

ACES & EIGHTS



SHOWDOWN

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

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WELCOME TO ACES & EIGHTS

Through the gunsmoke and over the slumped loser of the shootout, beyond the sprawl of grazing buffalo on the high plains, above the din of a saloon in full swing and farther than the blue sky atop the open range lies the Shattered Frontiers of the Aces & Eights game. A game about the daring adventures and everyday lives of people in the Old West, Aces & Eights lets you tell the tale of the West that could have been, in your own words, deeds and history. The Aces & Eights game covers rugged cowboys, brave Indians, murderous desperados, determined lawmen, sturdy prospectors, powerful rail barons and all of the characters we think of when we watch a good western movie or read books about the expansion of the western frontier in America.

Don't worry though, you don't need to know much about this time period to enjoy the game, although western aficionados will certainly find this game engrossing, to say the least. If you consider yourself a western history buff, you might want to set aside what you know and open your mind. Aces & Eights is set in the West That Never Was, an alternative history created to maximize the potential of the game by freeing the future from the inevitable reality of the true West. While the setting is firmly entrenched in historical accuracy, a few small

changes in the history of North American politics at significant moments in history has created a very believable alternative history of North America. Sprung from small changes are new nations, businesses and a slight acceleration in arms technology.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

In order to play Aces & Eights Showdowns you will need scratch paper, a pencil and a set of standard polyhedral dice with the following sides (4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 20). Multiple dice of certain types are helpful but not necessary. Throughout these rules we may refer to the different die types as "xd6" where "x" is the number of dice of a particular type you should roll. So 3d6 means roll three six-sided dice. A standard deck of poker playing cards are needed to resolve combat in the game as is the Shot Clock™ overlay provided with the rules. Other handy but non-essential items include: a table to play on, miniature figures to represent your characters and terrain such as model town buildings or simulated vegetation or boulders. Most game, model or hobby shops carry items like this to enhance your game experience. Finally, if you use miniatures, you'll want to use a ruler or tape to measure ranges of weapons during shootouts.





CHARACTER GENERATION

The Showdown rules are a complete set of skirmish level western miniatures rules as well as the backbone of gunfight resolution for the Aces and Eights: Shattered Frontiers role playing game. Consequently, the Showdown rules allow for gunfights and other short scenarios and thus do not contain detailed character generation rules. For ongoing campaigns, you'll eventually need the Aces & Eights: Shattered Frontier rpg core rulebook. But for situations where professions, skills, long-term goals and reputation merit little consideration, the following character generation rules will do just fine.

SPEED AND ACCURACY

Every gunfighter has two primary traits: Speed and Accuracy. Determine your character's Speed score by rolling two six-sided dice and consulting Table 1-1: Speed and Accuracy Scores. Next, generate your character's Accuracy score by rolling two six-sided dice and again consulting Table 1-1: Speed and Accuracy Scores.

For example, Mark rolls two dice for a result of 5 (a three and a two). This means his gunfighter's Speed score is a 1, a tad on the slow side. Luckily, he rolls a 5 and then a 6 for his

Accuracy, meaning this hombre has a 2 Accuracy. If he can survive the first shots from his opponent, he stands a pretty good chance of hitting what he aims at.

TABLE 1-1: SPEED AND ACCURACY SCORES

<u>Result</u>	<u>Speed Score</u>	<u>Accuracy Score</u>
2	3	-3
3	2	-2
4-5	1	-1
6-8	0	0
9-10	-1	1
11	-2	2
12	-3	3

HIT POINTS

Your gunfighter can only take so many bullets before the life expires right out of him. In game terms this is represented by "hit points" or "HP." Whenever your gunfighter suffers damage (such as by getting shot up), he loses hit points from his total. Your character begins with 20 plus the roll of one d4 (for 21-24 total).



GUNFIGHTS

Josiah ducked his head so as to hide his face with his hat brim as he made his way toward the door. If he could get out of the saloon, he might be able to mount up and get out of town before being spotted. Keeping his head down and eyes watching the floorboards, he made his way across the saloon. At about half-way the routine noises of the saloon weakened and then fell completely silent. It could mean only one thing. Josiah slowly lifted his gaze and saw the cause of the hush – Rodrigo Baca Guitierrez stood just inside the doorway. A chill worked its way up his back and darn-near moved his hat. The hardened killer from Mexico had sworn he'd finish Josiah the next time they met, and this was that time. The silence broke by tell-tale clatter of chairs and tables scraping and shifting along the floor, followed by the shuffling of men trying to clear out of the way. Without a word, both fighters slowly moved their hands toward their guns, each mentally preparing for the first move.

Looks like ol' Josiah has gotten himself into a gunfight. From here, the action will turn ugly sooner rather than later. In the following sections, we'll cover the various ways of handling a gunfight – for better or for worse. These sections appear in a modular fashion so that your game need not incorporate all of the rules at once. Play with only the rules you feel comfortable handling. When these become second nature, you can add more advanced rules – or not, as you prefer.

The Aces & Eights gunfight system is a realistic tabletop simulation of a Wild West shootout. The fundamental premise of the system is that a shooter always aims for a specific location or target (e.g., the “rustler’s gun hand”) rather than an abstract target (e.g., the “rustler”). The worse the shooter’s shot, the further off from his mark his shot flies. This also means that a very near miss can be just as deadly as a bull’s eye. The shooter determines his precise shot location by using the Target Silhouettes and Shot Clocks that come with the Showdowns game.

A split second during a gunfight can sometimes mean the difference between survival and a painful -- or even mortal -- wound. Thus, time is always handled in tenths of seconds. Each tenth of a second is referred to hereafter as a “Count.” Everything from drawing a weapon to reloading to crawling behind the water trough occurs in tenths of seconds or Counts.

TAKING ACTION

If you’re an avid game player, chances are you’re used to choosing an action or actions on your “turn” -- probably from a list of allowable actions or categories of actions. In contrast, much like in real life, in the Aces & Eights Showdowns rules your character can attempt any action he wants at any time. For example, in real life, to walk across the bar, you think

miniature or state which character you plan to target. Note that in order to shoot at a target, the target must be visible. Specific advanced rules for checking this sort of thing come under the Line of Sight rules later in this book.

2. PLACE THE CENTER OF THE SHOT CLOCK OVER THE INTENDED TARGET LOCATION ON THE TARGET SILHOUETTE

Place the Shot Clock over the Target Silhouette in the exact spot you want to hit. For example, if you want to disarm a drunken brawler that drew on your partner, you can try to shoot his gun or hand. On the other hand, if your target is a known horse thief you might feel a powerful urge to target the face (or perhaps knee if you're of a mind to have a hanging).

3. ADD ALL ACCURACY MODIFIERS

Now that you've chosen the target and location, add your modifiers. Modifiers are covered in some detail hereafter, and include things like range, visibility, movement, personal Accuracy, wounds, etc.

4. TAKE THE SHOT

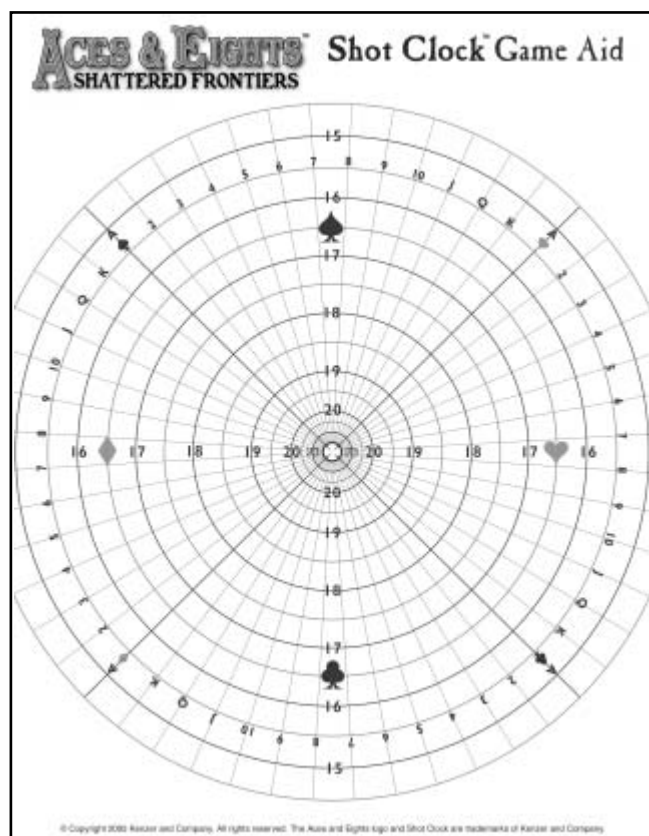
Roll a d20 "To-Hit" your mark and add to it all of your modifiers. (Note: these modifiers can sometimes be negative, thus deducting from the roll). You'll need a modified 25 or higher to hit the exact spot you've targeted, while a roll of 14 or less is a miss. (Note: if you roll a 20 on the die, immediately roll a d6-1 (one 6-sided die minus one) and add the resultant 0 to 5 to your To-Hit roll. Continue rolling (and adding the results!) if you get a result of 6 on the d6. Thus even at extreme ranges and with a poor shooter, there's always a chance -- albeit, perhaps a mite small one -- that a shot will strike true).

5. DRAW A CARD TO DETERMINE EXACT SHOT LOCATION (IF NECESSARY)

If your total To-Hit roll was 24 or less, you'll need to draw a card from a standard poker deck to determine where your shot went. Note that the closer you were to 25, the closer to center the shot was; the poker card merely determines which direction the shot went astray (spades = high, clubs = low, diamonds = left, hearts = right)

6. ROLL DAMAGE

If the shot hits anywhere on the target, roll damage (see "Wounding" for details).



The Aces & Eights Shot Clock

Table 2-3: Shooting Procedure

- Declare general target
- Place the center of the Shot Clock over the intended target location on the Target Silhouette
- Add all Accuracy modifiers
- Take the shot (i.e., roll a d20 and add all modifiers to the roll)
- Draw a card to determine exact shot location (if necessary)
- (if necessary) roll damage

Table 2-7: Gunshot Wound Effects (continued)

Shoulder
Wound Severity

<u>Wound Severity</u>	<u>Effect</u>
<2	no effect
3	no effect
4	1 in 3 chance to drop held items (i.e. gun)
5	2 in 3 chance to drop held items (i.e. gun)
6	drop held items (i.e. gun)
7	drop held items (i.e. gun)
8	drop held items (i.e. gun); broken bone
9	drop held items (i.e. gun); broken bone
10	drop held items (i.e. gun); broken bone
11	drop held items (i.e. gun); arm mangled, severe bleeding
12	Arm mangled, severe bleeding, unconscious

Neck

Wound Severity

<u>Wound Severity</u>	<u>Effect</u>
<2	no effect
3	no effect
4	Severe bleeding
5	Severe bleeding
6	Severe bleeding, 1 in 2 chance for unconsciousness
7	Severe bleeding, 1 in 2 chance for unconsciousness
8	3 in 4 chance for unconsciousness, severe bleeding
9	Unconscious, severe bleeding
10	Unconscious, severe bleeding
11	Spinal cord hit, victim is a quadraped, unconscious
12	Spinal cord severed, victim decapitated (dead)

Face

Wound Severity

<u>Wound Severity</u>	<u>Effect</u>
<2	no effect
3	1 in 2 chance of becoming dazed
4	3 in 4 chance of becoming dazed
5	stunned
6	1 in 2 chance for unconsciousness, d4 broken teeth
7	1 in 2 chance for unconsciousness, d6 broken teeth
8	3 in 4 chance for unconsciousness, d8 broken teeth
9	unconscious, d8 broken teeth
10	Unconscious, severe bleeding, if character recovers he is horribly deformed and scares children
11	Face mostly blown off (dead)
12	Face blown off (dead), victim unrecognizable

Head

Wound Severity

<u>Wound Severity</u>	<u>Effect</u>
<2	no effect
3	1 in 2 chance of becoming dazed
4	3 in 4 chance of becoming dazed
5	stunned
6	1 in 2 chance for unconsciousness
7	1 in 2 chance for unconsciousness
8	3 in 4 chance for unconsciousness
9	unconscious
10	Bullet lodges in brain (dead)
11	Large hole blown through skull (dead)
12	Skull exploded (dead)

FACING (ADVANCED RULES)

Clearly, it's a mite easier to shoot straight ahead than behind you. It's also a ton harder to see an opponent whose stalking at your backside than strolling up to your front side. In order to take these matters into account, we'll need to know which way a given character is facing at a given moment in time. The Facing rules require miniatures for clean adjudication; without figurines or markers of some sort it becomes much more difficult. Thus, if you don't use miniatures with your game, the GM and/or other players will decide which way a character is facing based on the player's stated actions or positioning. However, application of the Facing rules is the same whether miniatures are used or not.

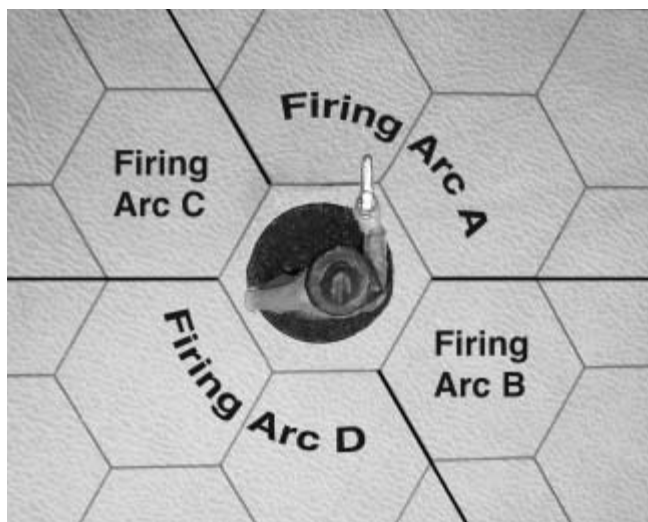


Figure 2-3a: Arcs of Fire for a right-handed pistol shooter (also applicable for a left-handed rifleman)

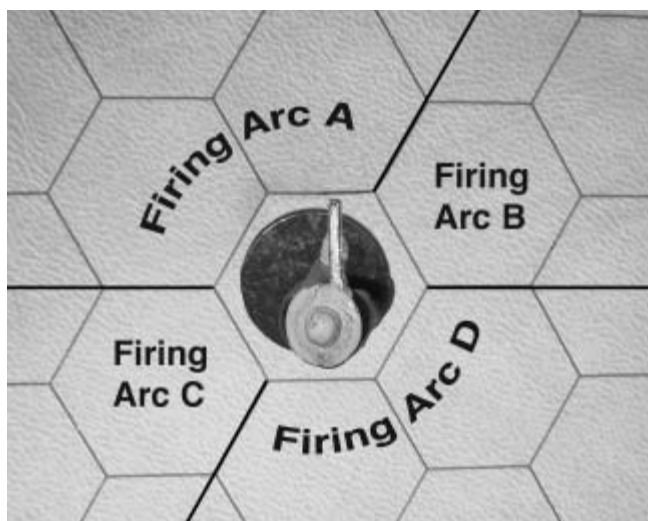


Figure 2-3b: Arcs of Fire for a right-handed rifleman (also applicable for a left-handed pistol shooter)

A moving character's front facing is ALWAYS the direction in which that character is heading. A stationary character's front facing is ALWAYS the direction his chest is facing. A character suffers both Speed and Accuracy penalties the further that character fires from his front facing. Figures 2-3a and 2-3b: Arcs of Fire define the specific arcs of fire. Table 2-9: Firing Arc Modifiers lists associated firing penalties.

Table 2-9: Firing Arc Modifiers

<u>Location</u>	<u>Speed</u>	<u>Accuracy</u>
Firing in Arc B	1	-1
Firing in Arc C	2	-2
Firing in Arc D	5	-5

Arc A is always in front of the character, so there's so particular Speed or Accuracy penalty for firing there. Likewise, Arc D is always behind the character. However, the location of Arc B and Arc C varies depending on the shooter's weapon hand. For a right-handed shooter with a pistol, Arc B is on his right. For an hombre with a pistol in his left hand, Arc B is on the left. If in doubt during play, simply hold your gun hand out in front, and then swing it to the side. Then swing it to the other side. You'll find it much easier on the same side as the gun hand (Arc B).

Of course, if you're holding a long gun, Arcs B and C will swap positions. For a right-handed shooter with a long gun, Arc B is on his left. For a left-handed pistoleer with a long gun, Arc B is on the right. That's because you're stretching the off-hand out to hold the barrel. If you want to try it, bring up your arms like your holding a rifle in your off-hand and pulling the trigger with your main hand. Swing your arms to one side, then to the other (without moving your feet, of course). As you can see, it's easier to move to the side with the outstretched hand.

For example, Francis Dodger and Wilbur Marshall are firing shots at each other in the center of Main Street. Wilbur's shots are getting pretty close, so Fran decides to run down a side street, glancing over his shoulder and firing back at Wilbur the whole time. Since he's firing behind himself (in Arc D), Francis suffers a +5 Speed penalty and a -5 Accuracy penalty.

shot. Additionally, the shooter presents a much smaller target to his enemies.

Unaware of Opponent: If one hombre knows the other is there and catches him unawares, it puts such an hombre at an advantage, or said another way, the one caught by surprise is at a disadvantage. Any time an opponent knows a character is there but the target is unaware of the opponent, the target character suffers a one second (10 Count) penalty.

Resting Weapon on Solid Object: A shooter resting his gun on a water trough, railing, windowsill, dead horse or other solid object affords him an Accuracy advantage. In most instances, such a solid object also has the helpful side effect of affording cover.

Resting Weapon on Horse: A shooter resting his gun on a live horse or other creature such as mule, sheep, dog, partner's shoulder or wounded and prostrate individual affords him a small accuracy advantage. In most instances, such gun rest also has the helpful side effect of affording cover, at least until the first shot hits.

2nd Shot at Same Target: A second shot at the same non-moving or steadily-moving target lets a shooter better hone in on his target because he can see how far off he was and adjust (or keep doing the same thing in the case of a hit). If the target is dodging, moving irregularly or if line of sight is broken (including the shooter flinching or ducking) this bonus does not apply.

3rd+ Shot at Same Target: Each successive shot at the same non-moving or steadily moving target lets a shooter better hone in on his target, but with a maximum advantage at three shots. As with the second shot, if the target is dodging, moving irregularly or if line of sight is broken (including the shooter flinching or ducking) this bonus does not apply.

Second Shot in less than Two Seconds: Firing more rapidly than one shot every 2 seconds causes inaccuracies due to factors such as fast cocking and recoil. Failing to take the time to steady a weapon only increases the problem.

PRIMITIVE RANGED ATTACKS

Ranged attacks with primitive projectiles such as knives, axes and the like, are handled in the same fashion as firearms. A character may fire

Table 2-25: Indirect Fire

Shooting blind, complete cover	-8
Partial Cover	-1 to -7
Head showing only	-7
Upper chest and neck visible	-6
Solar plexus and above visible	-5
Covered from the waist	-4
Cover from mid-thigh	-3
Knees and below	-2
Feet and ankles covered	-1

arrows (or hurl other weapons) over an obstacle to hit a target that is either behind cover or obscured. Table 2-25: Indirect Fire describes the To-Hit penalty for this type of attack. Note that cover on the Target Silhouette should be placed from the perspective of the incoming projectile (typically at 45 degrees from above). This means that the target, unless he has cover from above, loses some cover from the front. Adjust your cover representation by lowering it on the Target Silhouette by 50% to reflect this fact.

DETAILED EXAMPLE OF A GUNFIGHT

Josiah and the bandito stared down one another. Josiah saw the expression on the bandito's face, and he knew – there was no talking his way out of this one.

The following example of play assumes starting play with only two players (for simplicity's sake, though you'll often play with more). Their characters are Josiah Smith and the bandito (Rodrigo Baca Guitierrez), respectively.

Each character's statistics are as follows:

Josiah Smith: Spd +2, Acc +2; HP 21; Revolver (draw 5, aim 4, d6+1 body, 2d6 head, 6 shots); Rifle (draw 10, aim 4, d8+1 body, 2d8 head, 15 shots).

ACES AND EIGHTS

Rodrigo Baca Guitierrez: Spd +2, Acc +2; HP 24; Revolver (draw 5, aim 4, d6+1 body, 2d6 head, 6 shots).

Starting off, both Josiah and Rodrigo's players need to roll a d10 for Initiative and add their Speed. Josiah's total is 8+2, or 10, and Rodrigo's is 4+2, or 6. At this point, one of the players (or a GameMaster) begins the Count Up.

On 6, Rodrigo can act. His player declares that he's gonna draw his pistol (5 Count), so the gun will be drawn on 11 (6+5=11). Bringing it to bear on Josiah takes another 4 Count, but Rodrigo also wants to Fire Deliberately (+4 Count to Speed, but a +2 bonus to Accuracy), so his shot will go off on 19 (11+4+4=19).

On 10, Josiah's player, seeing Rodrigo is drawing a gun, declares that he's going to fire. Like Rodrigo, drawing his pistol also takes 5 Counts, so Josiah's gun will be drawn on 15 (10+5=15). Aiming it takes another 4 Count, so Josiah decides to skip that and hipshoot instead (+0 Counts to Speed, but a -4 to Accuracy). Josiah's shot will go off on 15.

On 15, Josiah hipshoots. His player places the Shot Clock overlay on the Target Silhouette, centering the bullseye on Rodrigo's chest. Josiah rolls a d20 To-Hit for a result of 19, adding his base +2 Accuracy, and a +4 for a range within 10 feet, getting a total of 25. The shot hits directly in the center of Rodrigo's chest, dealing 1d6+1 (in this case, 4) points of damage. Of course, since Rodrigo wouldn't have been standing completely still when the shot was fired, it's possible that he turned at just the right moment for the bullet to avoid any major arteries or organs, or perhaps the bullet lodged in a rib. In any case, Rodrigo is still up.

Since the wound damage (4 points) is less than 25% of his total hit points (he has 25 hp total), he now suffers a +1 Speed penalty and a -1 Accuracy penalty. Rodrigo's player also consults the wound severity table but, fortunately, sees that he doesn't suffer any additional problems from this particular wound. Of course, since he got himself shot, he's also gotta check to see if he's tough enough not to flinch. At this point, Rodrigo's player rolls a d20 to see if he flinched. He'd normally have to get a final result of 10 or

lower, but since he took that 4 point wound, he has to get a 6 or lower (10-4=6). Rodrigo rolls a 12! Fortunately, he also gets to deduct how many gunfights he's been in (6, not counting the one he's in right now), so his total result is a 6. Dang, that was close. Rodrigo manages to stand his ground and keep his aim, but that shot that was going to fire on 19 is modified by his wound, so it won't go off until 20. Also, getting shot distracted his aim a mite, so any Accuracy bonuses from Fire Deliberately are lost, unless Rodrigo wants to take another 4 Count and fire on 24 (which he doesn't, bein' the impetuous fella he is).

Meanwhile, Josiah decided it would take too long to bring his revolver to bear (4 Count), Fire Deliberately (4 Count) or take Careful Aim (10 Count), so he decides to hipshoot again. It takes him only 5 Counts (half a second) to cock and fire again, so his shot should go off on 20 (15+5=20).

The Count Up continues. 16, 17, 18, 19... On 20, Rodrigo fires. Rodrigo's player puts the Shot Clock overlay over the Target Silhouette, placing the bullseye right on Josiah's head. He rolls his d20 To-Hit for a result of 7, adding a +1 base Accuracy and a +4 for a range within 10 feet, getting a total of 12 (7+1+4=12). That's a miss. (Remember, getting shot reduced Rodrigo's base Accuracy by -1, and messed up his aim so he doesn't get the Accuracy bonus from Fire Deliberately.)

Rodrigo's player declares he's gonna fire again. This normally takes 5 Counts to fire another shot, but Rodrigo has a +1 Speed penalty from the wound, so it takes him 6 Counts. He knows he also has that -1 Accuracy penalty from the wound, so he decides to Steady Hand (+2 Speed, +2 Accuracy) and Fire Deliberately (+4 Speed, +2 Accuracy), so he'll get to fire with a total +5 Accuracy (2-1+2+2=5) when the Count Up reaches 32 (20+6+2+4=32).

Also on 20, Josiah fires again. Josiah's player again places the Shot Clock overlay over the Target Silhouette, placing the bullseye on the center of Rodrigo's chest. He rolls his To-Hit, and gets a 1. Uh-oh. That ain't good. Because he rolled that 1, his shot automatically misses (if it's even fired) and his gun suffers some form of mishap. He rolls percentile dice (a d100 or 2d10) on Table 2-18: Mishaps and Failures, and

gets a result of 53 (“shot nearby livestock/horse”). Since both characters are inside a saloon, it seems that the shot must have gone out the window and struck a horse hitched up outside. Josiah decides this hipshootin’ ain’t working, so he’s gonna cock his revolver again (still 5 Count for 2nd+ shots) and bring his gun to bear (4 Count), so his next shot should go off on 29 ($20+5+4=29$).

Now, let’s say that another player just showed up and wants to get in on this action. He decides that his character is a Cherokee Indian named Tsani Cook and the owner of the horse, and that he’s walking up the steps to the saloon when he sees his horse get shot. He declares that he will draw his pistol (5 Count) and then walk into the saloon (another 5 Count). Tsani will enter the fight when the Count Up reaches 30 ($20+5+5=30$).

The Count Up continues. 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28... On 29, Josiah fires at Rodrigo. He places the Shot Clock overlay on the Target Silhouette, centering the bullseye on Rodrigo’s head. He rolls a 9, and with his +4 range modifier and +2 Accuracy gets a total of 15 ($9+4+2$). He then draws a card, getting a King of Hearts. That’s a miss, off to his right. Don’t seem like Lady Luck is with these hombres tonight.

On 30, Tsani Cook enters the saloon. Worse, it turns out that Josiah’s last shot hit just where Tsani would have been standing if he’d entered the saloon a tenth of a second earlier. He spots Josiah holding a gun, and raises his own. Looks like this fight just got a lot more interesting...





HISTORY

BIRTH OF A NATION

Britain's American colonies declared independence for their mother country in 1776 and were recognized as the new nation of the United States of America following the Treaty of Paris in 1783. The young nation expanded westwards in the ensuing decades and aided by the providential Louisiana Purchase of 1805, her territorial claims soon encompassed the vast watershed of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers in the heart of the North American continent. Much of this western territory was, however, primeval wilderness occupied by indigenous peoples.

The nation's economic and political maturation followed a sectionally divergent path whose roots predate independence. The northern seaboard states of New England were politically dominated by commercial interests while the Southern States were controlled by a plantation agriculture elite. These two groups came into conflict as the nation began to organize new territory west of the Appalachian Mountains. Ostensively, the debate concerned the expansion of slavery into the newly organized states and territories. Underlying this divisive matter was a far more fundamental issue, that of the distribution of governmental authority. New Englander commercial and industrial interest, represented by the Federalist and later the Whig parties, favored a strong central government with the ability to set a national agenda. Businessmen desired to compete with their

English counterparts, a ruinous undertaking unless protective tariffs were enacted. Revenue generated by these tariffs would then be used to fund domestic infrastructure such as canals and roads which while benefiting settlers in the growing west of the country also were of immense value to manufacturers in bringing goods to these markets at affordable prices.

Southern interests favored a strict Jeffersonian interpretation of the constitution that devolved most power to the state legislatures. Plantation agriculture dominated this region and much of the most productive land was already within easy reach of ports. Tariffs weighed disproportionately heavy on the south in that they siphoned off profits on exported cotton and raised prices on manufactured goods, little of which were produced in this region.

This uneasy balance was maintained for three score decades by a policy of parallel admission of new states to the Union. Following a longitudinal line roughly corresponding to the division between the original Yankee and Southern colonies, states were added in pairs – one south and the other north – such that the National legislature (the Senate and Congress) would be maintained at approximate parity with no one interest able to dominate the other. This policy was not implemented without a great deal of controversy. Oft times significant legislative brokering was required to maintain the undeclared pact. One of these, the Missouri compromise of 1821 which formalized the division

between the slave and free states at 36° 30', would have unforeseen but disastrous consequences.

THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS

The Republic of Texas declared her independence from Mexico in 1836 and secured it with their victory at the Battle of San Jacinto later that year. The Mexican government would employ political and military means over the next eight years to thwart their breakaway department but eventually bowed to the inevitable. It was always the intent of the Texican authorities to seek admission to the United States. The Americans had debated the matter internally since Andrew Jackson's administration but for various reasons had never formally assented to the request. Finally in 1845 the new American President Henry Clay, elected in an atmosphere of divisive sectional politicking and wary of engaging in a war with Mexico after the painful drubbing unprepared American forces endured in challenging British regulars in the Aroostook War of 1841, settled the matter for good by recognizing the Republic of Texas as an independent nation.

THE CALIFORNIA ACT

Many of America's territories were quickly growing and had reached the state of political maturity that a generation ago would have guaranteed them statehood. Maintaining the delicate balance between free and slave states, however, would be more difficult than ever. Glancing at a map of the unorganized western territories, it was clear that the nation's future growth would be to the north and west, territory designated as future free states under the Missouri compromise. Herculean efforts were made to assuage Southern interests such as the purchase of Cuba from the Kingdom of Spain and her rapid admission as the thirtieth state in 1849 thereby allowing for the admission of Wisconsin as a free state.

In 1845, American settlers in the Sacramento Valley revolted and established the California Republic. Though they claimed territory south to the Gulf of California, a counter-revolution by oppressed Californios aided by Mexican troops resulted in the Battle of San Luis Obispo. Neither side possessed the means to continue hostilities and they consequently agreed to the Truce of Monterey setting a temporary border at

the bay of the same name. The northern Californians thereafter wrote a constitution barring slavery and petitioned President Lewis Cass for admission to the Union. Congress would hardly have considered the petition were it not for the fact that enormous gold deposits were discovered nearly simultaneously with said petition. Washington was faced with a terrible dilemma. To forgo California's request would mean the loss of a windfall of specie, something the American treasury had been in dire need of since its inception. Worse yet, California might easily fall into Mexican hands now that its true value was recognized.

Admission of California would be no simple task. All territory designated as future slave states by the Missouri compromise had already been organized and admitted to the Union. With no ready slave state to balance out California, southerners were unwilling to consider statehood or even admission as a territory for they knew it would simply be a matter of a few years before such a territory would simply have to be admitted to statehood.

The matter was an open filibustering sore. Southerner Senators had dug in their heels and were prepared to wait forever if necessary. Senator Calhoun of South Carolina even dared to go so far as to broach the subject of secession.

To break the impasse, Cass proposed to organize the Platte River valley into several smaller territories. Three territories would be formed South of the Platte River: Kansas, Arapahoe and Colorado. To the north and bounded by the Missouri river two additional territories, Nebraska and Ogallala, would also be created. Additionally, the balance of the old Iowa territory would form the new Minnesota territory. These "New Territories" would decide the question of slavery for themselves. The obvious inference—at least to Southerners—was that many of the territories would be admitted as slave states to maintain the fragile balance.