

# Doomtown Terminology

A lot of the things I'm gonna tell ya here might be common to a number of Collectible Card Games (CCGs), but you might not have played any of those either (and I almost certainly ain't) so I'm makin' no allowances for that. These ain't a guide to the terminology used in the game mechanics- that's all included in the rulebook and the [FAQ](#) site. What you got here is a guide to the language used by the grizzly old cowhands still inhabitin' the Doomtown Maillist and attendin' those wild tournaments.

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## Cards & Cardplay Terminology

One of the things that old-timers will spend most time yawning about is playing them cards. Whether it's the features of individual cards, or the things that can happen when you start putting 'em together, there's a few terms or phrases you should learn if you wanna keep up with them.

### ~ Broken Cards

"Broken" is a term that sees a fairly wide usage usually being bandied about for a few weeks after a tournament or new card release (while the game was in print). Meaning essentially a card or combination of cards (even whole deck strategies) that are so successful and so difficult to defeat that they undermine the entire game and render it NOT FUN for anyone, prompting calls of "this must be [errata'd](#)", "the game is SO unbalanced now" and "we're doomed I tell ye".

There's many a folk who'll call "broken" to combos that are actually just very [cheesy](#) in a way no one had seen before and which are quite possible to counter. Doomtownters prefer to keep the phrase in reserve so that broken means B-R-O-K-E-N. By this we mean rendering the game itself dangerously unbalanced, in need of repair and quite beyond any sensible counter measures except the introduction of some serious [hosers](#), a retroactive [errata](#) of the card/s involved or possibly a complete [ban](#) on the card's use.

### ~ Banned Cards, Errata, MRP

A game as involved as DT will always have a sizeable compendium of "rulings", where the many esoteric card combinations people will try, (or poor original wording) means you need somewhere to have a more detailed description of the intended card effects than you could actually fit on the card itself. Sometimes though there is a situation where a clarification of a card's effect is not enough, as the card has proved to be unexpectedly powerful, either by itself or more likely in combination with other cards (see [broken cards](#)) and a decision is needed- ban the card or issue an errata .

The designers of Doomtownter have always been very reluctant to concede on calls for banning or rewriting of cards (however hard people screamed "[Broken!](#)" at them) and for good reason. Going down the road of banning cards en masse is only ever going to weaken a game, especially when young frothers come to their first tournament to be handed a huge list of cards they may not play. In fact it's a pissing contest for anyone to have bought a pile of cards that are now just a 2" square picture with some adjoining text.

Extensive errata is not much better- no one wants to have to memorise a huge list of cards that no longer perform the actions described on them (other game designers take note), or to explain to a new player "no you can't do that, that card has been errata'd" (to which the usual reply is "#/Kof!#/ OK, I'm just

going to go over there... I'll be back really soon... honestly...").

Rightly prideful, the producers have never banned a card from tournament play, and allowed only a few to be reworked into something different (and even then it was only once the lynch mobs started homing in on their farmstead). The cards were changed through a method called Most Recent Printing (MRP), whereby a card is reissued with a different text and all copies of the card are then considered to contain the text on the (you guessed it) most recent printing. The technique has been extensively used with little argument when cards had required more specific wording to account for later game developments or to correct poor wording and misprints (most notably the printing of the Flock dudes in Pine Box and episode 7 without their Outfit symbol- no Wrath isn't a Drifter).

The critical MRPs are as follows:

Sweetrock Home (Original)-	amended to allow only one dude from another outfit, production dropped to +3.
Sweetrock Home (Gomorrah Ltd Rail Line)-	amended so you can't save the deed you are acing for GR... so take those Bucket Brigades out of the deck!
Burnt Offering-	only provides 1 VP regardless of the target's CP value.
Pistol Whipped-	boots the dude performing the action.
It Was A Mountain Lion-	aces itself.
Eureka's Rage-	aces itself.
Legal Offices of _____ -	was issued in Pine Box Edition with "incorrect" upkeep and CPs, MRP'd in Boot Hill Edition.
Take Ya With Me	will only work if one of your casualties has a higher bullet rating than one of your opponents dudes in the shootout.

Oh, and "Walking Dead" (which has been changed twice) but apparently that was an accident(!).

Though the list of Rulings and MRPs (held and administered in the [Legal Offices of Gerry Crow](#)) can seem long reading, and the game had (IMO anyway) been teetered on the edge of chronic imbalance through the last few releases, the old pros (those havin' played more than o" these card games) will usually agree that DT has escaped with a remarkably low level of messy reworking.

If you're going into a tournament its essential that you familiarise yourself with the rulings and errata for the cards you will be using. Doomtownt players are the nicest in the world for sympathising when your deck concept falls apart on an MRP you didn't know about, and some'll even let you take take a play back in a real live tournament if you missed/misunderstood the errata (don't be countin' on that mind), but noone's gonna let you play the card as you think it reads if their World Championship place is at stake!

I'd go a step further and recommend you give a detailed examination to the MRPs and Rulings anyway, cos plenny of the headings describe the situations where the cards do things your opponent won't expect. Indeed this is why many of them errata are needed, cos someone smarter'n me looked at the card and and thought "hmm, how can I break this..?".

## ~ Coasters

Coaster is a term to describe an essentially useless card, or leastways one that has no business appearing in yer serious decks. For any furriners or cow-hands in the saloon, coasters are what them

Yankees put under their drinks to stop their fancy tables gettin' tarnished. No, there ain't even no call for those out in Gomorrah, "cept maybe to keep the muck on the table off yer glass. A coaster card, so the theory goes, ain't no good "cept for restin" yer drink on.

Opinion shifts on what constitutes a coaster, and while new cards were bein' produced there was always a chance a new [combo](#) would breathe life into an old table mat. Cards that seem to do very little, or do nothing at all except in very rare circumstances, are prime candidates for this tag, as are new cards that map existing effects without being as good.

Sometimes a new card eclipses an older one by incorporatin' its effect but being easier to play, or more powerful, without any new disadvantages. This'll render the older card a coaster in a flash. It's also a particularly insidious marketing ploy (as everyone rushes to purchase the newer card) and is particularly annoying for anyone holding copies of the older card. Not one that the Doomtown team have ever employed I might add, though it sadly appears to common in some other CCGs.

Of course theres bound to be a new [combo](#) that some bright spark'll pop up with next tourney around. And of course if you like a challenge you'll be startin' at Coaster Central when building your fun decks. Oh, and just fer anyone who thinks they've found a card with no useful purpose *whatsoever*, [UnclEvl](#) has a special "[Back Room](#)" for educatin' the likes of you...

## ~ Hosers

A hoser is a card that weakens/destroys the impact of an "abusive" card or strategy, often being dropped in to discourage strategies that appear to be dominating the game. Essential to keeping things alive and interesting, and even to avoid usin' [errata](#). A hoser may, however, be regarded with some degree of scorn if it is blatantly geared to defeating a single card or [combo](#), especially if the strategy it is countering shouldn't have slipped past the playtesters in the first place (though some'r' always gonna).

The best hosers are cards that actually have a fairly wide usefulness in their own right rather than clogging up your hand (see "[Cycling](#)") if you meet a player with a different strategy. The worst are useless in general play, are hard to get out of your hand if they aren't needed and often have very little impact on even the one strategy they are designed to foil (see [Coasters](#)).

## ~ Rarity

As with all Collectible Card Games, Doomtown was sold on the Pannini Principle, namely that instead of purchasing a game, or a game and a set of expansions and upgrades, you buy a lottery ticket. You don't know what cards you are getting when you pick up a starter set (though it's a safe bet you'll end up with at least one Charlie Landers) or a booster pack, so you keep buying till you've got all the cards you want and as often as not a whole shed load you'll never use. On top of that you'll see that the cards are deliberately produced and distributed in unequal quantities, so you'll keep chasing the "Rare" cards while piling up stacks of "Commons". Swapsies? Well that's always an option and you will find that your mate has two copies of the Rare card you need while you can only pray you've picked up a double he hasn't. Chances are neither of you has Michel Platini or Maradonna, and whoever gets it isn't going to swap for marbles or toffee ("Austin Stoker: Experienced" for some pieces of caramelised sugar or glass beads anyone?).

Hey, get with it, the world's a harsh place. Point of fact is that you can't make a profit on little bits of card any other way (come to think of it AEG couldn't even make a profit this way, which illustrates the point rather well I think). In fairness to DT the rarity structure was always a lot kinder than with other games (at least as stated by the old war veterans, who are known to delve into these things) and this is a comforting thought to me (until I look at my stockpile of "Mesa Checkpoint"s again). "sides, tradin"

the cards is all part of the fun. Seriously.

Of course the most "powerful" cards are also the rarest, but be succoured by this thought- the game is balanced so that an excess of rare cards is very unlikely to win you the game anyway (these usually being too expensive, in game terms, to bring out and maintain early on). Heres how the rarity works in Doomtown. More or less.

Starting at the finish, rarity is pretty much meaningless to the Do Unto Others set, since all the cards were released in one big box. Technically speaking I guess they are all "Fixed Rares" (denoted by an F or FR)- that is, cards that are only issued in a specific starter box.

Every other release, indeed every starter deck, has at least two fixed rares, these being the home card featured on the back and one other card that would always come with that home. For the Episode 1-9 starters (where each Outfit was introduced) this was a Dude card, the leader of that Outfit. This meant that each new player had at least one strong Dude in their card pool, and the fact that the card didn't appear in boosters was something of a bonus, since if you weren't playing that faction the leader Dude is usually pretty useless. Usually.

The later sets also had a fixed dude per faction, though this wasn't usually the leader but an "Experienced" version of another key Dude. The compilation sets (Pine Box and Boot Hill) also had fixed rares in addition to the home cards, though these weren't necessarily dudes. Pine Box actually had some rather natty new cards, but then there were the decidedly rubbish "[Ancestral Swords](#)" in the Boot Hill set.

The other rarities are Rare, Uncommon and Common denoting how many of each were printed and distributed in the set, though in fact the first 9 sets only had a two-tier rarity system (ie. there were no Uncommon cards, and more Rares were printed). Of course it is all a bit more complicated than that, if you really want to get into it (skip to the next header if you don't).

The fixed rares in PBE, for example, were also issued as rares in the boosters (making them slightly less rare of course). Any card that was never reissued in one o' the compilation sets is obviously rarer as a result, and Common cards in *both* compilation sets (e.g. Charlie Landers) are pretty much ten a penny. Theres also a few freak issuings that you really don't need to know about (like the Blackjacks Home being reprinted in Episode 7, or Animate Hand being reissued in DUO because it was accidentally released as a fixed rare in E4E).

There was also different ways of packing out the boosters across episodes. In any set after episode 9 there's only 1 rare to a booster, so in fact a Mouth of Hell Rare is about three times rarer than a rare from the previous sets. Except that as they form a smaller proportion of the cards produced for the set, its actually easier to collect them all. Or something.

Uncommons in MoH, RoS and Rev are actually rares that have been printed twice (R2s) rather than having their own run, but by most calculations are about as common as other uncommons given the packout. If anyone understands that better'n me (like a raccoon prob"ly unnerstands it better'n me) please send along whats what and I'll post it up fer the good folks.

## ~ Spoilers, Spoiler Space

A lot of people like to be surprised when they open their packs of shiny new cards for the first time, and would rather find out what a card does by getting hold of the card rather than reading it on an e-mail, mailing list or website (especially when the card set isn't due for release in their country for several weeks). It's a bit like tapin" the football and then tryin" not to find out the score before you get home (if anyone can think of an analogy that fits the weird west can you let me know..?).

Spoilers are sites or mails that give people these details- its not a term of abuse, just a warning for those who would rather not know. It was considered polite to give a warning when a mail contained spoiler information, usually by putting the word "spoiler" in the subject header, and to leave a "spoiler space " - a gap (blank lines) at the beginning of an e-mail large enough that if someone readin" it has their messages automatically open or whatever then they wouldn't just "catch" a glimpse of the spoiler text. Not an issue now theres no new card releases of course, but you might come across the term when sifting through old telegrams at the archive.

## ~ **The Headline Rule, Statute 7**

In yer rulebook, under the "Lowball" heading, theres a rule sayin" "Since a newspaper can have only one headline, each player may resolve only one Event per turn". Twas not always thus, and there was a time where the only limit was that the same Event only resolved once in a turn.

There came a point though, where Event heavy decks such as the [Fondues](#) and [Ghost Towns](#) were threatening to dominate the game- a shame because the strategies (while ingenious) cut out most of the finer points of the game to demolish opponents from afar with Events. The design team leapt into action, offering the players a vote on the best way to combat the new evil in Gomorrah.

The project was initially coined "Statute 7", and what eventually emerged was the Headline Rule as you can see in your rulebooks today. Just remember young"uns, that some people had to fight fer the rights you take fer granted today- so have a little respect eh?

## ~ **Rolling Thunder**

The earlier days of DT saw a very rapid release system (Rolling Thunder) where a new episode (a run of 52 cards including a new home) came out once a month. The idea is to keep the game fresh and fluid by continually producing new product (and get all those ideas "out there"). It was also marked by having an unusual two-tier [rarity scheme](#), with three rares in each fifteen card booster pack. Some people hark back to this time (basically the second half of 1998) as DT's halcyon days, while others wonder how they ever kept up with that speed of new issuings.

Answers simple in my case- I didn't. Theres a lesson there somewhere I'm sure.

## ~ **Gang/Outfit Weapons, Ancestral/Clan Swords**

Ancestral, or Clan, Swords is a term borrowed from Legend of the Five Rings (L5R), where each clan (L5R's equivalent for an Outfit) had a card that represented a weapon specific to that one clan. The Gang Weapons were AEG's attempt to do the equivalent for DT and were the first new cards they produced when they reclaimed the license from WoTC.

The first thing them designers decided to do was make a second "basic set", as a starting point for the new players they were hoping to attract. Where Pine Box, the original compilation set, had included 20 new cards in its release (enough to get old players interested in what was basically a re-issuing of cards they already had), it was decided to make a set of Outfit-specific card that would be fixed in each of the Boot Hill starter decks.

The cards were identical in the way they were played, a Weapon card providing a +1 bullet and influence bonus to the holder for each member of the appropriate Outfit present in that location- making them potentially the most powerful weapons in the game. This decision to have identical effects was based on experience from L5R that having different effects for each card (as occurred with the Ancestral Armour) inevitably meant that some of the cards were seen as more useful than others.

This in turn meant that only a few would ever get played (and then players of the other clans would complain that they'd received rather short thrift).

What you end up with is a card that is still inherently more useful for some Outfits than others, relying as it does on weight of numbers for its effect. The cards are not even entirely equal in effect- the Collegium "sword" is of course a gadget (meaning it is potentially worth a CP with the right home) but confusingly does not require a gadget skill pull (or even a Mad Scientist). At the same time you have the Agency "sword", "Sister Mary's Shotgun", not having a shotgun effect (or trait) but being eligible for a bonus from "Roll of Dimes".

Even without these (relatively minor) problems, the uniformity of effect just smacks of a disappointing imagination shortfall- certainly not a reassuring thought for those fans who had been hanging on to see what AEG would be able to do with the license. Given the length of time it took AEG to produce the Boot Hill set (cited by some as a factor in their eventual failure to revive the game) it was disappointing that the 9 new cards in the 300 card set were quite so boring.

There was also the problem of forcing this rather extreme game effect onto a storyline item that supposedly justified it, and it doesn't appear that the designers brought much in the way of imagination to this problem either. While we can fairly well imagine the holder of Corky's Sidearm to be inspired by the history of the weapon, quite why Mr Prim's Bust should provide a bonus of any kind, never mind be counted as a weapon, is way beyond my simple faculties.

A real shame and a wasted opportunity in a game relying so heavily on flavour and atmosphere for its appeal. Having said that, the card art was good, especially those portraying Wendy and Rachel, who never did find out what those buttons were for. Just on the wrong side of exploitative- nice...

Fortunately AEG were able to pick up the pace with its first "proper" new release, Ashes to Ashes, showing us there was plenty of new life in the old dawg yet.

Er, enough for three releases anyway. Hm.

## Deck Formats & Strategies

Its all very well bein' a mean gun-man, but ya ain't gonna hit anythin' with a crooked six-shooter! In Doomtowntown you could be a great player, but you'll also need to a great deck if you want to go far in this town. Theres some info on doin' that here, the points you'll need to consider and yet more o' the words them old gimmers'll be usin' if you try an' ask them about it.

Which you should- they may have been around town a while now, but theres times when a handful of experience is worth a bucketload of what you young'uns have got. Whatever that is... balls I guess. It certainly ain't looks or brains...

### ~ Combo

Ho, you really are new to these parts ain't ya! As in any Collectible Card Game a combo is a combination of cards that work really well together- sometimes obscenely well and in ways the designers never even thought of! The card's effects complement each other well, often negating a drawback of one card or multiplyin' its effect. Everyone's seekin' those "killer" combos that'll win 'em a game an' amaze their opponent (see "[Cheese](#)").

Effective use of combos is a major part of deck construction in any CCG, no less so in Doomtowntown. The strength of a card combo is measured not by its power but by its effectiveness. One very important

consideration- the fewer cards you need to make it happen, the more useful it will be. This is doubly true if one or more of the cards can stay in play (e.g. a Dude or a Spell) because unlike most Actions you don't have to have the card in your play hand to set the combo in motion.

This point can't be stressed this enough- fewer cards is a stronger combo. Its easy to make a "killer" combo that never happens!! You might even see some combinations described as "One-card Combos", which combine a single card effect with a home ability- doubly powerful since your home is always there and you only need wait for the other card to come into play.

To give yer an example... with an Original Maze Rat deck it is common is to give a Buffalo Rifle to "Buckets" Nelson. This allows "Buckets" to join a shootout at a strike and use his ability to create sharks- despite the fact that he ain't at the strike himself! This cheesy old favourite is a great combo "cos its easy to get into play- though it's by no means one of the easiest combos to pull off. The Maze Rat home is always in play and its where "Buckets" will spend most of his time anyway, and the rifle only costs you 2 Ghost Rock.

Technically a 3 card combo, you might only be waiting on the rifle since "Buckets" himself could be a starting dude (try throwing in a "Rooftop Sniper" for extra laughs). Note that this combo doesn't work with the Experienced "Buckets" (see [Coasters](#)). The moral here is look long and hard at your home card, "cos often your strongest combo effects will utilise these abilities.

Of course there are other considerations, like how expensive the required cards are and how useful they'll be in isolation if the combo doesn't come off. In a drawn out multi-player friendly you may well get a chance to see your masterpiece come together, but in a time-limited tournament game you'll usually just see them key cards whizzing by in yer lowball hands. Remember friend, any given combination of cards, no matter how devastating in potential effect, is only useful if it gets played!

Don't ask me fer the winning formula though- if I knew that I wouldn't be proppin' up the bar at the "Green-Eye" talkin' to you tenderfoots! Whyn'cha go [see UnclEvl](#) in his lab, he's always lookin' fer new subjects. I mean... er, students.

## ~ Cheese, Cheesy

"Whats all this talk of cheese?" I hear you say. "Now that theres no official sponsorship do you gotta play for slices of cheddar? US Championships, grand prize a whole camembert?" Nah, not quite.

Cheesy decks, or cheesy play in general, means the kind of play that leaves a rather chalky, salty taste in the mouth when you witness it tear your "balanced" deck to pieces, and will definitely make you sick if you are forced to eat too much. That's not to mention the nightmares. Combinations of cards that hit you over and over again, leaving you gasping at the audacity and vowing never again to invite that varmint for a friendly game of DT.

Usually it is that much sought after way of pulling out the most unlikely combinations that make no sense in the "flavour" of the game and the card, and have no relation to the way the card designers saw the cards being used- which is why its so hard to do yourself!

People have varying ideas on what exactly constitutes "cheese", but in general it is audacious card-abuse and a severe departure from the way Doomtown "should" be played. Well, sure, if ya wanna get all moralistic about it- but the cards are there to be played, right? No good gettin' uppity jus' "cos someone's better'n you at it!

A cheese deck will usually concentrate on one or two particularly strong [combos](#), or set of effects, over and over again (well, until you've lost) and will "always" win if you've not seen that style of deck cheese before.

Suddenly a successful cheeseball tactic means that everyone has to start building countering effects into their deck in order to keep their hand in (see [Metagame](#))... which can be hard work (and dull) even after the games producers get around to dropping a "[hoser](#)" in. And they ain't gonna be getting to that any time soon are they?

Not everyone uses the term in the same way. You'll most often find it used as a tongue-in-cheek rebuke to those serial card-abusers who consistently pull off these brilliant stunts and regularly turn the game on its head. They know who they are. Or for decks which repeat the same cracked [combo](#) in every game 'til everyone else loses the will to live. Some folks'll use the term in genuine outrage and annoyance, and almost interchangeably with "[broken](#)" - usually these are hombres without the wherewithal to built an effective counter. [Breakage](#) is generally regarded as a different kettle altogether, and though there is a fine line its certainly helpful to keep the terms distinct.

My advice to the big cheesers is the same advice I'd give to any purveyor of dairy produce- keep it fresh! First of all if you habitually play the same dodgy combos someone will hit on a way to break it. Secondly if you make every game a tedious stream of [Power GLR Landslides](#) or Curse-laden Sioux [Fondues](#) then you're likely to find yourself bushwacked, quite possibly by me.

Regardless of this, if you're headed for a big tournament, make sure you bring your crackers, cos these guys will have been fermenting all year.

## ~ **Metagame**

Bringing together a deck that'll wipe out yer little sister is one thing, but taking it to a proper tournament with real cowboys in is always an eye-openin' experience. Unless your little sister is "Killer" Kerry Brittenstein of course...

Its not just a matter of those hombres bein' smarter, or more experienced, or jus' plain dirtier'n you (though they are). They've been playin' a different game to you, developing new plays and counter-plays that you and your playing group hadn't ever considered. As described earlier ([Cheese](#)), they'll be using weird strategies and combos and will have built their decks not only to defeat yours, but to defeat decks that have been built with their particular brand of mayhem in mind and so will have cranked it up a notch or two. This leaves you (who wasn't prepared at all) flappin' around like a fish in the breeze.

Look at it this way- its like evolution. Someone develops a strategy, say, puttin' a whole lot of influence reduction cards in their deck. Other people they play with might try'n emulate this style, or counter it, or both. Not only will yer weak influence reduction effects be completely useless against players accustomed to countering much stronger effects, but you yerself'll be unprepared for the level of the effect people are using to get past those defences (and so you're on the way to losing in 1-2 turns).

This can be used to your advantage- if you know what the current trend is you guess what many people'll be packing and what others'll have in their medical bag to counter it. Once everyone's obsessed with this metagame development you can turn the tables by throwing in something they never expected and can't counter, 'cos they were too busy worrying about the old big thing. You might even luck out and be playing a devastating combination that your play group is rather weary of but these guys will themselves be unprepared for. You come in from a different environment, with different strategies, and either lay everything to waste or get consumed by the native wildlife.

Turtle decks popular at the moment? You'll need a really aggressive shooter then, or try to to take advantage of the opponent's passivity by doin' your thing faster and better. Lots of aggressive Sweetrock decks around? Let them worry about your first attack while you build up for a last minute [Landslide](#). Original Maze Rats popular? Build in-town deeds!

And that's the metagame, not only building your own deck but trying to take into account what the current trends are, and then trying to second guess everyone else's reaction to the current trends. This adds a whole new level to the deck-building process, as you need to think how you'll counter the current "trendy" decks without leavin' yerself open to an older strategy or a mean new combo.

Metagame tips? Hey, I been tryin' ta keep ma head down. One thing is I seen a lot of strangers come breezin' into town with big stacked decks an' lookin' for a shootout, only to get shot down by Cheatin' cards. Seems no out of towners are used to punishin' cheaters so much, even though the Cheatin' cards are amongst the most powerful in the game! What did that sign say outside the Sherriif's Office? "DON'T CHEAT!". You missed it? Shame...

## ~ **Card Pool**

Now yer card pool is quite simply the number of cards you've got to choose from when puttin' together a deck. Some folks've been around this town fer a long time now, and have massed up a whole bunch of cards- filling their safes, under their floorboards and stuffed into their pillows. If you're new to the game you probly ain't gonna be able to rival them fer that (though if yer local store is sellin' up its stock you might have a chance), which inevitably means they've got an advantage over you should you meet them in a tournament.

Don't worry too much about it though. First of all DT's construction format means you're not at such a disadvantage- you can only use 52 cards at a time after all, and only four of each one. Secondly its quite possible to enjoy Doomtown without spending bucketloads on it, and if theres a card or two you've got to have for your deck theres plenty of folks selling or trading singles- perhaps theres a cardmart near you?

## ~ **Turtle, Turtling-**

In DT dudes who sit at home can't (normally) be called out, so that's what many of dem yellerebellys will do. Turtling is just that, sitting yer dudes in a safe spot (usually home), biding yer time til the cards come together for a big push in the later stages. Don't knock it- if you don't stick it out it won't get shot off! A turtling deck is built around this premise, a slow-burner that usually starts off weak (at least shootin'-wise) but once the cards have built up (particularly by attaching goods or spells to those turtlin' dudes) they either come out blazin' or overwhelm you from home with big influence dudes, hefty hexes and expensive control point deeds.

Just sitting at home is no guarantee of your safety in Gomorrah, so turtle decks will also carry cards that block a more aggressive player's deck: Sherrifs Watching, Heavy Rain and Christmas Day are favourites, along with several protective spells. Theres lots of ways to interfere with a turtler, from interrupting their supply of ghost rock (or just plain stealin' it) to forcin' shootouts in the early stages. But remember- no shootin' at Christmas! That includes you Mr Wrath.

## ~ **Cycling**

An easily overlooked issue in deck construction is how quickly you can cycle through your cards. Its also a tricky balance to get right. One of the most important factors in a winning deck is how quickly it can bring out all the cards it needs to complete its strategy- indeed in tournament play the most successful decks will go all out for a quick win, almost ignoring your deck. Whether you're waiting for a few key cards or jus' buildin' up your forces, if your opponent gets there first you'll lose. Remember when building your deck that you can only normally discard one card a turn, and its very easy to get your hand clogged up with cards you can't play.

Obvious as it may seem, you can only play Shootout Actions in a shootout, you can only play costly cards if you've got a supply of ghost rock and you can only play Cheatin" cards if your opponent cheats. No matter how essential they seemed when you built the deck, if you aren't careful you'll end up with a play hand full of unplayable cards, and wishing for a few cheap Deeds just to get your hand moving again. When including Actions, especially when the values are important to your shootout hands, give special consideration to whether you will be able to play them quickly. In the early stages of the game you'll probably be short on cash, so don't get too caught up in the romance of those expensive Dudes n" Deeds- they'll only show up when you can't afford to bring them out. Getting stuck with Gadgets and Spells before the appropriately skilled Dudes enter play (or after they have been Kidnapped/ Ambushed) is another surefire way to cause a jam.

Spell decks are great at cycling "cos spells"re (usually) free, provided you have enough of the requisite spell user to bring them out (be very careful about only including one Huckster, Blessed or Shamen if there are several spells you want to bring into play). Some card effects will help you to cycle through your play hand, and these can allow you to include more "late game" cards without crippling your early game. "Buckets" and Dolores Whateley are very useful for cycling out cards if you can force shootouts at favourable locations, while the Automaton Factory doesn't even need you to do that. Lady Luck, meanwhile, allows you to discard a number of cards at lowball and can easily make the difference between stagnation and success.

## ~ Degeneration

No, not the Harrowed [Hoser](#), we're talking about a theme linked to [Cycling](#). A degenerating deck will aim quickly get rid of most of its cards, either by putting them into play, acing them or hiding them around the place (like in the Tea and Tobacco shop, or perhaps in the Storage Shed).

Now why'd you wanna do that? Well sometimes its a nuisance havin" all those cards to go through before you can pick up the ones you need. Especially if we're talking about actions you want to use a lot of, or the cards you're wantin" to make up your shootout hand.

Puttin" a whole lot of of the same cards in your deck is one way of makin" sure you can get to them. The other is to get rid of all the other cards quickly, so that you're only left with a straight flush in clubs and enough actions to force a shootout and to weaken your opponent's shooters.

Still not convinced? Take a look at how the [Endless Rage](#) deck used rapid degeneration to get to a tasty position.

Sure you need deeds to bring up your income, and dudes who can enter play once theres enough cash to pay "em. But get it done quickly and be left with just what you need- your end-game actions and a solid shootout hand.

## ~ Denial, Denier

A denier or denial card is aimed at preventin" your opponent from enjoying the benefit of a certain aspect of the game, hopefully one that is critical to their deck's performance. A deed denier, for example, might look to remove deeds in play (Arson, Foreclosure), snatch control/ ownership of deeds (Claim Jumper, Hostile Takeover, Extortion) or cripple deeds to reduce their effectiveness (Jailbreak, Termite Infestation).

The Den of Eastern Delights...  
a heavy duty Event hoser.  
Card art by Mike Raabe  
Used by permission.

Denial cards can be very effective against certain decks, and are useful as a reaction to [metagame](#) issues. Be careful to only choose cards that will see use, as denial cards often require the targets to be

present before they can leave your hand!

### ~ Lose to Win

One particularly mean trick you can play on your hot shootin' enemies is to lure them into a gunfight with some weak target (AKA bait or cannon-fodder) and let them win- only to pull out a Reaction that lets you ace their prime dudes anyway. A Deaths Head Joker will kill someone regardless of the hand rank it appears in, but more insidiously a "Take Ya With Me" or "Hot Lead Flyin'" will, if correctly built into a deck's construction, often give you a better return on a shootout than a deck built towards actually winnin' the combats.

It'll also have a significant psychological effect on your opponent, as they avoid engaging your weaker dudes even when you don't have the dreaded "suicide bomber" cards in your play hand. Its particularly galling for them if you manage to save your dudes with magic or reactions while theirs remain pushin' up daisies. Ouch! Better still, engage them with Token Dudes who're always happy to take a fall for you. This is a very good reason to start packin' "No Funny Stuff" if you want to go shootin' up the opposition!

### ~ Rage, Endless Rage

When "Eureka's Rage" (ER) was originally released, I gotta admit I didn't give it much attention. A handy little cycling card, it actually allowed you to refill your hand provided ER was the last card in your hand when you played it. An original ruling that you could play the card with no effect if it wasn't the last in your hand, combined with a greater vision than mine, led to a (small) explosion of Rage Decks which would cycle through a vast number of cheap cards in very quick succession. The ultimate expression of this ethos is the Endless Rage deck (Chris Foley) though in fairness our very own **UnclEvl** was torturing us with a similar Sweetrock deck at around the time.

The Endless Rage basically uses extreme [degeneration](#) techniques to get itself down to 6 or so cards that are then recycled indefinitely, until your opponent is a quivering wreck or you get a .44 between the eyes. After 2 or 3 turns (oh yes) your entire deck is made up of two copies of ER and a handful of other easily played actions, like "Bad Tequila", "Rumours" and "Reserves". You play all the cheap actions, play ER last, pick up all the actions again, play them again. Mmm.

"Reserves" only gives you 1GR, but if you play it 20 times you're gettin' pretty wealthy. "Rumours" is cumulative, so if you play 5 copies on "Howard Findley" he's still a nobody once he leaves home. Once you've got a million GR and all your opponent's dudes have no influence you only need 1 CP to win- though you probably have a few big CP deeds stuck under the "Stagecoach office" just for something to spend that GR on. Luverly.

Of course they [MRP](#)"d ER after that, so now it aces itself. Hohum.

### ~ Fondue

You might see "Fondue" in a posted deck's title- this is "a dish of flavoured melted cheese" and mostly refers to the event driven decks that were running riot in the late 90s (see Ghost Town and Flock Fondue) and should be viewed as a warning that playing the deck, especially in polite company, won't make you many friends!

## ~ Flock Fondue

The original Fondue deck was a cheesy tournament winner, developed by Chris Foley in the late nineties. You won't hear too much about it nowadays, but just so you don't look blank-eyed if the subject is raised... For you tinhorns who weren't around at the time this and similar decks caused quite a stir, indeed enough to force the makers to change the rules of the game (see [Headline Rule](#))!

Basic Engine- low value starting dudes, high pulling deck. 4x "It Was A Mountain Lion" and 4x "Los Diabolos Stampede". "Run Outta Town" removes Influence in Cheatin" decks, with "Rumours", "Babble On", "Blood Curse" and "Mind Twist" in fours to finish any influence you thought you could bring to bear on the situation and "Calm" (x4) to maintain the essential turtle element.

We're talking about a reliance on Events that means the deck suffers under the [Headline Rule](#) and newer event [hosers](#), but it still in the back of many peoples minds when they build a deck (and you could still rip through a few decks built on the assumption that the Fondue won't make a reappearance).

See Chris's writeup for the Flock Fondue at the Crow's Nest. He even tells you how to beat it! What a nice feller.

## ~ Fear Fondue, Sioux Fondue

More cheese theme decks, the Fear Fondue was particularly popular when the Fear Level was starting at 7 a few years back, making the Whateley Family Estate the only home that could start the game with two Control Points(!). A few events and hexes to raise the Fear Level (before there were any reliable ways to lower it apart from "Church Raisin") and "Lord Grimeleys Manor", which not only increases the Fear Level itself but is worth extra control points when the Fear Level is 10.

The Sioux Fondue was another popular Fondue format, featuring big events and [influence reduction](#). Strong for the Sioux because of the influence the spirits can have on events ("Ask the Spirits"; and ";Apache Devil Dancers"), the strength of "Curse"; (still one of the best influence reducers in the game) and the relative strength of their low value dudes (at the time at least).

## ~ Ghost Town

Once upon a time some clever cowboy worked out that you didn't actually need any dudes to win the game provided you could wipe out your opponents before they could come back with any control points.

Like the [Fondue](#) decks, Events like "It Was A Mountain Lion" and "Los Diabolos Stampede" (usually four of each) allow you to slaughter your opponents while your dudes are in the next town. Remember the only drawback of these cards, and the only reason they were built to be so powerful, is that they might hit your own dudes. If you ain't got none...

Other cards will prevent opponents moving or drop their influence, and you just use all the money you saved on hiring hands to throw down a whole load of expensive deeds. Hold some dudes in your hand just in case your opponent gets out some control points early, and then you're heading for a 2nd or 3rd turn win.

That smart hombre was Andrew S. Davidson (you'll see a likeness of him on the DUO card "Anderson Consulting"), and you can check out his history of the decks evolution in the [August '99](#) folder of the newsgroup archive, after he won the '99 World Championships. Andrew played a similar deck in the '98 competition, and came very close, but it only made the big waves when he became World

Champion with it.

Remember young'uns this was before the "Headline Rule" where only one event per player per turn goes off- in fact this style of deck (and other event driven cheese) is the entire reason this rule was introduced! Ah, now it makes more sense to you. Imagine you took the old injun's advice and start 2 influence dudes and 2 shooters. In the first turn you could get hit by LDS and IWAML and your whole game is crippled. Turn 2 and you've got no dudes! If your opponent doesn't already have more control than your influence, with 20 odd ghost rock to spend.

This could still be a winner in your local play area, if just for surprise value, but it isn't really a viable competition strategy any more. Andrew used the original Sweetrock home, as this allows you to select your lowball hand to a limited extent- a Sioux variant can be quite powerful too.

### ~ **Influence Reduction**

The simple premise here is to build a deck that keeps pace with its opponent while also building up cards to sap their influence. Rather than plain shootin' down your dudes the typical influence sapper will use spells and actions in obscene quantities to knock the influence of your dudes down to nothing. After all it's a whole lot easier than tryin' ta shoot you. Cowards!

A dude with no Influence can't control a deed, and a dude with reduced influence will have trouble getting control of the deed back, but worst of all you'll find yourself unable to prevent your opponent's flurry of Control Point deeds winning them the game.

### ~ **Dudes as Deeds**

The principle of Dudes as Deeds is to avoid the need for those pesky Deeds in a deck. Deeds, after all, are a nuisance to maintain, you're constantly having to defend them from other gangs tryin' ta control 'em, and theres plenty a Deed [Deniers](#) available to them. It's especially a problem when you want to turtle away at home, 'cos it's hard ta raise funds without deeds, but you need to defend them to collect.

The original Blackjacks home is a grand vehicle for the Dudes as Deeds principle, containing as it does the method for generating cash in the home card ability. Now though everybody can have a piece of the action provided they can pull out a couple of Investment Machines- indeed if you're facing an original Collegium deck they can use their home ability for Control Points, thus obviating the need for deeds altogether!

Strictly speaking thats Gadgets as Deeds of course.

Dudes as Deeds can be a pain if you've brought along a number of Deed [Deniers](#), or if your strategy depends on taking over your opponents deeds (Maze Rat decks will suffer particularly here), but is vulnerable to the same types of play as any other [turtler](#), and can take a while to build up momentum. Once someone gets a couple of Investment Machines up and running you'd better be close to delivering your killer blow, 'cos they'll be buyin' out the Sweetrock Board O' Directors before too long.

### ~ **Brawl Decks**

Now Brawl doesn't seem like such a powerful card does it? Start a shootout any number of turns, but noone gets hurt. Hm. Useful if ya wanna clear out the enemy without takin' a risk I guess...

Now take a look at the third Sioux Union home, Spirit Warriors.

Ironic isn't, that the most aggressive Sioux Home, and the only one that confers no bonus for Shamen, should be called "Spirit Warriors". D"ya think?

#kof. Anyway I digress.

"Surely", you're saying, "Surely you aren't suggesting we use the proud Spirit Warrior's home ability to start brawls in which our Dudes can't be aced but our opponent's can? Thats soooo cheesy!"

No of course I'm not suggesting that, any more than I would suggest you equip your warriors with Stallions, so they can move to your opponents home and start a brawl there as one action, in order that your opponent doesn't even get the chance to call out your dudes normally. What do you take me for? Exploiting overpowered homes in such a manner. Shame on you.

Doesn't have to be Spirit Warriors either, its just that they've got brawler shennanigans built into their home ability (you remember [what I told you](#) about that?). As theres no law against bringin' weapons to a barfight (well, none that gets enforced anyways) its a simple matter to go in with a couple of shotguns and plaster your enemies over the walls. Its only dudes aced for losing a round of the shootout that're saved, "member?

Dirty tricksters like Experienced Deputy Templeton (he"s experienced alright) or Flim are constantly forgettin"the etiquette of a fist fight, but anyone with a shotgun can spoil a nice civilized riot without riskin" their own neck.

## ~ **Swarm Decks**

As you may have picked up by now, a lot of deck construction strategies aim to force through a win not by having a slight edge but by going to extremes to overpower the opponent. A swarm deck, therefore is packed full o" cheap dudes that"ll be spreading across the game in an alarming fashion in a matter of turns.

Having many poor dudes can often be an advantage over a smaller number of good quality, well fed hombres, not least because they're dirt cheap an" can cover more ground. Though very sensitive to shotgun rounds, low-to-mid value dudes are usually also quite easy to bring back around with Medicine or Healing Hands- if you can be bothered... after all, these guys are pretty expendable.

A swarm can afford to start shootouts it might not win, especially if theres a chance to take out one of your senior shootists with a freak shot (often a spade flush). There"s plenty to make your opponent feel the superiority of numbers too, with cards like "Caught in the Crossfire" or "We've Got Ya Surrounded". Your opponent will probably be fearful of [Lose to Win](#) strategies too, even if you ain"t playin" them (which you probly are)! A [Gang Weapon](#), "Vermin Problem" or "Leopard and Her Cubs" are then just icing.

Especially strong for Maze Rats and Sioux (for the prevalence of cheap dudes in those Outfits), a Swarm just needs to make sure its got enough income for those signin" up fees and then it"ll be floodin" all over the town.

## ~ **Landslide/ Power GLR**

By the same principle as a [swarm](#), a landslide deck will churn out deeds faster than the opponent can deal with them. The aim is to win the control battle by merit of the enemy not having enough dudes sitting on them to make any difference, even if they do have the more aggressive shooting deck.

For an effective landslide you really need some help from your home card- dishing out that level of Control that quickly is really expensive. Once you get started you should have a large income of

course, but you need to have been building your real estate portfolio quicker than any other gangs can send their "inspectors" around to stifle your enterprise.

The original Flock and Sweetrock homes were quite good for Landslides, given the free Control Points for what would otherwise be fairly mediocre strikes. But nothing compares to the power of possibly the most ridiculously overpowered home card in the game "Sweetrock: Gomorrah Ltd Rail Lines" (SW:GLR). With a full 2GR off the cost of *every* deed (basically a free and unlimited "Chinese Day Labourers"), plus the ability to ace those deeds for more than the initial investment in the unlikely event of a cashflow problem, Power GLR is quite a force in the modern game. You don't need to rely on Strikes either, which are always prone to various interventions. Indeed, in the right hands its more like a force of nature, and will likely be combined with powerful [Turtling](#) and [Influence Reduction](#) options, especially "Dehydration" if playing with strikes.

## Tournament Terminology & Formats

Now theres nothin' the folks of Gomorrah love more than a good ol' fashioned western showdown. When it comes to showin' for a tournament, you've normally got a simple format- standard deck construction rules (52 cards plus jokers and only four of each card in a deck), with a series of timed duels makin' up a knockout tournament to determine the winner. The first half of the show'll be a few rounds of [Swiss](#) to sort out whos man (or woman) enough to ta contend fer the top places.

But sometimes of course people like to try somethin' a bit diff'rent, an' theres always some crazy showman with a new twist, and some crazy tournament variations have emerged from [Bicycle](#) to the [Town Stack](#).

Don't worry, if anyone is pullin' off sumthin' funny they'll be bound to explain it all in full. But jus' so you're up to speed (and in case you wanna run your own sideshow with a few different twists o' your own) heres the lingo those circus hands'll be usin' when they next come to your town.

### ~ Bicycle Format

The bicycle format don't mean you play on them new-fangled "perambulator" gadgets- it means that every deck in play will be a "legal" deck o' cards- like we all used to play with before those tricky hucksters and grifters all showed up. 52 cards, all a different suit and value, and two jokers (if you wannem).

You'll probably find less use for those Cheatin' cards, but then some folks play double dirty and realise they can get away with a "Marked Cards" or "Trick Deck"... and that's all you're getting for free here.

### ~ Double-Barrelled Format

Another variant which allows only 2 copies of each card to be used in a deck, instead of the normal four. Should cut down on the amount of [Cheese](#) going on I'd think.

### ~ Kansas City Format

A trickier format than the Bicycle, folks from Kansas are apparently very down on cheaters. So much so that anyone revealing a cheating hand automatically loses the game! Some gunslingers're still crazy enough to chance a few "doubles" to get that combat edge, while others just pull out their bicycles and smile to themselves.

The idea, according to Ed Bolme (inventor of the format) is that if yer basic Doomtowntown is the Weird

West, and Bicycle format is them East Coast dudes, playin' by the rules, then Kansas City (old-time gateway to the West) is halfway between the two. Apparently Ed was inspired by a line in Mel Brooks' "Blazing Saddles"...

Unlike out West there's absolutely no need for Cheatin' cards in the mid-west, and a "Trick Deck" is suicide! Don't get caught, even a "Swapped Decks" won't save you in Kansas City!

### ~ **Revolver Format**

In a revolver competition players bring along more than one deck and must play with a different deck in each round of the competition. The rules might vary as to how many decks you need to bring (six has a pleasant ring and is correspondingly popular, but is a lot of cardage for new players), but you must play each deck before you are allowed to return to one. You'll usually be allowed to transfer your Jokers between the decks too, but no other cards.

### ~ **Storyline Tournaments**

A lot of card games have an ongoing storyline running alongside the card play, adding flavour to the game and making the characters depicted on those little bits of card seem a bit more real. Worked real good in DT too, due to the richness of the background inherited from Pinnacle's setting and with no small thanks to a fantastic writing team headed by Patrick Kapera.

Now a storyline tournament is one where the outcome actually decides part of the upcoming story. The winner not only sees his or her favoured faction increase their impact on the game's story, but they would often get to decide on a key aspect of the story's ongoing development.

Oh how proud we were when GenCon UK 2000 became the first DT storyline tournament outside of the US! I was there you know, and I didn't come last either, not by a small shot. OK I finished behind Maynard, who spent most of the tournament asleep, but that wasn't my fault. I was just unlucky on the day.

"Course theres no more storyline tournaments now- sorry chum you missed it- hadn't you heard, boomtime's over! But that shouldn't stop you enjoying a crack at one of the prestigious national or regional events. You're bound to finish ahead of me after all!

### ~ **Sidebar, Side Table**

In some tournament for some card games I gather there is an option to hold a "side table" of cards, that you may swap in or out before a game according to your knowledge of the opponent or just how if your strategy is bottoming out. With the Home cards being so important in DT (and becoming more so) swapping cards into your deck before a game would have a major impact.

It is not legal in any format currently played, and suspected offenders may find themselves pistol-whipped and thrown in jail til we can sober up the hangin' judge. That's not to say you couldn't run yer own tournament with a legal side-bar, hell anything goes s'long as y'all have fun, though it'd be a unique event. But if you're going to the big tourneys, be sure to leave yer saddle-bags behind the bar.

### ~ **Town Stack**

So apart from the very cheesy decks, or the odd card thrown in for a heart value noone really trusts Events to do what is intended. Good thing really, Events were always meant to have quite powerful effects that're unpredictable, and the [Headline Rule](#) has managed to redress the balance rather well.

Problem is an Event is very often seen as being a poor use of a card slot, given the more controllable (and still reasonably effective) other card effects you could be using. Which is a shame, because events are rather cool, by and large.

In a Town Stack tournament we get around this problem by slapping a whole lot of events into the game for free. Everybody takin' part brings along a number of Event cards (usually two) which go into a single pile at the start of the game. At the beginning of each round the organisers draw an event from this pile- and it then applies to each game on each table as if it had come up in lowball!

This lends an air of total unpredictability to the game, enough to keep everyone on their toes and maybe, just maybe, maybe, present the cheesemongers with some problems that the more balanced decks are better placed to deal with.

### ~ **Swiss Format**

This is not a format of constraints on deck construction but a way of determining who plays who as opposed to a random draw. Heres how it works:

ROUND 1 - Random draw of all players and they play 1-1 for round one.

ROUND 2 - Players who have the same points are put against each other.

Control points from last game decide ties.

ROUND 3 - Players play the person with the same points or nearest they haven't played yet.

ROUND 4 - Players play the person with the same points or nearest they haven't played yet.

ETC....Or until ALL players have played ALL other players. So with a minimum 4 rounds and 12 players you will not get to play everybody if only 4 games are played. Extra rounds are added if time allows.

After round 4, new games will be played as long as there is enough time to play the final game between the top 2 players and the 3rd & 4th players.

In the case of any tied positions, total number of CONTROL points gained in previous games will decide the winner, highest taking precedence.

If that's tied, number of games won, if that's tied errr....I'll think of something! *Sy "Blackjack" Hughes, Team SELWG Fri Sep 11 1998, with an early attempt to explain Swiss format.*

What you'll usually see is a number of rounds of Swiss to get a "cut" of four, eight or sixteen players (depending on the size of the event) who then play a knockout style tournament (quarter-finals, semi-finals, final) to decide the eventual winner. Tiebreak points are a matter for tournament organisers to decide (there will be a lot of players with the same points!), in the UK its usually Control **and** Influence.

This is quite important to bear in mind, as if you have a choice between holding on to a strong draw (where you both have a lot of Control and Influence) and trying to force a win you may find the tiebreak a better option than risking a wipeout.

### ~ **Boot Hill Legal**

Once AEG had released the Boot Hill they had a crazy idea to ban a number of the older cards from official tournaments. "How comes that?" you say. The idea here was to bring the tournaments in line with the storyline, so that any dude "killed" in the official storyline (prior to the release of Boot Hill) would not appear in [storyline tournaments](#). After all, they weren't in the story any more so you couldn't really use a game they were involved in as inspiration for a story.

Well some people in town got all riled up, cos after all not only would they have to keep track of which cards (and thus which decks) were Boot Hill Legal, they'd also be prevented from playing some of their fave cards in the most prestigious events, thus devaluing the cards (which they'd paid good money for). Some saw it as a cynical marketing ploy by AEG to sell them new cards (though in truth if Alderac had been a bit more cynical you might well have an active game today- oops).

Another nuisance was that not only were there two Boot Hill formats: Boot Hill Strict, in which only cards released in the BH and subsequent sets could be used; and Boot Hill Extended, in which you could play certain cards from before the BH release, provided they had not been officially "killed"- including Deeds that had been destroyed. They never quite got around to producing an official list of the cards this covered, although several fans produced ad hoc lists which highlighted the alarming number of dudes and deeds killed (under often bizarre and plot-irrelevant manners) during the end of the previous story-arc. But in fairness Boot Hill Strict wasn't intended as a main tournament format just a possible format for some to attempt.

Other folk said it was cool, a good new challenge, a helpful equalizer for newbies with smaller (or just newer) [card pools](#) and made perfect sense in the context. Doesn't matter anyway, "cos it became clear there would be no storyline tournaments in 2001 anyway, so the rules never came into effect and theres never been (to my knowledge) a significant Boot Hill legal tournament.

Tell me if I'm wrong, I can easily append an "except" to that paragraph!