



Notes from the Bunker

Quick-Draw Contests

by Rich Redman

Welcome to my bunker. As one of the designers of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, and a veteran of real-world modern combat (having served as a tank platoon leader in Operation: Desert Storm), I'm in a unique position to offer insights into the game.

This month, we continue the discussion of variant rules with a new rule for quick-draw contests. Such matches are always high drama in a movie, and with a little work, they can be equally exciting in a roleplaying game.

High Noon

You've seen them all -- the showdown at high noon, the Chinese standoff, the slow-motion flight of doves in a John Woo movie, the dust blowing across a cemetery as the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly face off. Many films have great moments when the hero and the villain challenge each other to single combat. This rules variant provides guidelines for replicating such a dramatic moment in the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*.

The Showdown

A showdown requires mutual consent -- if only one party is willing to enter the contest, it doesn't happen. You know your opponent wants a showdown when he meets your eyes and doesn't attack you. Sometimes one party or the other makes a verbal challenge; sometimes the challenge is just understood. Either way, if all the participants agree, the first of the contest's three phases begins.

In terms of mechanics, the showdown happens when two or more characters, at least one of whom opposes the others, all hold their actions until the same initiative count. Phase 1 (The Entrance) occurs when all characters are poised to act together.

The Entrance

Whether you swagger confidently down the street, stroll through a flock of doves, or round a corner with the wind blowing your overcoat behind you, your entrance is vital. The entrance is a bold, confident statement of who you are and what kind of capabilities you have. You can't sneak into a showdown or make an entrance stealthily.

During the entrance, all the participants size each other up. Each player makes a Sense Motive check for her hero (or a Wisdom check for any character who lacks ranks in Sense Motive). Refer to the following table for the information gained about each other participant. Use all entries that apply. For example, if the check result is 21, the player learns the information from the first and second entries on the table, but not the third.

Sense Motive Check Result	Information Gained
15+	Opponents' total character levels
20+	Opponents' attack and damage bonuses with the weapons used for the contest
25+	Opponents' current hit points and any conditions affecting the opponents (such as dazed, stunned, or the like)

The entrance is, logically enough, a move action. The stare down (below) is an attack action that occupies the participants for the rest of this turn.

Any character may admit defeat after the entrance simply by refusing the challenge. Mechanically, this means the character must either surrender to the opponent or forfeit the rest of her action this round. She can then return to regular combat on the next round.

The Stare Down

The next phase of the contest is a projection of the character's will -- an attempt to make the opposing characters sweat, flinch, or tremble. All characters must be able to see each other during this phase.

Each character involved in the stare down must make an Intimidate check (or a Charisma check if he has no ranks in Intimidate). These checks constitute attack actions. The results have no immediate effect, but they come into play in the following (and final) phase of the contest, which happens during the next round.

The Draw

In the final phase of a showdown, all the participants go for their weapons. Whoever got the highest check result in the previous phase draws first, the character with the second highest check result goes second, and so forth. For the purpose of the High Noon variant, the shooter treats all participants with lower Intimidate check results as flat-footed. If the check results tie, those attacks occur simultaneously, and each character involved in the tie treats those with lower check results as flat-footed.

The draw is the first round of the actual shooting portion of the showdown. Each character may take either a move or an attack action, but not both. If you don't have Quick Draw and your weapon is still holstered after others have drawn, you'd better move behind cover!

Implementing a Rules Variant

I've posted this set of questions about rules variants previously, but these guidelines are worth repeating. Before implementing a rules variant, consider the following issues.

- **Why am I using this?** The "quick-draw contest" variant gives you a way to model those movie moments in which the hero and the villain face off directly against one another. It's great for games in which the players enjoy formal challenges, but if you're running a game in which the characters prefer to achieve their goals through teamwork and stealth, this variant isn't likely to be used much.

- **Am I clear on how the new rule really works?** When you're considering a rules variant, it's important to understand not only its mechanics, but also how it may affect play. Since this variant calls for roleplaying finesse as well as a bit of formality, players who don't care as much for the roleplaying side of the game may find it a bit tedious.
- **Have I considered why this rule wasn't included in the game to begin with?** Quick-draw contests aren't appropriate for every *d20 Modern* campaign. In some cases, because of the way the GM structures plotlines and the nature of the enemies, they're not necessary.
- **How will the new rule impact other rules or situations?** Quick-draw contests can make combat much more lethal because no one can take advantage of cover right away. Thus, you'll need to give your players ample warning about how they work.
- **Does the change favor one class, race, skill, feat, or the like more than others?** This variant favors characters with high Intimidate modifiers by effectively granting them initiative in a dangerous situation.
- **Overall, is this change going to make more players happy or unhappy?** Players who enjoy movie showdowns are likely to appreciate this option. But if all your players make liberal use of cover, concealment, and stealth in the game, chances they won't like it. On the other hand, they can always refuse a challenge.

Most importantly, remember to discuss variants and rules changes with your players before you decide to implement them. The players are part of your campaign too, and they deserve some say about proposed rules alterations.

About the Author

Before [Rich Redman](#) came to the RPG R&D department at Wizards of the Coast, Inc., he had been an Army officer, a door-to-door salesman, the manager of a computer store, a fundraiser for a veterans' assistance group, and the manager of Wizards of the Coast, Inc.'s Customer Service department. Rich is a prolific game designer who has worked on the **Dungeons & Dragons** game, the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, the **Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game**, and **Dark*Matter**. When he's not working as vice president of [The Game Mechanics](#), a d20 design studio, Rich does freelance game design, cooks, and practices yoga, tai chi, and silat.
