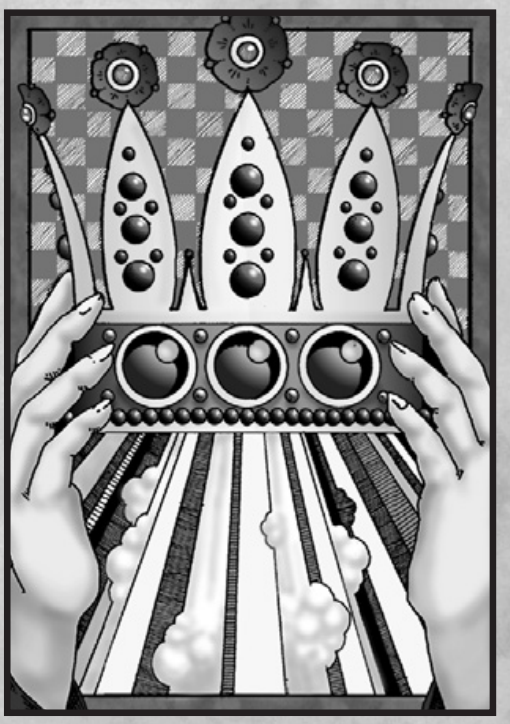
AGE 8+
PLAYERS: 4–8



The Great Dalmuti®



RULEBOOK

THE GREAT DALMUTI®

"One day I will ride a horse like that,"

said the child to the woman as they

watched the noble procession pass.

"Yes dearie."

"And I will have a palace, and lots of cake."

"Maybe," she said,

remembering the marble-lined

halls of her youth.

"But today let's just try to finish

planting to the stream."

THE ONLY PLACE THAT PEASANT AND PRINCESS
CHANGE PLACES FASTER THAN IN A FAIRY TALE!

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GAME

When I was in graduate school, I was introduced to a fascinating card game by a friend (who I called "Doctor Chocolate," but that's another story). I had never seen a game like it before; it rewarded the player in the lead and penalized the player who was falling behind. The game was played for no other purpose than to play. There was no winner or loser at the end; there was only the longest-lasting "Dalmuti" and the "peon," the player most talented at groveling.

Later my friends and I introduced scoring to the game and started playing it to get a winner. It was fun. I played it with my bridge club. It was fun. I played it with my folks. It was fun. I played it with gamers, nongamers, young people, old people, all kinds of people . . . and it was always fun. Curiously, this game was fun no matter who was playing. And the most curious thing of all was that no matter who I played it with, once we started playing we couldn't stop.

Intrigued by this game's wide appeal, I tried to trace its origin. I couldn't find it mentioned in any Hoyle, but I kept running into groups of players who played their own versions of the game. It went by different names in

different locations: "Super 2 Peasant" in Japan, "Rich Man–Poor Man" in Alaska, "Scum" in Utah, among others. My hottest lead was a gambling game that was played in Chinatown in New York City. Though I couldn't track down its name, I learned that it had been around for a long time, and it had qualities that would seem to make it a parent to all these other games.

Years later I found an amazing book that I recommend to anyone interested in games: *A History of Card Games*, by David Parlett. Parlett suggests that the common ancestor of these Dalmuti-like games is a Chinese game, "Zheng Shàng Yóu," which literally means "Climbing Up." Parlett's book also makes reference to a Japanese game called "Dai Hin Min," or "A Very Poor Man." This meaning is ironic since I believe "Dai Hin Min" to be the origin of the word "Dalmuti," which means something quite different in our game!

If you've enjoyed **The Great Dalmuti®** and don't usually play regular card games, give them a try. For me there are more hours of amusement in a single deck of cards than in all the world's movies combined. And I love the movies.

—Richard Garfield
The Great Dalmuti game designer

INTRODUCTION

The Great Dalmuti card game is easy to learn and quick to play. It's best with five to eight players, though you can play with four people and with nine or more. The faster you get rid of your cards, the higher your social class will be in the following hand. Since your social class is indicated by your seating, each hand ends with players changing seats to reflect the new social order. **The Great Dalmuti** card game is fun for just about anyone over eight years old.

GAME COMPONENTS

One deck of 80 cards
One rulebook

THE DECK

The number on a card is called its *rank*. The lower the rank, the better the card (see chart). For example, the Baroness (4) is better than the Abbess (5). A card's rank also tells you how many cards of its type are in the deck. The only exceptions are the two Jesters, which are

a type of wild card. A Jester played alone counts as a card with rank 13—worse than even the Peasants (12)—but when played along with one or more other cards, Jesters take on the rank of the other cards.

CARD RANKS

Jester (alone)	13	Knight	6
Peasants	12	Abbess	5
Stonecutter	11	Baroness	4
Shepherdess	10	Earl Marshal	3
Cook	9	Archbishop	2
Mason	8	The Great Dalmuti	1
Seamstress	7		

OBJECT OF THE GAME

In each hand of **The Great Dalmuti** card game, the object is to get rid of your cards as soon as you can. The faster you get rid of your cards, the higher your social class will be in the following hand.

SETUP

Shuffle and fan the deck, and let each player draw and reveal a card. Players arrange their seating to reflect their cards' ranks: The person with the best card is

called the *Greater Dalmuti* and takes the seat of his or her choice. The person who drew the second-best card, who is called the *Lesser Dalmuti*, sits to that person's left, and so forth around the playing area. The player with the worst card is the *Greater Peon*. The person to his or her right is the *Lesser Peon*. All other players are varying classes of *Merchants*. Remember, the lower the rank, the better the card; treat the Jesters as the worst cards possible. Break ties by drawing additional cards.

THE DEAL

The Greater Peon is responsible for collecting, shuffling, and dealing the cards. He or she deals out the entire deck each hand, starting with the Greater Dalmuti and giving one card to each player in clockwise order until the deck runs out. Some players may get more cards than others—after all, life isn't fair! Players may look at their hands while the cards are still being dealt.

TAXATION

Before play begins, the Peons must pay taxes. The

Greater Peon chooses his or her two *best* cards to give to the Greater Dalmuti, and in exchange the Greater Dalmuti chooses *any* two of his or her own cards to give to the Greater Peon. (Again, the lower the rank, the better the card, with the Jesters considered the worst cards.) The Lesser Peon and Lesser Dalmuti do the same but with one card rather than two. All exchanges happen at the same time.

REVOLUTION

If any player is dealt both Jesters, he or she may call a *revolution*. A revolution means there is no taxation, to the disappointment of the Dalmutis and the delight of the Peons. If the Greater Peon declares a revolution, it's called a *greater revolution*. In a greater revolution all



players exchange seats with their opposites. That is, the Greater Peon becomes the Greater Dalmuti, the Lesser Peon becomes the Lesser Dalmuti, and so forth.

THE PLAY

Each *hand* starts when the player who has the lead plays a *set* of cards of the same rank face up. A set is simply one or more cards. The Greater Dalmuti has the lead in the first hand, and then play proceeds clockwise. On his or her turn, each player can either play a set of the same number of cards of better rank or pass. (Remember, the lower the rank, the better the card.) A player who chooses to pass may still play later in the hand, when it's his or her turn again. Play continues clockwise until everyone passes in a row. This ends the hand, and the Greater Peon collects the played cards and puts them aside. The player who made the last play then gets the lead for the next hand.

GOING OUT

A player who has played his or her last card is said to have *gone out*. The first player who goes out wins the

hand and becomes the Greater Dalmuti for the next hand. The second person to go out becomes the Lesser Dalmuti and sits to the left of the Greater Dalmuti, and so on around the playing area.

After a player goes out, play continues clockwise as usual. If no one plays a better set, then the lead passes clockwise to the next player who still has cards.

WINNERS AND LOSERS

Each hand of **The Great Dalmuti** card game is played for its own sake: Becoming the Greater Dalmuti is winning and becoming the Greater Peon is losing, and all the other positions are somewhere in between. Like life, the game isn't fair, and it's often difficult to hold your position, let alone move up in rank.

For even more flavor, get into the roles. Merchants might schmooze with the upper classes while snubbing the lower. Dalmutis might be either kind or spoiled. Peons might show deference or defiance. Just make sure you have fun!

JOINING A GAME IN PROGRESS

New players can join a game at the beginning of any hand. Because the Peons shouldn't be deprived of the joy of working themselves out of the lower classes, the new player enters as a Merchant, halfway between the Greater Dalmuti and the Greater Peon. If there's a choice of positions, the Greater Dalmuti decides the order.

THE STRATEGY OF SAVING CARDS

Most of the time you should play your worst cards when you can, but don't be afraid to pass sometimes even when you can play. A savvy player in a lower position often won't play a good set until several people are out, saving it until he or she can use it to try to take the lead. Saving cards until they're the best that are left is a good idea if you're only trying to move up one rank or you just want to hold onto your position.

OPTIONAL RULES

Once you've got the basic game down, you might want to try one or more of the following variations.

First Deal Revolution

The first deal automatically has a revolution, so no taxes are collected. If the Greater Peon is dealt both Jesters, he or she may still call a greater revolution as usual.

Stripped Decks for Four or Five Players

When playing with fewer players you may want to use a smaller deck so you have fewer cards to hold. When playing with five players, strip out the Peasants so you're playing with a deck of sixty-eight cards. For four players, strip out the Peasants *and* the Stonecutters to bring your deck down to fifty-seven cards.

Scoring

As each player goes out, he or she gets 1 point for every player still in that hand. Set a number of hands to play, and the person with the highest score at the end wins. Twenty hands is a fine number to start with.

Philanthropic Scoring

Use the scoring rules above. In addition, the Greater Dalmuti gets 1 point at the end of the hand if the Greater Peon goes up in status, and the Lesser Dalmuti gets 1 point if the Lesser Peon goes up in status.

More Appropriate Seating

Arrange the playing area with ranked seating. This means the Greater Dalmuti gets the best or most comfortable seat; the Lesser Dalmuti gets a very nice seat; the Merchants get ordinary seats; and the Peons are stuck with the worst seats. The Greater Peon might even have to sit on a suitcase, a box, or the floor—if he or she gets to sit at all!

Other Status Symbols and Perks

Players wear hats that indicate their ranks: A crown for the Greater Dalmuti and a straw hat for the Greater Peon, for example. Allow the Greater Dalmuti first choice of the snacks, with the Lesser Dalmuti getting second choice, and so forth, so that the Greater Peon only gets the bubble-gum-flavored jelly beans. Use your imagination and invent your own status symbols.

Merchant Exchange

During taxation, the highest-class Merchant may choose a card at random and exchange it with another Merchant of his or her choice.

Misdeals

If the Greater Peon accidentally exposes a card while dealing, the Greater Dalmuti decides whether it goes to the intended person or to the Greater Peon. If the card goes to the Greater Peon, he or she must replace it with one randomly drawn from his or her hand.

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