

VIOLENCE



A Writer's Guide

Rory Miller

Violence: A Writer's Guide

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A Writer's Guide

by
Rory Miller

Published by Rory Miller at Smashwords
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<http://chirontraining.com>

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Cover design by Kamila Zeman Miller

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[Intro](#)

I should explain myself, and also give an introduction to what you will get in this little book.

My name is Rory Miller, but I've been called "Sarge" in a jail, "sensei" in a dojo and "abu Orion" in Baghdad. Rory is fine.

I don't write fiction. I *do* write fight scenes. I have written some of the most realistic fight scenes ever ... because they have to stand up in court. Conflict is the core of drama and much of my adult life has centered around conflict. The good side is that I know a lot about real violence. One of the many downsides is that I know enough that most fiction is infuriating to read.

What follows won't teach writing *techniques*. If you are a good writer or at least learning to be a good writer, you know more about the nuances of plot and point of view and voice than I do.

What I will try to do here is introduce you to the world of violence. To the parts that people don't understand. The parts that books and movies get wrong. Not just the mechanics, but how people who live in a violent world think and feel about what they do and what they see done. The psychological, physical, and spiritual reality.

Once upon a time, I was sitting on a panel, "Bashing Your Way Through: Writing Realistic Fight Scenes" at the Oregon Science Fiction Convention. The moderator, a very nice lady named Jayel Gibson, opened the panel by declaring, "NO ONE engages in violence except out of great fear, great anger, or great desperation."

"I do it for money," I said.

Jayel almost choked, but we became good friends.

[Chapter 1: Establishing a Baseline](#)

Violence in our culture is treated like a taboo or at least an aberration. Stylized violence is everywhere, but real information is rare and actively discouraged. In a lot of ways, most modern Americans and Europeans know as much about violence as they learned about sex in junior high school locker rooms.

So here are some myths and platitudes and how professionals feel about them:

"Violence never solved anything." This platitude is so patently and obviously false that it takes some pretty special mental gymnastics to say it, much less believe it. The fact is that some things, especially *dangerous things happening very fast*, can ONLY be solved by violence. This adage frequently infuriates professionals because sometimes the problem they have solved with violence was their own survival or the survival of someone they loved. Survival is pretty hard to devalue.

"Violence is the last resort of the ignorant" only shows the ignorance of the person stating it. It would be an ideal truth in a homogenous society of wealthy people with equal education. It is one of those ideas that only works if everyone involved chooses to believe it ... and the first person to reject the idea will dominate, kill or enslave the others. It is especially funny because many people who deal professionally with violence are pretty well educated and worldly. To hear such a pronouncement from someone who chooses to be ignorant about violence ... sigh. Maybe "Unthinking platitudes are the first refuge of the ignorant."

"Violence begets violence." Sort of. But that's kind of like saying "Sickness begets medicine." Here's the deal, and it's one of the basic truths. Violence is dangerous and it hurts and there is no guaranteed win, but an act of force is the only thing that can stop an act of violence. If a crowbar is coming at your head, there is no form of negotiation that can help in time. If part of the other guy's definition of a win is to enjoy you broken and begging, there is no win-win. You must understand that not only are there people who enjoy debasing others, they have been very common throughout history and they are still the norm in certain cultures.

Because we live in a society where hunger is rare and there is a rule of law and invading armies or bandits stealing food and raping are unheard of, we forget that this level of violence was the norm for most of human history. Pockets of it exist in even the most affluent society. And it can erupt when things start to break down.

Why do people use violence? Because it works. Violence *works*. Characters may need tortured reasons and justifications for their depredations. Real criminals (and I'm talking low-level street hustlers, not some psychopathic super-criminal) don't need rationalizations. It just works.

The following hyperlink leads to a video can be hard to watch. It is a Russian video of a crack addict attacking a fifteen year-old girl for her purse. She died after some time in a coma:

[RUSSIAN MUGGING](#)

You can choose not to watch the mugging if you don't want this sort of thing in your head. Many people don't. But it may be harder for you to understand this book, and real violence, if you close your eyes to it.

You may have worked your whole life to get your credit rating and savings. A crook can get your ATM card and your

PIN with a few minutes of judicious beating. Don't lose sight of this fact, not in your fiction and not in your real life: people use violence because it works ... and the less people are prepared for it, the better it works. The more peaceful a group, the easier they are to victimize.

What follows talks about levels of violence. You can apply it to your characters, but I want you to think of it in terms of your life. It's important to understand the levels because people (including authors) can rarely imagine upwards. In other words, if you live at a low level of violence, the motivations and beliefs of someone who functions at a higher level may be completely alien to you.

Most groups (offices, associations, gym classes, schools) are made up mostly of good people who avoid conflict. *Nice* people. They are the backbone of society and people generally seem to believe that this attitude is what humans should aspire to.

Nice people are easy victims for *manipulators*. Manipulation is an extremely low level of violence, but it is violence. Gossip, subtle bullying, understated threats, chilling someone out and forming alliances are all types of coercion.

Truly nice people don't understand manipulators or really get "why people can be so mean." Manipulators, on the other hand, see nothing wrong with what they do. They are just 'getting things done' and 'aren't hurting anybody'.

The manipulator will walk all over nice people, until they run into someone *assertive*. The assertive person will be the one to stand up and say, "I know what you're doing. Knock it off or I will stop you." The assertive person sets boundaries and backs them up, usually not physically but by resorting to policy or not being afraid to talk to others and gather allies.

Assertive people are rare because direct confrontation is discouraged in our society. Until you get used to it, being assertive can feel very uncomfortable... but assertive people, just like manipulators, don't think they are doing anything wrong.

Manipulators, on the other hand, think assertive people are bullies. Even if the manipulator is self-aware enough to grasp their own manipulation, they will say, "But I never got in anyone's face. That assertive person is rude!" Even nice people will feel uncomfortable around an assertive person and consider her pushy or bossy.

The *aggressive* person stops the assertive in her tracks. When someone barges into the office screaming threats and swearing, most assertive people crumble. The aggressive person, again, doesn't see anything wrong. That was just self-expression. The assertive person (and the nice people and manipulators) feels the aggressive person was completely out of control.

Take a break here and think about these levels. This is as far as most people have any real experience. Whatever level you are at is the one where you can reasonably talk about your own motivations and the level you are comfortable dealing with.

Most (almost all) people are completely unprepared for the next level higher. The level each person is on is the one that they have justified. That level is good. The next level up is 'bad'. People tend to define violence as the level above the level they are willing to use. The strategies for dealing with any given level do not work and often backfire when attempted on a higher level of conflict.

This is important, because if you are trying to extrapolate the mindset of someone comfortable with high-level violence from your experience with a merely manipulative office bully you will miss a ton. It will not only read false, but it will read as (weak? Watered-down? Tenuous? Unconvincing? Shallow? Impotent? Trite?)

Two more levels:

The aggressive person may feel like a big boss, screaming and insulting and making everyone cower. When some one hauls off and slaps the aggressive person, the aggressor has no idea what to do. Assault trumps aggression. Sometimes *assaultive* is angry, sometimes it is cold. Emotional intensity matters less than the fact that an assaultive person is comfortable using physical violence as a tool. Again, the assaulter will feel completely justified ("She shouldn't have made me angry" or "He had it coming"). The aggressive bully will feel violated and self-righteous ("I may be a little loud but I don't go around hitting people!")

And, finally, the assaultive person, whether a barroom brawler or a wife beater, is completely unprepared when he crosses a woman who is willing to slit his throat. *Murderous* (again, cold or hot) is a completely different animal, an undiscovered country.

Nice-Manipulative-Assertive-Aggressive-Assaultive-Murderous

This model has a few implications for you. First and foremost, beware of extrapolating from your experience at low levels to high levels. Second, no matter how well your protagonist functions at one level it takes a special circumstance or motivation to get them to go a level higher, much less two... and even a professional will have no idea what to do there. Not just the physical mechanics, but the emotional and spiritual barriers. I had well over three hundred unarmed fights

(unarmed on my end, anyway) with inmates before I ever shot someone. It was an entirely different feeling.

It has some implications for your fiction. If your character spends a lot of time at the higher levels of this model, most of what happens at the lower levels seems petty. When you transition from a job where people are trying to kill you to a job where office politics are high drama, the politics aren't that interesting. For people to whom the politics are everything, the professional strikes them as odd, maybe crazy.

This can be compounded by the way the professional considers options from much higher on the violence hierarchy than have never occurred to others in the office: "If he's such a bad boss, we could just kill him." Sometimes it's humorous, usually, but the undercurrent is there.

In relationships, there are things that seem obvious to us, to violence professionals. When our spouses are complaining about the office gossip or a bad boss, we suggest being assertive: "Honey, get in his face and tell him to back off. He'll back down." It seems obvious to us... we don't realize that we are asking a good person to jump two steps into behaviors they think are bad or aggressive. Hell, it might be two steps below where we would solve the problem...

Direct and indirect violence rewards. Most people play at or study violence (martial arts) for indirect rewards. They want to be seen as tough, or feel less afraid or get the trophy. Professionals execute violence for a direct goal—to stop the threat or to subdue the victim.

This is a profound difference in motivation, attitude and how professionals move and act. A professional does not fight you, doesn't even think about fighting you. He takes you out.

This is easier to see and teach in person than to write about and is most apparent in how weapons are used. A sword fighter may hear about an opponent who uses a combination: face thrust feint, disengage, slash at the extended knee (the coup de Jarnac, for anyone with a historical bent). A fencer, dueler or sword fighter's reaction to hearing of this will be to come up with a counter combination, a cross body parry and drop to a low line parry, then riposte on a low line to the gut.

This is dancer/game/amateur thinking. A professional's first choice would be to take the person out using surprise before the duel; his second would be to use a superior weapon first—shoot the threat before he even begins his combination. Third choice would be to use equal weapons first. The fourth is to disregard the combination and kill.

The duelist is interested in winning. In maintaining honor. The professional is interested in killing, as quickly and efficiently as possible. Maintaining honor and winning are *indirect* goals. Killing is a *direct* goal. Working towards direct goals peels a lot of bullshit off of your tactics.

It can take years to learn how to fight with a sword. If you have the right heart, the right mindset, learning to kill ruthlessly and efficiently with a sword takes about twenty minutes. If he or she has the right mindset, the killer will beat the fighter almost every time.

Then, of course, when you find the killer with the discipline to train, you have a god of battle.

To recap:

-This is a lot to cover, but the big point of this is to try to establish a line between what you actually know about violence and what you have been told.

-People use violence because it works

-There are levels of violence and the level you are comfortable with does not read as violence to you

-Going down levels is easy, going up levels is difficult

-Violence has both direct and indirect goals

-Professionals focus on the direct goals, amateurs on the indirect

THE RUSSIAN MUGGING-Discussion

The video shows a man, identified by Russian news sources as a crack addict, closely following a small woman into an elevator lobby. In the grainy film, the man looks tall and skinny and wears glasses. The woman is small. She walks to the far corner of the lobby. The man follows. He stands very close. The woman does not look at him, just stares at the bank of elevators. The man grabs her by the head, one hand covering her mouth and pulls/lifts/twists so that she hits the ground face up. He begins stomping on her head.

I counted the takedown and eleven stomps in seven seconds, but the film is grainy. There could have been more stomps. He then bends down and either tries to take her purse or go through her pockets. He stands up and begins stomping her head again. According to news reports, this was because she wouldn't stop screaming.

This dynamic, search and stomp, is repeated. When the elevator arrives, he drags her limp body into the elevator. One of my students was Russian and followed the case in the news. She says that the girl, 15 years of age, was in a coma for months and then died, and that the perpetrator was caught because of the video.

This is a good example because it is not special. It is a simple attack, a typical mugging.

Addiction is huge in crimes like these because it is one of the few things that we experience in the modern era that imitates survival violence. Whatever you might do for food or water on the edge of death is what an addict will do to feed his addiction. There are some other mental gymnastics that beginners have to go through to justify that level of violence, but it becomes easier over time until with an experienced violent criminal there is NO psychological fall-out. If it is reinforced quickly enough with cravings satisfied, it becomes soothing.

When you go back in history (or even folklore) people would do this and worse for food (Hansel and Gretel, anyone, as a cautionary tale to avoid cannibals?)

This is not special!!!! He kept stomping her head because she wouldn't quit screaming. Not because he was afraid of being identified, not because he had rage issues, not because of psychosis or dementia brought on by his addiction. She was screaming. It bothered him. Head trauma shuts people up.

Psychopath? Maybe. It doesn't take any mystical evil or Hollywood-style mental disorder to make people act this way. It only took a form of simple math: "I want X and don't care about you. What is the fastest way for me to get X?"


This isn't a super-criminal. This is a skinny Russian crackhead. This is very much the way an average assault goes down. Look at the victim choice, the range, the choice of technique, the victim's body language ("There's something wrong here," she thinks, "but if I just don't make eye contact or antagonize him, it will be all right.") which was exactly what the threat was looking for.

Psychopath and Sociopath have both been removed from the DSM-IV and are considered extreme Anti-Social Personality Disorder (APD). The terms psychopath and sociopath never had distinct definitions. There used to be a test that distinguished a true sociopath from an APD, but for whatever reason the APA (American Psychological Association) no longer recognizes it.

The essence of a true sociopath (and mimicked to varying degrees by APDs) is that the world seems unreal. People are just pictures. The only real things are personal pain and personal pleasure and both of those are fleeting. Most are quite stupid, because by their nature they can't learn from others. They can be very good, even brilliant in a narrow field, but they learn largely through trial and error. That's why the character of Hannibal Lector rang so false. He was a good bogeyman, but a terrible depiction.

A real Dexter (to name another great character that rings false to me) would casually rape his sister if the thought occurred to him and he had the urge. He would shut her up through fear, blackmail or violence-- whichever he thought would work with the least complications. And he wouldn't feel anything about it one way or the other the next morning.

Once upon a time I had to read a child molester's journal to determine if it was evidence. It was. He was shocked and disturbed. His victim, after all, was his daughter. How is that different than his shoes? He could do what he wanted with his shoes. How was this different? Isn't that what 'his' means?

No matter how disturbing you found this video, I have to remind you that you can't hear it and you can't smell it. Some of the things that stay with you forever are the smells. 

[Chapter 2: Context](#)

There are seven things that surround any act of self-defense and almost any fight or use of force. If you want a fight scene to appear real or to seem like it happened in a living, breathing world, these seven things are the context that you must understand. A professional will have a working understanding of all of these aspects. An amateur, a character who is not a veteran of a violent world will be completely unprepared for most of what follows.

1) Legal and ethical issues. Self-defense law is a specialty, and it is something that can screw up a character with the wrong training. It is also one of those things that can make the novel read wrong. Killings and beatings, justified or not, don't happen in a vacuum. Cops show up. Lawyers get involved. Families of the deceased start suing. The tension is unbelievable. You will hear the deceased, no matter how violent and despicable a criminal (or how terrified your protagonist) described as a, "Good boy. He would never hurt anybody. He was just depressed. I don't know why she called the police at all instead of an ambulance..."

The legal stuff is very complex. I did a short sidebar on it in "Meditations on Violence" and Loren Christensen put a chapter in "Fighter's Fact Book 2: The Street". There will be extensive information in "Facing Violence" which is due out from YMAA in 2011.

The basic things you must understand are, 1) that self-defense is an *affirmative defense*. This means that the defendant is admitting to the underlying crime (say, taking a life) and is claiming it is justified. It shifts the burden of proof largely to the defense. The defendant must prove that she had no choice.

The second basic is that the criminal and civil courts and processes are not the same. You can be found "not guilty" or "justified" in a criminal court and still be sued and lose in a civil court.

Self-defense laws are usually written into state statutes. Most of the state statutes are available on line. Do a search for “justification”. If self-defense has not been written into state law as a justification (as in Massachusetts) you may have to search for “jury instructions” and “self-defense.”

The ethical issues make for interesting character development. Everyone has issues with using force on a human. (Even some of the most extreme criminals will have lines they will not cross—not because of feelings, in some cases, but to protect a self-image.) No one, until they do it, knows exactly where that line is. Many can’t kill. Some can’t bring themselves to hurt. Some will protect their self-image even at great cost. Long ago a friend told me that she would never hurt a human being, even to save her own life or the life of a child. Would she cling to that image, to her own death?

Warning: the article in the following link is pretty disturbing. Ms. Davis writes with remarkable courage about her rape. I recommend it, but be prepared.

[“Betrayed by the Angel”](#)

Many professionals have work-arounds. It is easier to do dangerous jobs if you don’t have much of a survival instinct. That gives you the detachment to go in. To get back out, you need to find your survival motivation. My motivation is my kids. I will die someday. I accept that. I will, however, do everything in my power to keep my kids from being orphaned. Works for me.

2) Violence dynamics. There are social and asocial types of violence. Social violence is for status, territory, or the good of the group. Asocial is hunting, and the victim is not seen as a person at all.

Social violence breaks down into the Monkey Dance (MD), Group Monkey Dance (GMD), Educational Beat Down (EBD) and Status Seeking Show (SSS).

The Monkey Dance is a status ritual almost always between young men. The basic pattern is a hard stare, followed by a verbal challenge (“What you lookin’ at?”) followed by an approach, often trying to look bigger and tougher, then contact, either a two-handed push on the chest or a finger poke, then a punch, usually a wild, looping overhand swing. Both people play. The stares, verbal challenges and chest pushing are often mutual. Sometimes the punches are tentative and followed by a step back.

The ideal is for friends to step in and separate the ‘fighters’ so that they have established a reputation for being willing to fight without actually getting hurt. Hitting the head with a fist is far more likely to damage the fist than the head. Other than the medial metacarpal breaking (called a “boxer’s fracture”) if someone gets hurt in this scenario it is because he fell and hit his head. Like bighorn sheep butting heads, it’s a safe way to establish dominance in a group, and is probably biologically determined.

The Group Monkey Dance establishes boundaries and loyalties. The low level is when an outsider tries to interfere in a group’s activities and the group turns on the outsider. This happens frequently when people try to break up fights and the audience turns on the person trying to help or when cops show up to a domestic violence call and the victim turns on the cops.

The higher level of the GMD is when an outsider or an insider believed to have betrayed the group is savagely beaten, tortured and/or murdered by the group. It turns into a contest of proving loyalty by doing damage. The bodies dragged through Fallujah, the wildings in Central Park or the gang roving Seattle randomly attacking people are all examples. Committing violence together, whether hunting a mammoth or doing a drive-by, is intensely bonding.

The Educational Beat Down is simply enforcing the rules of the group. It’s a spanking for adults. In both redneck and some inner-city cultures, a thwack on the back of the head (always from a higher status to lower status member) is a reminder to watch manners. In some societies, the EBD can be relatively savage. Many people honestly feel that beating a spouse or child is teaching. It is not a euphemism or an excuse. It is what they believe.

In dysfunctional groups or groups with an insecure leader, the EBDs can be extreme, e.g. Al Capone murdering his lieutenant at the dinner table with a baseball bat. It wasn’t intended to teach the dead guy, it was to send a message.

The Status Seeking Show is what happens when someone decides to get a reputation for being ‘hard’ or ‘crazy’. Such a reputation is a very valuable thing in certain circles. An SSS is one or more acts of extreme public violence—shooting a stranger, picking a fight and beating someone to a pulp (ignoring the stops built into the Monkey Dance,) using a weapon in a Monkey Dance, etc. Ambushing a cop is a great way to get a reputation.

In asocial, or predatory violence, the threat has already put the victim into a “non-human” category and there are no internal limits on the force the threat can use. The limits are imposed externally—chance of getting caught, chance to do prison time, amount of prison time (with very experienced violent criminals sentencing minimums do act as a deterrent).

There are two types of predatory violence: resource, and process.

A resource predator wants something tangible and the victim is merely a source: usually money or something that can be turned into money, sometimes a car. He will use the level of violence that has the best pay-off-to-risk ratio. Merely threatening violence works most of the time. Aggressive panhandling is one of the lowest levels of implied aggression, but it often works.

If the threat ('Threat' is the law enforcement term for an individual who may require force—it sounds more professional than saying 'the bad guy.')

judges that violence is his best option, it will be fast, hard and from surprise. The entire goal is that the victim has no time to respond and will be frozen, trying to figure out what is happening. This tactic is almost always successful.

(When a former bad guy read "Meditations on Violence" he said I got one thing wrong: "You gave 'em too much hope, Sarge. I used to come up on 'em just like that and none of 'em ever had a chance.")

A Process Predator enjoys the act of the crime. The pain and dominance are the fun part. Rapists. Serial killers and torture murderers. People who get addicted to the Status-Seeking Show.

Predators use two types of tactics, charm and blitz. Read Gavin DeBecker's "The Gift of Fear" for the best list I've ever seen of the specific tactics that charm predators use to get close to you or even to get access to your living space. Once they have established privacy, the predator will go to work.

A blitz predator attacks with overwhelming force from surprise. A charm approach is often followed by a blitz assault.

3) The third basic of violence is prevention. Avoidance is merely staying out of places where bad things happen. Staying away from three kinds of places (where people get their minds altered by drugs, alcohol or ritual; where young men gather in groups; where territory is in dispute) will reduce the chance of encountering violence to almost zero.

A professional knows this and avoids those places. If she can't avoid them or needs something there, she is aware of the situation and takes precautions—stays alert, brings a weapon and back-up if possible.

Escape and Evasion is the habit of constantly revising a plan for how to get out of here now. Pros often walk the perimeter of a new building before going in, noticing traffic flow and exits. They keep track of ways to leave a room and what routes are concealed (a bad guy couldn't see you) or covered (something between you and the bad guy that could stop a bullet.) Beginners look at doors and stairwells. Some remember to look at windows they could break. A few are experienced or concerned enough to check which walls are drywall and could be smashed in a few seconds or minutes. Sub ceilings are sometimes an option, but they won't cross the load-bearing walls, are fragile and tend to make a mess of dust when lifted.

The one time I actually found an air-duct big enough for an adult, it sucked pretty bad. They are screwed together and have the sharp ends of the screws protruding inside everywhere. I was cut to ribbons.

The third element of avoidance is de-escalation. Sometimes mere presence can do it. People are usually quick to stop being bad when a cop shows up. The presence of witnesses will also discourage most criminals.

Usually, de-escalation refers to talking someone down. This is one of the things that authors and screenwriters get really, really wrong.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow postulated that there are five levels of need that all humans have. These needs must be addressed in order, in other words, if you are being eaten by a lion you don't worry about getting stores for the winter or whether your faction will be running the tribe.

The quick run down:

People need to live: they need food and water and must avoid being killed or freezing to death.

Only if the previous level is taken care of do people start to worry about security: Having enough food for tomorrow; building a barrier to keep the tigers out of the cave.

If the first two are stable, humans want to be in a group. They want to belong.

Once they belong, they want to be established, to have a place in the group and maybe a little love.

Once they achieve stability within a group, they can pursue their dreams, become what Maslow called "self actualized."

In our society, very few people have ever experienced deprivation of the first two levels. Physical security was taken care of by our ancestors long ago, to the extent that the normal way to deal with the possibility of hunger (and that itself is a far cry from starvation) involves paperwork and not snares or spears.

We have been conditioned to believe that self-actualization is a good thing, that it allows those who achieve it the security to act on their altruistic impulses.

This means that almost all of the conflict that most modern people experience has been driven by problems at the 3rd and 4th levels, the social levels. So citizens, including authors and counselors and teachers and specialists, draw from their experience with social conflict to write scenes of criminal violence. It comes out with very nice, poignant dialogues where someone touches the inner pain in the violent criminal and turns things around... poignant dialogues that in real life would leave the criminal laughing and the speaker bleeding.

People using violence for level 1 are in a survival mindset. This is where a lot of incidents with the mentally ill or

excited delirium go bad. No one is going to make a connection with your inner child when you are panicked and drowning in a raging sea (not a metaphor--drowning is one of the few times a citizen will encounter this. The most mild-mannered person in the world will drown a rescuer by trying to climb up on the rescuer and get another breath of air.)

People using violence for level 2 are very common. These are usually junkies trying to get money for drugs. It may not seem like a survival issue to your logical brain, but it feels like one to an addict. They need money. They need it now. If your talking gets them the money, fine. Just be quick about it. If it doesn't, they will shut you up, fast and hard. Their need outweighs your humanity. Their tortured past is not even on their minds compared to their present pain. You can make a connection here, but it is not easy and I haven't seen it done well in fiction or cinema.

An addict will be willing to do whatever you would do to keep yourself or your family from starving. That is how strong the drive is, and one way that you can, slightly, understand an addict's worldview. Conversely, if something (like talking about your childhood) would fail to dissuade you from feeding your children, it won't work on the addict either.

Lastly, Process Predators are about as self-actualized as they can be. They are being who they are and doing what they love, maybe the only thing that makes them feel alive. Trying to make a deep connection only amuses them. Some will play along, because the look of betrayal when the victim realizes that she has just wasted a bunch of time instead of fighting is pretty delicious...

For de-escalation to work, you must know what kind of threat you are dealing with.

The next three aspects (4-6) cover an actual attack, and we'll do those in the next chapter. For now, I'd like to discuss another aspect of violence that lies at the edges of the actual attack. That's the aftermath.

7) The last element of conflict is the Aftermath. Any time you use force there is the potential for criminal or civil legal entanglements, medical complications and psychological issues.

The better you understood force law going in, the better you will do with the legal aftermath.

There are also medical implications. Even winning is rarely free. In the rush of adrenaline you may not know if or how badly you were injured. A good blow to the head may not affect you at all until the swelling starts to squeeze your brain and you pass out (potentially die) hours later. I had an inmate who didn't realize he had shattered his hand until a half-hour after the attack. (He was the attacker, but he kept hitting his victim in the head with his fist even after several bones broke.)

A friend didn't know he was stabbed in the ass until he felt his shoe squishing when he was trying to unlock his car.

Even if all goes well immediately, there is a potential for blood-borne pathogens. Many of the people who initiate violence, especially for drugs, do not live extremely hygienic lives. Just being involved in a brawl can put you at risk for HIV and Hepatitis C.

The psychological aftermath is getting a lot of lip-service in fiction now, but without depth. Here's the deal.

We all have stories of who we are. This is our identity, and it is about as real and consistent as a wisp of smoke. Like all good works of fiction, this story is heavily based on conflict. Fortunately (or not) real conflict is vanishingly rare in most people's lives. Ergo, much of our internal story, our identity, isn't really based on anything.

When someone is exposed to violence for the first time, who they thought they were rarely survives. The big tough guy may crumble and usually freezes. People who always thought they had dignity beg. People who have studied yoga and meditation for years to keep negative energy out of their lives find out it was all a lie. Martial artists find out that their black belts only cover two inches and if they want to cover the rest of their asses, they need to do it themselves ... and most can't.

So, there's the first big issue. In a big episode of violence, identity tends to be shattered. What happens next, internally, is that the person starts writing a new story. Creating a new identity. It is hard because much has been proved false and no new truths have stepped in to replace it. Susan Brison in "Aftermath" describes her own process of this. It isn't a book that I recommend for survivors. Many of her decisions afterwards were disempowering but she chose to see them as empowering and fragile readers may not notice that. But I heartily recommend the book to people who deal with survivors, or write about them.

The second big issue is the sense of isolation. Most people today have never experienced serious violence and aren't sure what to do or think. Friends want to ask, but are afraid of bringing up memories or causing damage or seeming like vultures, so they stay silent. The survivor sees the look followed by the silence and reads it as condemnation or fear.

Simultaneously, strangers with no boundaries may butt in and ask. Some physically lick their lips when they do it. They are vultures. I can't speak for everyone, but knowing that there is a subset of young women who hit on me because they believe that I am extremely violent is pretty damn disturbing. A different personality type would exploit that.

PTSD doesn't just come from the event. It comes as well from a sense of being betrayed or treated unfairly. People who came from hard lives, the "children of adversity" who thrive in the special operations world are far more resistant to PTSD because they didn't expect life to be fair, easy or good.

People who have had one ugly violent encounter are at risk for PTSD because their basic beliefs about how the world works were betrayed.

People who have repeated encounters with violence do better than those who only have one (Exception: there is a victim personality that either jumps from abusive relationship to abusive relationship or is serially victimized by different predators or both). The first violent encounter you find out what was false. After that, you start learning things that are true. You also find out that some of what you thought you learned (OMG I froze! I'm a coward!) aren't really true, either. Most times, people freeze because they can't figure out what was going on. That's not the same as fear. No cowardice involved.

But it takes multiple encounters to figure out what is going on and where you fit in the Looking-Glass world of violence.

Multiple encounters ease the first problem—shattered identity-- but can compound the second problem, isolation.

Dealing with violence demands a different thought process and often results in a very clear ordering of priorities. It winnows internal bullshit like nothing else.

Many of the angsty things that drive drama have no meaning for me. Everyone that I love knows it. To love someone and not tell them, not give that tiny gift when I might die tomorrow is stupid.

And I don't care if they love me back. The world is not about me, and I'm not going to live through it anyway. I don't love to get something in exchange. It is just a fact. "I'm in love" is very similar to "I'm bleeding." Just an observation about my state, which may have some obligations attached. The world doesn't owe an attachment to me.

Few enough people look at the world this way (including immature violence professionals) that it can be hard to spend time with other people and hard for them to spend time around us. That increases the isolation.

There is a persistent myth in the martial arts that young men went to the temple to study fighting and achieve enlightenment. They believed this because of all of the very wise monks who lived there, men who could puncture certainty with a koan or love without attachment.

None of those old monks achieved enlightenment in the temple. At that time, the temple was the one place where an old warrior could peacefully retire. What they learned of truth and enlightenment (which is not the presence of wisdom but the absence of bullshit) they learned on the edge of death.

Recap:

- Violence happens in a context that includes:
- The legalities of the world
- The personal ethics (conscious or unconscious) of the people involved
- Predictable patterns and types of violence
- Opportunities to prevent or de-escalate violence
- Potential medical, legal and psychological aftermath

[Chapter 3: Mechanics of a Physical 'Fight'](#)

We have to define a couple of things. I put 'fight' in the title because I really don't have a better word. That said, fights are generally stupid and I don't do them.

This may mess with your writing, but you need to know something. Fights aren't dramatic. Professionals, whether a SWAT team or a mugger, do everything in their power to keep fights from being dramatic. One side gets the advantage early and keeps it. That's the goal.

Most people think of fighting in the context of martial arts (almost always based on a dueling paradigm) or from fistfights they have seen. The fistfights followed a script. Both sides, usually young men, follow a script:

- Hard stare (the other usually locks eyes or starts the next step)
- Verbal challenge e.g. "What you lookin' at?" (witty repartee follows)
- The approach, both trying to look bigger and tougher
- A push to the chest or finger poke (sometimes push back, sometimes next step)
- An overhand looping punch. The fight is now on.

This is called the Monkey Dance. It is stupid. Professionals do not play this game. Good guy or bad guy, if we can't handle it verbally (downcast eyes and apology works; as does raising the stakes "Son, I'm on parole. If this fight is going to cost me two years in prison, *believe* that I will make it worth the time.") we jump steps. Take him out before he gets to the chest push stage. By jumping steps a professional almost always get surprise.

The Monkey Dance appears to be biological, just like the way Big Horn Sheep fight. It is also designed not to do serious injury.

For too many people, this is what they think of as a fight. It is not serious, not dangerous and never self-defense. There are too many opportunities in the Monkey Dance to just leave to call it self-defense.

Most professionals do not 'fight' people. They take them out. They put them down. They do everything in their power to prevent the target from fighting back.

Of the seven stages mentioned in the last section, we skipped the three that compose the fight. Here they are:

4) The ambush. Good guy or bad guy, the person initiating the attack works to get an effective move in right away, and keep up the pressure so that the victim never recovers. In a military ambush, this is the initial coordinated fire with, say, small arms and RPGs. In an entry (like when a warrant service team goes into a house expecting armed resistance) flashbangs, shouting and constant movement usually work to freeze the threats' minds, which usually allow the officers to do something very dangerous without killing anyone. A flurry of hits from behind with a brick works for a mugger.

On the receiving end, things will get bad here. The appropriate response is to have one thing trained to reflex that works on all the things you are likely to encounter. The military trains soldiers to charge the ambush, firing (this is US, some other countries must radio for instructions under fire. Our system gets fewer people killed.)

It's hard for cops to train one thing because they can be attacked at different ranges. What they need to do for a sniper or taking gunfire is radically different than the best response when someone lunges at an officer with a knife or grabs for the officer's gun from behind.

Martial artists train for reflex response in some cases, but they tend to train many responses to many different attacks. If the attack is one of the ones they have trained against and the training has either been very long term or is really fresh, they'll do fine on the first attack ... if they saw it coming.

5) The next step is the freeze. Everyone freezes when attacked. Some only freeze for a fraction of a second, some stay frozen until the assault is over, sometimes until they die.

There's lots going on and lots of different elements to a freeze, even different types of freezes.

At the minimum, when you are ambushed, you have to switch from your day-to-day mind to your fighting mind. Even soldiers on patrol must switch from watch-walk carefully-listen to SHOOT. With experience, this can get really fast, too fast for most people to notice.

One of the worst freezes, and the one that cripples people who are not used to violence, is *thinking*. Thinking takes time and under assault time is damage. To think, "I need a plan" while taking damage will not help you. By the time you come up with a plan, you will have taken too much damage.

Completely untrained people hit four times a second. Trained and experienced people can more than triple that. If every second of thought is four solid hits to the head, by the time you think your way out of it you may not be physically capable to execute the plan.

Worse than this, even, are the people who freeze on, "Why is this happening?" It has all the drawbacks of the planning freeze but with the added problem that getting the answer wouldn't help in any way.

When you are taking damage and scared, a bunch of neurotransmitters dump into your system. They can freeze you like a deer in the headlights or make you go limp and lose bladder and bowel control. You have probably heard of this as the fight or flight reflex. Biologists call it the Fight-Flight-Freeze reflex and freezing is the most common in the wild. Freezing doesn't draw the predator's eye and, if the attack is already on, the predator may become bored with a limp catch if the predator isn't that hungry.

Freezing often feels pretty nice. There's a warm kind of floaty feeling and everything looks crystal clear. There is often a roaring in your ears like the ocean. You feel comfortable. The words in your head are so clear that you must be thinking logically: "Wow, is that my blood? It's so red."

A professional will likely, but not always, recognize this feeling as a freeze. An amateur rarely will. It takes an extreme act of will to break out of it. The primitive part of your brain wants you frozen—its millennia of experience says frozen animals are less likely to be eaten than moving ones and all this newfangled training is a pipe dream.

There is also (later in the fight) a possibility of freezing in motion. Sometimes very scared people repeat the same act or say the same things over and over again even when it clearly isn't working. One officer repeated over and over again, "Drop the rifle, drop the rifle" instead of shooting. He locked into that verbal loop until he was shot. This can be a hard one to watch. My personal copy has the dialogue subtitled.

[The murder of Kyle Dinkheller.](#)

6) The fight. If your protagonist survives the ambush and breaks the freeze, the fight is on. Ideally, if he or she had a good counter-ambush response, the bad guy will have frozen as well and leveled the playing field.

At this point, most of the things you think of as fighting (fisticuffs, martial arts, sword play, shooting) apply. With a couple of caveats:

- The threat is not automatically in front of you and you will have to deal with that before you can deal with the threat.
- Fights are dynamic affairs. One of the reasons that shooting at the range is so different than gunfighting is that gunfighting involves a lot of running and ducking. Taking time to aim makes your head a good target. Martial arts defenses against grabs often ignore the fact that grabs are rarely used to hold people in place but to yank them into the air and force movement. It is much harder to hit someone with power when you are both moving than it is to hit a heavy bag.
- Fights happen in places. There are doors and walls and obstacles to trip over and improvised weapons everywhere. A lot of techniques that work great in training work less well in a toilet stall, but on the other hand, misdirecting someone's head into a pipe does more damage than a fist.
- Fights are stressful. Under the stress hormones you may not feel pain, but you may not feel your fingers either, or be able to find the safety on your weapon. You might not be able to hear anything, even gunfire or words of warning. Tunnel vision is common. So is remembering everything in slow motion. Basically, if you have not been exposed to enough fights to get some control of the adrenaline, you will be clumsy (fine and complex motor skills are hampered) partially deaf and blind; and not thinking very well.

There are also two things that your experienced protagonists may experience in the fight.

The first is hitting the zone. It's been described as an optimum level of adrenalization. Senses, thought process and coordination are all at peak. You can tell what a threat is about to do. Tachypsychia (the sensation that everything is happening in slow motion) kicks in, but you can use it. You're in slow motion as well, but you can use the time to be supremely efficient and weigh options. In the zone, you can use all of your training and all of your instincts. You can pull off things that seem impossible.

Two examples from my blog:

<http://chirontraining.blogspot.com/2007/02/character-flaw.html>

<http://chirontraining.blogspot.com/2007/02/perfect-predator-moment.html>

The second is battle joy. There is a second when you know that the fight will happen and there is no way out of it and suddenly all bullshit falls away. You are you, the best body, mind and spirit all together, everything you have and are and it is all on the table to live or die. It is a feeling like your soul is just behind your ears and it is singing.

I have hit that battlejoy and gotten a manic grin that shut down a whole room of prisoners. Whatever signal it sends, when you touch that, people can feel it. Not to get too spiritual on you but ... On the inside you are not human but a force of nature. You know you can be killed, but you feel you can't be stopped, at least by any human.

Details on the Survival Stress Response

When humans go under extreme stress, such as a fight for life, they get a cascade of hormones and neurotransmitters that greatly affect how they perceive, think and move.

Perception changes. Many report tunnel vision, an inability to see anything beyond what is right in front of their eyes. Some see, or remember seeing everything happen in slow motion. Some remember incredible details, such as reading the brass ejected from a partner's gun. At the same time, someone thirty feet away might be remembered as close enough to touch.

Many report not hearing gunfire, even their own... or just a soft pop pop pop. And yet breathing can seem unbearably loud.

You lose feeling in the extremities, a godsend when you are being eaten by a tiger, a disaster when you are trying to work a safety catch or load a single bullet.

Thoughts can seem crystal clear, but irrelevant. You may notice time going slowly but instead of using the time, you spend the slow motion time wondering why you aren't using the time. Random, irrelevant thoughts may wander across your brain and seem very important at the time, "What color was my first girlfriend's eyes? Wouldn't it be horrible to die and not remember ...?" People often get stupid—making a bad plan—and then get stubborn about it. Something that is common in other forms of shock as well. And everything makes perfect sense at the time.

Because of the blood loss to extremities, you become very clumsy. With even mild stress reaction, fine motor skills (like threading a needle or aiming a gun) go out the window. At extreme levels, all that your body can do is a shambling run (the trope of the terrified maiden tripping and falling in a slasher flick is one of the most realistic depictions in there) or flailing with hard overhand hammer-like swings.

At these levels of fear, your kick-ass martial artist's skills will have evaporated entirely.

NYPD statistics from 1994-2000 show a hit percentage at 0-2 yards of 38%. Trained officers at contact range to six feet miss 62% of the time. At the range, it would be almost unheard of to miss at six feet. At 3-7 yards, they missed 83%

of the time.

That's how badly skills degenerate. The average trained officer under stress shoots worse than the average beginner not under stress.

I once put a deputy through a scenario that lasted probably two minutes and involved a lot of yelling and a single trigger pull. Afterwards, the deputy was gasping for breath, hands on his knees, shaking and sweating, "Sarge, I feel like I'm going to cry and I want to puke. Is that normal?"

This all sounds pretty horrible. The zone is pretty cool, but I have never met anyone who could stay there until they'd had several fights. Even those that can, start over at square one when the type of violence changes.

For me, when it got to the point where I could handle a hand to hand fight without putting my coffee cup down, I got the full adrenaline dump when I shot someone.

Your gunfighter protagonist will turn into a jellyfish in his first knife fight. And probably have nightmares, too.

Given time, you can adjust your hormone level. When we try to raise it to the zone, we call that getting psyched up. When we are too excited, the advice is to "take a deep breath and calm down." You probably recognize these from your own life.

This almost always means that the attacker, who has had time to do this, has the advantage. Recovering from an ambush requires major skill and conditioned, effective reflexes.

Attacking: The Offensive Point of View

The paradigm I used in "Meditations on Violence" is that attacks happen close, hard, fast, and from surprise. Close, because the threat wants you in a position where he can do maximum damage (next time you hit a heavy bag, notice how close you stand. That's where a bad guy will initiate from. Nothing like sparring distance, huh?) Harder than you expect from training because most people in training either pull their strikes or use safety equipment. A threat doesn't want to dominate you, he wants you out of action.

Faster. Most martial artists are used to sparring timing: feint, play for position, strike, maybe a combination, block and counter. A threat uses a flurry of attack with no thought of defense. Why defend when he knows he is hitting his victim so fast and hard that the victim will be obsessed with his or her own defense? Almost everyone freezes under a flurry of blows. Even if the blows are pulled, the information locks the person into the [OODA loop](http://chirontraining.blogspot.com/2006/01/ooda-introduction.html). <http://chirontraining.blogspot.com/2006/01/ooda-introduction.html>

Completely untrained people hit four times a second. A decent boxer or martial artist can easily double or even triple that.

Becoming a predator is most common in our society with serious addiction. You need drugs. In order to get drugs you need a lot of money (IIRC, the last number I heard was \$400 a day. Every day. Just to keep the withdrawals at bay.)

Most people can't do serious violence because they recognize the humanity of others, even animals. When society is or becomes marginal, that is a luxury. If there is not enough food for your family, compassion for others goes down. If someone in the village starves every year, feeding a prisoner instead of executing him condemns innocents to die. If the only way you can feed your babies is to raid another village and kill to take their food, you'll find a way to do it or you and your babies will die. Most of us can't relate to the power of addiction, but might be able to imagine what we would be capable of if starving (Read Elie Wiesel's "Night" for an amazing description of what desperation will do to ordinary people.)

Beginning violent criminals have to learn to dehumanize their prey. First crimes are usually sloppy because of the emotional blocks. They learn harder/faster/closer/surprise either through trial and error, having experienced it themselves, or being mentored.

Recap:

- The first element of the fight is the ambush
- The goal is to make sure it never develops into a fight
- People freeze. They freeze to different degrees and for different reasons, but people freeze
- Fights are dynamic, happen in environments
- The body has certain reactions to stress
- Attackers like it hard, fast, close and from surprise

DISCUSSION: The Murder of Deputy Kyle Dinkheller

The video was taken from the dashboard camera of Deputy Dinkheller. He has pulled over a man for driving erratically. The man gets out of his pickup and begins doing a dance, singing, "Shoot me! Shoot my fuckin' ass! Shoot me!"

The deputy tries to calm the threat down and orders him to approach. The threat shouts "I am a goddamned Vietnam

combat veteran and I am not taking orders from you.”

Deputy Dinkheller calls in that he has someone acting strangely.

The threat (Threat is the typical cop euphemism for someone who requires force) rushes Kyle, shouting, “Who you callin’ motherfucker?”

The next part happens off camera, but it sounds like Kyle draws his expandable baton. Likely he ground it against the threat’s sternum, using pain to drive him back. The threat returns to his pick-up and begins loading a .30 caliber semi automatic assault carbine.

The deputy has been getting more agitated. His voice increases in pitch, rate and volume. He starts to become less coherent on the radio. Whereas before he was ordering the driver to approach, he now orders him to get away, though he is already at the truck.

Kyle begins repeating himself, over and over, “Put down the rifle! Put down the rifle!” When you show this video to a room full of cops, they start shifting nervously. They know Kyle needs to shoot. Some will say it out loud. Kyle doesn’t, at first.

The threat charges, firing. Kyle returns fire, but the threat has the superior weapon, mobility, and tactical training and experience. The threat closes, bobbing and weaving. Kyle screams when he is shot. He is still trying to scream for help into the radio. He is back in the fight, but it is too late. He is shot again and screams.

The threat has either a jam or needs to reload. As he turns away Dep. Dinkheller, who is not yet dead, shoots again. The threat turns, flanks the deputy and kills him. The last shot, according to reports, hits Kyle in the eye.

The threat drives away.

It is chilling the way a good horror/suspense movie is chilling. The camera is not pointing at the point of action and so you do not see anyone get shot or die. But you hear it, and it is real.

This video is important. By all accounts, Kyle Dinkheller was a good man. He was a good shot and considered a good officer. There is nothing in my history or his to indicate I am the better man. That means if he can freeze, so can I. If he can get caught in a loop, so can I.

[Chapter 4: Bad Guys and Violence](#)

As already stated, bad guys use violence because it works. They want something. Violence is a quick and often a safe and efficient way to get it. If it looks like it won’t be safe or won’t be efficient, the criminal gives the whole situation a pass.

That’s criminals. We’ll get back to them, but let’s talk about some other potentially violent people.

Altered states of consciousness. Mentally ill people are not more criminal than others. People with altered states of consciousness, whether caused by mental illness, drugs, or extreme emotion *can* be dangerous and unpredictable.

With schizophrenia, the person may be responding to a world that only they can see. They may be told what to do by voices that wear them down. They may see some connections that make no sense to us—that high-pitched noises come from the devil and therefore babies cry because they are possessed and the only way to save the babies is to remove their voices...

The man was driving his head into a concrete wall. Again and again, he would stand, back up to the limits of his ten by twelve foot cell and run, driving his head into the concrete wall. He said he was trying to “knock myself to heaven. I want to see my grandfather.” The challenge was to use a type of force that would stop him without increasing his head trauma. A Taser saved his life.

Most fights with the mentally ill happen because the mentally ill person is terrified. They may not be able to interpret that someone is trying to help, and the fight often turns into a frenzied, frantic flailing. Lots of thrashing and biting.

Follow the dynamic. If someone who is not acting ‘right’ (your protagonist is unlikely to be able to tell at first glance if the person is drugged or mentally ill or in a severe emotional state) does something dangerous either to others (like breaking down a door and demanding honey) or to themselves (like running into traffic) they need to be stopped. The nature of the altered state of consciousness is that they cannot be expected to stop or control themselves. So someone intervenes.

The person in the altered mental state sees the intervention but is unlikely to see it as help and quite often sees it as an attack. They fight, in a panic. When they start to lose, it doesn’t occur to them to surrender, they fight harder. More force is used.

(Non-mental illness, like a diabetic reaction, can also trigger erratic and violent behavior. Graham V Connor, one of the cornerstones of police force law was a US Supreme Court decision stemming from a diabetic crisis).

In some cases emotionally disturbed people have fought to heart failure. Just like a horse can be run to death.

This brings up a point that affects a lot of officers but doesn’t get a lot of play. The truth is that force is used to stop force. But we want force to be used ‘justly’. If someone dies after a use of force, we want it to be a bad guy, not a poor

disturbed kid who panicked. That can be really hard on good people who had to use force.

Here's the deal. Hardened, experienced criminals know how to surrender. They know how much fight they can give without being hurt. They talk tough knowing that as long as they keep their hands in plain sight, they are safe. Some, many, actually, actively try to provoke the officer into an act of unjustified force. They might be able to sue or put pressure on to get charges dropped. We rarely use force, and rarely much force, on serious criminals. Serious criminals know how to behave when the police show up.

Regular citizens don't know how to behave. Some fight when they have no hope of winning or even when it will be a crime to do so. Many stand on rights they do not have or demand to be treated in a way that the officer won't or maybe can't (by law or policy) do. If you go to jail, the officers will take your wedding ring... because if you are housed with someone who is willing to bite your finger off for something shiny, the officers will be responsible. The officers will take the ring even if the arrestee is willing to fight for it. So force is more likely to be used on a regular citizen in a bad situation than on a serious criminal. In "The Code of the Street" Elijah Anderson makes a similar observation from the other side--people who live in the inner city rarely get injured in robberies because they know the etiquette of being mugged.

The EDP (emotionally disturbed person) is the worst case, as described above. And the least deserving of pain or injury. But, to repeat, force is not about justice. It is about stopping people.

Like anyone else, a bad guy uses violence socially or asocially.

Social violence is for the (perceived) good of the group. It is used to establish a hierarchy, to enforce the rules and norms of a group, to establish boundaries of membership or to strengthen bonds.

When two young males start with, "What you lookin' at?" They follow the specific steps of the human dominance game. Exactly the same way that Big Horn Sheep rams butt heads. It is designed to be safe.

Spanking, a smack on the head for a rude remark, or killing someone in the barrio because he tried to molest your sister are all the same dynamic: violence to make sure that everyone knows the rules. Domestic violence is usually perceived this way as well.

When an officer shows up to a domestic violence call, frequently both the aggressor and the victim will turn on the officers. We are hard-wired to resent an 'outsider' getting involved in 'insider' business. At a higher level, this violence to the outsider or especially an insider who has betrayed the group, can turn into a horrifically violent contest. The group members, in order to prove and show their loyalty, try to outdo each other in how much damage they can do to the begging, pleading victim.

It both establishes membership and increases group bonds.

A special case is a young member in certain subcultures who wants a reputation for being 'hard' or 'crazy'. In almost any violent culture, such a reputation carries a degree of safety. Crazy people are hazardous to threaten and better left alone.

This person will try to put on a show, usually by using extreme violence that would violate the local social rules or by attacking a victim that would normally be off limits—different gender, the very young or old.

Asocial violence is what happens when a person is able to completely or partially dehumanize a victim. It changes a fight to a hunt. I'm not sure I can put this in words. Most people can fight another human. An asocial predator can hunt one. We kill animals for food efficiently—whether hunting with a high-powered rifle or the quick throat-cutting of a halal butcher. A predator, someone who is in the asocial mode, can apply this efficiency to another human.

This is rare. Most people can't do it. Some can fake it and some, with intense training can act like it for short periods of time (a war or a battle), but the humanity of their victims tends to bubble up and they pay the price later—in nightmares, separation from others and, all too often, addictions.

For those who can, violence is a completely different experience than most of us imagine it. It is a tool. With proper planning, it is an efficient and safe tool. It often makes a truly asocial bad guy feel like a god (or asocial good guy, for that matter). When something very bad and violent happens to a group of people, most run around like screaming monkeys. They cannot just shift to survival mode but cling to each other and try to figure out what it all means. Humans mix their physical survival mentality with their social survival mentality.

To be asocial, whether naturally or trained or inured over time, is to walk into that situation without hesitation. When everyone else is spraying fire in an attempt to make others duck and not get shot, the predator is methodical... aiming, firing, murdering.

Some people, the process predators, use violence for its own sake. They enjoy the feelings of control and domination in a beating, a rape or a murder. They may fantasize about torture-murders and work to live out their fantasies. That's rare. The risks are high and the rewards are generally intangible.

More predators use a subconscious (or even conscious) risk-reward analysis. Aggressive panhandling for a dollar is low payoff, but it is very nearly zero risk. Showing a weapon and ordering a potential victim to obey (if you have

analyzed the victim) is lower risk than using force (sometimes people panic and fight when hit; in any case using force influences prosecutors to be more vigorous).

I mentioned early on that in some cases the death penalty or minimum sentencing standards are deterrents. It is in these cases. The more professional and experienced a criminal is, the more likely sentencing possibilities are on their mind when planning or conducting an assault. Two examples from my local criminals:

“Normally after I beat him down I would have gone through his pockets, but that would turn it into robbery and that’s a measure eleven charge.”

And:

“I held his head with my other hand so it wouldn’t hit the wall. I know how you guys trump up charges...”

No one is merely their criminal acts. Hard core violent criminals don't have a lot of friends and most addicts have ripped off family so much that family doesn't trust them ... but their moms still love them and so, up to a certain age even with horrific abuse, do their children.

Part of it is that parents and children are conditioned to love. Part of it is that in the attempt to make sense and normalize life, people can go through amazing justifications for a family member or friend.

The number of times that a local criminal well known by us to be a brutal pimp, drug dealer and extremely violent finally met his end (usually at the hands of another pimp or dealer) and his family came out of the woodwork to say that "He was a good boy" "Very gentle" "He had some trouble when he was younger but was turning his life around" and the like leaves me cold.

I always wondered if they really believed it. In a few cases I know the family members were terrified of the subject and had sworn out Restraining Orders... but they sounded sincere. They were genuinely grieving.

I used to remind rookies that each of our inmates was three people-- the one who did the crimes; the one the family knew; and the one we saw in jail. Some of the most violent criminals were good inmates. They knew the system, knew how little they could get away with and tried to do the time quietly. Some whiny little low-level hustlers tried to play big guy in jail. It never ended well, but some never learned. And at visiting every week, you would see a four-year-old on his crack-addicted prostitute mother's knee looking through the plexiglass and talking into the phone saying, "I love you daddy. When are you coming home?"

Recap:

-Social violence is used to establish place in a hierarchy; to set the boundaries of in and outside the group or to enforce the social rules

-Asocial violence depends on an ability to ‘other’

-Asocial violence is for a specific goal- to get stuff or to enjoy the process

-The humanity of the victim does not enter into asocial violence

-Experienced criminals/predators use a risk/reward analysis

-Violent people have lives beyond their violence

[Chapter 5: Good Guys and Violence](#)

Professional Good Guys

Some good guys get involved in violence as professionals. Police, soldiers, bouncers, maybe private investigators, bodyguards.

Except for those glorious rookie months where they know lots of facts and understand almost nothing, professionals do not think or feel about violence like citizens do.

Professionals approach violence differently. First and foremost, it is not some separate mysterious thing that only happens in a world turned upside down. Violence is natural. Force is a form of communication- for a good guy the most emphatic way possible of saying “No” “Stop!” or “I am not going to let that happen.” (For bad guys force is usually just a way to say “Gimme!”) Force works regardless of language barrier or altered states of consciousness or how dedicated the bad guy is. Sometimes it takes more force than others, but with enough force the behavior stops.

Professionals use force to stop or prevent behaviors. Amateurs use force to establish dominance quite often. That’s important and leads to one of the questions an author must answer before a fight scene:

Assuming the character knows anything about fighting, he needs a damn good reason to go hands-on. In almost every action movie there is an early scene to establish how bad-assed the protagonist is. He walks into an armed robbery about to go down and clears out the whole gang or breaks up a street fight and uses his mad martial arts skillz to take out a gang. It’s probably exciting for the audience. From professionals watching you get muffled gags and mutterings like, “Fuckin’ wannabe.”

In almost all of those scenes, the protagonist could leave. He could apologize. He could stay out of the situation and call for police or, if he is an officer, back-up. The only reason not to do these things is an ego so grotesque coupled with intelligence so low that there is no chance the guy would have survived being a rookie.

Get this—fighting is dangerous. Pros know this. All moderately intelligent people know this. It is much safer if you do it from ambush. It is much safer if you have friends, especially well-armed and trained friends.

Fighting also has consequences. Your protagonist beats up six gang-bangers who are hassling an elderly lady. Congratulations. He now has six people who will support each other's story that he attacked them from ambush while they were trying to calm him down. He couldn't have beaten six if they were fighting, so *they* must have been the peacekeepers. The protagonist will be lucky not to face criminal charges. Even if he does, he will face, and lose, a civil court case that will take all of his money and possessions and garnish his wages for life.

And if he is a cop, he will lose his badge and be labeled dirty, because any good cop would have known better and would have called for back-up. The very fact that he didn't make the call, in real life, would be a sure sign that he was acting criminally.

Wait! There's more! He needs an even better reason to go face to face. Remember the ambushes and resources thing? You do not only need to explain why the protagonist was fighting, but why he was fighting like an idiot. Like an amateur. *Like a character in a bad novel.*

Pros spend a lot of energy and attention on averting violence.

The primary skill is an ability to see violence coming. They need to be able to read terrain, read the dynamic and read people.

Reading Terrain

In any given area there are positions of power. Corners of the room limit the number of directions you can be approached, and hence the number of directions you need to watch. Hence the cliché of action adventure heroes not sitting with their backs to doors, trying for the corner table (it's sometimes fun to watch cops go out to lunch together). -- also, always notice the people who occupy the positions of power in a room.

There's more, though. There are places in a given room where you have advantages in visibility- you don't need to be facing the room if there's a mirror above the bar. If the sun is setting behind you, you will see the shadows of anyone trying to approach from the rear. Almost all elevators have a handrail that is shiny enough you can see the reflection of anyone trying to hide to the side of the door.

Your protagonist will also look for freedom of action for himself, "funnels of death" and escape routes.

It's not enough to be sitting in the corner if your weapon hand is pressed up against the wall. Being pinned in a corner is no advantage. Fights, especially gunfights, are very mobile affairs. What are the three critical skills for small unit operations? Move, shoot and communicate. Movement is critical.

The "funnel of death" is any small space that a person must come through, like a door or a hallway. It is easy to concentrate firepower in such a small area and the longer you are in one, the more likely you are to be killed. Violence professionals rarely stop in the doorway to scan a room. They scan what they can from outside and then step in quickly and get to one side of the door.

Scanning for escape routes also becomes habit. Things don't always go well. Good guys don't always win. If you have a plan, you can usually get out. If you don't, you will be cut down while you are trying to think of a plan.

Homework: Start cataloging, from this moment forward, the positions of power in each area you are in. Pay special attention to shadows and reflective surfaces. Start looking for escape routes and alternate ways into buildings and rooms. Be creative- can you break a window or cut through drywall to escape?

Reading Dynamics

People are social animals and violence is usually a social thing. An experienced protagonist can often read the people around him as a group and see danger signs well in advance. It's a good habit for writers, too.

Look at the flow of movement. People give more room to things that scare them and many people are remarkably intuitive. On public transportation or in any crowded area, who gets more personal space than others? Is it a crowd of regulars who know the local players? Or is it a group of strangers working on instinct?

The clothing- is it the norm for people to have untucked shirts or collared shirts with open fronts worn loose over t-shirts? Then the signal is that being armed is normal here.

See a group of guys with short hair, maybe goatees, wearing almost no accessories beyond a watch and a wedding ring, with loose jackets or fannypacks across their bellies? That's a group of cops.

See two guys standing close and looking over each other's shoulders as they talk? Probably extremely fit and with primarily greenish-black tats? That's a pair of cons who haven't been out long enough for their addictions to destroy the bodies they built on the weight pile in the yard.

Homework: Next time you are in a crowd, practice looking at things from different magnifications. Find a high place and look at the crowd like it was water-- where does it go, what does it avoid. Then look at small groups that you can

identify-- how does a family move through a mall? How does a group of teenagers hanging out interact or ignore the people around them? Skip looking at an individual for now, instead just look at hands, just look at eyes and just look at shoes. Personally, I look at pockets and count clip-on knives, but that's me.

Reading People

There is an old police saying, "The eyes may be the window to the soul, but people kill you with their hands." Always watch the hands. Your pro will get very nervous if he can't see someone's hands, especially someone who 'pinged' his 'radar'.

Pros tend to recognize other pros, good or bad. They scan a room the same way, often dress similarly (movement and weapon concealment are very important) position themselves the same way. People who have trained to fight move slightly differently than others (though sometimes dancers move very similarly they rarely watch the world the same way.) We call this 'pinging the radar'.

A story from Northern Iraq:

The first time I saw him, my initial reaction was to label him as an extreme danger, probably an assassin. This is a place where that word isn't bandied about. I mean it very literally. It took me almost two days to be sure that he was part of our security detail. 'Slim' is insanely alert, moves silently, rarely talks. There is a museum dedicated to the atrocities that Saddam Hussein perpetrated against Slim's hometown. He has been fighting for a very long time.

Things are quieter now-- he makes his living as a bodyguard--but what kept him alive for so long, the zanshen, is very close to the surface.

Slim and I pinged each other's radar pretty good that first day. I read him as a professional killer and he read me as something, too. He attached himself to me after that and we watched each other with wary respect (at least on my end).

The general invites us to dinner. He has fought for a long time, too. Now we dine and drink eighteen-year-old scotch in a fine restaurant. The food is wonderful. A woman sings Kurdish songs in a dialect that no one at our table understands. Everyone is armed. The general's PSD is at the table behind us, ours is at the table near the door. Slim is with ours.

I am at relatively high alert throughout the dinner. The general is possibly the highest-value target in the region. The things that make it secure can seem like a set-up aimed at us. I don't drink much and sit so that my weapon is cleared for a draw. The general keeps piling food on my plate.

Things relax a bit when the general excuses himself and leaves. Not right away. Loyalties here can be Byzantine and probably all of us entertain the possibility that the host leaving early from a meeting place and time of his choice could potentially be a very bad thing. We disperse around the room and stay watchful. Then most relax a bit.

Mike tries to take a picture of Slim and fails. He curses his luck.

"Mike," I say, "You can't take a picture of a really good bodyguard." He and Slim both nod in agreement and the flash goes off in the camera held in my right hand, way away from my body, "But I can." The picture is pretty good, Slim in profile. Were crosshairs drawn on it they would meet just behind his eyes.

Slim is not happy, but he nods approval. I have somehow just confirmed his assessment of me, whatever that was.

Later I see that Slim has his back to me and I slip the camera out of my pouch, planning to drift around a pillar...as soon as the thought is formed he snaps around, staring at me. He could sense me go into the hunter's mind.

That's the point of this story, really. There are things that happen to your senses on the pointy end of the spear. You become something a little different than your garden-variety human. Things that people who have never experienced them either gasp with shiny eyes and think magic or discount as bullshit. But it's there, and sometimes you can only share it with others who have gone even deeper.

Pros will watch how people move; how they dress; whether they are nervous; what they watch; what they try to hide (hands, emotions...). Most people will show adrenaline indicators before they escalate to violence. A pro will not-- he will show specific self-calming behaviors, such as consciously controlling breathing (autogenic or 'warrior breathing'- slow in to a count of four, hold to a count of four, exhale to a count of four); subtly stretch, especially the neck and spine; or check details of weapons and equipment.

Except for an extreme pro who has consciously trained against it, both pros and amateurs, when armed, have a tendency to subconsciously touch their weapons when tensions go up even slightly. Possibly just making sure they haven't shifted.

Common adrenaline indicators:

-Changes in coloration (flush or pallor)

- Breathing (rapid and shallow)
- Thirst (frequent drinking or licking lips)
- Gross Motor Activity (GMA) pacing, flexing, swinging arms
- Loss of Fine Motor Activity (FMA) shaking, dropping small items
- Unfocused gaze (“Thousand Yard Stare”)
- Repetitive, rhythmic or ritual behavior- tapping, humming a specific song.

Violence professionals are rarely the “lone wolf” type. Most can operate solo and many prefer to, but they still work and live in social networks.

Professionals require a logistical support network. In modern times, they need to get weapons and ammunition and SBA (Soft Body Armor) from somebody. They don’t make their own food and clothing, communications equipment, or transportation. Someone supplied all of that. Someone taught them to use it. Someone keeps the technology current and keeps the batteries charged.

Intelligence networks are just as critical. You can’t know all the details of all the underworld strata in every city of the world. There is a common tattoo among American criminals- three dots on the web of the thumb that has a very definite meaning. It stands for “*mi vida loca*” “my crazy life.” I saw the same tattoo on the Iran/Iraq border. It took me almost two months to find out what it meant there. (Sorry, can't share that.)

Getting entry into criminal circles in unfamiliar places is hard. These guys are paranoid and don’t really care if they use a little too much violence or kill the wrong guy. It is also hard to stay unknown in the places you are familiar with.

Your protagonist gets information from somewhere. Often the people who gather information have the more dangerous and challenging job. When the Mission: Impossible team read their little dossiers to find out that the smuggling family had two brothers who were rivals or that Crime Boss X’s wife had a drinking problem... someone found that out. Your kick-ass tactical operator is helpless, literally working blind, if he doesn’t have good intel from the guy on the ground. And being a good operator and a good intel guy are both full time jobs and require very different training and with a few exceptions, very different personalities.

Operators and Intel

There are different kinds of operators, of course, but one of the big differences is that operators (trigger pullers) need to be able to ‘other’ people quickly and thoroughly. They think about position and tactical advantage. Unless they are working to control it, a lot of people feel a vague disquiet in their presence, like they are being hunted.

People who gather intel need to be people persons and the best I’ve met are extraordinarily friendly and out-going, without ever actually volunteering information themselves. There has to be a coldness as well, but hidden. One colleague described the job of a Hostage Negotiator (usually called a crisis negotiator today): “You have to be able to make friends in a few minutes with some really nasty people and sometimes some really troubled people. Some of these kids have real problems and you need to be able to care and to reach them. And then you need to be able to talk them into coming closer to the window so that someone can shoot your new friend in the head. And you need to be okay with that.”

Most trigger pullers have trouble shooting someone they have come to know. That’s one of the reasons that snipers (snipers are not the same as sharp shooters or ‘target interdiction specialists’ I’m talking specifically about people who go out hunting for specific high-value targets) have such a reputation for being different. They study their kills before they shoot. Most people who study the kills couldn’t shoot. I don’t know if most snipers would feel comfortable talking and making friends and still shoot. I doubt if many would have the skill to do both.

Tactical operators also are obsessed with maintaining control, knowing the options and planning for their own safety. Undercover work is dangerous as hell and a lot of the basic safety precautions are out the window. Back up can’t be in sight and in deep cover may not be close. Armor will give you away and weapons might...

An experienced professional also has a social network. That social network is what keeps him sane. Dealing with violence has some serious emotional repercussions. Some are immediate and obvious: you see a head split open and watch and smell the brains drip out, you lose the ability to keep death an abstraction. You know someone who took a bullet in the face, someone who was as good as you or better--well trained and equipped and smart and cautious, just unlucky—and you realize how much your existence depends, each second, on luck.

You risk your life to save a life and you look at the person you saved—probably a drug addicted loser with a long history of violent felonies just as bad as the person you saved him from—and you have to question why. Is it just a job? Is it the right thing to do? Duty? Paycheck? Or habit? It is what you know how to do and most people can’t and it needs to be done...

Less immediate and obvious is the double-edged sword of simultaneously trying to live a normal life. The first edge of that sword is that it is easy for a professional to forget that he works with extremes. If you spend 80% of your waking

hours with dangerous, bad people it is easy to start to believe that 80% of the world is bad and dangerous. It's stressful not only because you spend too much time in a state of hypervigilance (adrenaline-fueled, jumpy alertness) but you also feel that the people you care about are in constant danger, and they seem unable to see it.

That's the second edge of the sword. People without a professional's experience are both incredibly naïve and ill-informed about even the most basic aspects of violence... yet they are very sure about right and wrong and swift to judge. They believe that they know more than they do. Talking about violence with non-professionals is as rewarding, illuminating and accurate as talking with first-graders about sex.

A lot has been written about the divorce rate among cops and soldiers and emergency services personnel. It's something of a cliché. Here's the deal- even a lot of professionals don't deal with the stresses of the job well. If they are drowning, it will come out in their families. If they try to keep stuff inside, to protect their families by silence ("there is some stuff in my head that no one else needs to know"), the strain will come out in the family.

And if the family can't handle it, if they need to deny the reality of what the professional deals with every day, that will come out in divorce as well.

There is a solid core of professionals who do the job well, long term, with great restraint and professionalism. Consistently, in this group you will find very deep, committed, long-term relationships. Nothing is hidden (including limits—once in nineteen years has my wife said, "I don't want to hear any more. This is bad." On only one subject.)

I don't know whether the high-end professional chooses or creates the relationship that allows him or her to decompress and focus on real life and function or if the good relationship allows the high-end professional to keep going.

A professional will bring different physical and emotional skills to an episode of violence as well as a completely different mindset than a non-professional. An amateur wonders if he can beat Chuck Norris. A professional wonders *how* he will beat Chuck Norris.

Physical skills will come from training and then be tempered and refined from experience. A lot of training, especially at the introductory stages, is not at all the same skill that needs to be applied in the field. A prime example is shooting on the range-- static, good footing, good lighting, ear and eye protection, safety monitors, unlimited time.

A real gunfight is almost exactly the opposite in every particular. Not because the basic skills are wrong, but because they are incomplete. That goes for almost all training—martial arts and even police academy and BCT (Basic Combat Training, military "basic".)

You need to know what your protagonist has been trained to do. Too many characters seem to be trained in 'everything' or the authors hand wave as if Special Forces or S.E.A.L. training included everything.

Emotional skills are another matter. Dealing with stress is both a talent and a skill. Some people are wired differently. I found out early that fighting is not something I take home. Even after my one shooting, no bad dreams, no shakes or flashbacks. But I had a much harder time with whining. I did, for a while, have a recurring dream of an infinitely long hallway with cell doors every four paces and a different criminal in every cell whining, begging or demanding something, "Officer, what time is it?" "Officer, what's my release date?" "Officer, will you sharpen my pencil?" "Officer, my baby needs heroin." That last—pregnant junkies would often beg for drugs, and always say "it's for my baby." That always bothered me.

Humor, especially dark humor is one of the most common and most disturbing (to outsiders) ways to stay sane. As one friend put it, "You're either going to laugh or cry. If I start crying I don't think I'll ever stop." Humor has to be controlled- as necessary as it can be for the professionals, when families or reporters overhear it can destroy careers.

Many professionals rely on faith. Not necessarily a particular faith. They deal far too often with a fact that almost all of society is designed to deny:

We are all going to die. There is no way around it and no way, other than suicide, to even control it.

That's a hard truth to wrap your head around, and if it seems easy you don't understand it yet.

At one level of faith, a belief in an afterlife or that there is a plan is a huge comfort. It makes a harsh, bleak truth less harsh, maybe less bleak. Maybe it's not true.

At another level of faith, professionals take comfort in tangible things-- their training, their experience or their team—so that they can believe that they won't die *this time*. It gives them the courage to go in, the belief that, sooner or later, they will be rescued if captured.

There is also a level of faith, what may be the definition of faith itself, unique to the men and women who deal with the possibility of death as a profession. How much information and preparation would it take for you to risk your life? To the professional, the answer is obvious: "As much as we have time for, and then we go."

You will never have enough training, information or skill to be perfectly safe. The operation, the mission, will have a definite window of opportunity. The ability to go in, without the possibility of knowing the outcome, defines, to me,

faith. It is the hallmark of the professional.

From my blog:

What Do You Think You're Doing?

What is worth killing for? What is worth dying for?

Believe it or not, those are the easy questions. The kindergarten version of this particular meditation. Whenever you think of self-defense or think of fighting, those questions are part of the equation. They have to be, because trying to work out your moral and ethical issues when someone else is trying to expose your inner workings to the cold air is ... inefficient.

Those questions are easy to ask and easy to answer. Too easy, because they are asked and answered from ignorance and comfort.

First thing, there are no absolutes, no trade-offs, nothing clear. It is never, "I will die to save ten children." The world doesn't work like that. It becomes, "I will risk dying for the chance of saving, maybe, some or all of the ten children." Risk and chance. You might not die. You might not save anybody. Or you might die and save nobody (an aside to the professionals- dead people don't save anybody.)

But it's not even that. That's still too clean. Because it might not be dying. When you think, "What would I risk dying for?" Take time to ask, to substitute paralysis and blindness for dying. Waking up in the same prison cell every day for the rest of your life. Waking up screaming from the same nightmare periodically, forever. Remember that dying also includes orphaning your children...

(And that's the other side, what got me thinking about this today. When you pull the trigger you may shift a human being from being to not-being, turn a person into a corpse, erase a history and turn it into meat- but you are also creating orphans and widows, who will become what they become in response to your action which may be decided and finished in the space of a breath.)

If those are off the table and it goes well for you then civil suits and legal entanglements and blood-borne disease are all out there. Or the face of someone who flashes before your eyes periodically, clutching his throat and trying to scream. Memories.

Even dying isn't what we think, not what we've been told. Some give up, sure. But the noble and heroic death, the manly eyes slowly fading as light passes and a look of satisfaction passes to the cold pallid lips...

There's pain and fear and thirst and screaming. But that's not the worst. The worst is being beaten- you gave all you had, everything you were and it wasn't enough. As your body slips closer to death, whether bleeding out or under blows you are helpless, utterly helpless. The warrior who wanted to take his stand against the world is mewling, begging and bargaining with god for one more breath of air or one less drop of pain. As helpless as a baby. In that instant, everything you thought you knew, the story in your head of who you are, is shattered.

This just barely scratches the surface. As you train, as you teach- what do you think you are doing? What are you training for? Living and dying? If only it were that clean.

The Reformed Bad Guy

IME, when people change their lives it is almost always an act of will because it is the smart thing to do. "If I stay here, doing this, I will die or go to prison."

There is a lot of potential drama in that decision.

I know one man who could make his current annual salary in a few weeks just by returning to a former life and doing a few jobs, but he desperately wants to live up to his wife's desire to see him as a good guy and doesn't want the kinds of people he used to associate with anywhere near his daughter.

Another who said, "The hardest part is learning how to be angry like a white man." That's his words and perspective. In his early world if you got angry you smiled, made sure everyone was relaxed and went and got a weapon. The idea of expressing anger struck him as tactical suicide. The idea of feeling anger and not acting on it with extreme force was beyond his comprehension.

He mentally labeled this as 'white' anger.

Both these men, and many others (including me, most days) miss this life. Most could flip a switch and go back to it in a heart beat, but something else, often children, gives a motivation not to... and all are supremely confident that if they had no choice, all the old skills would be in full play.

Sources

A very important point when considering your sources is that a paid professional DOES NOT mean the person has any real world experience. A rookie newly assigned to the team can put SWAT on his resume. A cook who has

completed jump school and been assigned to a ranger battalion can put “Ranger” on his resume. For that matter, officers assigned to special operations groups are officers first and operators second- many, probably most, are not required to complete the specialized training required of an enlisted man for membership.

Since the advent of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan this is less of an issue, but in the long stretch of relative peace between Vietnam and the Kuwaiti war there were many special operations soldiers who were trained and certified but never actually deployed. Always check your sources. If something smells wrong, check deeper.

The OPIEC Character

The OPIEC (Ordinary Person in Extraordinary Circumstances) character is a common trope and a good choice in a lot of ways. More readers will be able to relate to an ordinary person than someone who deals professionally with violence. Extraordinary circumstances allow readers to suspend their squeamishness over issues of force and violence.

The ordinary person thrust into extraordinary situations is a staple of fiction. Honestly, in real life, it doesn't work very well. In medieval times, an armed and armored knight was a match for an entire village. A handful of armored men with steel weapons were able to stand against and defeat an army of thousands in the Andes. (182 conquistadors against an army of 7000, the Incan king's elite guards, routed them at a cost of five dead Spaniards and over 2000 dead Incans).

There is a lot of power for the author if you can present an authentic and immediate experience of violence and the issues that will arise for your OPIEC.

These are the deficits the amateurs have to overcome:

- Without training or experience, the protagonist has no idea what to do
- Without experience or a very unusual personality, the amateur freezes
- The amateur tends to follow social scripts- they default to Monkey Dance tactics and don't injure the bad guy
- The amateur tends to test the waters when they do act—many people hit half force the first time they hit, and then pause to see if it worked
- Trained amateurs often have fantasy concepts— they are often shocked and freeze when the fight isn't like sparring
- Trained amateurs may be shocked by success or failure—failure is obvious, but sometimes well trained people are devastated when everything works fine, and they hear bones or tendons snap and see a big man screaming
- Amateurs are completely unaware of the context and the aftermath

Everything on this list are things that predatory criminals rely on in their victims. These are the reasons that violence works so well.

What To Do?

How you handle this as a writer will depend a lot on your protagonist and the situation. The most critical aspect of the situation is how much time is available.

If your protagonist is under a realistic assault it will be at close range, very fast, very powerful and with maximum surprise. That means that the protagonist will not have time to plan. Survival here will be due to instinct or skills trained to reflex. The most common survivor's mindset is when the fear, panic and surprise somehow turn into a righteous rage “I will make him pay!” and the victim, willing to take damage to give damage, turns into a whirlwind of ferocity.

If the situation is slower to develop, such as a hostage situation or a school shooting, you protagonist will have seconds to hours to think and come up with a plan. How well the plan works will depend on how well the bad guys have anticipated the possibility.

It is really, really easy, in the comfort of home to say what you will do. It doesn't work out like that. Until you or your character has reached that level, it is a dice roll what will happen. I haven't seen anything that is an indicator. One of the biggest cowards I ever worked with was a 6'4" former Marine. The guy I use as an example of people that always freeze is a gun nut, a martial arts champion and a Tactical Team member. This is why we always watch rookies so closely: until the first big fight you don't know if their instinct is to run away or run towards the fight. Neither do they.

Fighting Personalities

A lot of the bad writing is from thinking there is a certain way. Fights are idiosyncratic and very personal. Everyone has a fighting personality. One possible example:

I'm going to take this guy down. He has a reputation, possibly a weapon, and I want it over quick, but the goal is to take him into custody, not to neutralize him (notice that here I am even thinking in cold, professional language). The plan is to slam into him from behind with full body weight and leg strength at a slightly upward angle, slamming him into a wall and as he bounces off, swing him away, sweep his legs so that he lands face down on the concrete. I'll do a double

knee drop, kidney and neck if there's still a little fight... that's the plan.

I get the hit and he bounces off the wall, but he spins off of it, using the momentum and tags me with a hard hook punch. I'm going to freeze for a microsecond, partially because my plan has been spiked but largely because this guy has just shown me that he knows what he is doing and the fight has shifted from custody of a dangerous threat to survival. I've dealt with that before and will unfreeze before he hits the ground, landing on his feet.

Part of my particular unfreeze is that I completely stop thinking. My body (hindbrain) has done this hundreds of times. I let my body do it. I'm also, by training and inclination an infighter. I'll shoulder slam him into the wall, preferably keeping him off his feet. Infighters are rare and I usually have the advantage. If he goes for a weapon, I'll slam him hard, using the wall as an impact weapon. I'll also snake a hand up to the leverage point under his nose and twist and extend his cervical spine, using that action to slam his head into the wall if I can.

If he doesn't go for a weapon, most people don't know how to generate power at super tight range. If he's skilled, he'll be trying to wrap around to hit my upper cervical vertebrae at an upward angle. I want him high, either taller than me or still off the ground, to make that hard.

If I can get his spine extended and it's a very bad situation, I have practiced short power and will fire a fast, hard strike into his lower ribs preferably with his spine extended away, so that the ribs break easier and preferably on his right side, over his liver. Liver shots suck. It's like getting punched in an eight-pound testicle. Spine extensions, using walls, furniture, corners and ground as impact weapons, close range power and multi-level/non-conscious thinking are part of my fighting personality.

However, when I get ambushed, hit from behind, slammed into a wall, especially if I take some damage, I have an entirely different personality. My eyes light up, I get this maniac grin. Sometimes I giggle. I usually spin with the force of the first impact and then I want to make a show. Let him know that I am faster, more skilled and more ruthless. I beat right past his pathetic little arms.

Any way he stands and any way he moves all works for me. He's not only my toy, but he actively helps me with each pathetic attempt to attack. I just beat past his arms until I have his core and toss him in the air (not strength, there are a handful of judo throws that I love for this, but if you have ever used your hips to toss a hay bale, you know the action). When he lands (sometimes badly, but often I come back to my human mind when he is in the air and control his fall a little) I flip him over and cuff him. Casually. He's like a toy, a rag doll. Even when he is trying to fight.

I know what these states feel like from inside and know the mechanics of what happened, largely due to reports and witness statements. I don't have reliable insight to what it feels like to be on the receiving ends, since bad guys don't write reports.

The point is that not only do I have two distinct personalities when things go bad, your characters won't look at, feel about or respond to the situations the same as I do, or anyone else for that matter. No two people fight the same or think about fighting in the same way.

Recap:

- Professionals approach violence differently than OPIEC characters
- Professionals develop skills at reading terrain, dynamics and people
- Professionals try to avert uses of force and generally have the skill to do so
- Reformed bad guys reform for a reason and it is sometimes hard to stay reformed
- Be careful with your sources, including me
- The OPIEC character has a lot to overcome in order to win realistically
- People have distinctive fighting personalities

[Chapter 6: Gender Differences](#)

Here's a big shock: men and women see violence differently. It's bigger than that. We have both socially conditioned and biological reactions to danger and violence that differ. I haven't actually heard anyone say since the seventies that all gender differences are cultural (someone noticed the plumbing was different about then, I think) but there are a lot of very odd opinions out there.

Here goes. Boys and girls were raised differently. By the time a boy is ready to either start learning to fight or thinking about taking a job where fighting is likely, he has been wrestling and rough-housing for years. This means that most of the time he has been hit, he has it associated with fun, bonding and learning.

The 'don't hit a girl' ethic denies women this same chance. There are always exceptions, but for the most part if a woman or girl has ever been hit, she has been hit as a punishment. The hitting gets tied in her mind with shame. This even happens in abuse. A child who has done nothing wrong will still be told she is getting beaten 'for her own good' and that she caused it. That combination of beatings and shame make for an early and powerful association.

This is why women rarely train in martial arts and when they do they tend to pick classes with low contact. Toby Beck (Duchess Elina of the SCA) wrote about it. I have used her information to plan tactical operations and to really help teach female officers. [Link here.](#)

<http://forums.uechi-ryu.com/viewtopic.php?p=27215&sid=f4a748e1c9f45f08fe553d76dd725f61>

The most important biological difference is in adrenaline reactions.

When something bad happens, men get a big spike of adrenaline and other stress hormones that quickly fades. Women have a much slower build up, the peak never gets quite as high and it tapers off slowly.

In personal relationships, where you see this most often is in arguments. I have an argument with my wife. I'm getting loud, she's clearly wrong but she's being infuriatingly reasonable and I finally get so angry, after just a minute or two, that I stomp out, slamming the door and go for a walk. A couple minutes later it's pretty clear that she was right. I decide I might as well go back and apologize now... and I walk in just as she is getting to full fury.

To a man, since I got mad early and got over it quickly, she looks irrational. She wasn't mad when I thought it would be appropriate and was mad when I was over it. It actually has nothing to do with thought or rationality, that is just timing on adrenaline. (It's really a bunch of hormones and neurotransmitters, I use adrenaline for shorthand).

You see this in defensive shootings, where a man will usually fire around two shots as soon as he is aware of the intruder and a women will retreat and retreat and retreat and then empty the weapon.

This is valuable and one of the reasons why I loved working with a female partner. Early in the encounter when a guy is going into his fight or flight mode, the woman can still think, plan and even do fine motor skill things like, oh, aiming. Her memory and senses in a quick encounter will be clearer.

What gets misinterpreted a lot is that after a very tense encounter (when the guy is going into his sleepy or sometimes horny mode) the woman has a tendency to burst into tears. It's just adrenaline burning off, but often neither the man nor the woman are aware of it and think it is an emotional issue. (Not sure how it will affect your readers and your writing, but be careful with yourself to distinguish between hormones and emotions.)

Because the guy has his adrenaline timed to what is often the most violent part of the encounter, the things that might be misinterpreted as emotion are hidden by action. He'll probably get the shakes afterwards, they both will. But since hers will last longer no one seems to notice that they started later as well, and she was fine when he started shaking.

Evolutionarily, you can see why this works. Child-bearing women are the primary resource in a marginal hunter-gatherer society. If a handful of the younger men fight, even if the predator is too formidable to stop, it buys women and children time to get to safety. That time, if the predator breaks through, probably coincides with the female adrenaline peak.

One more evolutionary thing for the fantasy writers. The math doesn't work on female warrior societies, not unless they have a huge surplus of resources and people. Not because women can't fight. Trust me, in a lot of ways men are far less dangerous in a fight than women. It's because of children.

Let's say there are two tribes, all adults, each has ten men and ten women. Tribe A has its women do the fighting, tribe B has men fight. They get in a dispute. The battle ends in a draw and each loses four warriors. Both tribes now have 16 members, A has six women and ten men; B six men and ten women. The next year, assuming peace and war doesn't break out during pregnancies, all of the women can potentially have a baby. Tribe A now has 22 members, 9 of them female (potential warriors). Tribe B has 26 members, 11 of them potentially warriors. As this goes on, A will eventually whittle down and lose. Unless total destruction of the tribe was the alternative, women have been too valuable to risk in combat for most of human history.

This doesn't mean that such a society couldn't or hasn't existed, but there are reasons why it couldn't last without some extraordinary edge... and it will take some real deep motivation for a group to risk it, knowing how dangerous it would be. (Another side note-- in history and even in wilderness societies today people knew the world was dangerous on a gut level we have largely forgotten today. The people--tribal and colonial both-- that I met in Ecuador were not "living at one with nature" they were frankly scared to death of the forest and the river.)

Sending young, fit males to fight also doesn't take them out of the gene pool and does serve a purpose. From my current WiP:

Once upon a time, one of your ancestors was sitting on the savannah with about fifteen other men, women and children. He had a stick and was poking under a log hoping to find some ant eggs when Thog ran out of the brush, screaming. Thog was running as fast as he could for the biggest tree nearby.

Your ancestor ran too. Probably. There's a reason emotions are contagious.

Wugga, widely regarded as the snottiest of the tribe decided it wouldn't be 'cool' to run and looked to see what Thog was running from. So the lion killed him first.

MarMar and Roro, young males in the tribe, grabbed sticks and ran towards whatever Thog was running from. They were widely regarded as not very smart but sometimes useful members of the tribe. If they didn't die, they were definitely going to get laid out of it.

That's important, because without either stupid snotty people or stupid aggressive people, the math is bad. Men run and climb faster than women who run and climb faster than children. Without a few sacrificial males, the women and children die. So dies the tribe and eventually the species.

The stupid brave get breeding rights (hasn't changed much through rescuing princess and the modern action-adventure movie, has it?) because we will need more stupidly brave people later...

Look at the small percentage of modern soldiers who actually die in combat. It's been almost nine years since the first Special Ops groups went boots-on-ground in Afghanistan. In nine years combining Afghanistan and Iraq we have lost less people than we have in single days in WWI, WWII or the Civil War, despite huge advances in technology and fighting an urban insurgency, one of the potentially nastiest forms of warfare. (And I believe in one particular month in Vietnam we lost more troops to accident and disease than we have lost entirely in Gulf War II, but that's from memory.)

Even WWII, with 40-50 million killed, barely made a blip on the population growth charts. The 'baby boom' caught up nicely. Had a high percentage of those 40-50 million been women, it would have been a very different story as far as population growth.

These factors combine to make some cultural differences between men and women concerning violence. Because women weren't immersed in play violence as children and don't have the biologically driven 'monkey dance' programmed, they also don't have many of the subconscious rules that men have about fighting. When a woman goes physical, she is there to hurt you. IME, women go for eyes and try to cut (especially faces for some reason) far more than men do. They will often ignore the surrender signals that a man will respect.

Often, when a man goes physical, it is all about dominance and pride. When a woman goes physical it is all about either stopping the threat or hurting him. There is a stage some women get to that can seem sadistic. Happens in men, too, but usually with less intensity and is somewhat less common. To put it another way, even an enraged man usually stops when the victim is dead. An enraged woman doesn't. (Careful... these are all generalities. Use them as they work for you.)

Hitting after death is not sadism, exactly, especially sadism in the modern recreational sense of the word. But it is horrifying, both to witness and to clean up after. It has more to do with the lack of social conditioning with and to violence. When guys are learning it can be fun to pummel each other, they also learn when it is appropriate to stop. Women tend not to learn this. Combined with the longer adrenaline curve, females can go into a longer, more brutal "dancing on the torn and twisted corpse" stage than males have the endurance for.

It's not making sure the bad guy won't come after her, it's not that conscious. A lot of people, not just women, when it would be appropriate to make that conscious decision run headlong into their social programming. It is really hard to kill in cold blood and that can be a really hard decision to live with afterwards, even in war.

Women in the Violence Professions

It seems that lots of Americans feel that if we/they/me/Group X are only nice enough, everyone will like them/us. If we are accommodating, we will make people happy and comfortable and we will be liked. Women, in particular, are often taught that this is THE preferred strategy for fitting in and getting along.

There are a lot of cultures and subcultures that admire strength and courage, and that involves going head to head with problems and disagreements. Being too nice reads as obsequious and untrustworthy in those cultures.

In law enforcement, there is a dynamic with new female officers where they can feel harassed and marginalized. There are some instances where misogyny is in play, but that is relatively rare. It is actually a dynamic that guys who played competitive team sports have dealt with for much of their lives but women, even if they were top competitors, haven't experienced. Because they haven't experienced it, they have no idea how to act.

Cops believe (with a lot of justification) that a 'pleaser' personality stands a much higher chance of getting killed on the streets than anyone (and I mean anyone) else. When someone comes in with a pleaser personality, the veteran cops, especially the FTOs (Field Training Officers) push and they push. Not necessarily to get the person to quit (and this is the part that men learn in locker rooms and women don't) but to get them to fight. Not to get someone else to fight for them (filing formal complaints and lawsuits) but to stand up, get in their faces and set boundaries.

I was one of them. Everything changed the day after I got in a shouting match with my sergeant in the lieutenant's office, something to the effect of, "That's bullshit! I don't care if I'm on probation. I won't do something stupid just because you tell me to!" It was actually a lot more colorful than that. I thought, for a short time, that I had reached my limit and lashed out. I wasn't even in the vicinity of my limit and I did not at the time, like many people, know the difference between 'lashing out' and simply standing up. That's something you must learn in order to thrive in a dangerous profession.

If the rookie never once stands up and tells his training officers to pound sand, the rookie doesn't have the confidence to do the job well... and can't even do it safely. It's a big responsibility to put someone out on the streets who you believe will die.

I've had success with explaining this dynamic to women rookies. I don't think it's a matter of gender as much as experience. Some rookies, male or female, literally can't grasp that what the FTO wants is an argument with some righteous indignation and anger. Once it's explained, they see it. Not all can do it, of course. Sometimes the conditioning is too deep.

Female officers need different and extra training and they will never get it officially. Because of current labor law and practice, everyone going through the academy must be treated the same. Our need to pretend that everyone is equal turns a blind eye to the fact that everyone is different.

There are a lot of the problems that you imagine-- criminals, especially sexual predators, try to intimidate female officers. Many of the more violent subcultures in America have serious sexism issues as well and taking an order from a woman is almost always met with defiance...and if the female officer shows cultural sensitivity and calls for a male officer to handle members of this subculture other criminals see her as weak and she can't do her job. If she tries to handle it herself it will be dangerous, but if she doesn't the criminals won't respect her and will push her continuously.

Some officers (male and female, but any officer who isn't used to conflict and violence and those are more often female or upper-middle class male) are so afraid of losing control that they become little martinets, trying to badger and bully.

But probably the hardest thing and the one that women especially need special specific training for is how to function in a paramilitary, testosterone-drenched, extremely political and violence-driven field. (I don't consider any of those things negatives, by the way. Except maybe the politics, but even there I understand the need.)

When you are dealing with large numbers (my deputies were routinely working at ratios of 75 to 1, locked into the dorms in direct contact with the inmates) of violent people, the field *is* violence-driven and a big dose of testosterone and a good, clear organization contribute hugely to handling things safely. And all of this is new to most women.

They think people are being cold and unfriendly where a guy would know that they were waiting to see how he would handle stress. If someone is easily offended by words, it's not about being crude or sexist or Neanderthals-- guys believe that people who freak out over words will panic over actions. "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." People who believe that words really hurt haven't had bones broken yet.

A good female officer doesn't try to act like a male officer. There is a distinctive style to staying both feminine and in charge. The best are awesome at it. But because the academy classes are taught together, there won't be a class on "Feminine Power Dynamics in Law Enforcement" and there really should be.

One of the common mistakes women make is trying to act like one of the boys, trying to be cruder than the guys are. As a TL (Team Leader) I liked the energy that women brought to the team. The guys would be a little more polite and clear-headed.

We expected women to be morally superior in a way and we wanted them to want us to live up to being our best, chivalrous selves. When a woman tried to be cruder, she didn't do it well (just like in any society, cross gender there are lots of different subtle rules about what is appropriate and where and when) and it also tarnished that ideal.

Remember that most of the people that get involved in these career paths are something of idealists.

One of the expectations is that women will have to really work to go hands on and fight. When a woman is ruthless and determined and unafraid (or fakes it) it really impresses men...and when they do fight women tend to be more clear-headed and controlled than men, and that's very impressive. Remember that the clear-headed calm is because adrenaline curves are different. That has two side effects in that a woman usually must force herself to fight as an act of will and she gets the adrenaline affects after it is all over which can include shakes, crying, horniness or all three. Guys often interpret especially the crying as a hormonal weakness, fear, or "inability to deal". That's not what's going on. Most women take great pains to hide this phase. So do men. Much of the time many feel the after-effects of adrenaline as shakes or nausea, but I have seen one man, a big, tough experienced cop after a very intense few seconds say to me, "Sarge, I feel like I want to puke and I'm going to cry. Is this normal?" Yeah. That's perfectly normal.

Another factor is that violent places can get really sexually charged. One of the common side-effects of violence and danger is an incredible urge for sex. Biologists have even joked about the "Four F's" of survival stress: Fight, Flight, Freeze and Fuck.

The best women operators are strictly off limits. Very few women can engage in sex without emotional issues (even as basic as 'will he talk?' and 'what will the others think?') and even those that can, the men don't believe that these issues aren't coming up. It gets into a nasty cess pit of rumors and innuendo. It can tear a team apart, especially a team that is doing well enough to incite jealousy with the rest of the organization.

Like the best male operators, the best female operators have good relationships outside the team. And that can bring in another dynamic because some guys cannot handle a woman with a more macho reputation or job description. Unless

the guy is strong, he will have ego issues.

Staying feminine and in charge is difficult. Very, very few do it well. Far too often the idea of a powerful female is a bitch. The two most powerful (by acknowledged rank) women I know in my field worked hard to be *not*-feminine and have resulting health issues, largely related to weight.

The most respected are healthy, with the special beauty that comes with that, extraordinary athletes and absolutely (in front of everyone) fearless. They have proven their competency and maintain the feminine largely by the games they *don't* play. When the guys get obnoxious, they just raise an eyebrow and you feel like you told a dirty joke in front of your mom. It's a mix of a medieval lady archetype, a mom, and someone you really, really wouldn't want to mess with it.

A lot of good women operators don't try for rank. They are both satisfied to be accepted at the operator level and disgusted with how other women have advanced their careers. That's not a woman thing. Many of the people who achieve high rank in dangerous jobs sucked at the job. They were bad at it, it scared them, and so they worked and connived to move up in rank because the higher you are the farther away from the danger.

A woman who has worked hard as an operator has a huge disadvantage in the political field (integrity is valued highly in the operator ranks because these are people you rely on to keep you alive; career expediency is valued, sometimes even over lives, in the administrative ranks.) She also, often, doesn't want to be associated with the women who have made rank, and she will automatically be lumped in with them...and every last one of them will hate her and try to destroy her career.

Violence Professionals and Relationships

There is a stereotype that men are threatened by strong women. I can't speak for everyone, but in a strong relationship a strong woman is empowering, not emasculating. The emasculating paradigm only works if the guy has a need to dominate (which is common, maybe the baseline for most cultures).

"Can't you control your woman?"

"Partner, you couldn't even keep up with her."

When both members of a relationship are in high-risk jobs, the relationship can be very difficult. Lots end badly. Lots start badly for that matter. Some of the reasons:

Shiftwork. Your character may work or will have worked some of the lousiest hours there are. I was lucky in my agency--we had three shifts and bid annually by seniority (theoretically in my 22nd or 23rd year I might have a chance at day shift with weekends off). Some agencies rotate weekly between day, evening and graveyard shifts. One that I know of works twelve-hour day shifts for four days, takes three days off and then works four twelve-hour night shifts. It is damn near impossible to keep any relationship (social, going back to school, volunteer work) going on that shift. Or get a sleep cycle.

Nothing to talk about: I think this goes for most couples. If both are doing the same job and living together, they were there for most of the things they would normally talk about.

Nepotism, or accusations of: Unless both members of the couple have dead-ended or decided to dead-end in the job (lots of people choose to stay on Patrol, I had no interest in becoming a lieutenant, since that was exclusively a desk job) one will promote faster than the other. That can hamper their careers and create a headache for scheduling, especially in a small agency since most have policies prohibiting family members supervising family members. If one of the members rises to sufficient power, the other one (no matter how good) will face whispers and gossip over ANY positive action--getting promoted or even getting a medal for valor.

Out of about five hundred officers in my agency, I only know of four long-term relationships where both were on the job. One has a wide disparity of rank, but seem to be doing fine. The other three couples were pretty troubled. There were other relationships and marriages that all ended badly and most quickly. A lot of it has to do with maturity, with mature expectations for a relationship and understanding of self, others and the job... but I still have no idea if a good relationship fosters that maturity (I believe it did in my case) or the maturity enables a good relationship.

When only one of the couple is on the job, the stresses are different. And most are avoidable. It is very easy when you spend your workday dealing with the part of life that civilization seems designed to deny, to come to believe that no one understands you. That you alone see the real world. That everyone else is no better than blind sheep ... and in a few years you start saying, "You can't handle the truth."

It's bullshit. This is something we as professionals do to ourselves.

It's true that most people can't understand. When someone dies, you see something leave their eyes, and it is a different feeling when it is someone young who desperately wants to live. Children should outlive their parents, not be killed by them. Telling someone that a brother is dead is hard enough ... I never want to tell a child he or she is an

orphan.

There are aspects of this that people who live safe lives will never understand. But they will listen. And they, largely, will accept that you deal with it.

This is something that ties in to the long-term solid relationships. We share. We talk. I used to have a fear that the more icky stuff I dealt with, that it would somehow rub off on me, infect me. It's not true. Maybe because I work to spend time with good people, and the good people are the reason for all of this.

Good people don't need to understand. We do this job largely to keep that world away, to keep the good people not only from ever being victimized, but from ever really having to look at it closely. But good people will accept, and that can save your protagonist's mind.

For the partner who is not in the profession, it can be hard. The unpredictability of it can be hard. Most of these jobs are relatively safe, most days. Most soldiers come home. Almost every cop comes home every shift... but some don't, and that is always scary.

Some partners live in happy oblivion and just never think about it. Some obsess on it and that is very hard on the relationship, since the obsession won't go away unless the marriage breaks up or the other leaves the life. Some express faith, whether faith in a higher power or (sometimes ridiculous) levels of faith in the partner. Some partners require constant reassurance, and that is a horrible, wearying strain on the operator. Others are a constant source of reassurance.

I go home, every day, and see why I do this. It is worth it.

Recap:

- Men and women were raised to have different attitudes toward violence
- They have different biologies, especially regarding responses to fear
- These differences serve an evolutionary purpose
- The differences get misinterpreted, hormones seen as emotions
- Women in violence professions have to adapt to a new culture
- Relationships between two violence professionals have challenges
- Relationships between citizens and violence professionals have different challenges

Chapter 7: Survival Stress Response (SSR)

We've touched on this a number of times. Here is a fuller explanation.

The survival stress response is a fancy term for the effects of extreme fear. When your body and hindbrain perceive an immediate threat, hormones are pumped into your system that change your mind, body and senses. I'll use the phrases 'adrenaline' and 'adrenalized' but adrenaline is just one of a cocktail of chemicals involved.

Changes to perception:

I've been told that the eye physically changes shape. I don't know if that's true. But most people experience "tunnel vision" -- a sharp focus on things right ahead and a complete blindness to anything even a little bit to the sides. I've used this to get close to people fighting and break them up.

Things in that focused area can seem unnaturally clear—Dr. Alexis Arwohl writes about an officer who was reading his partner's brass as the expended cartridges flew through the air. This clarity can make things seem bigger and closer than they actually were, and sometimes results in people seeing a bad guy as very close who was actually quite some distance away.

"Auditory exclusion" is the name for the deafness of combat. Some people can't hear gunfire, including their own, or hear something that would normally be a deafening blast as a distant 'pop'. Sometimes all you hear is the rushing in your ears.

Between the tunnel vision and auditory exclusion, normal people never hear or see a third party joining the fight from the front or flank. Most don't even register when a friend shouts a warning.

Blood is pulled to the center of the body, an ancient mechanism to keep you alive as long as possible when an animal is chewing on your arms and legs. This makes your hands and feet very insensitive. It is difficult, even if you remember, to feel textures or the ground beneath you.

Physical Changes:

Your body changes, and many of these changes are reflected in the perceptions. Your insensitive hands and feet are also clumsy and writing, working a key or any fine manipulation (like carefully aiming a gun) are difficult.

Some people develop great short-term power, and that's good. But it is clumsy and exhausting and a few injure themselves, pulling muscles and straining joints, and don't notice until later.

Coordination is impaired. At lower levels, fine skills like writing are disrupted. You start dropping things. You can't dial a phone. At higher levels of fear, you can't work your hands and feet together. All of your martial arts training seems to be forgotten. A notch worse and all you are capable of is a stumbling run or swinging your dominant hand over and over like you are trying to club someone with a branch. At the highest level, you just freeze and your bladder and bowels let go and you don't even notice.

The more adrenalized you get, the worse the physical effects are.

There is a zone where everything is working beyond normal: senses are at peak acuteness, coordination is spot on and the brain is working fast and subconsciously. Few people reach this stage. I have never heard a reliable account of anyone achieving this in the first fight.

Mental Effects:

It is sometimes hard to distinguish perception and cognition. Did the officer read his partner's brass? Or did he merely remember that he read it? Your character under stress may be the ultimate unreliable narrator, or may be experiencing things that people who live in a comfortable, safe world simply can't imagine.

Often, everything seems to go in slow motion. Unfortunately, you're going in slow motion as well otherwise it would be a super power. Some people get hooked on the slow motion and start thinking, "That's weird, everything is so slooooooww...." And completely waste it. A very few can use the opportunity to choose more efficient actions.

Your brain will do dumb things a lot under the SSR. Really strange and irrelevant thoughts will float through your head... or completely relevant thought that cries for action and you stand there frozen, not really distinguishing between thinking about things and doing them: "Is that my blood? Should I be doing something about that?" Or worrying about missing work when you see your hand being carried away by a dog.

The slow motion feeling is called tachypsychia. Sometimes there is another state. Especially when you survive an ambush and do really well, you will have no memory of it at all or just a blur.

All of these effects are mitigated by experience. An experienced fighter can usually bring himself to the zone with just a little warning and some snap into it when attacked with just the tiniest freeze as they switch gears. When a professional sets up the attack, he can use specific calming behaviors (rituals, stretches or breathing exercises) to get to

the zone prior to the attack.

However, if the type of fight is novel, the warrior returns to square one. I had enough hand-to-hand fights in the jail that at one point I realized I was bored and planning the paperwork while taking down a convict/boxer. Shortly after that I shot someone as part of a tactical operation and had all of the adrenaline responses just like I was a rookie.

The veteran of a hundred gunfights will not be psychologically prepared for the up-close messiness of his first knife encounter. Stuff like that keeps the world fresh and exciting.

Recap:

- Under extreme stress, hormones are pumped into your system
- These hormones affect your perception, cognition and motor skills
- You can become inured to specific stresses

Chapter 8: Unarmed

It's a little artificial to break this up by unarmed, impact weapons, edged weapons, firearms and less-lethal, but I'm going to do it anyway. The actual mechanics and use have a lot of things in common. For instance, in most cases, aggression beats skill. A skilled knife player (say silat or arnis) usually chokes when confronted by a prison-yard-style shanking. A good shot tends to be killed by someone who charges blasting away. And blackbelts getting crushed by untrained streetfighters are almost a cliché.

It works the other way, of course. Aggression coupled with good skills and tactics makes an incredible foe. Add the clear predator mindset and it is more a force of nature than a human being. Mix timidity with bad skills (or, especially, bad skills with false confidence) and the person is almost more a danger to himself or bystanders than he is to the bad guy.

First break down: How people learn to fight unarmed.

1) Martial arts. What follows are generalizations and include a lot of my own prejudices. Just be aware that these are informed prejudices.

1A) Traditional martial arts: These are the things practiced by rote, usually in a uniform in a nice dojo (Japanese for "place to learn the way") or kwoon (Chinese training hall) or dojang (Korean, same name as Japanese). People from these traditions sometimes learn really good physical skills, but most have no idea of what they will be facing. They practice against techniques that bad guys don't use at ranges that bad guys avoid. The rules and rituals are as important as the technique.

That said, most of the traditional arts arose in very violent times. I find the body mechanics to be superb for a real assault. The weakness is that most instructors, having no knowledge of violence, tend to guess how things happen and how techniques should be used. They rarely guess accurately. Main point: unless your character has great instincts, some real world experience to put things in perspective or an extraordinary instructor, martial arts training tends to be a very visually interesting way to lose.

1B) Martial sports. This is stuff like boxing, judo, Brazilian Jiu jitsu (BJJ) full contact karate and Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). Again, the training usually misses the context of a real assault. These guys don't train against the ambush and they have to limit techniques for safety (there is NO SUCH THING as no holds barred *and* full contact sport in the civilized world). However, they tend to take solid hits in training, something many traditional martial artists miss. Since they have a very real possibility of being hurt, they tend to train much harder than other martial artists.

1C) Reality-Based Self-Defense (RBSD) schools. These range from weekend workshops to entire systems. The idea is to either from the ground up or using a traditional martial arts base create something effective for real assaults. The results are mixed, largely because anyone can start such a system and the definition of 'reality' or 'research' varies hugely. Basically, some of the systems are completely made up. Even the good established systems, such as Krav Maga, Systema (a Russian art derived from folk wrestling and filtered through Russian Spetznaz—special operations) or the Fairbairn/Applegate WWII combatives have a wide variety of instructors. A good instructor in this system can give your character a great edge. A bad instructor can pass on his bullshit macho fantasies to your character.

1D) Miscellaneous. This stuff mixes, and some of those mixes make for very good training. I trained in an ancient system of jujutsu. We actually learned how to bow properly while wearing armor and practiced sword defenses while kneeling. That training was filtered through brutal reality in a jail... so I've been the guy with training and experience teaching in a garage. One of my dearest friends and mentors is a former librarian, graduate of Maharishi University, Vietnam combat veteran, former cop and has almost as many blackbelts as fingers. That's some pretty unique training.

2) Military or Police training. People who haven't been involved with either tend to vastly over-rate the UAC (Unarmed Combat) or DT (Defensive Tactics) training that soldiers and officers get. UAC is not a primary tool for anyone in battle. The person who conserves ammo and has a bullet left will win a fist fight. It is still taught, but they get little time for it and the purpose of the training is more to get over the idea of closing and grabbing an enemy than to instill specific skills. Military skills are designed to do as much damage as quickly as possible. The target students are young men in peak condition. An aggressive young man in good condition can make a lot of things work that would fail if attempted by someone else.

Police DT training also has limited time but it is considered a more important skill. It generally emphasizes take-downs, locks and pressure points. It is taught in an intensely political environment. Public agencies are far more concerned about getting sued than losing officers. For that reason, the skills tend to be concentrated on less damaging techniques (regardless of whether they work) and taught by rote (to prevent cadets from claiming the training was in some way unfair.) 40 hours of training in DTs at the academy and eight hours a year of refresher training is about standard, but varies by state. It is not enough to get good and most of the best officers train on their own. Which is hard because of shift work.

3) Experience. Trial and error, by itself, rarely makes a good technical fighter (I define a good technical fighter as someone who can consistently defeat a bigger, stronger threat). That's a lot of error to overcome and error has a price. (I've been well trained and by most standards enormously successful, but I sometimes have trouble remembering names, my left eye is blurry and the cornea tears if I let it dry out, my fingers go numb every so often from all the shoulder dislocations, I have a slight limp if I get tired or the weather gets cold...) What experience can give you is resourcefulness, toughness and an understanding of other violent people.

4) Combination. Obviously, I find that training under a good instructor coupled with experience makes the best fighter. I will even go so far as to say that a mix of traditional skills (where they can learn very dangerous techniques) combined with hard-contact sport training (where the students get used to impact and pain) is a huge edge.

Second breakdown: What people can do to each other

This is another thing that can be broken down a lot of ways. One way to look at it is Movement-Pain-Damage-Shock.

Movement: In a fight, you can move the threat or part of the threat. You can shove him, throw him, make him lose his balance. You can plant him into a wall or slam him down the stairs or into traffic. You can also move part of him, shifting his arm so that his ribs are exposed or twisting his head up to expose his throat.

Pain: Causing pain is really variable. Most people are not beaten. They give up. If a threat really, really wanted to keep fighting you need to either shutdown the brainstem (people have kept fighting even with extensive damage to the neo-cortex) or break every long bone in the body (and even then, they can still pull a trigger). Pain is to make the threat give up. To decide he doesn't want to play anymore. Not everyone feels pain and not everyone reacts to it the same (some give up, some get enraged, some panic, some don't feel it at all). Pain can be caused by light strikes, gouging pressure points, pinching, pulling hair and joint locks... that's just a few off the top of my head.

Damage is breaking something to the extent that the threat loses ability. Break a leg, the threat usually has trouble standing, running or kicking. Break the elbow, the threat can't punch. But you must understand it is not automatic. Break a rib and it hurts to breathe but, until you get to a flail chest or punctured lung, the threat can still fight. I've known threats to keep punching with a shattered (not merely broken) hand. In the end, most threats give up taking damage not because they were unable to fight but because the stakes are now raised too high to make it worthwhile to stay in the game.

Shock: This is shutting down the system, essentially shutting off the brainstem or severing the upper spinal cord. A bullet to the back of the head, strangulation and smothering, even a rib punch that lacerates the liver and causes internal bleeding. Except for massive trauma to the brainstem or upper cervical spine, none of these are instantaneous.

There is an old gunfighter saying about the "Dead Man's ten" which are the ten seconds that someone can stay in the fight to kill you after being shot in the heart. A good blood strangle takes a minimum of seven seconds. An air choke takes a minute or more. Bleeding out takes as long as it takes.

[Stacy Lim's story/ Marcus Young's story](#)

http://www.lapdonline.org/inside_the_lapd/content_basic_view/27327#Stacy%20Lim

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0BTT/is_171_28/ai_n6123156/

You can also break down combat training by technique. Most systems will have a mix of what follows. Few have all of them, even fewer have only one. Almost all specialize in a few and this becomes the core of their strategy.

Hand strikes: almost every surface of your hand, wrist, and arm can be used to strike. Some styles emphasize closed-

fist punches, others feel it will do more damage to your hand than to the threat. Some target critical areas like the throat and cervical vertebrae, others count on massive damage to the head.

Kicks: can be delivered with the foot, knee or shin. They have a lot of power but pin your mobility on one foot for long enough to be dangerous. Kicking in boots is entirely different than kicking barefoot.

Throws: range through flipping someone over your hip, sweeping out his legs and twisting his spine to break his connection with the ground to simply getting out of his way and letting his own momentum drive him into the floor. A good thrower can make them work against much bigger, stronger people and it is easier to do in a real fight than in a martial arts setting. Many throwing styles combine with locking. The modern reason is to try to limit damage and not injure the opponent but the historical reason is that locks and throws work on armored opponents.

Gouges: Some styles actively work causing pain (and occasionally tearing muscle) through gouges, pokes and pinches. Some systems have elaborate mythologies of why they work and what amazing things can be done with them—at least one system ties their pressure points to acupuncture and teaches that if you hit five points in the right sequence, it will kill. Might be good for a fantasy setting.

Strangles: I differentiate strangles (cutting off blood to the brain) from chokes (cutting off air). Both have similar effects, but chokes take longer and are more likely to trigger a panic response. Sometimes a strangle will put the person unconscious and they won't even know it is happening. A strong neck helps fight them, but these are the only techniques that work on everyone despite insanity, drugs or rage. They can be done with bare hands, a tool (like a rope or garrote) or using the threat's own clothes.

Pins: Moving someone on the ground is an art form and grapplers play at it like chess masters. Pins are holding someone down. Generally in sport pins the opponent is face-up, to make the contest more challenging. In reality pins are face down, to make restraining or executing easier. Going for a pin makes you vulnerable to a third party. The usual winner in a groundfight is NOT the best grappler but whoever has friends who show up first and start kicking.

Locks: Locks are attacking a joint in a way it was never intended to move, or too far in a way it was intended. They can be used standing or on the ground. Locks can be used to force movement, to immobilize, to cause pain or to dislocate the joint (damage). Some can be modified into takedowns and throws.

Miscellaneous: Don't forget head butts; shoulder and hip slams (not much damage, but they also cause movement and tend to cause surprise) and using the environment. Those are the things that make a fight so dynamic.

Head butts are AWESOME. They deliver tremendous power with a big bone at close range and usually too fast to evade, as well as being a surprise (except in the UK where they are very common and they used to be common in Korea, for some reason.) But they require technique. Your head has flat places and corners. You hit the threat's flat places with your corners. Far more concussion to him than to you. They go much better with some neck strength and when someone tries to thrust or spear with the head, (like driving your character's head into a bad guy's stomach) it tends to strain the neck severely. You can do it to the nose, which hurts a lot, makes the eyes water, and gets blood everywhere. I don't recommend the mouth or jaw. It does a lot of damage but teeth break and broken or not, teeth cut. The character who does it will get somebody else's blood and saliva in fresh cuts, and that makes for some nasty infections and disease possibilities.

Stacking: A skilled fighter will use many of these things in combination. Strikes and gouges can both set up a throw and do damage during the execution. You can lock a limb while sweeping a leg. You can use a lock to slam the threat into a corner or over a coffee table. It's all good.

Specific styles:

I'm not going into this here because there are thousands of styles and systems and most are searchable on Google. If you emphasize that your character studied a system, spend a little time with an instructor from that system and let them double-check your scenes. That's more important in the training scenes than the fight scenes. Fights are messy and should be messy and won't look like it is supposed to look.

That's cool.

Self-Defense Schools and Instruction

There are some pretty definite gender differences in fighting. That affects how self-defense is taught greatly.

First of all, a lot of SD instructors have little or no experience with violence. Those who have none tend to make stuff up, and it winds up being more about the instructor's fantasy life than anything else. Some have limited experience and too often try to cram all violence into their single focus. Others are teaching as part of their own therapy, trying to get control of their lives and identity.

Remember that people with only a single experience of violence learn what is false and never learn what is true?

Some dedicate themselves, subconsciously, to creating a story that satisfies their need to believe that they understand what happened well enough to be in control... and the students are then pawns in the instructor's fantasy. This isn't true for all, but it is definitely something to be leery of. Part of the problem is that almost everyone is a "naive consumer" and doesn't have any way to tell a good instructor from a bad instructor.

Generally, self-defense instructors or schools have an orientation. I consider that there are three essential elements to self-defense: Awareness, Initiative and Permission.

Some schools focus intently on awareness-- how to recognize and avoid bad people and how to stay alert. If the instructor knows what he or she is teaching, that's fine. Few really go much deeper than "Check the back seat and under your car before you get in" or similar trite (to me) advice.

Some focus on what I consider initiative or technique, trying to get the students to act. Hitting becomes more important than how you hit. If the techniques taught actually reflect real crime, they can be useful. Otherwise not so much. Some of these also completely gloss over the legal aspects.

Some classes, especially Women's Self-Defense (WSD) focus entirely on the Permission aspect. The big thing in model mugging and similar programs is to get the students to let go, unleash themselves and really whale on an armored "bad guy" role-player.

All three of these are necessary, but some completely miss parts or don't understand them. Many male instructors are particularly bad at realizing that permission to act and hurt someone is a very serious problem with many women.

There is another dynamic that you should be aware of, and that is gender politics in self-defense. When I tell someone that the most important thing a young woman can do to avoid being raped is to avoid places with lots of young men (and if you absolutely have to go to such a place don't drink.) The dumb responses range from, "Girls have a right to have fun" to "You're just blaming the victim" all the way up to the ludicrous, "A woman should have the right to walk naked into a biker bar and not be bothered." These are political ideals. They might even be the way the world should work. They are not the way the world actually works.

The responsibility for self-protection has to rest with the potential victim because the potential rapist has no interest whatsoever in her safety or rights. The potential victim is the one who cares. Counting on the people who don't care to do the right thing makes no sense at all. I have seen some very, very bad advice given to support an ideal of the world, even if it endangered the student.

Women are often reluctant to ask men for advice and sometimes it is because they wisely understand that the men don't get it. Most have never dealt with the psychological blocks and conditioning. Too many SD instructors are fit young men and can make bad techniques work. I prefer female, small and even old or crippled instructors because if they can put me down it is skill. 300 pounds of steroidal muscle putting me down means nothing. There's also the factor that most instructors will try to teach what they would do, and there are often profound differences between how and why men and women fight. A successful woman has a huge advantage in mentoring another woman to be successful.

A lot of people (this is definitely not a male/female thing) want multiple things and sometimes multiple incompatible things. *I want to run, but I want to do it in shoes that were not designed for running. I want to battle at close quarters but look cool. I want to break bones and rupture livers without any twinge of conscience. In the end, I want to be able to go through the most intense, dangerous ten seconds of my life where everything I counted on about human interaction is revealed to be a lie and I want to do it without changing who I am. I want the experience without sacrificing any illusions...*

Recap:

- The classic 'fight' is a stupid game, played by amateurs
- People learn to fight by studying martial arts, getting police or military training, by experience, or by some combination
- Fight effects break down to movement, pain, damage and shock
- Fight techniques break down to striking, takedowns, locks, gouges, pins and strangles
- Self-defense schools have different focuses
- The instructor will make or break the skills

[Chapter 9: Impact Weapons](#)

The chapters on weapons and unarmed fighting will never be detailed enough. There are thousands of things that can be used as weapons. A friend said, "anything longer than it is wide, which includes people" but billiard balls work fine and they are exactly round. And there are lots of ways to use them.

Impact weapons are the notorious 'blunt objects': the candlestick in the library; the ASP expandable baton; the bo staff; the quarter staff ... on and on. Even the lowly brick can be a fight-changer.

Why use a blunt object? There are a bunch of potential reasons.

You can find a serviceable one almost anywhere. A piece of kindling. A rock. A vase.

I tried to find a link to a crime that happened near where I grew up in the early nineties. I found the memorial, but not a good article. The officer was called to a domestic. He had history with the threat and evidently decided he could handle him with OC (pepper spray). The threat yanked the waist of the officer's zippered jacket up over his head, blinding him and pinning his arms (a very common move in a fight in that region) and then beat the officer to death with a piece of firewood. It took a while.

Blunt weapons, even good ones, are significantly cheaper and easier to make than edged weapons. There may be concerns about killing or doing too much damage. Or your protagonist may live in a society where weapons are restricted to certain castes.

How are impact weapons used? You smack people with them. You can spend years learning nuances of jo staff or bo fighting or try to recreate quarterstaff technique from old manuals, but the basics aren't that hard. You hit people.

Now the details. Blunt weapons can be swung, thrust or flailed.

When you swing a club, the faster the impact end goes, the harder it hits. The heavier the impact end is, the harder it hits. Unfortunately, those same two factors slow you down when you need to recover after a swing, whether you hit or missed.

The best targets for a swing with a club, unlike a blade, are bones. You can bruise muscle with a club or staff and even get a 'charley horse' but for the most part an adrenalized threat won't feel the pain, won't notice immediately and it won't swell up until long after the fight is over. Smash his finger bones, however and he loses the ability to hold his sword immediately.

The other primary targets are the head (going for a concussion) and the muscles at the base/sides of the neck (especially with a sap--this is what police DT trainers call a "brachial stun").

Most blunt weapons (but not flexible weapons, like saps or flails) can also be used to thrust. This is the one really dangerous application of most staff work. Except for the brainstem/neck/head hits, which are relatively tough to get, most of the swing targets don't do lethal damage. The thrust can, and it tends to be slow and sneaky damage.

A thrust, particularly over the liver (your own right side, extending to below the lowest ribs) can cause internal bleeding. Kidneys, spleen ... lots of ugly ways to bleed. The hollow organs (bladder with some frequency, I haven't heard of a stomach rupture) can be popped, flooding the peritoneal sac with fluids and gunk that were never designed to be in there—a very, very painful death from infection. Even a strike that penetrates the abdominal muscles without damaging the organ can result in a hernia.

Flailing applies to weapons that are swung, like a medieval flail, nunchakus, or the manriki-gusari. A length of chain works here as well.

They develop a hideous amount of power, have a tendency to go around shields and blocks (and that wrap-around speeds their rotation and increases damage). They are relatively cheap and easy to make, but tend to break. All that torque works on the weapon as well.

Some specialty flail weapons with a longer chain, like the manriki-gusari (a weight on each end of a three-foot chain) or the kusarigama (about a thirty foot chain with a weight on one end and a stabbing sickle on the other) are used to entangle the opponent as well as to bludgeon.

You can often disrupt a flexible weapon by attacking (preferably with a thrown object) the controlling hand or the chain.

Note: when you think of martial artists getting all crazy with nunchakus, ignore it. Those drills are for practice and coordination. When a weapon is used to fight, it is snapped out to do damage and snapped back in to guard. Swinging things around in complex patterns not only invites the person to disrupt the pattern but frequently results in hitting yourself. Controlling a flexible weapon, like a flail, takes a lot more skill than just swinging it.

Last note: sticks, including batons, canes (canes are a great potential weapon for your character and can even be taken on airplanes) and staffs can be used for locking and sweeping. So can chain weapons. It's a rare skill but can be impressive.

Knockouts

There are three basic kinds of shock. Shock is "inadequate perfusion of tissues with blood and oxygen" and it is what causes organs and people to shut down, to die. A paramedic will argue that shock is the only thing that can kill you--everything else are the mechanisms to get to that state. Hypovolemic shock means inadequate fluids in the blood stream for whatever reason (dehydration or hemorrhage). Cardiogenic shock means the heart isn't pumping hard enough; Anoxic shock means the blood is getting there, but it is out of oxygen. Neurogenic shock means the brain has done something,

usually dilating the blood vessels faster than the heart can compensate (this is basically what happens when you stand up and get a 'head rush'). One of the subcategories of neurogenic shock is psychogenic--nothing went wrong in the brain but following a psychological or emotional trigger, the person faints.

If someone passed out without neurological trauma, they didn't get knocked out. They fainted.

It probably won't make much difference in writing, but people get immediately knocked out one of two ways--either the weapon overcomes the structure of bone so that it either compresses the skull or damages the skull and part of the bone and/or weapon intrudes on the brain, or the weapon (falls can do this as well, of course) moves the skull so fast that the brain slams into the inside of the skull and bounces, called a contra coup injury.

Those are the only MOI (Mechanisms of Injury) I know of that can cause enough brain trauma to turn someone off ... and most don't. Most pass out later as part of the brain swells like any other bruise and pieces get squeezed. Any injury that can cause even a temporary loss of consciousness will involve this swelling, hence the standard protocol to hold for 24 hours for observation. If the swelling is not too severe it will go down on it's own. If it is, the pressure will have to be released.

(Side note: some weapons, like saps, are favored less because of the injury than because they leave so few marks--redness and swelling that entirely disappears in a few hours coupled with sometimes severe contra-coup brain injuries.)

Taking head blows even without ever getting knocked out, "microconcussions" have some very bad long term effects. I think everyone should try boxing, at least until they get over the fear of being hit, but I don't recommend anyone stay with boxing.

There are some possibilities for non-concussive unconsciousness or unconsciousness without significant brain trauma--strangles (sleeper holds, vascular restraints... there are a lot of euphemisms) the person goes out for twenty seconds plus, and unless there is a pre-existing condition (heart problem, arterial plaque or blood vessels weakened by excessive drug use) there are no ill-effects.

Theoretically, a strike to the side of the neck a little towards the front will induce syncope (fainting) by triggering the baroreceptors, the points where your brain reads blood pressure. I haven't seen that work, but I also haven't talked twenty people into letting me try to punch them close to the throat.

A light slap to the point acupuncturists call Gall Bladder 20 gets an immediate stun reaction. Put your hand on the back of your neck, cradling your lower skull. Now slide it to the side so that the bottom of your palm touches your ear and you are cradling one of the rear corners of your skull. Slap, lightly, in and up to that juncture of skull and neck. It's a fairly reliable shock stun (short term, no loss of consciousness but the threat freezes). The acupuncturist told me it worked because it dilated the blood vessels. If true, it would be a faint and a no-side-effects knockout. I'm skeptical because hitting directly over the brainstem and at that angle doesn't take a lot of power to do severe trauma to the very upper spine and the parts of the brain that controls stuff like breathing. Potentially lethal.

To be clear-- head trauma can definitely put someone down, but rarely, if ever, without some pretty severe other effects, like nausea, dizziness, seizures, impaired vision, impaired coordination ...

Recap

- Blunt weapons are common, cheap and easily improvised
- They can be simple to learn
- Blunt weapons can be used to swing, thrust or flail. Some can be used to entangle, joint lock or takedown.
- Head trauma and knockouts have specific effects and mechanisms of injury (MOI)

[Chapter 10: Edged Weapons](#)

A note from the late Carl Cestari (used with permission):

KNIFE DEFENSE MYTH

Instead of talking about a lot of B.S. concerning so-called unarmed "knife" defenses, let's reverse roles for a moment.

Let us assume the "role" of the attacker, instead of the "defender".

First, let's consider the "choice" of weapon.

A knife or any edged weapon is an "up close and personal" tool of ferocious and brutal mayhem. You have to close with your mark and physically, violently and with extreme prejudice stab, slash, and hack him to bits. It's not like a gun, which could have an element of detachment. No, a knife is about as personal, brutal and ruthless as it gets.

So what kind of "mind-set" does this entail? You are going close with your target hard and fast, using deception, surprise or simply a committed and brutal pouncing. You are going to be determined, ruthless, brutal, ferocious, vicious, and most probably filled with hate and rage.

You are going to seize the target with abject brutality and stab, slash, hack and eviscerate with totally committed

rage, ferocity and hate. OVER and OVER and OVER.

NOTHING is going to stand in your way. NOTHING! You are going to DESTROY whatever DOES attempt to thwart your murderous assault. You will attack repeatedly with ALL the strength, speed, and brutality you are capable of. And THAT will be heightened even MORE by rage and adrenalin.

You KNOW that you MUST get this over with QUICKLY. Your attack will be a frenzy of hate, rage and murderous INTENT.

You WON'T "feint" with your blade, you WON'T "spar" with your blade, you WON'T "half-step" with your blade.

You WILL attack with brutal and ruthless rage. You WILL punch, kick, bite, gouge, butt, and do ANY and EVERYTHING that will accomplish your GOAL in as ferocious a manner as inhumanly possible.

Unless YOU are killed outright, NO injury will dissuade you from KILLING your mark. In FACT, anything LESS than your death, will ONLY add MORE FUEL to YOUR FIRE. NOTHING, short of your immediate demise CAN stop you. Rage, hate, murderous intent and adrenalin are fueling you to an almost superhuman state of FRENZY and FEROCITY!

Even when your man goes down, and DOWN you are determined to put him, YOU still continue the assault. You stab and stab and stab. You kick and stomp OVER and OVER and OVER again.

You DON'T even begin to "disengage" until your "blood" lust has been quenched, and your mark taken off the count.

THAT is what REALLY happens when one human being uses a knife on another.

Face that FACT squarely. Too many are "playing" knife gymnastics without EVER even realizing what the street has in store for them. It isn't going to be pretty!

Are you REALLY preparing to DEAL with THAT? Or are you kidding yourself and others? REALITY sucks, as they say. But it is what it is!

Sobering? Carl had a way with words.

When Carl was writing, he was trying to wake up martial artists on the subject of defense. The difference between practicing against a training partner and someone trying to kill you is huge.

The knife-wielder isn't always emotional. Knives work just as well with a detached mindset. There is still (except in sentry-removal style assassinations) this kind of fast, hard, implacable onslaught... but it can be cold.

This is one thing to be careful of: people who write fight scenes sometimes make the character sound like a chess master, with moves and countermoves.

A killer kills. He allows no countermoves. That mindset can be cold or hot, but it is there.

Here's the deal about knives: using a knife is more of an emotional skill than a physical one. If you ever use a blade you will feel the different layers of tissue. You might feel the signs of life, the heartbeat, the muscles contracting in pain, transmitted right up your blade. You will feel stuff gush over you and you will smell it, the coppery blood and sharp, stomach-acid polluted shit smell of open guts. You will be close enough to look in the eyes and see the intelligence and life fading from them. If you ever see that fade, you will probably come to believe in a soul.

And some will revel in it. Killing with a knife is profound. Profoundly sobering and sometimes, for some people, profoundly empowering and liberating. You have to decide for yourself if that emotional response is automatically evil.

If I could assign homework for you I would ask every one of you to find a local farmer and help out at slaughtering time. To wield the knife yourself. To take the life of a big, human-sized animal and watch and feel it die. To know that things rarely die easily.

There is a lot of technical stuff with blades. I'm going to start with knives. Here's the big shocker. Knives are not used to win fights. Knives are used to kill people. You get as close as you can and you stab (usually) or cut. A lot. Often holding an arm or the head so that the victim can't move.

Do knife duels happen? Maybe. But one of the more qualified people I know once said, "I'd rather be unarmed against a knife, because knife on knife I know there are two crazy stupid people in the room." Or, in the immortal words of anonymous: "There is one thing worse than coming in second in a knife fight. Tying for first." People smart and vicious enough to use a knife tend to be too smart to use them stupidly, and that includes dueling. The knife-on-knife training is just bullshit macho fantasizing (my opinion, of course. Feel free to disregard.)

With a knife, you can thrust or slash. The thrust is to get to organs. Heart, liver, kidneys, bowels, bladder, stomach. There are some specialized thrusts—behind the collarbone to get to the ascending aorta is a classic assassination. Thrust behind the trachea and then pushed out through the front of the neck used to be taught. Into the femoral artery/nerve. Through the pelvic gap (Directly at the bottom of the crotch you can stab upward through the soft spot. Hits the bowel and large intestines. Ugly way to die. Not quick.)

Slashes are aimed at muscle. If you can sever a muscle completely, that limb is half useless. People in medieval times regularly survived slashes, which led to the belief that thrusts were more dangerous. It was definitely true before antibiotics. I'm not sure today. Most of the survivors I know were slashed and most of those that died had thrust wounds, but a lot had both.

In either case, slash or thrust, bone near the surface is a bad target.

A lot of people don't notice any pain from a knife assault. Several have said after being stabbed repeatedly that they thought they were being punched. A friend didn't know he was stabbed until he noticed one of his sneakers was full of fluid. He thought he stepped in a puddle, but it was his own blood filling his shoe. Seeing your own blood and realizing it is yours tends to make most people panic. The fear turning into a righteous rage "I will make this bastard pay!" seems to be the survival mindset with the best track record (See Sanford Strong's "Strong on Defense").

Swords. I have a fair amount of training in swords but have only ever used them to kill goats. I've been trying in these chapters to stick with stuff that I know and avoid speculation. You can get speculation for free in other places. So some observations:

- Fencing has vastly changed how we think about swordfighting. With the advent of guns, the advances in metallurgy and the decline in armor, the small swords and rapiers changed the fighting world. For the first time the same tool could be used for offense and defense without being irreparably damaged.

- Specifically, up until the advent of fencing, you tried to avoid blocking with your sword. It was better than dying, but if a heavy sword hit another heavy sword, both would be too damaged to be reliable.

- Older European weapons were balanced to cut, not to defend. They feel completely different than a modern replica.

- In Europe especially, defense was based on the shield and armor.

- In older Japanese systems, the same was true, but never having developed the shield, defense relied on continuous movement and quick killing.

- Older Japanese systems look and feel very different from systems that were influenced by kendo.

- Dueling systems (post-kendo and post-fencing) emphasize a balanced offense and defense and layered strategy.

- Pre-kendo/fencing systems were simpler, more brutal and emphasized closing and cutting

- These older styles were also much more comfortable with using body crashing, sweeps, strikes and environmental opportunities than later styles.

- The few times I have played with armor it has been hard to slash through and disturbingly easy to thrust through (but I've never tried it with metal plate)

- A good sword is a three-foot razor blade. It doesn't take any power. While butchering the goats without adding any strength, just letting the blade's weight fall from my shoulder it went through eighteen inches of spine—eighteen inches of bone—and I never felt any resistance.

- Stiff or set targets are easier to cut than limp targets.

- Swords are not just for cutting. They are often heavy enough to break bones and some can shear through bones.

- I've played with some old Filipino weapons. I believe that the reason they emphasize flowing draw cuts so much is because the handles were attached so poorly that a heavy stroke would have snapped the hilt off.

- Which means that technology drives technique: the reason Japanese blades are curved is because of the folding process. Japanese swords were straight before that was introduced. The Vikings were able to figure out how to do something similar with a straight weapon, but never (as far as I know) discovered differential tempering.

- Toughness refers to durability, the ability to take a beating. Hardness refers to how hard something is to scratch. High hardness holds a better edge, but tends to be brittle (shatters or chips) while tough swords don't break (but some bend) tough swords tend to dull quickly.

- Hardening, annealing and tempering are the combined art form of trying to find the right balance of toughness and hardness.

- The longer a sword, the harder it is to get these good qualities evenly along the whole length without weak spots. That is why they were so expensive and a good, tested sword was so prized.

- If used against flesh, you can sacrifice a lot of toughness. Less so against armor.

Infighting With a Sword:

A lot of weapons, particularly swords, can be used infighting. Very few train it, but it is devastating. Infighting with a sword is easier to show than to write about. Let's give it a shot.

Hacking is swinging a blade to hit the target at 90 degrees. Slashing swings the weapon in a similar way, but with the weapon angled back from the swing so that slightly more of the blade gets drawn through the wound channel. A draw cut uses either of these mechanics and then, on impact, you draw your hands closer to your own center to pull the blade through the wound. A press cut does the slash or hack dynamic and on impact the hands push out, pushing the blade through the wound channel. You could play with these geometries on a piece of Hunter's Sausage or dry pepperoni to see the effects.

Infighting with a sword depends a lot on an ability to close and to cut angles and is done almost all with the legs and waist. Imagine a katana coming straight down at your head. A modern, dueling system fencer would dodge back, dodge

to the side or parry the weapon to one side and counter-attack. The infighting solution, which is common to battlefield styles (and very different from dueling) is to charge, angled slightly off from his center. Where a dueling system tends to lead with the point, an infighting system tends to lead with the hilt.

For the downward slash, if my timing (as an infighter) is poor, his slash will connect with my sword, which is angled back and down, hands/hilt in front, above and to one side, tip trailing over my shoulder. My weapon glides his weapon. If he can't control his slash and recover, I'll be behind him.

If my timing as an infighter is decent, a similar motion will happen but it will be his arms, not his blade that impact and slide on my weapon. I'll be behind an armless man.

If my timing is good, I'll be so far inside the range of his slash that my edge will go into his torso or armpit (if I know I'm faster, I may have dropped my blade lower to belly level). I lever the blade against his body and step away with a twist, which gives draw cut mechanics plus the effect of pressing directly on the back of the blade. You know when you cut frozen meat how you push on the back of the blade with your hands? Infighters wind up doing that a lot but often with their own hips or shoulders.

It has a lot of the mechanics of rugby, because there is a lot of rush and body impact. Some elements of wrestling, because you find that there are ways to control the threat's elbows with your shoulders. It integrates with some sweeps, throws and locks (battlefield era systems weren't big on punching and kicking, since they were ineffective against armor. Throws and locks work just fine on armor, though).

The battlefield/infighting was based on the idea that one of you was going to be dead in the next instant. Using dueling techniques on a battlefield could easily end with someone else sticking a spear in your side or back. That made continuous movement critically important. Staying really close to the enemy helped shield you from his friends. It's another example of the huge difference even in a fight between fighting and killing.

Spears, axes and other cool things:

The spear, not the sword, was the primary weapon on the battlefield before firearms. It had superior reach; thrusts were generally more effective against armor than slashes; and spears were far cheaper to make than swords. Use in battle required team planning. Used solo for dueling, the spear could become quite acrobatic and there would be opportunities to use the butt and shaft. If you see a staff form (kata) with a lot of thrusts, it often descended from a spear form.

Spears varied in length, from pikes that could be over twelve feet to the short stabbing spears of the Zulu, the assegai. The longer weapons were used in formation, turning the whole unit into a lethal porcupine. The shorter ones were individual weapons—even in well-coordinated mass battle, a Zulu warrior wanted to make a name.

There have been a lot of spear-based and combination weapons, usually trying to add slashing versatility (an edge, either like an axe or a short sword) armor piercing (putting a spike at 90 degrees to the haft) or disarming/dismounting abilities (hooks).

Common to swords, axes and spears—big swings make you vulnerable to closing attacks. A good fighter would attempt to rush inside the arc of the swing. That gave some short weapons an advantage and made even swinging weapons, like an axe, something that you held in a thrust position to defend (unless you were using it with a shield.)

Axes have a lot of the advantages of an impact weapon, like a mace. They put a fearsome amount of force on a small surface area. I have not used an axe against armor myself, but have read that it crushes through. They are also extremely useful tools, cheap to make and maintain (notice that expense comes up a lot in weapon descriptions- that's important) and versatile. Even big axes can be thrown and they can be used to hook over shields and yank them out of the way (an arm strapped to the shield will result in the whole body spinning, probably exposing the back) and can sweep legs. Some of the head configurations increase the versatility with a thrusting spike on top and an armor-piercing spike on the back.

A bayonet allows a musket or rifle to be converted to a spear. Remember that the spear was the superior weapon on battlefields. The bayonet/musket combination played a large part in making pikemen obsolete.

Improvised weapons:

Almost anything can be used as a weapon BUT not all of these weapons are actually an improvement on no weapons at all, unless they give confidence. And confidence based on inferior stuff is really close to superstition.

Recap:

- Knife is more of an emotional skill than a physical one
- Knives are not used to win fights. They are used to kill people.
- Thrust, hack, slash, draw cut, press cut, trapping with quillons, pummeling
- Pre-fencing sword work was very different than later styles
- Swords, and many other weapons can be used infighting
- Spears were the primary weapon on early battlefields

-Axes are versatile and cheap

Chapter 11: Firearms

There is so much going on with firearms and so many details that I am going to skip and gloss over a huge amount. Here's the deal: if your character is going to use a specific weapon, go to a range, rent one and shoot it. Make notes so that you don't make really stupid mistakes, like putting a safety or a silencer on a revolver (or having a detective pick up brass from a revolver).

If your character is a professional, she will know her weapons. They keep her alive. She doesn't need to know about all weapons, but she will certainly know about hers.

To demystify things a lot: a gun is a nifty machine that throws a rock in a straight line. Sure, the rock is usually made of lead and comes in a number of configurations and goes really fast... but the idea is dead simple.

An excellent source for little details, like whether you can shoot a lock off, is the [Big Box O' Truth](#).

First breakdown:

Handguns are small, portable and concealable. They don't have a huge amount of power, range and accuracy. That's a balancing act—if you ever need a gun, you want a rifle or shotgun, but handguns are quicker to get into play and you can take them almost anywhere.

A revolver has a cylinder. When you pull the hammer back (required on a single-action pistol) it rotates the cylinder so a fresh bullet is under the hammer. You pull the trigger and the hammer falls. A double-action revolver, like most modern ones, the trigger pulls the hammer back, rotates the cylinder and lets the hammer fall. With a DA, you can cock the hammer separately and it makes for a shorter, smoother trigger pull (and hence more accuracy) when you fire, but just squeezing the trigger is faster. Common calibers are .357, .38, .45 long colt, .44 magnum.

A semi-auto has a magazine, usually jammed into the butt of the gun. Each time a bullet is fired the expanding gasses push the slide back, kick out the old casing and slam the next round in the magazine into the chamber. A semi can shoot as fast as you can pull the trigger. A single action semi, like a colt 45 requires the hammer to be pulled back on the first shot (pulling the slide back and releasing to load one in the chamber also cocks the hammer.) After the first shot, the action cocks the hammer. In a double-action semi, the trigger can cock the first round. Common calibers are .45 APC; 9mm; .40; 10mm. There are also .357 and .44mag semi rounds but they are not compatible with revolvers of the same caliber.

Rifles are shoulder-fired weapons. They have threading in the barrel to spin the bullet and make it more accurate. They are more accurate than handguns, and hit harder.

There are a variety of *actions*. Actions are how the bullets get into the chamber. Examples are semi-automatic, automatic (as long as the trigger is held down the weapon keeps chambering and firing) bolt action, lever action and pump (rarely pumps—they are considered unsafe in center-fire rifles.)

There are many types of *sights*. Scopes; variable power scopes; night-vision scopes; thermal scopes; open sights (a vee notch in the back and a post up front) sometimes called iron sights; peep sights (a circle in the back like a peep hole and a post in front, common in military weapons) laser sights (an after-market addition that shoots a laser along the barrel. The bullet will hit about where you see the dot. Available for handguns as well). AimPoints and Eotech sights look like a short scope but show a red dot on the target point. One of the main advantages is that you don't have to be exactly aligned with the weapon to shoot accurately.

There are a huge variety of calibers. Rifles range from .22 used mostly for training, plinking at bottles and cans or shooting squirrels and rabbits up to elephant guns and .50 sniper rifles. Modern sniper rifles in Afghanistan have hit targets at over 1.5 miles.

Shotguns are big-bore weapons with smooth bores (which differentiates them from rifles). With the exception of the .410, shotguns are sized by gauge. 12ga is the biggest common shotgun today, but in the past 10, 8 and 4ga were built and used. The 4ga must have been like a cannon. Gauge is a weird number. It is defined as the number of spherical shot you could make of the same size as the barrel from a pound of lead... so a 4ga ball would weigh four ounces.

Shotguns don't shoot single balls today. The most common rounds are shotshells and slugs. A shotshell has a specific number of pellets inside. In buckshot, the pellets are about the same as a .30 caliber bullet. In dove shot, about the size of a BB. The larger pellets travel farther and hit harder than the smaller pellets.

A slug is a single big round coming out of a shotgun. It will blow a big hole, roughly the diameter of the barrel of the weapon. Most slugs are 'rifled' meaning that there are grooves in the side that compensate for the lack of grooves in a shotgun's barrel. The slug spins and its accuracy increases.

One of the cool things about shotguns is that they are extremely versatile. Rounds have been made for them to pierce

armor; to cause fires; to deliver chemical munitions, like pepper-spray; to not harm (rubber bullets and baton rounds); to shatter locks and, recently, as grenades.

Machine guns are rifles that fire continuously as long as the as the trigger is held down. Some are reliable, some are not. Most have problems under continuous fire in that the barrels get too hot to touch and may even bend. Most heavy machine guns today are belt-fed, meaning that rounds are linked by little bits of metal and feed through the action with the cases and the links being ejected.

Assault rifles (like the M-4, M-16 and AK-47) are designed to be light weapons that are easy to carry. They tend to use smaller caliber ammunition than hunting rifles or what used to be called “Main Battle Rifles” because ammo weighs a lot. Most are select fire, which means that they can either be fired semi-auto or, with the flip of a switch, set to full auto (the M-4 and some of the later M-16 A-2’s have a ‘burst’ setting that fires three rounds instead of a full auto).

Some are accurate (like the M-4), some are durable (like the AK).

Submachine guns (SMGs) are basically pistol-caliber weapons with slightly longer barrels, more accuracy; much greater magazine capacity and usually the option to select fire between single shot and full auto. They are the preferred weapons of many entry teams and groups that specialize in close quarters hostage rescue.

Caliber is done in millimeter diameter of the bullet, e.g. 9mm; percentage of an inch, designated by “cal” e.g. .45 cal is 45/100 of an inch across. .357 and .38 caliber are actually both .38, but a .357 has more powder. So you can fire .38 rounds from a .357 weapon, but if you try to do it the other way around, the weapon may be damaged or even explode.

Wounds. Don’t go overboard with handgun wounds. Physically, a .45 bullet does about as much damage as a half-inch stick being pushed through you. It’s not always that simple, of course. The bullet hits a bone and fragments of bone can go slicing away in different directions. Bullets often follow the path of least resistance and sometimes go between tissues instead of penetrating.

Some bullets are designed or modified in an attempt to do more damage. The "Glaser safety slug" is described as ‘frangible’ and the bullet breaks into small pieces on impact. A ‘dum dum’ is the idea that if you cut a cross in the top of the bullet it will expand and make a bigger wound channel. A hollow point has a scoop in the tip of the bullet designed to help the bullet deform. A wadcutter is flat across the top and originally designed for target shooting—the clean holes it punches in paper are easy to see. Wadcutters in flesh create wound channels that don’t close by themselves and bleed profusely. The flat tip means that they do not feed well at all in semi-automatic or automatic weapons. Some new rounds are designed to ‘star’ when they hit flesh and the soft lead core will force a split outer jacket into a jagged star that lacerates tissue in a bigger wound channel. Armor piercing rounds, the so-called cop killers are designed to punch through armor. They also have a tendency to punch through the body without deforming or deflecting, and so do slightly less damage than a regular bullet. Jacketed bullets have a layer of harder metal, like copper, around the lead bullet. It makes for a cleaner hole and also feeds better.

Note I said *designed* in an *attempt* to do more damage. Actual results from the field are less positive. When I have called the manufacturer to ask why an expanding ‘star’ bullet didn’t expand they said it probably got clothing stuck in the nose and didn’t expand. Well, duh. People wear clothes.

The other factor in bullet damage is speed. Gun nuts argue about this ad nauseam: for some reason a bullet going over about 2300 feet per second does a lot more damage than one going slower. No normal handgun, by the way, gets to anywhere near that speed.

People don’t fall over or get knocked back or knocked through the air by the impact of a bullet. Many don’t notice it and quite a few that feel the impact never even consider that they were shot.

Sometimes those that know they were shot curl up and die from wounds that aren’t physically lethal. A lot of gunfighting, any fighting really, is psychological.

Shots to the pelvis and stomach can be excruciatingly painful. The chest is rarely that painful. Bones can be broken. People bleed.

Except for a shot to the head, specifically the brainstem, people don’t die quickly.

Gunfights are fast, dynamic affairs. They go bad quickly.

An real-life example:

Analysis of an Officer-Involved Shooting

3 Officers

1 Threat with knife, charging

Distance: 10’ closing to 5’ from the nearest officer (C); maximum of 15’ from farthest officer (A) at start of incident, but A did not fire until threat was closer

*Officer A armed with a 9mm estimated firing 1-2 shots.
Officer B armed with a 9mm estimated firing 5-6 shots.
Officer C armed with a .45 estimated firing 3-4 shots*

Criminalists found eight (8) 9mm shell casings and four (4) .45 caliber shell casings. This adds to twelve, but in the criminalist report they say that thirteen cases total were found.

The officers entered the building with weapons drawn. The suspect was sitting on the floor through a doorway on their right. He was ordered to show his hands and drop the knife. He charged, screaming, weapon extended.

Officer C, the closest, opened fire while attempting to step back and create distance.

Officer B fired his first shot through the wall. He says he did not see the knife at first and fired because hearing another officer fire was sufficient indicator that it was a deadly force situation. As he explained his reasoning, it appears to be a clear example of time dilation- he remembers more conscious thought than there was time for.

Officer A distinctly remembers his point of aim as center mass between the hip and the armpit. This is the bullet that probably struck the threat in the side of the head, the only shot that clearly came from the side, which is where A was positioned.

Of the twelve or thirteen rounds fired, there were seven hits, two of which were deemed fatal by the medical examiner. In two of these the bullet was recovered.

*One bullet entered the side of the head (9mm)
One bullet hit the center of the neck and did some damage to the spine
One bullet entered the rights side of the chest and would have proved fatal (9mm)
One bullet hit the right upper arm/shoulder
One bullet grazed the left hip/thigh
One bullet hit the left groin/lower abdomen
One bullet hit just above the left knee*

All officers have been trained to fire center mass. Weapons were out and in hand. Ranges were approximately ten feet or less.

These were guys who were good shots at the range. They were responding to a call, a teenager who thought that someone was in her house. Her grandmother had already been stabbed to death outside.

Geeks

Everything has geeks. There are computer geeks and martial arts geeks and tactical geeks and definitely gun geeks. Getting really upset or picky about word choice to me is a sign of a geek, and geeks are rarely operators. So some people will get excited that a revolver isn't a pistol (but semis and flintlocks are)... it's a geek game. A pistol in standard usage is any firearm designed to be held and fired by one hand (despite the fact that most times you shoot two-handed.) In geek terms, a pistol only applies if the breech (where the bullet goes in) and the barrel are contiguous. Whatever. The same kind of issue comes up in 'magazine' and 'clip'. The only people likely to care are geeks (but stick with magazine).

Don't use this as an excuse for error of fact. 'Revolver' for instance is specific because it is a description of the action. If you make the mistake of calling a .45 semi-automatic a revolver, it's roughly equivalent to someone talking about typing a manuscript on a 'manual' laptop.

The 'hydrostatic shock' thing. I already mentioned that for some reason, bullets above about 2100-2300 fps (feet per second) do a lot more damage than slower rounds even when they don't break up. 'Cavitation' is one of the theories- that is the idea that a wave of air, like a sonic boom follows the bullet and causes the tissues to explode away from the wound channel. Hydrostatic shock is another theory, that basically kinetic energy travels through the liquids in the body and can cause damage distant from the wound channel. So it's not a myth, per se (though hand gun calibers don't get to the speed where it happens) but it is one of the theories to explain an interesting fact about terminal wound ballistics.

One more note on wound ballistics. Outside of war, rifle (high velocity) wounds are extremely rare. Most of what ER docs and coroners deal with are handgun wounds. When it is a rifle, often it was used at very close range (ala suicide) and the muzzle flash can do more damage than the bullet. Makes it hard to figure out cavitation vs. hydrostatic. It also

allows for a lot of 'twilight zone' effects with rifles.

A very experienced coroner said that he had no problem with the so called 'magic bullet' in the JFK assassination because the people questioning it were comparing the behavior to low velocity (handgun) ballistics and, simply, outside of war, not enough people are shot in the head with rifles to have any feel for what can happen...and in a war, people are too busy for that kind of research.

Soft Body Armor (SBA)

Soft body armor are the "bullet resistant vests" currently issued to most officers.

Details: My first couple of sets had white inserts, the later had blue. The inserts are the Kevlar part, the armor. They blue ones feel like slick plastic, the white ones felt like stiff cloth--you could see the weave. They have Velcro circles at the very top where they go up the shoulders.

The inserts are slipped inside a carrier that was black. The top of the carrier had matching Velcro circles on the inside to keep the actual Kevlar from slipping. The carrier was in two pieces, adjusted with Velcro straps at the top for length/height and Velcro on elastic at the side for width. A well-fitted vest went down to just above your belt buckle, had a slight v-neck and the layers would over-lap slightly on your lower ribs.

The armpits have no protection at all and that is one of the primary reasons that very few people teach the Weaver stance anymore. The carrier has an extra pocket for the 'trauma plate,' which is just another very thin piece of Kevlar that fits in the pocket over your heart. Many officers keep a laminated card in the trauma plate pocket with blood type, allergies and next-of-kin information. (For what it's worth, ever since Iraq I've wanted to get a tattoo: O+ NKA. Most people won't get it, the people that do will derive all kinds of information). There are cloth panels hanging from the front and back so that you can tuck them into your pants and keep the vest from shifting.

Can't speak for everybody, but mine smells like cat piss when I've been sweating in it for eight or twelve hours. It's not super heavy or that hot, but you definitely notice it and it doesn't breathe. You can wash the carrier like any other Velcro and elastic clothing. It washes fine but it's a mess when it comes out of the dryer. The panels can be sprayed with Windex and wiped off (or water, I guess). A lot of guys kept Febreze in their lockers.

The stuff degrades over time and has an official shelf life of five years.

[This article](#) has more detail than most street cops know about ballistic vest failures and ratings. I used the link to the Google quick looks instead of the PDF download, so let me know if it doesn't work.

Theoretically, the vests are rated to stop:

- I .22, .25, and .32 caliber handguns, .38 Special lead round-nose
- II-A .38 Special high-velocity, .45s, low-velocity .357 Magnum & 9-mm, .22 rifles
- II Higher velocity .357 Magnum and 9-mm
- III-A .44 Magnum and submachine gun 9-mm
- III High-power rifle: 5.56mm, 7.62 mm FMJ, .30 carbine, .30-06 pointed soft point, 12-gauge rifled slug
- IV Armor-piercing rifle bullet, .30 caliber (1 shot only).

I was issued a IIIa, most times.

If the vest doesn't fit quite right you can almost strangle sitting in a car. It really slows down any cross-body reach, like undoing your seat belt.

The current military armor is either horrible or really good. It will stop even rifle bullets if they hit the plates straight on (which could then ricochet of course, maybe up under your helmet. That's life in the big city). But those plates are inch thick ceramic. It's roughly the equivalent of wearing a brick shirt. And it is heavy, over thirty pounds. And hot. Bulky, it is hard to run in and you have to be very careful in placing your pouches on it. My left shoulder has problems and I had to get creative placing my magazine holders so that I could get them out.

The stories are kind of dry, lacking in the detail that would be most useful to an author, but the Kevlar [survivor's club](#) might have some hooks you can use.

I have seen bad tactics taught based on the idea the vest would save you. That's gambling, IMO. There is also an element of talisman to a lot of people and officers, both regarding equipment and training. People think that the vest will protect them and then don't think about what it might save them from. People believe that they have earned a black belt and can now survive a fight, without ever once looking at what a real fight is like and whether it matches their skills. People seem to believe that merely owning a gun will somehow, magically, keep them safe.

I'd say most people carry guns and even use them like amulets-- "As long as I have a gun, I'll be okay, I can handle it." Many cannot pull the trigger. That said, a few hours of training with a rifle allows a peasant to defeat a warrior who has trained all his life with a sword. That advance in technology made the concept of equal rights possible.

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Recap:

- Guns are nifty machines that throw a rock in a straight line
- Handguns, rifles, shotguns, assault rifles, machine guns, submachine guns
- Actions, sights, calibers and gauges, bullet configurations
- Gunfighting is different than range training
- Geeks exist. They get upset about terminology. Don't sweat it.
- SBA (Soft Body Armor) is the modern standard for protection

Chapter 12: Less-Lethal Weapons

Less-lethal weapons are a designation that has come to the fore in the last decade or so. In a lot of ways, the holy grail of law enforcement is a tool that would put a violent person down at least as reliably as a handgun, but without permanent injury.

Chemicals: two versions of mace (tear gas) are CN and CS. Users translate that as "Cry Now" and "Cry Sooner". They are mucous membrane irritants, eye irritants and cause your skin to burn, especially if you are sweaty. It seems to react with water (sweat) and so affects people who fear it more than people who don't. It is relatively safe, though some people do have breathing problems.

More importantly, most people can fight through it, especially if they have been exposed before. Exposure to tear gas is a staple of army basic training. I assume the other branches do it as well.

CS and CN have a sharp smell and make your eyes really burn. It makes your nose run, too and soldiers leaving the gas house with huge trails of snot hanging down their chest, hunched over and wheezing is a common sight.

The CS and CN are really crystals and if gear worn when exposed isn't properly washed, it will gas off later when it does get wet. Makes putting on a used gas mask (called a 'pro-mask' for protective mask) and then sweating really interesting.

OC, which stands for Oleoresin Capsicum, is what cops call pepper-spray. OC is believed to be safer than the military tear gasses. It is a food by product. It feels about like you would expect crushed hot peppers rubbed in your eyes would feel like. Which means it hurts and your nose runs and the skin it touches feels like a sunburn. It doesn't affect breathing, but many people feel like they can't breathe (if someone is screaming that they are suffocating, their air flow is fine.)

Pepper spray comes in different concentrations and what they call Scoville Heat Units or SHU. It is supposed to be a measure of how painful a particular batch is. It's actually kind of arbitrary. Same with concentration. Usually a 10% spray feels hotter than a 5%, but not always.

What does matter is the delivery system. OC comes in pressurized canisters of different sizes. Most cops carry a 4 oz bottle, but they came in larger "party canisters". Some canisters are 'stream' which squirts liquid OC. Easy to aim, penetrates the eyes quickly.

Aerosols penetrate the fastest and get into the mouth and nose. In my opinion, aerosol OC sucks the worst BUT it is also the one most likely to get blown off course by the wind and always affects everyone in the area, including the person using it.

Foam is an attempt to keep it from gassing off and affecting the officer using it. It hits and looks like creamed carrots. It does gas off and will affect the user as well, but not for a while. Unfortunately, it also tends to take a bit to affect the person it is used on.

Some OC details

OC is an oil and if you use too much it will make everything slippery. Trying to handcuff a guy dosed in OC can be like a greased-pig contest where the grease burns your skin.

Air and water wash it off. It usually takes about a half hour for the burn to get down to a decent level. If you drive with your car windows rolled up, though, the concentration will increase in your car.

It doesn't affect everybody. I've watched inmates wipe the foam from their faces and eat it or try to throw it back at us. Some didn't even shut their eyes.

Hot water opens your pores and reactivates the residue. In other words, a hot shower after an OC incident, especially when the water flows over your sensitive parts, can be an interesting experience.

The Taser. First of all, the Taser has nothing in common with the hand-held shockers usually called tasers on TV shows. The real taser is a device shaped roughly like a pistol that uses compressed air to shoot two barbs up to thirty-five feet (the civilian version has a range of fifteen feet). The two barbs leave the weapon, one in a straight line and the other at a slight downward angle. Each barb is attached to a thin, plastic coated wire.

When the barbs hit, an electric shock goes down the wires. The shock runs for five seconds in the police model and 30 seconds for the civilian (to give a good head start running away). The shock has a maximum of 50,000 volts, which sounds like a lot, but it is only 2.1 milliamps. That's about 1/7600 of the amps produced by a wall socket.

Those are just numbers.

Tasers hurt like hell. When I took my hit it completely blanked out my brain. There was nothing but pain. I'd had frostbite before and run on a broken fibula and thought I was pretty good with pain. This was a whole new level. A few seconds into the 'ride' I was able to think a little. I was able to lie down by myself and not scream, and that was something to be proud of.

They also tend to freeze the muscles between the two probes. That means that even people who don't respond to pain are usually frozen while the Taser is cycling.

Cool thing- the only injury in a Taser use are from the two barbs, or possibly from falling.

That brings up an important detail—injury and pain are completely separate issues. You can be grievously injured with almost no pain and in great pain without injury. Officers and people who deal with force on a legal basis are required to distinguish. Pain is preferable to injury, injury is preferable to killing. The huge pain of a taser is preferable to the potential injury of a wristlock or takedown.

Other cool toys:

There are a number of delivery systems that can be pretty versatile. A number of LL (less lethal) rounds have been made for the shotgun, including a self-contained Taser unit. There are rubber bullets designed to hurt a lot and bounce off and "ferret rounds" designed to penetrate a car window or drywall and spray OC on the other side. There are also bean bag rounds--small cloth bags filled with lead shot, intended to act as a long-distance sap.

There are 40mm and 37mm launchers. These are essentially grenade launchers. 40mm is the same caliber used by the military and so it takes a special license. The 37 cannot use military explosive grenades and do not require the same licensing.

There is the M203 40mm military grenade launcher, a single-shot device that can be put under the M4 or M16 barrel. The 37 and 40mm versions are usually single-shots but there are six shot versions, like big revolvers.

Munitions for them include:

Direct impact rounds, designed to be fired directly at people. Some have a single impact ball that looks like a racquet ball; others are like big shotgun shells, filled with a bunch of .60 cal hard rubber balls (I've taken a hit from the .60s. It stung and left a welt but definitely didn't take me out of the fight.) "Bean bags" are cloth bags filled with small lead shot.

Indirect impact rounds: heavier and larger, they fire thick rubber discs. The discs can do considerable damage if fired directly into a body. They are designed to be fired into the ground and ricochet into the threat's legs.

Chemical munitions: gas grenades are the classic munition that you see on TV. OC is used more often now than CS or CN. Some are designed to penetrate walls first and then splatter OC. Some on impact 'pop' and scatter three smaller canisters that burn and produce CS gas.

The PepperBall and FN303 are weapons designed to fire OC pellets. The FN303 is very accurate and relatively long-ranged. There has been one reported death of a young woman in a crowd struck in the eye.

The PepperBall is a paintball gun, but the balls have been filled with OC powder or water. The water stings a lot, as a kind of impact round.

Distraction Devices are the technical term for 'flash-bang' grenades. They make a very loud noise and a very bright light. A flash-bang is a hand grenade with no fragmentation and limited high explosive (HE). It is basically a blasting cap in a container. Loud and bright, but no shrapnel and much less of a pressure wave. The stingball and stingball/OC versions look like a black rubber softball. A regular flash-bang looks like a cylinder, black, about 1.5 inches in diameter and maybe four inches long. They have a spoon and pin like a military grenade but without the extra safety clip.

Technical detail: they make a slight pop first, something to do with the detonation, which draws the eyes for the bang.

Teams use them to make people freeze and, hopefully, prevent more dangerous force.

I've been within a meter of a flash-bang (and a stingball, see later) with no ill effect. You could feel the pressure wave and it was loud, but even at near contact, no damage. Throwing one in an enclosed space and trying to close the door, I've been knocked back about six inches from the pressure wave. A door has a lot of surface area.

A stingball is a flash-bang with rubber pellets in it. Theoretically it adds pain to the noise and blinding light. I've never noticed the pellets hitting, but part of that may be due to adrenaline.

Flash-bangs can also have OC in the mix.

There are lots of other weapons. Always remember to do your due diligence when finding experts on weapons. Some may have a lot of technical knowledge but never used the weapon in combat. Manufacturers make claims based on what

not work in time or has already failed.

If the baton fails, what then? Switch to the higher level of force, which is the handgun and take the threat's life? Or keep swinging the baton again...and again...and again...

The Taser seems so ideal- no injury, as safe as it gets but a level of pain that makes the most hardened street-fighter rethink his options. Effective on all but a handful of people. And safe. Those are the exact same factors that could let a sadist vent, the same factors that could turn one of the greatest advances for humane law enforcement in the last fifty years into a device for torture.

In the end, everything always has and always will come down to the judgment and integrity of the people in the crisis. The protagonists. Making, and living with decisions like this is the heart of 'protagging.'

Recap:

-Less-lethal technologies are an attempt to invent a tool that will take a bad guy down as effectively as a handgun but without injury

-Modern LL chemical weapons are CS, CN and OC

-The Taser is a directed energy weapon that hurts. A lot.

-Impact, chemicals and other specialty munitions can be fired from a 12 gauge, 40mm or 37mm platform

-Distraction devices are "flashbang grenades" and can some configurations have impact pellets and chemical sprays added

-Paintballs have been modified to fire OC powder

-Media and civilians freak out over LL technology regardless of lives saved

[Chapter 13: Concealed Carry](#)

There are weapons for battle and weapons for emergencies. For emergencies, you want something light enough to carry at all times, easy to conceal (and that is cultural-- people in our culture panic when they see weapons, in another place and time NOT carrying a weapon openly might mark you as a peasant) and quick to get into play. That makes most of the weapons you can carry concealed inferior to the ones you would take into battle. A stiletto up you sleeve is inferior to a broadsword. A handgun is an inaccurate, anemic compromise compared to an assault rifle.

Concealed weapons usually fall into the 'emergency category'.

There are three approaches your characters may consider- concealing a weapon; training and practicing with something not considered a weapon; or fashioning something that doesn't look like a weapon.

I'm going to start with the last two because they will be way shorter.

Practicing with a non-weapon: We've already mentioned canes. Something that can be carried everywhere, doesn't ping the radar as a weapon and can be very versatile. There are stainless steel pens (I believe Cross is the brand name) that can thrust through a sheet of plywood. Old school Marines used to practice with their belts and heavy buckles. I'm not big on the keys through your fingers idea, it rarely hits squarely and will tear the shit out of the flesh between your fingers, but it is the idea that is important.

What do you carry with you that can be a weapon? There's a lot, it just takes some creativity.

You also have to think through which are really only useful for assassination. A pen, for instance, is not intimidating. No one will decide not to fight you just because they see that you are holding a pen. It is useless for defense, in that it will not stop another weapon. It is not particularly effective. You can kill someone with a pen but it will take either extreme precision, an unmoving target and/or some fairly extensive time. You have to have it clear in your mind (and so must your experienced protagonists) that some weapons may be used to make it slightly easier to kill someone else but are not good tools for self-defense.

Non-obvious weapons. You can change things, a lot or a little, and turn them into weapons or shields. You can now buy kevlar sheets for your briefcase that make it bullet resistant. I think a holy book with a stainless steel cover (possibly kept in a sturdy purse with a long handle) would make a great weapon. I've seen chain mail pouches for sale at Ren Faires. Even a good leather pouch on a short rope filled with half a pound of coins would make a hell of a weapon. Two hefty bunches of keys on the end of a three-foot length of chain would be, for all intents, a kusari-gama. I've been looking for stainless steel solid beads for some time. Many religions have some sort of prayer bead and it would be cool to say, "I didn't hit him, I just blessed him vigorously." When chopsticks for hair pins were stylish, I had a pair made for my wife with long steel needles concealed inside.

This overlaps with the found weapons somewhat. Be creative.

Concealing a regular weapon: Most people are incredibly unobservant, so it is not nearly as hard to carry concealed as

you might think. There are some pointers, though: shiny weapons don't hide as well as those with flat finishes. Small weapons conceal better than large weapons, but tend to either have less ammo, less power, or both.

Make sure you have retention (like a thumb strap), or the weapon may fall out and people will notice (like, my personal shame, if you are dancing with the bride at a wedding and your .45 pops out of your inside-the-pants holster onto the dance floor.) Make sure you can get to it. I'm not big on pouches and purses because most people keep them closed and they are complicated to access quickly... and if you need a handgun, you need it quickly. If you had time, you'd be going for a rifle or shotgun.

Make sure you can get to it and practice drawing in different places-- in the car with your seatbelt on (an officer in my state was killed when she couldn't undo her retention straps while seated in her car. Investigators estimate that she had over three seconds. It wasn't enough time. Practice.) On the toilet. Your most vulnerable times are the times a bad guy will pick.

When you start carrying all the time you may develop severe lower back problems. The key is to balance the weight on the other side- a spare magazine, leatherman tool and tactical flashlight do it for me. It does make me look fatter, though.

If your weapon has an external safety make damn sure the safety won't pop off by rubbing against you as you move. If you ever kill somebody, you want it to be on purpose. And you never want to shoot yourself in the leg. Most of my holsters keep the weapon pointed away from me. Just in case.

Be careful with placement. The waistline is convenient and I prefer it (your hands are in that vicinity most of the time, so it's fast), but if you get knocked down, it will hurt. The small of the back is an excellent place for concealment, but if you fall on that it can do serious spine injury. You (or your character) will have to make some choices. Shoulder holster is decent concealment, especially on big-chested people, but it is slightly slower and you have to reach across your body, which means in close you can be easily slammed and have that armed trapped with no weapon. Also in a shoulder draw, when you pull the weapon, the barrel will briefly be pointed at your own left arm and will pan across 90 degrees on the way to lining up with your target. Every shooter is taught from the first day, never to point a weapon at anything she does not wish to destroy. 'Muzzle control' the constant awareness of where the barrel of a gun is pointing and the ability to never accidentally point it at others is considered a basic skill. Anyone who fails to control the muzzle is despised by serious shooters.

The shoulder holster automatically sets you up for this problem. A shoulder holster, however, is the absolute easiest way to carry concealed and draw while sitting.

Unconcealed, given my choice, I prefer a drop holster.

Basically, the weapon should be near wherever you habitually hold your hands. If you put your thumbs on your belt, a weapon may go there. If you wear a shoulder rig, uncrossed arms (arms like a crossed arm position, but the weapon hand on or near the weapon, the other arm over it, nothing crossed) puts thing in reach.

We've found that wasp-waisted and/or wide hipped women have trouble drawing from a waist holster, especially a high-rise. There are holsters that fit on the belt but lower the weapon a few inches that make drawing easier.

Another point—your skilled characters should practice drawing with the off hand. Just in case.

The weapon and placement is only part of concealment. What you wear comes into play. Shorts and a t-shirt make it hard (but I have a small Makarov, roughly equivalent to a Walther PPK .380, that is invisible at the small of my back under a t-shirt, as long as the shirt is untucked and I have good posture.) Your character will have a need for jackets or big loose shirts, which won't be appropriate everywhere.

You have to check your state ordinances for unlawful carry. The USSC (United States Supreme Court) just handed down some rulings that are really rocking the gun control world. Your bad guy characters won't care about the law. They are worried about dying. Jail (as a concern) ranges from an inconvenience to a vacation, unless they have made a lot of enemies inside. (Understand the difference between Jail and Prison.)

Your good guy characters will be more complicated. They can get permits, but that varies by state and in some it is almost automatic provided there are no histories of felonies or Domestic Violence and no mental health issues. In other states, it is almost impossible unless you are hooked into the political machine. A CCP (Concealed Carry Permit) is for the state that issued it, though some states have reciprocity agreements.

If the good guy can't get a permit and chooses to carry, there is some risk. For most people, no big deal. They will never be in a position to use it, the handful of people who might notice are friends, blah, blah, blah.

But that's not what makes characters. The big risk with the character (or real people) is that if they use a concealed weapon that they carry illegally, they will be prosecuted and the state will make a convincing case that carrying the weapon is proof of premeditation. Especially in states that have made a strong political stand on banning guns, they will really pull out all the stops to get a conviction and maximum sentence.

Cops are a special case. Since the passage of HR 218, officers and retired officers may carry concealed in any state. If stopped, they will show their ID, the officer that stopped them will call in to have it confirmed and, provided they haven't

done anything illegal or stupid (such as drinking) they will be on their merry way. Be aware that the on-duty officer making contact will not know or necessarily believe that the armed stranger is another cop and he will make himself safe. That may include doing a full felony stop-- "turn around, get on your knees, lace your fingers behind your head" and calling for back-up. Unless the off-duty guy is really stupid, really arrogant, or drunk, he will cooperate. It's stupid not to. Never make a nervous guy with a gun and a badge make a fast decision.

If a citizen wants to bring a firearm on a flight, he has to have it in a locked box in checked luggage with the ammunition in another box. The weapon must be declared and will be labeled. I hear anecdotally, that labeled weapons are frequently stolen. The TSA regs are [here](#).

The TSA regs on officers carrying on a plane are [here](#). So, the opening scene in DieHard couldn't have happened.

One other stupid little detail. When I was very young and thought I would be a bad guy, I carried a flat throwing/fighting knife under my shirt down my spine. So if anyone ever said, "Put your hands behind your head and lace your fingers" my hands would be right on it...
SEP1SEP1SEP1SEP1SEP1SEP1SEP1

Recap:

- Concealed weapons are usually for emergencies and less powerful than would be ideal
- You can train in a non-weapon, create a non-obvious weapon, or conceal a weapon
- Safety, accessibility, concealment
- Clothing choice is part of the equation
- Laws exist pertaining to citizens on a state by state basis

[Chapter 14: Mass Combat](#)

I think I was shot at. We were tearing through Kirkuk on our way from our camp in Sulaymaniyah to FOB Warrior for our weekly mail and grocery run.

Tony came over the radio, "Did you guys hear that? I think somebody was shooting at us." By that time we were probably a half a kilometer away from the ambush site.

Maybe I should amend the first sentence to: I think I may have been shot in the general direction of.

I have been in a war zone. I've never been blown up by IEDs or caught in a successful ambush or engaged in a firefight. My time in Iraq was spent as a teacher. So there are better sources for some of the nitty-gritty details. Keep that in mind.

Wars are based on politics, getting *something*-- either a tangible thing or a concession. Their purposes can be very cold-blooded because the people making the decision are far enough removed from the fighting that they can see the 'big picture' or what Liddell-Hart called 'Grand Strategy'. That's important. It rankles most of us, but war is one of those things that should be entered logically and coldly, never emotionally.

However, to get people to fight and support a war (in a liberal republic) you have to build up support. That's where the othering comes in, the ability to dehumanize the enemy. In the actual combat, you've bonded enough with your teammates that it becomes very tribal: "These are my people and those bastards are trying to kill my people." The part of your brain that would reason that, in fact, you are in their country, doesn't register. That bonding is emotional, limbic system stuff.

The farther we are away from a tribal core (always with definite us and them), the more we are taught that people are people (and this is a huge shift in thought, something that would have appeared literally insane at most points in human history) the harder it is to kill. Even in modern warfare with all of our technology, the current wars have an unbelievably low incidence of collateral damage. Soldiers, not just by policy but by character are risking their lives and taking extra chances to avoid killing potential non-combatants. An unintended side-effect of this is that what our culture sees as strength, morality and restraint, specific cultures we are fighting see it as fear and timidity and frequently use it against us.

"I don't understand Americans," Haider said, "From the time I was a little boy I always saw men walking the streets with rifles. Until the Americans, I never saw anyone trying NOT to shoot." -Baghdad, 2009

Those who were raised with a tribal identity 'other' very quickly and easily. Not only can they resort to violence quicker and easier and more extremely, there appears to be absolutely no PTSD or mental anguish associated with it. (In one of the last chapters of "Machete Season" the author talks about a prison holding seven thousand perpetrators of the Rwandan holocaust. Less than a dozen have mental illnesses. Or nightmares about the killing or any of the effects that we would expect.

Different cultures see war differently.

Until the modern era almost everyone everywhere held that winning in war **involved** looting, raping and enslaving. When one culture steps beyond that and chooses to take a more moral way, the other cultures they are fighting might not recognize that they are losing.

Another example: Some Native American nations preferred 'counting coup' to fighting. You proved your bravery by closing with and touching an enemy. Everyone knew who was brave and skilled and it kept the body count low. When nations that expected their very civilized and moral concept of counting coup to be the norm ran into peoples (such as the Europeans) who just simply killed, the skilled and noble warriors were slaughtered. Not because of technology-- until the mid 1800s a bow was a far superior weapon to a musket (except for the intimidation of noise, smoke and flame, which was important). Nor because of skill: a few of the colonists were soldiers or former soldiers, but every Native American man was a trained raider and hunter. Cultural attitudes and beliefs about winning left them vulnerable.

That wasn't, believe it or not, a political diatribe. Especially if you are writing in speculative genres (this is one of my pet peeves) the late 20th/early 21st century middle class white American ideals of right, wrong, noble, ignoble are not the way the world works. Not most of the world, almost never in all of history anywhere in the world. Quite frankly, we've never before had enough excess food to be able to afford to look beyond tribal and family lines and recognize other's humanity.

So a *buke* (the warrior caste of Japan, that included the samurai) would cut down a peasant (*heimin*, farmer, one of the other castes) without hesitation for a perceived rudeness (rudeness, as is common in hierarchical societies usually translating to a lack of sufficient deference). A modern *Federale* will slap a child to the ground who dares to look in his eyes. A friend, raised in a California barrio, believes it is an insult not to use a weapon on a man: "Bare hands are for women and children," he says.

Back to war and soldiers. Politicians make a cold-blooded decision. It would be ideal if they could then turn to a group of predators to carry out that decision, but predators are notoriously difficult to control. Small numbers of predators would be effective but the politicians wind up using large numbers of regular people.

Regular people can't kill cold. Many can't kill at all. So they have to get excited, "motivated" in military terms. They turn their squad into a tribe. It is like trying to do a predator's job with a troop of monkeys (which, given that we're primates, it is). It will be inefficient and political, feelings will get hurt and there will be stress and drama.

There will also be a core of professionals. Some will be natural predators, people who have found that they 'other' people easily, enjoy the job or at least excel at it and have found a home in one of the few places that what they enjoy is legal. Some will be true believers who don't need to be 'motivated' and have decided on their own terms and for their own reasons that it is okay to pull the trigger. This small core of professionals can get a lot done and often wind up mentoring the rookies, trying to teach their worldview because it is both efficient and pretty robust against PTSD.

In the big picture, war can be looked at as a war of attrition or a war of maneuver. In a war of attrition, both sides beat themselves bloody, sending men and material en masse head to head to wear out the other side. Perhaps to kill all the soldiers, perhaps to use up all the weapons and ammunition and food and supplies. The war of attrition is a giant meat grinder, a test to see who gets exhausted first.

Conquest is easier after a war of attrition since the means to fight, including many of the able-bodied warriors and leaders have been eliminated. Taking the land presents little problem.

A war of maneuver relies on breaking the adversaries psychological will. By rapid action, great flexibility and an ability to put arms and men where the enemy has no hope of prevailing, you overcome the enemy's ability to cope. Shock and awe. Guerrilla hit and run tactics. Early horse archers.

It leaves the enemy with many resources intact, and the peace that follows is often only as good as the paper the treaty is inscribed on. It tends to cause a political change in regime, which may or may not benefit the winning side.

As John Keegan described eloquently, the goal of war is not to destroy the enemy but to break the enemy's will. In a war, to truly 'beat' a nation, you would have to kill every last person capable of throwing a rock. Wars are over when one side becomes afraid or too tired to throw rocks. Or when factions within a side start forbidding retaliation in order to forge peace.

(This is true also in single combat. Unless every long bone is broken or the brainstem is shut down, a sufficiently motivated person could keep fighting. Exhaustion or fear of injury or fear of humiliation or ... is what stops most people.)

This is one of the big disconnects between soldiers and civilians in our population. In a liberal republic or democracy, war is not only a logical, cold decision. It is also a symbol that factions can use to manipulate popular opinion. The party in the minority can almost always use the fact of war and sometimes the fact of a refusal to engage in war, to try to remove another party from power.

In the civilian world this is rarely thought of and, when it is, seems fair, if political.

On the frontlines it is perceived not only as betrayal (remember that on a gut level, soldiers understand that winning is a matter of will and they can lose based on the lack of will of people who are not there) but as if the people back home are being deliberately manipulated for political reasons in ways that serve the enemy.

American soldiers (the type I have been and know best) pride themselves on their history. They have lost very few battles. Between technological superiority, training and tenacity, they tend to inflict extremely lopsided casualties. They do not feel they have ever lost a war and rarely lost a battle. But they have been pulled out of wars by those with weaker will or for political expediency... and running away, even under orders, feels infinitely worse than being beaten.

There is yet another factor that affects how soldiers and civilians see war. Especially in modern times, information is closely guarded. Those who actually know what is going on not only stay silent out of prudence or to maintain a tactical advantage. Almost everyone is under direct orders or contract to say nothing.

By definition, almost anything civilians hear on the news came from a source without direct information. Even when the information is incorrect or seems a blatant lie the people on the job are prohibited from denying information or pointing out inaccuracies.

When soldiers have been caught in this trap, notably Vietnam veterans, they see the civilian world as easily manipulated, misinformed sheep.

This means that modern war must be fought on several levels. It is not merely a mass of men and weapons vying for supremacy. Gathering intelligence, conducting tactical and strategic operations against the enemy have always been a part of warfare. But managing public sentiment back home and abroad and trying to mitigate media damage—or play the media, which the military seems to be very bad at—is a critical aspect of war that only in the last fifty years has become a decisive factor.

An important aspect of this, which also marks a huge change in philosophy, is that there is no longer any such thing as “acceptable losses”. Deaths, whether of soldiers or collateral damage, play poorly in the media. They are wasteful as well, and every commander I know considers every friendly death a mistake. My first commander long ago, Lt. Whalen, said, “There are only two things. Accomplish the mission and survive on the modern battlefield. Everything we do must serve those goals.”

This is a philosophy, however and soldiers have to deal with the practicality. How do you deal with an enemy who hides in the civilian population or uses children as shields? You can’t avoid all casualties and zero friendly deaths is a dream. And there is a very real possibility that taking this philosophy as truth would leave us helpless against an enemy that had the means and desire to wage a war of attrition.

Terrorists. When Americans try to write terrorists they want to give them some big tragedy in their past-- family killed by an Israeli bomb or something like that. That's not the profile. There are voluntary and involuntary terrorists.

Voluntary terrorists are almost all from wealthy, western-educated secular families. (Hmmm, exact same profile for cult recruits, huh?) They have usually lived for some or all of their lives in the West. As such, they have always felt like outsiders, never fully part of their ancestral world or the world they are living in. Always outsiders, hungering to belong...and someone offers them a guaranteed entry not just to one of those worlds but to the elite of one of those worlds. It's not about the virgins in paradise. It is about a human's sometimes pathological need to belong at any cost. It might take some work, but it's important to understand this from their point of view. Some volunteer for the army or join gangs because it is far more important to belong than to not be shot at. People volunteer for suicide bombings because death is abstract and belonging is real.

Involuntary terrorists

L, one of our translators told us the first day in-country:

We will be good friends. We will work together and you will like me and trust me. Never like me so much that you can't shoot me in the head. Listen to what I am telling you, this is how they are doing it now. I may come home and find the {Name of specific militia redacted} with my family tied up. They will point guns at them. They will point guns at me. They will give me a vest bomb. If I say no, they will shoot my youngest daughter. If I still say no, they will shoot my other daughter. Then my wife, then my youngest son. They will keep going until I say yes or they shoot me. If I take the vest, they will let my family go and give them ten thousand US dollars and protect them. I love you all like brothers, but I will wear the vest even to save my youngest daughter.

Most of that was background and based on modern war and modern perceptions of war, the idea of the ‘big picture’ as seen from the ground. What follows is more personal.

War is mostly boring. There is a lot of waiting, often in places that have terrible climates. Battle is anything but boring.

What follows is a list of things that have often bothered me in fiction. They are details, things to think about. Use as you will:

You can’t tell what is going on. Whether close range riot control or a pitched battle, your adrenaline is spiked, which

almost automatically guarantees that you will have tunnel vision and auditory exclusion. Even without the biology, it's usually dark or too bright. The enemy doesn't want to be seen, and neither do your own guys. In a matter of seconds, especially if the team isn't tight or the leadership is weak or comms goes bad or it is at night, you lose track of where everybody is. It is a mess of noise and light and deafness.

Repeating in a way, but in much of history you could not see, through musket smoke, cannon fire or dust of marching infantry and charging cavalry much of anything. You couldn't tell if you were winning or losing unless you saw that the guys running back were from your side. On horseback was best--it gave you some elevation--but it still sucked.

Nobody really knows the big picture. There are political considerations, strategic considerations and tactical considerations. If you have good leaders they will share what they know. This is one of the reasons that obedience is important: the people making decisions have more information than you. Trust is huge in this, but obedience is critical. There is a reason why the bigger, stronger Germanic and Celtic people with home-court advantage were easily defeated by the Romans. Individuals on a battlefield are meat. Organized units with good leadership are power multipliers.

Communication is always bad. I've worked with some relatively high-end radio systems designed for tactical operations. They all had dead zones in certain buildings. Microphones work loose and quit transmitting. Batteries die that should be fresh. In older systems they tried trumpets and drums and flags, most of which were hampered by the din of battle or the dust and smoke. Those with good comms have a huge edge, but it always seems to suck when it counts.

Supplies are critical. Armies, even roving bands of bandits, need a lot of food and ammo. Hunting takes time. Pillaging takes a lot less time. The idea of supply lines really made a difference not just in how wars are fought but in who won AND how the populace felt about invading armies (when invaders treat you nicer than your own nobles...)

Battling is anaerobic, usually, and very much a matter of nerve. Soldiering is aerobic and very much a matter of endurance. Fighters win your battles. Soldiers win your wars. Fighters bring down hell on the enemy. Soldiers are the ones who get to the right place at the right time.

Warfighting is not the place for heroism. Individualism may be valued in fiction and in our society, but in mass battle you must be able to suppress your ego and accept your place as part of a larger machine. An individual on a battlefield is just meat. At best, he will get killed, at worst he will get everyone else killed as well. What civilians see as rugged individuality we see as suicidal ego. Or, as the saying goes, "Hero is a four-letter word for someone who gets all his friends killed and manages to look good in the AAR (After-Action Report)."

Close range hand-to-hand combat, whether in a medieval battle (Not personally experienced) or a riot or mass brawl (have experienced) is a tangle of arms and legs. There is no room for big technique and people are almost as likely to hurt a friend as an enemy (one of the cool things about uniforms--if I'm twisting a blue polyester leg, I'm probably leg-locking a cop.)

The randomness of it is overwhelming. This is something that not just civilians but that even people in danger have trouble wrapping their minds around. Not many people actually die in modern war. Ancient combat often had incredible death rates... but even then battles or wars where an entire side was wiped out were rare. Going to war is not the inevitable doom many seem to believe. (*According to Plutarch in the Battle of Granicus River, Alexander the Great lost only 34 men routing an army of forty thousand. The Persians lost considerably more.*) Even in really horrific legendary battles, few, relatively speaking, die... but those that do die... it seems random. Bullets and arrows fly. Sometimes they hit the best soldiers. There is no skill for avoiding what you don't see and what you don't see is what kills you. It makes every time you step into battle a strange and desperate act of faith. It breeds a form of fatalism that is the opposite of fatalism, because those who are in train harder hoping it won't be luck that kills them. This is hard to put into words, but it is part of a warrior's psyche: *nothing will keep me safe. Death takes who she wishes. Maybe not me, maybe not today.*

Conversely, embracing that (*It is a good day to die*) allows you to do some truly amazing things. When you quit flinching and ducking you can aim, you can cut, you can become a cold predator and a force of nature. Those that embrace death care for their weapons. Everyone else does a kind of fidgety, ritualistic, preparation. They care for weapons but also pay obsessive attention to details of uniform and gear before a battle. Maybe it is a ritual, maybe it is just a way to not think.

I have been in riots and even when you are there to quell them the emotional force of a bunch of people losing control or even on the edge of losing control is intoxicating. For those in the riot, it is a feeling of enormous, anonymous raw animal power. *We can break things. We can destroy. We can leave our mark. We will never be known or punished.* It is the pure rage of a toddler's tantrum and just as free.

Teams are the essence of skilled group combat. It takes time and skill to make a team. Just throwing really skilled people together doesn't even approach what a skilled team can do. The ability to work together is a force multiplier like no other.

Teams must train together and they must fight together. Training will bring them to a level of skill, but actual operations will solidify the trust, and there are things that come up in real life that rarely come up in training: bad intel;

bad commo; environmental hazards so extreme that your equipment fails; the sheer speed with which things can go bad. Until your first operation, you don't know who can really fight. You don't know who can control the fear. You don't know who is steady and who is excitable.

In a good team with experienced members, the ability to remain steady will grow over time as new members model veterans. The veterans know what to pay attention to, what doesn't matter. Details get you killed. *Which* details will get you killed is something you learn from experience or from experienced people.

Every time a new member comes on a team, especially an experienced team, there is a rough period. Sometimes for two reasons. The person being replaced will usually be missed. If the lost member retired or moved on (fighting is a young man's game) there may be little problem. If the person being replaced was killed or crippled, there will be some unprocessed grieving and a lot of resentment. If the person being replaced was removed because he was a danger, then there may actually be some guarded hope.

The second source of tension is that any new person is a risk. No matter the person's skill or history, she may not fit and that potentially endangers everyone. There are, sometimes, membership rituals (usually low-key, nothing like a fraternity hazing, you don't pull that shit on dangerous people) to try to ease the tension... but the real membership initiation is the first operation.

A well-run team:

- Agrees on the goals and the methods.

- Communicates

- Are ordered to have balanced lives (seriously, some times you have to tell these guys to spend time with family)... and we always watch for that, because someone who wraps his or her whole life around the team is a short step away from burn-out. We don't just do this, whatever this is, for the team or an ideal. We are very aware that we deal with ugly things so that those we find precious never have to see or feel that kind of ugly.

- Trust each other. If I tell you to hold a door, I will not look to see if you do it...and if I hear gunshots coming from your sector I will not look or come to your aid unless you ask. I trust you to handle it. Wrap your head around that—I trust you so much that I leave my exposed back to your protection and I don't even look. There is an old SWAT saying: “If you catch yourself looking over your shoulder to see if a specific teammate is doing his job, one of you shouldn't be on the team.”

- Trains hard and fights hard. The harder you train, the easier you fight. They continually push each other to be better, faster, stronger and more creative.

- There is a dynamic that comes up in the best teams (and marriages for that matter) where insecurity makes things constantly improve. The rookie comes onto a legendary team and thinks, “I don't know how I made it. I'm not good enough to hang with these guys” and spends the rest of his career continually getting better trying to be worthy of the badge/pennant/order/name/whatever. And this is one of the reasons why self-aggrandizing egotists are so despised in the Special Operations community. Some are gifted, but they simply don't work as hard as the good operators. There are a few who have made names in the public sector who are despised by their old squadmates.

- Leadership is not bossy. Your guys follow you because they trust you. If you have to order them, have to ‘get their attention’ it is almost always a lack of trust. You follow, because you trust the leader: He knows the plan, He has the team's interest at heart. He will not get you killed for his own career.

- There is often a separation between the team and the people giving the orders. This may be a modern phenomenon, and it has good and bad points. You don't want people who are good at solving problems with violence deciding which problems need to be solved. That aspect of warrior/servant is pretty critical to modern ideas of civilization. That said, there is an often palpable fear and/or disdain from those who give the orders. They are aware that they could never do the job the team does, and to save ego, it is often easy to decide that the team is composed of savages or something not quite, and much less than a ‘normal’ or ‘real’ human.

Bad teams happen:

- When the goals or methods are not agreed on. Enemies make poor teammates. Pacifists don't blend well with meat-eaters. If the plan is to finesse/con the mission and one insists on going in with force and intimidation, the whole structure becomes weak, unstable and untrustworthy.

- When the leadership is weak. Operators do not rank weak and strong leadership by timid and courageous or quiet or loud or asking versus ordering, a weak leader is one who is not respected for ANY reason. Unskilled, stupid, timid, aggressive, or even morally questionable leaders lose respect quickly and lose control. Many try to take back respect by increasing aggression or loudness. It never works.

- When the members don't want to be there. Most elite teams in the US are voluntary and often the selection process is rough. The people who make these teams want to be there. In other places and times a bureaucrat decides who has the skills. These teams are often trained hard, even brutally, but they tend to be far less successful in combat.

There are a few administration issues that can damage or destroy a team. A connected resume packer may get a place on a team for the sole purpose of being able to brag about it later. The entire team feels cheapened, like their sweat and blood will be discounted to the value of his talk. Another is when the administration chooses to make a political statement by assigning members for reason other than fitness for duty. For instance (something actually somewhat common and a potential source of dramatic tension) assigning someone to an elite team in order to make it look more 'representational' (ethnicity, gender or religion) who failed the required tests to join.

Recap

- Wars happen for a specific purpose
- Different cultures see war differently
- Mass combat is chaotic and hard for an individual to see or understand
- Terrorists may be voluntary or involuntary and voluntary terrorists have a profile
- Teams, good or bad, are the essence of skilled mass combat

[Chapter 15: Violence in other Places and Times](#)

This is a really hard subject to talk about without people's political sensibilities getting in the way. Universally, however you were raised is 'normal' and your ideas of right and wrong seem sensible and obvious. We live in what is possibly the most affluent time and place in all of history. There are many things that we accept as obvious truths that would be considered unnatural in almost any other century.

There are few things I find more annoying than a work of fiction set in a medieval or quasi-medieval setting where the characters have 21st century American values.

Some of the factors that lead to this disconnect:

1) Level of violence/personal proximity to death in the world. People who routinely kill their own food and expect that half their children will die before adulthood will have very different attitudes towards life and death than those who don't.

My mom had 13 pregnancies, six live births and three of us survived to be adults. That's really unusual today. For much of history, that was the norm.

By the time you were twenty you would have cleaned the bodies and buried relatives- babies and parents and siblings. A larger percentage of the deaths than we can grasp now would have been due to violence or brutal accidents. And the ones that weren't, the disease...

You wouldn't have known what disease WAS. Without an idea of microbes and contagion, you would only see that death follows death, that maybe the dead want to recruit more dead... and you would try to understand with ritual or superstition or religion or vampires.

2) Level of (for want of a better word) lawlessness. Before about 1780, there was no such thing as a police force. A king *could* send in the military if it suited his purposes.

Sometimes the village men would form a watch, but the primary purpose was fire prevention and stopping victimization was optional... but there was no organization to investigate and punish crimes. If someone killed a family member you had a choice between revenge and sucking it up. You could go to the magistrate or equivalent and ask him to do something about it, but it would be his choice. This is compounded if there were active bands of outlaws or if the people lived on or near a war zone.

Unless a local lord or king (someone whose primary duty was to enforce social norms and protect the group by application of skilled violence) got involved, the only thing resembling justice was vengeance.

If you refused to participate in vengeance, you were marked as easy prey and would continue to be victimized. The only safety lay in a willingness (and preferably ability) to meet force with force.

3) Difficulty of killing: killing well and efficiently hand-to-hand takes some skill and fitness. Peasants rarely had the time to practice. Medieval agriculture or fishing was a daily grind of backbreaking, exhausting toil with no guarantee of enough food. Repetitive hard work forged bodies into inflexibility. Farmers could be tough and strong, but they made shitty fighters.

The good fighters were the nobles, not because of the leisure time, but because fighting was their birthright and full time profession. Then start tacking on things like a weapon that no peasant could ever dream of affording, armor and a horse that would beggar and starve families just in upkeep, and you wind up with very segregated fighters and non-fighters...and villagers were utterly helpless when the nobles wanted something.

Until the advent of the gun, especially the revolver. Something that made a consumptive skinny guy (Doc Holliday) into a force to be reckoned with. Something that made nobility based on skill at arms obsolete. Something that,

for the first time in all of recorded history, gave simple villagers and farmers the ability to stand up to people who ruled by force of arms.

4) That means that a skilled fighter could take anything he wanted with almost complete impunity. A Japanese noble could cut down a farmer, tradesman or merchant for not bowing quickly enough. A man with a sword could take any shepherdess he wanted and no one could do anything.

And, born and bred in a world where that was normal, no one saw anything wrong with it. They didn't *like* it. There was resentment and hatred and fantasies of revenge. But the idea that there was something inherently wrong, that there is an abstract and universal concept of good or evil or even justice, is a very modern idea.

When you hear the phrase "Divine right of kings" or even "insha'allah" it was a literal belief at the time. As I was told in Iraq, everyone hated Saddam Hussein because everyone had suffered. But Allah put him in that position AND Allah *made him who he was*. Everyone hated Saddam, hated the regime... but to say that what he did was inherently wrong would be to say that Allah is capable of being wrong. You just pray that God will give the next ruler a more merciful heart and move on with your life.

5) Violence was, for centuries, the most efficient tool to get what you wanted, and everyone knew it. The rape that naturally followed conquest for most of history was a far easier way to spread genes than raising children. You could pillage food in a day that would take you six months of labor to grow.

It was not until the combination of free markets and a press that trade became easier and more profitable than conquest. The rise of mercantilism, slowly, made cultivating trading partners a better strategy than conquering, raiding, or enslaving.

6) The world has rarely been secure. We assume a level of stability that rarely existed in the past. In much of the under-developed world today, saving money and planning for a future doesn't make sense because it doesn't work.

Before banks, money saved could be stolen. When taxes were based on the whim of a noble or the tax collector, a rumor of money meant you would have it taxed, or simply stolen. It was a better strategy to spend it on others who may someday fall into money when you needed it.

If you are ever in a position to advise people in developing countries how to save and plan for the future, they will be resistant. For many, their future and institutions have never been stable enough to make that a good idea.

After the advent of banks, it wasn't much different. What was to keep the person running the bank from simply keeping the money? Even if it was guaranteed by the government, what did that mean when the government might be overthrown at any time?

7) The idea that all people are equal, or even that all people have some value, is a very modern concept. Not just what we today call racism, but the idea that anyone outside your tribe or not related by blood was fair game, non-human, was common in much of history. This belief still drives and promotes much of the violence in modern tribal societies.

Those are some factors. The one opinion that I will share is that the more peaceful a society gets (lenient punishments and ineffective/unarmed enforcement) the better being violent works, the more it pays and the easier it is to get away with.

A thought experiment:

If you believed that there was a good chance your children would starve tomorrow, and no one was going to help you, what would you be willing to do?

Would you steal? Rob? (If you don't know the difference, robbery is stealing by force or the threat of force.) Would you murder? Would you get together a band of friends to pillage another village—even a village that might be worse off than yours?

Would you prostitute yourself? Would you prostitute one of your children to feed the others? For some reason that question brings up deeper soul-searching than the almost glib answers to the theft and murder questions.

If this situation of near-starvation was never going to end, if it was a constant (or seasonal) threat, you are an adaptable human—how long would it take you to come to terms with your decision? How long does it take you to convince yourself that your life of robbery, murder or prostitution is correct, even noble?

And do you then teach these attitudes to your children?

In modern times, only addicts are really in this mindset, but before current social safety nets and the extreme affluence of the modern age, many people lived here. For millennia.

In one of the colonial reconstructions (in Virginia?) they showed the jail cell. It was about ten feet by ten feet. It was the only jail cell for the entire colony. One of the tourists commented that there couldn't have been much crime back then. The tour guide said, no, it's just that people weren't held for punishment. The penalty for every felony was death by hanging. The cell was just a place to hold people while the gallows was set up.

Recap

-When you write a twelfth century rogue, the character will slit throats without thinking or hesitation. He will care more about not getting messy than having nightmares. He won't try to hide evidence because no one will look.

-When you write the twelfth century damsel, bodice ripping isn't romantic-- it is the prelude to a rape, something that she has probably experienced from those more powerful with no consequences since she was a child.

-When you are thinking about a violent person living in a violent time, they would do things that are unthinkable from the comfort of our places and times, do them with ruthless efficiency and be completely okay with it.

[Chapter 16: The Final Rant](#)

What bugs me about fiction and movies?

Almost every damn detail.

The heroes fight people that no one would fight for reasons that are pitiful to funny to unbelievable. Then when they do fight, they fight stupid and the more bad-ass the character is, the stupider he fights, almost the opposite of the real world. They avoid weapons and ambushes and those are how real fighters get the job done and stay alive.

The inexperienced person that hires them says, "I'm coming along and you can't stop me." Trust me, if you hired me to kill ten people I can sure as hell stop you from following. Or I can slap the shit out of you for being a whiney amateur who will get the person I'm supposed to rescue killed because of your combination of stupidity and arrogance.

They play up guns like they are easy to use (as if just telling someone to shoot the zombies in the head will suddenly make a high school kid pull off something that Olympic medalists have failed to do under stress) and then either play up the damage (people getting knocked down from handgun bullets) or play down the damage, ("It went right through the shoulder, I'll be fine.")

I haven't used much bad language yet, but the willful ignorance in those scenes makes me want to puke.

They approach fighting as if it was a sport-- do a training montage and get in shape and you can hold your own. Experienced sport fighters get blown over and blindsided when it's for real because they have no idea what to expect. That's assuming they don't just get shot, like champion Alex Gong.

I freakin' hate the 'knockout' where you get hit in the head and go to sleep for a little bit and are just fine, as opposed to the days of dizziness and puking and giddiness and the bad coordination and the very real possibility of going blind and all that from a shot that wasn't hard enough to make me lose consciousness.

And I hate, hate, hate when an author uses the same level of emotional power for a life-threatening situation that they use for an emotional issue. "Does he really love me?" Is bullshit angst. "Will I live to see my children again?" Is fear. An author who doesn't know the difference gets my absolute, undying and total contempt.

Authors and script writers try to take something that, at its heart, is a dirty and dangerous job and try to make it noble. It has a lot more in common with driving a garbage truck than it does with riding a white horse.

Anyone see "Jail Break" the TV series? T-Bag is the average criminal. Yep. Clearly the writer's worse nightmare but he would barely blip my radar. The only reason they don't get away with as much in a real prison or jail is because almost the entire pool of potential victims is just exactly the same. So they got one detail right, and made it seem special, an aberration.

There's more, but that should be enough of a rant for now. That's why I keep reminding y'all that I'm not your target audience and try to stay away from advice on that.

[Chapter 17: Random Details](#)

I've tried to organize the subjects in a semblance of logic and order, but in many ways violence is the soul of chaos and there are a bunch of things that don't fit in discrete areas. And these things are some of the details you might be able to mine to enrich your writing. So here goes, in no particular order:

^[1]_{SEP}-An infighter is someone who prefers fighting at extremely close range, chest-to-chest, chest-to-shoulder, chest-to-back. I sometimes call it halitosis range. Most people feel safer the farther they are away from the threat- so you get punchers and kickers. Infighting finishes things fast and combines damage with controlling the body. It's more tactile than visual. Most people can be taken down by someone who fights closer.

Physically, that's because it is harder to stay away than it is to close. Mentally it is because there tends to be a fear reaction to things that fight closer than you. The farther away you can kill someone, the cleaner and more civilized it seems. When you run into someone who is willing to kill at biting range it is terrifying for most people.

-If a woman is pushed to violence, her defaults will be to do damage and to use a tool. When a guy is pushed over the line, his default will be to do techniques that don't do much damage and to do so bare-handed.

There are cultural variations, of course, but even at the height of European dueling, a man would slap his opponent

(empty hand, no damage) to signal the desire to duel. A samurai had a right to instantly cut down anyone who insulted him, *provided they were of a lower caste*. Within caste, tribe, or group men doing less damage and empty-handed is the norm. It is social violence.

-Being the ambusher is a great advantage. As she is moving in she has time (if she knows what she is doing) to adjust her own adrenaline level to get closer to her peak, to the zone.

That's usually a combination of training and experience, but there are breathing exercises specifically for it (autogenic or 'warrior breathing'--in for a count of four, hold for a count of four, exhale for a count of four... repeat. Takes too much time to use in a fight but can be used during the build-up or the approach.) Officers have time to do it when responding to calls.

There is also an advantage in that the bad guys will be somewhat adrenalized. Due to the tunnel vision and auditory exclusion effects it is very easy to sneak up on people who are already fighting and get in a great position.

-Instant kills. Most take some time. The only instant kill on a human body is the brainstem, which is hard to reach with a knife. There are a lot of places that shut people down quickly, though. We are getting out of my direct experience here and what follows is stuff I have been trained (primarily military).

I have been told that kidney stabs make the victim go into shock almost instantly. You can hit the ascending aorta by stabbing down behind the collarbone and the person bleeds to unconsciousness in seconds (I'd guess ten, given that people with their heads cut off try to keep talking for about seven seconds...) A neck break, especially an inward and upward strike with a tool against the first cervical vertebrae is probably the fastest and most reliable (death in a minute or less but paralysis instantly).

To clarify, when I mention brainstem as the only instant kill, it is the one place where the person goes dead and limp. If you blow a gigantic hole in someone's head and miss the brainstem, heels will kick and there might be something that looks like seizure activity and the body will keep trying to breathe for some time. Not pretty. If the finger is on a trigger, the hand will clench reflexively and fire.

Hostage rescue snipers train to hit that spot, which means putting a bullet directly in the brainstem. The aim points are the tip of the nose from the front, the ear hole from the side or the first cervical vertebra from the rear.

There is a system to breaking a neck and it is to twist and bend (with a few exceptions, doing only one just strains the muscles) but the neck is both strong and flexible. The military systems to do a neck break usually involve full falling body weight or (and this is something that a lot of people for some reason forget) using a tool. A shovel or the edge of your own helmet will do damage to the c-spine (cervical spine, the neck) with a lot less effort and precision skill.

-There is a group, [Cane Masters](#), that both teach fighting with canes and make special hardwood versions with some extras. It's not something I've studied, but I have a friend near Victoria BC who teaches it. *La canne* is also taught in *savate*, and some hapkido instructors teach it as well.

-One of the universal things with shock, whether fear induced, from blood loss or hypothermia, is that people tend to get very stupid and very stubborn about it. Not getting blood stains on the carpet may seem more important than stopping the blood flow...and then they will argue with anyone who tries to question their screwed-up, shock-induced priorities.

-Tempering is an important artform that can destroy a sword or create something so miraculous that people try to reproduce it for generations. How hot you get it followed by how fast you cool it followed by slowly heating it up again (but to a much lower temperature) makes an amazing blade or a throw away. Katanas were wrapped in clay, thick on the spine, thin or none on the edge, so when they were quenched, the spine cooled slowly, ideally making a tough flexible sword, and the edge cooled quickly, usually making for a hard edge that could take and keep a serious honing.

-The hand is one of the primary targets in a sword fight. It is in range well before anything else (except sometimes the lead knee) and tends to stop the guy from fighting back when his fingers and sword drop to the ground (only one of my fingers and my thumbs haven't been broken yet in sword training). Bell guards make great punching tools and you can design the quillions to be blade catchers, which is pretty cool. The pommel can also be used as a weapon (where the word pummeling comes from). One detail is that the fancy pommels with dragon heads or wolves or whatever? Those little pretty bronze ears or horns tear the shit out of your forearm when you are practicing with the weapon.

-Eye contact is way over-romanticized. There's a time for it, but staring in the eyes or glaring is what wannabe's trying to look tough do. When you get the sensation of someone's eyes 'boring right through you' what you are picking up is that the eyes may be pointed at you but are out of focus. They are, in fact, focused to a point way behind you, where the horizon would be. This is the 'thousand yard stare' and it has nothing to do with shock or psychological damage. Focused vision, what you get with the center of your pupils, is great for picking up details but has the slowest reaction speed of any of the senses except, possibly, smell or taste. The thousand yard stare puts your hands, feet, shoulders and hips in the peripheral vision, which has much faster reaction time. It also helps break the tunnel vision problem.

Fighting or even sparring, I often deliberately look away. The threat is still in my peripheral vision, it reads as if I am unconcerned and it drastically improves my reaction time. Good benefits.

Infighting you can do with your eyes closed. In seminars, I usually get the students to try blindfolded infighting. The

amount of information you can pick up by touch strikes most as amazing. Not only can you target precisely (with only a little practice most can accurately kick a knee just by the contact of a hand on the shoulder) but since almost any movement is preceded by a slight shift in weight, you can feel what the threat is about to do... sort of a combative precognition.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Rory Miller is the author of the acclaimed "Meditations on Violence" (YMAA 2008) and the forthcoming "Facing Violence" (YMAA 2011). He has worked as a correctional professional (officer, sergeant, tactical team leader, trainer, mental health specialist) and an advisor in Iraq. Thirty years of martial arts training and nearly twenty years dealing with violent criminals have given him a unique perspective on issues of violence and conflict. This is his first e-book for Smashwords.

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VIOLENCE



A Writer's Guide

Rory Miller