

# Showdown rules

*Once, while surfing the net for those little nuggets of gaming inspiration, I came across some optional "High Noon/Showdown" rules for the D20 system over on the Wizards of the Coast site. I figured they were pretty cool and being the kind of GM I am (the kind that scavenges any and every remotely interesting RPG resource I come across) I adapted it to the Serenity/Cortex system.*

*Now the idea is fairly simple. Everyone's watched an old western at one time or another, right? Remember the showdown at "high noon" toward the end of the movie? Almost every western had one. In fact, just about every action movie where the protagonist and the antagonist eventually square off at the end has such a scene. It's the moment when the Hero(es) face off with the Big Bad Guy(s) in the middle of the street. It has a peculiar quality to it that set it apart from every other fight scene in the movie, didn't it? Well here we'll try to capture that quality and introduce it to our game...*

Showdowns can occur in a number of different situations. Usually it's the Big Bad Guy himself facing down the leader of the PC party in a last ditch effort at either winning his freedom or going out with some dignity. Sometimes it's as simple as defending one's honor (or someone else's) against that loud mouth in the bar. Or maybe the Big Bad Guy's right hand man has been given the order to eliminate those pesky PC's and, having come to begrudgingly admire their tenacity/skill/whatever, decides a Showdown is the only proper way of doing it. Whatever the case the Showdown does have some rules however unwritten they may be. Of course, we're going to write them right now. Here we go:

## **1) Someone has to issue the challenge to a Showdown.**

Pretty obvious, really. The Showdown is, after all, a semi-formal duel. It's not something that normally occurs in a heated gunfight or a brawl in the street. Usually it's unspoken, with one side or the other stepping forward with that particular and unmistakable look of challenge in their eyes. Other times one side or the other simply elects to "call out" the other, which is a flat out verbal challenge to a Showdown. Or, of course, the Showdown can be a true formalized dual (such as in "Shindig") where the two combatants meet at an agreed upon place and time for their death match.

## **2) Both parties have to agree to the Showdown.**

Now this may seem pretty obvious too but let's put it into practice. First off, whoever is issuing the challenge has already tossed their chip on the table. The one receiving the challenge, however, still has to accept. If the challenge occurred in a formal setting then one side or the other could always agree and then simply not show up. If we're looking at a bar fight kind of situation then they may have to run away. Or they could just shoot the other guy in the head while he swaggers around unarmed.

If one of the PC's is issuing the challenge then it's naturally up to you whether the NPC accepts. This, of course, boils down to whether or not you, as the GM, feel it will add to the game or not. Usually it will, but in the end it's up to you. If the BBG (or any other NPC for that matter) is issuing the challenge then it falls to the PC's. And who know what they're going to do?

## **3) A Showdown has to be worth all the trouble and danger inherent to it.**

Think about it. What idiot would swagger out into the street with their gun firmly in the holster and wait for their mortal enemy to come out and face them honorably? Why take the chance that they won't just dive for cover and try for a called head shot instead? Well, the Showdown is all about honor. It's about not only beating your opponent but doing so in such a way the proves beyond doubt that you're the superior individual, not just somebody who scored a lucky head shot. And, of course, since it adds drama and tension to the story...it earns Plot Points. That's right. You, as GM, should see the obvious Plot Point worthiness of a PC either issuing or accepting a challenge for a Showdown.

Once someone has issued the challenge for a Showdown and the other side accepts, then we can get down to it. The Showdown itself occurs in three steps.

## **1) Presentation**

It's all about the Presentation, baby. You have to swagger up to the Showdown with all the coolness and confidence of someone for whom victory is a foregone conclusion. The Presentation accomplishes two things. First, it gives you a moment to size up the opposition. This is an opportunity you don't usually get in a straight up gunfight. In fact, closely observing the other guy's Presentation makes it possible to gain insights that you wouldn't normally be privy to in any other situation. Second, the Presentation sets up for the second stage, the Stare Down. If you win the Presentation this will aid you in the upcoming Stare Down. If you stumble, sweat or twitch then you can bet your opponent is going to be all the more confident in his ability to put you down like the dog you are.

A Presentation is done in the open. No sneaking, slinking or stealthy on this one, folks. It's important both to see your opponent's Presentation and to be seen. The exact mechanics of the Presentation are up to the individual GM, of course, but I recommend Willpower+Discipline/Intimidation as the standard. [Naturally this can vary depending on the circumstance and one's imagination. You aren't pigeon-holed into a John Woo slow-mo swagger scene, after all. For example, let's say the guy issuing the challenge has the Performance/Gun Twirling skill and knows that his opponent does, too. He could (and probably would) issue the challenge non-verbally with a deadly glare and proceed into the Presentation with a stunning display of Gun Twirling skill.]

In the end the Presentation is an Opposed Action between the two participants of the Showdown using whatever skill you decide. Characters with an Intimidation specialty and/or Intimidatin' Manner asset do well here. The opponents each roll their Willpower (or whatever other ability), plus whatever applicable skill modifiers. The winner gains confidence and gets a +1 step bonus to all his actions during the first turn of the showdown. The loser is plumb skeered and gets a -1 step penalty to all his actions during the first turn.

In addition, the victor is made aware of the opponent's relevant ability score. In a gunfight Showdown, the ability in question would be Agility. If the Showdown is to be a bare knuckle bar brawl, then the opponent's Strength score is made known to the winner of the Presentation.

Furthermore, should they manage to win by seven points (an Extraordinary success) in the opposed action they can discover the opponent's relevant skill level as well.

Special Note Here: The Presentation is often the challenge itself. Therefore, both sides have the results of their Presentation right in front of them when they decide whether or not to proceed with the Showdown. Either of them may admit defeat after the Presentation simply by refusing the challenge. (Consider: if you've won the Presentation with an Extraordinary success and discover you're opponent has Agility D12+D4 and Gun/Pistol D12+D4 you might well decide to bow out with what grace you can despite the step bonus you just received.)

## **2) The Stare Down**

The Stare Down is essentially the culmination of the Presentation. Neither side is swaggering (or Gun Twirling or whatever) anymore and are facing off, ready to draw steel any moment. Staring into your opponent's eyes with all the ill will and sheer cussedness you can muster, this is your opportunity to minimize the damage from losing the Presentation or maximizing the benefits of having won.

Whoever won the Presentation now makes a Hard Willpower check. If he succeeds then the bonus from winning the Presentation is bumped up to a +2 step bonus and he gets a +1 step bonus to all actions in the second turn as well. The loser also makes a Hard Willpower check. If he fails, his penalty for having lost the Presentation increases to a -2 step penalty and he suffers a -1 step penalty to all actions in the second turn. This varies the results a good bit and ensures the first turn or two of the fight is particularly deadly.

## **3) The Draw**

Now we roll for Initiative and bullets start flying. Remember the bonus/penalty we got back in the Presentation and Stare Down steps? Well, that applies here too. Like I said before, it's all about the Presentation, baby.

Beyond the effects of the bonuses and penalties on each side this is like any other turn of combat.

The difference is that one side is sporting a nice bonus while the other likewise suffers a penalty. Any way you cut it, someone's going to tote a hurtin'.

The turn immediately following the first may often have some bonuses/penalties as well but the third round (assuming the fight isn't already over) does not. While this may boil down to nothing more than a standard fight in the end, bear in mind there are rules about this portion of the Showdown, too. While actively dodging during a Showdown is fine and dandy, running for cover is commonly considered the height of cowardice. Worse than simply shooting someone in the back when you consider the possibly vulnerable position both sides are agreeing to risk when accepting a Showdown. Better to simply run away or even throw down your gun and beg for mercy than to be the Bei Bi Shiou Ren who hid behind his horse during a Showdown.

*Showdown summary:*

1 - Showdown challenge is issued and accepted (possibly by instigating the Presentation phase).

2 - (Presentation) The participants make the appropriate Opposed action (usually Willpower+Discipline/Intimidation).

The victor gets a +1 step bonus for all actions in the first turn of the Showdown as well as learning the ability score of the opponent relevant to the type of Showdown (Agility for gun fights, Strength of unarmed combat, etc.) If the victor won the Presentation by 7 points or more (Extraordinary success) they also learn the skill level of the opponent as well (Gun for gunfights, Unarmed Combat for fist fights, etc.)

The loser suffers a -1 step bonus to all actions in the first turn of the Showdown.

3 - (Stare Down) The participants make a Hard Willpower check.

If the winner of the Presentation succeeds in their Willpower check then their +1 step bonus is increased to a +2 step bonus and they receive a +1 step bonus during the second turn of the Showdown. (If they fail there is no effect.)

If the loser of the Presentation fails their Willpower check their -1 step bonus is increased to a -2 step bonus and they suffer a -1 step penalty during the second turn of the Showdown. (If they succeeds there is no effect.)

4 - (The Draw) Combat proceeds normally from this point.

Plot Point rewards for Showdowns: How many Plot Points you reward the PC who participated in the Showdown should depend on the circumstances. The PC side of the issue is pretty relevant. Did the PC issue the challenge? Did they accept the challenge when they could have more easily just shot the Big Bad Guy down? The situation itself has an impact as well. If the circumstances are particularly tense or the BBG has proven himself to be particularly dangerous, then the Plot Point reward should reflect that.

In the end, though, like all Plot Point rewards it should depend on how the Showdown impacted the game in the end. I recommend a standard 2-4 point reward as a baseline, higher or lower depending on the overall impact of the Showdown in question.