BLACK DEATH

LEARN TO PLAY

OFFICIAL · OPEN PLAYTEST

4 players · One Going Medieval deck

A Going Medieval game inspired by Hearts

The Black Death sweeps through the Realm. Dodge the plague, beware the Sinner, and survive with the fewest Plague Points.

YOUR GOAL

Avoid capturing plague cards. When anyone reaches **100 Plague Points**, the game ends and the **lowest score wins**.

THE DECK IN 30 SECONDS

Three Estates: **Nobility**, **Clergy** and **Peasantry**. Each has ranks 9–0 plus 8 Faceless. Within an Estate, cards rank:

9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	Faceless

The three 0s are the Destiny cards: the **Page** (Nobility), the **Sinner** (Clergy) and the **Beggar** (Peasantry). They follow their Estate like any other card.

WHAT HURTS

Each Peasantry card you capture	**+1**
The Sinner, the deadliest card in the Realm	**+18**
The Page, a small mercy	**−1**

Peasantry is the plague-carrying ("infected") Estate. A full hand holds 35 points of misery.

EACH HAND

1. **Deal.** The Steward deals 13 cards to each player and sets the last 2 face down: **the Forsaken**.
2. **Pass 3 cards** at once: Left, then Right, then Across, then Keep (no pass). Pick your 3 before looking at what you get.
3. **The Page leads.** Whoever holds the Page must lead it. If it is in the Forsaken, the player left of the Steward leads.
4. **Play 13 tricks.** Then score, and the Steward role passes left.

EXAMPLE · THE FIRST TRICK

Alice leads the Page. Bob follows with Nobility 6, Carol with a Knight. David has no Nobility, so he drops **the Sinner**. Bob's 6 is highest: he captures the Page (−1) and the Sinner (+18), and the Plague is Broken.

PLAYING A TRICK

- **Follow the Estate led** if you can. If you can't, play any card.
- There is no trump. The **highest card of the led Estate** wins.
- If identical cards tie for highest, the first one played wins.
- The winner takes all four cards and leads next.

BREAKING THE PLAGUE

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

If you hold nothing but plague cards, you may lead one; that Breaks the Plague.

> **Unlike Hearts**
>
> Plague cards and the Sinner **may be played on the very first trick**. A player with no Nobility can drop the Sinner straight onto the Page.

THE FORSAKEN & THE BEGGAR

Whoever **wins the trick with the Beggar** claims both Forsaken cards, face down and unseen until scoring. Whatever is hidden there, from harmless cards to the Sinner itself, now counts as theirs. If the Beggar is in the Forsaken, the Steward claims them.

PURGING THE PLAGUE

Capture **every** Peasantry card **and** the Sinner (Forsaken included) and you score 0 for them. Then choose: everyone else **+36**, or you **−36**.

> **Your First Game**
>
> Play the core rules only. Once everyone is comfortable, add the optional modules on the back: **Wandering Plague** and **Beggar's Plea**.

BLACK DEATH

RULES REFERENCE

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Based on Master Rules v1.1

HAND SEQUENCE

1. **Deal** 13 each; 2 face down as the Forsaken.
2. WANDERING PLAGUE Reveal 1 Forsaken as the **omen**; apply Divine Mercy now if triggered.
3. **Pass 3**, simultaneously: Left → Right → Across → Keep.
4. BEGGAR'S PLEA Resolve it, if declared.
5. **Opening lead:** the Page holder leads the Page. Page in the Forsaken? Player left of Steward leads any legal card.
6. **Play** all 13 tricks.
7. **Score:** reveal the Forsaken, add points, check for a Purge.
8. Steward passes **one seat left**.

SCORING

CARD	POINTS
Each card of the infected Estate	**+1** (+2 Famine)
The Sinner (replaces any infected value)	**+18** (+36 Pestilence)
The Page	**−1**
The Page when Nobility is infected	**0**

Forsaken cards score for whoever claimed them. Scores may go below zero.

BREAKING THE PLAGUE

- No leading infected cards or the Sinner until Broken.
- Broken the first time either is played on a trick (followed or discarded).
- The Page's opening lead is always legal; it Breaks the Plague only if Nobility is infected.
- Holding only plague cards? Lead one; the Plague Breaks.
- Plague cards are legal on the first trick.

PURGING THE PLAGUE

One player captures every infected card **and** the Sinner, Forsaken included (checked after they are revealed). The Purger scores 0 for plague cards, then chooses **+36 to each other player** or **−36 to themselves**. Always 36. The Page's −1 still applies to whoever took it, unless Nobility is infected.

GAME END

After scoring, if anyone has **100+**, the game ends. **Lowest total wins.** Tied for lowest? All four play another full hand, and repeat until one player is lowest.

OPTIONAL: WANDERING PLAGUE

After dealing, reveal one Forsaken card. It stays face up in the Forsaken. **Its Estate is infected** this hand in place of Peasantry, and it scores for whoever claims the Forsaken.

OMEN	EFFECT THIS HAND
Pestilence Sinner revealed	Clergy is infected. The Sinner is worth **36**, and it rests in the Forsaken: whoever captures the Beggar inherits it.
Divine Mercy Page revealed	Nobility is infected. **Halve every positive score** (round down) before passing. Scores of 0 or less are unchanged.
Famine Beggar revealed	Peasantry is infected; each infected card is worth **2**. The Steward claims the Forsaken, no Beggar's Plea, and only the Steward can Purge.
Any other card	Its Estate is infected. Nothing else changes.

OPTIONAL: BEGGAR'S PLEA

Usable with or without Wandering Plague. After passing, before the opening lead:

1. The Beggar holder declares a Plea and names one opponent.
2. They secretly give that opponent the Beggar.
3. The opponent secretly returns **any one card**, even the Beggar itself.

Neither card is revealed. One Plea per hand. Decide the opening lead after the Plea. Optional table cue when the Beggar comes back: *"The Beggar is turned away!"*

STRATEGY TIPS

- **Quarantine Your Neighbor.** Pass your target a Nobility card so they must follow the Page's lead instead of dropping the Sinner on it.
- Collecting lots of plague? A Purge might still be on, but only if you can win the Forsaken too.