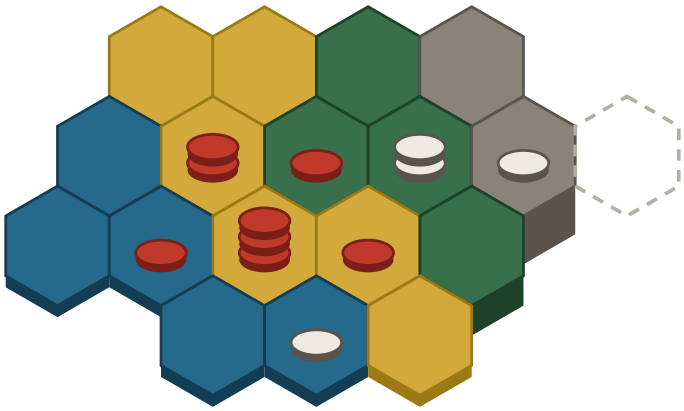
A MELD-BUILDING CIVILIZATION GAME

Blink

Climbing the ladder of civilization

2–4 PLAYERS 45–90 MINUTES TOBY SIKO

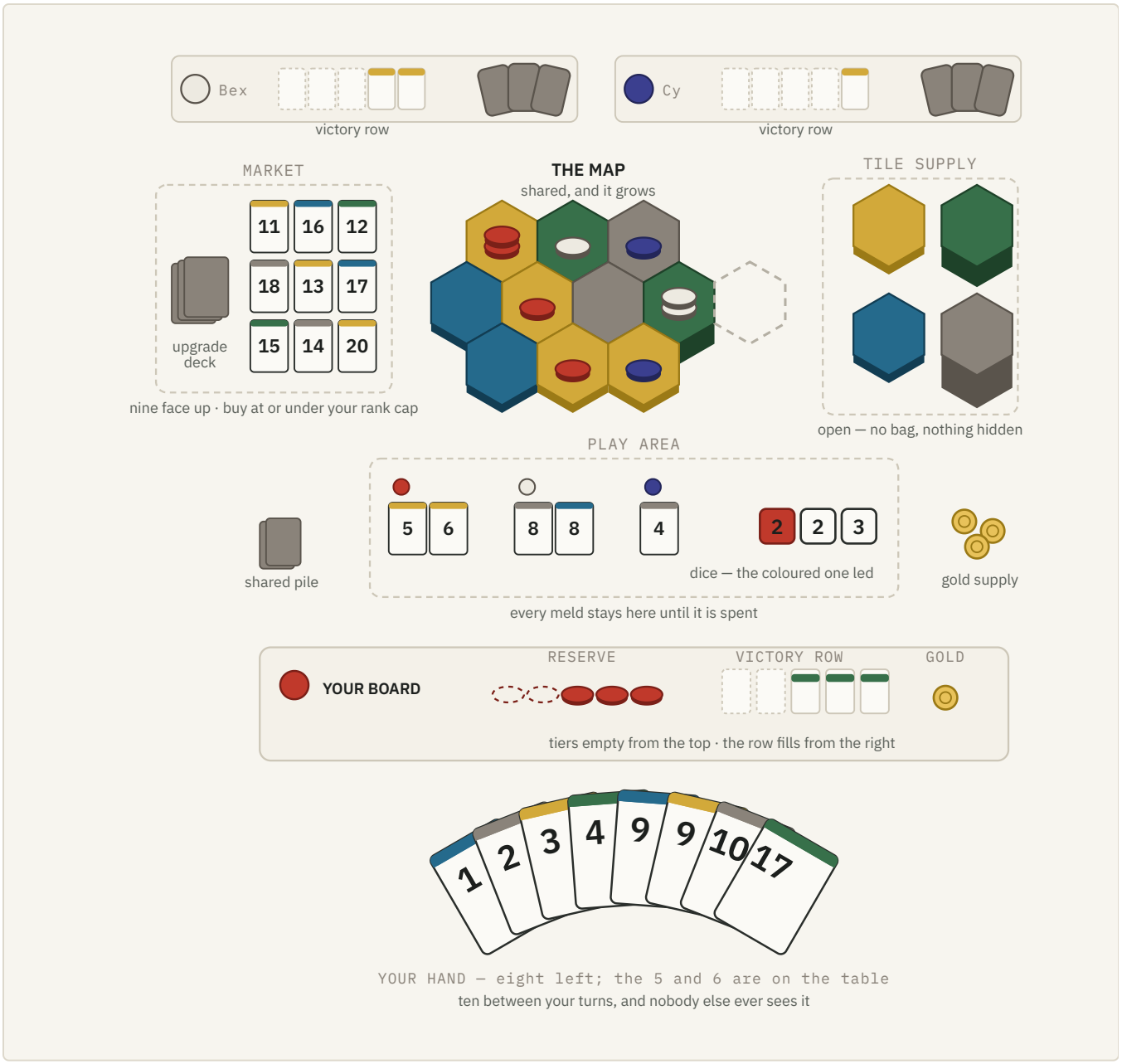


Start here

Each round you play a **meld** — a small combination of cards. The meld competes for the trick, and then every card in it becomes something: a settler, a new tile, an attack — or a coin. Win the trick and you act first, with every card you played still yours to spend; match the winner's count and lose, and one of yours is set aside. Come last and you pocket a coin.

1. **Card phase.** Everyone plays a meld. The highest total wins the trick.
2. **Map phase.** In initiative order, spend your meld — each card settles a unit, explores a new tile, attacks a rival, or is cashed for gold. Alongside the cards you have your free actions: your band's free moves, and gold shuffled between food, fortresses and research.
3. **Grow, and pay for it.** Units leave your board in tiers. Each tier you empty pays you a one-off ascension reward, lets you play a bigger meld and move further — and raises the gold your people cost to feed.

The game ends when someone places their last unit or the market thins to its last layer. Most points wins: one per unit on the map, plus your victory row, plus the terrain you dominate — the largest connected stretch of each.



The table, from your seat. The map in the middle is shared and grows all game; the market beside it is where cards are bought; every meld played goes to the play area and stays there until it is spent. Your own board holds your reserve of units, your gold and your victory row — and your hand is yours alone.

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01 The idea

In Blink, the cards you play do two things at once. They compete for the trick, and they are the budget your civilization spends. A pair is two things done; a run of four is four. You

never choose a move separately from the cards — the meld is the budget.

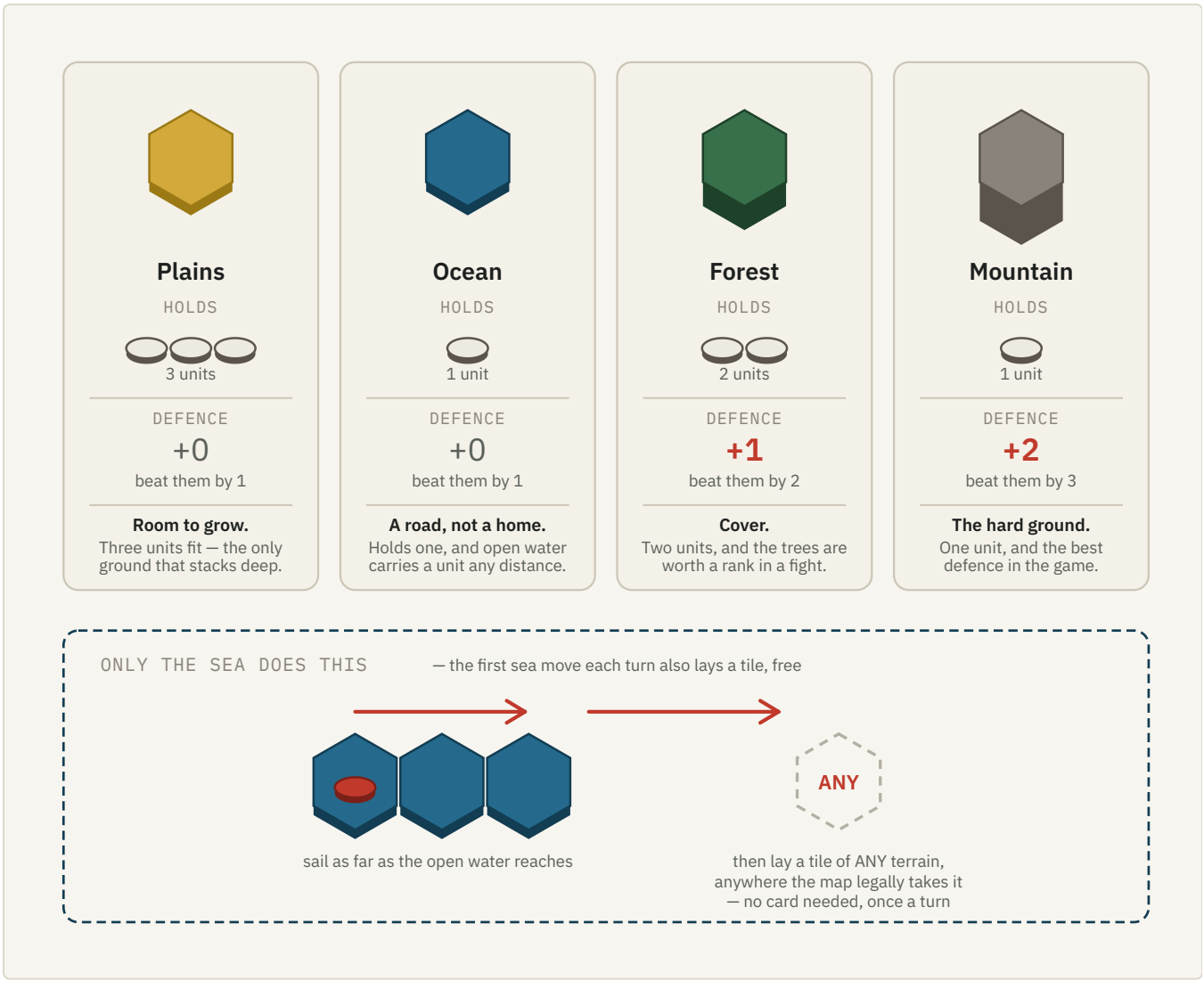
Winning the trick lets you act first, and every card you played still reaches the map. The player who came last takes a coin. So a strong meld buys tempo, but growth has a cost: the more ground you hold, the more it takes to feed, and feeding comes due whether or not you won.

Behind every card sits one plain question: **is it people, or is it gold?** Spent on the map, a card settles a unit, opens new ground or strikes a rival — always on terrain matching its suit. Cashed, it is a coin, and coins buy food, fortresses and research. Gold is tight, and winning play cashes cards constantly. The player who reads when a hand is people and when it is money — and when to spend a trick rather than win it — comes out ahead.

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02 Components

- **80 civilization cards** — four suits (Plains, Forest, Ocean, Mountain), ranks 1–20
- **60 terrain tiles** — 15 each of Plains, Forest, Ocean and Mountain
- **80 population units** — 20 in each of four player colours
- **4 player boards** — each with a **reserve** of five tiers, a **gold area**, and a **victory row** of five slots
- **40 gold coins** — if you run out, treat the supply as unlimited
- **4 dice** — one **winner's die** in its own colour, and three plain **initiative dice**. One per player.



Everything that differs between the four terrains. How many units the ground holds, how much it adds to a defender in a duel — and, read the other way, how far you have to beat them by to take it. Defended ground is moulded taller, so its height is its defence bonus. Ocean is the odd one: it holds a single unit and is a road rather than a place to live.

03

Setup

1. **Split the cards.** Divide the 80 cards into a **starting deck** and an **upgrade deck** by rank, according to the player count.

PLAYERS	STARTING DECK	UPGRADE DECK
2	ranks 6–10	ranks 11–20
3	ranks 3–10 †	ranks 11–20
4	ranks 1–10	ranks 11–20

† **Three-player balance.** Ranks 3–10 give 32 starting cards for 30 dealt. Draw **two of the four rank-3 cards at random** and keep them; return the other two to the box. The upgrade deck is the full **ranks 11–20 at every player count** — the tier rank caps only mean something if the market reaches above them.

2. **Draft your hand.** Deal 10 starting-deck cards to each player. Keep 4 and pass 6 clockwise; keep 6 and pass 4; keep 8 and pass 2; keep the last 2. You end with a fixed hand of **ten cards**.

3. **Take a board.** Fill all five tiers with your 20 units — 2, 3, 5, 5, 5 from the top. Place the **ascension coins** on their printed spots: 1 on Settlement, 2 on Kingdom, 3 on Empire, 4 on Civilization. Your meld limit starts at **2**.

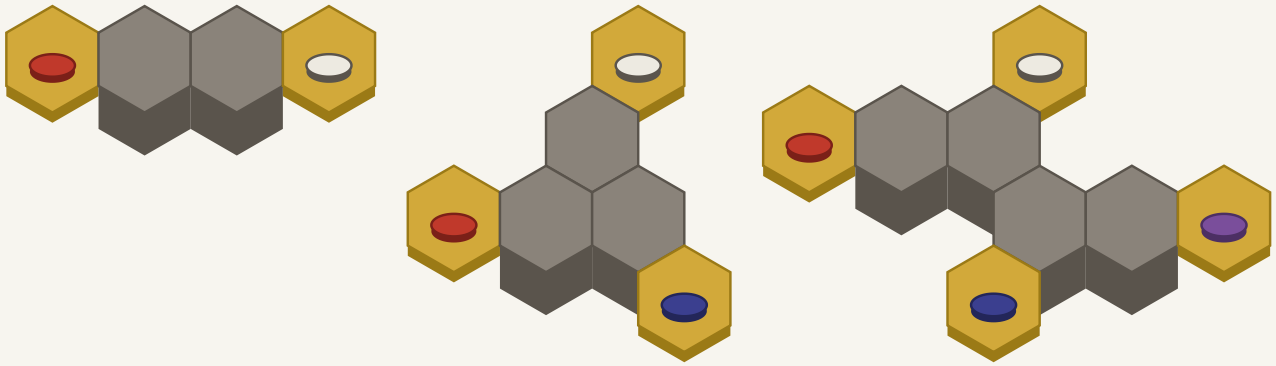
4. **Lay the starting map.** Build the layout shown for your player count, then each player places one unit from their top band on their own Plains tile. Whatever the count, the map obeys the same three rules:
   - **one Mountain per player**, in a single block in the middle;
   - **one Plains per player** around it, each touching exactly one Mountain;
   - every start exactly **three tiles** from every other.

   Three is not decoration. A card only acts next to your civilization, so in the opening rounds nobody can reach a rival's homeland at all. Long before homelands are in danger, the Mountains become the contested ground — each holds one unit and defends at +2 a card to take — so the fight for the middle comes first.

5. **Tile supply.** Sort the remaining tiles into four open piles by terrain, where everyone can see and reach them. There is no bag and nothing is hidden: any tile may be taken at any time until that terrain runs out.

6. **Upgrade deck and market.** Shuffle **all advanced cards together** into one face-down deck — **ranks 11–20, whatever the player count**. Deal **nine face up in a 3 × 3 grid** beside it — that is the market (§10). Leave a clear space next to it for the **shared pile**: it starts empty, and fills with the cards losing melds discard (§04).

7. **First player.** Choose a start player. They take the **winner's die**; nothing is played yet, so set it to 1.



The starting layouts. One Mountain per player forms the block in the middle; one Plains per player sits around it, each touching exactly one Mountain, and every start is three tiles from every other. Nobody opens with cheaper access to the high ground, and nobody can be reached in the first rounds.

A worked round

Three players — **Ada**, **Bex** and **Cy** — sit down to their first game. This is one whole round, start to finish, *before* any of it is explained in detail: read it for the shape of a turn rather than for the letter of the rules. Everything used here is set out properly in the sections that follow, and named where it comes up, so nothing below has to be taken on trust.

Setting up

With three players, the **starting deck** is ranks 3–10 and the **upgrade deck** ranks 11–20, shuffled together. They deal ten cards apiece and draft — keep four and pass the rest, then keep six, keep eight, keep all ten — until each holds a fixed hand of ten.

Each takes a board and loads all five tiers with twenty units, and sets their ascension coins on the printed spots. They lay the three-player starting map — three Mountains in a triangle with a Plains beyond each outer face, every start three tiles from the others — and each puts one unit on a Plains tile of their own. The remaining tiles are sorted into four open piles by terrain. Finally they shuffle the upgrade deck and deal **nine cards face up in a 3 × 3 grid** beside it — that is the market. Their Tribe rank cap is 12, so most of what is showing is out of reach until they grow. Ada is chosen to start and takes the winner's die, set to 1.

The card phase

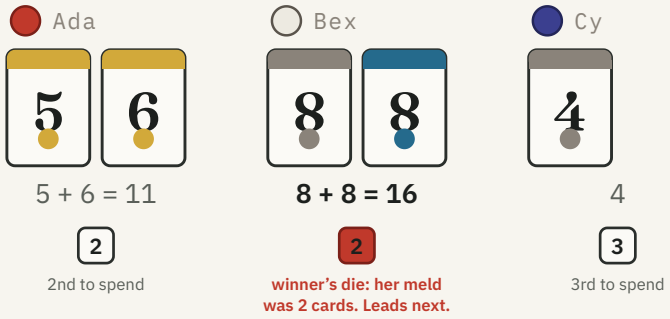
Everyone's board is full, so the meld limit is **2** for all three. Ada leads.

- **Ada** plays **5 of Plains + 6 of Plains** — the run 5-6.
- **Bex** plays **8 of Mountain + 8 of Ocean** — the run 8, doubled. Suits are irrelevant to the meld.
- **Cy** plays a single **4 of Mountain**.

Now the trick resolves: **highest total wins**. Bex played 8 + 8 for **16**; Ada played 5 + 6 for **11**; Cy played a single 4 for **4**. **Bex wins the trick** and takes the winner's die, setting it to **2** — the size of her meld, and a reminder that anyone who also played two and lost owes a card. She is first in initiative regardless of the number; she will lead next round. Ada, next best, takes die 2; Cy takes die 3.

Note what Cy could have done: a single 17 would have beaten both of them on its own. Under a total, one big card is a play, not a waste.

Because **Ada matched Bex's two cards and lost**, one of the two cards she played is **set aside**: it pays her 1 gold and goes to the shared pile instead of acting on the map. She picks which. Cy played only one — fewer than the winner — so he gives up nothing, and as the last-ranked meld he takes **1 gold**.



Highest TOTAL takes the trick — one big card beats two small ones.
Ada matched Bex's two cards and lost, so one of hers is set aside for a coin.

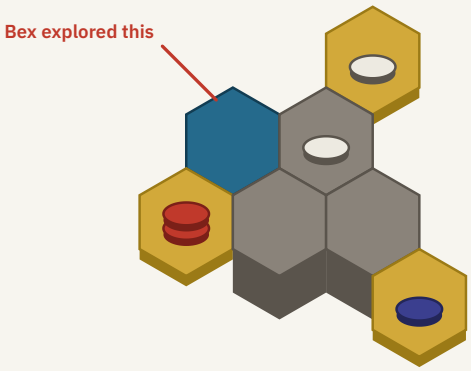
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Round one, all three melds at once. Add each row: Bex's 16 beats Ada's 11 and Cy's 4, so Bex
takes the trick and the winner's die — set to the SIZE of her meld, two cards, not to her
placing. Cy's single 4 is not a mistake in principle: a lone 17 would have beaten both of them.
```

The map phase

Bex spends both her cards; Ada spends the one she kept; Cy spends his single. They act in initiative order.

- **Bex** (2 cards). Only Plains and Mountain exist at setup, so her **Mountain** card is the one that can settle: the Mountain beside her start is adjacent to her homeland — in reach — and she **settles** it, taking a unit from her top band. Mountain holds one, so that tile is now hers alone. Her **Ocean** card **explores**: she picks an empty space beside her civilization, checks it touches at least two tiles already on the map (it touches three), and lays the Ocean tile from the supply.
- **Ada** (2 cards, one of them set aside). She keeps the **6 of Plains** and sets the 5 aside — the only Plains in reach is her own homeland, and a second unit there is worth more than a coin. She **settles** the 6 on it, Plains holding three. The 5 goes to the shared pile and pays her **1 gold**: the cost of matching Bex and losing.
- **Cy** (1 card). He has already taken **1 gold** for ranking last. The card itself he also cashes, for a second gold: nothing on the map is worth reaching for yet, and he is banking toward an upgrade.

Each also had **one free move** — the Tribe stride — but with one or two units standing exactly where they want them, nobody moved. Notice what did *not* happen: no Forest or Ocean tile existed to settle on, so the only way to use those suits was to build the ground first. To finish the round they check the end triggers — no one has placed their last unit and no suit deck is empty, so play continues. No one emptied a whole tier, so meld limits stay at 2, nobody has claimed an ascension coin, and no food is due; that only comes when a hand recycles. **Bex leads the next round.**



After the map phase: Bex settled a Mountain and laid the Ocean; Ada put a second unit on her Plains; Cy cashed and kept his coins.

The board at the end of round one. Compare it with your own: three Mountains in a triangle, a Plains beyond each outer face, one Ocean added. Bex owns a Mountain as well as her homeland; Ada has two units on one Plains; Cy has nothing on the map yet and two coins in hand.

> WHAT JUST HAPPENED
>
> One meld did two jobs for each player: it fought for the trick, then became the budget they spent on the map. Bex's 16 against Ada's 11 won her both initiative and a full turn; Cy's cautious single let him hoard gold instead. That trade — tempo now against resources later — is the whole game in miniature.

04 The round

Every round has two halves. First everyone plays cards. Then everyone spends those same cards, in the order the cards decided.

Your board holds your 20 units in **five tiers** — 2, then 3, then 5, then 5, then a final 5 — and you always take units from the **topmost tier that still holds any**. That tier is your current tier, and it prints the four numbers that govern your game: the size of meld you may play, the free moves you get each turn, the gold your people cost to feed, and the highest card rank you may buy from the market.

TIER	UNITS	MELD LIMIT	FREE MOVES	FOOD PER RECYCLE	RANK CAP
Tribe	2	2	1	free	12
Settlement	3	3	2	1	14
Kingdom	5	4	3	2	16
Empire	5	5	4	3	18
Civilization	5	6	5	4	20

Read all four off the topmost tier that still holds units — one rule, no counting, and **nothing cumulative**: you owe the coins on that tier and no others. Empty a tier and every number steps up together: the expansion that buys

you a bigger meld and a longer stride is the same expansion that sends you the bill. Melds never exceed six; placing the last unit of the Civilization tier ends the game (§11).

Ascension

Each tier below the first has a **coin printed on your board** at setup. The first time you reach that tier — the moment the tier above it empties — take those coins from your board into your reserve.

REACHING	SETTLEMENT	KINGDOM	EMPIRE	CIVILIZATION
Ascension reward	1	2	3	4

First time only. Ground you later lose does not put the coins back, and falling to a lower tier does not let you claim them twice.



The reserve empties from the top band down. Each tier you clear raises the meld you may play — 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 — and your free moves — 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 — pays a one-off ascension coin, and moves you onto a costlier row. You always pay only the row you are on. Here Tribe is spent and Settlement half-emptied: melds of three, two free moves, one food owed each recycle.

Declare

Before a single card is played, each player may spend one card from their victory row on effect **A** (§10). Declare together on a count of three, or in turn order from the leader — whichever your table prefers, so long as it happens *before any meld is on the table*.

You are committing blind. You do not know what anyone is about to play, only what is in your own hand — which is the whole point: A is a bet, not an answer.

Only A is declared here. **B** is used in your own map phase and **C** at any moment, so neither needs announcing now. Most rounds nobody declares anything and the step takes a second.

Card phase

1. The leader plays a meld from their hand — anything from a single card up to their current **meld size limit**, read off their board. You begin the game able to play two cards at a time.
2. Clockwise, every other player plays a meld of their own, from one card up to their own limit. You may not pass, and you never have to follow what was led.
3. The **highest total wins** the trick: add up the ranks of the cards in each meld. A single 20 is worth more than three 6s. If two totals are equal, the meld with **more cards** wins; if they are still level, compare their **highest card**, then second-highest, and so on. If two melds are still identical, the one played **earlier** wins. There are never ties after this.
4. Set the dice. The winner takes the **winner's die** and sets it to the **number of cards in their meld**. It marks them as first in initiative whatever number is showing — it is the only die of its colour, so there is nothing to confuse it with. The rest take plain initiative dice showing **2, 3, 4** in finishing order.

> WHY THE WINNER'S DIE SHOWS A CARD COUNT
>
> Two things have to be remembered between the card phase and the map phase: who goes first, and *how many cards the winner played* — because anyone who matched that number and lost gives a card up. One die carries both. The winner is the winner because their die is the winner's die, not because of the number on its face.

Map phase

In initiative order, each player spends their meld — card by card, in any order, each card resolved fully before the next (§06) — and takes their free actions (§07), woven between the cards however they like. Finish your whole turn before the next player begins.

The trick winner spends every card of their meld. So does everyone who played fewer cards than the winner. Cashing a card for gold is always your own choice, never a penalty (§06).

The round then settles two ways:

- **Match the winner's card count and lose, and one of your played cards is set aside.** You choose which. It is not spent on the map — instead it pays you **1 gold** and goes face down onto the **shared pile** (§09), where it becomes part of somebody's next hand. Play as many cards as the winner and you must give one up; play *fewer* and nothing happens, because you are already below the winner's count.
- **The player whose meld ranked last takes 1 gold.** Only that one player, whatever the player count. If the last-ranked player also matched the winner's count, they take both coins.

Nothing is docked from your hand, and there is no winner's bonus card: the winner's advantage is that they act first and that every card they played reaches the map.

A meld you have resolved goes face up into your **personal discard**, in front of you. That pile is not lost — it becomes your next hand when your current hand runs out (§09). The one card that leaves your economy for good is the card you set aside: it goes to the shared pile, and the next player to run out of cards may well draw it.

When all players have finished, hand the lead to the trick winner and begin a new round.

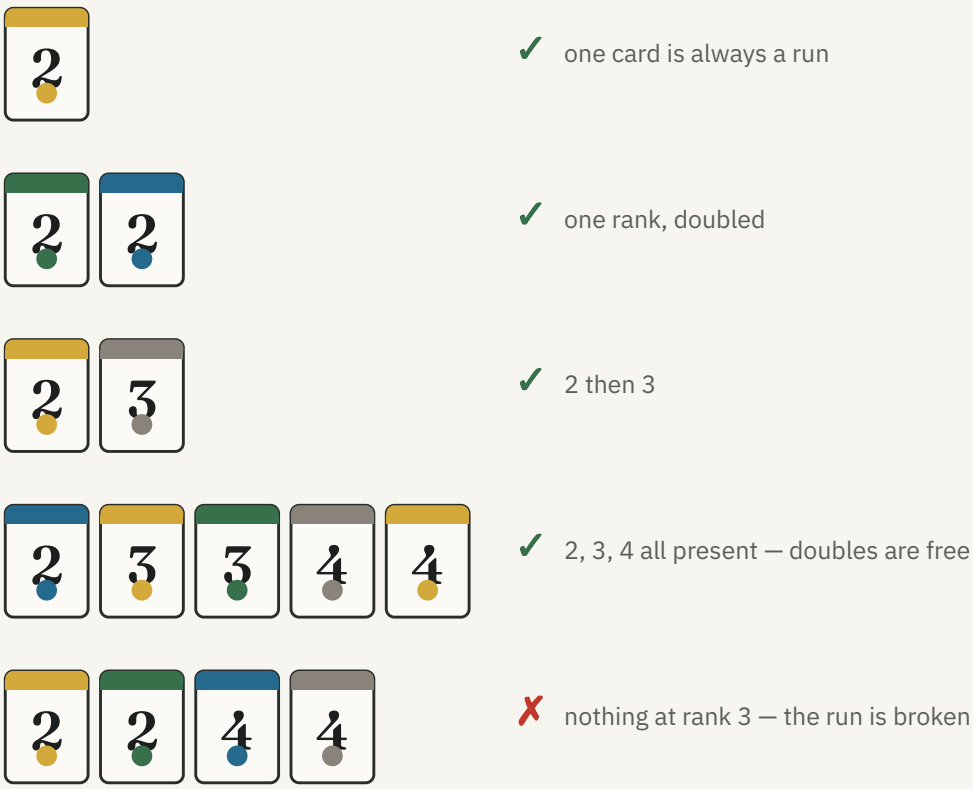
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05 Melds

One rule, and it replaces every meld type Blink used to have.

> THE MELD RULE
>
> A meld is **any cards whose ranks form an unbroken run** — every rank from your lowest to your highest must be present. **How many cards you hold of each rank does not matter, and suits do not matter at all.** One card is always a legal meld.

CARDS	LEGAL?	WHY
2	yes	a single card is a run of one
2 2	yes	one rank, no gap possible
2 3	yes	2 then 3, unbroken
2 3 3 4 4	yes	2, 3, 4 all present — doubles are free
2 2 4 4	**no**	nothing at rank 3 — the run is broken



The whole rule in five rows. Every rank between your lowest and your highest must be present; how many of each you hold does not matter, and suits are irrelevant at this stage. Only the last row is illegal, and only because nothing sits at rank 3.

So the old vocabulary is gone. There is no straight, no set, no full house — only runs with any number of duplicates. A pair is a run of one rank; a straight is a run with no duplicates; everything between them is now legal too.

Your **meld limit** is the ceiling on how many cards you may play, never a quota: Tribe 2, Settlement 3, Kingdom 4, Empire 5, Civilization 6. Suits still matter enormously — but only later, when each card is spent on terrain matching its suit (§06).

> LOSING THE TRICK COSTS YOU ALMOST NOTHING
>
> Play *fewer* cards than the winner and every one of them still reaches the map; if your meld came last, it also pays you a coin. The only players who give anything up are those who **matched the winner's card count** and lost, and even they are paid a gold for the card (§04). Playing a single on purpose is a real line, not a failure — matching the winner and losing is the one thing that costs.

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06 Spending your meld

Take each card of your meld in turn — **in any order you like** — and do *one* of four things with it. Each card resolves fully before the next, on the map as the last card left it: a tile you lay with one card can be settled by the next.

Two rules govern every card. Nothing else constrains it.

1. **Reach.** A card acts on a single cell **next to your civilization**: a tile you occupy, or a tile or empty space adjacent to one you occupy. Cards of the same meld need not land near each other — one can grow a border while another strikes across the map.

2. **Suit matches terrain.** The cell's terrain matches the card's suit — a Forest card acts on Forest, an Ocean card on Ocean. This holds for every one of the four uses below except taking gold.

> IF YOU ARE SWEPT OFF THE MAP
>
> Losing your last unit does not end your game. While you have **no units on the map** at the start of your map phase, your cards are **exempt from the reach rule**: they act on any unoccupied tile matching their suit, anywhere on the map. You re-found your civilization and carry on.

Settle

Put one unit from your board's reserve on the cell — always the topmost band that still holds any. One card, one unit. Drawing down the reserve is how your civilization gets bigger — and how the game ends (§11).

You may stack units on a tile up to that terrain's population limit — three on Plains, two in Forest, one on Ocean or Mountain.

Explore

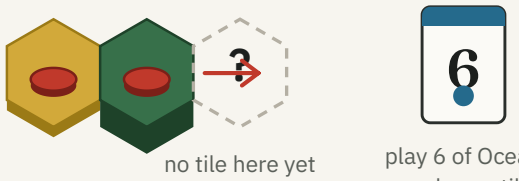
If the cell is an **empty space** beside your civilization, place a tile there from the open supply instead of placing a unit. The tile must match the card's suit. No unit goes down — settle it with a later card, or leave it as open ground.

The world grows compact, and one rule keeps it that way: **a new tile must touch at least two tiles already on the map**. Among the spaces that qualify, your reach decides which you may take.

Two edges, always. A tile touching only one existing tile is the first plank of a bridge into open table, and Blink has no bridges: every new tile is wedged into the mass, so the map grows as a single body you can still reach across. Two is also the most the rule can safely ask — any two neighbouring tiles leave a space touching them both, so there is always somewhere legal to explore. Ask for three and the map could grow into a shape it can never grow out of.

The supply is open, so there is never any searching: take the tile you need. If that terrain has **run out** — all fifteen are already on the map — the card takes gold instead.

The frontier pays. If the card you explored with is **rank 10 or under**, take **1 gold** from the supply. That is every card in the starting deck and none from the market: your weakest cards are worth something on the edge of the map, and the tap closes by itself as your deck improves. A card too poor to fight for a trick can still open ground and pay for the wall that holds it.



Exploring lays new ground beside your civilization. The tile matches the suit of the card and must touch at least two existing tiles — and the very next card may settle it. A card of rank 10 or under also pays a coin.

Attack

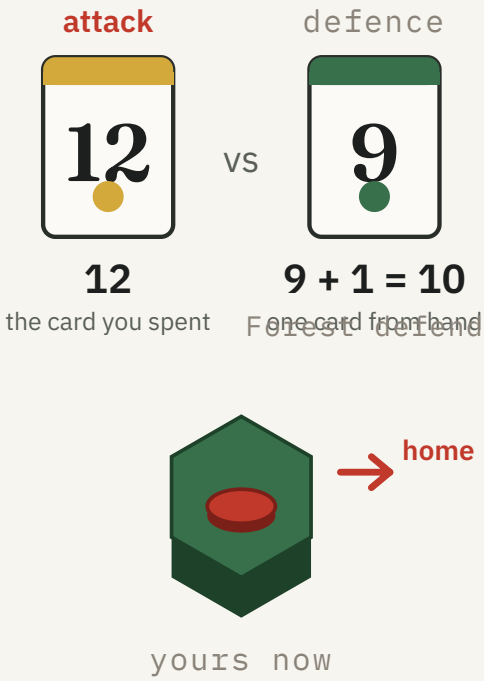
When the cell is a tile a rival occupies, you cannot settle there. Instead, spending that card **declares an attack** on it. Your own unit is **not** placed — the card is spent on the attack, and the unit you would have settled stays in your reserve.

An attack is not automatic. It is a **duel** — the card you spent against a card from their hand.

1. **Is the defender fortified?** Then the coin defends: it holds at **the wall printed on their tier** — 10 at Tribe, rising to 18 — and they may still answer with a card from hand if it beats that. The higher of the two fights. The coin goes to the supply either way (§07).
2. **Your attack is the card you spent.** Its rank, face up on the tile — you commit nothing further. Which card you send is the whole decision, and it is made before you know how they will answer.
3. **The defender answers.** They commit one card from their hand, face up. They may decline, and a player with an empty hand has nothing to commit — a hand played out is a frontier with nobody on the walls.
4. **Compare:**
   Attack = the rank of the card you spent.
   Defence = their card's rank **+ the terrain's defence bonus**. A card not committed counts as nothing.
5. **The higher total wins.** If the totals are level, the card whose **suit matches the ground being fought over** takes it; if both match or neither does, **the defender holds**.
6. **Attacker wins** — one defending unit returns to its owner's board. If that was the **last** unit on the tile, **the ground changes hands**: place a unit from your board on it at once, from your top occupied tier as usual. No unit in reserve, or defenders still standing, and the tile is simply left empty.
   Defender wins — nothing happens; the attack is spent for nothing.

The defender's card goes to their discard and comes back on the next recycle, so holding a tile costs tempo rather than material. The attacker spends nothing beyond the card already on the tile: an attack costs exactly what settling costs, and buys a fight instead of a certainty.

ATTACKING INTO	DEFENCE BONUS	WHAT IT MEANS
Plains	+0	Open ground. Rank alone decides it.
Ocean	+0	Open water — but it holds one unit, so every duel is for everything.
Forest	+1	Cover. You need to beat them by two.
Mountain	+2	High ground. Expensive to take and worth holding.



Higher total wins — and clearing the LAST defender takes the ground.

Attacking is not moving a unit across the map. A card spent on a rival tile declares a duel, and your unit stays on your board until the tile is empty — clearing a stack takes as many won duels as there are defenders, and the last one takes the ground.

> WHY YOUR HAND MATTERS TWICE
>
> Your cards fight for the trick, buy your turn on the map — and now defend your ground. A hand kept back is an army; a hand played out is a frontier with nobody on the walls. The moment before your hand recycles is the moment you are easiest to attack, and everyone at the table can count your cards.

Taking a contested tile is still patient work. One won duel clears *one* defender, so a Plains holding three takes three of them — and every one of those is a card out of your hand against a card out of theirs. What changes on the last of them is that you do not have to come back: the tile is yours the moment you empty it.

Take gold

Instead of using a card on the map, take **1 gold**. Any card, any number of them — a whole meld can be cashed. This is not a fallback for cards that found no terrain: gold is tight, it buys food, fortresses and research (§07), and winning play turns cards into coins constantly. Every card asks the same question — people, or gold?

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07 Free actions

Besides the cards, your map phase carries three kinds of free action. They cost no card, and you may weave them between your card plays in any order.

Free moves

Your current tier prints your free moves — **Tribe 1, Settlement 2, Kingdom 3, Empire 4, Civilization 5** — and you may use up to that many each map phase. Each move takes one of your units:

- **By land** — move a unit any distance **across tiles occupied by your units**, stepping off at the end onto an adjacent free tile with room under its population limit. Your network carries the traveller; the last step may leave it.
- **By sea** — move a unit standing on Ocean across **unoccupied Ocean**, as far as the open water reaches, ending on an empty Ocean tile.

Movement is never an attack: you may not move onto or through a rival, and moving onto a tile is only possible while it has room. You may empty a tile by moving its last unit away — splitting your civilization in two is allowed. An empty tile is nobody's, and your neighbours will notice. Because Ocean holds only one unit, the sea is a road rather than a place to live.

The water advantage

The first time each turn that you move by sea, you may immediately **explore one tile of any terrain you like** — free, and not tied to any card's suit. The new tile must touch at least two tiles already on the map, as every explore must (§06) — but it does **not** have to be within your reach. Lay it anywhere the map will legally take it.

That is the whole difference between a voyage and a card. A card acts beside your own civilization; a ship brings back news of ground you have never stood on. The sea is how a civilization finds land it had no card for — and sometimes finds it on somebody else's doorstep. Once per turn, however many sea moves your tier allows.

> A SEA MOVE STARTS ON THE WATER
>
> Read the second bullet above literally: a sea move is made by *a unit standing on Ocean*. Stepping onto an empty Ocean tile **from land** is an ordinary land move — it is how you reach the water, and it pays nothing.
>
> So the advantage costs two moves: one to put a unit out to sea, one to sail it. A **Tribe has only one free move** and cannot do both in the same turn — it must leave a unit on the water and collect the tile next turn. Getting a boat out early is an investment, and that is the point: the ocean pays the civilizations that have already committed to it.
>
> Touch-two still holds — §06 has no bridges, and a voyage does not get to build one. If the map has no legal space at all, or the terrain you want has run out, the advantage is simply **not spent**: sail again later in the same turn and you may still take it.

Reallocate your gold

Your coins live in four places, and during your own map phase you may move them freely between the first three:

- **Reserve** — the gold area on your board. Liquid, uncommitted.
- **Food** — coins on your current band's food slots (§09). This is the supply your people will eat at the next recycle.
- **Fortifications** — coins standing on your units on the map (below).
- **Research** — gold spent on upgrades (§10). Spending is one way: a coin given to research is gone.

Reallocation is free and unlimited on your own turn. Between your turns the coins stand where you left them — and that is when they matter: a fortification only protects while the coin is on the unit, and your food only counts if it is on the slots when your hand recycles.

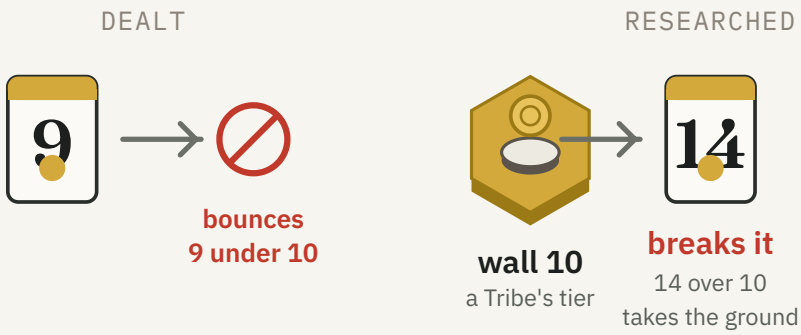
Fortifying

A coin on one of your units is a **wall**, and a wall fights. Your board prints what it holds at, beside the rank you may buy:

- **Tribe 10 · Settlement 12 · Kingdom 14 · Empire 16 · Civilization 18** — always two under that tier's rank cap, so a wall never quite catches up with the cards its owner can buy.
- The wall is a **floor, not a substitute**. You may still answer with a card from hand, and the **higher of the two** is your defence — a wall can never make you weaker than the card you were holding.
- The attacker still spends **one** card. Beat the wall and you have won the duel outright: a defender goes home, and the ground changes hands if that was the last of them.
- The **coin goes to the supply** whichever way the fight goes. It bought what it was sold as buying: one attack made much harder, once.

A Tribe's wall is exactly the top of the starting deck, which is the shape of the whole rule: **no card you were dealt can break a wall**. Walls are broken by cards you researched — and by the time you can buy an 18, the walls around you hold at 16.

One coin per unit, never two. The coin is also lost the moment the unit is disturbed any other way — moved, or stacked onto. You cannot fortify in response to an attack — attacks happen on someone else's turn, and by then it is too late. A fortification is a read on your neighbours, paid for in advance.



A wall holds at your tier's number — 10 / 12 / 14 / 16 / 18, two under the rank you may buy. It is a FLOOR: a better card from hand fights instead.

A wall does not save the unit — it raises the rank needed to come for it. The coin holds at your tier's number, the defender's own card fights instead if it is higher, and the coin is spent either way.

One victory card

Once per map phase you may spend a card from your victory row on its **B** effect (§10) — new ground founded beyond your meld: a tile or two from the supply, a unit from your reserve on each, and a fortification coin on each of those units from the general supply. It explores, so touch-two and your reach both apply. Effects A and C have their own moments; B is the only one tied to your turn, and it is **at most one per turn**.

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08 Terrain

TERRAIN	HOLDS	DEFENCE BONUS
Plains	3	+0
Ocean	1	+0
Forest	2	+1
Mountain	1	+2

These values are fixed — nothing in the game ever modifies them. The defence bonus is added to the *defender's* card in a duel (§06): taking a Mountain needs a card three ranks better than the one holding it. As a visual aid, defended terrain is moulded taller: Forest stands two layers, Mountain three, so a glance at the map tells you how much harder that ground will fight without looking anything up.

The supply holds the four terrains in **equal numbers — 15 each**. That mirrors the deck, where every suit appears at every rank. No terrain is scarce, and no card in your hand is worth more than another because the ground it

needs is rarer. What a terrain is worth is set by how many units it holds and how hard it is to take — never by how much of it exists.

---

09 Feeding and refilling

You play with a hand of **ten cards**. Cards leave it for good in two ways — **set aside** when you match the winner's count and lose, which sends a card you already played to the shared pile (§04), and **retired** to your victory row when you research (§10) — so the hand is topped back up rather than merely recycled.

The moment you play your **last hand card**, your hand **recycles** — immediately, in the middle of your turn, before you do anything else. Do not wait for the end of the turn: pick everything back up straight away, and you still have your full map phase and your research in front of you.

1. **Feed your population** (below).
2. **Take back everything you have played** — your whole personal discard.
3. **Draw from the shared pile** until you hold ten again. The shared pile is the face-down stack in the middle of the table, beside the market; it starts the game empty and holds the cards *set aside* by melds that matched the winner and lost (§04). Shuffle it before drawing if it has not been shuffled since cards were added.

Then carry on with your turn. Because the refill is immediate, playing your whole hand never costs you your research — you simply pick up ten fresh cards and retire one of those instead.

So your ten are no longer the same ten all game. Cards you lose flow into the shared pile, and cards other players lost flow back to you. A hand you drafted carefully will drift, and what it drifts toward is whatever the table has been throwing away.

Every player refills to exactly ten and every discarded card goes to the same pile, so the pile always holds enough. If it is ever empty when you must draw, you are already holding ten.

Your current tier prints its **food slots — Tribe none, Settlement 1, Kingdom 2, Empire 3, Civilization 4** — and the coins standing on them are your food supply. When your hand recycles, your people **eat the supply**: the coins on your slots go back to the general supply, and the meal is paid. Food is **not cumulative** — you feed the band you are on and no others.

If the slots are short — the food is not there when the recycle comes — return **one unit from the map to your board for each missing coin**. The debt is then settled; you never owe food into the next recycle. Coins reach the slots by reallocation on your own turn (§07): a well-run civilization sets the table before the harvest, and everyone can see whose slots are standing empty.

You choose which units go. There is no rule forcing you to give up your weakest or least defended ground first. A unit removed this way loses any fortification coin standing on it, and that gold returns to the supply.

A unit that comes back — starved off the map, or removed by an attack — goes into the **lowest band that still has a free slot**: the band you emptied most recently. Only once that band is full again does the one above it begin to refill. Losing ground walks your limit back down *one step at a time*, and never drops you straight to the beginning.

THE PRESSURE

The very expansion that lets you play a bigger meld is what sends you the bill: every band you clear moves you onto a costlier row, up to three gold a recycle at Empire. Gold buys research, fortifications, attacks on defended terrain, and food, and there is never enough for all four. A civilization that expands faster than it earns will starve back down — and shrink its own melds doing it. Losing a trick pays you a gold per unused card, so falling behind quietly helps you feed; racing ahead does not.

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10 Research and the market

All advanced cards are shuffled together into a single face-down **upgrade deck**. Nine of them lie face up beside it in a **3 × 3 grid** — the market.

Up to twice per turn, during your map phase, you may research. The **first research of a turn costs 1 gold, the second costs 2** — everything else about them is identical:

1. **Draw the top card** of the upgrade deck and place it face up on the grid position showing the **highest rank**, covering it. If two positions tie, take the leftmost. The covered card is out of reach until the one on top of it is taken. Nobody chooses this — the tallest idea on the market is always the one buried next.
2. **Retire the lowest-ranked card in your hand** into your **victory row**. If you hold several of that rank, choose which suit to give up. It leaves play for the rest of the game — but it scores (§11). Cards you have already played to the table are spent: they cannot be retired.
3. **Pay the price** — 1 gold the first time this turn, 2 the second — and take **any visible market card whose rank is at or below your tier's rank cap** — Tribe 12, Settlement 14, Kingdom 16, Empire 18, Civilization 20. It goes **straight into your hand** — ready to play next round, not waiting on your next recycle.
4. **Refill** any of the nine grid positions left empty from the top of the deck. Once the deck is empty, positions stay empty and the market begins to thin — which is what ends the game (§11).

WHEN THERE IS NOTHING YOU MAY TAKE

Draw first, then look. If after the draw **nothing** on the grid is at or below your rank cap, the research ends there: the drawn card stays where it landed, you retire nothing and pay nothing. It still counts as **one of your two** — the deck has moved, and the deck is the clock — but because you bought nothing, the **next research this turn still costs 1**. The price rises with cards taken, not with attempts made.

THE CAP IS A BUYING RULE, NOT A HOLDING RULE

Your rank cap only applies at the moment you take a card from the market. A card already in your hand, your discard or your victory row is yours to keep and use however it arrived — a low tier cannot reach the top of the market, but it is never forced to give up what it has.

> YOUR WORST CARD, NOT YOUR BEST
>
> Research replaces the weakest idea you hold with a stronger one: the card that leaves is always your lowest. So the victory row is a record of what your civilization *outgrew*, and it grows with you — early on it takes 3s and 4s, and by the late game your lowest card may be a 12.
>
> A high card *can* still reach the row — but only by being lived with. Hold it while you play the rest of your hand down, and eventually it is the lowest thing you have. What you cannot do is buy a 17 and park it straight into the row: everything in there was once the worst card you owned.
>
> Waiting for that is a thinner edge than it looks. Every research you skip is a card the row never gets, and each of those is worth a point on its own before any rank is counted — so a civilization that researches whenever it can afford to generally out-scores one that waits for the perfect card to fall.

Your victory row holds at most **five cards**. To add a sixth, first discard one of the five permanently — a card discarded this way is gone, and never scores.

Spending a victory card

Every card carries **three printed effects**, and a card in your victory row may be spent on **exactly one** of them. The card is then removed from the game — your row shrinks, and your end score with it. The three options are always the same three kinds, growing with the card's rank:

RANK	A · CARD PHASE	B · MAP PHASE	C · ANY TIME
1–5	Add this card's **rank** to your total	**Found a colony** — 1 new tile of this suit, 1 unit, fortified	**2** gold
6–10	Add its **rank**, and **win ties**	**Found a distant colony** — as above, up to 2 tiles out	**3** gold
11–15	Add this card's **rank** to your total	**Open a frontier** — 2 new tiles, 1 unit on one of them, fortified	**4** gold
16–20	Add its **rank**, and **win ties**	**Two colonies** — 2 new tiles of any terrain, 1 unit on each, both fortified	**5** gold

A is declared in the *declare step* at the top of the round, before any meld is played (§04) — blind, knowing only your own hand. Its bonus counts only toward winning the trick, never toward extra spending on the map; if two players both declare an effect that wins ties, the one who spent the **higher-ranked card** takes the trick. **B** is used during your own map phase, **at most once per turn** (§07), when you can already see the board. It founds ground: lay the new tile or tiles from the supply, settle a unit from your reserve on each one the card provides for, and fortify each of those units with a coin **from the general supply** — that gold is not yours and never was. Every tile it lays is an *explore*, so §06 applies in full: the space must touch at least two tiles already on the map and lie **within your reach**. The 6–10 band is the one exception, and the only reason to prefer it: its colony may sit **up to two tiles out**. **C** may be taken at any moment, even mid-payment when feeding falls short.

> ONE ROW, THREE APPETITES
>
> The same five slots are your *score*, your *war chest* and your *trick insurance*. High cards score best in the centre slot — and their effects are also the strongest, so the card you most want to keep is the card you most want to spend. That tension is the point.

---

11 End of the game

The end is triggered as soon as either:

- a player places the **last unit** from their reserve onto the map, or
- the **market thins to a single layer** — the upgrade deck is empty and no grid position has a card buried under another. While the deck lasts every research deepens the market; once it is dry the market can only be eaten down, and its last layer is the last of the ideas.

Finish the current round, then play **one more full round**. Then score.

SCORE

Population	1 point per unit you have on the map.
Victory row	**1 point per card** in the row — always, however many you hold. *Then, in addition*, arrange them in rank order **pushed to the right** of five slots: if you hold three or more, also score the **rank in the centre slot**. A full row of five therefore scores 5 plus its middle rank.
Dominance	3 points for each terrain type where you hold the **largest connected stretch** of it. Count only tiles of that terrain that **you have units on**, and that touch each other; your biggest such group is your stretch. Scattered holdings do not add up — a stack of five units on one tile is a stretch of **one**. If two players are level, the one with **more units on that terrain** takes it. A terrain nobody occupies scores for nobody.



The empty slots sit on the left, so the centre slot only reaches your true middle card once all five are filled. A half-full row scores a lower card — and slipping a low card in can push your centre down. Every card is also worth a point in its own right, so spending one is never free.

YOUR VICTORY ROW	LAID OUT IN FIVE SLOTS	SCORES
2 cards — 9, 17	· · · 9 17	2
3 cards — 6, 9, 17	· · **6** 9 17	3 + 6 = **9**
4 cards — 6, 9, 14, 17	· 6 **9** 14 17	4 + 9 = **13**
5 cards — 6, 9, 14, 16, 17	6 9 **14** 16 17	5 + 14 = **19**

The point per card is always there — with fewer than three cards it is *all* you score, which is why the third card is where the row starts paying properly and the fifth is where it pays best.

Most points wins. Gold breaks a tie.

> BEYOND THE BASE GAME
>
> Two optional modules follow, and they sit on top of everything above without changing any of it: **§12 Map objectives** gives every player a shape to build toward, and **§13 Perks** gives the victory row something to do before scoring. Add them one at a time, and not for your first game or two.

12

Map objectives

A module. Everything in sections 01 to 11 still applies; this adds one thing to setup and one line to scoring.

The map is where your civilization spreads. This module gives it a **shape to aim at**. Each objective card names three tiles in a row — a middle terrain with a particular terrain on either side — and pays **4 points** if you hold that arrangement when the game ends.

The pattern

Every objective is **three tiles**: a **middle**, and two **ends** that each touch the middle. The ends do *not* need to touch each other, and the three tiles may sit anywhere on the map.

- All three must be tiles **you occupy** — at least one of your units standing on each. A tile with no units, or one held only by a rival, never counts.
- An objective scores **4 points once**, or nothing. Building the pattern twice does not pay twice, and failing costs nothing.
- The terrain must match exactly. *Fjord* is Ocean between two Mountains; two Oceans around a Mountain is *Mountain Lookout*, a different card.

There are **twelve** objective cards, printed in their own booklet.

Three ways to play it

Agree on one before setup.

MODE	SETUP	CHARACTER
Secret	Deal **two** face down to each player. Look at both, keep **one**, return the other to the box unseen.	The tightest. Nobody knows what anyone is building, and choosing which to keep is the first real decision of the game. Choose *before* the card draft, so the objective can shape the hand you keep.
Open	Turn **two** face up in the middle of the table. They belong to everyone.	The friendliest, and the most contested — you can see exactly what your rivals want, because they want the same thing you do.
Keep both	Deal **two** face down to each player and keep them both. Both score.	The loosest. Up to 8 points, and two shapes to steer between.

In every mode, objectives are revealed **together** at the end, after the base score is counted.

> WHY IT CHANGES THE MAP
>
> Without objectives, ground is ground: you take what you can reach. With them, a particular empty hex beside your Forest is suddenly worth exploring *specifically*, and dominance stops being the only reason to hold a stretch of coast. Four points is roughly a fifth of a typical score, so an objective is worth steering for — but not worth wrecking your position over.

13

Perks

A module, and a new one. Everything in sections 01 to 11 still applies. This one has not been through a full playtest — treat it as an experiment and tell us how it went.

Your victory row scores at the end and does nothing before it, which is a strange thing for five slots sitting in front of you all game. Perks give them a job: a perk **wakes up when its slot holds a card**, and works for the rest of the game until you spend the card underneath it.

Setup

1. Shuffle the perk tokens and **deal four to each player**.
2. Put one on each of **slots 1, 2, 3 and 4** of your victory row, face up, wherever you like. **Slot 5 stays empty** — it fills on your first research, so a perk there would be a gift rather than something earned.
3. You may rearrange them freely until the moment your first card reaches the row. After that the arrangement is **permanent**.

Which slot, and why it matters

Cards fill the victory row from the **right** (§11), so the slot you choose decides how long you wait:

SLOT	WAKES WHEN YOUR ROW HOLDS	THE BET
4	2 cards	Working almost at once. The safe place for the perk you want most.
3	3 cards	Reachable in most games.
2	4 cards	Late, and only if you keep researching.
1	all 5	A long shot. It asks you to fill the row and never spend it down.

Every perk is **equal** — there are no better and worse kinds. What differs is how soon you want each one, and how much of your row you are willing to tie up getting it.

The two kinds

- **SPEND** — use it, then turn the token face down. It comes back the next time your **hand recycles** (§09), which is also when you pay your food, so the two happen together.
- **STANDING** — no use to spend. It simply works, for as long as its slot holds a card. These tokens never turn over.

Each token says which it is.

> THE PRICE OF A PERK
>
> Spending a victory card on its **A**, **B** or **C** effect (§10) takes it out of the row — and if that drops the row below a perk's slot, **the perk switches off**. So the more you like your perks, the fewer effects you will spend. That trade is the whole balance of this module: nothing here is free, and a player who wants everything running has quietly given up their war chest to get it.

Glossary

Meld
The cards you play in one round — one to your meld limit. It competes for the trick, then each of its cards is spent on the map or cashed for gold.

Cell
The single hex a card acts on — a tile or empty space in your reach, matching the card's suit.

Reach
Where your cards may act: any tile you occupy, or any tile or empty space adjacent to one you occupy (§06).

Civilization
All your units on the map, and the tiles they stand on.

Tier

One of the five rows of your reserve — Tribe, Settlement, Kingdom, Empire, Civilization. Your *current tier* is the topmost one still holding units; it prints your meld limit, your free moves, your food slots and your rank cap.

Ascension

Reaching a tier for the first time. Take the coins printed on that tier: 1, 2, 3, 4 as you climb. Once only (§04).

Shared pile

The face-down stack of cards *set aside* by melds that matched the winner's count and lost. You refill your hand from it (§09).

Set aside

The card you give up for matching the trick winner's card count and losing. You choose which of your played cards it is; it pays you 1 gold instead of acting on the map, and goes to the shared pile (§04).

Free moves

Your band's allowance of unit movement each map phase — by land across your own network, or by sea across open Ocean. Never an attack (§07).

Food slots

The coin spaces on your current band. What stands there when your hand recycles is what your people eat (§09).

Recycle

The moment your hand empties: you feed your population, then take your personal discard back as your new hand (§09).

Victory row

The five slots on your board holding retired cards. They score at the end — or can each be spent once for an effect, and then are gone.

Quick reference

Reserve bands

Units sit in tiers of 2 / 3 / 5 / 5 / 5, emptied top-down. **Tribe** melds 2, 1 move, food free, cap 12. **Settlement** 3, 2, food 1, cap 14. **Kingdom** 4, 3, food 2, cap 16. **Empire** 5, 4, food 3, cap 18. **Civilization** 6, 5, food 4, cap 20. Read them off your current tier only — food is **not** cumulative, eaten each time your hand recycles. Reaching a tier pays its ascension coins once: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4. Placing your last unit ends the game.

Round

Declare A effects blind → leader plays a meld → everyone plays a meld → highest total wins, then most cards, then highest card, then earliest played (never a tie) → **winner's die = their meld size** (and always first), others 2/3/4 → spend melds in initiative

Terrain

Plains	`holds 3`
Ocean	`holds 1 · sea roads`
Forest	`holds 2 · defends +1`
Mountain	`holds 1 · defends +2`

Exploring

A new tile must touch **at least two** tiles already on the map, in your reach, matching the card's suit. The supply is open; if that terrain has run out, the card takes gold.

order. The winner spends every card. Anyone who **matched** the winner's count and lost sets one played card aside: 1 gold, and it goes to the shared pile. Last place takes 1 gold.

Combat — a duel

Win the last defender and the tile is yours: settle it at once. Fortified? The coin defends at their tier's wall (10/12/14/16/18), or a better card from their hand — see §07. Otherwise the card you spent IS the attack: **its rank** vs **the defender's hand card + terrain (Plains 0 · Ocean 0 · Forest 1 · Mountain 2)**. Higher wins; level goes to the card matching the ground, and to the **defender** if both or neither match. Attacker wins, one defender goes home. Both cards to their owners' discards.

Melds — one rule

Any cards whose ranks form an **unbroken run**. Duplicates of any rank are free; suits are irrelevant. One card is always legal.
2 ✓ · 2-2 ✓ · 2-3 ✓ · 2-3-3-4-4 ✓ · **2-2-4-4 ✗** (no 3).
Limit by tier: 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / 6.

Each card of your meld

ONE of: Settle a unit · Explore a tile · Attack (duel) · Take 1 gold. Any order; each card resolves on the map as the last one left it.

Reach: a tile you occupy or adjacent to one you occupy. Suit matches terrain. No units on the map? Act anywhere.

The winner spends every card, and so does anyone who played FEWER. Anyone who MATCHED the winner's count and lost sets one played card aside — 1 gold, and the card goes face down to the shared pile. The meld that ranked LAST takes 1 gold.

Free actions, your turn

Moves (tier number, 1–5): by land across your own connected units onto a free adjacent tile, or by sea across unoccupied Ocean. Never an attack. · **Water advantage**: your first sea move each turn lets you explore one free tile of ANY terrain, anywhere on the map (touch-two applies; **reach does not**). · **Reallocate gold** freely between reserve, food slots and fortifications; research spending is one-way. · **One victory card on B** per turn.

Fortifying

1 gold on one of your units. The coin is a **wall**: it defends at your tier's printed value — **10 / 12 / 14 / 16 / 18**, two under that tier's rank cap — and the defender may still answer with a better card from hand, the higher of the two fighting. The attacker spends one card as always, and the coin goes to the supply either way. One per unit, placed on your own turn only, lost when the unit is disturbed.

Gold

1 per cashed card · **1 for exploring with a card of rank 10 or under** · ascension coins 1/2/3/4, once each · 1 for ranking last · pay 1 to research · pay 1 to fortify · your tier's food (0/1/2/3/4, not cumulative) is eaten when your hand recycles — short slots starve units off the map.

Research — up to twice per turn

Draw the top upgrade card onto the position showing the **highest rank**, covering it (leftmost breaks a tie; nobody chooses) → retire the **lowest-ranked card in your hand** to your victory row → pay → take any visible card **at or below your tier's rank cap** (12/14/16/18/20, +2 a tier) → refill empty positions. The **first research of your turn costs 1 gold, the second costs 2** — a research that finds nothing at or below your cap buys nothing, so it does not put the price up. No cards in hand, no research this turn.

Refilling your hand

Hand empty: **at once, mid-turn** — feed, take back your discard, then draw from the **shared pile** up to ten. Carry on with the turn.

Victory-card effects

Spend a victory card for ONE of: **A** add its rank to your meld's total this trick (higher bands win ties) · **B** found a colony — new tiles + units + fortifications from the GENERAL SUPPLY, once per turn · **C** take 2–5 gold. A is declared **blind, before any meld is played**; B in your own map phase; C at any moment. The card leaves the game.

Scoring

Units on the map + 1 per card in your victory row + the centre-slot rank of that row once it holds three or more + 3 per terrain for the **largest connected stretch** you occupy, level broken by units on that terrain. Gold breaks ties on the final score.