

# DUELLING RULES FOR OLD SCHOOL ROLE PLAYING GAMES



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## INTRODUCTION

The following rules are additions intended for more tactical play in D&D zero to second edition. The basic combat rules, while nicely tactical for small skirmishes, amount to little other than roll for initiative, I hack, you hack, and repeat until somebody drops from excessive blood loss.

The following rules assume that dueling combat largely consists of properly exploiting openings that arise as the opponents maneuver. Aggression is useful, but must be balanced with caution and finesse, or swift death can arise from an unconsidered counter-stroke.

All standard D&D (or clone) combat rules apply except as modified below.

### Order of Play

Each round, the duelist has two options, he can roll once to attack and once for finesse (in any order), or he can make two rolls for finesse. Multiple attack rolls are not allowed. *Neither duelist can move (change facing or position) except as allowed by his finesse roll.*

Once these rolls are made, the duelist can implement them in any order desired, though they must all take place in the same round. Rolls can be ignored, but any roll not used is lost.

### Attack Rolls

Attack rolls are made as per the standard D&D rules. All duelist miniatures must have a facing. These rules can be played on either a square or hexagon grid, or on a grid-less field using a measuring tape. In any case, a duelist can only attack an opponent whose miniature is in base to base (or square to square, or hexagon to hexagon) contact, and is at least partially within his forward 180 degrees. Attacks made from at least partially within the opponent's rear 180 degrees grant a 2 point bonus to hit. Attacks directly from the opponent's rear grant an additional 2 point bonus to hit, for a 4 point bonus, total.

### Finesse Rolls

Finesse is rolled exactly as an attack, except that it is modified by dexterity rather than strength, and is always made against armor class 5 (or 14 if using an ascending armor class system) modified for the opponent's dexterity score (standard dexterity modification, as to armor class). If the roll is made successfully, the duelist rolls 1d20 on the Table below. If two successful finesse rolls are made in the same round, this allows two maneuvers, which can be made in any order desired by the duelist:



### Finesse Table (1d20)

- 1-5 Circle: The duelist can move one space/inch right or left of his opponent, but must maintain base to base contact with his opponent. If he is not presently in base to base contact with his opponent, he can move one space/inch directly toward him. The duelist may change his facing so that he remains with his front directly toward his opponent.
- 6-7 Back-Pedal: The duelist can move one space/inch directly away from his opponent, maintaining his facing or facing directly toward his opponent, as desired. This maneuver is the only way to break contact in these rules.
- 8-9 Drive: The duelist can change facing (if needed) to directly face his opponent, and launch a furious attack to drive him directly backward one space/inch, with the duelist automatically following up. In addition, he rolls to hit the opponent, and, if he is successful, he does no damage, but automatically knocks his opponent prone. It requires a successful finesse roll (which can then accomplish nothing else) for a prone duelist to stand, and, until he does, he suffers a 4 point penalty to attack and armor class. A gentleman (not a pirate) can allow his opponent to stand immediately, and

automatically regains 1d6 hit points lost for this honorable action. A prone duelist who stands can automatically face his opponent, though he cannot move from his space.

- 10-11 Feint: The duelist gains a 3 point bonus to his next attack roll.
- 12-13 Riposte: The duelist gains a 2 point bonus to his armor class against his opponent's next attack roll, and, if the opponent misses, the duelist automatically strikes the opponent (ripostes) for normal damage. No attack roll is required for a riposte. It happens automatically if the opponent misses.
- 14-15 Trip\*: The opponent automatically falls prone.
- 16 Throw Sand\*: The opponent is partially blinded, and suffers a 2 point penalty to attack for the rest of the duel.
- 17 Stomp Instep\*: The opponent cannot attack or finesse for 1d3 rounds; during this time, he can only defend himself normally.
- 18 Grapple\*: The two opponents grapple, and are now in the same space (this is the space previously occupied only by the duelist's opponent). They can only attack each other by punching, for 1d2 + strength bonus damage. A successful finesse roll by either duelist allows him to break the grapple, and move into any adjacent space. In this case, both are considered prone, and must successfully finesse in order to stand.
- 19 Critical Strike: The duelist's next attack gains a 2 point bonus to hit, and, if successful, causes double damage and the effects of Stomp Instep (above). This is not considered a dishonorable action.
- 20 Masterful Sequence: Choose any one maneuver from this Table.

Note that the results of Finesse rolls are always optional, and the duelist is not forced to make a maneuver he considers disadvantageous. Instead he can always choose either to parry (granting a 3 point bonus to armor class against the opponent's next attack only) or rest. A rest action allows the duelist to size up the enemy to determine how he might best defeat him. This translates into maneuver points (1d6 for gentlemen, only 1d4 for pirates and other thugs) that he can then spend to modify future rolls on the Finesse Table. Multiple rests allow the duelist to accumulate additional maneuver points. All maneuver points accumulated must be used in the same duel, and any maneuver points not spent by the end of the duel are lost.

Maneuver points can be spent, on a 1 for 1 basis, to alter any future rolls on the Finesse Table, made at any point during the same duel. E.g.: A duelist with 5 maneuver points saved, who rolls a 7 (Back-Pedal), could keep that score, or spend 1 point to instead execute a Drive

(7+1=result #8), spend 2 points to instead execute a Circle (7-2= result #5), spend all five points to execute a Riposte (7+5= result #12), etc.

\*Any maneuver marked with an asterisk is dirty fighting, and allowed only to pirates in a pirate's duel. A gentleman never uses such tactics, and can only choose to parry or rest when he achieves such a roll.



### Requisite Bonuses

Duelists tend to develop their own styles of fighting based on their strengths and weaknesses, as below:

The duelist with the higher intelligence score gains one automatic re-roll on the Finesse Table once per duel. The second roll is final.

The duelist with the higher wisdom score gains one automatic Back-Pedal once per duel. This action takes place at any point, and is in addition to any other Finesse or attacks made by the duelist in the same round. It is effectively a third action, though the actions can be taken in any order the duelist desires.

The duelist with the higher charisma score can, once per duel, taunt his opponent, causing him to automatically miss any attack roll. This option must be chosen before the opponent's attack roll is made.

## Notes

While the rules seem to create a lot of randomness, experience with combat will show that they are subtly tactical, in that proper use of Finesse will allow tactical advantages that create situations allowing a lower-level but more tactically minded duelist to emerge victorious more often than not.

## Optional Rules

### Seconds

Player characters can bring other PCs and friendly NPCs to the duel as seconds. These are armed men who are there to make sure that the rules are observed and that fun things such as stabbing the enemy before the duel begins or bringing a pistol to a sword fight do not happen. The seconds are generally unarmored, but each carries a single pistol and a fencing saber.

If a character does cheat by any means, the seconds will call for an end to the duel. If this does not happen immediately, the seconds acting for the non-cheating party will react with pistol fire. If this takes place, there is a 50% chance that each second on the cheating side will fire in defense of his principal. If this still does not stop the fighting, all of the seconds and principals join in a general sword fight. Combat ceases to follow the dueling system, and is handled as per ordinary D&D melee.

If the rules for seconds are used, any NPC duelist will bring 1d6-3 seconds to his duel (generally level 1d4 commoners, fighters, warriors or aristocrats as his social level might dictate) with an additional second for every full five levels he has attained.

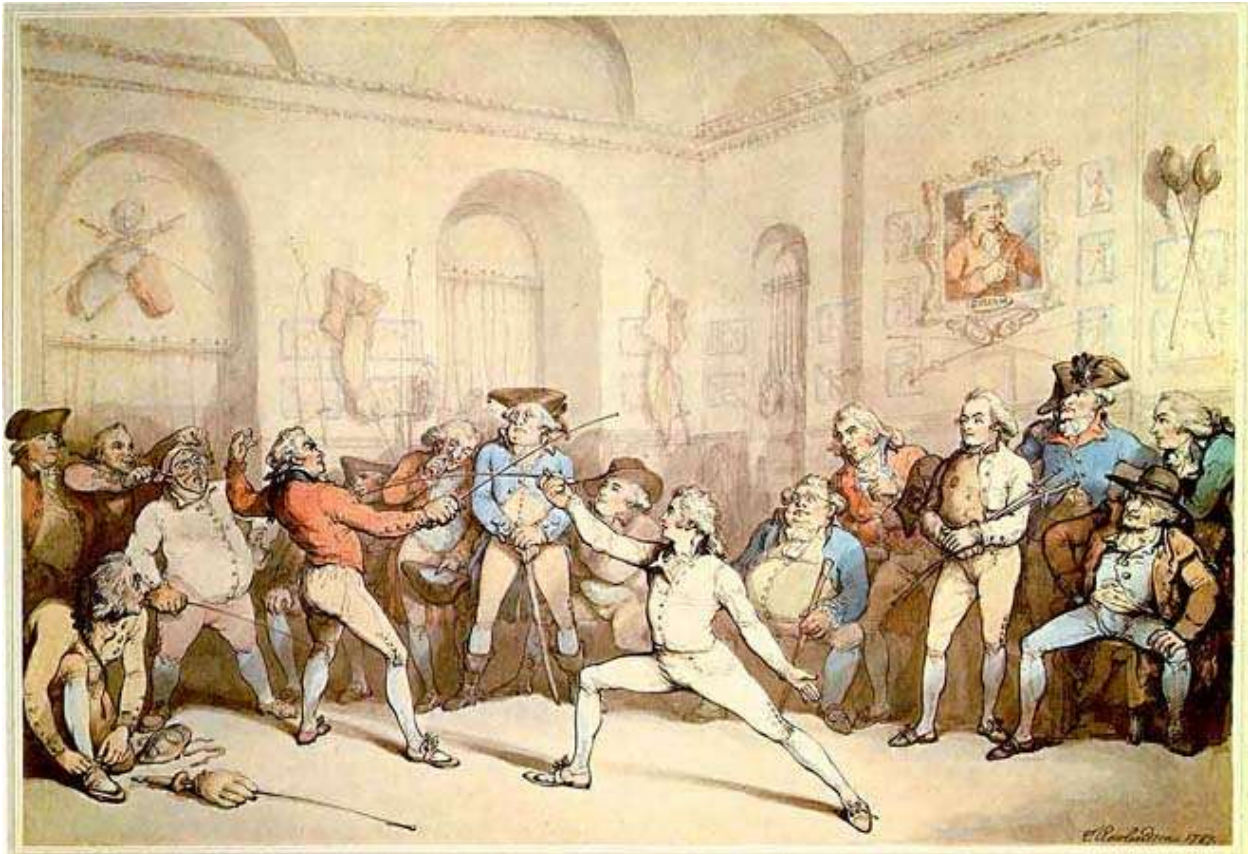
### Onlookers

There will generally be onlookers attending any duel. These are usually just people who wander in to watch the fun. Please note that many of the results on this table are rather tongue-in-cheek, so, if you want your duels to be dark and grim affairs, you may want to modify or skip this table.

Unless specified otherwise, all of the characters listed are first level commoners or aristocrats, and unarmed.

Onlookers must be activated before they will take effect. Activating an onlooker counts as a Finesse, though no roll is made on the Finesse Table, and requires the expenditure of 5 Maneuver Points, representing the player saying something or taking some action that would cause the onlooker to get involved.

Activated onlookers always act after the duelists do, each round. If more than one onlooker is activated, roll initiative between them if necessary.



### Onlookers Table (1d20)

Roll on the table below to determine whether and/or how many onlookers show up to watch the duel. Stop rolling as soon as a 1-6 is scored.

Note that to make this work, the duel is fought on an ordinary sized chess board, with the middle six rows reserved for the duelists, and the first and last rows reserved for onlookers and seconds, who can be placed randomly, or by agreement of the players.

- 1-6 None, and once this roll is made, no further rolls for onlookers take place.
- 7 Constable: Tries to arrest the duelists. Level 3 warrior with pistol and club.

- 8 Cur: A dog tries to bite one of the duelist's trousers each round thereafter. This causes no damage, but puts the duelist off balance, causing him a 2 point penalty to hit and armor class on any round where the dog successfully attacks.
- 9 Gentleman Onlooker: Acts as impromptu second for anyone who has not brought a second. Counts as an NPC second. Gentleman Onlookers will always side against cheaters. Does not need to be activated.
- 10 Great Detective: Investigating one duelist for some crime, real or imagined; this makes him nervous (the detective has a piercing glare), causing the suspect-duelist to suffer a -1 penalty to attack and armor class for the rest of the duel.
- 11 Nefarious Fellow: Shoots at one duelist, then runs. Gives cause to at least temporarily patch up the quarrel and start an adventure. May be anyone or anything.
- 12 Opium Smoker: Causes a 10' square cloud of opium smoke to drift randomly over the field, making anyone it drifts over groggy. A 1d6 penalty to accumulated Maneuver Points is suffered by anyone who spends any part of the round in the same space as the opium smoke. The cloud moves 1d3 x 10' per round in a random direction, each round. If it moves off the board, the opium smoker generates a new cloud next round.
- 13 Street Mime: When activated, the mime begins pantomiming being in an invisible glass box, imitating the actions of everyone else present, etc. The duel ends, as everyone instantly attempts to put the mime to a horrible death.
- 14 Surgeon: Can treat a wounded or dying duelist. Though non-magical, he has healing abilities (stabilization) equal to a cleric, level 1d3. Does not need to be activated.
- 15 Sweetheart: This woman, who is probably the cause of this fight, is, of course, here to gain status by watching these two idiots try to kill each other over her. Each duelist hits harder (+2 to hit and damage) to impress her for the entire duel. Does not need to be activated.
- 16 Swooning Lady: Faints at the sight of blood when activated, provided someone has already been wounded. When this happens, all of the onlookers and seconds are watching her, giving the activating character one round to attempt to cheat without being seen.
- 17 Urchin: When activated, this child (zero level commoner, -1 to hit) begins throwing rocks at the duelists, one per round, randomly, though if he does not have line of sight to one duelist, he will only throw at the other. A second or gentleman onlooker can be activated to drive him away, which requires one hit with anything from belt to bullet.

- 18 Vampire: Masquerading as a surgeon. Unless an appropriate observation roll is made, he will drain the blood from an unconscious or wounded duelist while supposedly treating him. Does not need to be activated.
- 19 Vampire's Paramour: Attractive, exotic, Continental woman. Will kiss the winning duelist (or the losing one, to console him, 50% chance of either) and drain blood from him if an observation check is not made.
- 20 Wife: The wife (mother, sister, maiden aunt or other appropriate domineering matriarch) finds out her husband/brother/son/nephew is fighting a duel, and attempts to drag him home by the ear, which she will do if she scores a successful hit. She, of course, cannot be attacked by anyone. Level 6 commoner, unarmed. Attacks at +4 to hit if the Sweetheart is present.

## Pistol Dueling

Dueling with pistols was, of course, a feature of the period, and, if allowed by the GM, the challenged person gets the choice of weapons.

A coin is flipped to determine which duelist will shoot first. Misfires and jammed weapons count as shots fired. After the first duelist fires, the second can fire. If the duel does not end at that point, each duelist gets another loaded pistol, with each given the opportunity, in the same order, to fire again.

The duel generally ends when blood is drawn, though the aggrieved party (challenger) can hold out for a duel to the death. However, this is considered distasteful, and there is a 50% chance that any seconds present will force an end to the duel after blood is drawn, unless this is a pirate's duel.



FIREARMS	Rate of Fire	Damage	Short Range(+1)	Long Range(-1)
Pistol	½ rounds	1d12	0-20 feet	40-60 feet

### MISFIRES (1d6)

Any pistol will misfire on a natural attack roll of 1. In addition, roll another 1d6 and, on a score of 1, the pistol explodes, causing normal damage to the firer.

### CRITICAL HITS (1d6)

Pistols Cause critical hits on a natural roll of 19-20. Roll 1d6 on the table below for the result of a critical hit:

- 1-2: Leg wound, double normal damage and ½ movement until healed.
- 3-4: Arm Wound, double normal damage and -2 to hit until healed.
- 5: Chest or stomach wound, triple normal damage and unconscious for 1d6 rounds (1 turn in mass combat).
- 6: Head Wound, quadruple normal damage and unconscious for 1d12 rounds (2 turns in mass combat).

### DUELING ON THE BATTLEFIELD

This assumes a duel that takes place during a large scale battle. The assumption is that it is between officers on opposing sides. Of course, it is possible for two officers on the same side to engage in a duel, selfishly settling their own quarrel while the fate of their nation hangs in the balance, but, if this happens, there is always the chance of court martial.

A duel taking place during a raging battle assumes that the two opponents square off while the battle goes on around them. Generally, this assumes that they are in a relatively quiet area to begin with, but the ebb and flow of battle certainly can affect their fight.

Before each player's turn, he rolls 1d20 on the table below to determine what, if anything, takes place that might affect the duel. Note that a battlefield duel does not include seconds, onlookers, or other such niceties.

### BATTLEFIELD EVENTS (1D20)

- 1-8 Grim Quietude: A dull roar of gunfire in the background, but the battle has shifted away from the duelists.
- 9 Churned Ground: Slippery mud caused by charging troops, exploding shells etc., causes the duelist to immediately fall prone. No further effect if already prone.
- 10 Din of Battle: The loud shriek of artillery fire causes the duelist to lose concentration, and, incidentally, 1d4 maneuver points.

- 11 Artillery Shell Explodes Nearby: The duelist takes 1d6 hit points damage and must save against dexterity or fall prone.
- 12 Fallen Colours: In a randomly determined square 1d6 spaces away from the duelist, a standard bearer of his own force is shot dead and drops the colours. If the duelist manages to pick them up (requires moving into the same space before the duel ends) and if he wins the duel, he is (1d6) either 1-3 promoted, 4-5 commissioned or 6 knighted.
- 13 Fallen Officer: A friendly officer is wounded and falls nearby. Same rules as for Fallen Colours, but apply a -1 to the roll for aiding the officer.
- 14 Stray Round: The duelist takes pistol shot damage, as per a pistol duel (see above). The shot is assumed to automatically hit, but roll a d20 to see if it causes critical damage.
- 15 Flotsam and Jetsam: The duelist spies a glint of metal. If he wins the duel, he recovers either (1d6): 1-4 1d4 x 100 gold pieces, 5 a dead cuirassier's locket showing a picture of his sweetheart (returning it to the lady grants him a permanent +1d3 charisma) or, 6 a masterwork saber (+1 to hit and damage).
- 16 Skirmishing Cossack or Hussar: A crazed, enemy light cavalryman appears for this round only, and takes a slash at the duelist from a random direction. This happens immediately. It can be effected by maneuvers as can the opposing duelist's attack, but the cavalryman immediately gallops away, so there is no chance to strike at him.
- 17 Choking Smoke: The duelist cannot attack this round. He can maneuver normally.
- 18 Dying Foe's Last Blow: A not quite dead enemy lying on the ground makes his last strike at the duelist's feet. He hits on a d20 roll of 11+, then dies. This blow is unexpected, and cannot be prevented.
- 19 Friendly Officer: The officer takes on pistol shot (as 14, above) at the enemy, before his duties call him elsewhere. However, if the duel is between two officers of the same nation, both will be court martialed after the battle (roll charisma or less on d20 to weasel your way out of a firing squad, but you lose one level of rank, regardless).
- 20 Sound the Retreat: The duelist's army has sounded the retreat. He keeps fighting, but must move one space toward his own side's table edge each turn if possible. The duel ends inconclusively if he moves off the table, or if the other side sounds the retreat as well.

## Adapting For D&D 3.5

3.5 adds in a little complexity that can be factored back out in this system. The main problem is the combat related feats that characters rely on in 3.5 have no place here. It must be

remembered that dueling is done by form and rules. Even the dirty tricks employed by pirates are a function of the dueling style itself.

It is also the case that the dueling system is much more complex, and tactically oriented than the 3.5 combat system. Thus, power attack, combat reflexes and similar feats are factored into the Finesse Table, which focuses on the character's ability to size up his opponent and the tactical situation, and then take advantage of the opportunities that mere fractions of a second provide... that can be the difference between victory and death.

The simplest way to deal with feats is just to allow each character an additional Maneuver Point at the beginning of the game for *each combat related feat* he possesses. Thus, such feats as improved initiative and lightning reflexes convert into Maneuver Points, while skill focus (diplomacy) and knowledge (alchemy) do not; neither do feats relating specifically to mass combat, naval combat, artillery fire, or anything other than up close and personal combat with blades. Generally, if the player has some reasonable argument as to why a questionable feat might count as combat related (say, a pirate who is dueling on a ship wants to count skill focus (seamanship) as a combat related feat, arguing that it will help him keep his balance on the rolling and pitching vessel) the GM should probably give the player the benefit of the doubt, though, as always, the GM's decision is final.

### Adapting For D&D 4.0

I have never played this system, and know nothing about it. You're on your own.

### Adapting For D&D 5.0

No additional rules are really necessary for adapting to this simple and precise system. You can probably just go with it as it is.



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