BLINK · A MELD-BUILDING CIVILIZATION GAME

Your First Game

A guided walkthrough — read this at the table, out loud

3 PLAYERS ABOUT 20 MINUTES TO LEARN TOBY SIKO

How to use this booklet

Don't read the rulebook first. Sit down with the box, put this booklet in the middle of the table, and work through it aloud. It sets the game up with you and then plays the first three rounds alongside you, introducing each rule at the moment you need it.

The walkthrough is written for **three players** — we'll call them **Ada**, **Bex** and **Cy**; substitute your own names. At two or four players everything works the same way; the setup table in the rulebook covers the differences.

One thing to leave in the box for now: the **perks** module. It is good, and it is for your third game. The **map objectives** stay in — they are part of the base game now, two cards each and one line of scoring, and leaving them out takes away the only points that are about the SHAPE of what you hold.

Once you've played, the rulebook is the reference — every section number in these pages points into it.

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1 Set the table up together

STEP 1 · THE CARDS

Split the deck by rank, not by suit

Find every card of ranks **1 to 10** — that's your **starting deck**, forty cards. Ranks **11 to 20** are the **advanced deck**, the other forty. That is the whole split, and it is the same however many of you are playing.

Nothing goes back in the box.

STEP 2 · YOUR HAND

Draft ten cards you'll keep all game

Deal ten starting-deck cards to each player. Now draft: **keep 4, pass the rest clockwise**. From the six you receive, **keep 6, pass 4**. Then **keep 8, pass 2**. Then keep the last two. You end with ten cards.

Put the rest of the starting deck **face down in the middle** — that's the **market**. Fourteen cards with three players, twenty-four with two, four with four. You never draw from it to refill: the only thing that reaches into it is **trade**, later on.

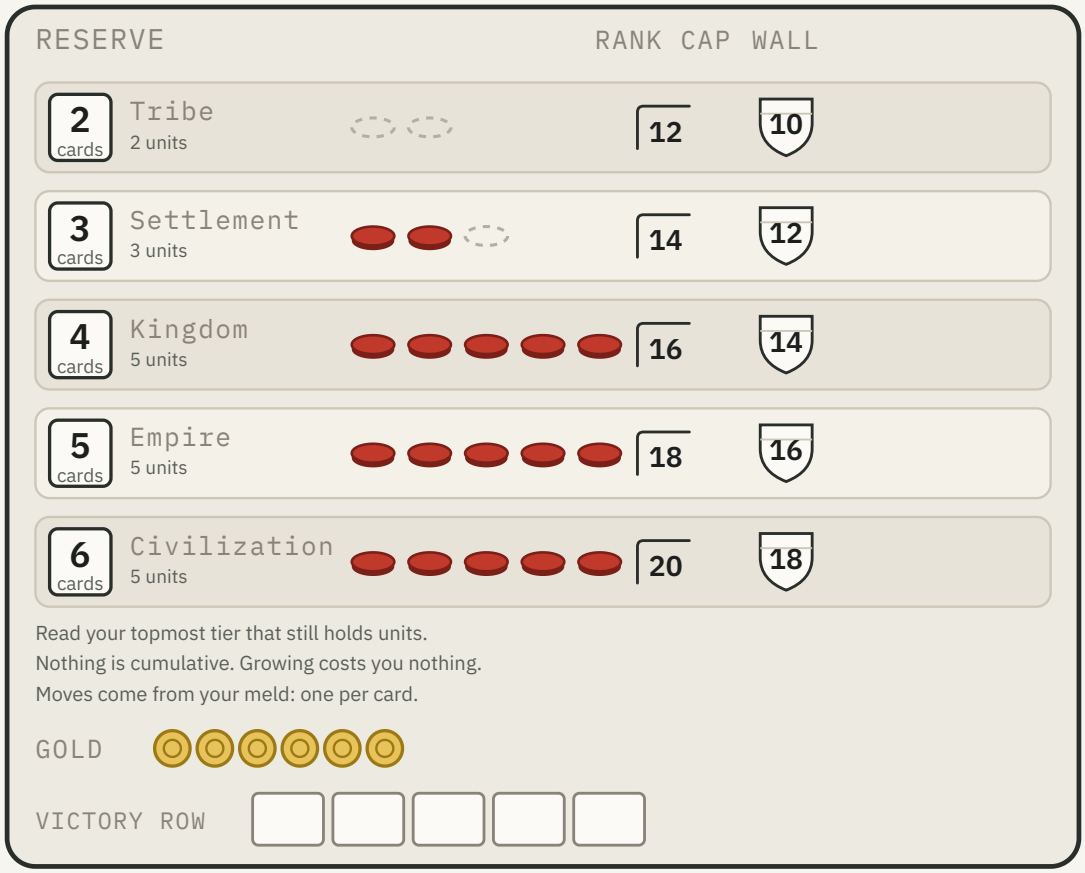
Say this out loud: *these ten cards are your civilization for the whole game. You will play them, pick them back up, and play them again. You'll only change them by buying better ones later — one at a time, and never more than ten.*

Drafting well is a skill for game two. For now, a rough guide: pairs and consecutive ranks are worth more than high cards on their own, because they let you play more cards at once.

STEP 3 · YOUR BOARD

Load all twenty units, top tier first

Take a player board and fill all five tiers — **2, 3, 5, 5, 5** from the top. Every unit you'll ever place is here. That is the whole board: no coins to pre-place, nothing owed.



Your reserve empties from the top band down. The tier you are currently drawing from prints what you may do: the meld you may play, the highest rank you may buy, and the rank a coin on one of your units defends at. Right now that is Tribe — melds of two, cap 12, walls at 10. Movement is not on the ladder: every card you play carries one.

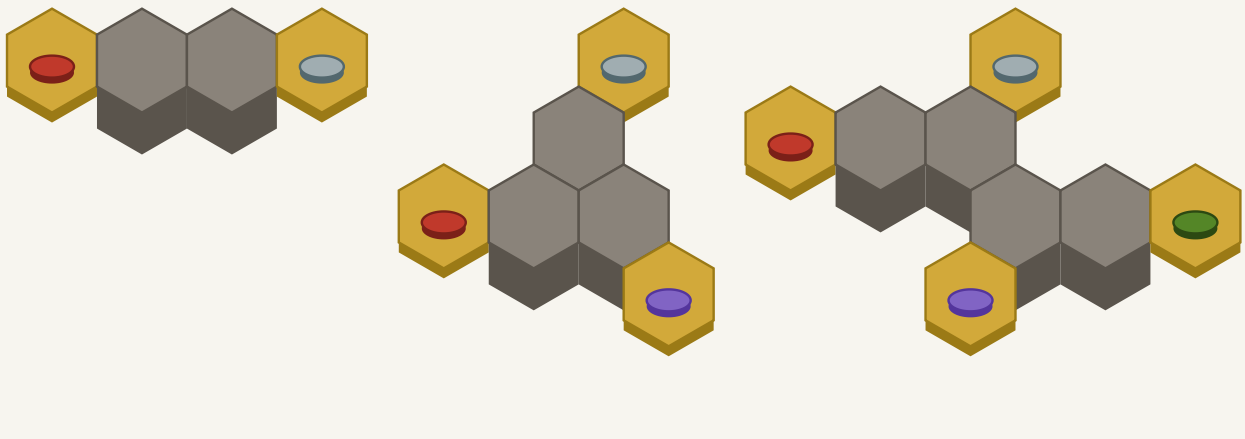
Say this out loud: *this board is the engine, and climbing it is pure gain — a longer meld, which is also more movement, and better cards within reach. Growing costs you nothing at all. What it spends is units, and units on the map are points.*

STEP 4 · THE MAP

Three Mountains, three Plains

Take three **Mountain** tiles and put them in a triangle in the middle of the table. Now put one **Plains** against each outer face of the triangle, spaced as in the picture, so that **every Plains is three tiles from every other**. Each player takes one unit from their top band and puts it on a Plains — that's their homeland.

Why three apart: *cards only act next to your civilization. Three apart means nobody can be attacked in the opening rounds, whatever they draw.*



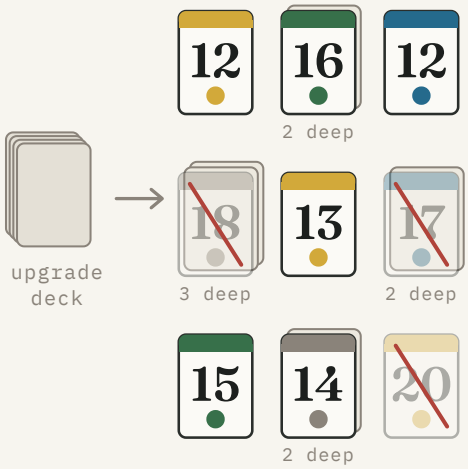
The starting layouts. One Mountain per player in the middle, one Plains per player around it — and every start three tiles from every other, which is what keeps you out of reach in the opening rounds.

STEP 5 · THE SUPPLY AND THE MARKET

Tiles in the open, nine cards face up

Sort the remaining tiles into four open piles by terrain, in easy reach of everyone. This is the **tile supply** — nothing is hidden and nothing is rationed. When you need a Forest, you take a Forest, until the Forests run out.

Now shuffle the whole advanced deck together, face down. Deal **nine cards face up in a 3×3 grid** beside it. That is the **innovation space** — a spread of ranks, not one per suit — and it is where research buys from. It is not the market: the market is the face-down stack you laid in step 2, and only trade reaches that.



your rank cap is 16: the taller cards are visible, not buyable
a draw covers the highest rank showing — nobody chooses

One shuffled deck, nine positions. Every research turns a card onto the position showing the highest rank — burying it. Nobody chooses where it lands, so the top of the innovation space keeps sinking out of reach. Your tier's rank cap decides how much of the spread you can actually take; the rest is visible and out of bounds.

STEP 6 · WHO GOES FIRST

Hand out the initiative markers

Pick a start player — Ada, say. She takes the **black marker**, set to **"1"**. The others take plain markers, 2 and 3. You're ready.

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2 Round one — play it with us

Everyone still has a unit sitting in Tribe — setup spent one of the two — so everybody's meld limit is **2**. You may play one card or two, never more. Note how short that is: the first unit any of you settles clears Tribe and lifts that player to melds of three.

The card phase

Ada leads, then Bex, then Cy. Nobody may pass, and — unlike most trick-taking games — **nobody has to follow suit**. Play whatever combination you like.

What counts as a legal meld? Just one rule: the ranks must form an **unbroken run**. Duplicates are free, suits are irrelevant. At limit 2 that means a single card, two of the same rank, or two consecutive ranks.

- ADA plays **5 of Plains + 6 of Plains** — the run 5-6.
- BEX plays **8 of Mountain + 8 of Ocean** — the run 8, doubled.
- CY plays a single **4 of Mountain**.

Now resolve it. **Highest total wins** — add the ranks up. Bex played 8 + 8 = **16**, Ada 5 + 6 = **11**, Cy a single 4 = **4**. **Bex wins the trick.** She takes the black marker, set to 1; Ada takes 2, Cy takes 3.

Ada matched Bex's two cards and lost, so one of the two cards **she already played** is **set aside**: she chooses which, it pays her **1 gold** instead of acting on the map, and it goes to **her own discard** — she will meld it again next recycle. Cy played fewer than the winner, so he gives up nothing. That rule counts CARDS, not the total — Ada played two and so did Bex.

> **Notice:** *Cy could have won this trick with a single card, if it had been a 17 or better. One big card is a real play. But it would have been one card to spend on the map afterwards, against Bex's two — which is the choice the whole game turns on.*

The map phase

Here's the move that makes Blink what it is: **you now spend those same cards**, one by one, as your actions on the map. Each card does one of four things: **settle** a unit, **explore** a tile, **attack** a rival, or **take 1 gold** — always on terrain matching its suit, always next to your civilization.

The winner spends every card they played, and so does anyone who played *fewer* than the winner. Only a player who **matched** the winner and lost gives one up — set aside for a gold, as Ada just did. The player whose meld **ranked last takes 1 gold**. Act in initiative order.

BEX — 2 CARDS, AND SHE WON

Only Plains and Mountain are on the table yet, so her **Mountain** card is the one that can settle: the Mountain beside her homeland is in reach, and she takes a unit from her top band. Mountain holds one, so that tile is hers alone now. She spends her **Ocean** card on an **explore**: she picks an empty space beside her civilization, checks that it touches at least two tiles already on the table, takes an Ocean tile from the supply, and puts it down empty for now. Both her cards reached the map — that is what winning the trick is worth, along with going first.

ADA — 2 CARDS, ONE OF THEM SET ASIDE

She keeps the **6 of Plains** and sets the 5 aside. The only Plains she can reach is her own homeland, so she settles the 6 by **stacking** a second unit on it — Plains holds three. The 5 goes to **her own discard** and pays her **1 gold**: that is the price of matching Bex's two cards and losing — the turn, not the card.

> **Notice:** *at the start there is no Forest and no Ocean anywhere. The only way to use those cards is to build the ground first — that is what exploring is for, and it is why nobody's hand is dead on turn one.*

CY — 1 CARD, AND LAST PLACE

His single ranked last this trick, so he takes **1 gold** for that. He cashes the 4 of Mountain for a second gold — nothing on the map is worth reaching for yet. He has built nothing and is not behind; he's saving.

To finish: pass the lead to Bex. Put your played cards face up in front of you — that pile is your **personal discard**, and it will become your next hand.

> **What just happened:** *one meld did two jobs. Bex's slightly higher card bought her initiative and a third card to spend. Cy's caution came last and paid him for it. That trade — tempo now against resources later — is the whole game.*

3 Round two — spend them your way

Bex leads. Before you play, here is the rule that new players most often miss.

A meld is a **combination of cards**, nothing more. Once the trick is settled, the meld has done its job — each card is then spent **on its own**, in any order you like, and each one sees the map as the last one left it. Explore a tile with one card and settle it with the next. Send one card to a border and cash the other for a coin. The meld decides *how much* you do, never *what* you do.

> **Say this out loud:** *every card is the same question — is it a person, or is it gold? There is no wrong terrain to hold cards for: a card with no useful place on the map is a coin, and coins are never wasted.*

Play round two normally. Four things to watch for as they come up:

- **A card with nowhere useful to go** — wrong terrain, or boxed in — simply **takes 1 gold** instead. You are never stuck.
- **Spending a card onto a rival's tile** is an **attack**, not a move — and an attack is a **duel**. Your attack is simply the rank of the card you spent; you commit nothing else. The defender may answer with one card from their hand, face up, of any suit — its rank plus the ground (Plains and Ocean +0, Forest +1, Mountain +2) is their defence. Higher total wins; a level total goes to *you*, the attacker (unless their card matches the ground too, when they hold). Win and *one* of their units goes home — and if that was the last unit there, the tile is yours: settle it on the spot. Both cards go to their owners' discards, back in your hand next time it recycles. Taking a tile always takes more than one turn. (You won't manage it this round — the Mountain is in the way, which is why it's there, and it defends at +2.)
- **Your movement comes from the meld.** Every card you played this round lets you move one unit: across your own connected units onto a free tile beside them, or across open Ocean. Never onto a rival. A meld of two moves twice; a single moves once.
- **Your top tier empties fast.** Tribe holds only two units and setup already spent one, so the first unit you settle clears it — and you are a Settlement. Your meld limit goes to **3** — which is three movements on a full meld — and your rank cap to **14**. Nothing is owed for it: climbing is free, and the only price is the units it took.

4 Round three — spend a coin

By now someone has two or three gold. Here's what it buys.

The most important purchase is an **upgrade**, and it is a straight trade: **your worst card out, a better one in**. Retire the **lowest-ranked card in your hand** into your **victory row**, pay **1 gold**, and take any one of the nine face-up cards in the **innovation space**. Say where it goes — your **hand**, where you can play it next round, or your **discard**, which shortens your hand and brings the recycle sooner. Either way you still hold exactly ten cards; one of them is just much better.

It has to come out of your **hand** — cards you have already played to the table this turn are spent, and cannot be retired. So a turn where you dump your whole hand is a turn you do not research.

You never choose *which* card leaves: it is always your lowest. That is what makes research feel like progress rather than shopping — the old idea is what pays for the new one, and nothing reaches your victory row that was

not once the worst card you owned.

Early on that means giving up a 3 or a 4. Later, when your hand is all upgrades, your lowest card *is* a good one. Don't hold back waiting for that: a card in the row is a point whatever its rank, so researching whenever you can afford it beats saving up for a perfect one.

The card you retired is not wasted — it sits in your victory row and **scores at the end of the game**: a point for being there, and, once you hold three, its rank may land in the centre slot and score again. Or you can spend it later for a one-shot effect, at the cost of never scoring it. One of those effects is declared at the very top of a round, before anybody plays a card, so it is a bet rather than an answer; the other two — extra units, and taking gold — are used when you can already see the board. That choice is the heart of the game's second half; ignore it for now and just keep them.

There is a second kind of improvement, **trade**: instead of reaching up for a better card, you swap two of your ten for the top two of the **market** — a different pile from the innovation space, and sight unseen until the two you drew are in your hand. It costs the same as research and comes out of the same twice-a-turn allowance: research, trade, or one of each. §09 has the whole of it — for a first game, researching alone is plenty to be going on with.

Gold also pays for **fortifying** (1) and **researching** (1, then 2). A coin stood on one of your units is a **wall**: it does not stop an attack, it answers one. The wall defends at the rank your tier prints — 10 at Tribe — instead of a card from your hand, so a single low card thrown at it simply bounces. Nothing else is owed, ever: your people cost you nothing to keep, and no bill ever falls due.

> **A warning worth hearing early:** *coins are the tight thing in this game, not units. Fortifying, researching and founding colonies all want gold and there is no steady income — you make it by cashing cards you would rather have played, by exploring with low ones, and by winning a fight that takes a tile. Losing a trick pays you a coin per unused card, so coming last is not nothing.*

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5 Now play on

You know enough. Play to the end — the game finishes when someone places their last unit or a suit's advanced deck runs out, then you finish the round and play one more.

At the end, count: **1 point per unit on the map**, plus the **centre card of your victory row** (once you have three or more), plus **2 points for every arrangement** either of your objective cards asks for — a middle terrain with one named terrain on either side of it, all three tiles yours. Build the shape twice and it pays twice. Gold breaks ties.

Then read the rulebook. It will take twenty minutes and it will make sense, because you've already seen every part of it move.

✦ Six things first-timers get wrong

Treating gold as a fallback.
Cashing good cards on purpose is how fortresses, research and colonies get paid for. The strongest players convert constantly. (§06)

Trying to win every trick.

Coming last pays you a gold, and you'll need it. Deliberately playing a single is a real strategy, not a failure. (§04)

Expecting to capture a tile in one turn.
One won duel removes one defender. A tile holding three takes three duels, and only the one that clears the last defender takes the ground. (§06)

Emptying bands as fast as possible.
Growing is free, but every unit you place brings the end closer, and a unit spread thin is one a rival can take. Growth is a decision, not a goal. (§04)

Hoarding cards in the victory row and never spending one.
They're also your emergency gold and your trick insurance. A row of five you never touched may mean you played too safely — though every card is worth a point on its own, so spending one always costs you something. (§10)

Forgetting the discard is your next hand.
What you play this round is what you'll hold next time round. Cards bought late arrive later than you think. (§08)