# VIOLENCE

**Autopsy: Easy?**

Hit Points: How fucking stupid?
Avoiding a Ruck
Aaagh! My Spleen!
Bleed out like Tim Roth
Violence Sucks
Help I'm being oppressed!

# Autopsy 3: Violence
## Introduction

After a very long break it's a hearty welcome back to Autopsy and the third – and final – themed issue, long promised. Today's subject – violence in RPGs. We already covered sex and drugs and so, other than 'Rock n' Roll', violence seemed like the best option.

We all take violence pretty much for granted in RPGs as the main source of conflict and tension in the games. Fpr a character to be 'cool' they generally need to be able to do something breathtaking violent, to take out hordes of enemies in combat, despite being outnumbered, or to shoot the wings off a mosquito from two kilometres away.

The largest sections in most RPGs are those sections that cover combat between characters and NPCs and they can often get quite complicated. Why? Because this is when the character's life is most often on the line and where you want the most input on what your character does turn to turn since their survival is at stake.

In many, even most, games this ends up dominating play, whether you're a gang of glorified tomb robbers busting into a subterranean mausoleum, a unit of cyber-enhanced mercenaries engaged in corporate conflict or even a poorly organised mob of defective clones tasked with – very literal – troubleshooting.

Games take a lot of different approaches to violence, some make it the very centre of the game, some abstract it, some go in for gratuitous detail, some try to avoid it. In some combat is made particularly deadly so that – in a bout of self-preservation – the characters will be more careful or find other solutions. In some the 'RP' element has been tuned down and the 'G' element tuned up until you're basically playing a small-scale wargame (much like the early precursors to D&D were anyway).

One need only look at other media, action films, blockbusters, computer games, TV shows, to see that violence is an exciting short cut to action and drama that almost all forms of media go to so this isn't unique to RPGs by any means and, these days, it's video games that take the flak for violence and end up heavily rated. Even so, there's a type of hypocrisy at work here. Culturally we're very accepting of violence, games that contain violence and only violence are likely to get a lower age rating than those that show so much as a nipple.

Tabletop Gaming used to be relatively secure from this sort of puritanical streak but more and more of late there seems to have been an increasing desire to create a 'family friendly' atmosphere. This has begun to impact on depictions of both sex and violence in games and I'm not 100% sold on the idea that this is a good thing. It seems to come about as part and parcel of the idea that the gamer population is aging and that we need new blood, people don't seem to remember that when we were coming up in gaming there were tits and arse in the Monster Manual and violent depictions in a huge number of games. If anything it was this that attracted us, rather than put us off.

Yes, there are limits to what you can have on general release in both spheres but, in my opinion, the needle's swung too far the other way. It seems ridiculous to me that with so many games concentrating on combat that conventions ban depictions of that violence, despite a still picture being far less graphic or engaging than – for example – Manhunt or Grand Theft Auto.

Games are violent, they can be disturbing and we should be celebrating, not condemning this. Many classic works of fiction or cinema are similarly violent and it's really, nothing, to be that ashamed of.

## Contacting Postmortem Studios

I value interaction with all my customers and potential customers and am always happy to field questions, hear game reports or take on board things that people might want published for any of my games. If you want to be part of the discussion there's plenty of ways to get hold of me or to partake of Postmortem's unique take on things:

**E-mail**
**Twitter**
**Facebook**
**Postmortem Studios Website**
**Postmortem Studios Forum**
**Moichandising!**

# A Malenky Bit of Ultraviolence

## Introduction

Games have a great many different approaches to violence but almost all have a nice, big, separate section from the rest of the book called 'Combat' which covers all the specifics of every tiny little detail of what you might try to do in a battle and how various factors like terrain, weapons and so forth, might affect your performance. I'm going to go through the various approaches that I've seen in a moment and talk through what I think are the advantages and disadvantages of each when it comes to creating – or playing – a game and some of the remedies for each issue.

Most games seem to use a combination of these approaches and there also seems to be something of a movement to unify mechanics to cover all conflicts under a unified mechanic. This is especially visible in story-oriented Indie games and in games like FATE which are essentially hybrids of the indie and more traditional gaming point of view. Unfortunately what seems to happen in these instances is that rather than the complexity and involvement of non-combat conflicts being stepped up to match combat, everything tends to get stepped down, watered down and simplified. I'm not convinced that this is necessarily the best approach though, needless to say, making everything as complex as a rules-heavy combat set isn't a solution either, but bringing depth to non-combat without sacrificing the tactical depth and engagement of a giving someone a good shoeing.

## Hit Points

Hit points are the oldest way of tracking damage, the missing link between casualties in the precursor war-games and the various forms of damage that we have today in our massive variety of different RPGs. Hit Points were the de rigeur way to do things for many years and remain a common solution to the issue of tracking damage, despite – or perhaps because of – their presence in many of the oldest and most formative RPGs.

Hit Points are a linear measure of damage, once you take so many points of damage you're down, or dead. Up until that point – generally speaking – you're unaffected. Hit Points are an all or nothing solution to tracking damage with little room for in-between interpretations. Hit Points – under a variety of names – are generally tied to class/level systems where as your character progresses they become harder to kill, not necessarily by sheer virtue of their skill but by the increase in their 'level', a concept that has no real-world equivalent. Because of this Hit Points have shifted in description over the years until they've become not only one's raw, physical capacity for enduring harm but also, to an extent, a measure of luck, morale and other factors, more of a 'capacity to fight' rather than health per se.

### Advantages:

Hit Points are extremely simple, easy to grasp and being able to endure strikes with relative impunity is great for creating an heroic feel. If you want a system that makes characters more enduring and able to face down greater enemies as they gain power – without relying on their luck at defending themselves by dodging or parrying – then this is a good way to allow for that.

### Disadvantages:

Hit Points obscure the drama of being wounded, as (increasingly) a catch-all they no longer mean that much and if Hit Points are also a measure of morale and luck, why do bandages heal them? Why would medical attention help with your luck? Hit Points can break immersion and they're a clumsy and unrealistic way of representing damage.

**Solutions:**
Some games try to compensate for the flaws of Hit Points by making them scarce, so that they're a treasured commodity, combat is shorter and there's still a good sense of risk to fights. Others divide Hit Points out by location so that rather than being a single total, Hit Points are spread throughout locations and a more descriptive form of combat where wounds can become crippled is possible. None of these entirely deal with the issues surrounding Hit Points but they may help to remove some of the worst leavings of this particular Sacred Cow of gaming.

## Wound Levels
Wound levels are on a linear scale as well and show some relation to Hit Points on that basis. Rather than going from fine to fucked on a binary switch, wound levels are normally graduated as different states of debilitation - for example going from 'fine', to 'lightly wounded' to 'heavily wounded' to 'knocked out' to 'dead'. Wounds levels are a little bit better than Hit Points when it comes to realism but it loses some points because multiple light wounds don't necessarily add up to a heavier, more debilitating wound – though they tend to under these systems. While it's fairly realistic for a wound to be debilitating to a character's performance, this can be really de-empowering to a player and probably isn't the best choice for a cinematic styled game.

**Advantages:**
Wound levels are simple to administer, just like Hit Points, but have a bit more depth and system variation in them. You can give tougher characters more wound levels at different degrees, so they might take more 'serious wounds' or more 'fine' levels, depending on how you want things to work or the nature of the character. They present a useful compromise for rules-light, but serious minded, systems.

**Disadvantages:**
Like Hit Points they're a little too simplistic and the death-spiral that characters get into as they get wounded and so lose their capabilities and so get wounded even more is the antithesis of heroic. There's also not as much gradiation as you might get with other forms of damage and the tendency for small wounds to stack up into big wounds is where you begin to grate against people's real life experiences and expectations, causing a disconnect from the game.

**Solutions:**
Not letting wounds stack – at least not so often – and rather having the wound level represent your worst wound is one possible solution, but with tough enemies it can be hard to push their wound level on and getting them killed. Dealing with that secondary problem tends to require complications that prevent the system from remaining fast and simple. One possible solution to that is only to make wounds of a certain level, or higher, stack. For example, a character might be able to take any number of light wounds and only ever retain a -1 penalty, but more severe wounds push the wound level up.

## Wound Thresholds
The concept of wound thresholds is that a different amount of damage will have a different effect upon a person, either being shrugged off since it falls below the threshold or causing some kind of wound if it goes over the threshold, or thresholds, even killing someone outright if it goes high enough. As realism goes this is pretty similar in scale to wound levels, though a bit closer to the nature of the way people actually get harmed. A hell of a lot comes down to luck though, one bad hit can kill you while a hundred lower level hits leave you unscathed. It's a hard system to get the balance right on so that the possibility of harm remains across the range of character statistics.

**Advantages:**
Wound thresholds are fairly realistic and can allow tough characters to shrug off pain and wounds that would fell less powerful characters. It's still not particularly complicated – though it can get bogged down in its implications on the rest of a system.

**Disadvantages:**
The effects of any hit become pretty unpredictable and random. This can have implications upon character survivability and heroics which means it tends to be preferable for military games or those with high character mortality rules. The danger also exists that if the combat system is not very well balanced, at the other end of the scale, tough characters can wade through a massive amount of trauma and damage without a scratch.

**Solutions:**
Allowing wounds to stack, the opposite solution to the wound levels issue, is a good way of compensating for the fact that tough enemies can be a beast to take down under games of this type. Scaling damage according to the weapon's size and purpose is another solution so that vehicle weapons become much more effective against things beneath their normal scale.

## Descriptives

Descriptives are wounds that are described in prose or adjective terms. A prime example being the 'consequences' in FATE and its offshoots but more than a few story games opt for similar methods. Wounds are described rather than being purely mechanical and their affects are determined by that description. 'Hamstrung' might penalise you for moving, climbing and other physical activities while 'Blood in your eyes ' might prevent you from being able to shoot accurately or spot that ninja sneaking up on you.

**Advantages:**
There's no real limit to what you can do with a descriptive wound system, any gratuitous injury that you can think of can be represented in such a fashion. The only real limit is people's imagination and their ability to describe that imagination in words. Even then, you don't really need to get overly complex in these descriptions.

**Disadvantages:**
Often the game mechanics fall short of your descriptive powers and while a truly debilitating wound might be described – and indeed justified – it doesn't have quite the effect that you were looking for upon your target. If you're no good at descriptions, or exploiting them, then you may not get your money's worth out of combat in such a system.

**Solutions:**
Upping the severity of penalties may go against the player enfranchisement ethic of many story games, but it does allow for consistency between wound descriptions and their effects upon the game. In some genres this isn't an issue at all, in horror and heroic settings alike people – particularly enemies – can be grotesquely injured and keep on going.

## Critical Hits

Critical hit systems allow for exceptional rolls to cause exceptional damage, even one-shot kills against terrible enemies. This is usually coupled alongside one of the other damage systems I've talked about and bolts onto it, itself as a sort of solution to some of the shortcomings of other systems. The kind of critical hits I'm talking about here aren't the 'double damage' kind but, rather, the sort of descriptive critical hits to be found in RoleMaster, Warhammer RPGs and Blood! The kind where you have a table according to the type of damage and roll to discover precisely what sort of unpleasant and crippling injury you have given to your enemy.

**Advantages:**
Critical hit systems allow for descriptive wounds and retain some of the impact and risk of battle. The crippling injuries done to enemies can bring a collective cheer from the players around the table and rolling to uncover the effect of a critical is often a tense and expectant moment. If you're not very good at wound descriptions, either as a GM or a player, these sorts of tables are a godsend and certain results can become group favourites that they look forward to rolling again and again.

**Disadvantages:**
The randomness of critical hits can be an issue, especially when the GM doesn't want their special bad guy to die right away, doesn't want players dying on the whim of a single dice roll or when characters have described their actions one way but cause a wound completely out of character with the attack they made when they roll it. You can, of course, fudge die-rolls, but this is often unsatisfying and can feel a bit too much like cheating.

**Solutions:**
A more generic critical hit table with more general descriptions can solve the issue of wounds not being congruent with actions. Using a 'lighter' table to describe the normal wounds that occur throughout battle may also be a solution to the stark differential between normal hits and critical hits but such additional rolling will tend to bog down play in table referencing.

## Toning it Down
A good number of Indie games try to tone down the violent aspect of RPGs by concentrating their efforts elsewhere, emphasising alternative approaches or subsuming the combat system within the other systems of the game, thereby making it no less critical to the game than any other element, stealing away its time in the spotlight. Some of these methods can be used in any game, even those with conventional combat systems in order to draw attention away from 'killing things and taking their stuff' to other aspects of role-play.

**Advantages:**
De-emphasising combat or subsuming it into the rest of the system streamlines games and allows them to be smaller, leaving more room for creative content and cutting a lot of complexity out of a game. This is ideal for small press indie games, games that are trying to appeal to different audiences and games where you want to concentrate on relationships, investigation and discovery.

**Disadvantages:**
Many gamers like to fight in games. They like to be powerful, deadly, victorious. Undermining the combat system or possibilities of a game or scenario deprotaganises these players and leaves them out. It doesn't tick their boxes and they deserve as much engagement with a system as anyone. Toning it down, in system or execution, is heavily dependent upon the group dynamic for success.

**Solution:**
Rather than stepping down the combat mechanics and emphasis, up the stakes and involvement of the other aspects of the system, bring them up to the same sort of speed and importance that combat has so that duelling with your tongue is as engaging as duelling with a sword.

## Chiefs & Braves
One way of combining sheer carnage with more challenging fights is to divide the enemies into Chiefs and Braves, Bosses and Mooks, Masters and Minions or any other set of distinctions you care to make along the same sort of lines. The point is that one set of enemies are, essentially, cannon fodder, wheat before your scythe, while others are much more effective and dangerous. This allows characters to be heroic and dramatic while cleaving through underlings but also allows them to engage in proper, heroic battles and duels against suitable enemies.

**Advantages:**

This is a great way of making characters feel powerful and heroic through a high bodycount and incredible effectiveness against the less-good enemies.  Even non-combat heroes can hold their own against minions fairly well in these sorts of systems and the greater challenge of the 'bosses' can make for some great scenes of combat conflict worthy of the finest duels in cinema. This is incredibly expedient for large scale battles as the rules for minions tend to be extremely streamlined and cater to large groups engaging in combat all at once.

**Disadvantages:**

The minions go down too easily and, as characters increase in power, you may need to create ridiculously sized legions of enemies in order to take on the characters and have any semblance of a challenge occurring. The sudden switch in style from mowing down hordes of enemies Aeon Flux style to a duel with a much more powerful enemy boss can also be jarring, especially if the two elements are mixed together. This style of combat system is also manifestly unsuited to games with vulnerable protagonists, realism or any real seriousness.

**Solutions:**

There aren't really any solutions to this issue past good GMing skills. Characterise the fights well, have clear delineations between mob and boss fights and the few issues that exist with this should sort themselves out. Also, don't use this system if you're going for a game that's remotely realistic or serious.

## Conclusion

It's often said that rules don't matter and that one can have fun with any game. While this is true – to an extent – a game's rules are the scaffold upon which you hang your story. They provide the game 'physics' and if the rules don't support the kind of story you're trying to create together, then you're going to have a lot of grief. Nowhere, to me, is this more apparent than with combat rules.

If you're creating a game you need to consider all these factors when you're choosing your own combat system – or perhaps you want to take a new approach that isn't discussed here. When you're running a game you need to consider the tools that you have to work with and, perhaps, may need to house rule a little – here and there – just to ensure that you get the feel from the game that you really want to have.

# The Road Less Travelled

*"Can I get a packet of Marlboro please?"*
*"Certainly sir, that'll be an arm, a leg and the soul of your firstborn please."*
*"I've only got a fiver..."*
*"No cigarettes then."*
*The customer drew his gun from inside his jacket, blowing the shopkeeper away with a fusillade of dum-dum rounds, turning him into little more than a red splash.*
*"I'll just take them then."*

Despite media reports and films trying to establish someone's bad guy/badass credentials, this doesn't really happen that often in the real world.  People find other solutions to their problems that don't involve sheer, bloody murder and if they can't afford something, they borrow money or make some more, they don't just kill the guy and take the one thing that they want – most of the time.

Unfortunately, in many games, violence seems to be the first – rather than the last – resort of many characters, through the medium of their players. Perhaps they're acting through their frustrations using the game as a cathartic exercise, all well and good but that sort of thing is what psychiatrists are for. Even if you're playing a barbarian he wouldn't get very far putting his axe through the head of every shopkeeper who doesn't have low-fat yoghurt to sell him and resorting to violence has consequences. Not least of all the fact that the supposed hero will rapidly become the villain.

Even in potentially violent conflicts, even after blows have been exchanged, you'll usually find people trying to mediate, break it up or calm the situation down whether it's a brawl outside of a pub or the negotiated surrender of a unit of soldiers to the enemy. In fantasy games the second option may not be such a good idea if you're facing cannibalistic orcs, but if they're going to take you back to their camp to eat you there may be escape opportunities – which is better than being killed and eaten on the spot. It's not like we charge into fields and bite cows now is it?

Still, outside of that particular context, fighting to the death is foolhardy and not even necessarily that heroic – at least when compared to breaking out of a prison armed with nothing but your own chains. There's lots of ways in which one can avoid, dissipate or end a violent conflict and these are as true of the characters' enemies as they are of the characters themselves.

## Talk

Surely you can talk about this? Surely there's no need to resort to violence straight away? Surely there's been a misunderstanding of some sort. You're not who they think you are, they're not who you think they are and it's better to exchange information now – since dead people can't talk to each other.

Any problem or conflict, so long as your enemy is intelligent, should be able to be talked out before – or instead of – becoming violent. Talking should be the first option, allowing your characters to blather, bullshit, fast talk, convince or otherwise use their silver tongues to avoid having to kill anyone – or risk their own deaths. This is why you keep the 'face' characters around after all and they deserve their chance to be pretty and charming just as much  as the guy with the axe gets to clobber heads.

In fantasy games a little judicious magic can ease this sort of thing along, influencing the enemies so that they're more inclined to be friendly. Otherwise, the time spent talking can be used to prepare some useful spells or magical items, just in case it does turn – abruptly – into a physical conflict.

## Run

Running away may be cowardly but 'he who turns and runs away, lives to fight another day'. Players are surprisingly reluctant to cut and run in games, despite the fact that they may be able to achieve the objectives that have caused them to need to fight, without actually slaughtering everything. This might be a by-product of so many games only rewarding victory, rather than low, animal cunning and good sense. You can counter that by rewarding intelligent, survival behaviour with experience, even *more* experience than stand-up fights that are foolhardy and stupid. You can tailor games to include good escape routes to also encourage your players to 'run away', a few deadly fights against near impossible enemies and they might get the message.

## Hide

If you've just busted out of your prison cell you don't really want to fight off a dozen angry guards with nothing but your chains and a winning smile. If you hide they might go past you, if you sneak they might not notice you. Hiding and sneaking are valid ways of avoiding conflict and can be as challenging as a more direct physical conflict itself. A Games Master can make this game of 'hide and sneak' more engaging by turning it into a series of challenges involving timing, shadows, distractions and misdirection in order to have the characters sneak past their opponents.

## Pay them Off

Money is a great way of avoiding conflict. If you're willing to give up your wealth without a fight who is going to want to risk death and injury in fighting you anyway? Equally an enemy may well be willing to hand over their treasure if they're obviously over-matched, without a fight. This can be problematic in some games where experience points are gained from slaughtering things, because there is a reward in killing people that you can't get otherwise. If you can defeat people without killing them, or vice versa, there's always the possibility of ransom and if someone has paid off your ransom that's a great hook to make you owe someone and do their bidding.

## Surrender

Against an intelligent enemy surrender is an option, unless they're cartoonishly evil. There is a deep resistance to slaughter in most human beings that military training has to work hard to overcome. Surrendered prisoners are going to end up in prison, ransomed or stripped of their armour and wealth and simply released. Even if they are to be killed there may well be a trial, even if it's peremptory and that's a great opportunity for drama and RP.

As you can see, violence and death aren't the only options and, indeed, many of these other options are much better for the game, for the story and for your characters.

# Injuries in the Real World

We're so used to abstracting damage in games that we forget what these injuries actually are and what they actually do to people, how debilitating they can be and what kind of damage they represent. If you want to add a dose of reality – and hey, you might want to – then this article should give you some idea of what these wounds and contusions actually mean for someone who takes them.

## Bruises

We don't really think that much of bruises, we brush them off. What a bruise really is though, is actually internal bleeding. A blunt strike against flesh ruptures the blood vessels at the surface without breaking skin and blood leaks into the surrounding tissue discolouring it. Wounds that can bruise can also cause concussions, brain injuries and break bones, all without breaking the skin. Blunt trauma – often 'non-lethal damage' – in games can be anything but. Severe bruises can weaken the muscle and make movement painful and difficult.

Really severe bruising from crash impacts and so forth becomes more like internal bleeding as we normally think of it. Really severe internal bleeding can cause someone to bleed out without any external sign that this is happening. A large amount of internal bleeding can compress organs and mess up their function and this is particularly harmful if it occurs on the brain.

## Cuts

A cut breaks the skin and allows a wound to bleed freely. It can cut into the muscle below, severing muscle fibres and make limb weak. Deep cuts can bite into internal organs beneath the skin and muscle and this can be be crippling and a danger to the life of the person who has been cut. Cuts also have a high risk of cutting into veins or arteries and causing someone to bleed out. Really deep cutting wounds can sever tendons, making a limb completely and utterly helpless.

## Brain Injuries

The brain is actually remarkably resilient. While a wound that afflicts the brain is normally terribly debilitating the brain can also suffer massive injuries and survive with most of its function intact. The brain has a way of 'routing around' damage and recovering function, albeit slowly. Brain injuries can have many strange effects, loss of coordination, loss of memory, loss of memory function, personality changes, paralysis and more.

## Broken Bones

Bones are usualy broken by powerful impacts and can entirely internal or can occur when the flesh is broken by the powerful blow of a blade-like weapon. The sharp ends of a broken bone can even pierce the flesh from the inside if the break is particularly severe. If the break is exposed there's a much higher risk of infection within the bone as well as the surrounding wound. Broken bones are extremely painful, a broken rib makes any action difficult, even breathing. A broken limb is much more debilitating than films would make you think, not only the pain and the risk of further injury but also the muscle spasms that can take place as the body tries to hold the bones together. Fully healing a broken bone can take as long as 18 months, though the bone is usually up to 80% of its original strength within three months or so. Casts aid healing by immobilising the bone that's broken and are usually worn for six to eight weeks. The bone is not fully healed at the end of this time, but usually strong enough to conduct normal activity. Bones may well heal stronger than they were before.

## Broken Back/Neck

A broken back or neck is not necessarily certain death, nor is it certain paralysis and resultant crippling. Breaking vertebrae is hard to heal but is otherwise not so different than any other broken bone. The danger in these injuries is not the broken bone itself, but rather the risk of injury to the spinal column that comes with it. If the damage to the spine at the neck or back injures the spinal cord beneath that's when death or paralysis occurs.

## Gunshot Wounds

Gunshot wounds are devastating because of several factors. They penetrate the skin and flesh, break and shatter bones that the bullet strikes, pierce organs, blow out large amounts of muscle tissue and cause death from shock or even wounds far from the site of the strike as energy from the bullet is distributed around the body. Bullets can tumble and fragment as they move through the body, causing damage on a track through the body. The exit wound is normally larger than the entry wound because of this. Most detahs from gunshot wounds are caused by bleeding, organ failure, damage to the nervous system and heart attack.

## Infections

An infection is any colonisation by virus, bacterium or parasite. When it comes to combat wounds such as occur in most games infection should be the chief concern when it comes to wounds that have otherwise been survived. Weapons aren't clean and breaking the skin gets dirt and disease into the body, bypassing many of the body's lines of defence. Infected wounds fester, weaken the body, cause fever and other symptoms and spread infection around the body. Wounds that pierce or slash the gut are particularly dangerous for this reason, exposing the rest of the body to fecal matter and the bacteria therein. Gut wounds were considered so deadly that the Vikings would feed the wounded a pungent mix of herbs and onions and if they could smell it rising from the wound would administer a mercy killing. Antibiotics and modern, clean surgical practices do much to protect against these deadly infections but it's by no means certain.

## Tendons

For a limb to work three things need to be working. The nervous system to send the signals, the muscles to react to the nerve stimulus and the tendons that attach the muscle to the bone. Tendons can be severed by piercing, cutting or gunshot wounds and this is like taking the elastic out of a waistband, rendering the limb loose, floppy and unable to operate. Modern surgical techniques can repair tendons but in a setting that isn't modern this isn't a wound that is likely to heal.

## Burns

Burns can be deadly if they're deep or over a large amount of the body. Otherwise the main problem with them for people who suffer them is that they are extremely painful and disfiguring. Skin heals tight and immobile, scarring is terrible. Burns can be caused by exposure to fire, heat, chemicals, scalding by liquid or electrical shock. The pain is what is truly crippling for those who suffer burns of a non-fatal variety, truly crippling agony the pain can last for a very, very long time.

## Nerve Damage

Damage to nerves can occurs anywhere in the body. Some nerve damage will heal, unless the nerve is completely severed. Otherwise the damage is generally permanent. Light nerve damage causes periodic interruptions to the nerve signal, which can cause palsy, tremors and muscle twitching. Heavier damage completely interrupts the nerve signal and can paralyse limbs or remove sensation, making them clumsy. Nerve damage from deep burns can, confusingly, make the burn feel cold, rather than hot, numbing the reaction to the pain.

Realistic wounds are 'not fun' but if you're going for a grittier game or for realistic and long-lasting harm from particular wounds or long term damage to a character who has been really hurt this may provide inspiration or some background to physical flaws that a character may have, resulting from their wounds in combat.

# The Slow Death

Most games have a death occurring suddenly in a moment of extreme violence. The single sword thrust through the body, a gunshot to the head, annihilated in the ravening beam of a spell or laser cannon. Death doesn't always come quickly though, it can come slowly as a character bleeds out or disease slowly claims their body. A person can battle death as much, if not more, than they battle the enemies who wound them.

Take Reservoir Dogs as a case in point. For most of the film Mr Orange is bleeding out from a gut wound but this doesn't stop him being a key character in the film, participating and acting as the major engine for the plot. A dying – rather than a dead character – has nothing to lose which can be freeing, even if it means the player is going to lose their character.

The rush for a cure is a heavily used dramatic idea and while a little hackneyed it does allow you to direct a group and 'railroad' them without being too overt or resented for it. Whether it's the cure to a rare poison or disease or a way to undo a wasting curse it gives an immediate plot hook and motivation – presuming the characters care at all about the person whose life is in their hands.

A wounded character who is slowly dying is also a common idea in stories that are set around a siege or defence of some sort. The wounded man who knows that he is going to die and fights to the end. The ally or mentor who is slowly dying from an arrow wound but who musters enough strength to organise his troops. If you're dealing with non-player characters in games these sorts of scenes and injuries are easy enough to dole out with sheer Games Master fiat. When it comes to characters the players will more likely want you to play to the letter of the rules rather than allowing story ideas to run away with you. The one exception to this might be where a character is otherwise definitely going to die and you grant them a reprieve provided that they are dying, if not actually dead. In this instance being able to 'carry on' for a while may give them hope that the other characters can somehow rescue them or at least give them a drawn out death as compensation for losing their character.

Even slower deaths can also act as motivation – through threat – to get characters moving and to motivate them to do something, anything. Starvation, thirst, heat, cold, these can all kill and again, referring back to the siege scenario with the dying mentor, they're what can inspire heroics and stupidity in equal measure from those who are subjected to them.

The threat of a slow, painful death in a fort as the food and water runs out, disease spreads and people start eating pets, rats and even each other in order to survive that's when you can get your hooks into the players and suggest some drastic, even foolhardy adventure hooks that might get them out of such a terrible situation. Plague can perform much the same function, prompting characters to move on and get out of the area that the disease is spreading as fast as they can. This is much more effective than an invading army or monster which, players being players, they will think that they can fight or outwit and will dig their heels in to confront.

Most games, most scenarios, concentrate on the immediate threat of sudden death. The fight. The trap. The fall from the tower. By keeping in mind the longer, harder and worse ways that someone can meet their end – whether they do or not – you can add a degree of depth to a game that goes beyond the rules as presented and the adventures as they are written out.



*Tim Roth in Reservoir Dogs*

# Risk/Reward

## Story Vs Jeopardy

Violence in real life can be utterly senseless and brutal but in games it should – usually – serve a purpose. Games have shifted away from the idea that characters are in constant threat of death every time they open a chest or examine a lock and we've both lost and gained from this change. We've lost the sense of accomplishment that comes with the overcoming of genuine danger but we've gained the chance to plan ahead and to create more sweeping, epic plots without them being put at risk just because someone treads on a nail and gets lockjaw. The danger is that characters – and players – get insulated from what their actions because there's a reluctance to apply consequences.

## Stupidity Should be Punished

There's something of an ideological battle, at least online, between broadly defined 'story gaming' and the more traditional 'kill 'em all' outlook. As with most things in gaming I seem to fall somewhere in the middle. I think there's a balance to be struck here, one where death should be significant, should be a risk, but shouldn't simply be thrown in to spice things up. If players make their characters do something stupid or dangerous then they should run the risks that go with it and if they act stupidly the Games Master should not hold back from applying those consequences. Play serious, but leave wiggle room to get around problems sensibly.

## Tempering Disappointment

Dying sucks. There's no getting around that fact. It sucks worse in the real world but it sucks pretty damn hard in fictional terms as well. People get very attached to their characters and when they depart this mortal coil there is a sense of loss, frustration and disappointment (unless they weren't really gelling with the character in the first place). While you want to maintain the threat of loss to some degree it doesn't hurt to temper the loss of the character with some compensatory aspects.

- Characters can leave a legacy. Children. Items. A weapon that carries their legend.
- Characters can have a death scene. Say what needs to be said, advise what needs to be advised.
- A character's death can provide a boost to their comrades as they seek revenge. You can reflect this with a temporary bonus to statistics, combat or defence if you want. A tangible benefit really helps soften the blow. You can even create a commemorative power or ability that invokes the name of the character or the battle where they fell.

## The Tales We Remember

Unexpected death can make a tale memorable. The first time we read The Lord of the Rings and Boromir dies its shocking and his redemption through his heroic death is a powerful keystone in the whole story. Unfortunately the other best example I can come up with is from the TV series 'Game of Thrones' and thus, the same actor. When Lord Stark is executed at the end of the first season it is a massive surprise to everyone who had not already read the books since he'd been such a key character. Death scenes from Spock to Marcus Cole (albeit a living death) have massive emotional weight and can be the linchpins upon which a whole story arc can hinge.

## Skill Vs Luck

One massive problem we have in RPGs is that, essentially, everything comes down to luck and the roll of a dice. When a character dies it comes down to luck and that robs a player of feeling that they have any real say in the fate of their character in the way, say, that they might in a computer game.

Sure, a player can minimise or maximise their chances by applying bonuses, making as much as possible work for them, but it does all come down to the dice. There isn't really much we can do about this but we can try to reward skill and good thinking on the part of the player in order to minimise the sense one gets that one has been 'robbed' by a bad roll.

You shouldn't let any death come down to a single roll either, there should always be a fall back. If a character falls off a cliff, give them a chance to grab a shrub. If a character is poisoned, give someone a chance to apply a cure. Always have a fall back, for the sake of the player and to give them a fair shake.

# Blood! Errata

## GMing Tips for Blood!

Blood! is a rules-heavy game, which can be a bit daunting in this modern age of rules-lite games that don't take anywhere near as much preparation. It's a percentile based game with a lot to keep track of (if you choose to track everything). People seem to feel that this might detract from the horror aspect, which is something that I don't feel is entirely fair.

- **Scarcity** - A lot of survival games on consoles and computers play up scarcity as a means of ramping up tension. For them it's about ammunition and health packs, in Blood! It's about hit points and blood points. The fact that they're relatively scant and can be annihilated fairly rapidly means you can use the statistics as a tool to intensify tension, horror and risk. When you're wounded in Blood! You 'feel' it. Players will tend to be careful and characters will die quite easily.
- **Kill the bastards** - Do NOT be afraid to kill characters. Indeed, it's hard not to in Blood! Even if you're playing a campaign you should kill. Be ruthless, it's a horror game. That'll make those lucky survival moments all the better when they do happen and will make surviving the game into a real badge of honour.
- **Improvise** - There's rules for a lot but once you get a handle on what damage things tend to do it's really just percentile roles. You can pull modifiers, differences and damage types out of your arse with no problem.
- **Smoke & Mirrors** - You don't need as much prep as you think - Use average stats for monsters and NPCs and just change how you describe things. Shift five percent around here and there, bump up or down HP from the average standard and you've got as much change as you really need to introduce a little variety. If you have time to create all the extras then, by all means, go all out and create each enemy individually.
- 

- **Use the Crits as a Guide** - Blood!'s critical hits are notorious, gory and cover a hell of a lot of ground, but even so they will get repetitious after a while. Use the descriptions and the kinds of wounds as a guide rather than an absolute. Keep the mechanics and switch up the descriptions a bit to make them fit how the combat has been going. View them as inspiration rather than absolutes.

## Official Errata

**Clarification:** A character can hold up to double their base actions in actions, or 5 actions, whichever is highest.

*EG: Derek has 2 base actions and can hold up to a maximum of 5. Sara has 3 actions and can hold up to a maximum of 6.*

**Official Rules Change:** If you have extra actions you may spend them to increase your chance to hit by +10% per extra action.

# Wound Thresholds for Xpress

## Current Damage System

Currently in most Xpress systems weapons have a damage rating and this describes the damage on an average hit (three successes) For example, a light handgun does damage 8 on an average hit, which is enough to take most people out, though not heroes in '45 and other more pulpy games.

The damage track is actually quite simple, but a lot of people find it complicated and unwieldy so the intention here is to provide an alternative way to track damage that's done to characters that isn't quite so paperwork intensive.

## Wound Thresholds

Rather than having a set amount of health damage that a character can take a character now has 'wound thresholds'. Damage that is done to a character trips these various different levels and applies their effects.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Stun:** | **Resilience** |
| **Flesh Wound:** | **Resilience +2 Penalty -1** |
| **Light Wound:** | **Resilience +4 Penalty -2** |
| **Medium Wound:** | **Resilience +6 Penalty -3** |
| **Severe Wound:** | **Resilience +8 Penalty -4** |
| **Crippling Wound:** | **Resilience +10 Penalty -5** |
| **Dead:** | **Resilience +12** |

Any damaging effect also has the stun effect, which imposes a -1 penalty to any actions for the character's next turn. Any hit that does double the character's Resilience in damage also knocks them out for 2d6 minutes.

Wounds are recorded individually and each one has a debilitating effect upon rolls equal to the Penalty it is. For example a flesh wound imparts a -1 penalty. Healing each wound type is as a difficulty modifier equal to the same level. These penalties also affect a character's Resilience, so it becomes easier to be wounded as time goes on. Healing these wounds is more difficult, penalised by the Penalty and each wound must be treated individually.

In pulp games the total incoming damage is reduced by the character's Resilience as well, making them much more durable.

This does change how damage is worked out as well. Now damage is equal to the damage score of the weapon plus the total number of successes.

*EG: In @ctiv8 Johnson lines up a rifle shot on a Somali pirate. He gets three successes to hit and the gun normally does damage 12. This gives him a total of 15 damage. The Somali has a Resilience of 4 and so suffers a Crippling (-5) wound from the hit. One more damage and he would have been killed.*

*Later Johnson gets stabbed with a knife for 8 damage. Johnson has a Resilience of 4 so he takes a Light Wound. This reduces his effective Resilience by 2, so he'll have less protection against any follow up strike.*

*EG: In a game of '45, Bubba is attacked and struck by a chainsaw wielding gorilla for 17 points of damage. Bubba takes his Resilience of 5 away from that leaving 12. He still takes a Severe Wound and is now in serious trouble.*

# Violence in Roleplaying
## By Michael Garcia a.k.a. The Crazy GM

*"The type of game we play shapes our expectation of the violence within it, just as occurs in the type of media we watch. D&D is different to Call of Cthulhu as an action movie is different to Saw. Taking the expectations from one game into another can throw this into sharp relief and real violence is far more like a horror movie than we like to think."*

The current generation's views on violence are horribly skewed in one direction or another. One set of people will come to the tabletop hobby by means of MMOs such as World of Warcraft. Almost everyone is familiar with this game as it has been quite popular for the last ten years. The problem with it is that it doesn't portray violence in a way that I would deem acceptable. When the 'toon goes out on a mission to kill the bandits and retrieve their handkerchiefs the players kill dozens of bandits. Not a single drop of blood is shown, no horrible cuts, no dismemberment or anything else of that nature. I understand that Blizzard took this stance to make it playable for children. But they are not the only one guilty of this.

Take another huge staple in fantasy fandom; The Lord of the Rings. If the next generation of gamers doesn't get their expectations from WoW they will probably get it from movies like this. I was a huge Tolkien fan long before it was commercialized, as I am sure most older gamers were. Now the movies were not too bad at portraying the story as it was written. I do have to give them some credit there. The problem is violence yet again. Boromir dies with large amount arrows in his chest. Not a drop of blood in sight. Then the beheading of an orc soon after and again, not a drop. I know not many people have seen a beheading. I have. It is something you can never forget.

I have lived a life of violence. Violence I've seen, Violence I've known. I was in the US Army for a short period and between jobs as a computer technician I worked in Law Enforcement. I have seen things that have made grown men wet themselves. I've seen more blood than all the Saw movies combined. I take violence very seriously in my games, unless I'm running them for children.

Most gamers now play without concern, but it also depends on the game being played. In a regular D&D type game, with the hack-n-slash mentality, kill the monsters take the loot, and save the princess. Not once does anyone consider what kind of pain a sword swing will actually do. I lost 4 points, and they carry on. I have seen knife wounds. That's not something you can shake off easily. A mace to the brainpan. 6 points of damage, I counter attack. What about concussion?

My recent game decisions have been a combination of the two. You need violence in a game without it being overlooked. In fantasy games it's a bit harder to convey this message. I understand that the heroes are just that, heroes, but it doesn't mean that violence is a side product of being a hero. One of my favorite quotes, and I'm not sure the origin, is from the movie Serenity, when a guy tries to get up and Zoë says:

*"Do you know what the definition of a hero is? Someone who gets other people killed. You can look it up later."*
Most people brush it off, without a care about what they are doing.

Most fantasy games that I have been, in or adventures I have read, involve flat out first-degree murder and there are no repercussions. So you saved the tulip caravan from the bandits, that's great. Did you have to murder them? Could you not have detained them for the constables to take care of later?

I suggest next time you play that you pay a little more attention to the violence being dealt and handle it more properly. Make your next fantasy game really stick out as you describe how horrifying the damage being dished out really is. Describe crushed skulls, amputated limbs, entrails spilling out. The stench of gore. How they can not get the blood and bodily fluids out of their cloths. And make a point of it. No royal person would speak to someone that filthy and I'm sure the town watch will have a few questions too, even if it is just goblin brains on their boots.

Violence is a horrible thing, and it should be horrifying at the table too. Lets not overlook it anymore.

At the same time though in a game such as Call of Cthulhu or any more serious modern game. A bullet graze becomes a big deal. Healing takes a lot longer. I tend to prefer games such as this. Just from life experience, probably. more than anything. The players in these games don't run out and kill the monster and take its loot. Hell no, they try to find some way to avoid the conflict and get rid of the adversary by any other means available. Violence is usually a plot device, the room covered in blood, trails of blood, mangled bodies and the like.

# Come and see the Violence Inherent in the System
*Musings on the Violence of Authority by Ian Warner*

## Preface

Having just finished **Tough Justice** a game of law and order set in the most brutal period of English legal history Grim thought I was the man to tackle the violence of authority. I shall try to be as generic as possible but of course **Tough Justice** will often be the fallback reference point.

He may have been a bit of right wing hack but Robert Heinlein came up with an excellent quote on the violence of authority.

*"When you vote you are exercising authority, you are using force, and force my friends is violence, the supreme authority from which all other authorities are derived."*

In context this used to justify his little Fascist paradise in Starship Troopers. Nothing wrong with that I'll probably use worse to justify my Fascist paradise in **On Our Republic** when I get round to writing it. However if we take the quote out of context it has a sinister ring of truth.

Humans are, by nature, selfish, violent, underhand bastards. All of which are not qualities conductive to the establishment of civilisation. To civilise you must control human nature and by far the most effective way to do that is violence or the threat of violence.

I shall proceed to describe the use of violence, in a Roleplaying Game context, for all aspects of Law and Order.

## Arrest

First things first you have to catch your suspected criminal and even in today's seemingly more civilised age this will likely involve brutal physical restraint.

There is a slight problem with this in grappling. I have never seen a grappling system that actually makes any sense and can be easily run. I toyed around with creating one for Xpress but after a few goes I just thought "fuck it ain't working."

To be fair it is a pretty damn fiddly thing to emulate and I don't blame any system in particular for getting it wrong. If you need to use grappling find a simpler way to wing it or learn your system, whatever it is, studiously in preparation.

If it is your Player Characters that are doing arresting they will probably want to go all Gene Hunt on the poor bastard! This is easy enough to handle. Most systems are relatively good at a bit of non lethal thumping. However they must bear in mind that police brutality can count against their case in all but the most corrupt of settings.

While not violence as such, the chase can be quite a good dramatic sequence. It's tempting to go Matrix leaping across the rooftops but even a mundane foot chase on ground level can be dramatic with the right handling.

How about when the Player Characters are on the other side and fleeing for their liberty or even their lives? Well unless you're a complete arsehole of a Games Master this is usually because they've fucked up. Yes I am well aware they could have been framed but in order to get framed you have to act suspicious in some way. Actions and consequence have always been the byword for Roleplaying even before that Certain Roleplaying Company started thinking themselves oh so "revolutionary" by plastering it all over their books.

Actions and consequences mitigates the supposed "punishment" of having armed bastards chasing you but the heavy handed forcing of the Player Characters into crime in order to bring in the heavies is not on: Unless you are playing **Paranoia** of course.

Arrest and apprehension make for fast paced dramatic action sequences. Regardless of the outcome they also help progress your plot. Screwing up on either side is all part of the fun!

## Interrogation

The reason Gene Hunt was such a breath of fresh air for some was because of the really irritating touchy feely interrogations by modern cop drama Characters. The insufferably nice Tom Barnaby (unfortunately retired not deceased) and the fluffy pair from Law and Order UK are probably the worst offenders.

Good cop- bad cop is one of the worst kinds of clichés but clichés are clichés for a reason. They're recognisable and popular. Either you can play to them and get the appreciation/ groans or you can twist them.

An example of this would be George Gently. He is a one man good cop- bad cop ranging from sympathetically chatting to his suspects one minute to beating the snot out of them the next.

If your Player Characters are doing the interrogating they will probably be going all out with the violence. Depending on your setting, beating up restrained, unarmed suspects may get them into trouble themselves. It will be at least frowned upon unless you are in a totalitarian state of the basest kind. Be prepared to put in consequences to violent interrogation however the pay off has to be promising enough for the option to actually be an option.

Think of that before you try tempting your players to slam a suspect's head into the desk!

Being on the receiving end of such a vicious interrogation should be frightening. Regardless of the actual lethality of your system emphasise every crack of bone or spurt of blood. Make the Players feel their Characters are getting hurt.

## Torture

A rough interrogation is one thing, outright torture is another entirely.

Even in the harshest of settings Torture is only ever employed for the most serious of conspiracy offences. Well to the people of that time anyway. These days Heresy is hardly worth the effort of a decent torturer!

Yeah about that, any old Gene Hunt rip-off can do a bit of rough stuff in an interrogation room. Torture is an art form: Actually it's more like a science. In eras of history (and thus parallel fantasy settings that haven't been sanitised) where medical knowledge was scarce the best physicians and anatomists were the torturers. They had to be to keep their victims alive and in pain for long enough.

It's not just your medieval settings that have torture though. Torture has never gone away and most likely will never go away. Just get ever more sophisticated and ever more deniable as torture (whatever you think of their ethics you have to admit water boarding, stress positions etc. have quite a bit of deniability as torture.)

As for using torture in games you must consider two factors...

1) **Attack of the grim dark:** Bringing torture into the mix makes your setting very dark if it isn't pretty dark already. Some particularly cartoony games of **Paranoia** may break this "rule" with IntSec employing feather dusters on the tootsies or forcing you to listen to some ancient archive of James Blunt but that's just **Paranoia** for you.

2) **Attack of the icky:** With groups with pre 18 gamers torture is a massive no-no unless it is the aforementioned tickling or James Blunt recording (actually I think the latter counts as child abuse in some views!) Also respect the sensibilities of adult players. Not all Roleplayers are the sort of geeks who sit down to watch Zombie High School while having breakfast. We're a varied bunch and not all sadistic Manhunt fans despite what the American Right would have you believe. In fact some of us are even squeamish in some form! Discus torture before you introduce it so you don't tread on any sensibilities.

Torture systems vary from clunky to far too simple but it's easy enough to have a play around and find out what works for you. Never be afraid to crunch numbers or randomly roll dice on your own. It's not sad it's SCIENCE!

Remember also the psychological impact of torture as well as the physical. Of course torture can only tell you what you want to hear whether it is true or not.

Here are my top 10 torture methods for Roleplaying games in reverse order....

10) **Laser edging towards the crotch:** Probably the most inventive of Ian Fleming's obsessive torture porn interludes in the Bond novels and immortalised by a performance from a genuinely terrified Sean Connery as a welding torch held by a stage hand edged ever closer to setting his trousers on fire! For more primitive settings replace the laser with a big circular saw or sword.

9) **Stress positions:** Another one more common to modern settings than the historical but even without understanding of psychological science the combination of sleep deprivation, loud noise and uncomfortable poses is obviously distressing. I think perhaps the most appealing side of this method is that it is 90% intimidation. Very little physical hurt involved.

8) **Burning Prods:** Getting a brand or poker red hot and jabbing away. Modern torturers use electrical shocks to much the same effect.

7) **Finger Amputation:** Favoured by organised criminals using secateurs more than the law but you never know. The fingers are snapped off one by one until the victim talks.

6) **Kneecapping:** Smashing the kneecaps can cripple someone for life. It also hits several important nerve clusters at once making it agonising.

5) **The Rack:** Ah yes a classic! Stretching the victim on a board until muscles tore, joints dislocated and even bones broke. One torturer admiring his handiwork in the 15th century said "sirs I do believe I made the gentleman 6 inches taller than God made him!"

4) **Drip, Drip, Drip:** The victim is placed under a slow dripping water pipe. It's just annoying at first but after a while every drip feels like a sledgehammer!

3) **Chinese Water Torture:** The ancient Chinese were so bad ass all they needed to torture you was a bowl of freezing cold water for your feet. It's semi bearable to start but after a few hours flesh starts peeling away!

2) **Thumbscrews:** Lovely little gadgets of the Middle Ages. These were little caps that, when tightened, crushed the bones in the tips of the thumbs. There are a lot of nerve endings there and the pain is agonising.

1) **The Bucket of Water:** So simple yet so awesome. Stick the bastard's head in and out of a bucket of water until he talks. Don't think this is intimidating enough? Watch the new Battlestar Galactica. There is a scene where Starbuck uses this on a "skin job" Cylon to amazing effect. Amazing how much even a religious fanatic shits himself when a badass tomboy fighter pilot slams a bucket of water down in front of him!

If you think your group are up for it being on either end of torture makes for great drama.

## Corporal Punishment

Particularly brutal societies, past, present and probably future use the public infliction of pain as a humiliating punishment.

This is particularly humiliating if the victim is female. Societies that believe in corporal punishment tend to believe in modesty i.e. strictly controlling female sexuality. This makes the poor woman ashamed at being stripped for punishment and the men watching a bunch of drooling perverts.

There isn't really much variation to Corporal punishment all being some variation on beating, flogging or branding. Sharia has its amputation thing but that is kind of unique to it. For good reason it's not only horrific it's based on flawed logic!

Using corporal punishment either as a background or as a direct result of the Player's actions (whether they themselves are the victims or not) can be an effective way of bringing home the brutality of your setting.

## Execution

As capital punishment is the basis of **Tough Justice** I have had to put a lot of thought into execution scenes. In my opinion an execution should never be a throwaway backdrop. No matter how brutal your setting having random executions in the background trivialises the true emotional impact of the judicial ending of a life.

The victim should always be someone the Player Character's care about whether a close Non Player Character or *gulp* a Player Character themselves. In the latter case they should either have been thoroughly framed or should actually be guilty.

With the advance of technology execution methods have been getting ever more efficient and supposedly more painless (to be fair nobody has complained so far... oh wait!) Here, again in reverse order are my top 10 methods of execution for use in Roleplaying Games.

10) **Drop Hanging:** Probably the most humane form of execution in history. If done right as in the late 19th and early 20th century "professional" hangings the victim is quickly restrained shoved into the noose and dropped breaking their neck. Albert Pierrepoint holds the record for quickest hanging. Within 34 seconds of meeting a condemned murderer he had restrained and dropped him. Iran still uses this method but they kind of miss the point with over the top ceremony and the victim's family being the executioners rather than professionals.

9) **Halifax Gibbet:** Contrary to popular history the device we now know as a Guillotine was not invented by the French Doctor who gave it its silly name. Nope 'twas a Yorkshire invention by gum! Seen as a far more efficient way of dispatching criminals than the slow strangulation hanging used elsewhere in England the Halifax Gibbet was in fact, according to medical experts probably very painless though maybe not quite the "slight chill" Dr Guillotine claimed. One thing we can give that French plagiarist credit for though. He improved the angle of the blade so that the head would just fall not fly off in a random direction like its predecessor tended to do!

8) **Traditional Beheading:** Hacking the victim's head off with a sword or an axe. With the former it is relatively swift. With the latter it all depends on the competence of the executioner. Pray it's not Jack Ketch: The guy never takes less than 7 strikes!

7) **Gas Chamber:** Now mostly discontinued in favour of lethal injection this modern method is probably kinder than its successor as you can guarantee that the cyanide gas gets in and does its job relatively quickly. It does look pretty horrific though.

6) **Lethal Injection:** Championed by the United States and China as the most humane form of execution there are a lot of problems with lethal injection. From the poison used being ineffective to executioners struggling to find a vein really drop hanging would be a lot cheaper and kinder but the US and Chinese authorities still swear by it.

5) **Traditional Hanging:** Most of the time when you see a hanging in film, even a period film it is a drop hanging. Drop hanging was in fact not perfected until the 19th century. Before then though there was a slim chance the victim's neck would break properly most hanging victims were slowly strangled. Of course this does have the advantage from a Roleplaying perspective that you can affect a dramatic rescue. Savage Worlds actually has a mechanic for this in Deadlands and Pirates of the Spanish Main.

4) **Electric Chair:** This is just fucking horrible: Execution by massive electrocution essentially roasting the body alive. The theory was that the shock to the brain was like a bullet and that the convulsions and screams of the victim were just the electrical energy animating an unconscious body but most doctors cry bullshit to this theory.

3) **Burning at the Stake:** The victim, usually female is tied to a stake and burnt to death. There were attempts to make this less painful. Friends gave victims gunpowder to finish them off quickly and in the late 18th century victims were hanged first in most cases. The real scary bit however comes in the destruction of the body. Most cultures who employed this form of execution believed you have to have an intact body to enter the afterlife. Thus being burnt at the stake killed you in body and scuppered your chances of life everlasting!

2) **Crucifixion:** Essentially this is the stress position torture as a form of slow and painful execution. Probably the slowest and most painful method of execution in history but it has an uncalled for mystique due to Jesus dying in this way. Remember there are several thousands more who died like this including, reportedly, the

Emperor Nero. Caught before he could commit suicide he had his citizenship (and thus immunity from crucifixion) revoked.

1) **Hanged Drawn and Quartered:** The goriest method of execution in history. Championed if not invented by King Edward "Longshanks" I of England it had a visceral terror that surpasses even the most ingenious inventions of the most depraved torture porn flicks. First the victim was hanged "until half dead," then he (for it was almost always a he, women were burnt at the stake) was cut down and laid on an operating table. He was castrated and eviscerated with the parts burned before him before being finally finished off with beheading and dismemberment: A public spectacle and fun for all the family.

Obviously check your group's tolerance for icky before bringing these into a session but there is no dramatic sequence quite like an execution scene.

## Conclusion

So there you have it. The price of civilisation is that good people do bad things to bad people in order to protect us. Or so they say! As with any theory article it is not enough that you just read this. Take it on board and like a good Roleplayer hack it up and use it in your own games. It really is the name of the game!

## Next Autopsy

From now on Autopsy's format will change. Issues will no longer be themed and – hopefully – it will be coming out on a much more regular basis. The format will shift to landscape, it will be PDF only. As well as soliciting articles on anything gaming related (particularly Postmortem Games) we'll be polishing and extending existing articles from our blog archive to make them more useful and complete for readers.

## RECENT PRODUCTS



*Courtesans is a game of intrigue and social one-upmanship in the demi monde of the 18th century or, if you indulge in The Weird and Wonderful, similar social one-upmanship in the far future, in the horror of Vampire society or in the realms of fantasy.*

*Adult, surprisingly strategic and perfect for online , forum or play-by-post, Courtesans is simple and easy to grasp but the implications are wide-ranging..*

Chavtastic adventure with double, triple and quadruple crosses galore.
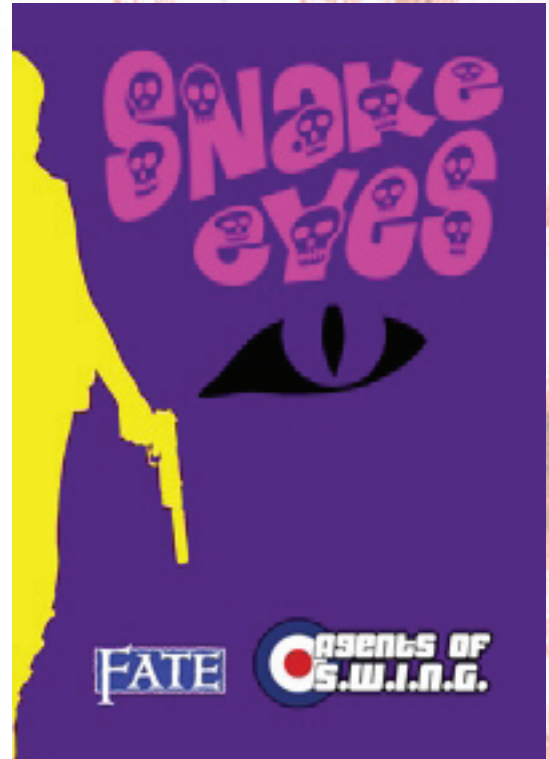


A full adventure for Agents of SWING taking on the big boys and their money-laundering operation in that den of sin, Vegas.



Bloody adventure with curses and a sympatheic evil for Lamentations of the Flame Princess.