

The Monster Hunter

You're just like anyone else. You're not a dark magician. You're not a monster desperately clinging to a human face. You've never seen the sun. You've never wielded the power that once held the world together. You know you've fallen far from the heights of your ancestors.

You're human, in an age where humans are hunted by monsters in the dark. You have no special gifts to set you apart. You're just like anyone else... except for one thing: you fight.

You go out into the vast cold unending night, and you don't return until you've met death and put a spear in its guts. You won't lay down and die. You won't give up. You won't accept that there can't be life in this black and horrible time. You're willing to risk yourself so other people can live on.

Maybe you're not just like everyone else after all.

History

Even in the age of grand magic and sorcerer-kings and airy miracles, the majority of the human race was made up of ordinary people: farmers, merchants, craftsmen, soldiers, spouses, clerks, scribes. They didn't transform the world. They didn't raise up flying citadels. They didn't harness lightning, or enslave devils. They just lived, and died, and gave the human world meaning somewhere between.

Now the sorcerer-kings are dead, and the flying citadels are fallen, and the miracles have ended or become unstoppable nightmares, but the people—regular folks scratching out a living from the dust—are still here.

Origin

You're an ordinary person of extraordinary will, a product of this terrible age. Where did you come from?

- Your clan were the retainers of a powerful necromancer family. Once, that meant something—you've seen a painting of your grandfather wearing fine livery and carrying a ceremonial silver sickle for his master. But the necromancers dwindled and scattered, and your folks were dragged off in a hundred directions until you were just a tiny household serving a single dark magician. Things got worse from there: maybe even your final patron is now gone and your family is trying to find a new place in the world. Maybe you still act as retainer for your master, the very last of your line.
- You were born in the dark and you have only ever known the fruits of this bleak age: toil, hardship, danger, and a gnawing cold. It's not much... and because of that, something inside of you broke when a stinking, hairy beast smashed open one of the huts in your village and dragged your neighbor into the night. You can't afford to lose anything in this awful world. Anything that would take away what little you have can't be allowed to live.
- You grew up around surrounded by pale, empty, beaten expressions. You couldn't understand it—the folks in your nan's stories weren't like this, the gallant heroes and fair maidens. As you became older, though, you put it together. You came to understand how much everyone had lost, and the understanding boiled in your gut. You don't know how to put the world right again. You don't know how to bring back the light. But you do understand one thing: nothing survives

without fighting in this long, terrible night. You won't be an empty shell. You won't be a broken back. Maybe there are no more knights, but there can still be people willing to stand up.

- You're afraid, you're always afraid. And with good reason: there's not enough food, there's not enough heat, there's not enough hope, and the night is full of sharp and hungry teeth. But if you sat and cowered and waited for the end it would drive you mad. You know this, because it happened once. You survived the destruction of your home, curled into a ball beneath falling roofbeams as the beast feasted on your brother, and almost fell into a darkness from which there was no way back. You can't go back there again. So you rush into the hunt, screaming at the top of your lungs, and folks mistake it for courage.

- This is a world in which only the strong can live and thrive. That's going to be you. You don't work for the good of your people. You don't fight because of a deep passion. You can't stand to be nobody, that's all, especially not in an age of nobodies. Heroes get seated at the head of the feast. Heroes get to fuck the prettiest young thing in town. Heroes get respect. There's not much left to have in the world, granted, but a person can still have ambitions. If you have to face down some kind of awful poisonous monster to get somewhere in the world, well, it's better than being nobody.

- Some other tale of ordinary beginnings and extraordinary danger.

Gender

Choose one:

Man, woman, ambiguous, or transgressing.

Gender has no impact your character's traits, though it may shape the way others treat you and what they expect from you. Still, hunting monsters is a bold enough feat to give you some leeway to buck the local trends.

Name

Select an ordinary name, a stranger's name, a foreign name, or a simple name. This is how others will know you in the long cold dark.

Appearance

Choose one of the following:

- **Fresh:** You're young, or at least fresh-faced. You've stared into the dark and it hasn't broken you, not yet. You still face the hunt with optimism, or at least make a show of it—people look at you and they see someone with a future. It makes them fear for you. Add +2 to rolls to appeal, elicit sympathy, and lead others. Suffer -1 to attempts to frighten or intimidate others.

- **Ordinary:** Honestly, you look like anyone else. Maybe a little rugged, maybe a little handsome, maybe a little homely, but mostly, you just seem like ordinary folks. Why not? It's what you are, after all. Add +1 to rolls to gain trust or blend in.

- **Harsh:** The hunt has left its mark on you. Maybe it's physical, in the form of a gruesome scar. Maybe it's an awful flat gleam in eyes that have seen the unspeakable. Maybe it's just in the set of your jaw and shoulders, always ready for the worst. However it manifests, you're the hero that people need... but probably not the first one they'd have asked to get. Add +1 to rolls to intimidate, threaten, or browbeat.

Mysticism

You don't know a damned thing about magic. Suffer -3 to attempts to enact rituals or operate magical apparatuses of the old world.

Resourceful

You don't have terrible death-spells, undead servants, or grotesque natural weapons. You have learned to do more with less. Gain the following perks:

- **Craftsman:** You've learned to let nothing, nothing, go to waste. You may use certain salvaged body parts after successful hunts to craft special items.
- **Corpse Scavenger:** If you have a few minutes after defeating a monster, you can try to salvage even damaged body parts for use as raw materials. Roll at +0. On a miss, the monster is too damaged to be of any use. On a 7-9, you can retrieve one monster resource of your choosing that would normally only be available as a death card result, if the monster presents any such opportunities. On a 10+, you can retrieve *all* monster resources of your choosing that would normally only be available as death card results, if the monster presents any such opportunities.
- **Scrounged Fortune:** You've dug up a useful thing or two in your past hunts. Select an additional trinket, which may come from any playbook.

Details

Choose up to two of the following details for your character:

- **Paranoia:** Sure, you're scared all the time. It keeps you sharp, and that keeps you alive. Gain +1 to detect ambushes, traps, and imminent danger.
- **Versatile:** You make it a point to familiarize yourself with all sorts of weapons. When wielding a weapon that would normally attack at +0, you attack at +1 instead.
- **Mysticism:** Perhaps you were the long-time retainer of a necromancer. Maybe you just grew up in the shadow of an old wizard tower. Either way, you know a little bit more about magic than most. Roll at -1 rather than -3 to operate rituals and devices of the old world.
- **Eclectic Collection:** You've come across a number of interesting things in your explorations. Select a second trinket.
- **Patch-Up Work:** Sometimes a bit of basic first aid is the difference between limping back from a hunt and not making it back at all. Roll at +1 to perform basic medicine.
- **The Better Part of Valor:** If you die, there's no guarantee anyone will step up to continue your work. Killing monsters is important, but being around to keep killing them in the future is even more vital. Gain +1 on attempts to escape from battle.
- **Reinforcement:** You've taken great pains to learn how to best keep your gear in working order, even when there's nothing left to hold it together but bad language and sheer will. When employing a piece of gear that breaks after a certain number of uses, you can wring one extra use out of it before it is rendered useless, so long as the default number of uses is higher than one. This doesn't apply to your Armor, of a Sort (see below).
- **Lucky:** *Something* seems to be looking out for you. Once per session, outside of combat, you may add +1 to a roll.

• **Bizarre Quirk:** Select a detail from another playbook, subject to the MC's approval and common sense. (For example, if selecting a detail from the Paladin's playbook, Eidetic Memory could easily make sense, but Tireless Sentinel wouldn't, as you lack the Paladin's armor and shield.)

Something to Kill Monsters With

You've found or crafted or been gifted weapons for the hunt. Select two weapons from the list below:

- A reinforced axe made from a monster's sharpened hipbone. This allows for one attack on your turn at +1, inflicting 4 harm.
- A sturdy spear with a heavy-bladed metal tip. This allows for one attack on your turn at +2, inflicting 3 harm.
- A pair of sturdy short swords. These allow for two attacks on your turn at +2, each inflicting 2 harm.
- A brace of weighted darts. This allows for two attacks on your turn at out to *medium* range at +2, inflicting 1 harm each.
- A bow and a quiver of arrows. This allows for one attack on your turn at out to *long* range at +2, inflicting 1 harm.

You are considered to have access to both of your weapons at all times during battle, and need take no special action to switch between them, though you may still only attack with one weapon per turn. You are also considered to have enough darts or arrows to last out a fight.

Armor, of a Sort

It's no shining coat of mail, but you've managed to cobble together a collection of thick beast hides and bones that offer some protection during the hunt. In the course of each hunt, you may reduce the harm of up to three separate attacks by 1. After you have done so, your armor is too banged-up to offer any further protection until you repair it back at your settlement.

Movement

When in battle, you have a base movement of one range band per round. You can take this movement before or after acting.

Defense

The only thing more important than bringing down your prey is living long enough to do it, and you've drilled extensively to be able to do so. Add +2 to rolls to defend.

Intimacy

When you share a moment of intimacy with someone, be it physical or emotional, you can opt to share your reasons for fighting with them. If you do so, they can later draw on that memory to gain +1 in a situation where your words seem to resonate.

Trinket

In your journeys through the endless night, you may have come across an interesting curio. Select one of the choices below to begin the game with.

- **Devil Heart:** A strange and unnerving object of burnt meat and shining brass. If you hold it and close your eyes, you may see the light cast by human souls up to a mile away, even in pitch-black or through solid walls.
- **Pyrosphere (x3):** A weapon of the old world, this brass-and-crystal sphere contains within it the volatile essence of fire. It may be used a weapon, consisting of a single attack at +0 out to *medium* range, and inflicting 5 harm as it shatters and bursts into a brief fury of flames. After one use, the weapon is rendered useless forevermore. Most assume these to have been wizard-forged, but they are in fact a product of the industry of devils.
- **Old Shield:** A battered old shield, bearing the faded heraldry of a long-dead kingdom. Requires the use of a hand in battle. Up to three points of harm may be negated by use of this shield; this negation doesn't have to happen all at once. Once three harm have been blocked, the old shield shatters into useless fragments.
- **Ghost Oil (x2):** A black vial containing a thick, viscous white fluid, said by some to be a distillation of tormented souls but more likely a product of alchemy. When a weapon is anointed with this fluid, it bursts into blue-white flames of terrible intensity, which do not mar or consume the surface they burn upon, but char all else into ruin. For the duration of one battle, a melee weapon anointed with ghost oil inflicts one additional harm.
- **Old Jacket:** This dusty but stylish black longcoat bears a crest of unknown design upon its breast in thread-of-gold.
- **Wooden Flute:** This instrument is older than you are, but still produces as sweet and pure a sound as the day it was made.
- **Nothing:** Maybe you only trust the weapon in your hands, maybe you were robbed, or maybe you're just unlucky.

Death Moves

When your death clock reaches midnight, choose one:

- Become *badly wounded* and erase all harm. You suffer -1 to all actions, and remain *badly wounded* until you have a period to rest and recover in safety, or are otherwise healed of the condition. You can't choose this option if you are already *badly wounded*.
- You die.

Gambits

Desperate maneuvers and well-drilled stratagems are your best tool in the hunt. Select one of the following Gambits to master:

Ruthless Aggression

The horrors of the long night ever expect to be the hunters, and not the prey. If your first action in battle is to launch an all-out attack, then you may make one additional attack in the first round and do so at +3.

Scramble Up

A hunter on their back is as good as dead. After being *knocked down*, you may roll at -1. On a 7-9, you can opt to avoid losing your movement but take a -1 to your action instead. On a 10+, you don't lose your movement.

Desperate Defense

You reach down deep, finding a reserve of strength and will to live that helps you escape the most desperate of predicaments. Once per battle, you may re-roll a defense attempt and keep the preferred result.

Seize the Moment

In battle against a terrible beast, a successful hunter learns to recognize the perfect moment and use it, knowing it will never come again. Once per hunt, you may opt to avoid making an attack roll, taking a 10+ result instead. You must opt to do so after declaring an attack but before drawing any death cards.

Fortified Armor

Skills are celebrated in song and story, but reliable equipment can always be depended upon. You've learned to fortify your armor so that it can absorb harm from four attacks per hunt rather than three.

Measured Strike

There are moments when a single attack can shift the course of battle. Once per hunt, when you draw a death card that contains a result which will allow it to be set aside from the death deck, you can re-roll your attack against that card and keep the preferred result.

Covering Advance

You know how to coordinate your movements with your allies to optimize protection in tight quarters. If you take your turn immediately after a character at *close* range with you, your defense rolls gain a +1 bonus during your turn. If a character at *close* range takes their turn immediately after yours, *they* gain a +1 bonus to defense during their turn.

Wary Anticipation

You've learned not to fall for the same trick twice. Once a monster has revealed its trap card, either during the current battle or a previous hunt, you always gain the opportunity to look at the top three cards of the monster's death deck immediately before attacking. You must put them back in the same order you found them, though.

Duck and Roll

After successfully defending against a monster's attack, you may move one range band in any direction.

Steady Defense

If you opt not to move or use your movement for any purpose, then until your next turn, absorbing harm from attacks doesn't degrade your armor.