BULLET WOUNDS AND BATTLE SCARS

Hit points represent one factor that along with others like Armor Class or damage resistance are abstracted to make combat work in a way that is easy to adjudicate. They are only part of a larger narrative that indicates if a PC is physically prepared to endure further action and what it will take to get them back into fighting shape. The abstraction that allows this to work can sometimes lead to dissonance and disagreement about what the narrative resolution of these shared concepts should look like.

Some espouse the view that every strike that chips away at hit points is a blow that has made contact with flesh and caused a wound, the severity of which is proportional to the hit point loss inflicted. Others opt to think of hit points as an indicator of narrative stamina, with the lethality of each hit being avoided through desperate or stressful action that incurs a loss of zeal to indicate how much longer they can avoid that last blow that will take them down.

The vitality point optional rule included here intends its changes to set forth a unique narrative view on how combat impacts the health, vitality, and overall well-being of adventurers. Hit points do not need fixed *per se* but having alternative options allows for subtle changes in play style that some GMs or groups may find more suitable to their personal view of how damage and other wounds manifest in their games. In this context vitality points represent a direct correlation with the essence of a creature's physical condition and remaining health until death while hit points are an abstract combination of grit, stamina, mental durability, the ability to dodge a blow or take one but keep on going, and the narrative perseverance of heroic and villainous beings.

Optional Rule: Vitality Points

At 1st level, your character has a number of vitality points equal to your Constitution score. This is also your vitality point maximum. Also at 1st level, your character has 1 Hit Die of a type determined by your class. You have a number of hit points equal to the highest roll of that die plus your Constitution modi-

fier, as indicated in your class description. This is your hit point maximum.

When your character gains a level, your vitality point maximum increases by an amount equal to your Constitution modifier and you gain 1 additional Hit Die from your class. Roll this hit die (or take the average) and add the total to your hit point maximum. If your Hit Die type is a d8 or larger, you can choose to exchange up to half of the hit points gained from that die for an equal number of vitality points when your character gains a level. Your vitality point maximum cannot exceed your hit point maximum. If it would, you convert the excess vitality points into hit points instead.

Changes to your Constitution only impact your vitality points. When your Constitution increases, your vitality point maximum is increased by a corresponding amount. When your Constitution modifier increases, your maximum hit points and vitality points increase along with it. If these changes to your Constitution are temporary (for example, caused by a spell or magic item) your vitality and hit point maximums do not change unless the rules for the effect specify that they should. Any spells or effects that would decrease your hit point maximum instead decrease your vitality point maximum.

Vitality Points for Monsters and NPCs

To determine the vitality point maximum for a monster, convert up to half of its hit point maximum into vitality points. Some creature types, like fey or plant, have lower vitality point maximums, while undead creatures almost certainly have no vitality points at all. Small and Tiny creatures are also likely to have lower vitality point maximums. Aberrations, giants, Large- and Huge-sized creatures, and legendary creatures are more likely to have higher vitality point maximums. Some particularly tough monsters may have all or part of the hit points that were lost in the conversion to vitality points restored to their hit point total (this can have a small effect on the CR, depending on the number of hit points added in this fashion). This flexibility allows GMs to tailor the vitality point totals of monsters to suit their needs.

NPCs can utilize the vitality point rules for monsters or PCs at the GM's discretion. Formidable foes, villains with class levels, and recurring characters will benefit more from using the vitality rules for PCs. Trivial or disposable NPCs, or those invented on the spot, can be more easily created with the guidelines for monster vitality.

Damage and Healing

When a creature takes damage, that damage is subtracted first from its hit points. The loss of hit points has no effect on a creature's abilities until the creature drops to 0 hit points. When a creature has no hit points remaining, it is bloodied (see the following section for details on the bloodied condition). Once all a creature's hit points have been depleted, damage subtracts from its vitality points, though certain types of damage might subtract from vitality points first. When a creature's current vitality points drop to 0, regardless of whether it has any remaining hit points or not, that creature either dies outright or becomes unconscious.

Monsters and NPCs, or any creatures that use the vitality point guidelines for monsters, die when they reach 0 vitality points (though an attacker can still choose to knock them out as normal). PCs are knocked unconscious upon reaching 0 vitality points. The rules for Instant Death, Falling Unconscious, and Stabilizing a Creature are not changed when utilizing the optional rules for vitality points.

Vitality and hit points have different methods for recovery.

▸ Rest and magic restore hit points as normal.
▸ Using hit dice during a short rest only restores hit points, not vitality points.
▸ A magic spell that restores hit points can instead restore vitality points, but not both at once.
▸ Spells always restore vitality points before hit points and a creature's vitality points cannot exceed its vitality point maximum.
▸ Any creature can also rest to recover vitality points. After 48 hours of rest, during which the creature cannot do more than light activity, it regains 1 vitality point.

Death Saving Throws. When you start your turn with 0 vitality points, you must make a death saving throw. If you roll a 20, you regain 1 vitality point instead of 1 hit point. The rules for death saving throws are otherwise unchanged.

New Condition: Bloodied

Without hit points, a creature has only its vital essence separating it from death. It has exhausted its natural stamina, resilience, and luck to the point where its wounds begin to show and sting as its adrenaline runs out. The following is what happens to a creature subjected to the bloodied condition.

Bloodied. A bloodied creature has disadvantage on Constitution saving throws. The condition ends when the creature regains hit points.

Using the Condition as a Trigger

Some monsters have one or more traits or special features related to the bloodied condition. The following examples are intended to inspire GMs using the optional rules for vitality points. Using more than one of these with a single monster may cause an increase in challenge rating and some options may not be appropriate for a monster's narrative role (or make sense given its lore and ecology).

- **Bloodlust.** A creature with this trait has a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls on attacks against an adjacent creature that is bloodied.
- **Death Throes.** A creature with this trait can make one additional attack when it uses the Attack action while bloodied.
- **Self-Preservation.** A creature with this trait does not provoke opportunity attacks while bloodied and its speed increases by 10 feet.

Other Optional Rules

Characters that use the optional rules for vitality points have a slightly greater ability to absorb damage, opening the potential for combat to become less harrowing. GMs that use vitality points are encouraged to utilize them alongside the options in the core rules for lingering injuries and with the modifications to certain damage types outlined below.

- **Bullet Wounds.** A gunshot wound has the potential to quickly kill if it hits a vital organ. If the campaign includes the optional firearms from the core rules, consider having each hit trigger a DC 12 Constitution save. Creatures that fail this save have the weapon's damage subtracted from their vitality points instead of their hit points.
- **Challenging Environments.** Exposure to freezing temperatures, contact with lava, and falls from great heights can be formidable hazards. Damage from a source in the environment, or from a fall, is subtracted from vitality points instead of hit points. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check can be made at the outset of exposure to violent storms and extreme temperatures to have the damage effect hit points instead.
- **Deadly Necrosis.** The otherworldly negative energies that infuse the living dead quickly sap the life of the living. Necrotic damage is subtracted from vitality points instead of hit points. This ability might only be possessed by powerful, intelligent undead creatures.

- **Lingering Injuries.** Losing vitality points causes serious bodily trauma that can result in a lingering injury. A creature sustains a lingering injury when its vitality points are reduced to 0 (the GM may decide other circumstances may also result in lingering injuries). A lingering injury inflicted in this way is removed once the creature's vitality points are restored to their maximum.
- **Potent Corrosives.** Acid dissolves flesh and bone as quickly as water washes away dirt and dust. Acid damage is subtracted from vitality points instead of hit points. Potent alchemical supplies might be needed for this ability or it may be unique to rare oozes like the gelatinous cube.