

# DEATHBALL

## A GAME OF TWO HALVES

In the future the excesses of society have rendered traditional non-contact sports obsolete. In it's place the public have returned to the gladiatorial arenas of an earlier age - the future is DEATHBALL.

DEATHBALL is a role-playing game of deadly future sport. The players take the roles of the various team members, struggling with the ravages of the sport, the strain of the limelight and the constant threat of death. The GM (known as the 'Umpire') presents a world of fleeting fame, insane rewards and desperate danger.

## THE FRANCHISE PHASE

DEATHBALL starts with The Franchise Phase - which defines the game which is played and the team that the characters play for.

### WHATS THE GAME?

As a group, the players should answer the following questions about the game and note the answers on the Franchise Contract. This will form a reference for the rest of the season of play.

1. What current sport is the game based upon? What aspects have been transposed to the new game. Where are it's roots in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century?
2. What arena is the game played in? How big is it? What does it look like?
3. How do you score?
4. How many people are on each team?
5. Which roles are taken by the players?
6. How do the players move around the arena?
7. Are there any weapons involved?
8. How lethal is the game? What violence is allowed between players? How often do players die?
9. How far has the game spread around the world?
10. Is it a popular sport or a fringe pastime?

**EXAMPLE** - Dave, Ben and Andrew sit down with Ian to run a game of Deathball. The first thing they must do is create their Deathball game. They decide that the game is based upon Rugby League and the increasing popularity of the game in the working class areas of the UK. They fill in a little future history of degenerate northern England having rising unemployment and the best way for young men to escape these new 'satanic ghettos' is to star in Deathball. They want to take the physicality of rugby and the speed into the new game.

Deathball is played in abandoned shopping malls into which the players are sealed for the length of the game. The malls are covered by hundreds of pin-cameras and floating robotic camera platforms to relay the action back to the studio.

You score by getting the ball into your opponents Home Zone, which lies at the opposite end of the mall from yours. You have to be carrying the ball into the Home Zone to score.

Each team has six players - three on offence and three on defence. The defensive team consists of three blockers whilst the offensive team consists of a runner and two wingmen. These players move around the mall by running - there is no involvement of external propulsion. Players have no weapons but they are allowed to use anything that they can find in the heavily looted malls.

The game is not officially lethal although violence is allowed between players and as the malls are never EVER opened until the end of the game, many players have died from their injuries before medical aid can reach them.

The sport is massive in the affluent south, where it is watched by millions on holoivid. Occasionally, exceptionally successful Deathball players will be granted southern citizenship and allowed to move from the ghettos and out of Deathball.

It is decided that Deathball is becoming a more internationally known franchise, especially as more countries experience the financial downward spiral of Europe. The game will be about one of the top teams in the UK taking the chance of a lifetime to tour the USA and play out some exhibition matches.

## ESTABLISHING YOUR FRANCHISE

Taking the answers in the previous section into consideration, now you must establish your franchise.

1. Where is it based?
2. How successful is it?
3. Who is the owner?
4. How affluent is the franchise?
5. Who are your rivals?

**EXAMPLE** – The franchise is called the Manchester Maulers based in the slums of the city of Manchester. Their home mall is the long-abandoned Arndale Centre. They are easily the most successful team in the UK, having co-opted a number of players from the local street gangs. The owner is a Australian media entrepreneur, Davey Davis. He has recently bought the team and it is his idea to tour the USA. The franchise is as affluent as any Deathball franchise – it survives on the handouts that the holoivid companies pay it. Enough to maintain itself, but never enough to improve. It is best that they know their place after all. Their rivals are the Liverpool Lions.

## SIGN YOUR ROSTER

The players now create their Team Members. These are the marquee players for the team, the ones that the game centres around. They should be larger than life characters who will live and breathe their lives through the game they play.

The first thing to do is decide which role your player takes on the team and a general concept to go along with it. Are they the superstar player? The newcomer? The rookie? The aging veteran? The rising star?

Each character has THREE statistics – POWER (a measure of your physical strength, endurance and resilience), SPEED (a measure of your swiftness and agility) and SKILL ( a measure of their technique and mastery of the game)

Each player should distribute 12 points between the three statistics.

Each player then defines TWO Specialities which are their trademarks. These should be specific manoeuvres or situations in the game in which they have a great benefit.

Finally they should define one area where they are particularly weak, in which they are less than happy.

**EXAMPLE** - Dave creates his character – CRUSHER CREED - he decides that he is going to play the teams #1 draft pick from the feeder city teams into the National Team. He decides that he is the main blocker for the team, a huge, burly young man still getting to grips with his new found fame.

He allocates his points as follows. POWER is given 6 points, SPEED gets 2 and SKILL gets 4. He decides that his two Specialities are 'TAKING OUT HIS MAN' and 'ENDGAME SURGES' – the first is defined as those times when his blocking becomes so violent it injures his opponent. The second is his ability to gain greater power at the end of the game, a second wind. Finally he decides that his weakness is a tendency to ease off when his side are ahead, which he calls 'CANNOT FINISH OFF THE OPPOSITION'

Ben creates DAVID 'DIAMOND' CRAMER. He is the team's Runner and the franchise's all-time high score. He has earned Southern citizenship and has retired to become a Deathball pundit, but he has come out of retirement, for reasons unknown, to join the team on their tour.

He allocates 3 points to POWER, 4 points to SPEED and 5 points to SKILL. He decides that his Specialities are 'SURGE FOR THE LINE' – an ability to make that scoring surge when he is in position – and LIKE A SHADOW – his infamous ability to disappear in a mall. His weakness is REPAIRED KNEE – an old injury that was one of his reasons for retirement.

## THE HYPE PHASE

Each game of a season is split into two phases – the HYPE phase and the GAME phase. The HYPE phase is the pre-match build-up and the impact this has on the lives of the players. The GAME phase is what actually happens on the field of play.

Before each game of the season, each player can author one scene for their character. During this scene the player is presented with a new ISSUE for their character. The ISSUE is decided as the scene is framed and it is established during the scene.

At the end of the scene, the ISSUE is rated at 2

Note that if the character has an established ISSUE they can choose to author a scene addressing it again, increasing it by an additional 1 each time this is done.

# THE GAME PHASE

Note that there is no formal 'resolution' during these scenes. Whilst the Umpire can introduce characters, settings and facts into the scene, the player is at liberty to resolve the scene as they see fit. These scenes are not about winning or losing – they are about establishing the character and their problems or complications.

Between each scene, the Umpire should add a Commentary Scene – some hyperbole which details the coming match. It could be an interview with one of the players, a profile of the opposition or their star player or just the thoughts of a media pundit on the upcoming clash. The Umpire can also use these scenes as a chance to bring a change to the Franchise or the game - new equipment, new owner, press coverage etc.

**EXAMPLE** – Ben authors a scene for Diamond Cramer where Team Owner, Davey Davis, has arranged for the star to have an interview on USA Deathball fan channel 'KTV-DEATH'. The ISSUE will be Diamond's increasing self doubt in his ability to perform 'in the mall' again. The Umpire takes the role of the interviewer and they play out a very tense interview where Cramer is embarrassed. Ben then reveals that the interviewer was in the pay of Davey Davis! Shenanigans! Diamond Cramer now has an ISSUE (Self Doubt) of 2

The Umpire then authors a Commentary Scene where he runs a commercial for the upcoming match between The Manchester Maulers and the Manhattan Madmen, a team of murderers drawn from the state's draconian penal system.

Dave then authors a scene where Crusher Creed is challenged by one of the Manhattan Madmen, a blocker known as Lobotomy Lewis Johns or LLJ. The issue being addressed is a rivalry with LLJ. The two of them meet as they tour the mall prior to the game and a fight breaks out. The lunatic gets the better of the Manchester player and pins him against the wall, telling him how he is going to eat his face clean off during the match. Creed now has an ISSUE (Rivalry with LLJ) of 2

The GAME phase is divided into a number of HIGHLIGHTS. Each HIGHLIGHT is a crucial moment during the game – it could be a scoring chance for either team, violence between teams and within teams, equipment malfunction, sacrifice, external intervention etc. Whatever it is, it has to be something that is worthy of inclusion in the replays over the holovids for days to come.

Each player can author TWO HIGHLIGHTS per game. The UMPIRE can author ONE HIGHLIGHT (to ensure no draws). During each HIGHLIGHT, the player must address one of their ISSUES as part of the HIGHLIGHT.

To resolve the HIGHLIGHT, the UMPIRE will choose an appropriate STATISTIC to be challenged.

To that STATISTIC add the rating of the ISSUE which is involved. You may add an additional +1 for any SPECIALITY that is involved. You lose 1 from the total if the roll can involve your WEAKNESS. Now roll 1d10. If you roll under this number, you have succeeded. If you roll over the number, you have failed. **YOU ALWAYS LOSE WHEN YOU ROLL 10.**

If you succeed, your team scores, regardless of whether the HIGHLIGHT was a scoring chance. If you fail, the opposition scores, regardless of whether it was a scoring chance.

Additionally, if you succeed, you may lower your ISSUE by 1. However, if you do this, your team does not score for this HIGHLIGHT.

If you fail, you must raise your ISSUE by 1. Additionally, if you fail you must roll a d10. If the roll is under the rating of your issue involved, something terrible has happened. If you roll under the rating of the ISSUE you must miss a number of scenes equal to difference between the number rolled and the rating of the issue. These missed scenes can be taken from remaining HIGHLIGHTS in the match or HYPE phases in the next match. If this would take you into the next match, you miss that match completely.

**EXAMPLE:** 'Crusher' Creed has his turn for a highlight. He authors a scene where he is double-teamed by the Manhattan blockers and comes face-to-face with LLJ. He has already established his issue, rated currently at 2. He describes the scene as he rushes to block the striker and is taken out of the game by LLJ. He taunts him and knocks him about, out of the view of the referees. Creed loses his

temper and explodes. The Umpire decides that this is most definitely a POWER test. Dave suggests that his TAKING OUT HIS MAN speciality is appropriate – which the Umpire agrees to. His target number is  $6+2+1 = 9$ . He rolls 3 and succeeds. He narrates Crusher beating seven colours out of LLJ, breaking a number of bones. Dave chooses to take the score rather than have his ISSUE decrease, – and already has plans for his new scene in his HYPE phases during the next game.

Later in the match the Umpire uses his HIGHLIGHT to author another scene featuring Crusher Creed and his rivalry. This time he is put into a conflict with the referees over a particularly dodgy tackle on LLJ and they are going to sin bin him for the last quarter of the game. Creed is having none of this and he loses it with the Umpires.

The Umpire decides that this is a SKILL test and that none of Crushers specialities count against it. His issue is rated at 2. His target is therefore  $4+2=6$ . He rolls 10.

The issue is now raised to 3 and Dave must roll again and roll over 3. He rolls 2. He enters into a massive fracas which turns into a fully fledged riot which has to be broken up by electro-baton wielding police. Crusher is shocked a dozen times and has to miss the first HYPE scene with severe brain spasms.

From these two HIGHLIGHTS the score is currently 1-1.

In the final HIGHLIGHT, Ben has Diamond Cramer making a run for the final goal, as the clock ticks down for the end of the game. He is being ran down by all three Manhattan blockers. The Home Zone is in sight ... all he has to do is believe he can get there.

The Umpire states that this will be a SPEED test with Cramer's SURGE FOR THE LINE ability counting, as does his INJURED KNEE weakness and his Self Doubt ISSUE. Cramers target number is  $4+1+2=6$ .

If Ben fails, his team loses the game. He picks up the dice and lets it clatter across the table. Want to know the result? Watch the highlights on KTV-DEATH, Deathball fanatics!

**The Rule Rule:** During any HIGHLIGHT a team may introduce a new RULE to the game. The rule cannot contradict a current rule and must relate to the HIGHLIGHT being resolved. That rule is now in the RULEBOOK and is applied

for the remainder of the season. No more than one RULE can be introduced during a game.

**EXAMPLE** – During the next game, Dave says that he wants to introduce a new RULE. He has already established that LLJ has transferred from the Manhattan team to their new rivals DALLAS DEMOLITION, thus perpetuating their rivalry. His new rule is that any team can introduce a 'Power Play' period in the game where lethal combat is legal. This is an adaptation of the game for the more bloodthirsty American audiences. The other players agree and it is written into the RULEBOOK. Of course, the Umpire can now use this in future games against the players – but that's why it's called DEATHBALL.

## STYLES OF PLAY

### League Play

League Play is an extended campaign of win or lose. The players and the Umpire should create a number of other teams in the league and then play off against them over a number of sessions. As characters tend towards having high ISSUES in these longer seasons, you may want to have a couple of characters each, for substitutes!

### Relegation Play

Relegation Play is a short form version of League Play where the season lasts for three games, with each team battling to avoid relegation. The players must win 2 out of 3 games to survive and stay in their league. The Umpire should create a situation where the consequences of relegation are simply to horrendous to face – a literal life or death situation!

### Cup Play

Cup Play is a single elimination structure (usually three rounds from eight teams or four rounds from sixteen teams). The players team is destined to get through to the final so even if they lose their opponents will mysteriously die in a plane crash or be found to be cloned ex-Soviet attack mutants. However, these knockout competitions are literally that – knockout. During each round the target number to be rolled under on a failed test is increased by one. So in a 'Best of 8' knockout there is a +0 mod in the first round (the quarter-finals), +1 in the semis and +2 in the final. Entire teams can be wiped out .... For entertainment.