

The Great Plague of Middle Earth

A Variant of Blackburg Tactical Research Centre's *Black Death*
by Nigel Hodge

Game Overview

The Great Plague of Middle Earth is a game of the Great Plague of TA 1636-37 that Sauron released into Middle Earth. It is suspected that his intention was for the plague to prepare the way for an invasion of the free lands of Middle Earth. In the event, his Orcs and other minions proved highly susceptible to the plague itself, so no invasion took place. However, large parts of Middle Earth were permanently depopulated and the royal family of Gondor was almost wiped out. The White tree of Gondor died at this time.

Players compete in this game to become the scourge of Middle Earth.

The Map

The map represents Western Middle Earth. Regions are represented by one or more squares, which indicate the maximum population of a region. Regions are connected by lines of communication.

Regions

A region will have one or more squares, each of which can only hold one disease counter, never more. A multi-squared region is considered to be a single square for purposes of moving to other regions. So, for instance, any of Gondor's four squares are considered to be adjacent to any region connected to any other Gondor square. Some squares have numbers in them (e.g. -1 or +1), which modify the chances of infecting that particular square. (Large population centres often have poorer sections ripe for the spread of vermin and pestilence, represented by +1. Conversely, some population centres were much cleaner than normal for the time and they have a -1.) According to Tolkien's books, Gondor and the South were much harder hit by the plague than the Northern kingdoms.

Lines of Communication

Some lines of communication have numbered circles near them which act as a modifier against trying to infect or move to a region along that line of communication. Such lines of communication cost 2 movement points to move along. 1 is subtracted from a disease's virulence rating when trying to infect along that line.

Example: A disease counter is in Laketown. Moving from Laketown to the Wood Elves or Dale would cost 1 movement point, but moving to the Iron Hills or Anduin vale would cost 2 movement points.

SETUP

Each player begins their phase by placing two of their own disease markers on the map in any region adjacent to an "entry" arrow. These are situated on the Eastern edge of the map. These regions are: Rhun, Mordor, Kand and Near Harad. If all of the available spaces are occupied by other players' markers, players may place their markers in Umbar.

Cards

The original game's cards event cards are not used. Instead, use the small set of 20 event cards included with this variant to simulate certain events and conditions that can affect play. Each player starts the game with an event card. When a player reaches a body count of 5, 10 and 20 they draw an additional card. These cards can be played at any time (unless the card specifies otherwise), and may be played upon any player (unless the card specifies otherwise). Card effects usually last until the next turn of the player who played the card.

Victory

The instant a player reaches the game's body count goal, they win the game & have become the scourge of Middle Earth and the most feared disease of the Great Plague of 1636 – 1637.

- * For 2-3 players, the body count goal is 20,
- * For 4-5 players, the body count goal is 15,
- * For 6 players, the body count goal is 10.

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Event Card Descriptions

Bad Weather

1. Slows travel. Subtract 1 from all movement die rolls until the beginning of this player's next turn.

Tip: Play this card at the end of your turn; that way it'll affect other players but not you.

2. Unseasonably damp and cold weather aids the spread of disease. Add 1 to all Virulence ratings until the beginning of this player's next turn.

Famine

3. All diseases add 1 to their Mortality ratings until the beginning of this player's next turn, but subtract 1 from all Movement die rolls.

Good Weather

4. All Virulence ratings are reduced by 1 until the beginning of this player's next turn.

Tip: Play this card at the end of your turn; that way it'll affect other players but not you.

Fire

5. Pestilence-cleansing fire gets out of hand. Reduce a multi-square region by one square, as if there had been a catastrophic kill there. If the destroyed square has a disease marker on it, this marker is removed from the map.

This is a "free kill". If a diseased square is destroyed by the fire, the player whose disease marker was removed in this manner gains 1 body count.

Mutation

6. For one turn only, the player may alter the Virulence *or* Mortality of any disease by 1 point in either direction.

This card must be played at the start of the target disease's turn (before any dice are rolled). It lasts until the beginning of the next turn of the affected disease.

7. For one turn only, the player may alter the Virulence *and* Mortality of any disease by 1 point in either direction.

This card must be played at the start of the target disease's turn (before any dice are rolled). It lasts until the beginning of the next turn of the affected disease.

8. For one turn only, the player may swap up to 2 points between the Virulence and Mortality ratings of any disease – one increases while the other decreases. The Virulence and Mortality ratings cannot be reduced below 0 or above 6 in this manner.

This card must be played at the start of the target disease's turn (before any dice are rolled). It lasts until the beginning of the next turn of the affected disease.

Quarantine

9, 10. Fear of disease closes one region until the beginning of this player's next turn. However, infection chances in this region are increased by 1 for any diseases already there.

Tip: This keeps a plague-free area free of outside infection or movement (in or out), but the closeted conditions increase the chance of spreading for any disease already there (which obviously is of help only in a multi-squared region).

Smugglers

11. Move infected goods past inspectors. This player's disease markers may move up to 2 regions this turn, but are still limited to the total movement points indicated by the Movement die roll.

Easterling Migration

12. The player gets one extra infection chance at +1 Virulence which must be used on Rhun, Mordor, Khan or Near Harad.

13. This player gets two extra infection chances which must be used on Rhun, Mordor, Khan or Near Harad.

War

14, 15. Tensions cause any two lines of communication to be closed until the beginning of this player's next turn. Place a "War" marker on these lines until then. This may apply to map entry routes, but cannot apply to the Grey Havens map exit route. The two lines of communication must be attached to one region.

War Against Angmar

16. All players must move at least one disease marker towards Angmar until the beginning of this player's next turn.

Threat From Mordor

17. All players must move at least one disease marker away from Mordor until the beginning of this player's next turn.

Orc Fever

18, 19. Until this player's next turn, add 1 to the Virulence of all diseases attempting to infect any Orc regions (Angmar, Mount Gundabad, Misty Mountains & Mordor). While this is in place, any catastrophic kills must be taken against an Orc region of this is possible.

Magical Defences

20. Remove a disease marker from one selected Elf region (Wood Elves, Rivendell, Lothlorien, Grey Havens). Until this player's next turn, all Elf regions gain the benefit of magical defences; any disease attempting to infect Elf regions have their Virulence reduced by a further 1 point (in effect, for one turn, Elf regions become "-2" instead of their usual healthy "-1").