GUNFIGHT

at the pretty good corral

a card game by James Ernest and Paul Peterson

Welcome to Winker's Holler, *a seedy little town full of ornery cowpokes, vicious outlaws, and gun-totin' lawmen. Just about every weekend, the whole confounded lot of them strut down to the Pretty Good Corral for a few hands of a quick-playing card game.*

The Basics: *Gunfight* is a quick-playing card game about rootin' tootin' cowpokes in an endless gun battle. Players take turns playing cards and picking fights. Cards on the table are fighters, and the goal is to shoot the most points of enemies.

> **Players:** 2-6
> **You Need:** A poker deck with two Jokers

To Begin: Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of five cards to each player. Play begins on the dealer's left.

On your turn, you have four options: You may *play a fighter*, *take aim*, *pick a fight*, or play a *special effect*. You must do exactly one of these if you can, otherwise you may pass.

At the end of your turn, if you played any cards, draw your hand back up to five. The game ends after the deck is empty and no one can make a legal play.

Option 1: Playing a Fighter

To play a fighter, place a card from your hand faceup on the table in front of you. Almost any card can be a fighter, except for Aces and Jokers.

You may have as many fighters as you wish, but only one per turn.

The ranks of the fighters are as follows:

Lawmen: Cards of rank 2 are *Lawmen*. They are worth only 2 points, but they *always defeat Outlaws*.

Cowpokes: Cards 3 through 10 are *Cowpokes*. These are ordinary fighters, all worth their face value.

Outlaws: Jacks, Queens, and Kings are *Outlaws*. These cards are worth 11, 12, and 13 points respectively, but they are always defeated by Lawmen.

The point value of a fighter is also its *Speed*, with higher numbers shooting first. The only exception is Lawmen, who are faster than Outlaws, although they otherwise have a Speed of 2.

Option 2: Taking Aim

To improve the speed of a fighter you control, you may play an *aim* card. This card goes *face down* on top of the fighter card. You can play any rank of card as an aim card.

In a gunfight, described below, aim cards are revealed, and they add to a fighter's speed. Every aim card is worth its face value; Jacks are worth 11, Queens 12, and Kings 13. Aces are worth one point.

Jokers are worth 15 points *on your turn*, but they are worth zero on *everyone else's turn*.

You can only play one aim card at a time, but you may play several aim cards on the same fighter over multiple turns.

Option 3: Picking a Fight

If you have a fighter in play, you may *pick a fight* with an opponent's fighter. Choose an attacker and declare its target, and the fight is on.

To resolve the fight, start by revealing all aim cards on both fighters. Add those values to the fighters, and the fastest fighter (highest total value) wins the fight. The attacker wins ties.

Note the exception, that Lawmen always beat Outlaws.

Aim cards are good for this fight only, and then are discarded.

The winner's fighter remains on the table, and the winner collects the loser's fighter card, setting it aside in a score pile.

Option 4: Special Effects

Some single cards, and some combinations of cards, can be played as *special effects*. You may play any one of the following effects as your turn:

Ace: An Ace is a *stray bullet*. It can shoot any fighter on the table. However, since no one knows where the stray bullet came from, that fighter goes to the discard pile, not to your score pile.

Pairs: A pair (two cards of the same rank) is an *ambush*. You can play a pair to shoot any fighter on the table whose value is less than or equal to the *sum of the pair*. For examples, a pair of 4s could shoot a fighter as powerful as 8. However, be careful, because the defender's aim cards *do count towards its value*.

If your pair turns out to be too low to score the target, because it was saved by its aim cards, then the target stays on the table and its owner *scores your pair instead!*

Jokers are wild for this purpose, and can be used to complete any pair. However, in this case they are worth zero points, so for example an ambush made with a Joker and a seven has an attack value of just seven points.

Pair of Lawmen: A pair of Deuces can be played to ambush an Outlaw, and will always succeed.

Poker Showdown: If you can discard a complete five-card poker hand (a straight, a flush, or a full house), then you can collect and score every fighter on the table *including your own*!

> **Straight** (five cards in sequence): Every fighter on the table "goes straight" (stops fighting), and you get points.

> **Flush:** Someone shot a powder keg, taking every fighter off the table. You get points for that too!

> **Full House:** Everyone went back to the saloon for a game of poker. Sure enough, you also get points for that.

Jokers are wild for completing any of these hands.

Ending the Game

The game ends after the deck is empty and no one can take another useful action. Players total the values of all the cards they have scored, and the highest total wins.

Strategy

You will almost never score cards from your hand. Almost all cards that go into your score pile will come from other players. So plan accordingly, and get the best value for the cards you hold.

If you hold a high-valued card that you fear someone might take (a face card, for example), you could play it as an aim card instead. That way, no matter who wins that fight, the face card will be discarded.

Gunfight at the Pretty Good Corral was designed by James Ernest and Paul Peterson in 1998. A version of this game appeared in *Games Magazine*, August 1998.

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