

Santa Saboteurs Rules

The rules below will be familiar to anyone that's played werewolves, but the character names and the setting are different.

Don't be put off by the length of the rules. Only one person, the moderator, needs to understand them fully and then he/she will be able to guide the other players throughout the game. Most people find the game easy to pick up once they start playing and it can be played with children as young as five.

The game is suitable for 8 to 24 players.

In addition to the players, another person acts as a moderator and storyteller. Before the game starts the moderator explains the story and basic principles of the game to new players.

The Story

It's late December and Santa and his elves are busy putting the finishing touches to this year's gifts in Santa's North Pole workshop. While most of the elves are loyal and hard-working, the workshop has been infiltrated by a small number of evil goblins - *Santa Saboteurs* – intent on ruining Christmas. The goblins are using magic to disguise their real appearance and look identical to loyal elves. Each night the goblins creep out of bed and ransack the workshop, smashing toys and other gifts. Worst still, before returning to bed each night the goblins prey on one of the loyal elves, draining him/her of all their elvish life essence to maintain their magical disguises.

The elves must root out the traitors in their midst and banish them from the workshop before they're all wiped out and Christmas is ruined for everyone!

Rules

Although it's worth outlining the rules to new players before beginning the game, only the moderator, who guides the players throughout the game, needs to understand the rules in detail.

Object of the game

For the elves: to save Christmas by banishing all the goblins.

For the goblins: to ruin Christmas by killing or banishing all the elves.

The basic gameplay

The game is played in alternating day and night phases. Each night the goblins vote on which elf they are going to drain the life from. This player is then eliminated from the game. The next day, after the death has been discovered, the remaining elves (including the disguised goblins) discuss who the goblins might be. When all the players have had their say, they vote on which player should be banished and the player with the most votes is eliminated from the game.

The cards

At the beginning of the game each player is dealt a card telling them if they are an elf or a goblin. Before handing out the cards, the moderator should show them to any new players and explain what they mean.



Goblin: By day the goblins behave like ordinary elves, concealing their evil nature to avoid being banished. But each night, the goblins get together to drain the life from an ordinary elf. The number of goblins depends on the number of overall players (see table below).
(*The Goblin is the Werewolf card in conventional Werewolves*)



Ordinary Elf: Ordinary elves must analyse the other players behaviour to work out who is a goblin and try to avoid being falsely mistaken as a goblin themselves. (*The Ordinary Elf is the Ordinary Townsperson card in conventional Werewolves*)



List Elf: The List Elf holds a secret key to the Records Room where Santa keeps his huge “Naughty or Nice” list. Each night the List Elf tiptoes off to look up one player’s records and discover if they are naughty (a guilty goblin) or nice (an innocent elf). The player that holds the List Elf card must try to help the other elves to identify the goblins. Towards the beginning of the game, this player should be careful to do this without giving away their identity as the List Elf – if they do the goblins are likely to kill them the following night.

Towards the end of the game, this player may decide that it is worth revealing their identity. (*The List Elf is the Fortune Teller card in conventional Werewolves*)



Love Elf: This is an optional card that you might want to leave out when you are first learning to play the game, or if you have a small number of players.

Armed with a wreath of magic mistletoe, the Love Elf has the power to bring a little extra fun and romance to the game. During the first night of the game, the Love Elf chooses two players to fall instantly in love with one another. The Love Elf can choose him/herself as one of the lovers. The lovers are completely loyal to each other and cannot vote to banish one another. If one lover dies during the game, the other’s life is no longer worth living and they must kill themselves – in a suitably conspicuous manner – immediately.

If one of the lovers is a goblin and the other is an elf, the object of the game changes for these two players. Since their only loyalty is to each other, they must try to win the game by eliminating all the other players using the standard game rules.

Once the Love Elf has chosen two lovers, he/she plays the remainder of the game as an ordinary elf. (*The Love Elf is the Cupid card in conventional Werewolves*)

Card Numbers

The number of goblins varies according to the total number of players (not counting the moderator) taking part. The table opposite tells you how many goblin cards to include. The *Love Elf* card is counted as an ordinary elf, if you choose to use it.

Playing the Game

The players choose a **moderator**, who needs to be familiar with all of the rules. The moderator also acts as a storyteller, announcing shocking deaths and revealing secrets, so the game is more enjoyable and atmospheric if the moderator is good at embellishing these announcements with amusing or dramatic details. The phrases shown in red below are only suggestions and the moderator should feel free to come up with their own wordings.

The game is best played with the players sitting in a circle, with the moderator in the centre.

The moderator shuffles the appropriate number of cards and gives one card, face down to each player. Each player then secretly looks at their card before placing it face down in front of them. Although the players will not need them again, it’s important that the cards are left where the moderator can access them easily.

Number
of players



8	2	5	1
9	2	6	1
10	2	7	1
11	2	8	1
12	3	8	1
13	3	9	1
14	3	10	1
15	3	11	1
16	3	12	1
17	3	13	1
18	4	13	1
19	4	14	1
20	4	15	1
21	4	16	1
22	4	17	1
23	4	18	1
24	5	18	1

The Night Phase

The game starts with a night phase, so the moderator puts the players to sleep by saying. **“Night has fallen and all the elves are tucked up snug in their beds.”** All the players must now close their eyes and keep them closed unless the moderator tells them to open them. The game relies on trust and players must resist the temptation to take a sneaky peek at what is happening! It's also important that all players remain silent during the night phase.

If you are playing with the Love Elf card: On the first night only, the moderator says **“The Love Elf wakes up and opens their eyes”**. The player who holds this card opens their eyes and silently points to two players (including his/herself if they wish) who will fall in love. Then the moderator tells the Love Elf to close their eyes again.

The moderator warns the players that he/she is going to walk around the room and touch two players on the head who will be lovers. When they've touched the two players chosen by the Love Elf, the moderator says **“The two lovers wake up and gaze longingly into each others eyes”**. The two lovers open their eyes and recognise one another. The moderator says **“The two lovers fall back to sleep again,”** and the lovers close their eyes.

Next, the moderator says **“The List Elf wakes up, opens their eyes and tiptoes to the Records Room to find out who's naughty or nice”**. The player who holds this card opens their eyes and silently points to another player. The moderator quietly turns over the other player's card and shows it to the List Elf. Then the moderator says **“The List Elf tiptoes back to their bed and falls asleep”** and the List Elf closes their eyes.

Finally, the moderator says **“The goblins wake up, ransack the workshop and select a fresh victim.”** The players who hold the goblin cards open their eyes – and on the first night look around and recognise each other. Then they silently consult (using gestures) on who that night's victim will be. When they've decided, the goblins point out the agreed victim to the moderator. The moderator says **“The goblins scuttle back to their beds and fall asleep.”** If, for any reason, the goblins can't agree on a victim (and there's not a majority choice) then there is no victim that night.

The Day Phase

Now the night is over and the day phase begins. The moderator says **“The breakfast bell is ringing and all the little elves wake up and leap merrily out of bed ... all except one lifeless elf who will never leap merrily again!”** The moderator points to the goblins' victim. The moderator then turns this player's card face up and shows it to all the other players. This player is now out of the game and can no longer communicate with the other players.

If the goblins' victim is one of the two lovers, the other lover takes their own life immediately and the moderator also turns this player's card face up and shows it to all the other players.

The remaining players now debate who the goblins might be, before voting on which one to banish from the workshop. The goblins must try to pass themselves off as ordinary elves and will be difficult to detect on the very first day. However as the game progresses and players are eliminated there will be more evidence to go on. A goblin may have given themselves away by making an obvious movement (felt by the person sitting next to them) when gesturing to the other goblins in the night. The goblins must try to protect each other and deflect suspicion onto others, so elves should look out for suspicious voting patterns and alliances; it might be noticed that two players always vote for the same player or that one player is always coming to another's defence. When an innocent player has been banished, it's worth trying to remember who voted for them. Likewise, when a goblin is banished, it's worth remembering who voted for them as this *may* show that that player is not a goblin themselves.

It's the moderator's job to make sure everyone has a chance to have their say and to defend themselves against any accusations. Once the moderator is satisfied that everyone has had a fair hearing he/she calls a vote.

The Vote

The moderator counts to three and then each player simultaneously points at the person they wish to banish. Players must point immediately and cannot change their choice in response to the way other players vote. Players should pay attention to who is pointing at who as this may be useful as evidence in future rounds.

The player with the most people pointing at them is then banished from the workshop. If there is a tie between two or more players then no one is banished.

The moderator explains that the banished player quickly perishes in the sub-zero temperatures outside the workshop. However, while an innocent elf simply turns into a frozen *elfcicle*, the guilty goblins lose their disguise and return to their natural form when dead. Once a player has been banished the moderator turns over their card and shows it to all the other players, revealing their guilt or innocence.

If the banished player is one of the two lovers, the other lover takes their own life immediately and the moderator also turns this player's card face up and shows it to all the other players.

Once a player has died, they are out of the game and can no longer communicate with the other players.

After the vote, the moderator puts the players to sleep again, saying. "**Night has fallen and all the elves are tucked up snug in their beds.**" and a new night phase begins.

The game continues to alternate between day and night phases until:

the **ELVES WIN** by banishing all the goblins

or the **GOBLINS WIN** by draining off or banishing all the elves.

Advice for the moderator

When you're speaking to players during the night phases (when the other players have their eyes shut) be careful not to give away any clues about their identity. For example, don't say "The List Elf returns to **her** bed," unless all of the players are female. Similarly, avoid directing your voice towards the player you're addressing as this could give away where they are sitting.

It can be difficult to move around the room during the night without your movements being heard by the players. So when you're checking a player's card for the List Elf, move around the whole room, pretending to turn over other players cards as well. That way it will be less easy for listeners to detect whose card was turned over.

Draw out the suspense when you are revealing the goblins victims.

Advice for goblins

While you should generally try to protect your fellow goblins, if it looks certain that another goblin is going to be banished, voting for them may be an effective way to deflect suspicion from yourself later in the game.

Goblins can lie as much as they like, so it may be worthwhile claiming that you are the List Elf. Then you can shift suspicion onto or away from a player (or yourself) by claiming you have seen their card. Of course, if that player is banished and, when their card is revealed, your claim is shown to be false, this will make you look suspicious.

Santa Saboteurs was created by children's author [Jonathan Emmett](http://www.jonathanemmett.co.uk) as an adaptation of the *Mafia* game invented by Dmitry Davidoff. You can download a pdf of the playing cards and find out more about the game at <http://scribblestreetnews.blogspot.com/2014/12/santa-saboteurs.html>