



# DEATHBRINGER

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work draws inspiration from *Basic D&D*, Warhammer, Tracy's Hickman's XDM, Knave, Index Card RPG, *and many others*. Much love and thanks to Brandish Gilhelm, DM Scotty, Don Garey, Ben Milton, and David Arneson and E. Gary Gygax—cool dudes all.

## WHAT IS *DEATHBRINGER*?

*Deathbringer* is a streamlined, grimdark version of the world's most popular tabletop roleplaying game. It is not a game so much as a “kit”—a toolbox of hacks to create a fast-paced, grittier game.

These rules can be used by themselves or imported into any 5E game or OSR retro-clone. Feel free to pick and choose which rules you use. Think of *Deathbringer* as the secret sauce on your RPG burger.

## WHY IS *DEATHBRINGER*?

We enjoy RPGS where death is a real possibility and danger lurks around every corner. We like PCs who are gritty antiheroes struggling to survive in a hostile world. We also like games that feel less like a tactical exercise and more like movies—where players use natural language like: “I sneak up behind him and stab him in the kidney,” as opposed to, “I move three squares and flank him for an opportunity attack.”

In *Deathbringer*, you are not limited by what is written on your character sheet. **Deathbringer Dice** make it possible for any character to swing from a chandelier, smite an enemy, or turn a leg of mutton into an improvised weapon—because every character has a right to kill someone with a leg of mutton.

Enough talk! Go, and may your death be one worth remembering.

## FEATURES

- **Compatible with 5E and OSR games.** Keep your monsters, spells, and favorite adventure modules.
- **No derivative stats.** Your bonus IS your **Ability Score** and your **Proficiency Bonus** in one. **Ability Scores** start at 0 and rise as characters gain levels. If a character has a high **STR**, they are trained and proficient in *all* melee weapons. A character with a high **DEX** is proficient with *all* missile weapons. If a character has a high **CHA**, they are proficient in *all* social situations.
- **Deathbringer Dice.** Replace class features, feats, skills, bonus actions, and inspiration with **Deathbringer Dice**—a pool of d6s that can “spent” to add to any d20 roll or increase/absorb damage. **Deathbringer Dice** increase with level, replacing rigid feats and skills with a flexible alternative.
- **“Pure” Hit Dice.** CON does NOT give you Hit Point bonuses.

- **Death at Negative HP.** Zero HP means a character is unconscious. Negative HP means you are dead. No death saves. No resurrections. Dead.
- **No clerics.** The gods of the **Deathbringer** world despise weakness and begging. They do not answer prayers.
- **Simple Levelling/Improvement system.** When you level up, you roll a Hit Die and add +1 to any **Ability Score**, gain a Hit Die, and gain **Deathbringer Dice**. No charts needed.
- **Roll to cast.** No spell slots. A roll of natural 1 means gaining a **Corruption Point** and a potentially deadly miscast.
- **Alignment is replaced with Corruption.** When a character commits evil deeds or rolls a natural 1 while spellcasting, they gain **Corruption Points**. At 10 **Corruption** they become a monster controlled by the GM.
- **Zones.** No grids, no counting squares. There are three zones: **Melee, Ranged, & Out of Range.**
- **Grimdark setting.** Characters start with almost nothing and must fight for every scrap they get. Magic is rare and dangerous. Magic Users have been hunted to near extinction. No one can see in the dark. No elves or cutesy, anthropomorphic creatures.



## CREATE A CHARACTER

### BASICS & ABILITIES

#### 5E Standard Array

Start out with 8 “build points.” Distribute these as bonuses between your six **Ability Scores**, with no higher than +6 in any one Ability Score. Ability Scores range from 0 to +10.

**Ex: STR +5, DEX +2, CON +1, INT 0, WIS, 0, CHA +1**

#### OSR Standard Array

Start out with 3 “build points.” Distribute these as bonuses between your six **Ability Scores**, with no higher than +3 in any one Ability Score. Ability Scores range from 0 to +10.

**Ex: STR +1, DEX +1, CON 0, INT 0, WIS, 0, CHA +1**

### Roll The Bones!

**5E:** roll 4d6, use only the bonus, arrange as desired. *No re-rolls!*

**OSR:** roll 3d6, use only the bonus, arrange as desired. *No re-rolls!*

18	+4	+3
16-17	+3	+2
14-15	+2	+1
13	+1	+1
12	+1	0
3-11	0	0

## ABILITY SCORES

**STrength:** Add to melee weapon attacks AND damage.

**DEXterity:** Add to DEF, missile attacks AND damage, stealth, climbing, lockpicking, acrobatics, etc.

**CONstitution:** Saves v. poison, you can carry items= CON+10, for each day of rest you regain HP= CON. Note: CON does NOT add to HP.

**INTelligence:** Add to spellcasting rolls, history, knowledge, +1 indicates literacy.

**WISdom:** Add to mind-based Saving Throws, searching, perception & tracking.

**CHARisma:** Add to all reaction checks, charm, deception, intimidation, performance, persuasion.

*Your Ability Score IS your proficiency bonus, skill level, and natural ability. A +1 STR means you are proficient with ALL hand weapons. A +1 DEX means you are proficient with all ranged weapons, acrobatics, climbing, stealth, etc. A high CHA means you are good will **all** social interactions.*

### HP= "Pure" Hit Dice. Do not add CON

This is what separates the bad ass from the masses:

- Characters do NOT receive CON bonuses when they roll HD.
- Characters roll for HP on 1<sup>st</sup> level. If they roll a 1 or a 2, too bad. They *must* keep it.
- No "do-overs," re-rolls, or claiming "interference" because the dice bounced off a pencil or a book. Wherever the dice lands, the face-up number is the roll.
- Once characters hit 20+hp, all future HD are rolled at **Disadvantage**.

### DEFense= 10+ DEX + Armor.

- All characters are human. No one can see in the dark.
- No clerics. The gods of Deathbringer are indifferent.
- Spellcasters have been hunted to near extinction.
- Begin with d6gp, a waterskin, and d4 days of rations.

## ROLL A RANDOM BACKGROUND

Toss some dice. If the results don't make sense, roll again.

Dd0	RANDOM MISERY
1	Abandoned at birth.
2	Banished from home.
3	Betrayed by a loved one.
4	Cursed by vengeful witch.
5	Disinherited or disowned.
6	Escaped bondage or prison.
7	Fled a scandal.
8	Framed for a crime.
9	Killed someone important.
10	Left for dead.
11	Locusts ate your crops.
12	Owe someone money.
13	Pursued by the law.

14	Raised in the streets
15	Reduced to poverty.
16	Rejected by society.
17	Ruined by vice.
18	Suffering from amnesia.
19	Survived a massacre.
20	Town ravaged by plague.

Dd0	BACKGROUND
1	Bounty Hunter
2	Courtesan
3	Duelist
4	Executioner
5	Farmer

- 6 Grave Robber
- 7 Leech Collector
- 8 Mercenary
- 9 Minor Noble
- 10 Outlaw
- 11 Performer
- 12 Pit Fighter
- 13 Pirate/Sailor

- 14 Priest/nun/monk
- 15 Rat Catcher
- 16 Servant
- 17 Student/Scholar
- 18 Swineherd
- 19 Soldier
- 20 Urchin

#### BIRTHPLACE (2d10)

- |                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Blighted        | 1. Village        |
| 2. Cursed          | 2. Backwater town |
| 3. Decaying        | 3. Hamlet         |
| 4. Famine-Stricken | 4. Castle         |
| 5. Haunted         | 5. Slum           |
| 6. Locust-ravaged  | 6. Swamp          |
| 7. Plague-infected | 7. Forest         |
| 8. Putrid          | 8. Outpost        |
| 9. Squalid         | 9. Ruin           |
| 10. War-ravaged    | 10. City          |

#### YOUR TRAGIC LOVE

- 1. Died of plague.
- 2. Was murdered
- 3. Kidnapped or imprisoned.
- 4. Betrayed you for another.
- 5. Is betrothed or married to another.
- 6. Is hated by your family.
- 7. Is an occupational rival.
- 8. Is of a different social class.
- 9. Does not return your affections.
- 10. You haven't met them yet.

#### PARENT FATE (d10)

- 1. Both dead from plague
- 2. Burned at the stake.
- 3. Wrongly executed.
- 4. Killed in a raid.
- 5. Mother died in childbirth or disease.
- 6. Father died of pox.
- 7. Abandoned you at birth.
- 8. Sold you for coin.
- 9. Refuse to acknowledge you.
- 10. Alive and well

#### SIBLINGS

You have d6-2

#### Roll D6

1-3 = Younger

4-6 = Older

#### Roll D6

1-3 = Male

4-6 = Female

#### SIBLING FATE (d10)

- 1. Dead from plague.
- 2. Murdered.
- 3. Hate your guts.
- 4. Want you dead.
- 5. Jealous of you.
- 6. Estranged.
- 7. Starving from famine.
- 8. Crushed by debts.
- 9. Look up to you.
- 10. Protective of you.

## CHARACTER CLASSES

### DEATHBRINGER

**Requirement:** +1 STR

**Hit dice:** d10 (after 20hp + roll at disadvantage)

**Armor & Weapons** Any & all

**To start:** doublet

**Special Abilities:**

- **Deathbringer.** Spend one DD to make an extra attack.
- **Ferocity.** Gain an additional attack at 5<sup>th</sup> level

### GRIMSCRIBE

**Requirement:** +1 INT or better

**Hit Dice:** d6 (after 15hp+ roll at disadvantage)

**Armor & weapons:** Clothes & dagger, staff, light crossbow, cannot wear armor

**To start:** 4 cantrips, two 1<sup>st</sup> level spells, journal, tattoo needles, ink, dagger.

**Special Abilities:**

- **Cast Spells.** No spell slots. Roll to cast, DC 10. On a roll of Natural 1 gain +1 **Corruption** and roll on the **Miscast Table**.
- **Gain spells** by finding scrolls grimoires, or by having a friendly higher-level wizard teach them to you. You are a **living**
- **grimoire** and must tattoo all spells on your skin

### PLAGUE DOCTOR

**Requirement:** Minimum +1 INT & +1 WIS

**Hit dice:** d6 (after 15, roll at disadvantage)

**Armor & Weapons:** Light and meat cleaver and crossbow

**To start:** Leather coat, medical kit, chemistry kit, meat cleaver, very suspicious diploma.

**Special Abilities:**

- **Cure Wounds.** Restore d8hp once per day, per patient.
- **Cure poison & disease.** At will. DC 15.
- **Create Potions:** create d4 random potions per day. These chemicals are highly unstable and only last 24 hours.

### D8

1	Acid Spray	D10 range within throwing distance.
2	Bomb	D10 damage within throwing distance
3	Hallucinations	Save v. CON 15 or suffer demonic visions for d4 rounds.
4	Healing	Heal d8hp.
5	Poison Cloud	D12 damage
6	Rage	Drinker gains +2 STR but suffers a -2 DEF
7	Sleep	Save vs. CON or fall asleep
8	Your choice	Any one.

### SCOUNDREL

**Requirement:** +1 DEX or better

**Hit Dice:** d8 (after 15hp+ roll at disadvantage)

**Armor & weapons:** Light & any

**To start:** thieves' tools, 50' rope, leather jack (1 armor). Club or dagger.

**Special Abilities:**

- **Backstab.** Score an extra damage die on any surprise attack.
- **Roguish Talents.** If properly equipped, roll with **Advantage** on tests related to stealth, hiding, listening, eavesdropping, lockpicking, finding & disarming traps, climbing, disguise, picking pockets, etc.

## WITCH HUNTER

**Requirement:** +1 WIS or better

**Hit dice:** d8 (after 16+hp roll at disadvantage)

**Armor & Weapons:** Light and any

**To start:** leather coat, club, crossbow, holy symbol, 6 torches

**Special Abilities**

- **Protection from Evil.** Once per day.
- **Turn the Undead.** At will. Test WIS against the target's DEF. If the target fails, they flee at the sight of the Witch Hunter's holy symbol.

## NAME YOUR CHARACTER

Here are some tricks for choosing a cool name:

- One syllable first name, two syllable last name. Ex: *Hans Hurtzman*, *Britt Welkin*
- Two syllable first name, one syllable last name Ex: *Degger Rykes*, *Malice Frost*
- Change the spelling of a common name. Ex: Edward to *Eddard*, Jennifer to *Yennefer*,
- Roll on the following chart:

## POSSIBLE NAMES (d6)

- 1 Absinth, Astrid, Angelique, Anya, Arnulf, Astrid, Axe, Axel, Avarice, Bardolf, Bastard, Bastian, Beatrix, Bernhardt, Blade, Bjorn, Brand, Brigid, Brynn, Britt, Brom, Bront, Bruiser, Bruno, Brunt,
- 2 Celine, Claudia, Claus, Cloak, Clutch, Conrad, Dagmar, Danika, Dania, Dead-eye, Degger, Dieter, Dirk, Dorian, Drudge, Dogface, Duchess, Elspeth, Enoch, Erasmus, Erik, Ernst
- 3 Faith, Fallon, Fang, Felix, Fester, Fletcher, Flame, Flint, Franz, Frida, Frog, Filthy, Frost, Gabrielle, Ghost, Goblin, Gretel, Grime, Grift, Gripper, Grubber, Gregor, Grift, Grub, Gustav, Hans, Heinrich
- 4 Ingrid, Isolde, Johann, Karl, Karve, Kat, Knock, Kruger, Kurt, Lefty, Leopold, Lilith, Locke, Lotus, Ludwig, Magda, Maglind, Magnus, Malice, Malicent, Malkin, Malleus, Margot, Marienne, Marius, Mathias, Mathilde, Max, Mercy, Mila, Mirage, Moloch, Mordecai, Morgan
- 5 Nadya, Nails, Natasha, Nine-fingers, No-thumbs, Nightshade, Nocturne, Nyx, Olga, One-Eye, Olaf, Onyx, Osric, Pike, Pug, Randel, Randolph, Raven, Regan, Reiner, Reinhardt, Rieka, Renata, Ripper, Rolf, Rook, Rosalyn, Rufus, Ruprecht,
- 6 Scabs, Seline, Silence, Shadow, Silk, Sliver, Snake, Snare, Solace, Solange, Splinter, Spider, Stefan, Sven, Thorne, Tobias, Toad, Theodore, Tuomas, Werner, Udo, Ulrich, Ulrike, Uma, Valen, Wilhelm, Wolfgang, Wulfgar, Yvette

## EXPERIENCE POINTS

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- 1-4xp per session. Level up at 10xp.
- 1-2xp for achieving scenario objectives (rescue prisoners, solve the mystery, foil the evil ritual, etc.)
- 1-2xp for achieving individual goals (avenge your father's death, etc.)
- 100gp=1xp. When converting OSR or classic modules, divide all gold by 10. For example, if an ogre's hoard is listed at 2,100gp, reduce it to 210gp. This eliminates "gold bloat" while providing an incentive for PCs to explore without the need for a "plot hook."

## IMPROVEMENT

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- Gain an additional Hit Die each level. Once you reach 20+hp, roll with disadvantage. No re-rolls!
- Gain an additional **Deathbringer Die** each level.
- Gain +1 to any ONE Ability Score at levels 3,5,7,9.

## ENCUMBERANCE

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- PCs have item slots = to CON + 10.
- 100 coins takes up one slot.
- Once all slots are filled, characters move at half speed.



## THIS IS HOW WE ROLL

- **Deathbringer Dice** replace class features and may be used to improve rolls, cause/block damage.
- **Advantage & disadvantage** for cover, low visibility, having the proper tools, etc.
- Natural 20 means +d12 damage and you lower the opponent's DEF by 1.
- Natural 1 is a critical failure. Quiver is empty, you are disarmed, or **Critical Miscast**.

## DEATHBRINGER DICE

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Replace class features, Skills, Feats & Inspiration with **Deathbringer Dice**. Begin each session with DD equal to your level.

A player can "spend" DDs to:

- (1) Add d6 to any d20 roll.
- (2) Inflict an additional d6 damage on a successful hit.
- (3) Absorb d6 damage.

You may use multiple DD at the same time.

DD cannot be used to alter a Nat 1 or used for initiative rolls. They are not replenished with rest but respawn at the start of a session.



Store up to 10 DD on your sheet in these slots:

### GAINING DEATHBRINGER DICE

**GM** may award additional *Deathbringer Dice* for good roleplaying, clever thinking, or for enhancing the game for everyone at the table.

Players can use **Deathbringer Dice** to customize their characters or make them more versatile. Want to be an expert archer? Use **Deathbringer Dice** when you shoot your bow. Want to be a martial arts master? Use **Deathbringer Dice** to increase hand-to-hand combat. Need to take out that guard in one shot? Use **Deathbringer Dice** to cause extra damage.

**Pro Tip:** make **Deathbringer Dice** a different, uniform color so they don't become confused with the other 6-sided dice at your table.

### ADVANTAGE & DISADVANTAGE

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- **Advantage** means roll two dice and take the higher number.
- **Disadvantage** means roll two dice and take the lower number.

### CRITICAL SUCCESS (NAT. 20)

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- A roll of **Natural 20** is a critical success.
- In combat, a **Critical Success** means +d12 extra damage.
- A natural 20 on a spellcasting check means the spell ranges and effects are doubled.

### CRITICAL FAILURE (NAT 1)

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- A roll of **Natural 1** is a **Critical failure**.
- A critical failure in combat or spellcasting means the player rolls the d20 again. This time, high is *bad*, and the GM decides on an appropriate complication based on the circumstances. A Natural 1 on a spellcasting roll means a Critical miscast (see Spells):

d20	Melee Weapon	Missile Weapon
1-10	Disarmed. Your weapon flies d10 feet in a random direction.	You run out of arrows/bolts.
11-19	Weapon becomes lodged in a beam, table, or ribcage and cannot be dislodged until after the combat is over.	Bow string or firing mechanism breaks and may not be used again until repaired (d10 minutes).
20	Your weapon shatters.	Your bow is damaged beyond repair.

### WEAPONS

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<b>D2:</b>	Fist, kick, headbutt	Free
<b>D4:</b>	Bone, club, dagger, improvised weapon	0-5gp
<b>D6:</b>	Mace, short bow, spear, staff	5-25
<b>D8:</b>	Battle Ax, long bow, rapier, sword, warhammer	10-40
<b>D10:</b>	Crossbow, two-handed sword	25-50



## ARMOR

Light	+1 DEF	Doublet, helm, leather jacket	10gp
Medium	+2 DEF	Gambeson, scale, studded leather, chainmail bikini	50-75
	+3 DEF	Brigandine, Full chain	100-200
Heavy	+4 DEF	Full field plate (low visibility: -1 to hit)	1000+

## KILL SHOTS

- 1-5: Agonizing death. Your attack inflicts grim wounds to vital organs. Victim dies in d4 rounds.
- 6-10: Clean Kill. Your decisive, devastating attack drops your opponent with quiet simplicity.
- 11-15: Brutal Doom. You overkill your target with force, crushing bone, spraying blood—a real mess.
- 15-19: Splatter & gore. Your attack renders the victim unrecognizable, smashed to a pulp or hewn in two.
- 20: Deathbringer. So powerful is your kill, a nearby enemy is also hit. Enemies who view such a kill are terrified and intimidated.

## COMBAT

- Rounds are 6 seconds. Group initiative every round: d6, highest roll wins. Ties= simultaneous attack.
- Players take turns clockwise from the GM.
- Everyone must declare actions and Magic Users must declare their spells before initiative is rolled. If the Magic User loses initiative and is successfully attacked, the spell fails.
- PCs can move up to 20 feet and attack in one round.
- No bonus actions.
- Stunts: maneuvers such as pushing, disarming, tripping, blinding, etc. The GM rules whether the stunt is possible and if the player has advantage, disadvantage, or makes a clean roll. If the roll succeeds, the stunt is successful.
- 0 HP is unconscious. Negative HP=DEAD.

## CIRCUMSTANCES

### Advantage

- Attacker surprises their opponent.
- Attacker strikes from behind.
- Attacker has the higher ground.
- Attacker spends a round aiming their bow.
- Attackers outnumber the defender 3-1.

### Disadvantage

- Defender has partial cover.
- The ground is slick or icy.
- Defender has the higher ground.
- The area is foggy or crowded.
- Firing from a moving vehicle.

## MOVEMENT & RANGES

Forget feet and yards. *Deathbringer* uses three simple, abstract units of distance: **Melee**, **Ranged**, and **Out of Range**.

- **MELEE** means within a few steps—about the size of a wrestling ring. Anyone in **Melee** range can move and hit anyone else in **Melee** range.
- **RANGED** means within missile or spell distance. It might be 30 feet or 100 feet—it's abstract and flexible.
- **OUT OF RANGE** means you are within earshot but cannot see what is going on. You know the combat is happening but cannot interfere.



In one **combat round**, you can:

- Move from **Out of Range** to **Ranged** and attack with a bow or spell.
- Move from **Ranged** to **Melee** and attack with a weapon.
- Move anywhere in **Melee** and attack anything else in **Melee**.
- Move two zones. For example, move from **Out of Range** to **Melee**.

If a character is beyond **Out of Range**, they are unaware the combat is happening and may not interfere.

## INJURY & DEATH

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At exactly **zero HP** a character is knocked unconscious. Players rolls the d6.

5-6 *Lucky*: awoken in d4 rounds with 1hp and a cool scar.

3-4 *Concussed*: awoken in d4 rounds with 1hp, but you receive a -2 penalty to all rolls until you rest for d4 days.

1-2 *Mangled*: lose a finger, limb, or eye—GM decides.

At **negative HP** a character is **DEAD**.

## HORDES

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- If a PC is surrounded by four or more attackers, roll one attack, adding an additional +1 for each attacker over 1. Ex: 4 attackers= +3
- On a successful hit the PC suffers regular damage +1 extra damage for each attacker over one. Ex: 4 attackers = +3 damage.

## MASS COMBAT

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In the event of a mass battle or castle siege, the GM should describe the battle: arrows darkening the skies and raining down on shields, the ring of clashing steel, the mud, blood, and screams. Then have the PCs make a **Saving Throw** to see how much damage they take in this initial clash:

- Battlefield: test **DEX 10** test or lose ½ of hit points. Success means d6 damage in minor scrapes and bruises.

- In a siege **against** a castle or other fortification: test **DEX 15** to avoid losing ½ HP. Success means d6 damage in minor scrapes and bruises. When **Defending** a castle or other fortification, test **DEX 10**.

After the initial crush of battle, telescope to the *specific* fight in which the characters are involved. Roll that out like any normal combat. At the conclusion, roll on the following chart. Add +1 one if the character won. Subtract -1 if they lost.

2d6	MASS COMBAT RESULTS
2-3	<b>Massacre!</b> The PCs are among the sole survivors of a brutal massacre. Their army is utterly crushed and loses the battle.
4-5	<b>Retreat!</b> The PCs' side suffers heavy casualties and retreats.
6-8	<b>Inconclusive.</b> Suffer heavy casualties before declaring the battle a draw.
9	<b>Victory—barely.</b> The enemy is routed but the players' side suffers heavy casualties.
10-12	<b>Victory!</b> Players' army wins a decisive victory, destroying the enemy's forces.

## CASTING SPELLS

- Use any OSR or 5e spells you like—but the PCs must find them through exploration. Keep the damage for those spells as is.
- DC 10 to cast. Saving throws are 15.

All 5e and OSR spells are compatible with **Deathbringer**. Spellcasting is illegal and spellcasters are burned on sight. As such they keep a low profile. Spellcasters who show off their powers in public will find themselves quickly surrounded by an angry mob.

## TO HELL WITH SPELL SLOTS!

You can learn unlimited spells—that's the good news. The bad news is you must *find* them. You do this by:

- Exploring ruins and dungeons to recover ancient scrolls and grimoires.
- Exchanging spells with a friendly NPC or another wizard. Sometimes lower level wizards apprentice themselves to higher level ones.

### Acquiring Spells

- Begin with the number of spells proscribed by your class.
- When you gain a spell, you must tattoo it on your skin. The more spells you know, the more easily recognized you will be to witch-hunters. A freshly dead magic user's skin is a valuable treasure!
- Just like in 5e or OSR, you cannot cast spells higher than your level will allow.
- You must roll to cast spells.

## ROLL TO CAST

- The DC to cast is 10.
- Add your INT (or CHA if a sorcerer or warlock) score to casting rolls.
- On a natural 20, the damage or effect of the spell is *doubled*.
- On a natural 1, gain 1 **Corruption** and roll on the **Critical Miscast Chart**.

## CRITICAL MISCAST

Caster gains +1 **Corruption** and...

1-10	<b>Fizzle.</b> Spell does not work. Ghostly laughter fills the room.
11-15	<b>Backfire.</b> Caster takes the damage or effect.
16	<b>Disaster.</b> All armor, both friend and foe, disintegrates.
17	Spell hits wrong target or summons a hostile monster.
18	Caster loses a level or ages d20 years.
19	Caster gains a random mutation.
20	<b>Catastrophic.</b> Caster explodes in a shower of gore.

## SAVING THROWS

- All Saving Throws vs magic are **DC 15**.
- Add **WIS** to saving throws vs mind-control spells like *charm* or *sleep*.
- Add **DEX** to saving throws vs explosive spells like *fireball* and *lightning bolt*.

## CORRUPTION

- Gain +1 when you commit an evil deed or roll Nat 1 when spellcasting.
- “Evil deeds” include killing prisoners who have surrendered, innocent people, or anything the GM determines to be morally wrong.
- At 10 Corruption you have lost all humanity and become a monster controlled by the GM.

Corruption is an essential part of the *Deathbringer* universe. Actions have consequences and the PCs may be heroes—but flawed heroes who are haunted by their pasts and who must constantly struggle against becoming the very monsters they fight against. Some characters may be forced to retire before they lose their souls.

Characters begin with zero **Corruption**. When a character gains ten **Corruption**, they become a monster controlled by the GM and are removed from play. **Corruption** may manifest physically in the form of a physical mutation (a third eye, scaly skin, or a second head growing out of the PC’s shoulder, etc.) or it can be mental, with the character having a seemingly normal appearance, but completely depraved and murderous thoughts.

There is no way to remove **Corruption**. PCs can only gain it. Evil deeds haunt a character forever. If the GM chooses, a PC may gain a mutation once they gain +6 **Corruption** and an additional mutation every point thereafter.

## MUTATIONS (D20)

1. Pustules.	11. Scaly skin. Craves live mice.
2. Candles dim when you enter a room.	12. Craves brains.
3. Hair turns white or falls out.	13. Extra eye in random location.
4. Craving for raw meat.	14. Extra limb—withered and useless.
5. Gaunt.	15. Extra fetal head growing on shoulder.
6. Strong, distinct scent.	16. Extra mouths on back.
7. Eyes glow faintly in the dark.	17. Tentacle.
8. Black, pupilless eyes.	18. Demonic horns.
9. Translucent skin. Hates sunlight.	19. Skull face.
10. Ages d20 years.	20. Molts into a giant roach or worm.

## HEALING

- Use a DD to stitch up wounds after combat. If you stitch your own wounds, divide the DD roll in half and round down.

- Heal HP = CON every day of complete bedrest.

## NO REST FOR THE WICKED

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There are no “short rests” or “long rests” in **Deathbringer**. The only time for resting is in the grave.

## CONVERTING SPELLS & MONSTERS

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- Import and monsters and spells you like from 5e/OSR games.
- 5E Monsters have pure HD (no CON bonuses). OSR monsters remain exactly as written in the description/module.
- Spells do the same damage.
- Magic items are virtually non-existent. Potions are rare.



## GAMEMASTER SECTION

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### THE CORE RULE

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Here is the *real* core rule designers keep from the general public, lest panic ensue: No matter what variant you play—1<sup>st</sup> E, 5e, OSE—character “advancement” is largely illusory. As characters rise in level and gain bonuses, the **GM** responds by raising the **Difficulty Class** of the challenges progressively higher. No matter how powerful a character becomes, no matter what level they achieve, no matter how high their bonuses, a twenty-sided die can only produce results between 1 and 20. If you strip away all the character ability score and skill bonuses, the game looks like this:

Roll	Result
15+	<i>Success!</i>
10-14	<i>Maybe.</i> Check with the GM.
1-9	<i>Failure.</i>

**DC** of 11 gives PCs a 50% chance of success. A **DC** of 16+ represents a significant challenge. In combat, **DCs** over 15 should be rare; otherwise, the encounter may drag on interminably, with neither side landing a blow. A **DC** of less than 10 is so easy the **GM** should ask—*is this roll even necessary?* Failing an extremely low skill check can humiliate the player and make their character seem incompetent.

The entire game then, hinges on a GM using their best judgement to set a **DC** within the 10-16 range. If the **DC** is too high, players become frustrated. If the **DC** is too low, the game is not challenging. Once a GM understands this, they can make decisions with greater confidence.

### WHEN TO ROLL & WHEN NOT TO

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Call for a roll when the outcome is a reasonable chance of failure (better than 50%) or when there is some sort of time pressure on a character. If a thief is attempting to pick the lock of a chest in a dungeon and wandering monsters might show up any minute, it requires a check. If the thief carries the same chest back to the tavern and has unlimited time, no check is needed.

More important is when *not* to roll the dice. When a GM calls for a die roll, they must be open to the possibility that the die will come up 1. If it's critical to the plot for the PCs to find a secret door, allow them to find it without a check. Also, too many checks create lazy players who think their character sheet can overcome every problem. Here are some things we *don't* roll the dice for:

- **Perception & searching.** Players should describe what they are searching and how they are searching it. Example: "I search the library shelves. Do any of the books tilt back and trigger a secret door?" If there is a secret door, let them find it.
- **Insight.** Psychologists, police detectives, and divorce attorneys will tell you there is no way to tell if someone is lying—it's not a real thing. If players want insight into an NPC, they must roleplay with them.
- **Most Social Encounters.** Don't allow players to skip role-playing by rolling the d20—and a natural 20 does not mean a PC can convince a king to give up his crown. It means some commoners made him crack a smile and he will remember them.

## TIPS FOR MAKING COMBAT EXCITING

### KEEP IT MOVING

Ever notice most RPGs *slow down* when the action starts? Here are some tips for keeping it moving:

- Never stop to look up rules—ever. If characters do something not covered by the rules, trust your instincts and go with the flow. Assign a **DC** and move on.
- Real combat is fast and real soldiers have to make split-second decisions. Don't allow players to take too long to decide what they want to do. Say, "*What does Malleus want to do? You have five seconds. Five...four...three...*".
- Have the players all roll their attack dice at the same time, then look at the results and narrate what happened.

### AVOID GAME LANGUAGE

Use natural language, not technical jargon. Describe the results of every die roll. Do not say, "*The goblin missed.*" Instead say, "*Splinters fly and your arm goes numb as the goblin batters at your shield!*" Do not say, "*You kill the bandit.*" Instead say, "*Your blow slices through the bandit's carotid artery, spraying you with blood and dropping him to the ground in a gurgling heap.*"

You can also off-load descriptions on the players. Have *them* describe what their miss or critical hit looks like!

### ROLL OUT IN THE OPEN

Nothing is more terrifying than when a GM makes their rolls out in the open. No hiding. No fudging. No pulling punches. If a natural 20 comes up and a character is killed on the first shot—well, that's life. It happens—even to heroes.

When players know the GM doesn't pull punches, they are more cautious about entering combat in the first place. They start thinking about using the environment to give them the advantage and will seek to take the

enemy by surprise. Even if no characters die, your game will *feel* more dangerous, because the players know their favorite character is one natural 20 away from a dirt nap.

So, roll out in the open and let your players know combat is potentially fatal.

### TIMER DICE

The moment someone throws the first punch, the GM tosses a d4, in public view. The resulting number is the number of rounds before something terrible happens. For example:

- reinforcements arrive
- a torch goes out
- the ceiling collapses
- the ice cracks and the PCs fall through
- the enemy slits the prisoner's throat
- the monster regenerates to full HP

The GM can let players know the stakes—or just give an evil laugh and say the consequences will be serious. Timers are one of the most effective ways to build tension.

### IMPORTING & CONVERTING MONSTERS

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- Import any monsters stat from 5e/OSR games.
- Monsters have pure HD (no CON bonuses).

Monsters from 5E and all OSR retro clones are compatible with *Deathbringer*. If you play 5e, simply ignore HP due to Con bonuses; this will reduce monster HP by about 1/3. OSR stat blocks do not need to be changed. Other tips:

- **Monsters should be rare and mysterious.** *Deathbringer* is strongly influenced by the writings of Robert Howard, Fritz Leiber, and Karl Edward Wagner. In their stories, monsters exist but are rare. If a scenario is about a werewolf terrorizing a village, build the scenario around that *one* werewolf. One werewolf, well done, is more frightening than pack of werewolves.
- **Humans are the most common monster.** The easiest way to create a grimdark atmosphere is to make most of the enemies human: brigands, raiders, cannibals, cultists, cavemen, rival witch hunters, mutants, mad scientists, and so on.
- **Re-skin old tropes.** Players are frightened by what they *don't* know. Avoid the familiar. Orcs, hobgoblins, and ogres are tired. Keep the stat blocks but change their appearance and call them something else. Reskinning kobolds as “creepers” or an ogre as “The Man-Skinner” will make them seem frightening again.
- **Dungeons should be thematic, not monster zoos.** A depraved noble's dungeon might contain depraved servants, cultists, and torture devices, but not animated skeletons or giant spiders. Think about the location. Consider its purpose. Why was it built? For whom? Then place the monsters that would logically live there.

### MAGIC ITEMS

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*Deathbringer* is a “low-magic” world. Magic items are rare and one-of-a-kind—no +1 daggers or +2 rings of protection. Potions are the most common type of “magic,” created through chemistry, not sorcery.

## POTIONS & DRUGS

Potions are typically found in small glass vials and contain a single dose. Potions are rare and unstable—after just 24 hours, the ingredients begin to separate, and the potion loses its effectiveness. Common potions & drugs include:

<b>Acid Spray</b>	D10 range within throwing distance.
<b>Bomb</b>	D10 damage within throwing distance
<b>Hallucinations</b>	Save v. CON 15 or suffer demonic visions for d4 rounds.
<b>Healing</b>	Heal d8hp.
<b>Moonsnow</b>	A powder made from refined <b>moonstone</b> . Spellcasters gain +2 to cast for 30 minutes, but must Save DC 5 or become hopelessly addicted.
<b>Poison Cloud</b>	D12 damage
<b>Poison</b>	Coat a weapon. Save DC 15 or suffer d6hp damage.
<b>Rage</b>	Drinker gains +2 STR but suffers a -2 DEF
<b>Sleep</b>	Save vs. CON or fall asleep
<b>Weirdweed</b>	Smoked by spellcasters in ornate pipes or cigarette holders. Smells like wintergreen. Spellcasters gain +1 to cast for an hour but must Save DC 3 or become addicted. Side effects include lethargy and cancer.

## ADDICTION

Addicted characters need to consume 5-10gp of their drug of choice every day. How, when, and if a character can overcome addiction is up to the **GM**. Asylums, surgery, treatment facilities, mystical cures are all options, but should be expensive (100+gp) and meet with only a 50% rate of success, at best.



## RARE & UNIQUE MAGIC ITEMS

### +1 Sword of Evisceration

On a natural 20, this razor-sharp blade inflicts d20 bonus damage. On a natural 1, it inflicts damage on the nearest ally.

### Prayer Beads of Saint Umbrage

These golf-ball sized prayer beads are made from the bones and hair of a martyred saint. They inflict d6 damage and can be used to strangle opponents. On an attack roll of natural 1, the strands of hair break and the beads scatter and can never be repaired. Only Witch Hunters may use these.

### Shield of Screaming

This ornate shield has a face carved in the center and grants +2 additional points of **DEF**. When combat begins, the face starts screaming profanities at opponents like, *Come get us, you bastards! You'll never able to take down THIS warrior!*

### Arcane Pistol



This wand of magic missiles is shaped like a gun and inflicts d6 damage on any target, no saving throw. On a natural 1 it explodes, taking d4 of the caster's fingers with it.

#### **Severine's Boots**

Stylish ankle-high women's boots made from the softest baby unicorn skin. Although the heels are high, they are incredibly comfortable, and the wearer will never trip while using them. They will get stuck in mud, however, and only fit the smallest of female feet.

#### **Monster Lure**

This grease is often sold by duplicitous witches. Rubbing it on the skin grants +1 DEF but its scent attracts monsters within 500 feet.

#### **Telescopic Eye**

This artificial eye extends like a telescope and can triple the distance the user can see when outdoors.

### **MOONSTONE**

Moonstone is a rare element that arrives in meteors from the stars. It is the essence of chaos, and highly sought-after by cultists and spellcasters. Moonstone is black, with flecks of green, and the primary ingredient in moonsnow, poisons, black powder, sorcerous rituals, and magic weapons. Direct contact between pure moonstone and the skin can lead to mutation. Raw moonstone can sell for as much as 1gp per ounce.



## **APPENDIXES**

### **EQUIPMENT**

All prices are given in gold pieces (gp), except where noted in silver (s).

- 10 copper (c) = 1 silver
- 10 silver (s) = 1 gold (gp)

Prices and availability may vary by region and circumstances. If an area is isolated or afflicted with drought, famine, plague, war, etc., PCs can expect to pay up to double these prices.

### **WEAPONS**

Item	Cost	Damage	Item	Cost	Damage
Axe, battle	20	d6	Mace	10	d6
Axe, hand	5	d4	Meat Cleaver	3	d6
			Breaks on a natural 1		
Blunderbuss*	500	d8	Pistol*	1000	d10
Brass Knuckles	5	d4	Pole Arm	10	d6

			Requires two hands.		
Bow, Recurve	30	d6	Rapier	20	d6
Club	3	d6	Sling & bullets	2	d4
Crossbow* *Takes 2 rounds to reload.	50	d8	Sword	20	d6
Crossbow, mini Takes 2 rounds to reload.	100	d4	Sword, Great Requires two hands.	40	d8
Dagger/Knife	10	d4	Spear	10	d6
Flail	20	d6	Unarmed	-	2
Improvised*	-	d4	Warhammer	20	d6

\*Firearms ignore all armor DEF but take 6 rounds to load and are unreliable. An attack roll of natural 1 is a misfire; roll the d20 again. On a roll of 1-19 nothing happens, and the gun must be reloaded. On a natural 20 the firearm explodes and the user loses d4 fingers.

## EQUIPMENT

Gear	Cost	Gear	Cost	Gear	Cost
Arrows, quiver of 20	2	Disguise Kit	25	Rations, 1 week	5
Backpack	2	Flask or bottle	1	Rope (50')	2
Bedroll	1	Grappling Hook	2	Sack	2
Bolts, case of 20	2	Hammer (small)	1	Saddlebags	5
Book (blank)	25	Holy symbol (fine)	5	Shovel	2
Boots (good)	2	Iron spikes (6)	2	Spyglass	99
Bullets, Sling (10)	1	Lantern	5	Stakes (3) & mallet	5
Candle (10)	1sp	Manacles	20	Tent, canvas	5
Chain	1	Medical Tools	50	Thieves' Lockpicks	35
Chemistry Kit	100	Mirror, hand	5	Tinder box	3
Cloak, Wool	1	Moonsnow (1 dose)	10+	Tome	50
Cloak, Fine	10	Musical Instrument	1-10+	Torches (6)	1
Clothing, common	2	Oil (1 pint)	1sp	Vial, glass	2
Clothing, fine	15	Perfume	5+	Waterskin	1

Cookware	1	Pick	2	Wine, pint	1
Crowbar	2	Pole (6', wooden)	2	Wyrddweed (d4 doses)	4

## SERVICES

The following reflect average prices. During famine, wars, or a busy season, prices may increase.

Food & Lodging	Cost	Hirelings	Cost	Transport	Cost
Ale or wine	1s	Barber	5sp	Cart	5
Meal	2s	Guide	1	Coach	10
Expensive Meal	5s	Henchman	2-5	River Boat	2
Feed & stable horse	5s	Physician	10+	Wagon	5
Inn, Common Rom	5s	Scribe*	5+	Riding Horse	100+
Inn, Private Room	2	Specialist*	10+	War Horse	500+
1 week lodging & meals	20				
Hospice	1-2s	*Not always available outside of cities.			



## D20 KILL SHOTS

Need Help Narrating Death & Carnage? Use these.

### d20 BLADES

- 1 You chop off your opponent's hand at the wrist. They drop to their knees, clutching the mangled stump, and will die of blood loss in d4 rounds.
- 2 You drive your blade into the meaty part of your opponent's leg. As you yank it out, you sever an artery, spraying blood over a wide area. They scream for d4 rounds before dying.
- 3 You slide your blade between your opponent's ribs and out their back. They fall to their knees and stare blankly for d4 rounds before keeling over.
- 4 You rupture your opponent's abdominal cavity. They stand shocked for a moment, attempting to hold in their intestines inside. Then they collapse, dying in d4 rounds.
- 5 You hack your opponent's skull, the blade lodging itself in their brain. They stagger forward a few steps before collapsing.
- 6 You slide your blade under the arm push it through until it emerges out the opposite shoulder.
- 7 You drive your blade through the ribs and out your opponent's back.
- 8 Your blow hacks through the arm, severing it completely before lodging in the rib cage. Death from shock and blood loss is nearly instantaneous.
- 9 You slice open your opponent's belly, unleashing the contents onto the floor.

- 10 You sever the carotid artery, unleashing an arterial spray.
- 11 You shatter your opponent's skull and bury your blade in their forehead, unleashing gouts of blood and brain fluid.
- 12 Your blow drives your opponent's jaw into their brain, killing them.
- 13 Your blow removes the top of your opponent's skull, exposing their brain.
- 14 You bury your blade in your opponent's side, slicing through several organs and lodging in their spine.
- 15 You hack your opponent's neck, unleashing a fountain of blood.
- 16 Your blade cleaves through your opponent's collar bone and into their rib cage, exposing bone and internal organs and unleashing a geyser of blood.
- 17 You plunge your weapon into your opponent's eye and into their brain.
- 18 You cleave your opponent's skull, splattering you with blood and brain matter.
- 19 You hack through your opponent's torso and they fall in two separate pieces.
- 20 Your opponent's surprised head flies d10 feet in a random direction before bouncing to a stop.

#### **d20    ARROWS & SHARP PROJECTILES**

- 1 Your shot lodges in the pelvis. After d4 rounds of agony, your opponent dies from blood loss.
- 2 Your shot lands in the meat of the leg, severing the femoral artery and spraying the area with blood. After a round of kicking and screaming, your target dies.
- 3 Your shot enters the bicep and then lodges in the chest. They die after d4 rounds of screaming.
- 4 Your shot enters the shoulder and exits out the neck. Target gurgles and dies after d4 rounds.
- 5 Your shot enters under the armpit and emerges out the neck. They stagger forward a few steps before collapsing on their face.
- 6 Your shot penetrates the belly and lodges in the spine. Your opponent groans for d4 rounds before succumbing to blood loss.
- 7 Your shot enters the diaphragm, tearing through flesh and bone. Your target falls to the ground, vomiting blood, then turns still.
- 8 Your shot punctures your opponent's lung. They vomit blood before collapsing.
- 9 Your shot enters the solar plexus, pierces the heart, and emerges out the back.
- 10 Your blow penetrates your opponent's armor, passes through the sternal plate, and lodges in the heart.
- 11 Your shot lands between the ribs and pierces the heart.
- 12 Your shot enters the throat and exits the back of the neck. Your opponent drops to their knees, gurgling, before collapsing.
- 13 Your shot enters the neck, severing the carotid artery and sending a spray of blood into the air. Death is nearly instantaneous.
- 14 Your shot enters the bottom of your target's jaw, impales the brains, and emerges out the back of their skull.
- 15 Your shot enters your target's open mouth and lodges in the brain.
- 16 Your shot enters one side of the skull and emerges out the other.
- 17 Your shot enters through the left eye and emerges out the back of the skull.
- 18 Your shot enters the right eye and into the brain.
- 19 Your shot enters the head between your opponent's eyes and impales the brain.
- 20 Your shot passes right through the body—killing the target instantly—and continues onward to strike the target behind them.

#### **d20    BLUNT WEAPONS & HANDS**

- 1 Your blow slams into your opponent's side, cracking their vertebrae, and rupturing several internal organs. Death from shock and internal injuries in d4 rounds.

- 2 Your blow shatters the shoulder and drives shattered bone through the rib cage. Your opponent dies of internal bleeding after d4 rounds.
- 3 You crack several ribs, driving them into internal organs and causing massive hemorrhaging. Death in d4 rounds.
- 4 You smash the ribs repeatedly, rupturing several internal organs. Your opponent vomits blood and keels over, dying in d4 rounds.
- 5 Your blow shatters your opponent's sternum. By chance, a shard of bone impales the heart. They stagger forward a few feet before collapsing on their face.
- 6 Your blow shatters the ribs. By chance one of them punctures a lung, causing your opponent to vomit blood before dying from shock and blood loss.
- 7 You collapse your opponent's rib cage, rupturing several internal organs and causing them to vomit gouts of blood before collapsing dead.
- 8 You shatter your opponent's collarbone. Part of the bone emerges out the throat, severing a major artery and killing them almost instantly.
- 9 Your blow lands on the skull, shattering several vertebrae and causing a sharp of bone to emerge out the neck. By chance, this bone severs the carotid artery. Your opponent slumps to the floor gurgling, then dies.
- 10 You snap your opponent's neck with an audible crack, killing them instantly.
- 11 Your blow lands so hard it snaps your opponent's neck and twists the head nearly all the way around.
- 12 Your blow lands between your target's eyes and they drop to their knees, staring stupidly. Suddenly, a fountain of blood erupts from their nose, and they slump over dead.
- 13 You shatter your opponent's jaw, driving it upward into their brain.
- 14 You smash your opponent's nose bridge, driving a splinter of bone into the brain.
- 15 You shatter the eye socket, sending a shard of bone into the brain, killing them.
- 16 You bludgeon your target's face repeatedly, turning it into a pulpy mess of blood and brain matter.
- 17 You cave in your opponent's skull. They drop to their knees, the nose unleashes gouts of blood, and they keel over dead.
- 18 You shatter your opponent's skull, splattering you with blood and brain matter.
- 19 You cave in the side of your opponent's head, crushing the brain to pulp and splattering you with blood.
- 20 You cave in your target's skull, killing them instantly.



### **THIS IS THE END**

What about fighting on horseback? Or while mounted on a griffon? Or ship-to-ship combat?

We dunno. That sort of stuff doesn't come up much in our games, so we're not going to touch it. Instead, we've given you all the tools you need to answer the question yourself. Assign a target number and move on. Make it up. Nobody is watching. There are no game police to say you did it wrong. Share your ideas on the DungeonCraft Discord.

May all your rolls be 20s!

