

Black Maria

3-5 players

52 cards

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: Medium

Avoid taking penalty cards, especially the Queen of Spades.

SETUP

- 3-5 players, deal all cards evenly.
- Pass 3 cards to the left before play.
- Player with lowest club leads.

SCORING

- Hearts = 1 point each.
- Queen of Spades = 13 points.

Tip: Pass high spades and void a suit early to duck penalty tricks.

ON YOUR TURN

- Follow suit if possible.
- Highest card of led suit wins.
- No trumps.

Black Maria is a British hearts-style trick-avoidance game where players try to avoid taking penalty cards, especially the Queen of Spades (Black Maria) and all Hearts.

Objective

Avoid taking tricks that contain penalty cards. The player with the fewest penalty points after all rounds wins.

Setup

1. **Players:** 3-5 players.
2. **Deck:** Standard 52-card deck (for 3 players, remove the 2 of Clubs).
3. **Deal:** Deal all cards evenly to each player.

Gameplay

1. **Step 1:** Before play, each player passes 3 cards to the player on their left.
2. **Step 2:** The player with the 2 of Clubs (or lowest club) leads the first trick.
3. **Step 3:** Players must follow suit if possible. The highest card of the led suit wins the trick.
4. **Step 4:** There are no trumps. Play continues until all cards are played.

Scoring

- Each Heart card scores 1 penalty point.
- The Queen of Spades (Black Maria) scores 13 penalty points.
- The King of Spades scores 10 and the Ace of Spades scores 7 in some variants.

Variations

- **Slippery Anne:** Only the Queen of Spades carries penalty points, not hearts.
- **Omnibus Hearts:** Adds the Jack of Diamonds as a +10 bonus card.

Tips and Strategies

- Pass high spades to avoid getting stuck with Black Maria.
- Void a suit early to duck tricks containing penalty cards.
- Watch for players trying to 'shoot the moon' by collecting all penalty cards.

Tips & Strategy

Pass away dangerous high spades and create voids in suits where penalty cards lurk. Track which penalty cards have been played.

Card passing is crucial. Getting rid of high spades and creating a void suit gives you control over which tricks you take.