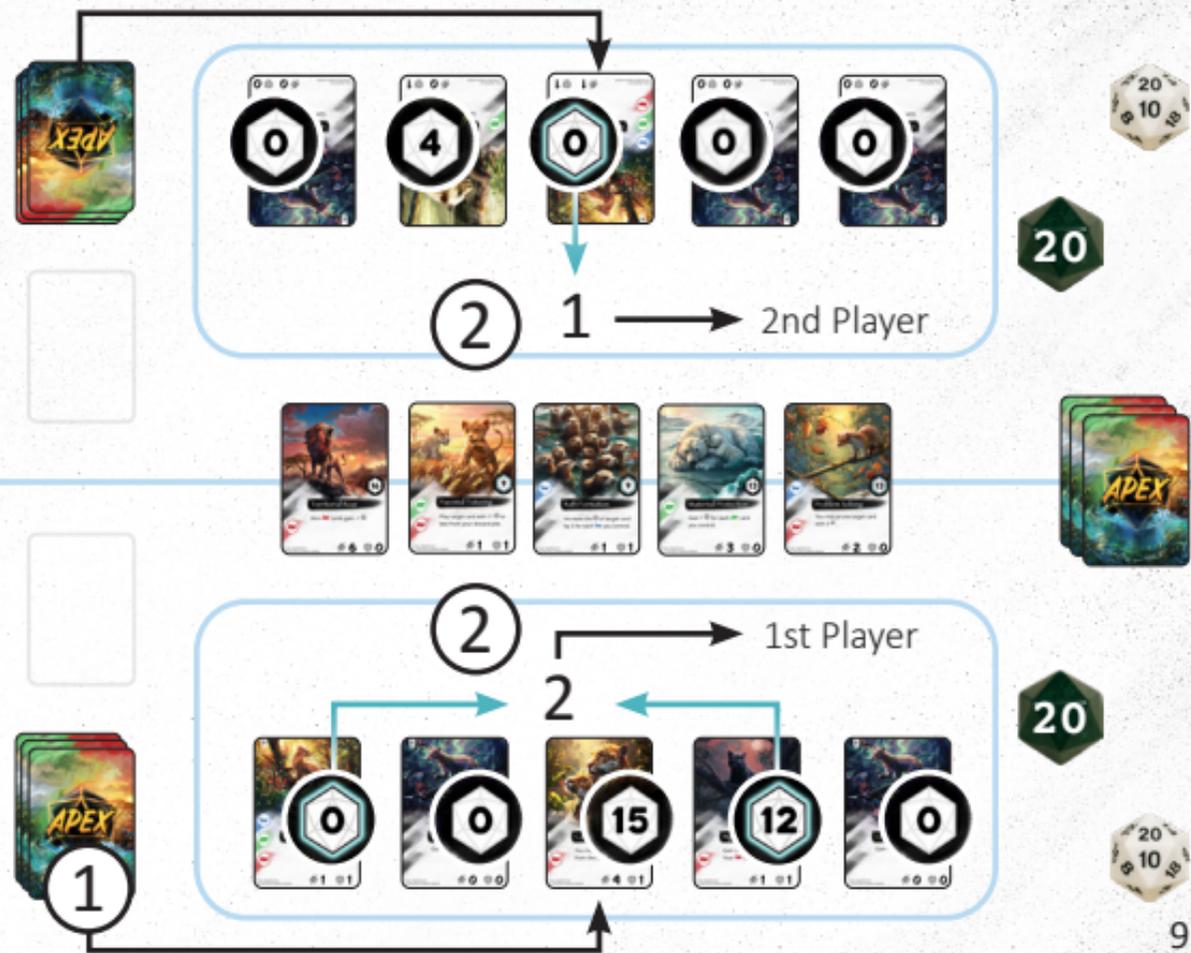
(2/5)   ACTIVATION PHASE

1. First Player tries to **activate, one by one in any order, all cards in their play area** by performing skill checks. If a card activates, **resolve its effect now**. If it fails, turn the card sideways: It cannot be activated this round.

   Reminder: To activate a card, pass the skill check corresponding to its ⬡ (including any skill check modifiers,)!

   Tip: To easily track your cards, move all Lineages to the side (they have 0 ⬡ and last as long as they are in play), then move forward each card you successfully activated!

2. When all skill checks have been performed and abilities resolved, **Second Player does the same**.
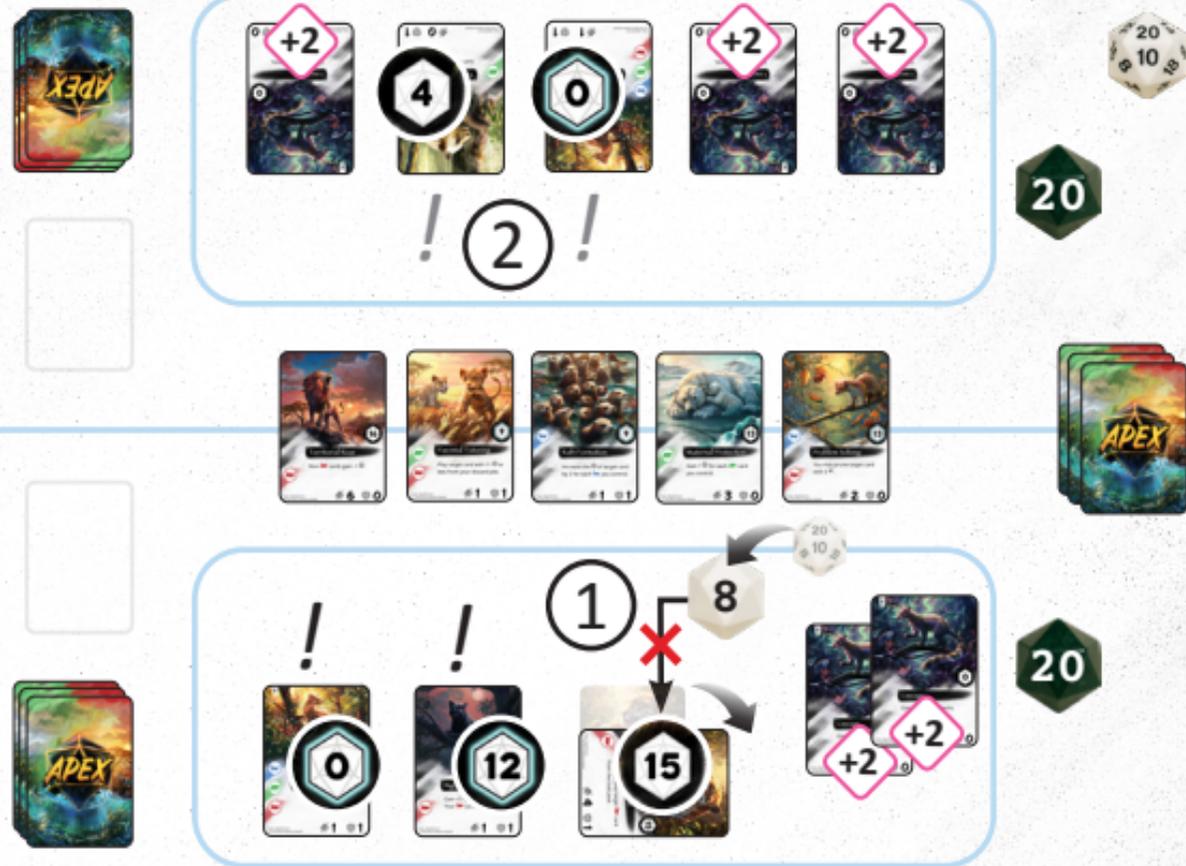
(3/5) SURVIVAL PHASE

1. (a) **First Player checks the total power of their activated cards**, including modifiers, and attacks Second Player.

   (b) **Second Player checks the total defense of their activated cards**, including modifiers, to reduce the damage.

   (c) If the attack power is greater than the defense, excess damage reduces Second Player's life points by that amount. **If their life points reach zero**, **the game ends and the First Player wins now** (before the Second Player can attack)!

2. Second Player attacks in the same way. If First Player's life points reach 0, Second Player wins now!

Gain +5 for 🐾 skill checks.
Your 🐾 cards gain +1 ⫽.
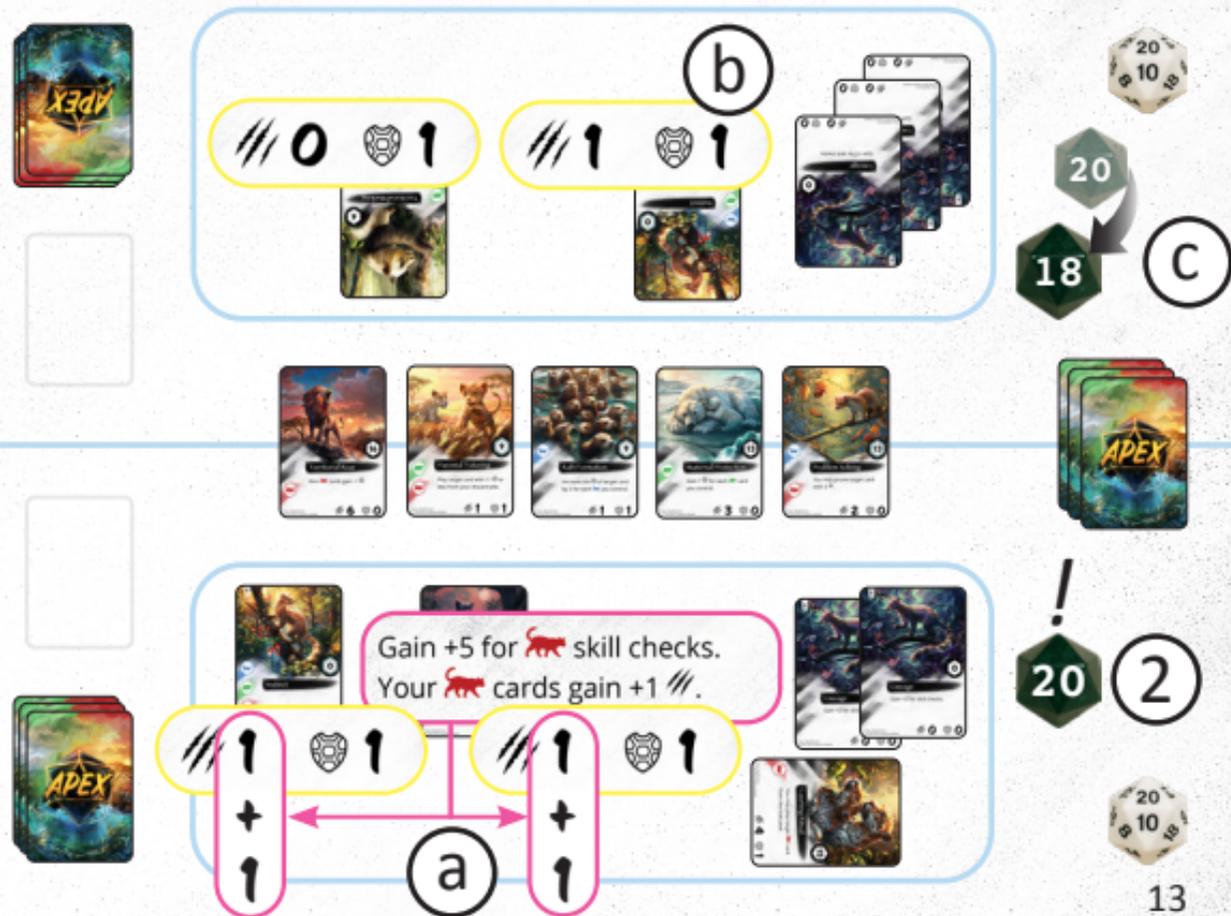
(4/5) EVOLUTION PHASE

Starting with First Player, players **alternate until each succeeded in exactly one of the following actions**:

- **BUY** – Choose a card in the trait pool, then (1) perform the corresponding skill check to buy it. If you succeed, (2) put that card into your discard pile, otherwise leave it in the pool: You may not try to buy this same card again this round.
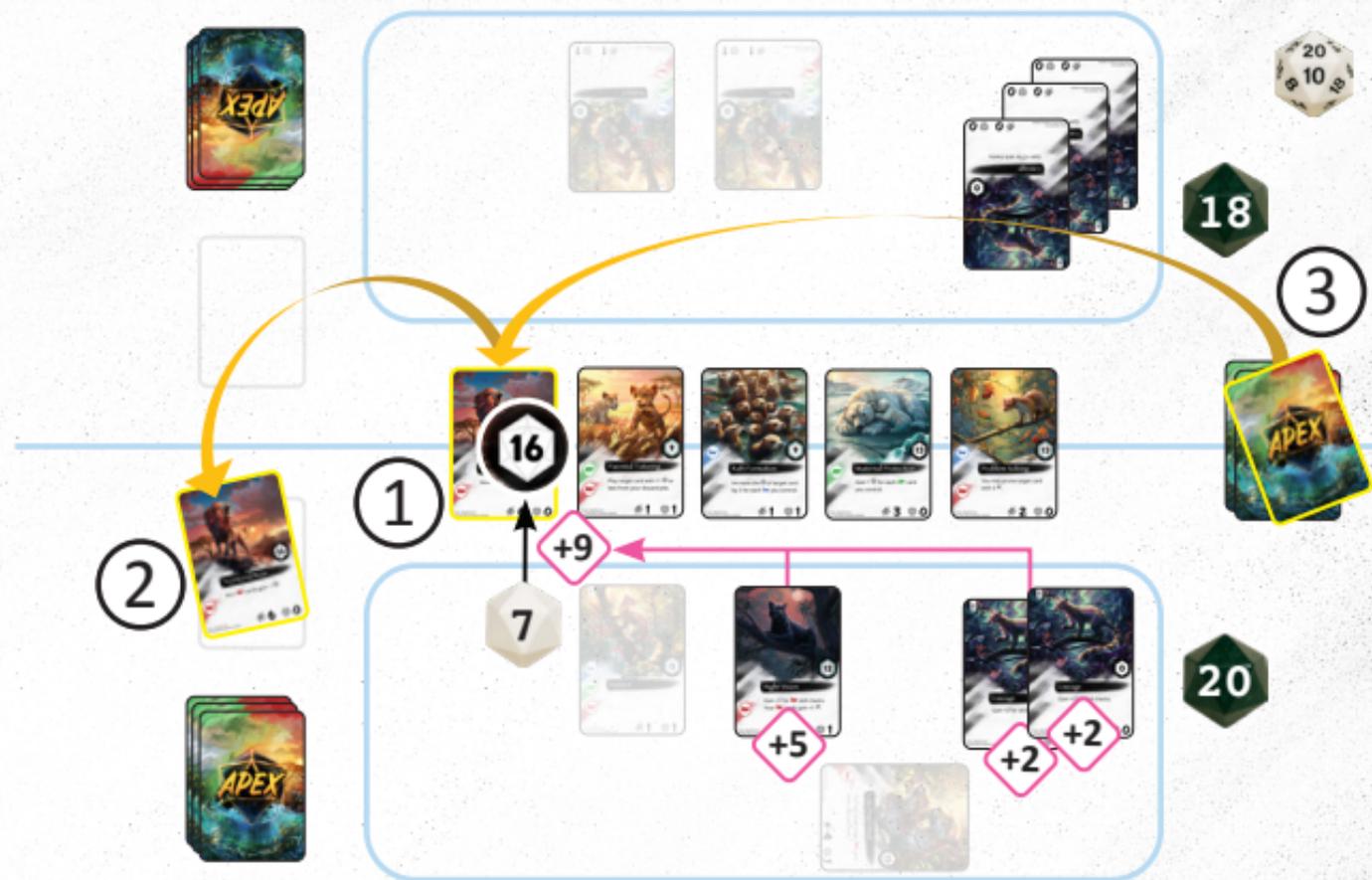 Tip: Skill check modifiers from activated cards apply!

- **PRUNE** – Remove one card in the pool from the game.
  Note: This action succeeds automatically, without a skill check!

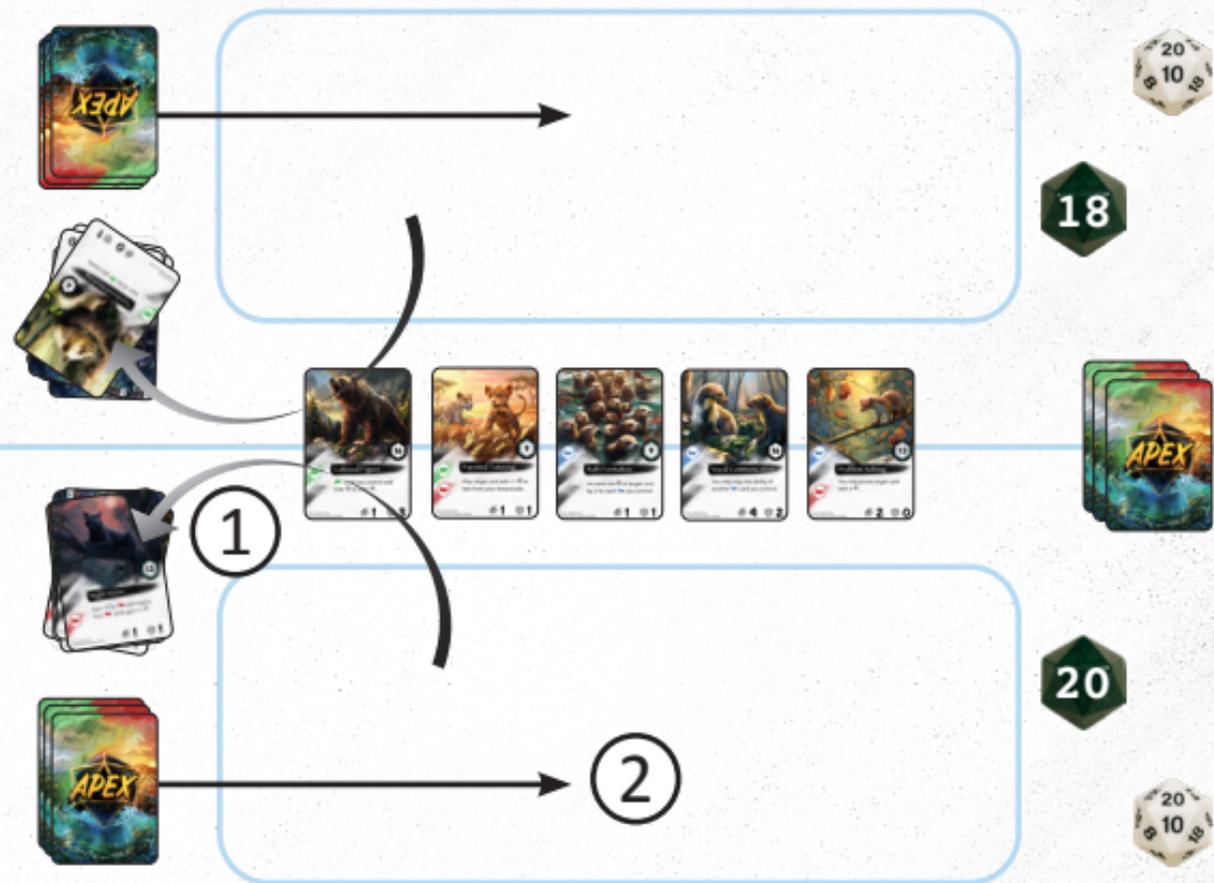Example: 1st Player (P) chooses BUY: ❌. 2nd P chooses BUY: ❌.
1st P chooses BUY: ✅. 2nd P chooses BUY: ❌. 2nd P chooses PRUNE: ✅.

Reminder: (3) Whenever the trait pool has less than 5 cards, refill it (see p. 6).

1. Players put all played cards face up into their discard piles.
2. Start a new round!

Science of Carnivora

Back when Earth was a steamy greenhouse, the canopy-dwelling Miacidae family kicked off the carnivore tree: Among the families in this game, bears split first (≈43–38 Ma), mustelids next (≈34–30 Ma), and cats last (≈27–25 Ma). Which path will you take?

Learn more!

60   50   40   30   20   Million
                                   years ago (Ma)
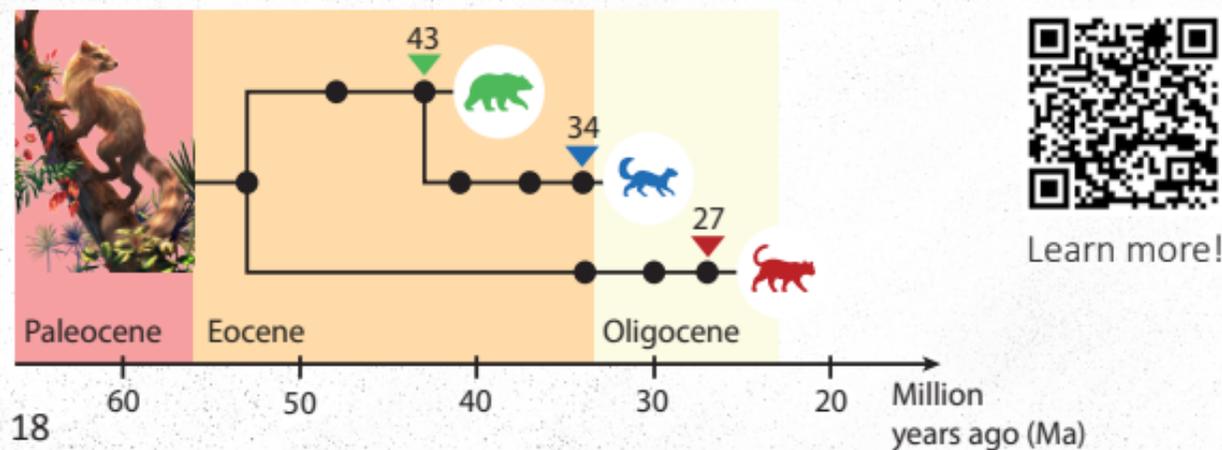
Single-player

A rival species emerged, driven by a singular instinct to dominate.

How to Play: You roll dice and make decisions also for your rival, but their Evolution Phase follows one archetype:

- **The Opportunist** – Always buys cards with the **highest** ⬡.
- **The Specialist** – Always buys from a family chosen before setup. If unable, prune the whole trait pool and refill it instead. Levels: To up the difficulty, replace 1-2 Instinct cards in its deck with the following cards:
  - 🐾: Flexible Spine / Camouflage
  - 🐻: Standing Upright / Den Building
  - 🐱: Keen Senses / Raft Formation

Multiplayer

How to Play: You play as normal, following the order of initiative within each phase. Only the order of attack is special: Players always attack the next player in initiative order, with the last player attacking the first.
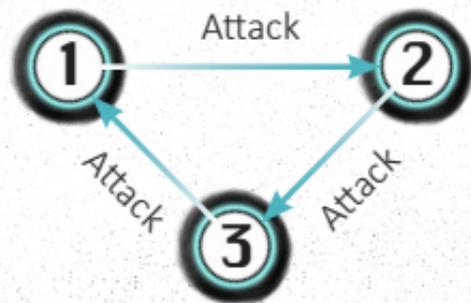
Glossary

- **Control:** You control cards in your play area (even if they are not activated).
- **Difficulty class / Skill check:** see Card Anatomy and Core Mechanics (pp. 2-5)
- **Discard:** Move from your play area into your discard pile.
- **Draw:** Draw a card from your deck and play it into your play area.
- **Effects:** Cards have abilities that activate immediately when their skill check succeeds during Activation. Any effect ends when the card leaves play! Effects apply in order of activation and take previous effects into account.
- **Play (from…):** Cards can be played from different zones (e.g., the trait pool using effects). When you play a card from anywhere, put it face up in your play area (see p. 7). Played cards can be activated during the Activation phase. A card is considered in-play if it is in a play area or in the trait pool.
- **Prune:** Remove a card from the game. Set it aside for the remainder of the game instead of putting it into a discard pile.
- **Target card:** A card of your choice in play or in a discard pile.

Credits

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