

# ACES & EIGHTS™

## SHATTERED FRONTIER

— A ROLE PLAYING GAME —

# PLAYER'S GUIDEBOOK

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# 1 | Introduction





# Welcome to Aces & Eights

**T**hrough the gunsmoke and over the slumped corpse of a gambler, 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 Frontier 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 allows for 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 American frontier.

Although you don't need to know much about this time period to enjoy the game, western aficionados will certainly find it 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 role-playing 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 American politics (at significant moments in history) create a very believable alternative history of North America. Sprung from small changes are new nations, businesses, and a slight acceleration in arms technology.

*Aces & Eights* allows you to create a character from scratch, introduce him or her into this detailed frontier setting, and forge a new future like so many of the great pioneers from the past. Your character's potential is limited only by your imagination and your grit.

## WHAT IS A ROLE-PLAYING GAME?

A role-playing game is a lot like improvisational acting. The players create characters that they pretend to be during the course of the game. This rulebook describes methods for determining and recording the strengths and weaknesses of each character, but his or

her personality is in the hands of the player. The rulebook, the group of players, or one of the participants (designated as the referee, narrator or judge of the game) presents a scenario to the other player characters (PCs). Each player then decides how his character will act in the given scenario.

The judge, or GameMaster (GM), uses made-up characters that are not controlled by any of the players (these are called non-player characters, or NPCs) to interact with the PCs. And so the game goes on with the players and the GM role-playing the characters they created, in a struggle for fame, fortune, or simple survival.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

To play *Aces & Eights* you need at least one sheet of 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 different colors (especially 10-siders) are helpful but not necessary. The group member acting as the GM should also own the *Aces & Eights* core rulebook which contains additional information specific to his role as judge. We also recommend that you download a free character record sheet from our website.

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 d100 (or d%) means roll two d10s, designating one as the “tens” spot and one for the “ones”. A d1000 means roll three d10s, and so forth.

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, a calculator, miniature figures to represent your characters, and terrain (such as model town buildings or simulated vegetation or hills). 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 measure to determine weapon ranges during combat.

# 2|The Basic Game



C.M. Russell  
1909

THE HOFFMAN

HOTEL

LICENSED  
GAMBLING

\$1000  
REWARD  
FOR  
KID CURB

OLD TIME  
WHISKY  
MCFARLANE

Sample file



## 2.1 | Basic Characters

If this is your first outing to the Shattered Frontier, you may wish to quickly generate a character with which to begin play. Later on, as you become more familiar with the mechanics of the game, you will likely want to flesh out your character's abilities, skills, quirks, flaws and so forth using the methods presented in *Chapter 3.1 | Character Creation*. But if you want a simple bandito or marshal for a quick shoot-em-up, just grab some dice and read on, compadre. There's no need to invest the time if all you care about is lead slingin' (or "shootin'" to all you greenhorns).

### SPEED AND ACCURACY

To create a basic gunfighter, you need to know two things: Speed and Accuracy. With an advanced character, this would be determined by a combination of the character's Dexterity, Intelligence and Wisdom scores, but we're not going to slow you down with all that here. Instead, all you need is a single d4.

Speed represents how quick your gunfighter is on the draw – the lower the better. Accuracy is just what it seems and higher numbers are beneficial here.

To determine your gunfighter's Speed, roll a d4. Record this number then flip a coin to determine if the value is positive (heads) or negative (tails). The result is your gunfighter's Speed score – somewhere between -4 and 4. Repeat the process to determine Accuracy.

*For example, let's say that Mark rolls a d4 with a result of 4 and then flips a coin (it lands tails). This means his gunfighter's Speed score is -4. That's pretty durn fast! Unfortunately, he then rolls a 3 for his Accuracy and a coin flip that again is tails, meaning this hombre has a -3 Accuracy score.*

### HIT POINTS

Each character has between 21 and 24 hit points (hp) determined by rolling a d4 and adding 20. This gives you a measure of how much physical damage your gunfighter can sustain before keeling over.

### WEAPONS

For basic gunfighting, weapons are restricted to a few general categories of firearms (see *Table 2.1-1: Basic Firearms*). You may either choose your weapon from this list or roll a d6 to randomly determine your armament. In a basic gunfight, there are no modifiers to Speed or Accuracy based on the type of firearm or the number of gunfights the character's been involved in. *Chapter 2.2 | Scrapes* describes the rules for basic gunfighting in detail.

### BACKGROUND

If you want to get a "feel" for your gunfighter, you may also choose to roll on one or more of the quick background tables found on the following page. Otherwise, you're ready to go!



**TABLE 2.1-1: BASIC FIREARMS**

Roll (d6)	Firearm	Damage (body)	Damage (head)	No. of Shots	Reload Speed
1-4	Pistol	d6+1	2d6	6	1 cartridge per 10 count
5-6	Rifle	d8+1	2d8	10	1 cartridge per 10 count

**TABLE 2.1-2: QUICK NAMES (FEMALE)**

Roll (d10)	Name
1	Anna Young
2	Emily Abrams
3	Esther Matthews
4	Hannah Coronel
5	Holly Sawyer
6	Laura Stone
7	Rosa Martinez
8	Ruth Gardner
9	Sarah Snelling
10	Witashnah Chumani

**TABLE 2.1-4: QUICK PROFESSIONS**

Roll (d20)	Profession
1	Bandito
2	Banker
3	Barber
4	Bartender
5	Cowboy
6	Dance Hall Girl
7	Doctor
8	Engineer
9	Farmer
10	Gambler
11	Lawman, Deputy
12	Lawman, Marshal
13	Miner
14	Postal Worker
15	Prostitute
16	Rancher
17	Soldier
18	Stage Coach Driver
19	Telegraph Operator
20	Undertaker

**TABLE 2.1-3: QUICK NAMES (MALE)**

Roll (d10)	Name
1	Allen Hamilton
2	Butch Montgomery
3	Cassidy "Doc" Wilson
4	Dustu Adahy
5	Fernando Vasquez
6	"Handsome" Jack Jones
7	Josiah Ledbetter
8	Juan de Cisneros
9	Matt Santos
10	Zachariah Smith

Sample file

## 2.2 | Scrapes

*Gabe Smith coolly tossed 25 pesos into the large pot, raising the perspiring vaquero across from him. He had reason to be confident; no one had seen him pull the Ace of Spades from his sleeve, and Aces over Kings is a mighty hand indeed. Time seemed to halt as the table sat perfectly silent, waiting for the Mexican cowhand to make his move. Wiping his brow, the cowboy finally called the bet and both players laid down their hands. Gabe had the better hand, but stopped short as he reached for the money. The Mexican's cards read Two Pair with an Ace kicker – the Ace of Spades!*

*Looks like ol' Gabe has gotten himself into a scrape. From here, the action could turn ugly in several ways. Gabe could run to his horse, initiating a chase, he could draw a Bowie knife and opt for a knife fight, he could draw a pocket pistol or six-shooter and shoot it out or try his luck in a brawl. In the following sections, we'll cover the various ways of getting out of a scrape – for better or for worse.*

### ★ GUNFIGHTS ★

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 aim, the further from his mark the 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 game.

A split second during a gunfight can sometimes mean the difference between survival and a painful – or even mortal – wound. Thus, while time in other areas of the game occurs in terms of seconds, minutes or even days at a time, during a gunfight, 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 mounting a mustang to crawling behind the water trough occurs in tenths of seconds or Counts.

#### A Note on the Modular Rule System

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.

### 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, *Aces & Eights* allows your character to attempt any action he wants, at any time.

In real life, to walk across the room, you think about walking across the room, then you start moving and after a certain number of seconds you accomplish the task. Likewise, in *Aces & Eights*, if your character wants to take an action (such as crossing the saloon floor), you simply declare his intent and, after a certain amount of time (if there are no unexpected obstacles), he completes his action. Thus, *Aces & Eights* has no artificial time segmentation such as “turns,” “rounds,” “segments,” or “phases.” In *Aces & Eights*, your character’s actions are measured by time and time alone.

### INITIATIVE AND SPEED

Before discussing just what actions are possible in a gunfight (and how long they take), it’s important that we cover just who goes first. Several factors affect how fast a character can take action, most notably the character’s Speed (the advanced rules include other modifiers such as prior gunfight experience, Fame, weapon model and type, etc.). The final factor is a random d10 die roll to represent the variation of one character getting the drop on another. This die roll is called the Initiative roll.

At the onset of the action, each character rolls a d10 for Initiative and adds it to their Speed score. The result is the character’s Starting Initiative. During a gunfight, each character begins taking action based on his Starting Initiative. Since actions take place based on time and the Count Up (described later), it’s best to have a low Starting Initiative. Note that negative numbers are possible (for example, a Speed of –3 plus a “1” on the Initiative roll equals –2), but rare. The Shooting Actions section describes the effects of this more fully.

### GUNFIGHT PROCEDURE

Players use the following procedure to resolve all gunfights:

1. When a gunfight is about to erupt, each player rolls a d20. Players declare actions in order of lowest score to highest score. In cases where gunfights erupt due to declared actions (“Forget negotiations, I draw on him