

The 12 Days of Christmas

A charming Holiday Card Game by James Ernest and Mike Selinker



Players: 3 to 5

Playing Time: About 15 minutes.

You Need: Two decks of cards, including the *Gift Deck* and the *Holiday Deck*.

The *Gift Deck* contains 80 cards: two *Clauses* (Santa and Mrs. Claus), plus everything that my true love gave to me: 12 drummers drumming, 11 pipers piping, 10 lords a-leaping, and so on.

The *Holiday Deck* contains 12 numbered day cards, for the twelve days of Christmas.

Instructions for making your own decks are given on the last page of this rulebook.

To Begin: Shuffle the *Gift Deck*, and deal each player a hand of 12 cards. Arrange the *Holiday Deck* in numerical order, with the first day of Christmas on top.

Play is simultaneous. There are 12 rounds, or “days.”

Each Day: On each day, everyone will do three things:

Pass one card to the left;

Play one card, to try to take the day; and

Draw one card.

Passing Cards: Each player chooses one card and passes it, face down, to the player on their left.

Playing Cards: Each player plays one card face down on the table. When they are all played, these cards are revealed and discarded. The “best present” among these cards wins the day (see below), and that player captures that day card. Each day card is worth points equal to its number. For example, day 4 is worth 4 points.

The “best present” is usually the lowest number. So, normally, whoever plays the lowest card will win the day. However, if there is a *tie for lowest card*, then those cards are ignored, and the *next lowest card* wins. If those cards are also

tied, the *third* lowest number wins. If *all the cards are tied*, then no one takes the day, and both cards will go to the winner of the next day.

An example of a tied bid: On the 3rd day of Christmas, the gift cards are: 3, 3, 5, 6, and 10. Because the 3’s are tied, the 3rd day goes to the player who played the 5.

The Clauses: Santa and Mrs. Claus are the best gift cards, with a value of 0. They are the lowest number, but they can still cancel each other out.

Drawing Cards: Everyone draws one card. You should end every day with 12 cards. When the deck is empty, reshuffle the discards.

Ending the Game: The game proceeds for twelve days. (Remember to draw your card at the end of the twelfth day.)

Note: If no one wins the twelfth day, the game ends anyway, and that day card goes to no one.

Scoring: You score points in two ways. First, each day card you capture is worth its number. In addition, players score the cards in their hands as follows: whoever holds *the most cards of each rank* scores the point value of that rank. For example, whoever holds the most 9’s scores 9 points. You can remember this by putting one of your 9’s into your collected day cards, and discarding the rest.

For maximum drama, you should always score the gift cards in ascending order, starting with 1. (Santa and Mrs. Claus are worth zero, so you can skip them.)

If players are tied for most cards in a particular rank, then each of those players scores the *full value* of that rank.

The player with the most points wins, and earns the awesome responsibility of dealing the next game!



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Free? Seriously?

Tell me a little more about that.

Okay, here's the deal. If I made a great game and sold it to you for ten bucks, I'd probably keep about a dollar. If I sold it to a big game company, they'd probably make a nicer version for thirty bucks, and I'd still get about a dollar.

The rest of your money would go to printers, distributors, retail stores, and freight companies. And most of those guys don't know anything about what makes a great game.

Mass-producing entertainment is a gamble. It's a convoluted way for creators to protect their intellectual property, by selling it in a way that is prohibitively expensive to counterfeit. And it's getting a little old.

Why do you pay \$30 for a board game? The story goes like this: the retail price of a game covers the cost of manufacturing it, and there is no way you could make your own copy for that price, to say nothing of the hassle of finding little wooden men in six colors. So, it's worth \$30 because it costs \$30, *QED*.

But the value in a board game isn't the manufacturing cost. It's the play value. Unfortunately, this means that some games are priced way out of whack with what they are worth. And because the big gamble doesn't always work out, some of your money helps pay for the stuff that goes straight to the dump.

I've decided to try a different gamble. I'm giving my games away for free. This way, you can read the rules, make a copy, and even play the thing, before you decide what it's worth.

If you do like my games, I hope you will send me some money. But I'm also hoping you will share this experiment with your friends. You are my sales force, my marketing department, my demo team.

You're also my testers, so if you can think of ways to improve my games, please share them with me. I'm easy to find at big gaming conventions, and even easier online. Look for Cheapass Games on Facebook, or drop me a line at cheapassjames@gmail.com.

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How to Make your 12 Days of Christmas Deck:

This game requires a total of 92 cards: 12 Day cards and 80 Gift cards. Because this is the free version, you will have to make your own deck. Luckily, there are several options.

Here are our suggestions for making your own cards.

Standard Playing Cards:

You can make a deck out of standard playing cards, but you will need the components from three decks. If you want to be extra-special, you'll want to use four decks, one of which has a different back.

Use the ranks Ace through Queen to represent the numbers 1 through 12. You need 1 x A, 2 x 2, 3 x 3, and so on, up to 12 x Queen. For the Zeroes, use two Jokers.

To make the Holiday deck, you can use leftover cards of the same ranks (substituting a King for the 12), or you can assemble a set of A through Queen from a fourth deck with a different back.

This deck isn't very Christmassy, but since the game mechanics only require numbers, it will work just fine.

Specialty Cards:

It turns out that there is a published card game called The Great Dalmuti which has exactly the cards you need for the Holiday deck. It has 12 x 12, 11 x 11, and so on, as well as two "Jesters" that can substitute for Mr. and Mrs. Claus. It's almost like we playtested this game with a deck of these cards! (Yes, we did!)

There may be other games that break down like this as well. We just happen to know about Dalmuti.

Our Free PDF:

Of course, we have a PDF that you can download and print, and it's got lovely Christmas artwork on it. Making cards is a little bit of a pain, so here are some methods for converting those files into playable cards.

Method 1: Labels on Playing Cards

Print the cards on full-sheet labels, then cut the labels and affix them to a deck of playing cards.

Yes, this method still requires that you get 92 playing cards (or trading card game cards) and it would be better if 12 of them had a contrasting back design.

Print the card sheets on white, full-sheet mailing labels. Print at 95%, so that the stickers will fit easily on the cards.

Apply the cut labels to the card fronts. Your cards should be fairly easy to shuffle and deal.

You will probably want to ignore the card backs, since adding another label to the back of the card will make the deck thicker and harder to shuffle.

Method 2: Card Sleeves

Print the cards on plain paper and insert the paper, along with a stiffening card, into trading card sleeves.

Sleeves that are made specifically for trading card games can be found online and at most hobby stores. To build this deck, print the cards at 100% on plain white paper. Thicker paper helps keep the images bright.

Cut the cards down to 2.5 x 3.5, keeping the white borders. As with Method 1, you probably won't have much use for the card backs, since card sleeves are usually opaque on the back.

Sleeve each card with a stiffener: a playing card or trading card behind the paper. This deck may be slightly more durable than the label deck described above, depending on the quality of your card sleeves

Method 3: 110-lb Index

Print the artwork directly on heavy cardstock, and then trim the sheets down to card size.

110-lb Index paper is a good paper grade for printing cards, which you can find at your local office supply store.

If your printer has a straight paper path, you'll have better results with this paper. Also, inkjet ink tends to show through this paper, so you should print the card backs just to keep the cards from being marked.

The biggest challenge with this method is cutting the cards. You need a decent paper cutter, or access to one (at your job or the local copy shop).

Use the card backs, not the fronts, as a cutting guide, since you want the backs to be indistinguishable. If there is some misalignment between the fronts and backs, it is better that it show up on the fronts.

Although it is tempting, do not begin by trimming off the outside of each page. Instead, make a single vertical and a single horizontal cut through the interior of the pages, creating four sub-sheets with multiple cards and raw edges.

Then, set the cutter depth (using the backstop that your cutter hopefully has) to 2.5," and trim each card or strip of cards to exactly this width. Next, set the back stop at 3.5" and finish the cards the other way.

If you have a corner rounder, you can take the extra step of finishing the corners. This is a simple scrapbooking tool, which clips a round corner on a piece of paper. Rounded corners make cards *much* easier to shuffle.

Our Artscow Project:

These cards are posted as two projects (Deck 1 and Deck 2) at artscow.com. You can find a link from the game's page at www.cheapass.com. Before their discounts, Artscow decks can run about \$15 each with shipping, so this is the most expensive method (and we don't get any piece of their fee). But it will produce lovely results.