

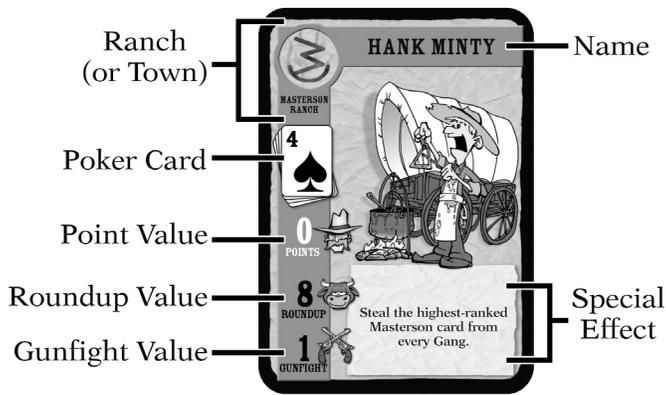
COWPOKER™

A GAME FOR 2-4 FIVE-CARD STUDS BY JAMES ERNEST AND MIKE SELINKER

Players: 2 to 4

Contents: 54 game cards, three sets of four Ranch cards, and these rules.

Welcome to Centerville, home of the four most ruthless gangs of cattle rustlers and gamblers on either side of the Mississippi. You and your dusty cowpokes will compete with your rivals in roundups and gunfights, trying to build the biggest and meanest bunch of hombres, create the best poker hands, and win.



START A RANCH

There are always four players in *Cowpoker*, even if there are fewer than four real players. The extra ranches are run by “Deadwood” players who have no hands and always play the top card of the deck. Watch out: Deadwood players can be pretty crafty!

To begin, determine where the Deadwood players will sit. Next, take *one set* of four Ranch cards (Davila, Gallagher, Masterson, and San Joaquin), shuffle them, and hand one card to each player. This is your Ranch, and cards showing that Ranch will have their Special Effect for you. Place your Ranch card face up in front of you.

Deadwood players also get Ranch cards, so every Ranch is represented at the table. The other eight Ranch cards are used as randomizers, as described below.

Shuffle the 54 game cards and deal a hand of five cards to each live player. Deadwood players get no hands.

If this is the first game, the Gallagher Ranch goes first. Thereafter, the lead passes to the left.

MAKE YOUR PLAY

On each turn, players do certain things . . . the order depends on whether the player is live or Deadwood.

Live Players

First, draw cards from the deck to bring your hand to five. Once the deck runs out, you will take a turn if you have drawn at least one card. Otherwise, the game ends.

Next, play one card from your hand onto the table. If that card belongs to your Ranch, or to the Town, follow the “Special Effect” instructions on that card. If it is from another Ranch, ignore the instructions. Aces are a different case; see *Special Effects*, below.

Example: If you’re the Masterson player, you will follow the instructions on Town and Masterson cards when you play them, but not cards from the other three Ranches.

After you play the card, it goes into an area of face-up cards in front of you, called your “Gang.” (Some Town cards have Special Effects that break this rule, and go directly into different Gangs, no matter how they are played. Follow the instructions on the card.)

Cards in your Gang are open for everyone to see, and can sometimes be stolen by other players. Your Gang can hold cards from other Ranches, and you will often play these cards just to score points.

Your Gang is different from your Cellar; see below.

After you have played your card, the turn passes to the left.

Deadwood

Deadwood players do not have hands. Instead, they simply turn over the top card of the deck as their play. Special Effects on these cards usually work in the same manner as those of live players – they are followed if they are Town cards, or if they match the Ranch of the player. If they are from a different Ranch, they are ignored.

When the instruction begins with “Live Player,” the Deadwood player ignores it.

However, when the card calls for the Deadwood player to make a choice, as in “*Gunfight or Roundup! (You choose.)*,” that choice is made randomly, by shuffling the extra Ranch cards and picking one.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Roundups and Gunfights

The two most frequent Special Effects are “Roundup” and “Gunfight.” The play of such a card initiates a “trick” in which everyone plays one card.

When someone calls a “Roundup,” each player puts down one card, starting on the left of the player who called the Roundup. The player who called the Roundup plays last. Deadwood players draw and play the top card on the deck. (If the deck is empty, they play nothing.)

Cards do not have to belong to your Ranch for you to play them in Roundups. Unless the card reads “however this card is played,” the Special Effects on the card do not take effect when played in a Roundup.

The trick is taken by the card with the highest Roundup value. If there is a tie for the highest Roundup value, it goes to the later-played card. This gives an advantage to the player who started the Roundup, since he plays last.

Whoever wins the trick takes the cards and puts them face down in his “Cellar.” *Exception:* Some Town cards go into specific Gangs no matter how they are played. These always wind up in someone’s Gang, never in a Cellar.

Cards in your Cellar remain face down for the duration of the game.

“Gunfight” works the same way, except the number you compare is the Gunfight value.



Gang
(face up on table)



Your Ranch
Card



Your Hand
(in your hand, pardner)



Cellar
(face down)

Determining Randomly

Remember, when a Deadwood player is offered a choice, he always makes it randomly.

You can determine anything randomly by drawing from the eight extra Ranch cards. The Ranch cards are marked with Gunfight and Roundup symbols as well as the Ranch names.

Cards That Go Into Specific Gangs

Some Town cards say, "However this card is played, it always goes into the Gang with the worst poker hand," or something similar. When you play these cards, carry out their Special Effects *after* you determine where they will go.

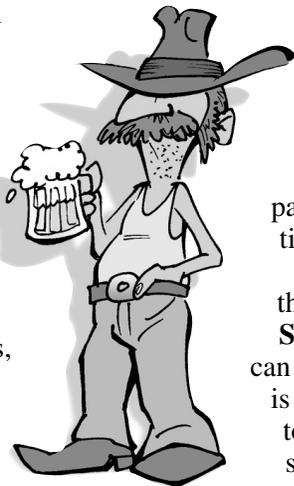
When you play them in tricks, ignore their main Special Effects but do pay attention to the "however they are played" text. If several of these cards are played on the same trick, figure out where they go in the order they are played.

Aces

The boss of every Ranch is an Ace. When you have an opponent's Ace in your Gang, that Ranch's cards work for you (that is, you now follow the instructions on those cards). This effect is *not* optional – if your Gang contains the Ace of another Ranch, cards from that Ranch work for you whether you want them to or not!

Aces have no additional effect in their own Gang. If your Ranch's Ace is in another player's Gang, you still follow the instructions on your Ranch's cards normally.

Aces affect Deadwood players as well as live players.



ENDING THE GAME

The game ends when a player can't draw any cards. You will score points based on what cards you have and where.

Remember:

- Your *Gang* contains all the cards you played normally.
- Your *Cellar* contains all the cards you took in tricks.
- Your *Hand* is all the cards you drew but didn't play.

Scoring

Your base score is equal to the point values of all the cards in your Gang.

In addition, each player makes three poker hands . . . one each from his Gang, his Cellar, and the cards left in his Hand at the end of the game. These score as follows:

- 6 points for the best poker hand in a player's *Gang*;
- 6 points for the best poker hand in a player's *Cellar*; and
- 6 points for the best poker hand in a player's *Hand*. Your final Hand will never contain five cards, which means that four of a kind is the best poker hand you can make from it, and a pair is pretty good!

There is also one penalty, which applies to live players only:

- -6 points for the Cellar containing the *fewest* points.

Points in your Cellar don't count directly toward your score. They count only toward avoiding this penalty. Points left in your Hand don't count at all.

Cards That Make Other Cards Wild

Some cards have the Special Effect of making other cards wild. They have this effect only in the poker hand you make from the place they are located – not in your other poker hands. They *do not* have to be included in the five cards that make up the final poker hand. For example, if Marigold Finster is in your Cellar, she makes 2s wild in your Cellar . . . whether you include Marigold in your five-card Cellar hand or not.

Ties

If any of these conditions is tied, split the points (or the penalty) among the tied players. For example, if two players are tied for fewest Cellar points, each of them takes a penalty of 3 points.

POKER HANDS

In case you are rusty on the hands in poker, here is a short refresher.

Poker hands can contain no more than five cards. When you are comparing hands with more than five cards, you play only the best five cards from each hand. If you have fewer than five cards, you can still create some of the hands below, such as a pair. Aces are usually high, though they can also form the low end of a straight. Suits do not have an order; no suit is higher than any other. Jokers are wild, and can be made into any card.

High Card: This is the lowest poker hand, ranking below a pair. In hands with no better combination, the highest card wins; if the high cards are tied, compare the next higher cards (the "kickers").

Pair: Two cards of the same rank, such as a pair of Sevens. The higher the pair, the better. If the pairs in two hands are tied, compare the kickers.

Two Pair: Two different pairs. If two players have two pair, the one with the single highest pair wins. If those are tied, compare the lower pair, then the kickers.

Three of a Kind: Three cards of the same rank, such as three Queens. In case of ties, compare the kickers.

Straight: Five cards in sequence, such as 9 10 J Q K. Aces can be high or low in straights (but not both – i.e., Q K A 2 3 is not a straight). Straights are compared on the basis of their top card, so a 5-high straight is lower than an 8-high straight.

Flush: Five cards of the same suit, such as five hearts. Two flushes are compared in exactly the same manner as High Card hands (i.e., highest card wins).

Full House: Three of one rank and two of another, such as three Jacks and two Tens. The triplet determines the rank of the hand, so Tens full of Twos (three Tens and two Deuces) beats Fives full of Aces (three Fives and two Aces).

Four of a Kind: Four cards of the same rank. In case of ties (possible with wild cards), compare the kickers.

Straight Flush: A hand that is both a straight and a flush. The highest of these, 10 J Q K A, is called a Royal Flush, and is the highest hand you can make without wild cards.

Five of a Kind: Five cards of the same rank, possible only with wild cards.

About Wild Cards: Wild Cards can represent any card in the deck, even a card you already have. This means it's possible to have a double-Ace-high Flush, if you have four suited cards (including an Ace) and one wild card. You could even make a quadruple-Ace-high-Flush (except four of a kind is a better hand).

Wild cards always become the *best possible card* for a hand, so you can't make them into something else just for the purpose of having the lowest poker hand mid-game.



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