Lobo (The Wolf)

A Solitaire Game tor the Postas Deck
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Introduction: One of the oldest games in the Postas family is *Lobo*, also called *The Wolf*, a challenging solitaire game that can be adapted for tavern play.

Summary: The Player and the Wolf start with four cards each. Through a series of captures, the player is attempting to get rid of all of the Wolf's cards.

The Deck: The Postas deck contains 50 cards, which are the ranks 1 through 10 in five suits. You can buy or print your own deck from Crab Fragment Labs. Suits are irrelevant in Lobo, so you can also build a deck using cards from two poker decks.

Setup: Shuffle the deck and deal two rows of four cards, as shown above. The top row belongs to the "Wolf," and the bottom row belongs to you. These rows are also called "hands."

The top card of the deck is always kept faceup. This card, and the cards below it, might be dealt into either hand, depending on what actions you take.

Goal: Your goal is to empty the Wolf's hand. Even if you cannot defeat the Wolf, you are still trying to leave it with the smallest number of points. You will play several rounds, keeping score after each, and racing the Wolf to 100 points.

Player Actions: You have the choice of several actions. Each has a consequence.

> **Perfect:** In a "Perfect" play, you play one card from your hand to remove one card of the matching rank from the Wolf's hand. For example, in the example above, your 9 could take out the Wolf's 9.
> > **Result:** Discard both cards, and move the top card of the deck into your hand.
>
> **Sum:** In a "Sum" play, you will discard more than one card from your hand, which add up exactly to one card in the Wolf's hand. For example, 6+4 takes 10, or 1+1+3 takes 5.
> > **Result:** Discard all the cards involved, and move the top card of the deck into your hand.
>
> **Split:** A"Split" play is the reverse of a Sum: You play one card, and capture more than one card from the Wolf's hand. The cards you capture must add up exactly to the value of the card you play. For example, 9 takes 6+3, or 7 takes 1+2+4.
> > **Result:** Discard all the cards involved, and move the top card of the deck *into the Wolf's hand*.
>
> **Over:** In an "Over" play, you play one card from your hand to capture one smaller card from the Wolf's hand. For example, 9 takes 7, or 6 takes 2.
> > **Result:** Discard both cards, and deal a number of cards from the deck into the Wolf's hand equal to the *difference in ranks*. For example, if 6 takes 4, the Wolf takes 2 cards. (There is no upper limit to the size of the Wolf's hand.)
>
> **Fold:** If you feel you cannot improve your situation, you can stop at any time. You might also be forced to stop, if you have no moves left.

The Wolf does not take any actions, just you. You may continue taking actions until you are out of options, or you decide to fold, or the Wolf runs out of cards.

Scoring: If the Wolf is out of cards, you win the round, and you score the point values of all the cards left in your hand. (Don't forget to draw the card that comes after your final capture.) For example, if you finish with cards 1-2-4, then you score 7 points.

If the Wolf still has cards left, you lose the round, and the Wolf scores the point values of their cards (in this case, your remaining cards are ignored). Note that sometimes you should fold even if you still have actions, to keep the Wolf's score low.

Record your points on a ledger, and play to 100 points.

Shuffling: It is typical to deal more than one hand from the same deck, shuffling only once every three or four hands. Note that if you do this, you can gain a small advantage by keeping track of which cards have been played.

Easier Modes: It is notoriously hard to beat the Wolf, even with perfect strategy. To make the game easier, you can strip some high ranks out of the deck.
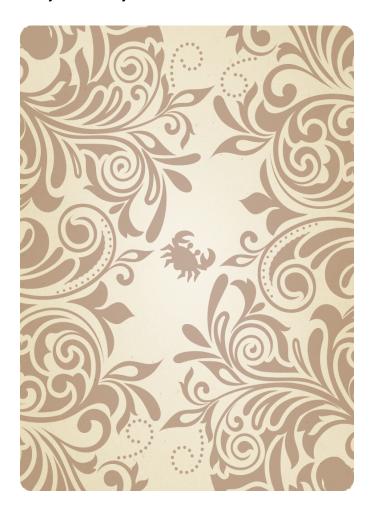
Hard Mode: Play with the full deck as described above.
Ordinary Mode: Play without the 10s.
Easy Mode: Play without the 9s and 10s.

Gambling Rules: In this tavern game, the play is the same, but the House takes the role of the Wolf, and banks the game. If you win the round, the House pays you one coin for each point in your hand, and if you lose, you pay the Wolf's card total to the House. Your bankroll is your score.

This version of the game is endless, you can stop at any time, and the goal is simply to finish with more coins than you started with.

Note: As we develop this game further, we expect to settle on a more comprehensive set of gambling rules that offer a tiny but guaranteed advantage to the house. Without a perfect grasp of strategy, we are definitely not there yet.

Rules for Multiple Players:

If you enjoy the challenge of Lobo and want to share it with friends, here is a basic format for scoring in a multiplayer game.

Each player will play three rounds from one deck, and then players can compare their final scores. Treat all Wolf's points as negative, and all Player points as positive.

If you have enough decks, each player can play their game at the same time. Otherwise, pass the deck around and tally each player's final score.

Note that in a three-round game it's easy to set cards aside after each round to track your score, and write down just the final total after three rounds.

History and Strategy:

Lobo is one of the oldest known games with the Postas Deck, which was the primary card deck in Sierin during the first half of the 8th century. It was mostly known as a solitaire game, but a small number of gambling houses did offer to play the game for money. Other gambling games from this era include *Prima Carta and Postes de Cerca,* commonly called *Holdout*.

As with many solitaire games, Lobo can be frustratingly hard to win. Anecdotally, perfect play under the tavern rules (TBD) will give you a slight edge over the House, but perfection is quite difficult in practice. It is this level of challenge, combined with the short play time, that keeps Lobo popular to this day.

They say "The wolf takes small bites," meaning that a player must often be satisfied with a minimal loss, rather than a win. Choosing the right time to fold is one of the hardest elements of perfect play. Fighting too long, or taking big risks without a clear path to victory, can be costly. This is also encapsulated in the phrase "Looking for the cheapest way to die."

The top card is nicknamed "the cub," and the unseen card beneath is called "mother," or "the wolf mother." When you play an Over with a difference of more than 1, you are drawing into unknown territory, sometimes with disastrous results. More generally, "mother" has come to mean that which is dangerous and unknown.

Design Credits: Lobo was created by James Ernest in August 2022. Playtesters included Shawn Carnes, Rachael Groynom, Avri Klemer, Carol Monahan, and Greg Whitehead.

Please send us your questions, comments, and feedback at Crab Fragment Labs, https://crabfragmentlabs.com/feedback-form