



During medieval times, a guilty verdict in a criminal trial could result in punishment so horrifying that today we can hardly comprehend the depths of cruelty involved. The long, drawn-out execution process was meant to impose "a fate worse than death."

Hugh Despenser, the Younger, is an example. During his lifetime, he was a great friend of King Edward II. The weak King relied on the strong Despenser for all kinds of things. In turn, Despenser became more powerful, more ruthless and more wealthy than anyone could imagine.

Then ... he was captured by his foes. Charged with high crimes and misdemeanors, committed over many years, he was convicted and sentenced not just to death but to a torture-filled end.

We [learn more about him](#), and his fate at the hands of his enemies, from the Chronicle at Caerphilly County Borough Council. It's not for the faint-of-heart.

Despenser died in 1326. Near the end of the next century, in 1493, a poet by the name of Fabyan memorialized how the much-despised man met his end:

*With ropes wert thou bound and on the gallows hung,
And from thy body thine head with sword was cut;
Thy bowels in the fire they threw and burned long,
The body in four pieces with an axe was slit,
Before that by horses wert thou dragged, none pitying thee.*

This image illustrates the story of Hugh Despenser as it is told in *Froissart's Chronicle*. The original is maintained by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France.

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Hugh Despenser and Prisoner Torture - Medieval

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