

Beyond the Supernatural House Rules

By Steven Dawes

Weapon Related:

Wooden baseball bats do 1D12+1 damage:

This house rule came about solely as I feel that 12-sided dice are getting ignored more and more these days. So out of sympathy for the 12-sided die, the fact that my players love arming their characters with baseball bats, and the fact that baseball bats are potentially more lethal than a 1D8 suggests, I raised the damage of *wooden* baseball bats to 1D12+1. Aluminum bats still only do 1D6 damage (taken from page 114 of the *Dead Reign* main book).

Note: Till something is released with more details concerning weapons for BTS, the weapons section of the *Dead Reign* main book is a great resource for weapon stats and damage in BTS.

Melee Weapon Proficiency Damage Increase Bonus

In taking a second look at how weapon proficiencies work, virtually all weapon experts that I've researched agree that part of being an expert means knowing how to use a weapon more precisely as well as more lethal in combat.

However, while the precision is covered in the Weapon Proficiencies via bonuses, there's no accounting in the rules for those with expertise in a type of melee weapon as being more dangerous / damaging with it.

In the current format, anyone can pick up a weapon that they've never used before and be just as deadly with it as the 12th level guy with a W.P. in the same weapon. "I have a knife, and I know how to use it" should be scarier than it really sounds with the cannon rules.

To compensate for this, I've created a house rule that adds a +1 damage bonus that's accumulative at levels 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 14, to all melee weapons that the character has the W.P. for. And like new skills that are added as the character progresses, bonuses start at 1st level. Example: A character at 3rd level takes a Blunt W.P. as a new skill. When the character reaches 4th level, his Blunt W.P. is now considered to be 2nd level and gets a +1 damage bonus to his blunt weapons.

Melee weapons do maximum damage with a critical hit:

This house rule stems from the joy of getting a critical hit with a melee weapon only to be deflated and frustrated due to a poor damage roll. For example, if a character without a damage bonus gets a critical strike with a baseball bat and rolls a 1 for damage, all he gets are a lousy 2 points for a critical hit.

I understand this frustration just as much as I understand that BTS characters tend to have a lower P.S. attribute and therefore have less damage bonus potential than other RPG's. So I allow my players to increase the damage of their critical strike to the maximum amount of the melee weapon being used. Using the baseball bat example above, the minimum damage of a critical strike is raised to 6 if it's made of aluminum and 13 if it's made of wood.

Pistol whip and rifle/shotgun smash damage

A pistol whip does 1D6 damage +P.S. bonus, while smashing with the butt of a rifle does 1D8+1damage +P.S. bonus. Note: *W.P. Blunt* bonus will not apply to this attack as it this is not the intended method of using the pistol/rifle/shotgun (and it's difficult to do in this manner with any accuracy). However, characters with *W.P. Gimmick/Improvise skill* may add a bonus to this attack.

Concerning shotguns

The shotgun is a favorite weapon amongst my BTS players, so much so that the game mechanics need to be looked at, discussed and fine-tuned every now and again. So after some discussing, some tinkering and some play testing here and there, I've come up with the following rules when using shotguns:

-When using buckshot ammo (which scatters to cover a 3 ft. area up to 30 feet away which then covers a 10ft area for another 30 feet), this good area coverage lowers the A.R. rating of the target by -2. For example, firing at a *Dybbuk* with a round of buckshot only requires a roll of 11 or higher instead of the usual 13. Of course the tradeoff is that buckshot doesn't do as much damage or travel as far as solid slugs.

-When using buckshot ammo on a shotgun that's equipped with a flashlight, all "single shots" (not bursts) gets an extra +1 to strike when the flashlight is turned on and illuminating the target. The mentality here is that between the mandatory close range use of the shotgun, and the fact that the flashlight beam only has a radius of about three feet in diameter, whatever is in the flashlight's beam will effectively get hit. As a lot of BTS games take place in the dark (or in poor enough lighting that a flashlight is needed), this is a rule that comes into play often. Coincidentally, this mentality has been tested and proven in a lot of first-person horror survival video games.

-Shooting one handed with a rifle is attempted with a -2 penalty to strike, even when aiming or using call shots (unless using the *Trick Shooting* skill). However, if an action is taken to aim a shotgun that's loaded with buckshot, the penalty is removed, due again to the area coverage of the scatter. Note: A saving throw to keeping balance should be made when attempting this action (see the *Shooting from the Hip* rule below for determining how to save.)

“Shooting from the hip”

"Hip shooting" is an action/reaction with a shotgun or rifle as seen in the movies & on TV. This reaction is usually done as a "surprise reflex" or "quick initiative" action when the character wasn't aiming at anything and his rifle was slung or held at his side. As BTS creatures love sneak attacks and jumping out at characters from the shadows, trying to beat the creature's initiative when it's attacking you is an outright survival mechanism (especially if you tend to have lousy dodge rolls).

The rules work like this: The character gets a +3 to initiative when hip shooting, but is at a -2 to strike (no aiming bonus is added as the sights are nowhere near eye level and there's no time to aim). As the stock isn't braced against the shoulder (it's at waist level), there's no recoil absorption when the weapon fires, and may throw the character off balance (needs to make a saving throw to keep his balance).

Using percentage dice, the character attempts to maintain balance save by rolling lower than the combined total of his P.S., his P.P., and his experience level. For example, a 5th level character with both a P.S. & a P.P. of 20 would need to roll a 45% or lower to save. Failing means the character is off balance for the next two actions and loses any bonus they may have for those actions (be it attacking, defending, dodging, etc.)

Note: Characters may use "Sense of Balance" skill if they have it.

“Close Combat Firearm Rules” worth noting

The “Zombie Close Combat Firearm Rules” on page 182-183 of the *Dead Reign* main book works well in a lot of situations with little modification in BTS and I encourage you to use them.

Revolvers do not jam

This rule is being added due to one of my newer players being a “wheel gun man”. GM’s that use any sort of critical fumble rules (such as the Lucky Psychic rules in *Rifter #53*.) that could cause a weapon to jam should note that Revolvers don’t jam like semi-auto handguns do. If the bullet doesn’t fire, it just sits in the chamber, allowing the shooter to simply fire the next bullet.

Skill and Attribute Related:

Weapon Proficiency “Expert” Upgrade

Similar to how select skills can attain a professional quality, W.P. skills can be upgraded to *Expert* at the cost of two skill selections. These skill selections represent the extra time and resources devoted to mastering these particular types of weapons. The payoff to becoming an expert with that weapon type is that it *doubles* the bonuses earned from that W.P. skill. Example: Joe selects the weapon proficiency “Archery”, but decides to become an expert, spending two additional skills to obtain this upgrade. At level 1 he gets a +2 to strike (instead of +1), at level 2 he gets a +4 to strike (instead of +2), at level 4 he gets a +6 to strike (instead of +3) and so on. His bonus to disarm via archery also doubles.

Note: This one affects only the bonuses, not the rate of fire or any of the modifiers on page 167. Needing two actions for a Called Shot or Aimed Shot stays the same, as well as all potential penalties (shooting blind, shooting bursts, shooting at moving targets, etc.) None of the tricks from “Trick Shooting” are altering in anyway either.

Using I.Q. and M.E. attributes for percentage rolls

I believe that the I.Q. & M.E. attributes are important to characters in the BTS world, but they tend to go unnoticed and provide little use outside of a possible skill percentage bonus or a save vs. psionics bonus. I also believe that it can be difficult playing a character with a high I.Q. or who possesses skills than the player knows little about, and role-playing “brainy” characters can suffer because of this.

In an effort to help these players out, I came up with a percentage system that allows the character know something that the player himself may not know or had realized (“I’m not a scientist, but I play one as my character who’d know this stuff”). This also covers the aspect that a character may know something or could make an educated guess about something he lacks the appropriate skill for (“While I’ve never really studied any magic lore, I do recall hearing somewhere that you can use good quality kosher salt for banishment spells”), and for figuring out puzzles, riddles or mental challenges the player has given up on, etc.

The setup is similar to my *shooting from the hip* rules as you add your character’s I.Q. stat, M.E. stat, and level of experience together as the percentage base (representing both the intelligence and the mental agility to recall some obscure details or when figuring out a mental challenge) and attempt a percentage roll by rolling a number that’s less than the total.

Using this rule has resurrected the “GO MENTAL!” article from *The Rifter #19* in my game as the skills presented here are all about raising the mental attributes that don’t get as much use as they should. If you don’t have issue #19, I recommend getting it, if only for this article.

W.P. Gimmick/Improvise

This Weapon Proficiency is for those players who understand that sometimes you have to make use of whatever you have on hand as weapons, and by means available to them. These could include bar stools, broken bottles, pens, pencils, pistol whipping, using the butt of a rifle, choking attacks with cables, neck ties, and so on. Some common sense needs to come into play with this skill however as most objects will break quickly when used as a weapon as this was not their intended use. My general rule is the object suffers ½ the damage it dealt.

+1 to Strike at levels 1, 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15. +1 to throw at level 4, 8, and 12.

Small objects: small or lighter objects like pens, pencils, flashlights, deer antler, bottles, pool ball, bricks, skulls, bowling pins, etc. does 1D6 damage +P.S. bonus, throwing them does 1D4+P.S. bonus.

Larger objects: wooden, plastic or plaster items like chairs, bar stools, crutches, large planks, bowling balls, prosthetic limbs, etc. do 1D6+1 damage +P.S. bonus, while metal objects like chairs, bar stools, foosball rods, gumball machines, handrails, paper cutters, tire irons, electric conduits, iron frying pans, drive shafts, fire poker, etc. does 1D8+1 +P.S. bonus. Throwing any of these items does 1D6 damage +P.S. bonus.

Flexible objects: Objects like coat hangers, neck ties, t-shirts, plastic bags, belts, cables, extension cords, piano wire, etc. does 1D4 damage per choking attack to S.D.C. for the first melee round (15 seconds), then 1D4 directly to Hit Points for every continued choking attack afterwards.

New “Trick Shooting” Selections

I love the *W.P. Trick Shooting* skill, and I felt that more selections were needed.

Spaghetti Western: Can fire two handguns simultaneously without an “off hand penalty” (which is usually -2.) Burst penalties still apply as normal.

Burst Revolver Shooting: This requires using both hands, but the character can fire a revolver quickly while remaining accurate enough that it’s consider burst firing (which is normally not allowed with revolvers per *W.P. Handguns*). Burst penalty applies as normal, and a burst still equals three shots.

Game Rule Related:

Reroll 1's and 2's when rolling for damage:

This house rule allows players to reroll 1's and 2's when rolling for damage. This rule can be as harmful as it is helpful however as they are only allowed to re-roll once, if they roll a 1 or 2 again, the roll was meant to be and the numbers stand. This rule can be detrimental at times because, for example, if a player rolled all 2's and then rerolled the dice, I've seen the outcome where all 1's were rolled the second time, reducing the damage total even further.

Note: This rule does not include 4 sided dice.

Saving Throws automatically fail on a roll of 1-4

This rule was carried over from my days of running *Heroes Unlimited* and *Rifts*, games where getting incredibly high bonuses to saving throws are common place. Some of these bonuses are so high that the character couldn't fail a roll, creating a *false immunity* in some cases. To counter this in my games, I took a page from the combat rule that states that a natural 1-4 is an automatic miss, and added it to saving throws. Ergo, no matter how high the character's bonus is, a natural roll of 1-4 is always a failed saving throw.

Supernatural Related House Rules:

Deceiving abilities will mask a creature's supernatural aura

This may be something that's already official, but was overlooked in the main book (planning to confirm this with Kevin the next time I talk with him). When supernatural creatures use shape changing (like the *Dar'ota*), inhabiting the dead (like the *Dybbuk* or the *Hoarse Whisperer*) or are otherwise hiding or concealing themselves in plain sight (like a *Tectonic Entity*, *Syphon*, or *Scaring Crow*) or when using psychic/magic like *Psychic Invisibility*, it shields their supernatural aura from psychics. The trade off to this is that the creature cannot use any of their offensive talents unless stated otherwise in their details.

For example, a group of psychic investigators could be conversation with a *Dar'ota* who shape changed into a beautiful woman. None of them will suddenly get the "psychic adrenaline rush" unless she changed suddenly or attacked them in some way with her supernatural strength. Using any sort of offensive spells or ability will reveal her aura to the psychics.

While I'm on this subject, there are abilities that can alert the psychic to the creature's true nature, but this will not automatically trigger an adrenaline rush. For example, if a Diviner uses "See the Aura of the Supernatural", he would see through her disguise, but this will not trigger a power boost. The *Dar'ota* will still need to unleash its aura somehow to trigger this.

Using hunting rounds vs. "defensive" rounds

When confronting supernatural adversaries that are larger than humans, one of my house rules are that "man stopper" bullets (such as .45 A.C.P. and 9mm) only does ½ damage against these larger creatures. Bullets that were designed as hunting rounds (like the .357, .41 or .44 Magnum) all do full damage. Most rifle cartridges are considered hunting rounds and do normal damage as well.