

Blink - Climbing the Ladder of Civilization.

Designer: Tobias Sikosek

2-4 45

(Short Version for Essen Spiel 2025)

Intro

A card game for 2-4 players that drives a civilization game on a map. Start with a small tribe in unknown lands, grow your population, explore the world and develop new technologies. But beware of your opponents competing for victory! Even the greatest civilizations may rise and fall within the **blink of an eye**.

Blink combines elements of **trick taking** / **ladder climbing** and **deck building** card games. Card play unlocks actions on the **growing map** to expand your population and explore new terrain. Card suits match terrain types, each with different properties. Decisions involve expansion and combat vs accumulating gold and upgrading cards. Balancing population on all terrain types unlocks more powerful card combinations.

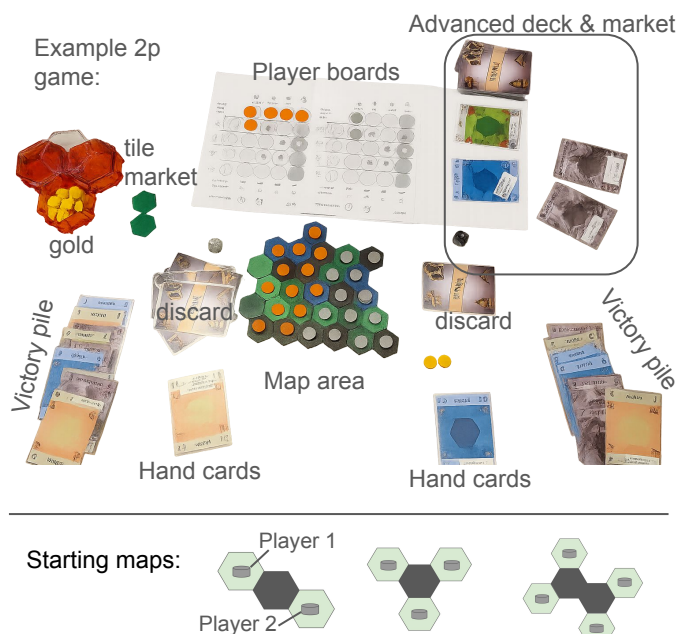


Components

80 civilization cards in 4 suits	60 hexagonal tiles in four terrain types	4 D6 initiative dice (1 black, 3 white)
4 player boards	80 population units , 20 per player color	20 gold coins 1 bag

Setup

- 1) Separate cards into **starting deck** and advanced deck. Each rank in four suits (Plains, Forest, Ocean, Mountains).
- 2) Starting deck: ranks 1-5 (2 players), 1-8 (3 players), 1-10 (4 p.)
- 3) Deal **10 random hand cards** from the starting deck to each player. Remove any leftover cards from the game.
- 4) **Drafting**: keep four cards, rotate remaining cards clockwise, take two new cards and repeat until all cards are taken.
- 5) Set up player boards by placing all units of the same player color on the round slots
- 6) Select a **starting map** and place one unit on a starting tile per player
- 7) Place remaining tiles into a **bag** and draw a number of tiles equal to the player count plus one as an **open tile display**.
- 8) Prepare **advanced deck** as a face down deck sorted by rank with highest ranks at the bottom. Suits with the same rank are in random order. Then draw the top 4 cards and place them face up as a **market** next to the deck.
- 9) Place initiative (round order) dice within reach showing numbers 1 to player count. The black die is always the number one (trick winner)
- 10) Determine starting player



Game Play

Blink is played in multiple rounds. Each round alternates between **card phase** and **map phase**, until one of the end game

Card phase (trick-taking):

1. Starting player plays a valid **meld** from their hand. In **clockwise** order: every player plays a number of cards between one and their current meld size limit. No passing. If multiple cards are played, they must form a valid meld. No other „must follow ...“ restrictions.
2. **Rank players** by score: **sum of ranks**, resolve ties in play order. Highest score (played first) wins the trick.
3. Set **initiative dice** to current ranking. **Trick winner** sets die to “1” (new starting player), next-best player to “2”, etc.

Map phase (actions):

1. In **increasing rank order** use meld cards to **perform actions**. Restriction: only **trick winner** can use all meld cards, everyone else can use only one card less than the winner.
2. Meld cards not used for map actions (voluntarily or not, see “card play”) can be used to **earn one gold** each.
3. To perform actions on a map, you **choose one tile** with or adjacent to one of your units. The suit must match the terrain type.
4. Optionally: pay one gold to **upgrade a card** from your hand (see “bonus actions”). Can be done multiple times. Can also be done in the moment the entire discard is picked up again.
5. After each action: move played cards to **personal discard**.
6. Check **end-game** conditions.
7. After every player has performed their map actions, **fill up market tiles** by drawing randomly from the bag.

Card Play

In blink you play a card game loosely connected to the tradition of trick taking and ladder climbing games. In such games, everyone in turn plays a card or combination of cards called **melds**. Based on some evaluation system, one player is determined the winner of the “trick”. This is where blink deviates from that tradition, because players will always keep their own cards. There is also no rule to „follow suit“ or such. Players can freely play any number and value of cards as long as they form valid melds. Thematically, cards played during the card phase represent different ideas and plans that the civilization leaders (you, the players) leverage to gain political influence and thus **initiative on the map**. These cards can be combined to form more complex ideas if they obey certain rules. These combinations (melds) yield a combined **score by adding up the rank** numbers on the cards. The **highest score wins the trick** and allows the player to perform the most actions on the map first and also initiate the next round. Everyone else gets to **use one card less than the winner**, but receives **one gold per card affected** by this rule. You will always keep a fixed number of ten cards, which will be discarded in front of you, meld after meld. Once all cards have been played, players pick up the discard pile as hand cards, and continue play.

Terrain

The map consists of four different terrain types that match the four card suits: **Plains** can hold the most population but offer no protection. **Forest** can hold less population, but gives +1 defense bonus. **Mountains** have low population capacity and cannot be attacked or launch an attack. **Ocean** also holds little population, but as a starting point for exploration, two tiles are revealed instead of one (the first of which must be ocean). Ocean also allows rapid movement across any unobstructed tiles. Population limits increase during the game and also the number of cards that need to be played to add a new unit to a tile (“populate”) can vary. See player boards.

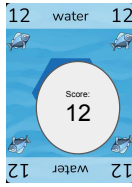


Terrain / suits

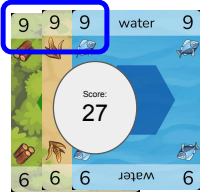
Valid melds

Melds are card combinations that may be played simultaneously during the card phase. Melds must adhere to the **current meld size limit** of the player (see player board).

single cards



Sets (pairs, triples etc) of same rank



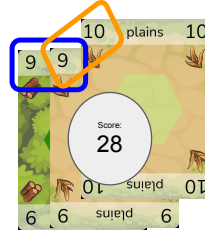
Straights (e.g. 2,3,4) of same suit



Friends of 10s: pairs of ranks summing up to 10, 20, etc



Super melds: any overlapping combination of melds (e.g. 2,2,3 which combines a 2,2 set and a 2,3 straight.)



Player boards

These boards initially hold all player units on four parallel tracks, one for each terrain type. When a unit is placed on the map during a “populate” action, the lowest unit on the corresponding terrain track is taken and placed on the map, potentially revealing and thus activating a gameplay bonus. To synchronize the map with the player boards (after movement and combat), units on the board may be minimally rearranged to reflect the current distribution of units per terrain type. This may be done at any time, also during other player turns. Once all tracks have surpassed the same horizontal line, the meld size limit increases and more cards may be played together in combination.

Map actions

Each played card of a given suit can be applied to a tile of matching terrain type. The following actions are available:	
populate	Place a new unit from the bottom of the matching terrain track on your board onto a tile with your unit or adjacent to one
move from / to	Move one of your units either from or onto a tile of the matching terrain. Move one space onto unoccupied tiles, move any number of tiles on land that you occupy, as long as the population limit has not been reached. Movement from land to ocean and vice versa always take one full move action. On ocean, move units across any open unoccupied tiles.
explore	Place one tile from the market into an empty tile slot on the map adjacent to one of your units. Optionally, move a unit one space onto the newly placed tile.
combat	Between two adjacent tiles. Each player calculates their combat score: # units on tile + 1 defense bonus (if defender on forest) + 1 if gold spent (only one on either side). Highest score wins. Winner takes the attacked tile, loser moves units back to player board.

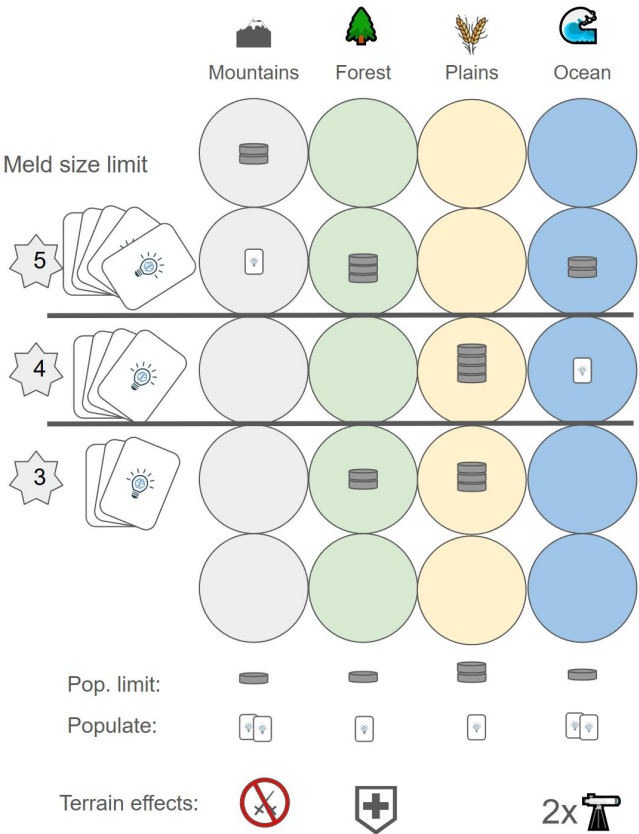
Bonus actions

Gain one gold	Any card from your played meld that is not used on the map, will produce one gold. This can be a voluntary decision and not just the result of losing the trick.
Upgrade card	After all your map actions: Spend one gold to remove one of your hand cards permanently. Take a high-rank card from the market display. Repeat any number of times. Gold goes to the supply. New cards go to your discard, old cards go to a “victory pile” near you. Finally, redraw market cards from the advanced deck.
Redraw tiles	Any time during your map actions: return any number of tiles from the market to the bag and redraw a full set of tiles (no. of players plus one)

End game

As soon as the first player puts their last unit onto the map, the game ends. However, it is the player with the most victory points that wins. VP = sum of units placed + the number cards upgraded + the highest rank upgraded.	
Blink (full version) preview: play a longer game of Blink where upgraded cards enter a secondary life cycle as technologies with unique bonus effects, but potentially long-term risks. Risks may trigger or worsen global disasters that all have to survive to make it to the end.	

Fully uncovered player board:



Contact: follow Blink online at www.deep-diversions.com, get in touch with the designer and hear about other exciting projects, such as the **TableMatch App** for scheduling board game sessions and getting your games to the table!
About the designer: Tobias is a computational researcher in the biotech industry and father of two. He lives in Heidelberg, Germany.
Email: deep.diversions.com@gmail.com

