



A CARD GAME OF
COMPETITIVE GIFT-GIVING

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How to Play

In *Secret Santa* you will have a hand full of cards, most of which represent Christmas gifts. The object of the game is to give away your presents as quickly as possible to prove that you're a better person than everyone else. Whoever gets rid of all their cards first is the winner!

To begin, write everyone's names onto the score sheet. Shuffle the cards thoroughly and deal the entire deck into separate hands for each player. Give everyone a moment to sort their cards into groups of matching numbers, keeping all the 1s together, and so on. Whoever is left of the dealer starts play.

The game is played in a series of rounds, in which the first player decides how many cards will be played, by playing any number of cards of the same value, e.g. three 'turtle doves' with a value of 2. The next player then plays the same number of cards of a higher value, say three 3s, or three 4s. No ties! If a player cannot beat the current cards in play, or wants to hold on to some of their good cards for later, they can pass.

Once a player has passed they are out for that round. Play then continues until everyone has passed, and the round ends. The cards played that round are discarded. Whoever played the highest value cards in that round then begins the next one. If the player who won the round is now out of cards, the next player to their left gets to start the new round.

When a player has only one card left they must immediately declare 'Final Gift!', so the other players get a chance to stop them. If they fail to declare it, they must miss their next opportunity to play the card. However, if they've got a number of cards which can be played together, they don't have to say a word.

The first player to get rid of all their cards is the winner! They get a number of points equal to the number of players and write it on their score sheet. The next player out gets one less point and so on, until the last player gets a single point. At the end of the night count up everyone's points! Whoever scores the most is objectively the best person in the room.

Gift Cards

These are the main cards of the game, and represent gifts you are giving away to impress everyone you know. They are all assigned a value from 1 to 12 based on ‘The Twelve Days of Christmas’.

Higher value gifts are rarer: there is only one card with a value of 12, two cards with a value of 11, and so on, while there are twelve cards with a value of 1. It’s generally best to get rid of low value cards as soon as possible.

Special Cards

Some cards don’t have number values in the corners. These are special cards which can be used to your benefit, or to slow down other players. They are broken into three types, depending on when you can play them.



Star cards are played on your turn, either with or without gift cards.



Holly cards are played immediately after someone else's turn.



Snow cards are played between rounds, and affect the round that is about to begin.

Star cards cannot be played if you have already passed within a round, but Holly cards can be played even if you have passed. Holly cards must be played after someone else's turn. If you have just played gift cards you must wait until at least one other player has played a gift card before you can play a Holly card.

Towards the end of a game if you have any special cards left unplayed, you may play them as gift cards if you get an opportunity to do so. If so, they have a value of 0. You may only do this if you have run out of gift cards.



Santa

Santa is the best at gift-giving, so he immediately wins the round. He can be played on his own, regardless of how many cards are in the round, so you'd better watch out!



Elves

The Elves are expert gift-makers. They can copy any gift and create an exact replica of it. Play this card from your hand with any gift card and it counts as another copy of that card, e.g. two 5s and an elf would count as three 5s. Three 4s and two elves would count as five 4s.

The Elves card is the only special card that has multiple copies in the game.



Christmas Tree

A surprise gift for everyone! Play this card after a round has ended, but before cards are discarded. Shuffle the gift cards from the last round (remove special cards), randomly deal one card clockwise to every player, then discard the rest. You may not check to see which cards get discarded. If there aren't enough cards to give one to everyone, just deal as many as you can. You can decide whether to deal first to yourself or to the player on your left.



Fruitcake

Re-gifting is a Christmas tradition! Play this card after you have arranged your hand but before the game starts. You must now give one gift card of your choice to any other player.

This will always be the first card of the game to be played.



Scrooge

What kind of miser would let a whole round go by without giving any gifts? Play this card and name a player who passed in the last round without playing any gift cards. That player must pass in the next round without playing any cards.



Christmas Carol

An unexpected guest? Carol has arrived! Swap seats with another player of your choice and stay there for the rest of the game. This can be useful if someone is about to win a round, and you want to be to their left, or if the cheese and sandwiches are at that end of the table!



A Mouse

Not a creature is stirring! The round immediately ends. Whoever played the highest value gift card(s) currently in play wins this round, and begins the next round.



Ghost of Christmas Present

The ghost of the gift that was just played comes back to haunt that player! They must pick up the cards they just played, and play continues to their left as though nothing had happened. This counts as a skip rather than a pass, so if that player has an opportunity to play again during this round, they may do so.

Tips, Tricks & Clarifications

- As the player who begins the round gets to decide what amount of cards will be in play, there is a strong incentive to win a round. The trick to *Secret Santa* is to spend your high value gift cards and special cards for a chance to get rid of your low value gift cards.
- New players may find the game easier to learn with fewer special cards. If you've got a group of new players, try playing the initial rounds with just Santa and the Elves, or with just the Snow cards.
- In the interest of speedy gameplay, we suggest that everyone declares their cards as they play them. If anyone plays five 'gold ring' cards, we suggest they sing, and everyone else should cheer appropriately.
- It's generally better for you if a player to your right wins a round rather than a player to your left, as this gives you a chance to get rid of your lower value cards.
- Even if everyone else passes after you have played gift cards, you may still play on top of them to get rid of additional gifts.

- Players may use the Ghost of Christmas Present to force the player who started the round to pick up their cards. The next player to their left then gets to pick the opening cards. This is particularly cruel though.
- Only write down points scored at the end of a round. If two players both get rid of their last card in the same round, the one who played the card of the highest value finishes ahead of the other.
- Though the game is designed for four to eight players, it is possible to play with just three people. Before you begin, remove the 1s, 2s, 3s and all the special cards except Santa, the Elves, the Fruitcake and the Christmas Tree.

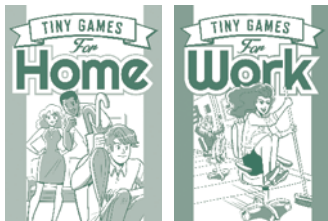


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