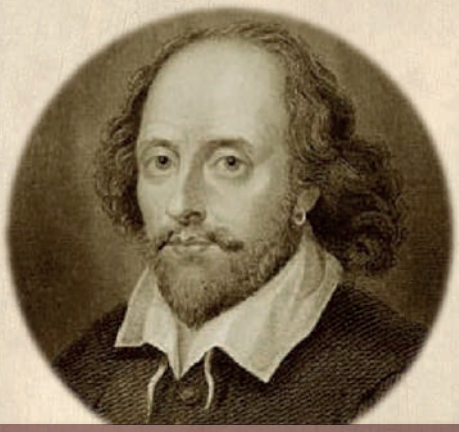

Black Sonata

by John Kean

Rules

1 player

aged 14+

30 mins

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The story

The identity of the Dark Lady from Shakespeare's sonnets has eluded scholars and historians for more than four centuries.

In **Black Sonata**, you will pursue the elusive Lady through the streets and alleyways of Elizabethan London, catching glimpses and whispers which may yield clues to her identity. However, not all of the evidence is clear. You will need to sharpen your wits if you are to finally unmask the Dark Lady before she slips quietly from the pages of history and is lost.

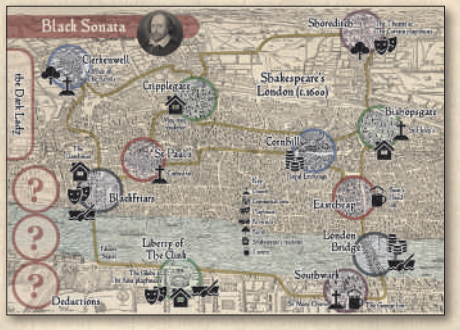
Black Sonata is a solitaire hidden movement and deduction game for ages 12 and up.

Aim of the game

You will track the Dark Lady as she flits through Shakespeare's London, circa 1600. If you manage to find her you may gain a clue to her identity before she slips away once more.

You must acquire enough clues to deduce her key characteristics, and confront her before she escapes for good. If you can successfully catch and unmask her then you will win fame, respect, and the game.

Components



1 game board

back



12 clue cards

comprising 2 cards in each of six suits:

- rose (red)
- acorn (gold)
- oak (green)
- thistle (teal)
- bluebell (blue)
- sage (purple)



1 clue mask card

back



32 stealth cards

These have varying landmarks on the back, but all have a thin border line

back



11 location keys
with holes

back



10 fog cards
with a ? symbol
and no border



1 countdown card
with a thick border



7 deduction tokens



1 player pawn



4 tracker tokens

Key concepts

Black Sonata is a solo game of hidden movement and deduction. To make this work, some information needs to be kept hidden from you, the player, and this requires some care in handling the components. Whenever the rules instruct you to do something unusual or counter-intuitive it will be to make sure that you don't get the wrong information at the wrong time.

An important part of the game is the hidden movement of the Lady. This is governed by a deck of **stealth cards**, and you will need to spend a few moments at the start of each game to place these in a prescribed order. Each stealth card represents one of the 11 locations on the board, and the top card of the stealth deck define's the Lady's current location. The sequence of these cards determines the path of the Lady and ensures she always moves one step at a time without any long distance leaps.

When you search for the Lady you will replace the current stealth card with a **fog card** which ensures you cannot catch her at the same place next time through the deck. Each card that comes out of the stealth deck is replaced by exactly one fog card, ensuring that the Lady's movement path is uninterrupted.

The deck of **clue cards** is kept face up but covered. This is to minimise exposure to the card suits and avoid them being memorised over many plays. Even if you do learn which Dark Lady belongs in each suit, this will not spoil the game as you need to deduce her three characteristics rather than her name.

Set up

Preparing the play area

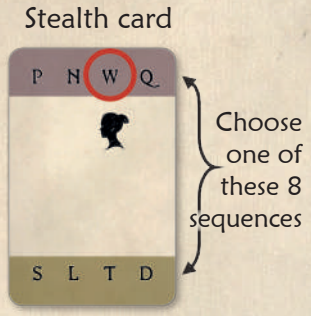
1. Lay the **game board** in the middle of the play area and place the **pawn** on the map in any location of your choice. The pawn shows your current location.
2. Place the **deduction tokens** and optional **tracking tokens** near the lower left corner of the game board.
3. Shuffle the **fog cards** and place them face down to the right of the game board to form the **fog deck**.

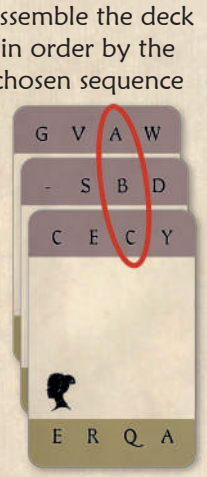
Assigning the Dark Lady

1. Shuffle together the **clue cards**. Take the top card face down and tuck it part way under the game board where indicated. This is the **Dark Lady** whose characteristics you must deduce.
2. Locate the clue card with the same suit as the Dark Lady. Place this face down near the board and stack the **location keys** on top of it. This **suit card** is necessary to deduce the Dark Lady, and will be available once you have removed all of the keys by entering every location on the map.
3. Remove further clue cards to adjust the game difficulty as desired (see p. 18).
4. The remaining cards comprise the **clue deck**. Shuffle this deck and place it **face up** near the board with the **clue mask card** on top.

Preparing the stealth deck

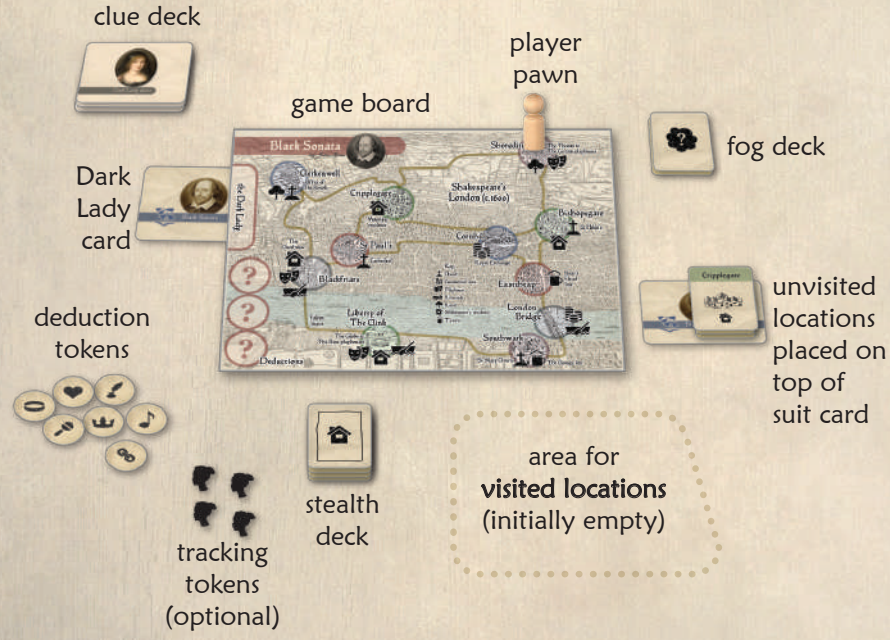
1. Choose one of the eigh **movement sequences** shown on the front of the stealth cards. Sequences defined at the top create paths in which the Lady moves every turn. Those at the bottom are slightly harder because she may sometimes remain in the same location from one turn to the next.
2. Sort the cards alphabetically (A to Z) according to the characters in the chosen sequence position. For variety you may assemble the deck in reverse order (Z to A) instead.
3. Discard the stealth cards that do not have any character in the chosen position. These will not be used.
4. Turn the assembled stealth deck over (face down) and 'cut' it by taking a block of cards from the top of the deck and placing it on the bottom. This randomizes the starting location of the Lady along her path while keeping all of the cards in the same cyclical order. You may cut the deck as many times as you wish without disrupting the Lady's path.







5. Finally, turn the **countdown card** so that it has the number 2 uppermost and place the card on the bottom of the stealth deck. This card will keep track of how many times the deck is cycled. The standard game ends after three times through the stealth deck.



Game play

Hold the stealth deck face down in one hand during the game.

The top card of this deck represents the location of the Lady. The icon visible on its back shows a landmark of that location, corresponding to the icons on the game board. As you cycle through this deck, the Lady moves around London, following the indicated links between locations. She will never jump between locations that are not joined by a line on the game board.

The game alternates between you and the Lady. Each round, the Lady will move, followed by your turn.

1. Update the Lady's location (p. 11).

Your turn: choose **one** of the following actions.

A. Move your pawn to an adjoining location (p. 12);

B. Search for the Lady at your current location (p. 12) to gain a clue card (p. 15) or confront her (p. 16);

C. use the fog card action, if available (p. 14); or

D. pass (no action).

Updating the Lady's location

Advance the **stealth deck** by moving the top card of that deck to the bottom. The new top card represents the Lady's new location, which is never more than one step from her previous location.



Here, the top stealth card shows the Lady is at a playhouse

You may use tracking tokens to help track the Lady's location by marking the possibilities on the map. Remember that for some sequences she may not necessarily move every turn.

When the **countdown card** comes to the top of the stealth deck, immediately rotate or flip it to show the next lowest number and place it at the bottom of the deck, revealing a new top card. If you were advancing a certain number of cards (e.g. after searching for the Lady, p. 13) then the countdown card, or any other with a thick coloured border (as in some expansions) does not count towards that total.

If at any time the countdown card is revealed on zero, then time has run out – the Lady slips away and **you lose the game**.

Option A: Moving your pawn

You may move your pawn along a marked path to any adjoining location on the map.

After setup, when you enter a new location you may claim the matching **location key card** from the top of the suit card where they start. Move the key card to the area below the game board to indicate that you have visited that location. Once all locations have been visited then the exposed suit card may be revealed at any time of your choice and added to your collection of clues.

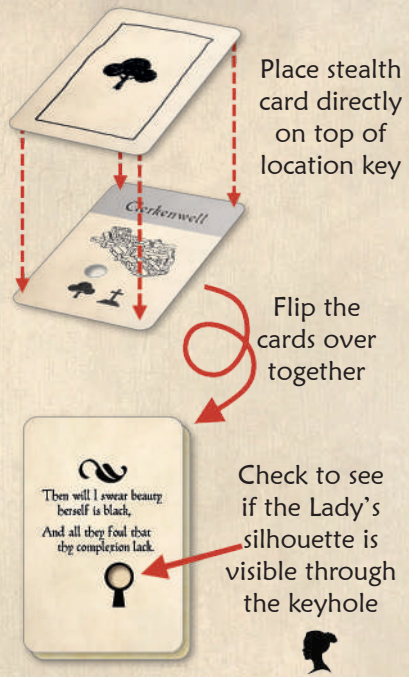
Option B: Searching for the Lady

This action is not available when the stealth deck shows a fog card.

If you believe the Dark Lady is in the same location as your pawn, you may search there. When you search, regardless of the outcome, the card will be replaced with a **fog card**. This does not change the Lady's path, but prevents you from searching at the same part of the sequence next time through the stealth deck.

1. Take the top card from the **fog deck** and slide it face down beneath the top card of the stealth deck. This is to avoid seeing the next location clue. If there are no fog cards left with which to do this, **you lose the game**.
2. Place the top card of the stealth deck onto the location key for your pawn's current position. Holding both cards aligned, turn them over together.
   - If the Lady appears as a black silhouette in the keyhole, then you may reveal the top card of the clue deck by sliding it out from beneath the mask card. Use revealed clues to identify the Dark Lady (p. 15).

   - If you already have enough clues to deduce all of her characteristics then you may instead confront her (p. 16).
   - If the Lady is not showing then she is not currently at this location.
3. Discard the stealth card from the game and place the location key into the area for visited locations.
4. Finally, the Lady flees: advance the stealth deck by one card for each clue you now have, including the new one if you were successful. If you have no clues then skip this step. Move the cards as a block so as not to see them, but take care to check among them for the **countdown card** or any other with a thick coloured border – these should be activated as usual but do not count towards the number of cards to move.



As the Lady flees you will move a block of cards from the top to the bottom of the stealth deck. The first of these cards will be the fog card that you just swapped in.

Immediately after this the Lady will move as normal (p. 11), so after noting the landmark on the top card you will be advancing the deck by one further card and seeing a new landmark.

Option C: Using a fog card

The fog cards do not change the Lady's movements in any way. If the top card of the stealth deck is a **fog card** then the Lady still moves along the same path as before but the fog prevents you from searching for her that turn. However, you may optionally use the fog card's special action. To do so:

1. Take the top card from the **fog deck** and slide it face down beneath the fog card on the top of the stealth deck. If there are no fog cards left with which to do this, **you lose the game**.
2. Turn over the fog card on the top of the stealth deck and read its special action. Then place the card on the bottom of the fog deck (unless you are instructed to discard it from the game).
3. Now you must perform the action. If you are unable to do so **you lose the game**.

*All **discarded items** are permanently removed from the game. They may not be searched or re-examined, and are best placed to one side, out of sight.*

Option D: Passing

You may choose to do nothing on your turn, but instead proceed straight to the Lady's next move.

Identifying the Dark Lady

Each clue card that you reveal will give you more information about the Dark Lady's characteristics. Each candidate Dark Lady has a different combination of three characteristics, most of which are historically accurate.


literary or creative


married


has court connections


musical


has children


amorous


has a documented link to Shakespeare

The left side of each clue card shows the three characteristic traits of the woman on the card. On the right side is a key telling you how many of these characteristics also apply to the Dark Lady, depending on the suit of her card.



clue card

In this example, Jacqueline Field is literary and has children and is married. If the Dark Lady's suit is a red rose, teal thistle or purple sage then this clue card tells us that only one of these traits also applies to her. If the Dark Lady has a bluebell then two of these traits apply to her. But if she has an oak leaf or an acorn then either none of the traits apply to her or exactly two do.

By collecting sufficient clues you will be able to deduce all three traits of the Dark Lady. Use the deduction tokens to keep track of your logic. Turn a token to its grey side when you are sure it is not relevant, and place a token on one of the three deduction spaces on the game board when you are sure it applies to the Dark Lady.

Confronting the Dark Lady

To confront the Dark Lady, you must have identified all three of her characteristics and indicated these by placing the relevant tokens on the bottom left of the game board. Then you must successfully search for her in your current location (p. 12). You may not search to gain a clue and then confront the Lady in the same turn.

If you successfully find her in your current location, then confront her by revealing the Dark Lady card and comparing its icons to your deduction tokens.

- If you correctly identified all three characteristics of the Dark Lady then **you win!** Congratulations, you have succeeded where four centuries of scholars and historians failed.
- But if your deductions do not exactly match those on the Dark Lady card then **you lose the game**.

Scoring

If you successfully identified the Dark Lady you may optionally tally your score.

Count the number of cards on the top of the stealth deck up to (but not including) the countdown card. Multiply the number shown on the countdown card by the number of stealth cards in the sequence (normally 26, but see p. 19-22) and add this to your count. Then add two points for each card left in the fog deck and apply any adjustments for the difficulty level you played (p. 18).

Score	Rank
< 20:	chimney-sweeper
20 – 40:	golden lad/girl
41 – 60:	fair youth/maid
> 60:	immortal bard

Golden lads and girls
all must,
As chimney-sweepers,
come to dust.

- Shakespeare
(from *Cymbeline*)

Scoring example:

4 cards on top of count-down card	4 points
Number 2 on count-down card	2 x 26 = 52
3 cards left in fog deck	3 x 2 = 6
Played in Easy Mode	-30
Total score	**32 (golden lad)**

Adjusting the difficulty

- **Training mode:** Each turn you may move your pawn AND search for the Lady, if you so desire. Halve your score (rounding up).
- **Easy mode:** After assigning the Dark Lady, remove the two cards of the next suit joined to hers by a dotted line in the diagram. Start the countdown card at 3. At the end of the game subtract 30 points from your score.



- **Normal mode:** Play with all six suits as normal.
- **Advanced mode:** After assigning the Dark Lady, remove the two cards of the next suit clockwise from hers in the diagram. At the end of the game add 5 points to your score.
- **Expert mode:** Play Advanced Mode, plus discard one or more fog cards at set up, adding 5 points to your final score for each one discarded.

You may also use stealth deck sequences of greater or lesser difficulty, as described in pages 19-22.

Additional stealth deck sequences

This section specifies additional hidden movement sequences for the Lady.

These sequences identify each stealth card by the character in its top left corner. If that character is a dash then it uses the following character.



Choose one of the sequences and place the cards in the order given, setting aside any unused cards. You may also order the cards in reverse for additional sequences, but this may change the difficulty.

Then randomise the starting location by cutting the deck as described on page 8.

Very easy sequences (30 cards)

Moves every turn	May not move
J K -A I U T W X M Y --X -L Q P Z D ↺	C B A L -K N F G S R -S E H V
N M Z B K J X W T U I H V -A A Y ↺	L --X O -L D C P F G S E Q R -S

Easy sequences (28 cards)

Moves every turn			May not move		
R	N	I	O	W	T
H	-U	J	P	V	J
V	E	A	-U	H	K
W	S	M	Q	G	M
I	I	N	G	D	Y
J	-A	Q	S	R	C
K	K	R	U	-U	D
Y	W	D	V	E	Z
X	X	C	-A	F	-L
B	Y	L	X	P	-S
C	-K	K	L	Z	R
-L	L	W	M	M	-U
O	Z	X	A	C	E
N	D	B	B	Y	U
-S	M	O	-K	K	G
G	P	P	-L	J	F
U	C	-K	C	T	P
T	-L	-L	D	I	Q
-A	O	--X	-S	-A	N
A	B	Y	E	A	O
M	A	Z	H	B	L
L	J	-S	R	--X	--X
-K	T	G	F	-L	B
P	U	U	N	-S	X
Z	G	V	Z	N	W
D	F	H	K	-K	V
E	R	T	Y	L	I
-U	Q	S	--X	X	H

Moderate difficulty (26 cards)

Moves every turn			May not move		
G	Q	--X	G	B	J
-S	-L	B	Q	--X	T
P	C	M	-L	-K	V
-U	D	-S	F	L	S
R	Z	-L	E	X	G
F	N	-K	D	C	F
E	-U	L	Z	-S	R
Q	P	X	P	-L	-S
-L	-S	J	M	P	N
-K	E	V	A	Z	M
N	U	H	C	Y	K
Z	T	E	B	O	L
Y	J	S	--X	N	--X
O	A	G	Y	-U	Y
B	Y	U	K	E	C
X	-K	R	X	U	D
M	L	Q	L	I	P
K	X	N	-K	H	-L
L	W	O	O	R	Q
C	V	Y	N	S	E
A	H	C	-S	G	H
J	I	A	R	D	I
T	S	W	U	M	-A
U	G	K	I	A	A
I	F	Z	V	J	W
S	R	P	H	K	X

You can also assemble sequences in reverse order.

Hard sequences (24 cards)

Moves every turn			May not move		
U	G	-L	D	-L	X
E	D	--X	P	Q	C
D	P	B	F	P	N
-L	Q	X	G	-S	-U
M	N	M	U	N	R
A	--X	A	I	F	S
C	Y	-A	H	G	E
X	-K	T	S	D	U
J	L	S	T	Z	H
I	O	R	J	B	G
-A	-L	-U	V	--X	-S
T	-S	N	W	Y	P
S	R	-S	X	L	D
V	S	C	-A	C	M
W	T	K	K	X	A
K	W	Z	M	K	W
B	A	Y	A	J	T
Z	J	-K	L	I	V
-S	V	P	B	T	J
N	-A	F	Z	W	K
Q	I	G	N	V	Z
G	U	U	-S	-A	Y
-U	E	E	C	A	-K
R	H	Q	-L	M	L

When counting up your score use the number of cards in the sequence as the multiplier for the countdown card value (p. 17).

Credits

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Quick summary

Aim: Track Shakespeare's mysterious Dark Lady as she flits around London. Successfully search for her in your current location to gain a clue to her identity. Collect enough clues to deduce her three traits, then find and confront her one last time to win the game.

Set up:

1. Place the pawn and shuffle the **fog cards**

2. Take a random clue card to be the **Dark Lady**



3. Stack the **location cards** on top of the card with the same suit as the Dark Lady

4. Shuffle the remaining **clue cards** and put them face up under the **clue mask**

5. Place the **stealth cards** in order according to one of the alphabetical sequences. Cut the pack and place the **countdown card** at "2" on the bottom.

Turn sequence:

First **update the Lady's location.** Move the top stealth card to the bottom of the deck.

Now choose one of the following actions, or pass:

A. **Move your pawn** to an adjoining location. Once you have visited every one you may take the clue that was under the location cards.

B. **Search for the Lady.** Slide a new fog card under the top stealth card. Put the stealth card on the location key and flip both over. If you see the Lady through the keyhole then take a new clue. Discard the stealth card and advance the stealth deck by one card for each clue you have.

C. **Use a fog card** (if it is the top card of the stealth deck). Slide a new fog card under it, then flip the top card and carry out the stated action. Place the used card at the bottom of the fog deck.