

A WUSHU GUIDE TO...

CUT-FU



THE ANCIENT ART
OF THE SWORD FIGHT

Written by Daniel Bayn

Loath Your Fellow Man
www.Bayn.org

INTRODUCTION

WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?

Cut-Fu is about kicking unholy ass with anything that chops, slices, or stabs. It's about cutting the cardinal's men to ribbons with a bow and a flourish! It's about swinging from the rigging of your pirate ship while turning aside the blades of imperial soldiers. It's about dispatching your old nemesis with a single, lightning stroke.

The first section of this Wushu guide covers the essentials: types of blades, basic fencing maneuvers, and cinematic stunts. Next, we show you how to run one-on-one duels with the Wushu system, for all your Nemesis slaughtering needs. Then, we give you plenty of reasons to bring knives to gunfights, so you can incorporate blades into modern and sci-fi games. Finally, you'll get to see Cut-Fu in action via some detailed (and extended) examples of play.

When we're finished, you'll be a whirling dervish of steel of blood!

HOW DO I USE IT?

As you may have discerned from the title, Cut-Fu was written for the Wushu role-playing system. That's why there are so many references to "Yang dice," "Chi," and "Embellishments." However, since Wushu is so ridiculously rules-light, most of the content is general enough to use with any game.

The ancient art of the sword fight is informed by a fencing class I once took, a few episodes of "Crusade" (on the History Channel), and many hours of wuxia action movies. Go rent a few; they'll help you visualize all this cinematic insanity and keep you entertained for many glorious hours. Here's the short list...

- **Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon** (CTHD) - Despite its length and inconsistent pacing, this high-budget wuxia film includes a lot of excellent swordplay.
- **Hero** - This wuxia masterwork hits the US in December 2003. The swordplay, particularly the scene with Jet Li *and* Donnie Yen, is spec-friggin-tacular!
- **The Hunted** - Amazing knife fighting, and from Tommy Lee Jones, no less!
- **Blade I & II** - The first movie, in particular, has some excellent mook whomin'.
- **Highlander** - Stylish sword fight choreography is the only saving grace of these movies. Personally, I prefer the TV series.
- **(Almost) Any 3 Musketeers Movie** - Yes, Even the live-action Disney movie, which I rather enjoyed. You can safely skip "The Man In the Iron Mask," though.

SWORD FIGHTS

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

Wushu treats all weapons the same, as far as tactical issues like damage, reach, and speed are concerned. That leaves you free to choose the weapon that best fits your character. To do that, though, you have to know how various types of bladed weapons are meant to be used...

Knives & Daggers - These tiny terrors are as varied and numerous as all of their big brothers combined. They range from pocket-sized utility knives to massive bowie knives to slim sleeve daggers. Modern knife fighting techniques teach you to hold the blade forward, like you would a steak knife, and attack with quick jabs and slashes. Medieval techniques used an underhand grip, usually to stab downward through the ribcage and into the heart. You can also use a dagger with a long sword, as an off hand parrying weapon, and they're easy to throw.

Short Blades - There's no clear line between a dagger and a short sword, but short swords tend to *look* more like long swords. The samurai's wakizashi is an excellent example, as is the Roman gladius. They are faster than their larger cousins, meant for quick thrusts and slashes. They are also easier to conceal beneath a coat or in a gym bag. Their primary disadvantage is lack of reach; an opponent with a long sword can hit you before you get close enough to hit them.

Slashy Blades - Most of your traditional swords (broad swords, katanas, sabers, etc.) fall into this category. They're equally good at stabbing and parrying, but their weight and length make them best for slashing attacks. They can hack off limbs, split open abdomens, and lop off heads with relative ease.

Stabby Blades - During the Renaissance, long swords became lighter and faster, like modern fencing foils. Rapiers are lightning quick, but lack the mass for slashing or chopping attacks. Instead, they channel all of their force into the tip, which can deliver extraordinarily precise thrusts. They are archetypal dueling weapons.

Choppy Blades - Heavy blades like axes and machetes are far too slow to provide any kind of defense. Instead, they must be wielded with such aggression that your enemy cannot muster an attack. Screaming like a madman never hurts, either.

Wacky Blades - In the Middle Ages, most soldiers carried pole arms; these spear-like weapons could keep swordsmen at a safe distance and even take out knights on horseback. There are countless Martial Arts weapons with blades of one type or another: the hook swords seen in CTHD, the sickle-like kama, and so on. Oh, and don't forget the scythe, official melee weapon of the grim reaper!

FENCING 101

In a Wushu game, the key to victory is creative and exciting narration. To embellish a sword fight, you need to know the basic vocabulary. This is not meant as a technical glossary, only as a way to give you terms more colorful than “attack” and “defend.”

Thrust - A direct, stabbing attack. A particularly long-distance thrust is called a “lunge.” This is the most efficient form of attack for most sword types. The key to embellishing a thrust is in the peripheral details: your target (hand, heart, leg, eye), the speed of the attack, your footwork, the way the sun glints off your blade, and so forth.

Slash - I use this as a general term for any swinging attack. You can make long, slow slashes to sever limbs, quick slashes designed to exploit momentary weaknesses, and fancy-looking, spinning slashes that resemble dance moves more than combat tactics. As with a thrust, the key is in the peripheral details.

Parry - Any move that blocks an incoming attack. This is usually done with your own sword, but there are other options. Shields are always popular, from tiny bucklers to the full-body shields preferred by the Romans. You can also parry with a weapon in your off hand, usually a dagger. There are even fencing techniques that use a cape or coat in the off hand to parry attacks and blind opponents.

Feint - A fencer is always most vulnerable when they’ve committed to a move, whether in offense or defense. A feint is a fake attack designed to get your enemy to commit to a particular defense, creating vulnerabilities elsewhere. The attacker then switches the direction of their attack, striking where it will be most difficult to parry.

Riposte - An attack made after parrying an enemy’s attack. Many times, skilled fencers will intentionally leave themselves vulnerable in order to bait their opponent into a particular attack, then executing a particularly fast or clever counter-attack.

Lock - This one’s a cinematic favorite, because it can be used to bring two fighters together for a dramatic close-up! You can take control of an enemy’s blade by trapping it in a wall, grabbing it with your off hand, tangling it up in another enemy’s ribcage, pinning it with your own blade... the possibilities are endless. In the movies, both combatants lock each other’s blades at the same time, drawing them face-to-face so they can trade snappy one-liners.

Disarm - Any attack that is designed to take an opponent’s weapon away from them, rather than injure them directly, is a disarm. In a Wushu game, an unarmed opponent is just as dangerous as any other, so you might not get much mileage out these little maneuvers. Still, it’s something to keep in mind, especially if a gun is involved. Take Batman’s typical response to gun-toting thugs: disarm via bat-a-rang.

CUT-FU STUNTS

You have your weapon, you know how to fight, now it's time to cut loose with the kind of over-the-top stunts that Wushu does best! The key to Cut-Fu is not to integrate your martial arts with your swordplay, it's to integrate a sword into your martial arts.

The Slippery Disarm - A sleight of hand trick for stealing your adversary's weapon. It requires a little grappling, either unarmed or with a parrying weapon. A deft twist of the wrist later, you're stabbing them with their own blade! (You can pull the same trick with thrown weapons by grabbing them out of the air and throwing them back.)

The Monkey Parry - This classic anti-mook maneuver redirects an enemy's attack to another target, usually one of their fellow mooks. You know the drill: Duck a swing and the guy behind you gets his head lopped off. Sidestep a thrust and he gets impaled. Grab the knife arm of a guy on either side and pull their blades down into each other's stomachs. Plus, you can always throw mooks into a bunch of their friends.

The Lock & Load - This coup de grace is a lock that sets up an attack. First, get your opponent's blade trapped against their body or throat. Then, pull out of the lock and bring their blade with you, slicing them up with their own weapon! Make sure to send them spinning through the air like a hemorrhaging ballerina (See the end of Jet Li's "Fist of Legend" for a spectacular example.)

The Meat Locker - If you don't have any kind of regenerative abilities, you might think twice before trying this one. Execute this unconventional lock by trapping your enemy's blade in your own body, either by taking a thrust to a non-vital area (like the shoulder or between the bones of your arm) or, for shorter blades, impaling the palm of your hand. Thus locked, your enemy is left vulnerable to counter-attack. Make it count!

Keep Moving! - The key to winning against hordes of mooks is to never let them get organized. Always keep moving, making hit-and-fade attacks that keep you out of their reach. By pushing back one flank, then another, you can stop them from closing in.

Don't Forget the Props - Since Wushu lets you place props in the environment as you see fit, there's always a chandelier around to swing from or to drop on unsuspecting mooks. Other sword fight props include banisters to throw people over, chairs to use as parrying weapons, and moving vehicles to stand on while you duel. You can also invent trick weapons on the fly, like knives or guns hidden in the hilt of your sword.

Stances & Styles - You can always grab extra dice by slapping wacky names on any of your moves. Samurai types may call a maneuver "Fox Ducks Under the Fence" or "Angry Monkey Stance." Western sword masters may use "The Montoya Defense" or a "Parisian Gambit." You might want to write a few down between sessions; it can be hard to improvise good ones during a game.

DUELS

Sword duels between masters of equal skill (like a PC and a Nemesis) have a style all their own. Understanding that style, and how to reflect it in Wushu, is essential for running truly classy, climatic sword fights.

Pacing - Whereas the spotlight is held on one character at a time during most Wushu rounds, a sword duel requires much faster back-and-forth between combatants. Each side (usually a player and the GM) should limit themselves to 1-3 Embellishments at a time. That's enough to describe most feints, ripostes, and other maneuvers. You may need to increase the maximum dice pool to avoid stopping too often to roll.

The Duel Is In the Mind - it is said that two samurai masters can fight an entire duel without ever drawing their swords. If you're familiar with the principle of the psych-out, you're half way there. You can spend the entire first round of a duel just circling your opponent, measuring their skill, and/or intimidating them into submission. For a more artistic approach, you could fight a "shadow" round that takes place in the characters' minds. (See "Hero" for the quintessential example.)

Advantage, Not Injury - A good duel can go on for quite some time without either side scoring a solid hit, but that's not to say no one's winning in the meantime. In a duel, the first few hits on each character should be considered losses of tactical advantage, not necessarily wounds. The attacker has moved into a better position, pushed their opponent into a worse position, put them in a lock, disarmed them, whatever. The victim then spends Chi to stay in the fight, not to avoid the lock or keep their weapon.

Witty Repartee - Most duels are not just about physical confrontation. At their core is some deeper conflict between the characters themselves, perhaps a philosophical difference or some personal rivalry. The resolution of the duel should reflect the resolution of this conflict, and the way you do that is through dialogue and snappy one-liners (which get you bonus dice, naturally). Usually, the dialogue goes something like this: 1) Villain taunts hero into making the first attack, then counters. 2) Hero defends himself, then refutes the villain's position. 3) Villain tells Hero why they are wrong, and either gains the upper hand or makes a fatal mistake. 4) Hero sums up their belief in a snappy sound bite, then delivers the coup de grace!

The Coup de Grace - This is the "stroke of mercy" that ends a victim's suffering. Duels are often decided by a single stroke of the sword, so you should save your ultra-sweet finishing move for when you know the fight is won. In other words, a Wushu duel is fought for the right to narrate a coup de grace. There's no need to roll the dice. Your opponent has already been defeated.

What this means in game terms is that the loser has over-spent their Chi. If both duelists go negative in the same round, the loser is the one who went below zero the

most. If they're tied, fight one more round to break the tie. (This could be one of those dramatic finishes where the hero, seemingly defeated, turns the tables on his adversary at the last possible moment!)

Unless you're at the end of a one-shot game, or maybe if you're running a true-to-form samurai game, you should let the winner of the duel walk away regardless of how far negative their Chi went. Just reset them to zero, so the speak. They're still up and walking around (barely!), but the next hit will knock 'em out cold.

Finally, note that these guidelines are not necessarily exclusive to sword duels. They could also be used for sniper duels, wild west showdowns, those classic kung-fu tournament fights, or a down and dirty battle to the death between drunken soccer hooligans. Any dramatic, mono-a-mono confrontation is fair game.

BRINGING KNIVES TO GUNFIGHTS

Okay, so swords are cool. We can all agree on that. But there's a reason that modern armies and police forces don't use them: they're no good against guns. Fortunately, the role-playing milieu allows us to take certain liberties with tactical reality. If you want to use blades in a setting dominated by guns, just pick your favorite excuse...

You Can Dodge Bullets! - Bullets are tiny and only threaten a particular point in space for a fraction of a second. Characters with preternatural reflexes have no trouble ducking or sidestepping them. In fact, most handguns and SMGs are inaccurate enough that your average Mook won't be able to hit a normal person at a distance... as long as they keep moving. (That's why gunfighters in John Woo movies jump around so much!) Even trained soldiers will have a hard time drawing and firing at a target who's within a few dozen feet; rush them and get in close enough that they can't bring their gun to bear. Then, cut 'em up!

You Can Block Bullets! - Think of this one as the Jedi Principle. Bullets have very little mass, so it's easy to knock them out of the air with a decent sword blade, provided you have the reflexes, precognition, or cybernetically-augmented senses to pull it off. Kevlar armor also does an excellent job of blocking bullets, but a good knife (or arrow head) will slice through it like warm butter.

Hey, That Tickles! - Most gunshot deaths are caused by shock, not blood loss or any kind of catastrophic injury. In the genres most beloved by role-players, many hostile entities are not so easy to put down. On the other hand, even a regenerating soldier, walking corpse, or killer cyborg will be averse to losing an arm, an intestine, or their head. Again, possessing such a power will also make player-characters less afraid of firearms, freeing them up to rely on their trusty axe or rapier.

Bullets Are Expensive! - Okay, they pretty damn cheap in most modern settings, but your average post-apocalypse is quite another story! You can also artificially limit access to ammunition during an adventure by trapping your player-characters in a remote wilderness, or just not giving them any spare clips. When bullets become a commodity, a weapon that works as long as you have the strength to swing it starts to look better and better.

Bullets Are Traceable! - Modern forensics can match a bullet to a gun based merely on the pattern of scratches the latter leaves on the former. In sci-fi settings, ballistics might be even more traceable, and/or tightly regulated by the government. Assuming your characters are engaged in some manner of illicit activity (gasp!), they may want to avoid weaponry with so little discretion.

No Mojo for Bullets! - A key difference between bullets and blades is that the former does its work when beyond the user's immediate control, both physically and mystically. The sword is an extension of the self, and therefore an extension of its wielder's will. Got superhuman speed? So does your sword. Know how to channel lightning? Steel is notoriously conductive. Bullets pale in comparison.

Bad Mojo for Bullets! - Conversely, bullets may also be easier for your adversaries to work *their* mojo on, for the same reason. Telekinetics will have a much easier time turning away bullets than wresting control of your broadsword away from you. A gun's inner workings are easily sabotaged by magic, but steel never misfires.

Why Decide? - Blades and bullets... two great tastes that taste great together! Even if one of the above excuses is in effect, there are many ways to use a gun and a sword together. First, you could use the sword as a parrying weapon against bullets, as described above. Second, you could save the gun as a hold-out weapon, either because bullets are expensive or because bullets are traceable. Many pirates used their flintlocks as parrying weapons after firing their single shot at point blank range. Finally, there's always the bayonet: a blade mounted on the end of a gun.

Guns are Despicable! - On the other hand, there are plenty of character types for whom guns are simply too distasteful to wield in combat. Honorable samurai, anachronistic western duelists, luddites who refuse all modern technology, and many others who commonly find themselves among the ranks of player-characters.

CUT-FU IN ACTION

SWASHING YOUR BUCKLE (OR BUCKLING YOUR SWASH)

While the crew of the *Kraken* is ashore, burying their booty, an Imperial boarding party draws alongside the ship. It's up to the cook and the cabin boy to repel the scurvy invaders! The cabin boy rushes into the hold to grab his cutlass and pistol, while the cook retrieves his favorite weapons from the galley: a pair of huge butcher knives. By the time they've armed themselves, the Imperials are already climbing onto the deck!

The Cabin Boy (Spunky 4) sails up from the cargo hold, pulled skyward by a severed cargo line (+1). He fires his pistol at the closest Imperial (+1) and screams the wild battle cry of his Gurka ancestors (+1) as he zips up into the rigging, safe from their panicked return fire (+1).

This boarding party is just the appetizer before the game's main course (an all-out assault by the Imperial battleship), so the GMs gives them a mild Threat Rating of 15. The Cabin Boy rolls his 4 bonus dice for attack and keeps his default die for defense, getting 3 Yang successes and 1 Yin success. He suffers no gunshot wounds for his daring stunt and knocks the mooks' Threat Rating down to 12.

Now that the Imperials are out of ammo, the Cook (Slice & Dice 4) wades into battle, swinging his twin meat cleavers with abandon (+1)! He hacks off a mook's sword hand (+1), rendering him helpless, and knocks another over the side with a well-placed kick (+1). Then, he quickly blocks a pair of sword thrusts on his left flank (+1) and yells, "You look like a meaty one! I'd love to have you for dinner!" (+1).

The Cook maxes out his dice pool at 6: 5 bonus dice plus his default die. He chooses to roll 5 Yang and 1 Yin, getting 4 Yang successes, but no Yin successes! One of those attacks on his flank must have been a little too quick; he loses a point of Chi. However, he also brings the mooks' Threat Rating down to 8.

The Cabin Boy sees his friend take one in the ribs and rushes to the rescue! He cuts loose some of the rigging and swings down into the fray (+1), lopping off a powdered wig (and the head beneath it) with his cutlass (+1). He lets go of the rope and does a quick back flip (+1) before landing on the deck. He grabs his pistol by the barrel and uses the grip to parry a vicious swing (+1), then runs the brigand through (+1)!

Six dice for the Cabin Boy, too! Still on the offensive, he rolls just one Yin die and rolls the the other 5 for attack, getting 1 Yin success and 4 Yang successes. He loses no Chi to the mook and drops their Threat Rating to a rapidly diminishing 4.

The Cook's had just about enough of these salty wankers! He goads one of the two remaining mooks into a foolish attack by juggling his butcher knives, appearing to leave himself undefended (+1). When the mook lunges forward, the cook steps to the side (+1) and lets the mook stab his comrade (who is fighting the Cabin Boy behind him) right in the spine (+1)! Then, the Cook snatches one of his cleavers out of the air (+1) and buries it in the clumsy oaf's neck (+1).

The Cook knows the end is near, and he's still got Chi to burn, so he goes on an all-out offensive, rolling 6 Yang dice! He loses 1 point of Chi for not defending himself, but nabs 4 Yang successes, which is just enough to send the last of those Imperial swine to Davy Jones' Locker!

SAMURAI PSYCH-OUT

Zi (Kendo 5) stares into the Black Heron's eyes (Artist with a Blade 5) and watches the entire duel play out in her mind. Every stance, every move unfolds before her. They face each other on a silent battlefield of anticipation, where conviction and character, not physical reality, dictate the course of events. Only when this psychic duel is won will she deliver the real stroke. *(In other words, this a handy excuse for wuxia stunts in an otherwise mundane setting.)*

She draws her katana like a lightning bolt (+1) and snaps it's chiseled edge towards her opponent's throat (+1). The Black Heron shifts his weight back, just out of reach (+1). He pulls his mammoth war sword from its scabbard (+1) and swings it straight down, cleaving the air above Zi's head (+1). She raises her blade and gently guides the heavier weapon to the side (+1), then runs up her adversary's chest (+1), kicks him in his armored face (+1) and backflips out of reach (+1). The Heron leaps over a dozen feet into the air (+1), covering the distance in mere moments (+1), and brings his war sword down at a sharp angle across Zi's body (+1). She kicks off the ground and floats up to the lowest of the temple's three tiered roofs (+1), well out of harm's way (+1). Her enemy snarls in frustration (+1) and follows her skyward (+1).

That's a whole lotta dice! Both characters get 8 bonus dice, plus their default die, for a total of 9. Zi takes a balanced stance, rolling 5 Yang and 4 Yin. The GM is on the war path, so he devotes 7 dice to attack and rolls just 2 Yin dice. Zi gets 4 Yang successes against the Herons 2 Yin successes, so he cashes in 2 of his 3 Chi. However, the GM rolls a much more impressive 6 Yang successes against Zi's 3 Yin successes, wiping out her Chi with 3 hits. In this instance, that means that Zi has been driven onto the defensive; the Black Heron is intimidating her back in the real world.

Now atop the roof, Zi slips into "Lunatic's Revenge," a wildly offensive stance (+1). Her nemesis adopts the "Wu Shan's Relentless Onslaught" (+1). Zi swings wide, striking at the Herons left flank (+1). When he moves to parry (+1), Zi drops her weapon (+1), grabs his sword arm (+1), and twists the blade into his stomach (+1). He bellows in agony (+1), pulls a concealed knife out of the hilt of his sword (+1), and stabs down

into Zi's chest, aiming for her heart **(+1)**.

Two evenly matched combatants, both near the end of their Chi. They know victory will be a matter of chance, so both hedge their bets , rolling 3 Yang dice and 3 Yin dice. It all comes down to the roll: Zi gets 3 Yang successes for her spectacular feint, but only 2 Yin successes. The Black Heron slips up with 2 Yang successes, not enough to get through Zi's defenses. He rolls only one Yin success, reducing him to -1 Chi. Zi has turned the tables by exploiting her adversary's over-confidence. Now, she gets to narrate a coup de grace...

Back in the real world, Zi glimpses defeat in her enemy's eyes. She springs forward like a striking snake, whips her katana up from its sheath, and slices his neck open. Arterial blood sprays behind her like a crimson fan. Her blade is back in its scabbard before his body hits the ground.

DEFENDING A LADY'S HONOR

The Earl of Saint Nazine (Duelist 4) has recently suffered a most egregious insult at the hands of a Spaniard (Swordsman 5). The blackguard had the gall to say, in public, that the Earl's female companion had an "inviting smile." Well, you can imagine the Earl's outrage at such a vulgar insinuation! Why, the mere idea that she would willfully "invite" men's attentions is so ghastly that the Earl drew his saber on the scoundrel right then and there. However, as dueling is forbidden within city limits (by the Earl's own decree), he had to settle for the Spaniard's promise to meet him outside the city gates at sunset. Now is the appointed hour...

"So," the Earl says as the Spaniard dismounts. "You are a man of your word, after all. I would have thought you'd be aboard the fastest ship in the harbor by now." **(+1)**

"And I would have thought a man with such a beautiful woman on his arm would spend his evenings in bed" replies the Spaniard. **(+1)**

"I shall cut that foul tongue from its moorings!" **(+1)** The Earl draws his saber and lunges forward **(+1)**. The Spaniard parries with his rapier **(+1)**, then draws a dagger and slashes at the Earl's throat **(+1)**. Ducking under the riposte **(+1)**, the Earl spins around, getting close enough to smell his adversary's fetid breath **(+1)**, and delivers a punishing elbow smash to his face **(+1)**. The Spaniard disengages with a quick step back **(+1)** and removes the Earl's powdered wig with the tip of his sword **(+1)**.

That's a pretty good opening bout. The Earl gets a total of 7 dice; he chooses to roll 4 of them in offense and 3 in defense. The GM takes the Spaniard's 6 dice and splits them evenly into Yin and Yang. The Earl rolls 3 Yang successes and 2 Yin successes, while the GM gets 3 of each. The Spaniard is just getting warmed up, but the Earl must cash in one of his 3 points of Chi. His anger has put him at a disadvantage.

The Earl, his bald head flushed with rage (+1), rushes forward and swings savagely for the Spaniard's left leg (+1). The Spaniard moves his parrying dagger to block **(+1)**, but it was a feint! The Earl's saber has already pivoted up to strike at the Spaniard's head (+1). He is forced to parry with his rapier **(+1)**, stopping the saber just inches from the tip of his nose **(+1)**. The Earl leans hard on his weapon, driving it through the block (+1). The Spaniard whips his parrying dagger up from its lowered position **(+1)**, slides it into the saber's crossguard, and rips the sword out of the Earl's grasp **(+1)**. This time, it's the Earl's turn to jump back, out of reach (+1).

The Earl was definitely on the offensive this round, so he rolls 4 Yang dice and 2 Yin dice. Once again, the Spaniard splits his 6 dice evenly. This time, he rolls a couple of sixes, resulting in 2 Yang successes and 2 Yin successes. The Earl gets lucky, rolling all 4 Yang successes, and one Yin success. The GM gives up 2 of the Spaniard's 3 Chi, and Earl loses one more of his, leaving both characters with a single point.

"Rendered impotent, once again," the Spaniard gloats **(+1)**. The Earl pulls a knife from his belt and rushes forward (+1). The Spaniard intercepts this wild attack with the point of his rapier by stabbing into the Earl's sword arm **(+1)**. Pain flows into the Earl's mind, clearing it (+1). He leans into the sword thrust, pushing the rapier clean through his forearm (+1) and trapping it between his ulna and radius (+1). The Spaniard brings his dagger to bear **(+1)**, but the Earl impales his off hand on its blade (+1) and twists it up against the Spaniard's throat (+1).

The GM is so impressed with the Earl's mettle that he calls the round then and there. The Spaniard only gets 4 dice, which he splits evenly once again. The Earl takes his 7 dice and rolls 5 Yang dice and 2 Yin dice. He gets an impressive 4 Yang successes and 1 Yin success. All of the Spaniard's dice turn up successes, but it's not enough to save him. The Earl loses his last point of Chi, but the Spaniard loses 2, dropping him to -1 Chi. Now, the Earl gets to execute his coup de grace...

The Spaniard struggles, but cannot liberate his blades from the Earl's body. He begs for mercy. "You can only push a gentleman so far," replies the Earl. "Let this serve as a reminder." He draws the dagger up the Spaniard's cheek, drawing a ragged red line from chin to temple. Then, he rides back to his mansion and the virtuous woman who awaits him there.

BUTCHERING SOME GUNBUNNIES

A trio of super-powered vigilantes finds themselves under siege! Their nemesis, the Insidious Doctor Fang, has tipped off the cops as to their hide-out. A small army of kevlar-coated SWAT guys surrounds their derelict warehouse, seals off the exits, and fills the place with a hail of hot lead!

The Reaper (Bringer of Death 5) just walks towards the nearest mob of goons, letting their bullets tear through his regenerating flesh (+1). He drinks in their sweet, sweet fear (+1) as he raises his wicked scythe (+1) and lops off three consecutive heads (+1).

The Blind Man (Perfect Aim 5) dodges to the side (+1) and knocks bullets out of the air with his wakizashi (+1). His scarlet blindfold trails behind him like a parade streamer (+1) as he pulls his desert eagle from its holster (+1) and plugs most of its bullets into a dozen mook's unarmored neck (+1).

The Savage (Hunter 5) leaps into the rafters above (+1), dodging a stream of bullets as he disappears into the shadows (+1). Moments later, his twin machetes hurtle out of the darkness (+1) and cleave both the kevlar and the sternums of two mooks (+1). The Savage's wild howl echoes through the warehouse (+1).

Everybody gets 6 dice this round. The GM gives the SWAT mooks a Threat Rating of 30 due to their armor and high-caliber weapons. The Reaper is an unholy bad ass, so he rolls 5 Yang dice and just a single Yin die; he gets 4 successful attacks, but his Yin die comes up a failure. Apparently, even the undead should fear a solid wall of bullets! He cashes in a point of Chi. The Blind Man and the Savage both roll 4 Yin and 4 Yang; they both get their obligatory 1 Yin success, plus a total of 7 Yang successes. That's a total of 11 successful attacks, reducing the mooks' Threat Rating to 19.

The Reaper lets the next rank pepper him with bullets until they run out of ammo (+1). Then, he chops one off at the knees (+1) and continues his swing up into the skull of the one next to him (+1). He pulls back the hood of his black sweater jacket, exposing his rictus grin and milky white cataracts (+1). The last goon is on the run before he even gets to say "Boo!" (+1)

Now behind cover in the back of the warehouse (+1), the Blind Man senses SWAT guys approaching from both sides (+1), so he leaps out into the open (+1). When the mooks shoot, he uses his waki to deflect bullets from each side into SWAT guys on the other side (+1), shattering their face plates... not to mention their faces (+1).

Meanwhile, the Savage dives out of the rafters like a hawk, hits the ground in a forward roll, yanks his machetes out of two corpses, and comes to his feet smack in the middle of a crowd of four mooks. He drives his blades up into the jaws of the SWAT mooks to either side, kicks the one in front of him square in the jimmy, and reverse head butts the one behind him. By the time they hit the floor, only his howl remains.

The Savage's filibuster nets him 6 dice, same as his two compatriots. Everyone rolls 4 Yang dice and 2 Yin dice. The Reaper gets 3 Yang successes and 2 Yin successes, much safer than last round. The Blind Man gets successes on all 4 Yang dice, but both of his Yin dice come up sixes! He loses a point of Chi. The Savage scores 3 successes to attack, and the obligatory one to defend. That's a total of 10 Yang successes, which leaves the SWAT team at a Threat level of 9.

Sensing the end is near, the Reaper takes his time with the last two on his side. First, he spins his scythe like a windmill (+1) and nails one mook to the wall with the back swing (+1). Then, he reaches towards the second one with a skeletal hand (+1), sinks his fingers into the mook's chest (+1) and stills his beating heart (+1).

Guided by tiny disruptions in the room's feng shui, the Blind Man locates five SWAT snipers in elevated positions around the warehouse. Holding his gun and this wakizashi across his chest, the Blind Man spins out into the center of the room, using his blade to block the snipers' bullets. His desert eagle barks like a machinegun as four rounds explode from its chamber and puncture the eyes of four different snipers. As he finishes spinning, he extends his sword arm and whips his waki right through the kevlar vest of the fifth. Smoke rises from his gun barrel as he comes to rest.

The Savage leaps on one of the last goons like a snarling leopard (+1) and rakes his chest with both machetes (+1). His partner rushes to the rescue, but the Savage parries his kick with the flat of one machete (+1) and hacks his kneecap with the other (+1). As the mook falls to the ground, the Savage brings the first machete up, burying it deep in his skull (+1).

Once again, everyone earns or filibusters the maximum dice pool. The Reaper puts in 4 Yang dice and 2 Yin dice. The Blind Man and the Savage both go in for 5 Yang and 1 Yin. Everyone gets their obligatory 1 Yin success. The Reaper contributes 3 Yang successes, the Blind Man earns 5, and the Savage pulls in 4 more. That's a grand total of 12, which obliterates the mooks' remaining Threat. Of course, our anti-heroes' place has been turned into a corpse-filled block of swiss cheese. Easy come, easy go.