Blow-Fish!

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Abstract

Blow-Fish! Is a variation on the classic *Go Fish* game. Two or more players compete to make sets of four matching cards. Each player takes their turn by asking their opponent for a specific card to complete these sets, and if they don't have it in hand, a card is drawn. Certain rules have been added that diverge from the classic *Go Fish* game to make the game-play more dynamic and unpredictable.

Materials

One standard deck of playing cards and 2-4 players.

Rules

1) **Setup**

   a) A standard playing deck of 54 cards is used to play the game.

   b) The dealer first removes the 2 Joker Cards from the deck, these are referred to as the *Blow-Fish Cards*.

   c) An additional 4 cards are removed from the deck at random, being sure to leave the cards face down and not show them to the players.

   d) Place the *Blow-Fish Cards* back into the deck, face-down, and shuffle the entire deck thoroughly.

   e) Deal 7 cards face down to each player, and leave the remainder of the deck in a face-down stack on the table

2) **Play**

   a) The player left of the dealer goes first and is allowed to request a card of any face from an opponent. Eg. "Do you have any Jacks?". The goal is to complete as many full sets (4 of a kind) so this player may have already had 1-3 Jacks.

      i) *Note:* You must possess a Card of this type in order to request it.

   b) If the opponent has the card they must hand it over to the requester, if not the opponent says "Go Fish!" and the requester will pull the top card from the stack.

      i) If the requester successfully attains their desired card (either directly or via fishing), they may take an additional turn until they are unsuccessful.

   c) After completing the turn the next player proceeds with a request for a card.

3) **Blocking**

   a) The *Blow-Fish Cards* (Jokers) play a special role and if you have them in your hand you are given a defensive power. In a typical game an opponent will often keep requesting the same card, even stealing 3 of a kind when they have just 1. In this situation, one may play the *Blow-Fish Card* allowing you to steal back the entire completed set.

      i) *Note:* You may only take this defensive action if your opponent has requested all 3 cards from you.

4) **Winning Conditions**

   a) The game ends when there are no more sets left to be made, the player with the most sets wins!

      i) *Note:* Due to the fact that 4 cards were initially removed from the deck, there will be multiple incomplete sets. You may spend wasted turns trying to complete a set that doesn't exist as 4 of a kind!

Design Process

I.   Basis

I chose to modify the popular kids card game, Go-Fish. The beauty of Go-Fish is that it is simple enough to be played by a young child, and is moderately entertaining without having overly complex scoring or game-play.

II.   Iterations

Go-Fish is likely one of the first card games children ever learn to play. It has a simple game structure and setup, allowing even the youngest of children to enjoy it. By simply requesting cards from your opponent, or drawing from the top of the deck you attempt to build numerous sets before anyone else.

My initial play-tests of the game quickly became tiresome. Although there is some moderate amount of strategy involved (remembering what cards your opponent has requested lets you know that they have those cards, so you can later steal them) it is not overly engaging. This can be nice if you are playing with children or watching a movie as it doesn't take a large amount of focus. Fortunately with a few minor additional rules to the game structure, the game was made more dynamic and engaging.

I had first thought of altering the scoring structure, but ended up scraping that idea for some more simple setup modifications. First alteration I added was to remove 4 cards from the initial deck. Knowing there would be incomplete sets in the game didn't dramatically impact the game-play, but in the back of your mind you know that any set you are attempting to build could be leading you down a rabbit hole. Seemingly though, it was only apparent at the end of the game when players were left with a few cards in their hands and no further sets to complete.

A major frustration with the game was following into the same patterns of being asked for the same card over and over again, often most unfortunately leading to having three of a kind stolen by your opponent as they make a complete set. While this can be fun, it was a pattern I chose to inhibit.

Joker cards are typically not used in *Go-Fish*. For *Blow-Fish!* Joker cards are added and if you have one in your hand it gives you the defensive ability to block and reverse the steal of three cards. This addition led to some strategizing around possibly avoiding requesting the same card numerous times, and the surprise reversal of momentum was a fun interaction to play out.

Between the removal of cards in the setup leading to an element of unknown, and the addition of the Joker defensive mechanism, the game became somewhat more dynamic, unpredictable, and overall a bit more fun for the adult player.

III.   Further Work

Going one step further I would modify the scoring scheme, giving number sets 1pt and face sets 2pts. This would increase the importance of using the *Blow-Fish* cards at strategic moments to prevent a stealing of a more valuable royal set. For example you might want to let a set of 6s go and hold onto your Joker to protect that set of Aces you are building!