Black Dogs

Unofficial house-rules and materials for
Lamentations of the Flame Princess

Issue IV

by Daimon Games

Black Dogs is a dark fantasy collection of house-rules, materials, adventures and monsters, a toolbox to generate new content for OSR systems, particularly focused on Lamentations of the Flame Princess.

Issue **IV** contains: guidelines about
social interactions with **NPCs**
instructions for designing **NPCs**
skills and experience house-rules
an adventure on a dangerous
mountain pass with new creatures
advice on setting up a campaign

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It is not part of the printed material.
It's just here for viewing pages side by side.

BLACK DOGS #IV

JUNE 2018

Unofficial house-rules and materials for
Lamentations of the Flame Princess

For any feedback or question, contact me at
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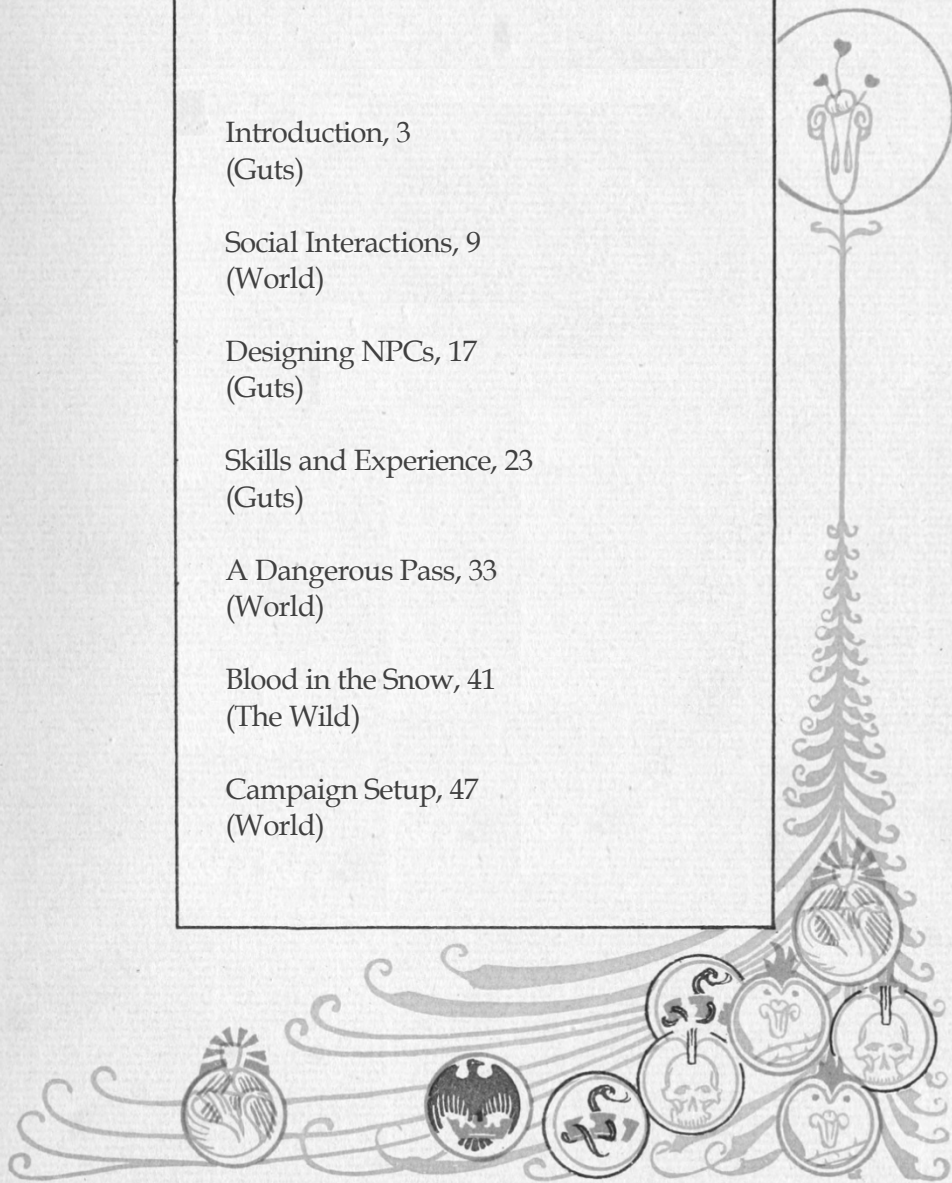
INTRODUCTION

Black Dogs is a dark fantasy collection of house-rules, materials, adventures, monsters, and together a toolbox to generate new content for OSR systems, particularly focused on **Lamentations of the Flame Princess**. Black Dogs shares a common set of rules and aesthetics with Lamentations, but it has its distinct flavor. Whenever a rule is not found (or not presented yet) in the Black Dogs 'zine, just use the default from Lamentations or whatever OSR system you're running.

Index by 'zine

This is an index of topics as presented in the various issues of the Black Dogs 'zine, listed as issue number (I, II, etc.) followed by the section title and content, and in parenthesis to the side the related topic (Guts, Blood, World, etc.).

This is instead an index sorted by what I consider the ideal order of sections in some imaginary manual. Note that different sections are mixed when related to the same topic.

If something like the above "manuals" would be interesting for you, please let me know and if I get enough requests, I'll put these rewrites in my endless list of "to-do".

Call for editors

If you liked the first Black Dogs issues and you are a native English speaker - I will gladly accept your help to edit the future issues of this 'zine. I am not a native English speaker and **I need editors and proofreaders**.

If you'd like to participate, just drop me an email and get in touch. Usually **the deal is this**: if you submit changes or fixes which are accepted into the 'zine then you will get that issue in PDF for free.

Submit your materials

I received a few inquiries about submitting original material for The Black Dogs 'zine. Please, **do send me your stuff if you'd like to participate**. It might be perhaps a bit early now - as I proceed with future issues it will be clearer and clearer what is going to be the atmosphere and spirit of this 'zine and its fantasy world. But if you think you have already material suitable to be published here, send it right away! We'll work out a deal with a revenue percentage.
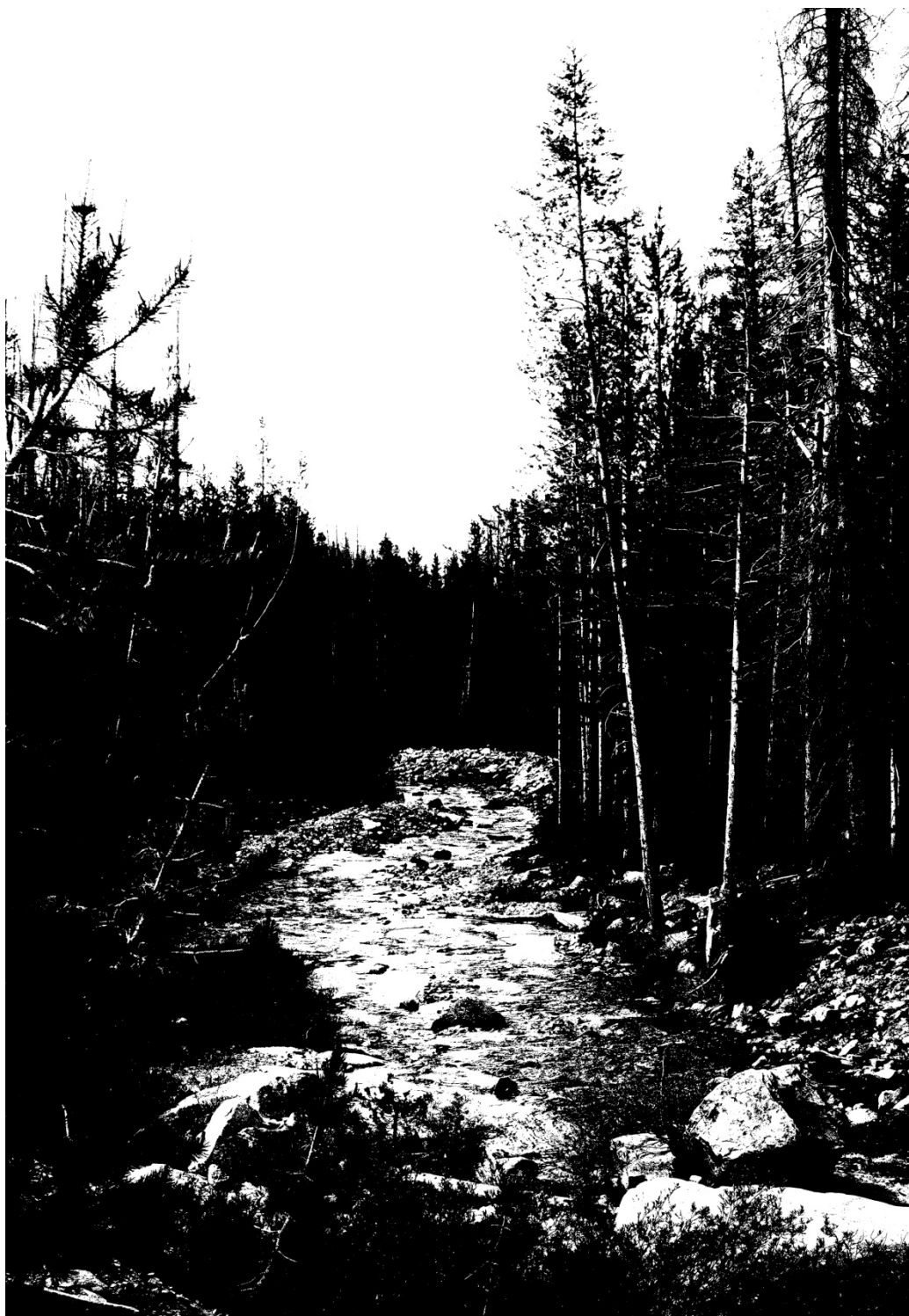
SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Characters are going to be dealing not only with the monsters and all the dangers of The Wild, but also with plenty of non-playing characters they meet in towns and villages, which serve as a hook for adventures and which often play some part in the resolution of your session or mission.

When thinking of a town and its inhabitants, think of it as a dungeon, with its peculiar features, but **without** the need for an exact map.

As a dungeon, a town or village has:

❖ **Notable locations**: unmovable features, such as a specific building, notable regardless of their role in the adventure

❖ **Some mission's specific locations**: unmovable features significantly related to this mission, and the upcoming events

❖ **Some wandering NPCs**: these are the NPCs that characters may meet in the streets or in certain locations. Potentially all NPCs have the possibility to be **in a location different than their usual ones** and this has potential for adventure twists and complications

❖ **Something unstable or definitely wrong going on**: a town or a village is never stable and safe. Do not design a place where everything works correctly. There is always something wrong which serves as a mission hook, as a clue, or as a complication

Basic social map

Notable locations

Mission's specific locations

Wandering NPCs

Something unstable or wrong

Other features

Trap are hidden
but can be
revealed and
defused

More importantly, a town or village and its collection of people, have other features that are similar to those of a dungeon such as:

- ❖ **Direct connections**: like tunnels, certain location or NPCs by default will lead characters to another, without blockage. Do not insert a blocking mechanism unless it makes sense

- ❖ **Simple blocks**: like doors or walls, those blocking mechanisms can be bypassed fairly easily and are made to be visible to the characters, and possible to open or break or bypass. Simple blocks are **visible and explicit**, and have often one or more very **simple solutions** for passing them. Of course, these blocks don't need to be only physical ones

- ❖ **Traps**: these could be anything, from real traps to NPCs machinations, or simply tripwires, actions that would cause the events to unfold in a way unwelcome to the characters. Write down these traps, these tripwires, in advance, and outline their consequences. Traps or tripwires are **usually hidden but can be revealed** if the characters interact with the situation, or they can even be explicit from the beginning: sometimes the difficult thing is not detecting the tripwire but defusing it safely

- ❖ **Secrets**: like secret doors, secrets are either **hidden places** or more often **information kept secret or lies**. Be honest and be clear with your players: always give them enough opportunities to discover and unveil secrets (perhaps at a price: fail-forward)

- ❖ Notable locations
- ❖ Mission-specific locations
- ❖ Wandering NPCs
- ❖ Something wrong with this place
- ❖ Direct connections
- ❖ Simple blocks
- ❖ Traps and tripwires
- ❖ Secrets

These are some examples for your reference:

- ❖ **Notable locations**: an armory, a tavern, a temple, a fortified tower, etc.
- ❖ **Mission-specific locations**: the house of a certain NPC, the alchemist's shop, the basement where the missing person is held prisoner, and so on
- ❖ **Wandering NPCs**: a local priest, a young belligerent son of the local noble, a woman who speaks with the voices of the spirits; but also a fisherman far from his boat, a mercenary who accidentally discovered a secret, a merchant clearly cheating, etc.

- ❖ **Something wrong with this place**: inappropriate or complicated feelings of **lust**; **greed** for money or power, or for a certain position and its prestige; **abuse** of substances like drugs or spirits but also abuse of the land, of the people, of the wilderness; **lack** of humanity, charity, empathy, but also lack of intelligence, foresight, prudence; **neglect** what's important or critical like military defense; **envy** within families or within the community; **corruption** from the inside of the community for personal gain, or from the outside for nefarious purposes, etc.

❖ **Direct connections**: these are easy, just let the characters go where they want to go, and frame the next scene there

❖ **Simple blocks**: a fortified house, a barred door, a body of local guards patrolling the streets. But also social blocks like witnesses, or like curious people keeping their eyes on you, or like the peasant that says he doesn't want you to speak with another NPC, etc.

❖ **Traps and tripwires**: if you manage to speak with the farmer's wife against his will, there will be a family argument; if you put the young noble against his father there will be blood in the streets, and so on

❖ **Secrets**: secrets are not secrets; there is always a way to discover them. Follow the cultist to learn of their secret and blasphemous temple; interrogate those kids and they'll tell you that the baker buys his flour from a shady merchant; keep an eye on the fortified tower and notice a monstrous figure silently leaving it every full moon, etc.

As GM, you are **not** here to play tricks or hide pieces and features of your adventure from your players.

There is **no such a thing** as an undiscoverable secret, no such a thing as an information or a location which can be revealed only *when the time is right*. Let the players direct their characters on the right path and let them witness important events; if they find what they are looking for, let the situation escalate and the confrontation begin.

- ❖ **Reveal suspicious features**: a twisted face, a blatant lie, a malicious look, a raspy voice
- ❖ **Highlight what's wrong**: show physical consequences of a spiritual threat
- ❖ **Lead by traps and secrets**: where there are traps and secrets, there is something meaningful for the adventure
- ❖ **Let the instability manifest**: if the characters do not solve the situation, or they're clueless, let the situation escalate. All this instability goes from ashes to flame to fire
- ❖ **Leave space for creative solutions**: let them take another road if it makes sense

Without overdoing it, make sure they have enough clues about what's wrong here; let them connect the dots, but give them enough of the dots

Avoid railroading

When dealing with an OSR adventure, you should prepare a set of situations, but not have a predefined plot in mind - **do not railroad** your players into a specific series of scenes where you pilot the final outcome according to what you planned.

Just prepare a situation - a "charged" situation: something that is bound to explode into a wild mess unless the characters do something about it. Then just role-play the situation, according to your inspiration or your preparation.

Social components of an adventure are harder to keep on rails if you do the mistake of planning too much of everything in advance.

So be mindful of what happens at the table when your characters are in town: **if you notice** that you're nudging them in a certain direction, you've probably fallen into the trap of trying to railroad them.

Play your NPCs

When the characters are in civilized location(s) of your adventure, make sure **to play your NPCs** (and your village or town, with its unique features), **but don't play the story**.

Do not try to push the characters in certain directions or force certain solutions; just present the NPCs, their troubles and instincts, their relationships and how they involve, pressure, oppose or fight against the characters.

If you are in doubt about what to do, remember that every NPC - besides attending to their regular tasks - will act to pursue **what they desire** and will do it according to their instincts.

Your situation should always be fluid: there will be some major problems caused by monsters or troubles in town, and there will be others caused by the NPCs simply pursuing what they want. Without intervention, the situation should usually escalate, rather than be still and stable.

When characters interact with NPCs or move in a civilized area, try to remember these guidelines:

❖ **Let the characters be where they want, with who they want**: if this is an area with no risks, do not roll to see if a thief comes along to try to rob the characters, do not side track them, do not try to prevent them from going where they want or even meet who they want. There might be a reason to insert delay or obstacles if they're functional to the story, but don't do it unless it's a necessary challenge. Otherwise, just let them have their scene where they want with who they want: save your creative energy for this scene and generate obstacles here (this way, obstacles are relevant to the story and caused or triggered by relevant NPCs, not random thugs in the streets)

❖ **Answer players' questions**: answer and be honest, let them detect clues about NPCs' desires and instincts, about who they serve, what they want from the characters, what they offer, what they really feel, etc.

- ❖ **Give information freely**: some GMs like to make their players to work very hard to gather information. If you do that, make sure it's because the info is really hard to get, and be on guard: don't stall the game. There is no purpose in forcing players to bang their heads against the wall. Don't make it easy, but make it challenging only when necessary and be prepared to use "fail-forward": you want the story to progress and so often a different complication is better than receiving no information
- ❖ **Do not lie, do not hide things**: in the spirit of trying to give information freely, also make sure you don't lie to the players and you hide only what's necessary. Let the characters always have a clue about a lie (a tremor in the NPC's voice, their eyes shifting nervously, etc.). You can even declare outright that the NPC is lying: the challenge is often to extract the truth, to find it, or to face it; not to detect a lie

DESIGNING NPCS

Given that the town or village or whatever location has the characteristics mentioned in the previous chapter, now it's time to help you design your NPCs. NPCs are the most direct and easiest tool you have at your disposal to convey information to the players and their characters. So when you bring them into play, know that they may and should also serve to this purpose.

When drafting an idea of an NPC, before thinking of stats and numbers, think:

- ❖ How they look and what they do
- ❖ Their purpose or deep desire
- ❖ Their motivation, which is not necessarily what they want, nor necessarily in sync with it; it's a fire, it's an instinct
- ❖ A twist, a detail out of place, a single prominent feature - which might be strictly related to their drive or in opposition to it

- ❖ This is what characters see first, both the NPC's physical **appearance** and perhaps their **job** or who they are, their **position** or rank, or what they **pretend** to be
- ❖ In your description, think about a drawing: nobody likes an NPC illustration which is static. Present the NPC as **dynamic**; the NPC doesn't "pose" for your presentation
- ❖ Show the NPC moving, doing, talking, and interacting. Show how **they do their things**
- ❖ Who they are is also their voice, charm, attitude, what they **reveal** of their personality

Who they are
What they want
What drives them

Something
unexpected or
characteristic

Who

they are

Appearance
Job and position
Rank and status
Pretenses
Dynamicity
Moves and words
Interactions
Attitude and
charm
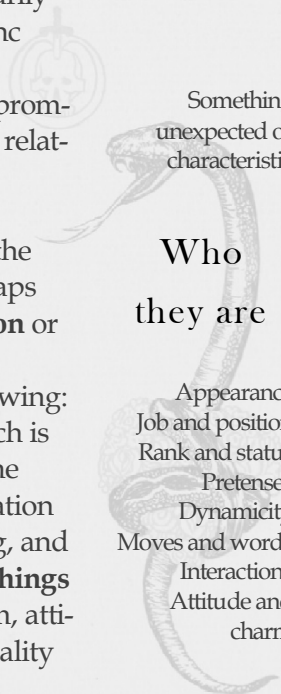
What they want

This is a target, an objective

The NPC will always try to obtain what they want

Have the NPC act to pursue this target

- ❖ This is what the NPC **deeply wants**. It might be to simply go on with their lives, to save some money, to be in peace
- ❖ It might be something **more radical or urgent**, like to save someone from a great risk, or to have something or someone they should not, to make a lot of money, to gain more power, to find love, and so on
- ❖ The NPC is usually aware of what they want, and will do **what they can to obtain it** - sometimes at all costs
- ❖ Always keep in mind what an NPC wants: when you bring them into play, try to imagine if they can do something to accomplish this or make another step towards their goal. **Act to pursue this goal**

What drives them

A drive is an instinct

It's the basic of their personality

Regardless of their objective, this is *how* they would like to act even if perhaps they restrain themselves

- ❖ This is their **fundamental instinct**, their profound nature; this is how they do things
- ❖ In a way, it's their personality, their attitude, when you dig deeply into them
- ❖ It's how they act when nobody watches or when they don't fear consequences; it's also how they act when they cannot control themselves any longer
- ❖ This is **how they try to achieve what they want**; but it is not necessarily in sync with their desire
- ❖ It could be even **in contrast** with it (they want power, but their instinct is to seek protection, so they lack the courage to take decisive actions)
- ❖ Always try to make the NPC act reasonably enough at the start, but **be ready to give in to their instincts**

- When making an NPC, often starting **from the very first description** you give to the players, insert something which is notable, odd, **in contrast** with the stereotype of this sort of character, or that is at least unexpected
- It might be something physical, or something related to their attitude; regardless of what it is, it has an impact both on the NPC's physique and on their character. There is a **mutual influence** between physical and spiritual
- It might be something related to what the NPC wants, or their drive; and even if it's just a physical trait it still **must have an impact somehow** on desires and instincts
- Regardless of where you insert the oddness, the contrast, the unexpected, this trait gives you NPC a new depth, something to remember them by, and it is **a powerful tool for your inspiration**. Whenever you're out of ideas, bring this oddity into play

Use contrast from the start

Use contrast to inspire you for their personality

❖ A strong blacksmith with small hands (he loves small details, he's obsessed about quality; but he's also capable of kindness, of lovely gestures, even though he appears tough at first)

❖ A lovely waitress with big ears and a small mouth (she likes to listen, she doesn't talk much, she can keep a secret)

❖ A fat duke with skinny legs (he doesn't go around much; he has troubles supporting his own weight; but he's also incapable of carrying the weight of his role)

❖ A seasoned merchant in love with small dogs (he loves animals, he speaks to them, he grants favors to those sharing or giving praise to his passion)

❖ A priest always hungry for sweets (he's always giving in to physical temptation, he's easy to bribe, he's going to spill secrets over a plate of sweets)

❖ A tailor with a loud voice (he talks too much, he doesn't listen, he's aggressive and abusive with words, but his threats are empty)

Reference stats

You can use any stats that seem reasonable to you or that are provided by the adventure you're running, but the next page might prove useful if you need to improvise an NPC. Use as reference and always **tune as needed**.

All **Saves are expressed for a d6** (roll equal or under to save) and not divided by categories such as vs magic, vs poison, etc.

If you need, you can add some modifiers as you see fit (i.e. Save 2, 4 vs magic for someone with higher magic resistance).

For morale, use the **d6 Save vs HP**: roll equal or lower than the HP left and the NPC stays in the fight, roll higher and the NPC will try to escape or surrender.

If you prefer to use Saves with a score from 1 to 20 and use a d20, you may multiply these reference save scores x3

Commoner
Level 0 or 1
AC 10
Save 2
HD 1d6 (3 HP)

1 attack:
unarmed (1d2) or
small weapon
(1d3 or max 1d4)

Use also for priests
(Save: 3, plus
maybe
add spells)

Guard
Level 1
AC 14
or 15 (50%)
Save 2
HD 1d8 (5 HP)

1 attack: regular
(1d6) or versatile
weapon (1d8)

Only if AC is 14
(no shield) a
pike is allowed
(1d10+2)

Local Guard
Level 1
AC 13
or 14 (50%)
Save 2
HD 1d8 (4 HP)

1 attack: regular
(1d6) or versatile
weapon (1d8)

50% of them have
a regular weapon
(1d6) plus a
pike (1d10+2)

Bandit
Level 1
AC 12
Save 2
HD 1d8 (5 HP)

1 attack: regular
(1d6) or versatile
weapon (1d8)

Use also
for cultists
(Save: 4)
or thugs
(2 attacks)

Soldier
Level 2
AC 13
or 15 (50%)
Save 2
HD 2d8 (8 HP)

2 attacks: regular
(1d6) or versatile
weapon (1d8)

75% to have also
a bow (b2d8) or an
arquebus (b2d8)
and 10 shots

Captain
Level 3
AC 14
or 15 (50%)
Save 3
HD 3d8 (13 HP)

2 attacks: regular
weapon (1d6)
plus pistol (1d8)

Add +2 to to-hit
and damage rolls
Usually with 1d6
guards/soldiers

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Noble
Level 2 or 3
AC 13
or 15 (20%), plate
Save 3
HD 2d8 (8 HP)

2 attacks: regular
(1d6) or versatile
weapon (1d8),
plus pistol (1d8)

Add +1 to-hit
and damage rolls
With 1d6 guards

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Knight
Level 3
AC 16 plate and
shield, or rare
14 (20%), mail
Save 3
HD 3d8 (13 HP)

2 attacks: medium
(1d6) plus better
weapon (1d10)
No fire weapons

Add +2 to-hit
and damage rolls

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Veteran
(or mercenary)
Level 3
AC 14
or 16 (50%)
Save 3
HD 3d8 (13 HP)

2 attacks: regular
(1d6) or versatile
weapon (1d8),
plus pistol (1d8)

Add +1 to-hit
and damage rolls

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Inquisitor
Level 3
AC 13
or 15 (20%), plate
Save 3
HD 3d8 (13 HP)

2 attacks: medium
(1d6) weapon

Add +1 to-hit
and damage rolls
Can use 3 spells
per day

- ❖ **Detect Evil**: detect Evil on sight, but there is a 2 in 6 chances to detect as evil anything or anyone simply not conforming to the Church doctrine
- ❖ **Interrogation**: the target must save vs Wisdom or answer the truth to one question. If the save failed, the target must lose 2 HP to keep silent or lie
- ❖ **Crusade**: 3 allies gain 3 points, to use within the day against Evil. Points can be spent in combat to add to to-hit or damage rolls, to improve morale checks or Saves

SKILLS

By default, all characters are adventurers of some sort and have the appropriate skills, even though they are not necessarily proficient in everything they do. Whenever they attempt an action which is dangerous, under pressure or time constraint, in hard circumstances, and so on, the GM might call for an **ability check**: roll a d20 equal or under the related ability to succeed.

Characters can also have skills. Skills grant **bonuses** to the ability check in the form of **increasing the ability score** (never above 20).

A **basic skill** is a +2 bonus; an **advanced skill** is a +4 bonus. An ability cannot increase beyond the score of 20 with a bonus (ignore the number in excess) and anyway a roll of 20 is always a failure in an ability check.

The bonus makes the d20 roll to be more likely to succeed in being equal or lower than the ability score + bonus

At character creation, every character has a number of skills depending on class and ability modifiers, as follows:

Starting skills

Fighter (and specialists)	Magic Users (and clerics)
A number of skills for STR equal to its modifier	A number of skills for INT equal to its modifier
A number of skills for CON **or** DEX equal to its modifier	A number of skills for WIS equal to its modifier
One skill for each other ability with positive modifier	One skill for each other ability with positive modifier
	One skill on any ability for every point of CHA modifier

Skills' list

This is the default skills' list for the game that you can improve according to your needs. Every skill has a related ability; the skill grants the bonus **only to the related ability checks**, not the Save rolls.

The only exception is for Saves on Constitution for the skills marked with a star (*); those skills grant a bonus of +1 on Saves as basic, and +2 as advanced (but the Save cannot increase past 5 anyway).

The placement of the various skills under one ability or another also gives an indication for the **standard** ability check that the GM will require in those occasions.

Specific circumstances or a different approach to the action by the player, though, could indicate that instead a different ability will be checked.

Charisma	Constitution	Dexterity
Persuasion and Seduction	Intimidation	Sleight of hand and Tinkering
Deception and Disguise	Resistant to poison and hunger (*)	Sneak attack and Stealth
Read NPCs' intentions	Resistant to cold and heat (*)	Athletics and Acrobatics

Intelligence	Strength	Wisdom
Investigation and Architecture	Open doors and Break stuff	Perception and Searching
Languages and Cultures	Climbing	Bushcraft and Survival
Knowledge and Arcana	Swimming	First aid and Medicine

EXPERIENCE

There are three standard ways to gain XP in the game:

❖ Spending coin earned
❖ Killing monsters (or resolving a situation which includes a monster)
❖ Roleplaying as indicated by your character sheet

When you earn coin during the game - through treasure you loot, money you gain for your services, and so on - you don't automatically gain XP. All coin spent to buy gear or sustain your character or saved, does **not** count for XP. Instead, you gain **1 XP for every one coin** (assuming silver pieces here) you **waste between sessions**. Your character must be in a condition where they're allowed to spend money (in civilization); write off any amount you wish and convert it to XP.

When you kill a monster, you gain its **HD x20** in terms of XP; this XP is divided among all combatants. When a monster is the cause of trouble, and the situation is somehow resolved (chasing away the monster, reaching a compromise, etc.), you gain the same amount of XP as if you killed it.

On every character sheet there is also an XP section where you see actions that would grant you XP when completed. When something is done, tell the GM and mark it on your sheet. As soon as you've marked at least three, **add the sum of the indicated XP and clear the marks**.

XP for coin

This is money that your character spends between adventures, according to their lifestyle

XP for monsters

Other XP

You cannot mark the same item twice; you can mark it again after clearing the marks

EXPERIENCE SHEET

Print one for every character, to use together with your regular character sheet, until there is an official sheet.

To gain XP:
- 1 XP every 1 silver wasted
- XP 20xHD defeated monster
- And as per the section below

When you marked at least 3, get XP on the next occasion; clear all marks

☐ **Leader**: lead 2 or more hirelings into battle (100 XP); ☐ **Losing them**: lose 2 or more hirelings (150 XP); ☐ **One for the team**: take damage for another character or for a hireling (100 XP)

☐ **Pain**: suffer a critic from an adversary (100 XP); ☐ **Brutal Pain**: suffer 10+ HP damage in one round (200 XP)

☐ **Bleeding**: suffer a wound on CHA, CON or STR (150 XP); ☐ **Stunned**: suffer a wound on DEX, INT or WIS (150 XP)

☐ **Best aim**: roll a critic with a missile weapon (100 XP); ☐ **Best fight**: roll a critic with a melée weapon (100 XP)

☐ **Search**: find or discover something secret (200 XP); ☐ **Curiosity**: open a door against better judgment (200 XP)

☐ **Daring**: face an enemy as tempted by the GM (200 XP); ☐ **Reckless**: face a risk as tempted by the GM (200 XP)

New Level: spend current LVL x 1,000 XP
- Write new level
- Add 1 HP ± CON mod

Then select one option:
- Burn a Talent point, add 1 to an ability; pay new ability score x10 XP
- Burn a Talent point, add 1 to a Save; pay new save score x100 XP
- Roll your class HD ± CON mod and add to HP; pay Level x100 XP
- Add a new basic skill (pay Level x50 XP) or improve a skill to advcd. (pay Level x100 XP)
- Add a new special (an ability, a power, a talent) for your class, paying its XP cost

Each +50 XP for physical, not digital:
☐ **Mapping**: 100 XP per session; 200 XP per adventure for beautiful maps
☐ **Drawings**: 100 XP per session; 200 XP per session for complex drawings
☐ **Reports**: 100 XP per session; 200 XP per adventure for better writing

When you have a break in your session or between sessions, you can check if you have enough XP to reach the next level. Players can waste money to gain XP only in appropriate moments (when in civilization) and XP gained by killing monsters is distributed only during breaks or between sessions.

To reach the next level, you need to **spend** your Current Level x1000 in XP, and this grants you only:

- **Level-up**: write the new level on your sheet, and all benefits that come from the new level (i.e. bonuses +Level)
- **HP**: add 1 HP to your total (add also the CON modifier), unless you decide to take the option below to roll the Hit Dice

At level-up, you can spend additional XP to buy also one (**and only one**) of the following:

- Burn a Talent point and increase the related **ability score** by one; pay the new ability score x10 in XP to get this
- Burn a Talent point and increase the related **Save score** by one (max up to 5); pay the new Save score x100 in XP
- Roll your Hit Dice and add the result to the **Hit Points**; pay 100 XP x Level for this (add the Constitution mod)
- Buy a new skill at 50 XP x Level (basic skill, +2) or improve a skill at 100 XP x Level (advanced skill, +4)
- Buy a **class' Special** (see the character sheet rear, in the upcoming issue V) at the XP price indicated on your character sheet

Level-Up

Do not slow down play to do XP accounting

While it is faster to level-up with these XP requirements, the benefits are also less than in other OSR games, especially for HP

The cost of these advancements is to be added to the regular XP to spend for the level-up

Since you spend XP every time you level-up, you usually start cumulating XP again from zero, or near zero, for your next level

Not enough XP

Unlike other more traditional OSR games where the characters' main goal is to earn gold and thus gain levels (1 GP=1 XP), the Black Dogs has a somewhat different approach to this matter.

The basic correspondence of coin=experience is maintained (although as many other low-fantasy games, the Black Dogs uses silver and not gold as the basic currency).

On the other hand, there are **fewer occasions to loot treasures**, if you play the monsters' hunters adventures proposed in the various 'zines. These adventures involve fewer monsters, these monsters usually have no default treasure, and putting some treasure next to them would probably spoil the low fantasy atmosphere of the game.

Also, human NPCs in the various villages offer plenty of opportunities for interactions and role playing, but way less in terms of coin to earn or loot. The Black Dogs do not (usually) slaughter human beings just to take their gold and increase their tally of XP.

So even if the level-up thresholds are lower than in the other OSR games, the XP gained from simple silver or gold **might not be enough**.

Additional XP

The solution to this is for the GM to award additional XP in form of special bonuses or special treasures, which is not necessarily just an unrealistic loot in silver or gold.

A combination of age and real-life matters, less time to dedicate to RPGs and gaming online, makes us all forget how important a map, a drawing, a written play report may be. Especially when those artifacts, produced during play or as a result of play, turn into precious memories and mementos months or years down the line.

For this reason, the following additional XP bonuses are encouraged.

- ❖ **Mapping**: the player mapping for the group during the session, gets 100 XP (only one per session)
- ❖ **Beautiful map**: the player turning a simple map or a draft, from the above, into a beautiful organized map, a piece of art, gets 200 XP (only one per adventure)

Make Maps

- ❖ **Drawings**: portraits of characters, of NPCs, of monsters, of locations, of scenes, and so on, grant 100 XP per drawing (only one per session)
- ❖ **Complex drawings**: as above, but for artistic pieces of art, 200 XP (again, only one per session)

Make Drawings

- ❖ **Reports or minutes**: a detailed report of a session, minutes of a meeting or of a game session, grant 100 XP (only one per session). The report must be in decent writing and not a rough draft
- ❖ **Better report or story**: a full recap, or editing and organizing of the above, for an adventure, grants 200 XP (only one per adventure)

Write Stories

Additional XP
for artifacts

Each of the aforementioned artifacts (maps, drawings, stories, etc.) are valued **50 XP more** each, if they are presented **in physical format** (like on a notebook, or anything that can be inserted in a group's diary), instead of digital format. Digital art is allowed when printed, if you want to stretch it.

Other Treasures

The next paragraphs offer several additional examples of how much of special treasure to give away to the characters, for even more XP.

This XP is granted **at the end of an adventure** (not every session).

The experience
is the XP

❖ **Characters learn about The Wild and about monsters**, as they face them in their adventures. Those experiences may be worth **1d4 x 100 xp** (for a typical adventure; a randomly generated Black Dogs' adventure) or even up to **1d8 x 100 xp** (for a longer adventure, or an extremely weird adventure; an official LotFP adventure)

❖ This reward should be reduced or even go to zero when characters face something that they already know well

Downtime

❖ **Downtime is for training and research**, and other personal improvement opportunities. Characters that do **not** participate in an adventure, might receive **1d4 x 100 xp** before the beginning of the next adventure

❖ Giving XP to characters on stand-by allows your group of characters to improve more evenly

- **Time passes for everyone**, but most games do not account for it. Grant **1d4 x 100 xp** for every in-game year, if you track time accurately. Otherwise you may assume that one year passes every 1d6 adventures and grant the same 1d4 x 100 xp
- Work out a penalty system for ageing if you feel like you need to; experience has a price

This XP is granted in terms similar to treasures and loot. This type of rewards in coin or equivalent must be "wasted" (see page 25) to be converted to XP, and may require traveling to a city, to a civilized area, or returning to some place visited previously.

- **The Black Dogs may provide service to commoners** and receive a variable amount of money for their services; this amount might be worth **1d6 x 100 sp**, to be negotiated before the adventure or given as a (perhaps unexpected) reward afterwards
- Nobles will pay more, up to **1d20 x 100 sp**
- Also consider bounty for criminals, or by the Church, and so on

- **A dead monster's body is a resource**: it might have magical blood or unique organs, monstrous horns or fangs, or some other special body part (or why not, some spiritual essence that can be somehow harvested upon its death) worth **100 sp x HD**
- Requires trading with an alchemist or a sorcerer, in a remote location or a major city

A DANGEROUS PASS

"A dangerous pass" is a short framework for an adventure on high mountains in the harsh winter season. Anyone can cross a mountain pass in the summer, when the weather is decent enough. Only the crazy or suicidal - or someone on the run - would attempt to cross in the winter.

This simple adventure can be easily inserted in any of your campaigns, whenever the characters need to cross a mountain pass. In the standard Black Dogs setting this might be an introduction to a series of adventures that will take place in Italy or Spain, thus locating this pass on the Alps or Pyrenees.

If the characters are on the run, this is a good opportunity to lose their pursuers. Otherwise, offer them a good reason to cross the pass in the middle of the winter.

A possible mission is the classic "carry these medicines to that town", but this is somehow unlikely in medieval times. Escorting someone important or someone on the run would be a better option. Another possible reason is something political: a bank has given them a dozen letters of credit to deliver to a noble house - they need them now so they can hire mercenaries before the spring campaigns begin. If they need an incentive, make this noble house somehow aligned with the political stance of the characters: they get paid and they have a good motivation to keep pushing forward.

You could even load their mules with a few enchanted chests: the chests contain pure gold, but if anyone is tampering with them the alchemical traps will trigger and all content turned into useless lead
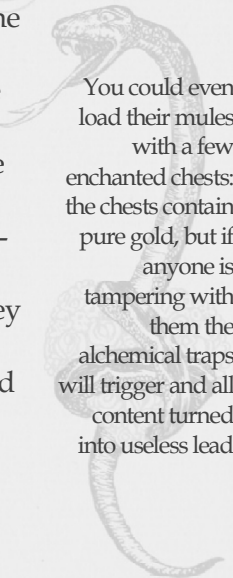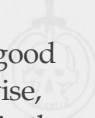
Prepare for the mountains

They are likely to travel where there is going to be no food, and hunting or foraging consumes an unreasonable amount of time

Stress with the players **how important the preparation** will be, and that they can expect a standard journey to take approximately 2 days to approach, 2 days of standard mountain roads, a last stop, then 9 days for crossing the pass (6 to climb, 3 to descend) if the weather is fairly good, and they do not get lost or leave the road. Of course, this would not be fun if the season and weather were good enough: **they are crossing in the winter** and must expect crossing times to double, triple, or worse. Re-mind players that **they must carry enough rations with them**.

Containers	Slots	Cost
Backpack	1	5
Barrel	4	5
Chest	4	15
Sack or Saddlebag	1	2

Food	Slots	Cost
Alcohol	1	5
Ration (normal)	1	1
Ration (dry)	1	3
Animal's food	1	1

Animals	Slots	Cost
Dog (trained, hunting)	3	30
Dog (trained, fighting)	4	50
Horse (riding)	-	100
Mule or pony	-	50

Travel	Slots	Cost
Cart (buy)	-	50

Characters can carry up to their normal load; see the Black Dogs 'zine issue II for my house-rules, or use your regular encumbrance rules.

A mule can carry 40 slots (4 sacks or saddle-bags), 60 if they move half speed. **A horse** can carry one person and 20 slots, or as a mule but without a rider. **A cart** doubles the load capacity of the animal (or human) attached to it.

Load

Light gear	Slots	Cost
Candles (5)	0	1
Flint & steel	0	1
Nails	0	1
Whistle	0	1

Regular gear	Slots	Cost
Bedroll or animal blanket	2	2
Chain (short; x2 for long)	2	25
Climbing gear	2	30
Clothes (winter)	1	20
Crampons and snow shoes	1	2
Fishing gear	1	2
Grappling hook	1	5
Hammer or light tool	1	3
Ladder (short; x2 for long)	4	5
Lantern	1	10
Oil (lantern)	1	3
Pick or heavy tool	2	5
Pole	2	1
Pulley	1	2
Rope (short; x2 for long)	1	2
Shovel	2	5
Tent (for 1; x2 for 2 people)	2	10
Torches (3)	1	1

The path

The path is a series of boxes to cross. Every time the party or scouts enter a new box (even if they track back), **roll a d12** for encounters. Differences from the expected length of the journey are correct and done on purpose; mountain people are funny that way.

- ❖ Approach □□□□, approach □□□□
- ❖ Mountain road □□□□, same road □□□□, last village, no cart □
- ❖ Ascend the pass □□□[□]□, ascend □□[□]□□, ascend □□□□□□
- ❖ Ascend the pass [□]□□□□, ascend □□□□□, ascend □□[□]□□□
- ❖ Descend from the pass □□□[□]□, descend □□[□]□□□
- ❖ Descend from the pass □[□][□]□□, descend □[□]□□□
- ❖ To the first village □□□□, village □

Movement rules

The daily movement is done according to these rules

Boxes in brackets, like this [□] indicate a hidden location, see pages 39 and 40 for rules and details

- ❖ Every day your party has **5 hardships** to spend; these include regular marching, stops for resting and eating, for making and breaking camp, etc.
- ❖ Spend 1 hardship to **advance of 1 box** on your path
- ❖ Making a **fortified camp** costs 1 hardship before the end of the day
- ❖ **Scouting** costs 1 hardship (say who's detached for scouting; the rest of the group goes on but at a slower pace to allow scouts to move and report back)
- ❖ **Scouting can be done ahead** (roll for the encounter in the next box: the scouting group makes the encounter, there are no bad surprises for those who follow unless all scouts die and cannot report back), **or can be done exploring around** (explore around the box you're travelling in; if there is anything in the area it will be revealed)

Roll a d12 for encounters when entering a new box.

Roll	Encounter
1-2	Very bad weather: spend 2 hardship to succeed to advance to the intended box and lose 1d4 HP, or instead make emergency camp spending 1 hardship but do not advance and do not lose HP. Spend no hardship and do not advance but also lose 1d4 HP
3-4	Bad weather: spend 1 hardship to advance and lose only 1d2 HP, or instead make a temporary stop spending no hardship but also not advancing
5-8	Nothing dangerous, just advance
9-10	Encounter, roll a d8 1) Snow banks or ice walls, spend 1 hardship to advance, they remain as a terrain feature 2) Hidden pits, avalanches or other dangers (must have ropes to hope to keep everyone together) 3) 1d4 mountain goats (each worth 12 rations, but quite hard to get; 1 hardship for every attempt to hunt) 4) 1d6+6 white wolves 5) A starving bear 6) 1d6+3 snow-walkers 7) 1d4+4 corpses and ghosts of a previous expedition 8) A freezing lonely human; still alive. What is he doing here? (if you roll this again, take goats instead)
11	Detect traces connecting to the closes hidden location that was not yet discovered, takes 1 hardship to reach it. Note that **scouting around in a box in brackets**, counts as if rolling this result, automatically
12	Detect traces of what's ahead; roll now a d10 on this table and let the players know in advance if the weather is getting worse, if it's safe, or if there is any upcoming encounter (and which one)

Things to know

You can share this information with the characters in terms of advice that the locals will give them freely

- ❖ If you have **no backpacks, sacks, containers**, the character or animal without them will lose one random item per box traveled
- ❖ **You need snowshoes to travel**; if you don't have them you move at half speed (2 hardships for moving one box)
- ❖ **You need crampons to scout around** (just snowshoes if you just scout ahead); without crampons you scout around at half speed (2 hardships)
- ❖ **You need one long rope** for each character and animal to be secured in a line
- ❖ **Without winter clothes** a character loses 4 HP every box
- ❖ **Pick and shovel** (one every 4 of humans and animals) are necessary to make a fortified camp

Same for animals without blanket

- ❖ **Humans need a bedroll and a tent**; sleeping **without one** of them makes the next day hell, spend 2 hardships to start the day and lose 3 HP to the cold. Sleeping **without both** requires the equivalent of fortified camping (dig in the snow etc.) or death will be inevitable. Still, even in a fortified camp, the HP loss is 6 and 3 hardships to spend in the morning

Make sure to bring enough food

- ❖ **A day without food**, for man and animal, is ok as long as the following two days everyone gets rations regularly
- ❖ **The second day without food**, spend 1 hardship just to start the day

Same for animals: mules have 1d6+6 HP, horses have 1d6+2

- ❖ **The third day and each following day**, spend 2 hardships to start the day and lose 1 HP; which you don't recover until you have at least 5 days of uninterrupted rations

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While ascending:

- ❖ **A fortress in ruins**, only a tower standing. It looks like it was made for giants; make 1d6+4 rooms/corridors and each should have 1 in 6 (independent) chances of monster, treasure (worth at least 500 sp), trap (50% deadly)
- ❖ **A little house**, it looks out of place and seems to be made for children; make 1d8 rooms and nothing inside. It's easy to spot tunnels to a dungeon underneath, make it 1d12+4 rooms/corridors long. Still in the size for children, and with a 2d8 **nasty frozen spirits** within; fights in rooms are fine, but in corridors characters must almost crawl and roll to-hit and damage at disadvantage
- ❖ **A cave complex**, make it 1d4+4 caves/tunnels long, and irregular. It ends with a large cave; there's what looks like a giant frozen whale within and in the ice there's gold and jewels (every 1 hardship spent digging, extract 1000 sp worth of treasure of 1/10th the weight, it's all precious stuff. Dig at most 1d8 hardship)
- ❖ **A forest**, which as soon as you get close enough, you can see it's made of sculpted ice trees. There are at least 5d20 x1000 trees, and within is an abandoned frozen palace. There is nothing and no one inside but it looks like a palace for snow-elfs, if they ever existed

Also all these locations can be used as a fortified camp and take no hardship to setup

Of course each of these locations might be an adventure on its own; you are free to make maps and populate each in advance if you wish to do so

Just remember that characters are probably short on food and under heavy stress for crossing the mountain pass; a beautiful dungeon might go wasted if they feel that they have no resources to tackle it in the proper way

While descending:

- ❖ **A nest of Ice Trolls**, this is a complex of 1d4+4 snow houses, connected to an underground complex of 1d4+4 caves/tunnels. Ice Trolls hunt further down the mountains but here come to nest and raise their offspring. There are 1d20 baby trolls (worth no more than 1 HD) and just a couple of adults. There is 1d8 x 1000 worth of treasures, easy to spot lying around in the caves. At the end of these caves there is a tunnel that with only 1 hardship march leads to the next hidden location, **the inverted tower**. No need to roll for encounters, just move there
- ❖ **The inverted tower** is built inside a giant cave; the tower hangs from the roof of the cavern and there is no visible way to climb inside it. If the characters manage to get inside, they'll find gravity reversed in there, and treasures worth 2000 sp and a couple of deadly traps. There is no evidence of who built the tower and why is it like this
- ❖ **Abandoned fort** and the **fort of bandits**, these two are close enough, and you can see one from the other (thus if you discover one, you discover the other automatically and you can reach it with 1 hardship worth of travel). The first is empty, the second almost empty, only a few bandits remain on these mountains in the winter
- ❖ **A beautiful cave and hot springs** within; a relief for those who travelled this far. Just beware of the moss that grows on mushrooms, it's poisonous

BLOOD ON THE SNOW

This section contains all the information for the animals and monsters quoted in the encounters table for the adventure "A dangerous pass".

Animals are not brave nor stupid; they will not fight to death unless they must or unless they're starving. Whenever an animal is hurt, **use a d8 to roll for morale**: a result higher than its current HP score will indicate that the animal will try to run away.

Wolves are starving 50% of the times, though: when they are, roll for morale only after at least half of the pack is dead.

The bear is starving, and there is no chance it will retreat.

Mountain goat	Starving bear	White wolf	Pack
AC 11	AC 14	AC 13	(white wolves)
Save 1	Save 2	Save 2	
HD 1d8 (4 HP)	HD 5d8+4 (25 HP)	HD 2d8+2 (11 HP)	If 3 or more are fighting against the same target, they all roll to-hit and damage at advantage
1 attack: horns (1d4)	2 attacks: claws (2d6+2) and bite (2d8+2)	2 attacks: claws (1d4) and bite (2d6)	
If the goat is not killed with a single strike, it will escape and you must spend 1 hardship for a chance to chase it	If the bite attack is successful, it gains a 3rd attack with claws against the same target of the bite	If the bite attack is successful, it gains a 3rd attack with claws against the same target of the bite	
	Add +3 to to-hit and damage rolls	Add +1 to to-hit and damage rolls	

Snow-walkers

Snow walker
AC 13
or AC 14 (25%)
Save 4
HD 2d8+2 (12 HP)

2 attacks: medium
weapon (1d6+1),
frozen touch (2d4)

If the frozen touch
hits, all those hurt
by it at least once
must spend 1
hardship every
following morning
to shake the
feelings of freezing
nightmares, until
they leave these
mountains

Snow-walkers are
immune to cold
and cold spells

Add +1 to to-hit
and damage rolls

Snow-walkers are
at home on the
snow: every round
they either roll
to-hit or damage
at advantage

Snow-walkers are a legend among those who travel on these mountains. They've been seen countless times, but nobody has seen them in person, nor can point you to someone who did.

Reports indicate thin-limbed humanoid forms, with ice pale skin and white hair, blue eyes and hissing voices. Some actually say they have four arms (another pair concealed on the back) and that they can climb like goats or spiders up the ice walls of these mountains. Some say they eat human meat - others that they are fundamentally kind spirits and just want to be left alone.

If the characters encounter the snow-walkers, the snow-walkers **will not manifest right away**. They will be detected if the characters decide to scout ahead or around, otherwise they will manifest after the characters have travelled another 3 boxes.

The snow-walkers demand that the characters keep away from all the locations they might encounter **while ascending**. They don't care about those on the descent.

If the characters do not agree, or agree then violate their word, or if they already entered any of the locations met during the ascension, the snow-walkers **become hostile**.

Otherwise they will remain neutral: they can even escort (and help) the party to keep an eye on them, but only up to the top and not on the descent. If the group moves with aid by the snow-walkers, they can spend 2 additional hardships every day. The snow-walkers might have spare equipment and some food of previous expeditions to share with the characters.

Note that it will require some leap of faith to trust the snow-walkers: they have indeed four arms and two thin long legs, they look more or less humans but all in shades of white, and speak with a hiss that reminds of cold winter winds. They also show little to no emotion.

The bodies of another expedition (1d4+4 corpses) are found in the snow, in what's left of their ruined camp. There is no sign of violence: death occurred probably because of the cold and the weather.

If the characters do not bury the dead (spend 1 hardship, 2 if there is more than 6 corpses) the ghosts will automatically be hostile. Otherwise, the GM can make them neutral and perhaps ask something from the characters (deliver a message? recover another body to bury?) and in exchange offer advice and friendship, and perhaps even some leftover rations or equipment in decent conditions.

Simple Ghost

Simple Ghost
AC 11
Save 1
HD 2d8 (9 HP)

1 attack: frozen touch (1d6+2)

Immune to everything except fire, silver and magic

This is the only survivor of some previous expedition; found in the snow, with half HP left, winter clothes and no rations and no equipment. He or she has only a single weapon.

Is there any dark secret behind their survival and their loss of memory?

If friendly to the characters, grant 1 hardship more to spend every day because of familiarity with these mountains and the pass.

Human (guide)

Human guide
AC 12
Save 2
HD 2d8 (8 HP)

1 attack: medium (1d6) or versatile weapon (1d8)

Frozen spirits

Simple Ghost
AC 11
Save 1
HD 2d8 (9 HP)

1 attack: frozen touch (1d6+2)

Immune to everything except fire, silver and magic

They live in the small house that looks like it's made for children. They are nasty: they have a hairy human body, six arms and no legs, and two heads (one in front and the other on the back). So they are never surprised or attacked from behind, and they crawl even in the smallest tunnels with agility and speed. Stats like Simple Ghosts, but creepier and very nasty.

They are found **only in the little house** that may be encountered while ascending. You may be tempted to recycle them for another location (in fortresses and caves, in the elfs palace or the inverted tower). Don't.

Ice Trolls (adult)

Troll
AC 15
or 16 (50%)
Save 3
(1 vs fire)
HD 8d8 (30 HP)

2 attacks:
claws (1d10)

If their 1st attack was successful, bite against the same target, for an automatic 1d8+1 damage

Add +1 to to-hit and damage rolls

Ice Trolls in this adventure are found in their nest (a hidden location that may be encountered on the descent), but not as wandering monsters. In case the characters find the Ice Trolls nest, there will be **only 2 adults** there.

There are **also 1d20 baby trolls**, but those have only 1 HD and will not fight. Slaughter them freely, if you must.

Trolls are not invulnerable but:

❖ **Normal weapons** inflict only half damage (rounded up) against them
❖ **Silver weapons** inflict double damage
❖ **Spells** inflict normal damage
❖ **Fire and acids** (and related spells) inflict double damage
❖ **Every round of combat** the troll regains 1 HP from wounds inflicted by normal weapons
❖ A troll can give up both attacks to **reattach a severed limb** (including its head)

CAMPAIGN SETUP

This chapter contains some advice on how to setup your Black Dogs campaign, if you haven't already started one. If you want to play Black Dogs to the fullest, you may want to wait for the next issue of this 'zine (#5) which will contain a summary of all rules and ad-hoc **character sheets**, plus **Careers** and backgrounds for characters. Issue #5 will also contain the missing house-rules for **Sorcery** and for the **Turn Dice** - this one which allows you to stop tracking turns for spells, lights, and other durations. Anyway, even if you've started - or if you're indeed going to wait for issue #5, the advice contained here might be of help, and hopefully it's valid for other OSR games too.

Same as anyone, when I was younger I could dedicate a huge amount of time to setting up a campaign, perhaps doing some world building, and writing tons of adventures, with recurring themes and NPCs, with connections and hooks between locations, and so on. Now time is scarce and it's better used to play, rather than to prep for play.

For this reason, I setup my campaigns in the simplest way: I prepare a few adventures (I playtest my own or pick some from my collection that fit the theme and spirit of the game I want to play) and start only with those.

You don't need many, 3 or 4 will be enough and **for each adventure you play** you should read another two, and prepare another one well enough. I usually do not prepare more than this.

Never enough time

Prepare the minimum to get the game started
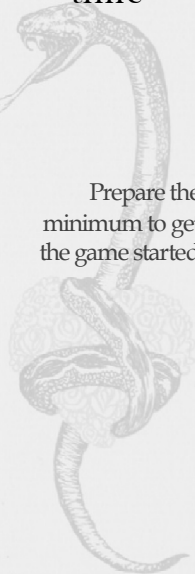
Do the bare
minimum
preparation
you can afford

Unless you are a chronic procrastinator, and you need to setup everything in advance or you never will, **a few adventures are enough**. In fact, you should get the game started with the minimum of the preparation that you can afford. Games don't always go the way we hope, players give up, GMs cannot keep up, life interferes (or simply happens). Campaigns with a huge amount of preparation done beforehand have still roughly the same chances of failing, but their failures become harder to accept because of all the preparation.

When in doubt,
spend time
playing at the
table and reading
adventures, not
preparing a
campaign in
details

Actually, a long preparation beforehand might even **postpone the starting time** of the campaign itself. Players might lose interest in the game you pitched or again, life could get in the way. If you have the chance to play, just start playing with a few adventures ready in your sack, no more. The rest will come afterwards.

Propose a campaign

Describe the
game system:
find analogies and
highlight a few
interesting
differences

The way I present a campaign to my players is the following: I present the game system very briefly and describe which spirit and tone the game will have.

In **describing the game system**, I focus on a few details, I mention a similar game we already played or that they might have played with other GMs, and **highlight a few differences or interesting bits**.

For Black Dogs, you can mention of course the OSR, LotFP more specifically, and say there are a few interesting house-rules regarding character creation, encumbrance, combat, and XP and level-up.

More important, though, is to describe the **spirit and tone of the campaign**. For the OSR, I believe that the crucial elements to mention are the mortality rate, the expected time for some meaningful character progression, and some words on the setting.

In describing the setting, you will do well to mention also why characters actually go on adventures, and if they start with very low power or if instead they are somehow different than regular folks (and stand a better chance of survival in critical situations).

For Black Dogs, you can say that:

❖ Characters start not too powerful, but perhaps a bit more than regular folks, and in line with other OSR games

❖ The mortality rate can be expected to be high, but thanks to Luck, for example, and slightly better Save scores, it's not too bad

❖ Level-up is faster than in other OSR games, but the characters gain a bit less (especially HP and Saves do not progress as in other OSR games)

❖ The setting can be presented as late medieval and issues #1 and #2 have got you covered about this topic

Remember to mention who are the Black Dogs, and why they go on adventures; also have a look again at the Players' Mission chapter in issue #3. Note that characters go on adventures for one reason, which is **not necessarily the same** for your players to come to the table and play.

Present the single adventures

In bringing adventures to the table, I usually follow a very simple procedure:

❖ I select at least two, better three or even four which I know well enough for having read them once

❖ These are usually adventures that suit well the spirit of the game, or my own adventures to playtest, prepared ad-hoc for this setting

❖ I don't often try to adapt an adventure originally written with a radically different setting or spirit; there are plenty which will be suitable from scratch, with lesser effort

❖ I pitch those adventures to my players, saying usually not more than a few sentences for each adventure. I imagine I talk about a single adventure for a minute or even less

❖ Based on this information, the group of players selects at least one adventure, perhaps more - sometimes expressing some preferences regarding which one to play first - leaving me the choice of how to bring it to the table and insert it in the story

My process is based on few very simple assumptions:

❖ The GM does not have an unlimited amount of time to dedicate to play, and it's better to play than to prep

❖ The choice between two well prepared adventures is better than the illusion of freedom of a sandbox full of desperate improvisation

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- The players care mostly about playing and exploring; the freedom of choice is not in picking a random direction but in choosing the adventure, and in playing the adventure
- The players are here to play the game: they will not bail on me for offering this adventure instead of that one; they will not create imaginary reasons for their characters to back away from an adventure unless there's a real reason to (usually, a well educated guess that scared the shit out of them)
- Everyone at the table wants to explore the world, and the story emerging from a few selected adventures is as good as the one from a virtually unlimited sandbox

This doesn't mean that GMs that play sandbox style campaigns are doing it wrong; it simply means that I setup my campaigns differently and it works as well

When you need to present an adventure to the players, say at least two or three of those things:
- Something you're excited about, perhaps only that you just bought this and it's cool!
- Something about the location or atmosphere of the adventure
- Something about a cool NPC or a weird or dangerous monster
- Something about a peculiar situation, or interesting opportunity
- Something that would actually motivate the characters

What to present

While presenting the adventure try to avoid spoilers, of course, but there is no reason why not to tease your players

If you need, make a few written notes, with bullet points, and remember that your pitch doesn't have to be perfect. Offer two or three adventures and let them choose.