



DARK SOULS

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME



THE TOME OF STRANGE BEINGS



WE ARE AMIDST STRANGE BEINGS,
IN A STRANGE LAND.

—

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For all those who seek to link the flame.
May your quests be glorious,
and may your deaths be painless.





INTRODUCTION

Turn back while you still can. Turn back while you still possess your mind...and some semblance of a self. That which lies herein is designed to kill and to maim. To break your body and snap your mind. There is no escape, there is no respite. Once you begin your journey, there is no way back. There is only death, and darkness, and the possibility of flame.

We are in a strange land, after all. And strangers in strange lands should know what to expect. It's in the name of the book in your hands. Strange beings. You're still here then? No words of ours will dissuade you from your path? Well then...Welcome traveller, to the Tome of Strange Beings.

This bestiary contains creatures from throughout the DARK SOULS universe—from across the different video games—now assembled here to terrify your players, butcher their character, and introduce them to the miracle of the bonfire!

After all, let's not kid ourselves. *DARK SOULS: The Roleplaying Game* isn't about balance or carefully compiled lists of encounter ratings. It's about hopeless odds, and death, death, death. These are creatures to surprise and slaughter your players, to force them to think and to work together. There's almost nothing in this book that isn't directly hostile to the Unkindled.

So...Prepare to Die.



USING THIS BOOK

This book is a bestiary, featuring a host of iconic DARK SOULS creatures ready to bring terror to your tabletop. Complete with all new abilities, terrifying attacks, and brutal bloodied actions, the creatures herein provide a wealth of new ways to send your characters back to the bonfire, and bring the worlds of *DARK SOULS: The Roleplaying Game* to new, and grisly, life.

To make things easier, this book is broken into sections, each concentrating on the different types of monsters to be found therein. You'll find a minion section, which contains all of the lesser terrifying monsters and beings you'll encounter as you wander through the world, from variations on the lowly Hollow you're after to the Dark Knights. If you want to skip straight to the big bosses, they have their own chapter—as you'd expect! If you're looking for Nito, Lord of the Undead, for instance, or any other iconic boss, then you'll want to check out this chapter.

There's also an initial chapter that guides you through how to use monsters and build encounters in *DARK SOULS: The Roleplaying Game*. After all, everyone expects to die in a DARK SOULS game, but they also anticipate actually making some forward progress at some point. This chapter offers ways to build interesting encounters, use monsters in interesting ways, and ensure your games feel fair and authentically difficult—and brutal, like you expect in this strange world.

BUILDING ENCOUNTERS

When you imagine battle, it's not just enemies trading blows until one side is killed—no, battles are much more than that. They are tense, and tactical. Combat shouldn't become a matter of rolling dice over and over again, running through the same litany of actions, until a resolution is reached. An exciting battle should cause players to think, and to push their characters to the limits of their abilities.

Battle should be a dynamic, exciting, and perilous test of mettle and steel. So, how do you go about achieving this feeling in your games? The following tips should help, but they don't stand alone. Each tip interacts with all the others and you, as GM, need to weave each choice you make and each element to create thrilling battle scenes.



WHAT'S THE FIGHT FOR?

What are you attempting to achieve in your game with this fight? Fights shouldn't just happen. Of course, it's fine to throw in random fights to subject your players to a challenge, but most fights should serve a broader purpose. Determine what this purpose is—what you want your characters to experience and recognise in the fight. It can be as simple as determining that their current path is especially well-guarded and dangerous. It can be subtle, reinforcing the overarching theme of your adventure, or brutally obvious as you show the characters that there's something cool behind this door! You don't need to overthink it or have each fight provide a major turning point, but knowing what you want it to achieve is a great help to you as a GM in terms of running the fight and knowing when to draw it to a close.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT BAD GUYS

This can seem obvious, but there's more to it than it might initially appear. To start, you need to know what kind of challenge your characters are going to face. Do you want to kill them? Because you can, it's pretty easy to do, but you need to know why you're doing that and what lesson your characters are going to learn from it. In both DARK SOULS videogames and in the *DARK SOULS: The Roleplaying Game* death comes pretty easily, but it always communicates something more. This can help determine your monster choices, as can the environment you're setting the fight in. Is it in a castle? Then you're likely going to want Silver Knights, or other creatures who suit both the environmental aesthetics and the tone of the location. You can change things up completely, if you want to, of course. Rather than Silver Knights or Hollows, fill the dingy confines of the castle with walking plants and giant butterflies, maybe even some scarecrows.

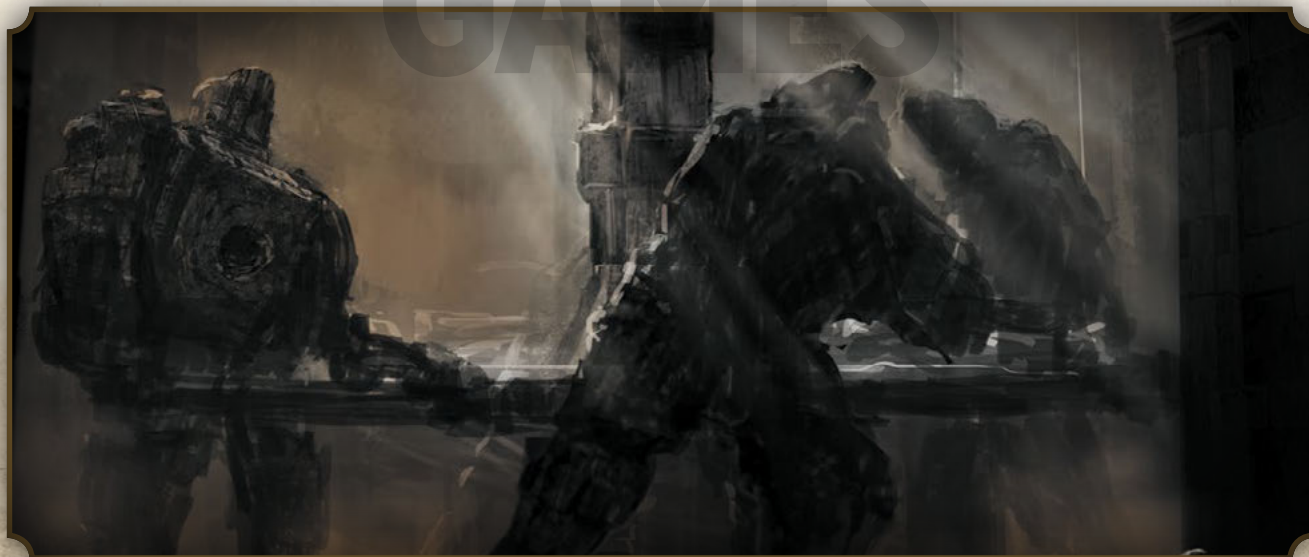
Be sure that's the effect you want your battle to have though, as the characters are sure to wonder why the castle is full of butterflies. Dislocation and uncertainty are great emotions to invoke in players, but make sure you're building an encounter capable of achieving that aim. The tone of your adventure depends on the monsters you're pitting them against. Think about what impact you want the monsters to have, think about where they encounter the characters, and what character should take from meeting them—both in terms of gameplay, and in terms of atmosphere around the table.

DESCRIBE, DESCRIBE, DESCRIBE

The glorious, gothic world of DARK SOULS is instantly memorable. It surrounds the characters at all times; stygian darkness making everything unsafe, unsound, uncertain. Description is your dearest friend in evoking this bleak mood. You can't stop at your describing the surroundings, however. Describe your monsters. Emphasise their strangeness, dwell on the most disgusting or disturbing elements. Use the monster descriptions and key phrases, included with each stat block to advise you how to effectively communicate the monster's appearance, how it moves, and the way in which it shapes the world around it. Description is a key GM tool, but that doesn't mean it's always easy to pluck the perfect phrase from your mind when needed. That's okay though—that's something this book is designed to help with. Describe as much as you can and respond to player questions with information—if they've earned it, of course. While DARK SOULS lore should always remain mysterious and impenetrable, monster behaviour shouldn't. If characters ask questions about how a creature moves, or what it does when it's about to attack them, give them the answers!

PLAN FOR THE BOSS EARLY

One way to make monster fights feel important is to link them to the approaching boss fight. This does several things—it gives you a means of teasing the approaching boss battle, a great way of allowing characters to perfect the tactics they might utilise in the forthcoming battle, and it helps the characters infer things about the world. The boss battles (we'll get to those shortly!) are one of the major focus points of any DARK SOULS game, but they shouldn't come out of nowhere. When building your encounters, try and construct them so there's a dialogue between the individual encounter and the broader story you're telling. How do the initial creatures the characters meet reflect, or contrast, with the boss? What's the relationship between the boss and the other monsters? Are they loyal soldiers? Debtors, forced to repay even after death? Or are they mindless things, bound through magic or sheer misfortune to infest an area, waiting for annihilation to free them? And if so, what does that say about the boss? What does their choice of minion say about the boss? What does it say about how the characters need to approach the fight? These are important questions and answering them, or at least giving thought to them, is a great way of shaping meaningful and exciting encounters.



BOSS FIGHTS

Now, we've got the tips for building an encounter with the smaller things, the monsters that surround you and close in on all sides in Lothric. But then, there's still the big fights—the boss battles. They're a vital part of any DARK SOULS experience, and they should be difficult. They should be challenging. They should even, on occasion, be gruelling. But they should also always be moments of high drama, of grand and terrible acts, and of decisions taken in the midst of desperation. Sometimes, they might even turn out to be decisions leading to victory. So, let's look at four principles to underpin your boss battles!

DON'T BE CRUEL

There are bosses in *DARK SOULS: The Roleplaying Game* who can do awful, terrible things to characters, but you don't need to use these bosses every turn. This is a co-operative game in which you're working with the players to tell a story, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't challenge them nor does it mean they shouldn't struggle or that they won't suffer setbacks. The characters should be reminded about the constant dangers they face and the deadliness of the enemy combatants arrayed against them, especially when they face off against a boss. However, you should be generous and be sparing in utilising the most powerful of boss abilities to make sure things are fair. There are a few ways of making things feel fairer for characters: the first of which is to use the names of attacks when telling characters what the boss is going to do. This lets characters prepare their actions, learn what to expect, and build tactics to counteract what's coming. It's also great for building apprehension!

DEATH IS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

This isn't a direct contradiction of the above, even though it might sound like it. While you shouldn't be unnecessarily cruel, you also shouldn't be afraid of the characters struggling a little bit. If your players aren't making use of their abilities, if they're hoarding Position rather than spending it judiciously, or if they're simply choosing to play stupidly, then it's okay for things to go badly for them. Death is a reasonable reward for idiocy in the world of DARK SOULS. Even then, you should try to make character deaths feel meaningful—have them contain some elements of progress, and of salutary lessons for the characters. Let the characters, as they're being butchered, glimpse a momentary weakness. A means by which they can ensure that they do better next time. Death isn't the end in DARK SOULS; it's just an opportunity to have one more go.

What This Doesn't Mean...

Don't try to solve out-of-game problems with an in-game solution. If someone is disrupting the table, don't kill their character—no matter how tempting it might be! Talk to them, explain how you want the table to function and how you want the game to flow. A lot of these issues can be dealt with via a Session 0, held before the game properly begins. You should discuss your expectations as a GM along with any expectations your players have. Combine your Session 0 with other safety tools such as those discussed in the *DARK SOULS: The Roleplaying Game* corebook to make sure your games are fun for everyone.

Bosses should be scary and, as they are vital to any DARK SOULS game, they should feel like a big deal. Bosses are the pinnacle of a game session, an adventure, or even an entire campaign. When characters meet the biggest and deadliest beings in the world of Lothric, or Lordran, they should feel central to the action. Encounters should build to a boss fight, with the characters increasingly aware that they're drawing near to something ominous, something dreadful, something likely to send them back to the bonfire in assorted pieces. Now, of course, you can achieve positive results by occasionally throwing in a sudden surprise boss, or a boss the characters need to hunt down. Truly though, most of the time, bosses should feel inevitable and unavoidable. A terrible threat against which the characters must test themselves and which they can't advance past until they've found their way.

There's no dodging a boss battle in the DARK SOULS videogames and there's no running away. Once you've begun a boss fight, you either complete it or you die. You don't have to be quite as ruthless in your games, but it does achieve a definite atmosphere and it lets characters know there's no way out. It makes every boss battle properly significant, and means characters bring their best to the battle. There's no hiding. It's do or—very literally—die.

LET THEM BE COOL

While you're making sure characters recognise the terrible peril they're in whenever fighting a boss, you should also be ensuring they get the opportunity to be amazing. If the characters come up with a means of defeating the boss—or any creature—let them try it. Think of an appropriate check the characters need to succeed on, or a succession of them if that feels most appropriate—collaborating to develop an unconventional plan is the beauty of roleplaying. While DARK SOULS video games require characters to hack their way to victory, you don't have to use the same approach every time for the roleplaying game.

If the characters engage with their surroundings and decide on a plan to drop a vast portcullis onto Black Dragon Kalameet's neck, or to lure Halfbreed Priscilla into a pit of lava, let them! It's your game and, importantly, it's the player's game. If they find exciting or unusual ways to deal with big fights, then you should go with it. Don't enable them to avoid risks or danger, of course, but use their choices to open up new and different risks.

Being smart, using your resources intelligently, and achieving your goals is what DARK SOULS is all about. Give your players that chance, and your battles will be all the more exciting as a result.

Now you've got the key advice for building epic, authentically DARK SOULS encounters and boss battles. They're intended to challenge your players and their characters, to push them to their limits, and to build the kind of endlessly threatening adventures you've experienced in the video games. So now, go forward, choose the creatures most suitable for your games, and get ready to set them against your poor, unprepared players!