title: HAMMERCRAWL! RPG Player's Guide Part 1

subtitle: Book One Part 1: The Basics of HAMMERCRAWL!

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created: 2018-03-22

CHAPTER: Introduction and Basic Concepts

Welcome to the Meat Grinder

Ahhhhh... Fresh Meat!

About this Document

This document is the beginning of my attempt to write a full HAMMERCRAWL! game system from the ground up. This is very much a work in progress.

Future Plans

The intended result will hopefully be a recognizable game with inspirations from *Dark Dungeons*, *The Nightmares Underneath*, and *Dungeon Crawl Classics*.

Acknowledgements

HAMMERCRAWL! in this "complete game" format would not exist without the amazing creativity contained in the followed pre-existing games:

- **Dark Dungeons** by Blacky the Blackball
- **Dungeon Crawl Classics** by Goodman Games
- **The Nightmares Underneath** by Red Box Vancouver

Seriously, you should probably just go play those instead, they're much better games with much better production values.

Cost, License, and Contributions

HAMMERCRAWL! is now and always will be a free game. Very few (if any) of these concepts are original to me, and asking for money for the project would just be wrong.

Contributions to testing and development are always welcome.

About HAMMERCRAWL!

HAMMERCRAWL! is a fantasy dungeon-crawling role-playing game entirely derived from a half-dozen other similar

games which were themselves built up from house rules for the older variants of "That One Game" (henceforth just referred to as The OG) that everyone knows. HAMMERCRAWL! doesn't try to do anything new or revolutionary, instead focusing on establishing a familiar-feeling baseline for 100% procedurally-generated tournament-style role-playing. It sands down a lot of the rough points, standardizes a number of odd inconsistencies, and sacrifices more than one established sacred idol of The OG in order to make the game a bit more approachable by noobs and randos that may plop down to play at a public tourney.

This text won't try to introduce you to the hobby or explain the ideas of role-playing to a novice reader of the genre. If this is your first introduction to a game text, good god, Lemon, I hope you enjoy reading but a lot of the text may be confusing. Good luck, and god speed.

Materials of Play

A game of HAMMERCRAWL! requires the following materials of play.

The Basics

- The game rules
- Multiple sets of gaming dice, including: d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d20, and at least one d30.
- The 'Smith may also choose to involve the other "funky" dice on some random tables (d3, d5, d7, d14, d16, d24, and d30), and even within the core game play. These are detailed a bit further below.
- Various writing utensils
- The spells and monsters from at least one other "classic" game (I tend to use *Dark Dungeons*, but YMMV).

The Randomizers

This method focuses entirely on spontaneous, random play, and as such you're going to need a buttload of Random Generator tools. A good number of these are linked in **the base Readme file** as well as at the end of this document in Appendix R.

The Divining Dice

The Hammersmith will need a special set of "Divining Dice" for assistance with generating threats, challenges, and other dungeon content on the fly. As of January 2019, the HAMMERCRAWL! process has been revised to make use of the custom color-coded dice from the **Genesys** role-playing game, published by Fantasy Flight Games. The dice are available anywhere that game is sold, including online retailers and your FLGS. We recommend getting two complete sets, as that should likely be more than enough for a complete dungeon.

If you go not have the physical dice, there are a number of apps that can be used instead:

- **Heroku Web App**
- **Official Android App**
- **Official iOS App**

The legacy version of this system used the dice from the now out-of-print 3rd Edition of Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay. The previous incarnation of the rules for using those dice are now found in Appendix W of the Smith's

Guide.

Details on the individual dice and their usage in HAMMERCRAWL! are located in the Smith's Guide.

Additional Things

You may find the following useful as well:

- Monster Books from other old school games
- Treasure Books from other old school games
- **The Gamemaster's Apprentice series of card decks**
- **Monster Mod Cards**
- **Dungeonmorph Dice and Cards**

The Expectations of Play

HAMMERCRAWL! is an old-school dungeon crawl based game. One of you will take on the role of the Hammersmith (aka Dungeon Master, Game Master, Judge, or whatever you like), and guide the proceedings. The rest of you will take on the roles of Players, and in turn guide Adventurers through a deathtrap meat-grinder of a dungeon that the Hammersmith describes for you.

Player Roles and Expectations:

- Role-play the character you have created (or drawn).
- Create Story by describing your Adventurer's actions, motivations, successes, and failures.
- Go into the Dungeons described by the Hammersmith
- Lead your Adventurer forth to Get Rich or Die Trying

Hammersmith Roles and Expectations:

- Arrange and master tools for spontaneous creation of play.
- Improvise description of the world around the Adventurers, and the actions it takes against and in response to them.
- Create Story by describing the dungeon environments that the Adventurers explore, and the perils and treasures that they encounter within.
- Enhance the world with Non-Player Characters and other interesting denizens.

Both the Hammersmith and the Players will work together to feed a group of Adventurers to a dungeon, and see who survives. Inside the dungeon, the heroes will encounter wicked monsters, insidious traps, maddening mazes, and hopefully gobs of amazing treasures. Those that fight bravely and/or wisely may just have what it takes to make it out of the dungeon, return to town, and level up to greater tiers of personal power and glory.

The Tenets of HAMMERCRAWL!

Tenet the First: Embrace Death - You will die, frequently, and in hilarious ways. It's expected. Embrace it. There's

no need to learn to "play better" and no need to "git gud" in this game. It's *meant* to be a brutally hilarious meat grinder. Enjoy the process of character divining, and even more so the churn of characters that replace your first ones, all of which will inevitably die memorably in the darkest of dungeons. And when they die, draw tombstones on the back of their sheets and give them amazing epitaphs, too!

Tenet the Second: Don't Take it Seriously - Have fun, and don't get too attached to your characters. Develop awesome stories and personalities for them, but do it all for a laugh. Develop their wants and dreams and then relish when those hopes are destroyed forever by the spiked maul of a demonic bugbear. Ham it up as much as you can, and generally have a good time with it all.

Tenet the Third: Fail Forward - One core focus of almost every die roll in the system is that failure isn't always final. In HAMMERCRAWL! you are encouraged to embrace "failed" rolls and push them even harder into success, via the principle of "Failing Forward." This is explained in detail immediately below, but the real short version is that a "failed" roll doesn't always mean a failed action, and instead can often mean that you succeed with consequences which make things worse than you had any good reason to expect. And by "worse" we mean "more fun!"

Game Mechanics Basics

This section should give you enough of a really quick and basic introduction to the game rules for you to be able to rapidly make sense of everything else that follows.

Established Systemic Conventions

First, let's get review the pre-established ideas. If you're familiar with The OG and its many derivatives, the following should probably make sense to you. If you're not, read it anyway because it might still be helpful.

HAMMERCRAWL! is built with the following system assumptions:

- **Roll High:** The system is tooled around all D20 rolls being targeted high. 20 is good, 1 is bad.
- **Stat Rolls:** Class is determined first, then 3D6 stats in order, with highest two determined by the class.
- **Race as Class:** Races are implemented as entirely separate character classes.
- **Skills:** In addition to expectations based on class abilities and career backgrounds, every character gets 4 random skills they are somehow good at as well.
- **Feats:** There are no "Feats" in this game, at least as codified by other derivatives of The OG.
- **No Natural Darkvision:** No characters begin the game with natural low-light or darkvision. The management of light sources is a crucial part of play for every character in the party.
- **Armour Class:** is called **Defense** and starts at 10, ascending.
- **Time Tracking:** The "Beat" is the equivalent of the "Turn" in older editions (i.e. 10 minutes of in-game time). "Turn" is instead applied to Combat only. A Combat round is 10 seconds of time, thus there are 6 Rounds in a Minute. However, any single combat encounter *always* advances game time by one full Beat.
- **Combat Initiative:** Side-based, flowing in phases (Morale, Movement, Melee, etc.).
- **Damage:** Weapon damage is based on the Hit Die of the character using the weapon.

- **Experience Levels:** 15 levels for all characters. To attain the next Experience Level, you need that level x10 in Experience Points (XP), and every time you gain a level your XP reserve resets to zero.
- **Experience Points (XP):** XP is gained from exploring new locations and defeating the challenges within. The scale is very small.
- **Advantages:** Made popular by the fifth edition of the OG, HAMMERCRAWL! uses a similar concept to Advantages, but with a different implementation called "Beans."
- **Consolidated Spellcasting:** Clerics and Magic-Users have much closer-aligned rules for spellcasting and memorization, including both drawing from the same spell lists. This is to assist new/random drop-in players in having fun with playing these two classes, which have historically presented challenges for noobs.

Whenever Possible, Use Fiat Before Dice

Rule the First: The best possible solution to every question and conflict is to say what happens and move on with the story.

In every conceivable in-game situation, do your best to work things out among yourselves without reflexively reaching for your dice. Think fiction-first, and influence the world with imaginative descriptions of what you are doing. Go wild with your stuff until someone at the table (most likely the 'Smith) steps in and says "Wait a sec, that will require a Check." Only *then* should you grab those dice and let them decide the outcome.

Try not to say things like "can I roll my Freestyle Beats skill to distract the ogre while my friends sneak behind him?" Instead, say things like "Okay I've got Freestyle Beats, I'm going to bust out a sweet air drum solo an distract the ogre." Chances are high that if you say it with conviction and role-play some fresh beats, the Hammersmith will laugh and just let it happen, maybe even giving you a bonus XP in the process.

Sadly not all situations can be agreed-upon in this way, and thus the rest of these rules exist. But seriously, try that whole "go with fiat" thing as much as you can, and I promise you will have a good time.

Using the Gaming Dice

I'm assuming you know about common tabletop gaming dice already and probably have dozens of them at least. So we're not gonna go into describing what they are and how to roll them. In short, you just need a standard set, consisting of a d4, d6, d8, d10, d%, d12, and d20. You'll also need a d30 on hand, which are thankfully a lot more easily acquired today than they used to be. You may find it helpful to have multiple d20s, and a few extras of the d4, d6, and d8 as well.

You may also find it useful to keep an additional set of "funky dice" on hand to assist with rolling certain odd checks here and there. These dice are made popular by the excellent game Dungeon Crawl Classics (DCC), and include dice of sizes d3, d5, d7, d14, d16, d24, and d30. They can be especially useful with the newer monster damage save rules. Also, they're just cool, and you automatically gain awesome nerd cred by having them.

The decision to use Funky dice is up to your 'Smith. None of the rules-as-written assume that you have them, but some of the "step"-based rules can benefit from having the additional dice types on hand, for easier number curves and increased mechanical versatility (see below).

Dice "Checks"

The most common type of dice roll in HAMMERCRAWL! is the **Ability Check**, also simply called a "**Check**." Whenever the game calls for a test of your character's ability, the 'Smith will likely call upon you roll a Check to determine the outcome of that test. The most common such Ability Checks are Skill Checks, Combat Checks, and Saving Throws.

In order to perform a Check, you first determine what Stat, Save, or other such character widget you are "testing" with this Check. Find and mentally note its associated **modifier** (it'll probably be on your character sheet), then roll a single **twenty-sided die**. When it settles, add said modifier to the topmost number shown on the resting die to determine your **Check Result**.

Meanwhile, the Hammersmith will determine the **Target** number you are trying to beat with your check result. This number is often (but not always) determined by a comparison of associated character, dungeon, or monster **Tiers**.

If your Check result equals or exceeds the Target, then the Check is considered a **Success** and you get whatever the game rules and general common sense would expect for that outcome. If the result is less than the Target, then the Check is considered a **Failure**, which in turn commonly means that you have failed to meet the check's objective (and often screwed things up even worse than they were before!).

Note, however, that **Failing Forward** is a major part of this game, and as such a "failure" result doesn't always have to mean a *complete* failure. This concept is explained in more detail just a little further below.

Non-Check Dice Rolls

Aside from Checks, there is a great variety of other rolls to be found in these rules. **Damage** rolls, for example, involve rolling one or more dice, adding a modifier, and then applying that total to your opponent in the hopes of defeating them in combat. **Table** rolls require rolling one or more dice as indicated by a table of information, then consulting that table's rows and columns based on the dice results. None of these rolls are considered Ability Checks, however, unless they specifically state as such. Each of these different situational dice rolls is detailed later in the greater rules text.

On Success, Failure, and Failing Forward

In most single-die pass-fail RPGs spawned from the OG, when you roll a Check and your total results in a Failure state, you simply fail at your check without consequences beyond wasted time and action. This usually concludes the transaction, move along, next.

In HAMMERCRAWL! we do things differently, embracing the spirit of "failing forward" on every Check. Should you roll a Check in this game and score a "failure" result, you always have the option to *choose* to Fail Forward by declaring that you actually succeeded, but with unintended consequences.

Narratively and mechanically, this means that you succeeded at accomplishing the core focus of your check: you won the footrace, you stabbed the goblin, you saved against the medusa's gaze, etc. However, in choosing to turn the failure into a success, you have consented to **Pay the Price**.

"The Price" is whatever the Hammersmith deems an appropriate and/or interesting (and usually bad) consequence of your action. 'Smiths are advised to base the severity of the consequences on the difference in die roll needed to pass the check, but in truth they can do whatever they please as long as the story is made more awesome as a result. And the best part is that you (the player) must decide to use the Fail Forward option *before* the consequences are decided upon.

Following the examples above, here are some suggested consequences:

"You won the footrace..."

- "...but victory was given to the Prince anyway, because the game was rigged."
- "...but pushed yourself so hard that you threw up on the King during the award ceremony."

"You stabbed the goblin..."

- "...but they pulled out a grenade as a dying action, taking both of you in the blast."
- "...but he was just a distraction so the bugbear could get a good shot, take 1d8 damage."

"You saved against the medusa's gaze..."

- "...because your brother stood between you at the last second. He's now the statue that you were supposed to be, I hope you appreciate his sacrifice."
- "...because you accidentally panic-cast that Darkness spell upon yourself. You and everyone around you are fighting blind in the magical darkness, but hey, at least none of you can see the medusa now, right?"

As evidenced, sometimes the cost is worse than the success, but that's the price. Be sure to make it fit the moment, and make it awesome.

Please note: Failing Forward is *only* allowed on the common Checks (Attacks, Saves, Skills, etc). You cannot Fail Forward on damage, initiative, other such non-Check rolls.

Beans, Boons and Banes

HAMMERCRAWL! uses a system of **Boons** and **Banes** (sometimes collectively referred to as **Beans**) as its preferred method for approximating various affects that can affect a character's ability to succeed at standard tasks. Boons give the character bonus dice to add to their roll totals, while Banes similarly give them penalty dice to subtract from their roll totals. Boons and Banes cancel each other out one for one, and are also cumulative to a limit of six (6) total net Boons or Banes. For example, if a PC is attempting a roll in which they have three Banes and one add, then their net total is two Banes.

With net Boons, the character rolls an extra die (called the **Bean die**) during the check, adding its result to the base die's total. Similarly with net Banes, the character rolls an extra die but instead *subtracts* its result from the total. The size of the Bean die depends on the net total of applicable Beans. With one (1) net Bean, the die is a d4. With two (2) it's a d6, three (3) get a d8, four (4) get a d10, and five (5) get a d12, ending with six (6) or more total net Beans getting an entire d20. Any net Beans over six are ignored.

Beans as described here apply to all possible dice rolls, including d20 checks and d100 checks. In all cases, the effects are the same as detailed above, using a d4 through d20 additive or subtractive modifier die.

Dice "Steps"

Within the HAMMERCRAWL! game rules you may encounter the term "steps" in the context of rules regarding dice use and manipulation. These refer to the concept of a "dice chain" of escalating potential. The easiest way to perceive this is to take your standard dice and lay them out on the table in front of you, in order from smallest on the left, to largest on the right (excluding percentile dice). Depending on whether or not your 'Smith has chosen to

include a set of "funky dice" mixed in, this chain will be one of the following:

The Basic Dice Chain:

d4 ↔ d6 ↔ d8 ↔ d10 ↔ d12 ↔ d20 ↔ d30

The "Funky" Dice Chain

d3 ↔ d4 ↔ d5 ↔ d6 ↔ d7 ↔ d8 ↔ d10 ↔ d12 ↔ d14 ↔ d16 ↔ d20 ↔ d24 ↔ d30

When working with these dice chains, you start with a reference die which should be contextually obvious by the situation. Each subsequent die to the left of it is one step *down* the chain, which each subsequent die to the right of it is one step *up* the chain. For example, when applying steps to a basic attack Check, the reference die is a d20, and thus one step down is a d12 (or d16 with funky dice), and one step up is a d30 (or d24 with funky dice).

Steps can be applied to any die roll, including (but not limited to) Checks. If a game rule tells you to apply one or more steps to a die roll, you must find the expected reference die on the chain, count the situationally-indicated number of steps, and then substitute the new die for the roll instead. For example, if a monster is making a saving throw (reference die = d20) and a rule makes them roll with a three-step penalty, then they would instead roll using either a d8 or d12 with basic or funky dice, respectively.

Steps that would push you either below the leftmost die or above the rightmost die are ignored.

Why Use Beans AND Banes?!

You may ask yourself, why use *both* a Die Step system *and* a Bane/Boon system when one should be good enough on its own?

My short answer: Because they're fun and I like them, that's why.

My long answer is that some situations just made more sense to me to use one or the other. Copious amounts of wine and whiskey have been imbibed while running and writing this game, cut me some slack.

Using the Divining Dice

These special weird-faced dice are used exclusively by the Hammersmith, and as such are fully detailed in the 'Smithing rules chapter. For now, just understand that much like casting bones and reading runes, rolling the Divining Dice similarly gives the 'Smith a variety of positive and negative symbols which she can use to develop challenges and treasures on the fly.