What am I trying to do?

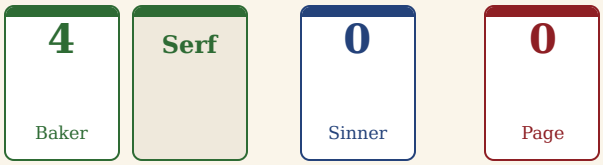
Dodge the plague. Beware the Sinner. Survive. · 4 players · One Going Medieval deck

> **Don’t capture plague cards.** When anyone reaches 100 Plague Points, the game ends. **The lowest score wins.**

THE ONE BIG IDEA

Black Death is a trick-taking game, like Hearts. Each trick, everyone plays one card and the **highest card of the Estate led** takes all four. Peasantry carries the plague, and the **Sinner** is the deadliest card in the Realm. Whatever you take, you keep, so you want to take as little as possible.

WHAT HURTS?



+1 each	+18	−1
every Peasantry card	the Sinner	a small mercy

Everything else is worth nothing. One hand holds 35 points of misery: 18 Peasantry cards, plus the Sinner, minus the Page.

WHICH CARD IS HIGHEST?



Ranks only matter **within the Estate led**. There is no trump: a Peasantry 9 can’t win a Nobility trick.

THE THREE DESTINY CARDS

The rank-0 cards are the **Page** (Nobility), the **Sinner** (Clergy) and the **Beggar** (Peasantry). Each follows its own Estate like any other card, but each has a job: the **Page** opens play, the **Sinner** costs 18, and the **Beggar** claims the Forsaken (page 2).

WHAT YOU NEED

- One 54-card Going Medieval deck.
- Paper and pencil for keeping score.

SET UP

1. Choose the first **Steward** (the dealer) any way you like.
2. Everyone starts at **0 Plague Points**.

What happens each hand?

Six steps, always in this order.

1. **Deal**: the Steward shuffles and deals 13 cards to each player. The last 2 go face down in the middle. They are **the Forsaken**; nobody looks at them.
2. **Pass**: everyone passes 3 cards at the same time (see the pattern below). Choose your 3 before you look at the ones you receive.
3. **The Page leads**: whoever holds the Page must lead it to the first trick.
4. **Play**: play all 13 tricks (page 3).
5. **Score**: reveal the Forsaken and count your plague (page 4).
6. **Next Steward**: the Steward role passes one seat to the left.

THE PASSING PATTERN

Hand 1	Pass 3 cards to the player on your **left**.
Hand 2	Pass 3 cards to the player on your **right**.
Hand 3	Pass 3 cards to the player **across** from you.
Hand 4	**Keep**: no passing this hand.

Then repeat: left, right, across, keep.

THE PAGE OPENS PLAY

The player holding the Page **must lead it** as the first card of the hand. If the Page is hiding in the Forsaken, the player to the Steward's left leads the first trick with any card they're allowed to lead.

THE FORSAKEN AND THE BEGGAR

Whoever **wins the trick with the Beggar in it** claims both Forsaken cards. Keep them face down without peeking. At scoring they are revealed, and whatever is hidden there, harmless or the Sinner itself, counts as yours.

If the Beggar is one of the Forsaken, nobody can win it, so **the Steward** claims them.

> **Every hand is a fresh deal.** Shuffle all 54 cards before each one. Scores carry over from hand to hand.

How does a trick work?

Follow if you can. Dump if you can't.

FOLLOW

If you have any card of the **Estate that was led**, you must play one of them.

CAN'T FOLLOW?

Play **any card you like**. This is your chance to dump plague on someone else.

WHO TAKES THE TRICK?

The **highest card of the Estate led** wins. Cards of other Estates can never win. If identical cards tie for highest (two Serfs, say), the first one played wins. The winner takes all four cards, stacks them face down, and leads the next trick.

BREAKING THE PLAGUE

You may **not lead** a Peasantry card or the Sinner until the Plague is **Broken**. It Breaks the first time one of them is played on any trick, usually by someone who can't follow and dumps it. After that, anything may be led.

Holding nothing but plague cards? Then you may lead one, and that Breaks the Plague.

> **Unlike Hearts:** plague cards, even the Sinner, may be played on the **very first trick**.

A WORKED TRICK (the first trick of a hand)



1. **Alice** holds the Page, so she must lead it.
2. **Bob** and **Carol** have Nobility, so they must follow: the Queen and a Knight.
3. **David** has no Nobility at all, so he can play anything, and he drops **the Sinner!**
4. Bob's Queen is the highest Nobility card, so **Bob takes the trick**: the Page (−1) and the Sinner (+18). The Sinner has been played, so **the Plague is Broken**.

Who wins?

Count the plague. The lowest score survives.

1. Reveal the Forsaken. They belong to whoever claimed them.
2. Score your captured cards: **+1** for each Peasantry card, **+18** for the Sinner, **−1** for the Page.
3. Add your hand score to your total. Totals can go below zero.

SCORING EXAMPLE

Alice took 5 Peasantry cards and the Page: **4**. **Bob** took 3 Peasantry cards and the Sinner: **21**. **Carol** won the Beggar's trick (6 Peasantry cards, the Beggar among them), and her Forsaken hide a Serf and a Clergy 6: **7**. **David** took 3 Peasantry cards: **3**.

PURGING THE PLAGUE

Feeling brave? Take **every** Peasantry card **and** the Sinner in one hand, including any hidden in the Forsaken you claim. You score 0 for them, then choose: **everyone else takes 36**, or **you subtract 36**. It's Black Death's version of Shooting the Moon. Fail by even one card and you keep everything you took.

THE END

After a hand is scored, if anyone has **100 or more**, the game is over. The **lowest total wins**.

TIED FOR LOWEST?

All four players play one more full hand, and repeat until one player is lowest. Anyone can still sneak ahead.

> **Quarantine Your Neighbor:** when passing, give your target a Nobility card. They'll have to follow the Page instead of dropping the Sinner on it.

READY FOR MORE?

Once your table knows the game, the Rulebook adds two optional modules: **Wandering Plague**, where the plague jumps to a different Estate each hand with the omens *Pestilence*, *Divine Mercy* and *Famine*; and **Beggar's Plea**, a sneaky secret trade.

TABLE SPIRIT

Groan when the Sinner lands, gasp when the Forsaken are turned over, and point fingers at whoever passed you that Peasantry. A doomed Purge attempt is half the fun.