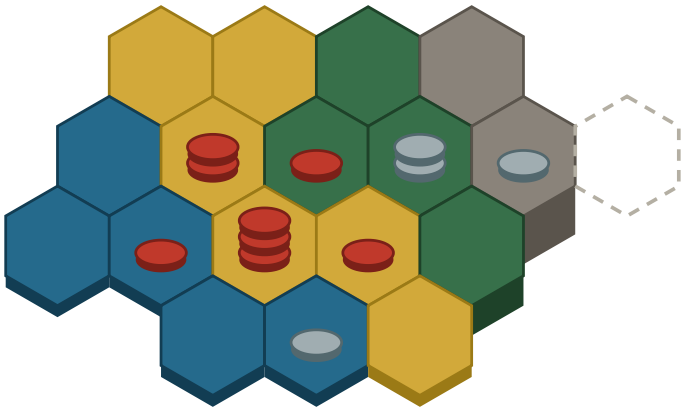
A MELD-BUILDING CIVILIZATION GAME

Blink

Climbing the ladder of civilization

2–4 PLAYERS 45–90 MINUTES TOBY SIKO

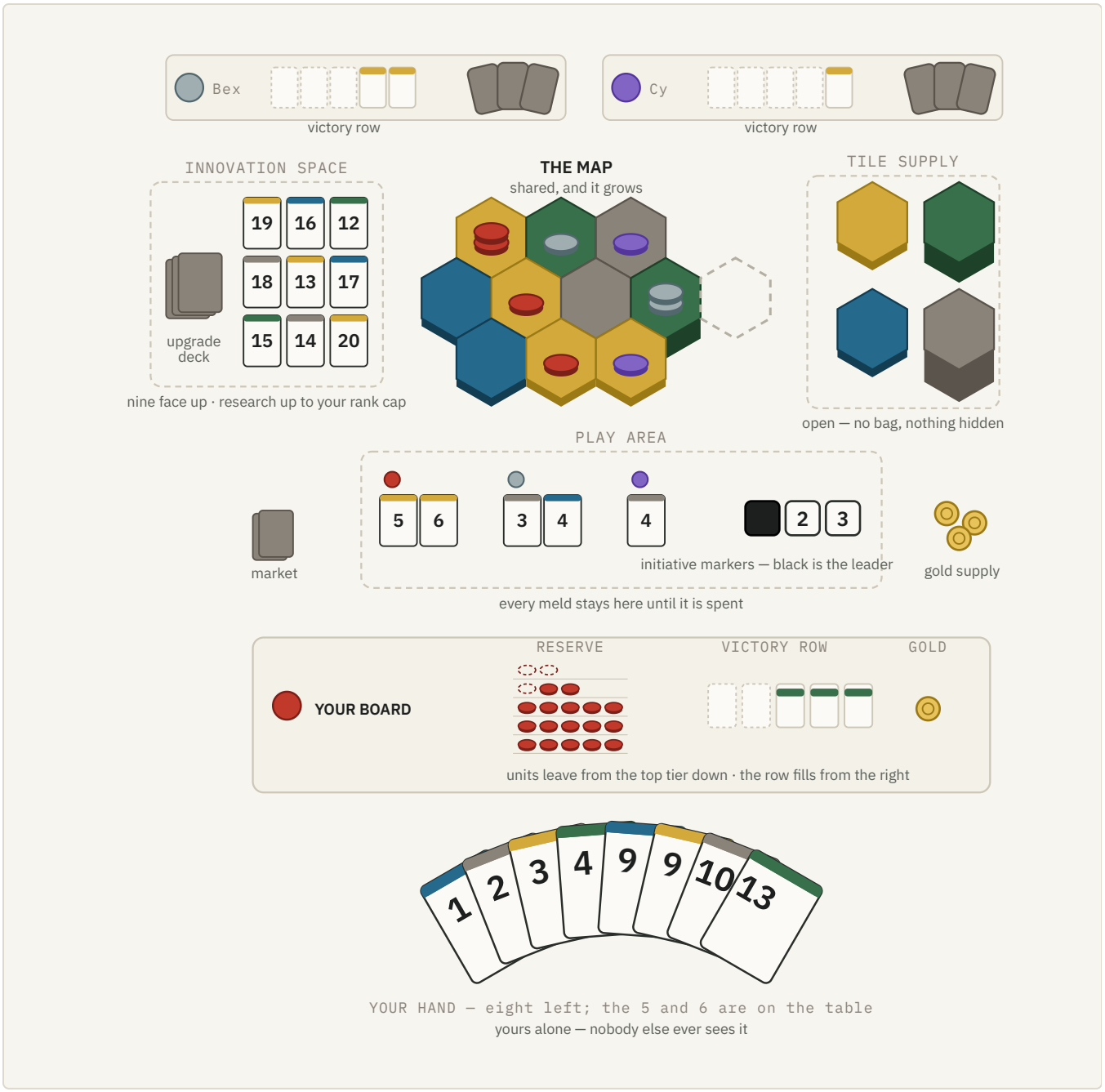


Start here

Each round you play a **meld** — a small run 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. Come last and you pocket a coin.

1. **Card phase.** Everyone plays a meld face down, then all are turned over at once. The highest total wins the trick.
2. **Map phase.** In trick order, each player spends their meld card by card — settling units, exploring new tiles, attacking rivals or cashing cards for gold — and takes their free actions: moving, fortifying, and improving their hand.
3. **Grow.** Units leave your board a tier at a time. Each tier you empty lets you play a bigger meld, research a stronger card and hold a taller wall.

When someone has placed their last unit, finish the round, then play one more, and the game ends. Most points wins: one per unit on the map, plus your **victory row**, plus your two **map objectives** — small patterns of terrain that score when you hold them.



The table, from your seat. The map in the middle is shared and grows all game. Beside it lie the innovation space, where research buys cards, and the face-down market, which only trade reaches. Every meld played stays in the play area until it is spent. Your 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 jobs 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 an action separately from the cards.

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 walls and better cards. Gold is tight, and good players cash 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.

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**, a **victory row** of five slots, and spaces for your **discard** and your **shown objective**
- **4 player aids** — one each: the round, your options and the numbers at a glance
- **12 map objective cards** (§12), with their own back
- **40 gold coins** — if you run out, treat the supply as unlimited
- **4 initiative markers** — one black, three plain: set to finishing place each round, the black marker always 1 for the trick winner, then 2, 3 and 4 in order

Optional modules and expansions are published separately.

03 Setup

1. **Split the cards.** Divide the 80 cards by rank into a **starting deck** of ranks **1–11** (44 cards) and an **upgrade deck** of ranks **12–20** (36 cards), whatever the player count.
2. **Draft your hand.** Shuffle the starting deck and deal 10 cards to each player. **Pass 6 to your left**, then **4**, then **2**, each time from the ten cards you are holding — what you kept plus what just arrived. A card kept earlier is not locked in; pass it on if something better comes. The ten you end with are **your hand for the whole game**. Put the undrafted cards face down in the middle: this is the **market** (§09) — 24 cards at two players, 14 at three, 4 at four.
3. **Take a board.** Fill its five tiers with your 20 units — 2, 3, 5, 5, 5 from the top. Everyone starts with no gold.

4. **Lay the starting map** shown for your player count, then each player places one unit from their top tier on the Plains nearest them — their homeland. Every layout follows three rules: **one Mountain per player** in a single block in the middle; **one Plains per player** around it, each touching exactly one Mountain; and **no two starts closer than three tiles**.

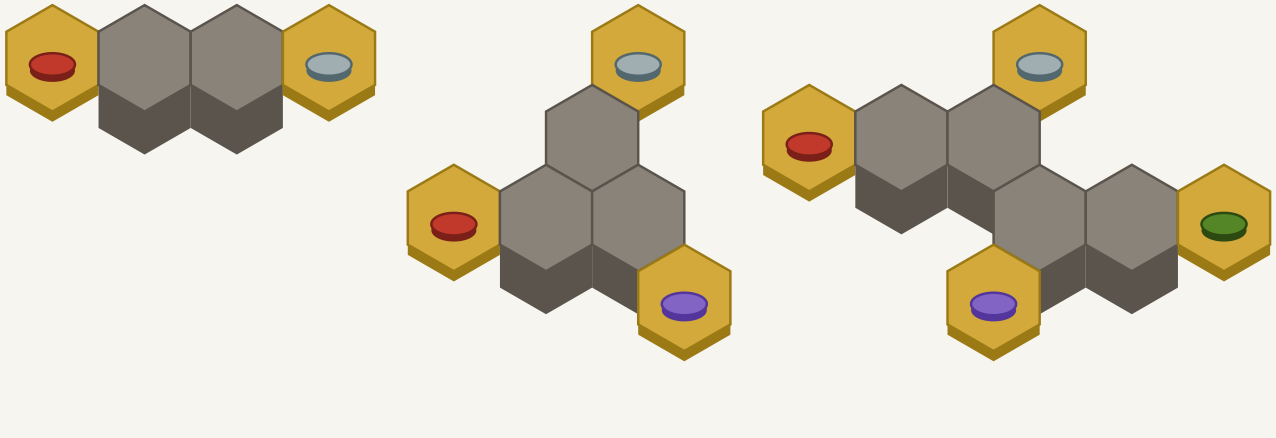
   Cards only act next to your own civilization, so nobody can reach a rival's homeland in the opening rounds. The fight for the middle — the Mountains — comes first.

5. **Tile supply.** Sort the remaining tiles into four open piles by terrain, face up. Every tile laid during the game comes from here.

6. **Innovation space.** Shuffle the upgrade deck face down and deal **nine cards face up in a 3 × 3 grid** beside it (§09).

7. **Map objectives.** Shuffle the twelve objective cards and deal **two** to each player. **Show one** face up on your board and keep the other hidden (§12). Return the rest to the box unseen.

8. **First player.** Choose a start player. They take the black marker, set it to 1, and lead the first round.



2 players **3 players** **4 players**

The starting layouts for two, three and four players, each with every homeland unit in place.

> OPTIONAL: QUICK START
>
> To skip the slowest part of the opening, each player places **two** units from their top tier on their homeland in step 4 instead of one. That empties the Tribe tier before the first card is played, so everyone begins at **Settlement**: melds of up to **three** cards, research up to 14 and a wall of 12. Nothing else changes. The worked round below uses the standard start.

A worked round

Three players — **Ada**, **Bex** and **Cy** — play their first round. Read it for the shape of a turn; every rule used here is set out properly in the sections that follow.

Setting up

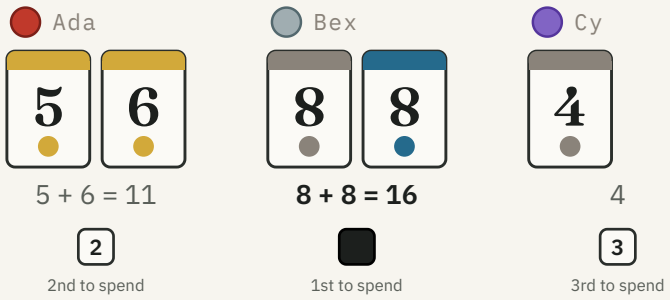
They draft their hands of ten; fourteen starting cards are left over and go face down as the market. Each loads a board with twenty units and lays the three-player map — three Mountains in a triangle, a Plains beyond each outer face — putting one unit on their own Plains. The upgrade deck deals nine cards into the innovation space; with a Tribe's rank cap of 12, only the 12s there are within reach for now. Each is dealt two map objectives and shows one. Ada starts, with the black marker set to 1.

The card phase

Everyone's meld limit is **2**. Ada lays first, face down, then Bex, then Cy. All anyone sees is the count: two, two, one. Then they turn them over together:

- **Ada**: **5 of Plains + 6 of Plains** — a run, total **11**.
- **Bex**: **8 of Mountain + 8 of Ocean** — one rank twice, total **16**. Suits do not matter in a meld.
- **Cy**: a single **4 of Mountain**, total **4**.

Nobody has a victory card yet, so nobody declares. **Bex wins the trick** with 16 against Ada's 11 and Cy's 4. The markers are set — Bex takes the black marker, to **1**, Ada's to 2 and Cy's to 3 — before anyone touches the map, the trick's dues are settled clockwise from Bex. Cy's meld ranked last, so he takes **1 gold**. Then Ada, holding as many cards as Bex played and having lost, sets one of hers aside. It pays her **1 gold**. Cy played only one card to Bex's two, which is already fewer, so he owes nothing further.



Highest TOTAL takes the trick — one big card beats two small ones.

Cy ranked last and takes a coin.
Ada held as many cards as Bex and lost, so one of hers is set aside too.

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Round one, the moment after the reveal. Add each row: Bex's 16 beats Ada's 11 and Cy's 4, so Bex takes the trick, and every marker is set to a finishing place — her black marker to 1. Cy's meld ranked last and earns him a coin; Ada held as many cards as Bex and lost, so one of hers is set aside for a coin of her own.
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The map phase

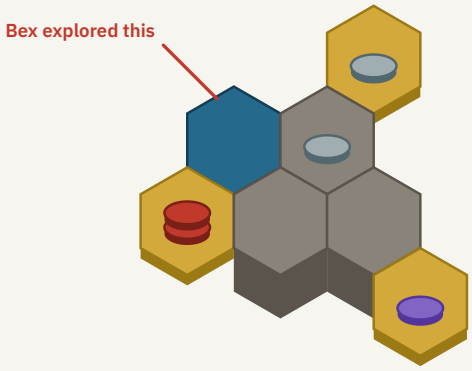
Both of the trick's debts are already paid, so Ada now has only one card left to spend. They act in initiative order: Bex, then Ada, then Cy.

- **Bex** spends both cards. The Mountain beside her Plains is in reach, so her **8 of Mountain** settles a unit there — Mountain holds one, so it is hers alone. Her **8 of Ocean** explores: she picks an empty space beside her civilization that touches at least two tiles, and lays an Ocean tile from the supply.

- **Ada** spends her one remaining card, the **6 of Plains**, to settle a second unit on her homeland, which holds three.
- **Cy** could settle the empty Mountain beside his homeland, but he cashes his 4 for a second gold instead: he is saving for research.

Each card spent also carried one movement — two for Bex, one each for Ada and Cy — but everyone's units already stand where they want them, so nobody moves.

Look at the reserves. Bex and Ada have now each placed both units of their Tribe tier, so they are **Settlements**: next round they may play melds of three and research up to rank 14. Cy is still a Tribe. Nobody's reserve is empty, so play goes on, and **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 map at the end of round one: three Mountains in a triangle, a Plains beyond each outer face, and the new Ocean. Bex holds a Mountain as well as her homeland; Ada has two units on her Plains; Cy has his starting unit and two coins.

> 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 won initiative and a full turn; Cy's cautious single let him bank gold instead. That trade — tempo now against resources later — is the whole game in miniature.

04 The round

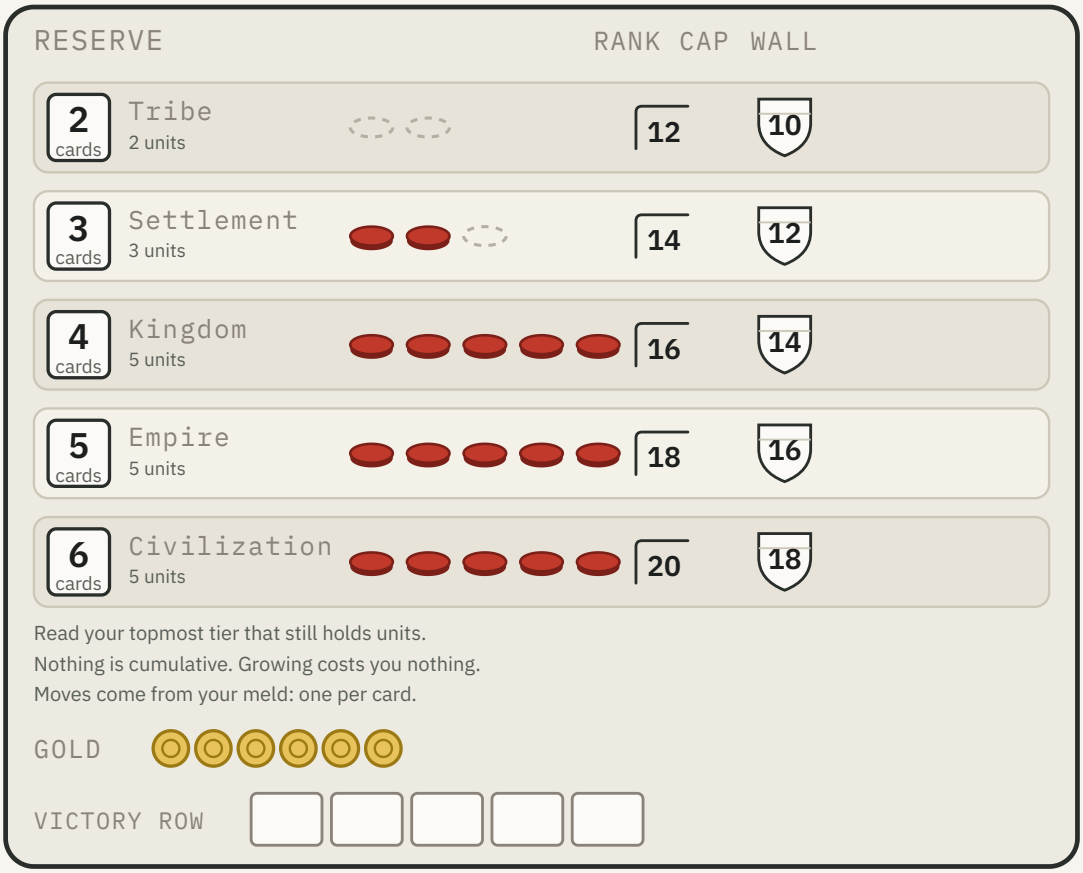
Every round has two halves. First everyone plays cards; then everyone spends those same cards, in the order the cards decided.

Your tier

Your board holds your 20 units in **five tiers** — 2, 3, 5, 5, 5 — and you always take units from the **topmost tier that still holds any**. That is your current tier, and it sets three numbers: the **meld** you may play, the highest **rank** you may research, and the **wall** your fortifications hold at.

TIER	UNITS	MELD LIMIT	RANK CAP	WALL
Tribe	2	2	12	10
Settlement	3	3	14	12
Kingdom	5	4	16	14
Empire	5	5	18	16
Civilization	5	6	20	18

Read only the row you are on — **nothing is cumulative**. Empty a tier and all three numbers step up together, at once. Growing costs nothing; if units come back to your board (§06), the numbers step back down.



The reserve empties from the top tier down. Here Tribe is spent and one Settlement unit placed, so this player reads the Settlement row: melds of three, research up to 14, a wall at 12.

Card phase

1. **Lead.** The leader lays a meld from their hand **face down**: one or more cards, up to their meld limit, forming an unbroken run of ranks (§05).

2. **Follow.** Clockwise, every other player lays a meld of their own, face down, one or more cards, up to their own limit. You may not pass, and nothing has to follow what was led. **All anyone sees is how many cards each player laid.**

3. **Reveal.** When the last meld is down, everyone turns theirs over at once.

4. **Declare.** Starting with the leader and going clockwise, each player may spend one card from their victory row on its **A** effect (§10), adding its rank to their total. You can see every meld and every earlier declaration before you decide.

5. **Compare.** The **highest total** — the ranks of the meld added together, plus any A effect — wins the trick. If totals are equal, the meld with **more cards** wins; then a tie-winning A effect; then whoever spent the higher victory card on A; then the **highest card**, then the second-highest, and so on; and finally the meld laid **earlier**. There is never a tie.

6. **Set the markers.** Four initiative markers, one per player, are each set to the seat's **finishing place**: the winner takes the **black marker**, always set to 1; the rest take plain markers set to 2, 3 and 4. This is the initiative order for the map phase, and the black marker is how the table spots the leader at a glance. Each player keeps their marker in a corner of their board until their turn is over.

7. **Resolve the trick's dues.** Clockwise from the winner, before anyone touches the map: the player whose meld ranked last takes 1 gold. Everyone holding as many cards as the winner played, or more, sets cards aside — one at a time, their choice — until they hold fewer than the winner did. Each pays 1 gold instead of acting and goes face up into its owner's **discard**. A player owed both coins takes both.

Map phase

Every forced discard is already settled by the time the map phase opens, so each player's meld is exactly what they will spend. In initiative order, each player takes their whole turn before the next begins: spend the cards of your meld (§06) and take your free actions (§07), in any order you like. None of what you set aside is lost: it sits in your own discard and becomes part of your hand again at the recycle (§08).

When everyone has finished, the trick winner leads the next round.

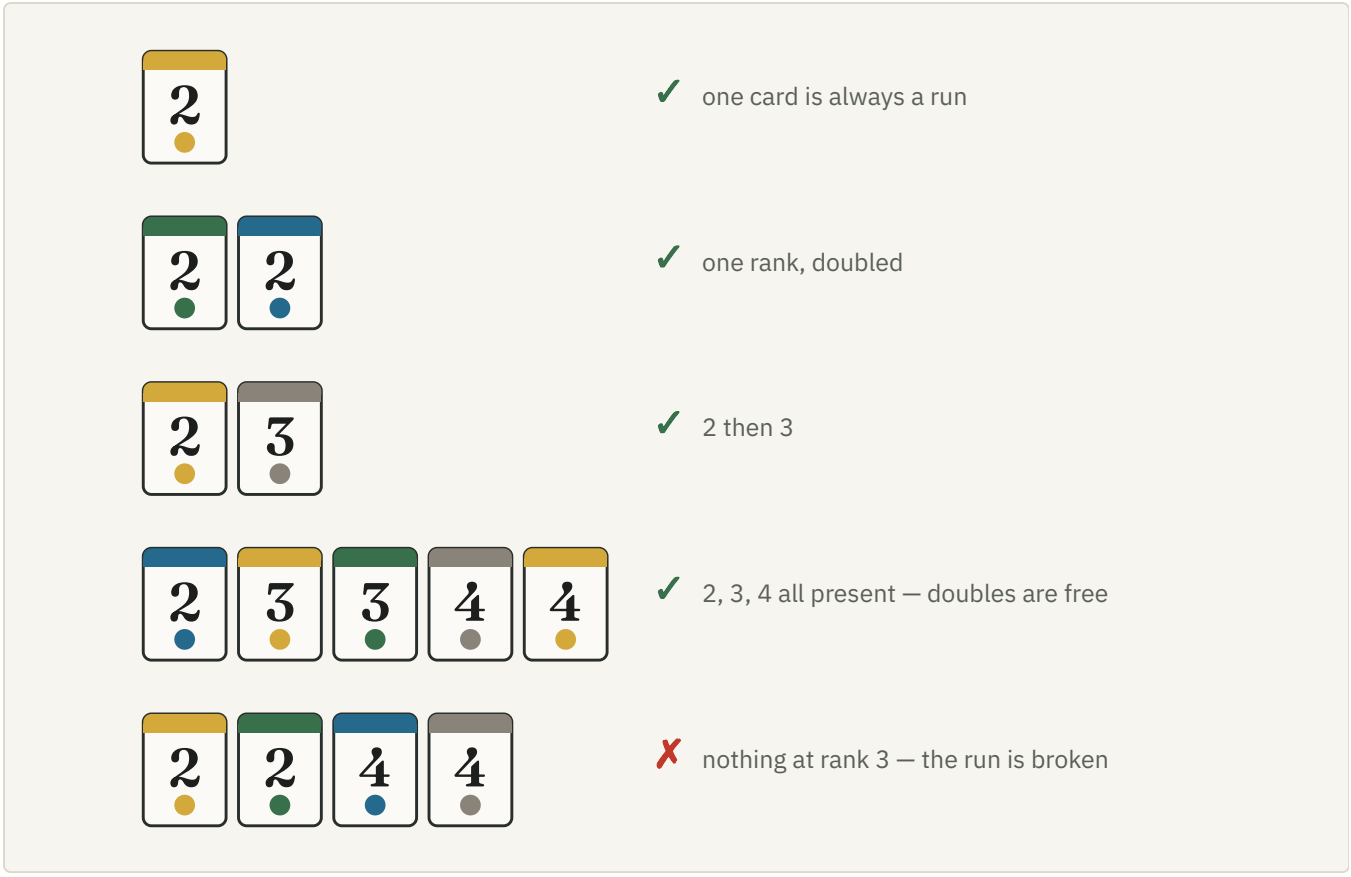
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05 Melds

> THE MELD RULE
>
> A meld is **one or more 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.

If you know rummy or poker, set that vocabulary aside: there are no straights, sets or full houses, only runs, and duplicates inside a run are free.

Your **meld limit** is a ceiling, never a quota. A short meld is a real line, not a failure: it still reaches the map card for card, and losing with fewer cards than the winner costs you nothing at all.



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. Only the last row is illegal, because nothing sits at rank 3.

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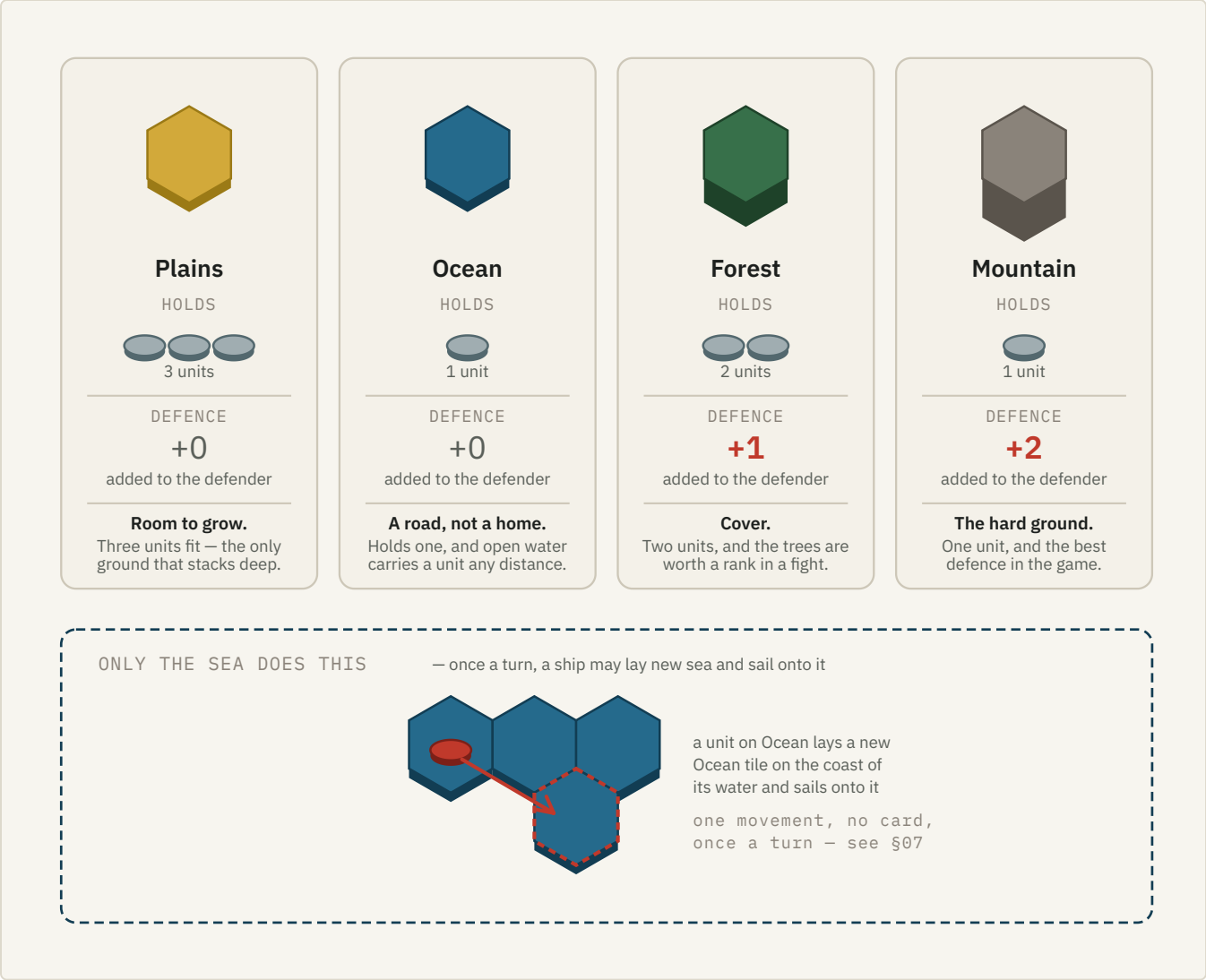
06 Spending your meld

Take the cards of your meld one at a time, **in any order you like**, and do *one* of four things with each: **settle**, **explore**, **attack** or **take gold**. Each card resolves fully before the next, so a tile you lay with one card can be settled by the next.

Every card except one taken as gold obeys two rules:

1. **Reach.** The 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 one meld need not act near each other.
2. **Suit matches terrain.** A Forest card acts on Forest, an Ocean card on Ocean, and so on.

The four terrains differ in two ways. **Holds** is how many units a tile can take: Plains 3, Forest 2, Ocean 1, Mountain 1. **Defence** is added to a defender in a fight: Plains +0, Ocean +0, Forest +1, Mountain +2. Defended ground is moulded taller, so a glance at the map tells you how hard it will fight.



Everything that differs between the four terrains: how many units the ground holds, and what it adds to a defender. The dashed panel is the one thing only the sea can do — the water advantage, explained in §07.

> IF YOU ARE SWEPT OFF THE MAP
>
> Losing your last unit does not end your game. While you have **no units on the map**, your cards ignore the reach rule and may act anywhere on the map. The exemption ends the moment one of your units is back on it.

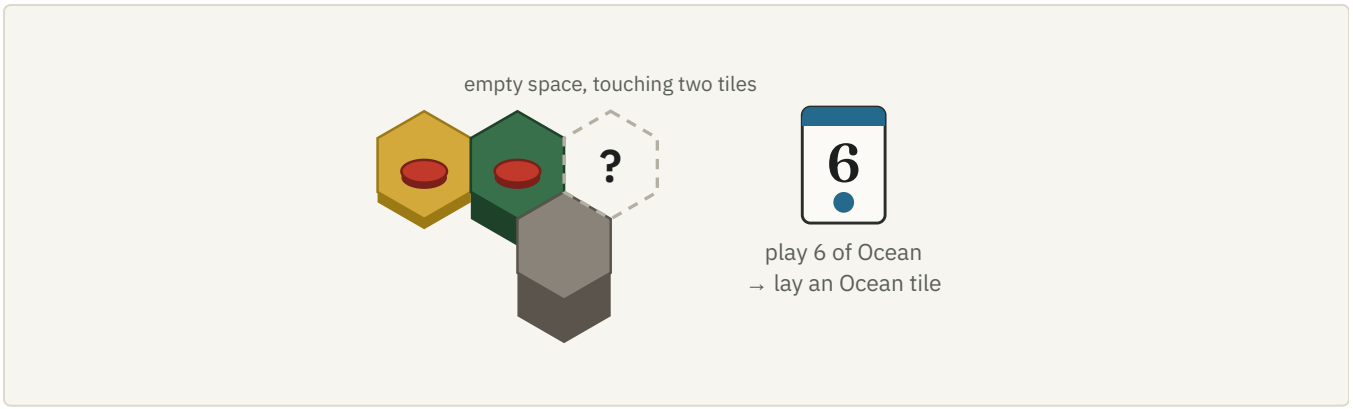
Settle

Put one unit from your reserve on the tile — always from the topmost tier that still holds any. You may stack your own units on a tile up to what its terrain holds. Drawing down your reserve is how your civilization grows, and how the game ends (§11). With no unit left in your reserve, the card takes gold instead.

Explore

On an **empty space**, lay a tile of the card's suit from the supply instead. No unit goes down — settle it with a later card, or leave it as open ground.

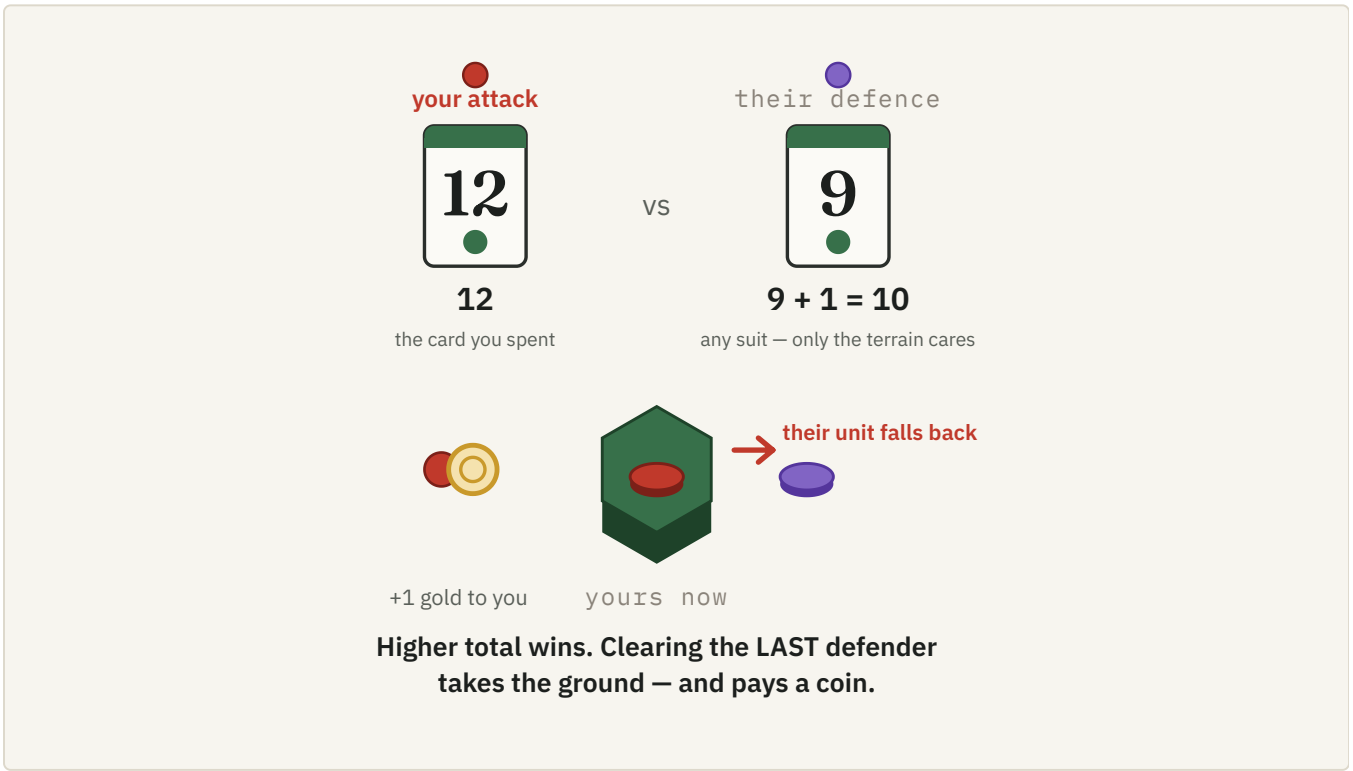
A new tile must touch at least two tiles already on the map. The map grows as one compact body; there are no bridges into open table. If that terrain has run out of the supply, the card takes gold instead.



Exploring lays new ground beside your civilization. The tile matches the suit of the card and must touch at least two tiles already on the map — and the very next card may settle it.

Attack

A tile a rival occupies cannot be settled. Spending a card on it **declares an attack** instead, and the attack is a **duel**.



Attacking is not moving a unit across the map. The card you spent is the attack; the defender answers from hand, and the ground adds to them. Clear the last defender and the tile is yours — and pays a coin.

1. **Attack.** Your attack is the rank of the card you spent. You commit nothing else.
2. **Defence.** The defender may answer with **one card from their hand**, of any suit, face up — or decline. Their defence is that card's rank **plus the terrain's defence**; a card not committed counts as nothing. If the tile is fortified, the higher of the wall and their card defends (§07).

3. **Compare.** The higher total wins. A level total goes to **you** — unless the defender's card is also of that terrain, in which case they hold. (Your card always matches the ground; that is how it got there.)

4. **You win:** one defending unit **falls back**. Its owner moves it to an adjacent tile they already hold that has room, and chooses if there are several. With nowhere to go, the unit goes home to their board and **refills their current tier** — or, if that tier hasn't lost a unit yet, the tier before it, reopening it so the owner's numbers **step back down** (§04). Either way, it costs them at most one tier.
   If that was the **last** unit on the tile, **the ground changes hands**: place a unit from your reserve on it and take **1 gold** from the supply. With no unit left in your reserve, the tile is simply left empty, and pays nothing.
   They win: nothing happens. Your card is spent.

Cards used in the duel go to their owners' discards. Clearing a tile holding several units takes one won duel per unit, and the coin comes only with the last.

> WHERE A RETREAT CAN GO
>
> Ocean and Mountain hold one unit each, so one you already occupy has no room to spare: a retreat can only reach **Plains or Forest**. And a unit with nothing of yours beside it has nowhere to fall back to at all — a lone outpost goes home.

> YOUR HAND DOES THREE JOBS
>
> Your cards fight for the trick, pay for your turn — and defend your ground. A hand played down to its last cards is a frontier with nobody on the walls, and everyone at the table can count your cards.

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. It is not a fallback: gold buys walls, research and trade.

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07 Free actions

Besides your cards, your map phase offers actions that cost no card. Take them whenever you like during your turn, between card plays or after them:

- **move** your units, and once a turn take the **water advantage**;
- **fortify** your units with gold;
- **research** or **trade**, up to twice a turn between them (§09);
- spend a victory card on its **B** or **C** effect (§10).

Movement

Each card of your meld carries one movement — including cards cashed for gold, but not a card you set aside. Lay three and you may make three moves this turn. A movement need not be spent by the card that paid for it. Each move takes one of your units:

- **By land** — through any chain of tiles you occupy, and onto a tile beside it that is unoccupied, or yours and has room.
- **By sea** — a unit standing on Ocean may sail across **unoccupied Ocean**, as far as the open water reaches, to an empty Ocean tile.

Movement is never an attack: you may not move onto or through a rival. You may empty a tile by moving its last unit away — an empty tile is nobody's, and your neighbours will notice.

The water advantage

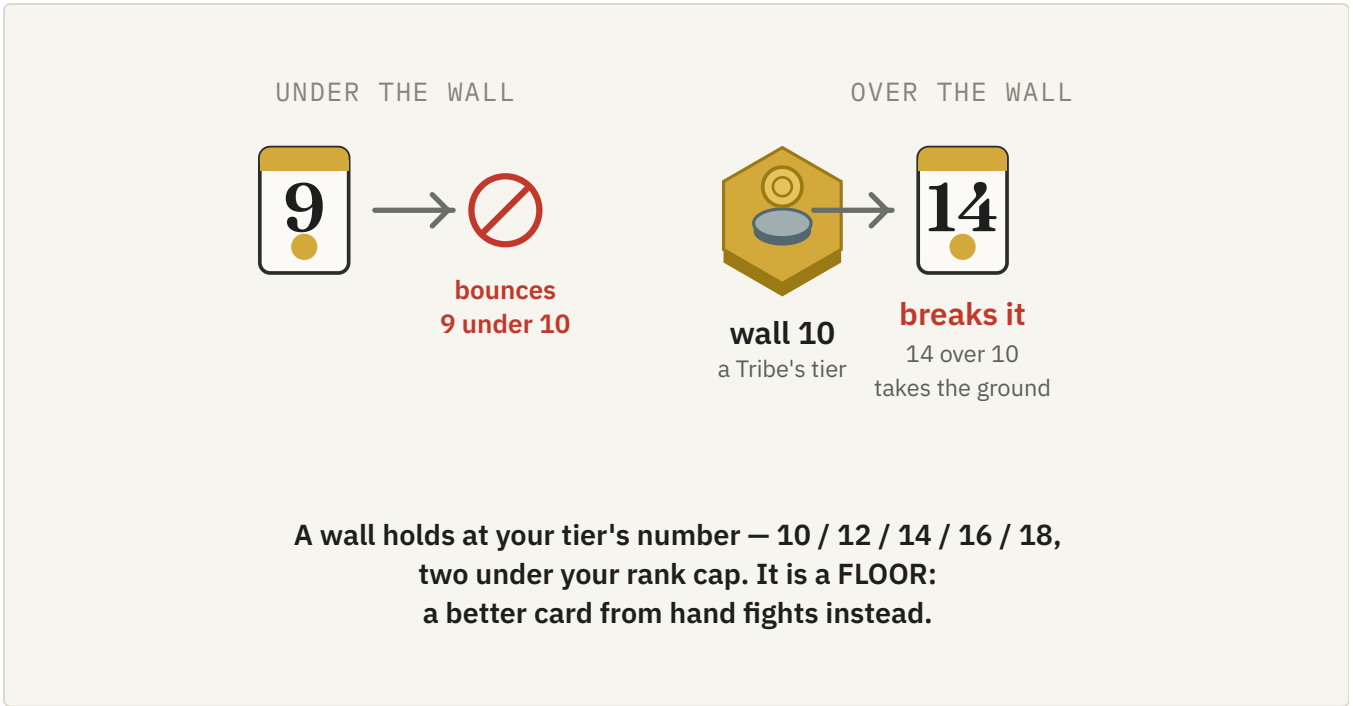
Once per turn, a unit standing on Ocean may **sail out onto a new Ocean tile**. Lay an Ocean tile from the supply on an empty space that touches the water the ship could sail through — its own tile, or unoccupied Ocean joined to it — and move the unit onto it. This uses one movement and no card. The space must touch at least two tiles, like any explore, but it does **not** need to be in your reach.

That is the difference between a voyage and a card: a ship pushes the charted sea outward, so a later card can act on ground it could not reach before. It never brings you ashore — real Plains, Forest or Mountain still takes a card of that suit.

Reaching the water is an ordinary land move, so the advantage usually costs two movements: one to put a unit out to sea, one to sail. A single-card meld can only take it with a unit already waiting on the water.

Fortify

Pay **1 gold** and place the coin on one of your units on the map — at most **one coin per unit**. The coin stays until a fight spends it or the unit is disturbed: moved, or stacked onto by another unit (which strips every coin on that tile). A coin on a unit never comes back to your gold.



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

A coin on a unit is a **wall**, and a wall fights. When the tile is attacked:

- The coin defends at **your tier's wall** (§04) **plus the terrain's defence**, and it counts as a card of that terrain.
- It is a **floor, not a substitute**: you may still answer with a card from hand, and if that card is higher, it fights instead. If it is not, it stays in your hand.
- The attacker still spends **one** card. Beat the wall and the duel is won: a defender falls back, and the ground changes hands if that was the last of them.
- The **coin goes to the supply** either way. One coin, one attack made much harder.

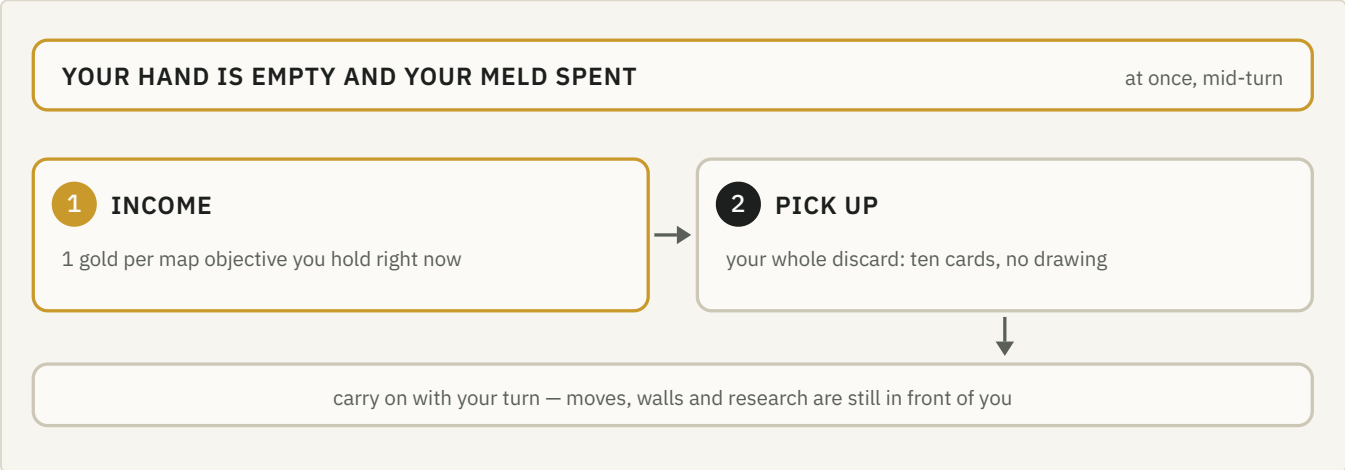
The starting deck tops out at 11, so a dealt card can break a Tribe's wall only on Plains or Ocean — an 11 against 10 — and never on Forest or Mountain. Every higher wall needs a researched card. You cannot fortify in answer to an attack, because attacks come on someone else's turn: a wall is a read on your neighbours, paid for in advance.

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08 The recycle

Your hand is **ten cards**, and nothing you play ever leaves you: every card goes to your own discard. When your hand is empty **and** every card of your meld has been resolved, your hand **recycles** — at once, in the middle of your turn:

1. **Collect your income:** 1 gold for each of your map objectives, shown or hidden, whose pattern you hold right now (§12).
2. **Pick up your whole discard** as your new hand — ten cards — and carry on with your turn. You never draw cards to refill.



The recycle, in order: income first, and the hand comes back last. Your map phase — moves, walls, research — is still in front of you.

If you spend your last card defending on someone else's turn, you recycle as soon as your own meld is resolved — or at the end of the round, if your turn has already passed.

Only research and trade ever change which ten cards you hold (§09). A hand drifts because you paid to make it drift, never because the deal moved underneath you.

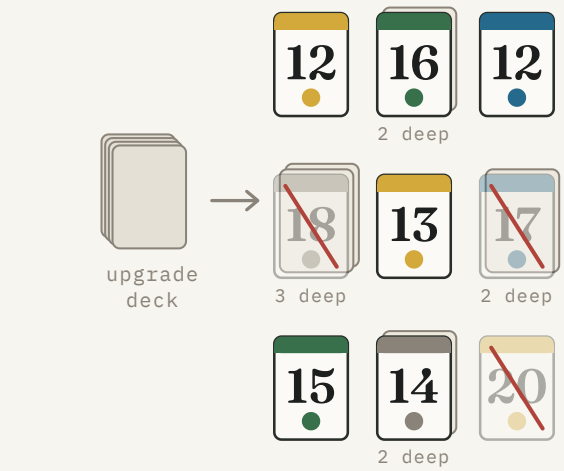
09

Research and trade

Two piles of cards sit beside the map:

- the **innovation space** — nine face-up cards from the upgrade deck in a 3 × 3 grid. **Research** reaches into it.
- the **market** — the face-down pile that began as the undrafted cards. **Trade** reaches into it.

Up to twice per turn, during your map phase, you may improve your hand: research twice, trade twice, or one of each. The **first improvement of a turn costs 1 gold, the second costs 2**, whichever kind it is.



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

The innovation space. Each draw covers the highest rank showing, so the tallest idea is always the one buried next. A player with a rank cap of 16 may research any visible card up to 16; the taller ones are in view but out of reach until they grow.

Research

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 tied, the first in reading order). Nobody chooses; a covered card is out of reach until the one on top of it is taken.
2. **Retire the lowest-ranked card in your hand** to your **victory row** (§10). If you hold several of that rank, choose which suit. With no card in hand you cannot research.
3. **Pay** — 1 gold, or 2 for your second improvement this turn — and **take any visible card at or below your rank cap** (§04). Put it into your **hand**, to use this cycle, or your **discard**, so your hand runs out and recycles sooner.
4. **Refill** any empty grid positions from the deck. Once the deck is empty, positions stay empty.

> WHEN THERE IS NOTHING YOU MAY TAKE
>
> Draw first, then look. If nothing on the grid is at or below your rank cap, the research ends: the drawn card stays, and you retire nothing and pay nothing. It still counts as **one of your two** improvements — the deck has moved — but because you bought nothing, your next one this turn still costs 1.

The rank cap only limits what you *take*. A card you already hold is yours to use whatever your tier. And because research always retires your *lowest* card, your victory row is a record of what your civilization outgrew: 3s and 4s early on, perhaps a 12 by the end.

Trade

Where research reaches **up** — a stronger card, paid for by retiring your weakest — trade reaches **sideways**: two cards for two, no rank gained and nothing retired.

1. **Draw the top two cards** of the market into your hand, blind. There must be at least two.
2. **Pay** — 1 gold, or 2 for your second improvement this turn.
3. **Bury any two cards** from your hand — the two you drew, two you already held, or one of each — face down at the **bottom of the market**. Your hand is back to its size.

The draw commits you: once you have seen the two cards, you must bury exactly two. The market is never shuffled after setup, so what you bury comes back up in its own time, in somebody's trade.

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10 The victory row

Every card you retire by research goes to your **victory row**: five slots on your board, filled from the right. A card there does two jobs. It **scores** at the end of the game (§11), and until then it can be **spent once** on one of three printed effects.

The row holds at most **five cards**. Retire a sixth and the lowest of the six goes to the bottom of the market — even if that is the card you just retired. A full row never stops you researching.

Spending a victory card

Every card prints three effects, growing with its rank. Spend a card on **one** of them, then put it at the bottom of the market: your row shrinks, and your score with it.

RANK	A · AFTER THE REVEAL	B · YOUR MAP PHASE	C · YOUR MAP PHASE
1–5	Add this card's **rank** to your total	**Found a colony** — 1 new tile of this suit, 1 unit on it, 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 of this suit, 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 card phase, after the reveal (§04). It counts only toward winning the trick, never toward what you spend on the map. "Win ties" places you ahead of an equal total with the same number of cards (§04).
- **B** is used in your own map phase. Lay the new tile or tiles from the supply and settle a unit from your reserve on however many of them the table gives a unit for — one tile only for the 11–15 band, every tile for the others — fortifying each of those units with a coin **from the gold supply**. Each tile is an explore: it must touch two tiles and lie **within your reach** — or, for the 6–10 band, **up to two tiles out**. You need at least one unit in your reserve and a tile of the right terrain in the supply; lay what you can.
- **C** is taken in your own map phase, at any point in it.

> ONE EFFECT PER ROUND
>
> A, B and C share **one allowance per round**: at most one victory card leaves your row each round, whichever effect it pays for. Declare A and you may not also found a colony or take C's gold this round, and so on.

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

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11 End of the game

One trigger, and you can see it coming from across the table: if, at the end of a round, any player's reserve is **empty** — all twenty units on the map — 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. *In addition*, lay the cards out in rank order **pushed to the right** of the five slots: if you hold three or more, also score the **rank in the centre slot**.
Map objectives	**2 points for each arrangement** you hold of each of your two objectives, shown and hidden (§12).



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.

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**

With fewer than three cards the row pays only its point per card; the third card is where it starts paying properly, and the fifth is where it pays best.

Most points wins. If tied, the tied player with more gold wins; if still tied, share the victory.

> FOR A FIRST GAME
>
> **Map objectives** (§12) are part of the base game, but you may leave them out of a first game — the rest stands without them.

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12 Map objectives

The only points in the game that reward the *shape* of what you hold, not its size.

Each objective card names **three tiles**: a **middle** of one terrain, and two **ends** that each touch the middle. The ends need not touch each other, so a bend counts exactly as a straight line does.

- All three must be tiles **you occupy** — at least one of your units on each. An empty tile, or one held by a rival, never counts.
- The terrains must match exactly. *Fjord* is Ocean between two Mountains; two Oceans around a Mountain is *Mountain Lookout*, a different card.
- An objective scores **2 points for each arrangement** you hold at the end: count each tile of the middle terrain that has both its ends beside it. A tile may serve as an end for more than one arrangement, but each middle pays once. Holding none costs nothing.
- While you hold it, an objective also pays **1 gold at each recycle** (§08) — one coin per objective, however many arrangements.

There are twelve objective cards. You are dealt two *after* the starting map is laid, so they reward where you go, not where you began. **Show one and keep one.** Showing tells the table what you are building — and which single tile would break it.

> AT THE TABLE
>
> Hold your **hidden** card with your hand of cards — it is not one of your ten, and its different back keeps it apart — so you can check it after every tile you place. Keep your **shown** card face up on its space on your board, where everyone can read it without asking.

Other ways to play it

Show one is the standard game. Agree on another mode before setup if your table prefers.

MODE	SETUP	CHARACTER
Show one (standard)	Deal **two** to each player after the starting map is laid. Show **one** face up on your board; keep the other hidden.	Half declared: the table can see one shape you want, and guess at the other.
Secret	Deal **two** to each player before the draft. Keep **one**, hidden; return the other unseen.	The tightest. Nobody knows what anyone is building.
Open	Turn **two** face up in the middle. They belong to everyone.	The most contested — everyone wants the same shapes.
Keep both	Deal **two** to each player and keep both hidden.	The loosest: two shapes to steer between and nothing declared.

In every mode, hidden objectives are revealed together at the end, after the rest of the score is counted.

> WHY IT CHANGES THE MAP
>
> Without objectives, ground is ground. With them, a particular empty space beside your Forest is suddenly worth exploring *specifically*. They are worth steering toward when the map offers them — but many players end with none, so they are never worth wrecking your position over.

Glossary

Cell
The single space a card acts on — a tile of the card's suit, or an empty space where one will go — in your reach.

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

Discard
Your own face-up pile of the cards you have resolved or set aside. It becomes your new hand at the recycle (§08).

Duel
An attack: the rank of the card you spent against the defender's card from hand, or their wall, plus the terrain's defence (§06).

Explore
Spend a card to lay a tile of its suit on an empty space in your reach that touches at least two tiles (§06).

Innovation space
The nine face-up upgrade cards in a 3 × 3 grid. Research takes from it, up to your rank cap (§09).

Market
The face-down pile: the undrafted cards, plus spent and bumped victory cards and cards buried by trade. Only trade draws from it, and it is never shuffled after setup (§09).

Meld
The cards you play in one round — one or more, up to your meld limit, forming an unbroken run of ranks. It competes for the trick, then each card is spent (§05).

Meld limit
The most cards you may play in a meld, from 2 to 6, set by your current tier (§04).

Movement
One per card of your meld, except a card set aside. By land through your own tiles, or by sea across open Ocean. Never an attack (§07).

Rank cap
The highest rank you may take when you research, from 12 to 20, set by your current tier (§04).

Reach
Any tile you occupy, or any tile or empty space adjacent to one you occupy (§06).

Recycle
When your hand is empty and your meld spent: collect income, then pick up your discard as your new hand of ten (§08).

Set aside
A card you give up after losing with as many cards as the trick winner, or more: one at a time until you hold fewer. It pays 1 gold instead of acting, and goes to your own discard (§04).

Settle
Spend a card to put a unit from your reserve on a tile of its suit in your reach (§06).

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 sets your meld limit, rank cap and wall (§04).

Trick
The contest of the card phase: every meld is turned over at once and the highest total wins, taking the first turn (§04).

Victory row
The five slots holding your retired cards. They score at the end, or can each be spent once on an effect (§10).

Wall
A fortification coin on a unit. It defends at your tier's wall plus the terrain, and is spent by the next attack (§07).

Initiative markers
Four markers — one black, three plain — set to each seat's finishing place in the trick. The black marker is always 1; whoever holds it acts first (§04).

Quick reference

Tiers

Units in tiers of 2 / 3 / 5 / 5 / 5, taken from the top. Meld, rank cap, wall: **Tribe** 2, 12, 10 · **Settlement** 3, 14, 12 · **Kingdom** 4, 16, 14 · **Empire** 5, 18, 16 · **Civilization** 6, 20, 18. Read your current tier only.

Card phase

Leader lays a meld face down → others follow clockwise, face down → reveal together → declare A effects, leader first → highest total wins; ties: more cards, then tie-winning A, then higher A card, then highest card down, then earliest laid → **initiative markers = finishing place**; the winner takes the black marker (1), then 2 / 3 / 4.

Melds

An **unbroken run** of ranks; duplicates free, suits irrelevant, one card always legal. 2 ✓ · 2-2 ✓ · 2-3 ✓ · 2-3-3-4-4 ✓ · **2-2-4-4 ✗**

Map phase

Before it opens, settle the trick's dues clockwise from the winner: the last-ranked meld takes 1 gold; anyone holding as many cards as the winner, or more, sets cards aside until below that count, 1 gold each. Then act in initiative order.

Each card of your meld

ONE of: **settle** a unit · **explore** a tile · **attack** · take **1 gold**. In your reach, suit matches terrain. No units on the map? Reach does not apply.

Explore

New tile touches **at least two** tiles. Terrain run out → gold instead.

Duel

Attack = your card's rank. Defence = their card from hand (or their wall) + terrain (Plains 0 · Ocean 0 · Forest 1 · Mountain 2). Higher wins; level goes to you unless their card also matches the ground. Win: one defender falls back (or goes home). Last one gone: place your unit, +1 gold.

Terrain

Plains 3 · Forest 2 (defends +1) · Ocean 1 · Mountain 1 (defends +2)

Free actions

Move: one per meld card (not the set-aside card); by land through your tiles, by sea across open Ocean. · **Water advantage**, once a turn: a unit on Ocean sails onto a new Ocean tile laid on its coast; touch-two applies, reach does not. · **Fortify**: 1 gold onto a unit, one per unit; wall 10 / 12 / 14 / 16 / 18 + terrain; spent by the next attack. · **Research or trade**: up to two a turn, 1 gold then 2. · Victory effects **B**, **C**.

Research

Draw onto the highest rank showing → retire your **lowest** hand card to your victory row → pay → take any visible card **at or below your rank cap** (12/14/16/18/20), to hand or discard → refill the grid. Nothing to take: stop, pay nothing, still counts.

Trade

Draw the market's top two → pay → bury any two hand cards at its bottom.

Recycle

Hand empty and meld spent, at once: income (1 gold per objective you hold) → pick up your discard. Ten cards; no drawing.

Victory row — one effect per round

A add its rank to your total (6–10 and 16–20 also win ties) · **B** found a colony: tiles, units and walls from the supply · **C** 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 gold. A after the reveal; B and C in your map phase. Spent cards go to the bottom of the market. A sixth card bumps the lowest there.

Gold in

1 each: cash a card · last-ranked meld · set-aside card · take the ground in a duel. Also: 1 per objective held, at each recycle · effect C.

End and scoring

Any reserve empty at the end of a round → one more round. Score 1 per unit on the map + 1 per victory card + the centre-slot rank (three or more cards) + 2 per objective arrangement. Ties: most gold.