Dead Man's Bluff

Born to sail the seas not read the rules?



Scan the QR for the rule video!

Need a shanty for your game?



Scan the QR for the DMB Playlist!

The Rundown

Each player plays with a deck of 15 cards, made up of Ace, 2, 3, 4 and 5 in suits of Crowns, Daggers and Skulls.

Played over several rounds, the winner of each round takes the same number of cards the losing player drew during that round, from the losing player's deck.

The aim of Dead Man's Bluff is to have won the most cards from other players by the end of the game, and then be crowned the winner!

The Setup

To set up Dead Man's Bluff, each player simply chooses a deck, ensuring any blank cards are removed (*these are for replacing lost or damaged cards, or creating you own cards*), and places it face-down on the table in front of them. Place any of the remaining decks face-down in the middle of the playing area to be used as the Crew Deck, and choose any player to make the opening bid.

The Gameplay

THE BEGINNING - To begin each round, each player shuffles their deck and draws two cards. Two cards are then flipped face-up from the Crew Deck and placed next to it.

THE OPENING BID - The first player makes a bid based on the quantity and value of cards they believe — or want other players to *think* they believe — are present in all cards drawn around the table, including their own cards and the Crew Deck. For example, a bid of Four 3's means the player is stating that there are at least four cards with the value three drawn around the table.

Note: Aces are wild and always represent the current card value in a bid (*e.g.* an Ace counts as a '3' if the current bid is Four 3's).

Throughout the game, you can also bid on Aces themselves or bid on a quantity of suits (*see: 'Other Ways To Bid'*).

Once the Opening Bid is set, play moves clockwise to the next player - unless someone challenges the bid (*see: 'The Bid'*).

THE DRAW - On your turn, you can choose to **either:**

Draw from your own deck: You can draw up to three cards each turn and can stop drawing at any point.

- The first two cards are drawn directly to your hand.
- The third card is placed face-up in front of you, and will stay there until the round is over.

Draw from the Crew Deck: Alternatively, you can draw one card from the Crew Deck and place it either face-up or face-down beside the Crew Deck.

- A total of six cards can be drawn from the Crew Deck each round, including the cards that were flipped at the start of the round.
- If you choose to place a card face-down, you cannot look at it before placing it. It remains face-down until the round is over.

Neither: You can also choose not to draw any cards and instead move directly to The Bid.

THE BID - On your turn, you must **either:**

Raise the Bid: Increase the quantity or the value — or both — of the last bid based on the cards that are currently drawn around the table (including your own cards, other players' cards, Crew Deck cards and any face-down cards).

For example, if the previous bid was Four 3's, you might bid Five 2's (increasing the quantity), Four 4's (increasing the value) or Five 4's (increasing both the quantity and the value).

You can increase the quantity of the bid by any amount (*e.g.* if you're feeling brave, you can bid Seven 3's even if the previous bid was only Four 3's!).

Challenge the Bid: If you don't think the last bid is true, you can challenge it by announcing that you think it is false. You can get as creative with the announcement as you like, but a simple 'No!' will do.

Any player can challenge the bid — whether or not it's their turn — until the current player has drawn a card. From then on, only the current player can challenge the previous bid. As the current player, if no other player challenges the bid — and you do not want to raise the bid — you must challenge it.

THE REVEAL - If a bid is challenged, players reveal their cards. All values counting towards the challenged bid are counted, including all cards drawn from the Crew Deck that round. For example, if the challenged bid is Seven 2's, all 2's and Aces are counted (remember, Aces are wild).

If the bid is correct (*e.g.* at least seven 2's were counted, and the bid was Seven 2's) the player who made the bid wins the round. If the bid is incorrect (*e.g.* there were fewer than seven 2's) the player who challenged the bid wins.

Note: Face-down cards are flipped and counted one by one after all face-up cards have been counted (a drumroll isn't required, but is certainly recommended!).

THE WAGER - Once each player has shuffled their cards back into their deck, the player who lost the round will give the same number of cards they drew from their deck — including any cards they had placed in front of them — to the player that won. These cards will first come from cards they've won from previous rounds (their 'Spoils'), then from their deck *(see 'Spoils')*.

THE NEXT ROUND - Shuffle the Crew Deck and then discard two cards face-down. Between each subsequent round, you will count the discarded Crew cards before shuffling them back into the Crew Deck, then discard that same number of cards plus an additional two.

Each player then draws two new cards from their deck, and two cards are flipped face-up from the Crew Deck. The next round opens with the player to the left of whoever made the final bid of the previous round (as it would have been their bid next).

Note: Between rounds, you may refresh the cards in your deck by taking back any of your own cards that are in other players' Spoils and shuffling them into your deck before dealing the same number back out to the players you lost them to. If, during a round, you draw your deck completely, you *must* refresh your deck before the next round.

Other Ways to Bid

Below are two more ways you can bid in a game of Dead Man's Bluff. While they are essential to the game in the long run, we recommend introducing them after a game or two once everyone has got their sea legs under them. Either skip ahead to the Spoils section, or read on and keep these rules in the back of your mind while you play the first few rounds.

BIDDING ON ACES - When bidding, you can choose to bid on a quantity of Aces. Aces are worth double the quantity you bid, at a value of one. For example, when you bid Three Aces, the bid is worth Six 1's. This means a bid of Three Aces would beat a bid of Five 4's and is outbid by a bid of Six 2's.

Each time you bid on Aces, you must place one card from the top of your deck face-down in front of you without looking at it. This card is flipped and counted at the end of the round, and also counts toward the total number of cards you must pay to the winner if you lose the round. If you do not have any cards left in your deck to bid with, you cannot bid on Aces.

BIDDING ON SUITS - You can choose to bid on a quantity of suits, with each card worth one of the suit that appears on the card (*e.g.* if you bid Three Skulls, you are saying that there are currently three cards with Skulls on them drawn around the table).

The value of suits sit between a four and a five, meaning that Four of any suit beats Four 4's, but does not beat Four 5's. Within this, the value of suits is Skulls, Daggers, then Crowns, so Four Crowns would beat Four Daggers, which in turn would beat Four Skulls.

Spoils

Each time you win a round, you will take cards from the loser equal to the number of cards they drew in that round.

You will first take cards from their Spoils (cards they have won in previous rounds), before taking cards from their deck. For example, if you are owed four cards from the loser and they have two cards in their Spoils, you will take those two cards first and then two cards directly from their deck.

If you win back any of your own cards from another player's Spoils, shuffle them back into your deck. Other players' cards are kept face-down beside your deck and become your Spoils. These cards are never looked at or used.

If a player loses all the cards in their deck at any point in the game, they are eliminated. Their Spoils are removed from the game before another round begins.

The Dead Man

The player who has the most cards in their Spoils becomes the Dead Man, and must place the Dead Man's Card in from them, with the black side face-up. The Dead Man cannot draw from the Crew Deck, and must give away an extra card to the player who beat them, if they lose a round.

Whenever another player accrues more cards in their Spoils than the current Dead Man, they take the Dead Man's Card and become the Dead Man themselves.

Note: If, after the first round, multiple players are tied for the lead, those players are all the Dead Man.

Winning the Game

After each round, two cards will be discarded from the Crew Deck. After seven rounds, just one last card will remain. At this point, flip the Dead Man's Card red side up to indicate that no quarter will be given - **from here on out, as soon as the Dead Man wins a round they will win the game!**

Flip the final card in the Crew Deck to begin the round. If the Dead Man does not win this round, all players discard two cards from their own deck (not from their Spoils). Now play another round, with no cards flipped from the Crew Deck. The game continues until a player wins a round while holding the Dead Man's Card, or there is only one player left standing!



May you ever have the truth in your sights and a lie on your lips.