# Mechanics and Meaning – GDC 2015

AA – 4th Draft – 2015-02-28

## Next Pages: Base Game Mechanics for the Activity

I’ve modified a bunch of game theory games such that they are:

* 2-player games
* Played quickly
* Had easily discoverable optimal strategies.
* Make use of ‘Action’ cards that can be easily labeled
* Result in a maximum ‘score’ of 12 white poker chips

## Activity Instructions:

Step 1:

Play the game above and understand the dynamics. See if you can find the ‘dominant’ strategy: the strategy that gets each player the most chips.

Step 2:

Label the cards such that the fiction of the game changes the behavior of the players.

Test with players who have NOT played the game before (Kleenex Testing). Keep a data log of the moves played and the results of each game.

Step 3 and 4

Iterate, test, Iterate, test. Push the change in dynamic further.

# Game Mechanic #1: Ro-Sham-Bo

## Components

* 2 sets of three white cards:
  + Card with a red dot that says “This beats the card with the yellow box”
  + Card with a yellow dot that says “This beats the card with the blue box”
  + Card with a blue dot that says “This beats the card with the red box”
* 16 Poker Chips

## Rules

2 Players each start with 4 poker chips and a set of white cards.

The other 8 poker chips are in a pile on the table.

Play 4 rounds.

Each round, the players can discuss their intended play.

Then, each player secretly chooses a card, then simultaneously reveal it.

* Winning player gains two poker chips from the table; the losing player discards a poker chip to the table.
* In case of a tie (players play the same card), BOTH players win a chip from the stack on the table.

Scores from 0 to 12 poker chips to each player.

**This beats the card with the YELLOW box**

**This beats the card with the YELLOW box**

**This beats the card with the RED box**

**This beats the card with the RED box**

**This beats the card with the BLUE box**

**This beats the card with the BLUE box**

# Game Mechanic #2: Blue & Red

## Components

* 3 sets of two white cards:
  + Card with a red box.
  + Card with a blue box.
* 20 Poker Chips

## Rules

2 players are each given a set of the white cards.

The 3rd set is randomly dealt face-up between them as their “ID” – a “blue” player and a “Red” player.

Play 4 rounds.

Each round, the players can discuss their intended play.

Then, each player secretly chooses a card, then simultaneously reveals it.

* If BOTH players play a Blue dot, then the ‘blue’ player gains 3 chips and the ‘red’ player gains 2.
* If BOTH players play a Red dot, then the ‘red’ player gains 3 poker chips and the ‘blue’ player gains 2.
* If the ‘red’ player plays a red dot and the ‘blue’ player plays a blue dot, they each get 1 poker chip.
* If the ‘red’ player plays a blue dot, and the ‘blue’ player plays a red dot, then they each get 0 chips.

(Underlying rule: Playing your own color is worth +1 point, playing the same card as your opponent played is worth +2 points.)

Scores from 0 to 12 poker chips

**RED**

**RED**

**RED**

**BLUE**

**BLUE**

**BLUE**

# Game Mechanic #3: “Now or Later”

## Components

* 2 sets of six white cards:
  + 5 cards that say “Later”.
  + 1 Card that says “Now”.
* 17 Poker Chips

## Rules

2 players are each given a set of the white cards.

There are 2 piles of poker chips on the table: a stack of 4 and a Stack of 1. The remaining chips are set aside for later.

Play 5 rounds.

Each round, the players can discuss their intended play.

Then, each secretly chooses a card, then both simultaneously reveal.

* If BOTH players play “Later”, the large stack gains 2 chips and the smaller stack gains 1 chip. Players discard their used cards and play continues to the next round.
* If ONE of the players plays a “Now” card, that player takes the larger stack of chips and the other player takes the smaller stack of chips. The game is over.
* If BOTH players play the “Now” card, the two players split the larger stacks of chips. No one gets the smaller stack and the game is over.
* If NEITHER player has played a “Now” card after 5 rounds, the game is over as a ‘tie’, and each player gains 8 poker chips. (The players will still have one card in-hand)

Scores 1 to 12 poker chips.

NOW LATER LATER

LATER LATER LATER

NOW LATER LATER

LATER LATER LATER

# Game Mechanic #5: “High Player Bonus”

## Components

* 2 sets of 3 white cards, number 1-3
* 24 white Poker Chips
* THIS ‘Payout Table’

PAYOUT TABLE

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Total on Cards | Payout Each Player | High Player Bonus |
| 2 | 3 | n/a |
| 3 | 2 | + 2 chip |
| 4 | 1 | + 3 chips |
| 5 | 0 | + 4 chips |
| 6 | -1 | n/a |

## Rules

2 Players are each given a set of cards. The poker chips are set aside to pay out each round.

Play 3 rounds.

Each round, the players can discuss their intended play.

Each player secretly chooses a card, and then simultaneously reveal it.

Compare total of both cards to Payout Table; each player takes (or discards) chips due.

* BOTH players get Payout Each Player.
* If the cards are different, the player of the higher card gets the High Player Bonus.

Scores between 0 and 12 white chips.

1 2 3

1 2 3

# Game Mechanic #5: “Guess”

## Components

* 1 set of 3 white cards, numbered 1-3
* 2 sets of 2 white cards, with “Pay 1 to Reveal Dealer Card” & “Don’t Pay”
* 24 white poker chips

## Rules

2 players each start with 4 chips.

A dealer takes the 4 white cards and the remaining chips.

Play 4 rounds.

Each round, the Dealer randomly deals a white card, face down.

The players can discuss and decide if any one of them is willing to pay 1 poker chip to the dealer to reveal the card. If any player does, the card is revealed.

Each player then secretly decides how many of their chips to give to the dealer, from 0 to 3, then simultaneously reveals and gives those chips to the dealer.

If the card had not already been revealed, it is now.

If a player gave the dealer the exact amount of chips listed on the card, the dealer gives that player 3 chips in return.

Scores between 0 and 12 white chips.

1 2 3

**Don’t pay to reveal.**

**Pay 1 to reveal Dealer card.**

**Don’t pay to reveal.**

**Pay 1 to reveal Dealer card.**

**Add ONE chip to the stack**

**and pass control.**

**Add NO chips to the stack**

**and pass control.**

# Game Mechanic #6: “Boost or Pass”

## Components

* 1 set of 3 playing cards, numbered 1-3
* 2 sets of 2 white “action” cards
  + 1 ‘Pass’ card that says “Add no chips to the stack and pass control”
  + 1 ‘Boost’ card that says “Add 1 chip to the stack and pass control”
* 13 white Poker Chips

## Rules

2 players each get a set white action cards.

The Dealer takes the 3 playing cards and the 12 chips.

Play 3-6 rounds – stop when the Dealer has 1 or fewer chips.

Each round, the Dealer puts 2 chips in a stack at the center of the table, then deals each player one of the three playing cards face-down. The third is put aside face-down.

Randomly decide who the ‘1st Player’ is. (Alternate on subsequent rounds.)

Players may discuss their intended play.

Starting with the ‘1st Player’ and taking turns, players can play either their ‘Pass’ or ‘Boost’ action cards.

* If a ‘Boost’ is played, a chip is added to the stack of chips.
* If a ‘Pass’ is played, nothing is added to the stack.
* Control is passes back and forth ***until*** …
  + A player plays ‘Pass’ after the other player plays ‘Boost’
    - The player who played ‘Boost’ claims the stack of chips. The round ends.
  + OR both players play ‘Pass’ in a row.
    - Players reveal their playing cards and the owner of the higher card takes the stack of chips. The round ends.
  + OR both players play ‘Boost’ in a row.
    - Players reveal their playing cards and the owner of the higher card takes the stack of chips.

Note: The stack is never > 4 chips. Scores between 0 and 12 white chips.

1 2 3

**Add ONE chip to the stack**

**and pass control.**

**Add NO chips to the stack**

**and pass control.**

# Game Mechanic #7: “Fake”

## Components

* 2 sets of 2 white cards
  + 1 card that has a blue box
  + 1 card that has a red box
* 16 white Poker Chips

## Rules

2 Players, each gets a set of the white cards.

Play 4 rounds.

Each round, the players may discuss their intended play,

Then each player secretly selects a card to play, then both simultaneously reveal.

* If both players play their cards with blue boxes, they each gain 2 chips
* If both players play their cards with red boxes, they each gain 1 chip
* If they play different cards, the player playing a red box gains 3 chips, and the player playing a blue box gains none.

Scores between 0 and 12 white chips.

**RED**

**RED**

**BLUE**

**BLUE**

# Game Mechanic #8: “Odd Pot”

## Components

* 2 sets of 6 white cards, numbered 0-5.
* 32 white Poker Chips

## Rules

2 Players, each gets a set of the white cards and 6 poker chips. The remainder is set aside as a pool nearby.

Each round, players may discuss their play,

Then each player secretly selects one their white cards to play. (The number on the card represents how many of their poker chips they will add to the ‘pot’.)

Players simultaneously reveal their cards and add that many poker chips to create a ‘pot’ between them.

* If there are no chips in the pot at this point, the GAME ends immediately.
* If there ARE chips in the pot, then 2 more poker chips are added from the nearby pool.
* Then, if the pot has an ODD number of poker chips, add an additional poker chip from the pool nearby to make an even pot.
* Each player takes half of the poker chips in the pool.

Play additional rounds until:

* One player has 12 poker chips.
* One player has 0 poker chips.
* Both players have chosen to add 0 poker chips to the pot (GAME ends before payout).

Scores between 0 and 12 white chips.

0 1 2 3 4 5

0 1 2 3 4 5

# Game Mechanic #9: “Chance”

## Components

* 3 sets of 2 white cards; one with a red box, and one with a blue box.
* 23 white Poker Chips

## Rules

2 Players each take a set of white cards.

The Dealer takes the last set and the poker chips.

Play 4 rounds.

Each round, the dealer randomly selects one of the two cards and plays it face down, and hides the other.

Each round, the players may discuss their intended play, then each player secretly selects a card to play.

ALL THREE cards – the players’ and the Dealer’s - are simultaneously revealed.

Players are given chips depending on the three cards played:

* If ALL THREE cards have blue boxes, each player is given 3 chips.
* If ALL THREE cards have red boxes, each player is given 2 chips.
* If ANY card has a different color than the others, then any player who plays a red box gains 1 chip, anyone who plays a blue box gains 0.

Scores between 0 and 12 white chips.

**RED**

**RED**

**RED**

**BLUE**

**BLUE**

**BLUE**

# Game Mechanic #10: “Limbo”

## Components

* 2 sets of 4 white cards, numbered 0-3.
* 24 white Poker Chips

## Rules

2 players each take a set of cards. The poker chips are set aside.

Play 3 rounds.

Each round, the players may discuss their intended play, then each player secretly selects a card to play.

Players simultaneously reveal their cards. Players are given chips depending on these rules:

* If the cards are =, each player earns chips = number on the cards played, otherwise:
* Player with the lowest card earns chips = Lowest Card # +2,
* Player with the highest card earns chips = Lowest Card # +0.

Scores between 0 and 12 white chips.

0 1 2 3

0 1 2 3

# Game Mechanic #11: “High for Low”

## Components

* 2 sets of 3 white cards; numbered 1-3.
* 24 white Poker Chips

## Rules

2 players each take a set of cards. The poker chips are set aside.

Play 4 rounds.

Each round, the players may discuss their intended play, then each player secretly selects a card to play.

Players simultaneously reveal their cards. Players are given chips depending on these rules:

* If the cards are =, each player earns 2 chips, otherwise:
* Player with the lowest card earns chips = 0,
* Player with the highest card earns chips = Highest card # - Lowest card #.

Scores between 0 and 12 white chips.

0 1 2 3

0 1 2 3

# Game Mechanic #12: “Accept or Reject”

## Components

* 1 sets of 4 white cards for Player 1, labelled:
  + 0 for me, 3 for you.
  + 1 for me, 2 for you.
  + 2 for me, 1 for you.
  + 3 for me, 0 for you.
* 1 set of 2 white cards for Player 2, labelled “Accept” and “Reject”.
* 16 white Poker Chips

## Rules

2 players each take a set of cards, randomly selecting ‘Player 1’ and ‘Player 2’. The chips are set aside in four stacks of 3 chips.

Play 4 rounds.

Each round, sets a stack of 3 chips in front of Player 1.

Player 1 plays one of the 4 cards describing the distribution of these chips.

Player 2 then plays either “Accept” or “Reject”

* If Player 2 chooses “Accept”, the chips are paid out according to Player 1’s card.
* If Player 2 chooses “Reject”, then NO CHIPS are awarded to either player.

Players trade white cards between rounds so that they switch roles.

Scores between 0 and 12 white chips.

**2 for me,**

**1 for you.**

**0 for me,**

**3 for you.**

**ACCEPT**

**3 for me,**

**0 for you.**

**1 for me,**

**2 for you.**

**REJECT**