

The Death Knight

Blood, shadow, and steel: these things define you. You are a warrior of the grave, your life, weapon, and armor all bound together by the power of the Dark Arts. You swore an oath, made a deal, or suffered a curse, and now you are bound to powerful deathly artifacts that dominate your fate. If bloodshed and death were not your calling before, they are now, and the palpable chill of the grave dogs your footsteps wherever you go. It's a dire destiny, but there are things in the echoing night which need killing. There are fates much worse than your curse; perhaps you can spare at least a few people from them.

History

The golden age, it is said, contained many orders of mage knights: warriors sworn to the service of the sorcerer-kings, granted powerful enchanted arms and armor and bound to them by magical oaths. Those orders all vanished along with the wizards they served and protected. When the necromancers rose up to take the place of the vanished sorcerer-kings, they tried to create guardians and servants of their own, anointing the first death knights. But the empires of the necromancers crumbled beneath the world's steady degradation, and few of their dark champions remain. The death knight orders have withered and disbanded, leaving lone killers wandering the endless night, seeking their fortune in the dark.

Origin

Death knights come by their profession along a number of roads. Here are some possibilities:

- You signed on to service with a necromancer and were imbued with cursed arms and armor—but there is power in that curse. Perhaps your original master is long since lost to the dark, or perhaps you journey with them still.
- You failed your master or your order in some terrible fashion, and were bound to cursed armor and blade as penance. Now you wander the dark, seeking to atone for your crimes or failings, death your only tool of absolution.
- Lost and abandoned in the dark, you cried out to the never-ending night for deliverance, and death answered. You accepted its bargain and its curse, and found tools of power shortly after. You wonder what purpose the darkness has in store for you.
- You were a member of one of the black brotherhoods of Anacrethe, sent forth on mission or pilgrimage years ago. Now word spreads that Anacrethe is fallen, and you do not know if your order still endures in the world or if you are its final survivor.
- All your life, your elders told you never to enter the mausoleum on the hill. There was power of old within, they said, but a wicked, devouring power, best left to the cobwebs and dust. Then the people began to disappear, leaving only broken huts and bloodstains, and you knew something had to be done—no matter the cost. Breaking into the forbidden tomb, you found wicked arms and armor adorning an ancient corpse, and used their power to save your people. They had no words of thanks, instead casting you out in fear and horror. You lost your home, but you still have the power of the grave.
- Something else—a tale of oaths, curses, or no-win decisions of your own devising.

Gender

Choose one:

Man, woman, ambiguous, transgressing, or concealed.

Gender has no impact your character's traits. As a dreadful figure of enormous power, you are unlikely to be bothered or constrained by gender taboos or expectations, no matter where you venture.

Name

Select a strong-sounding name, a cursed name, an antique name, or a name implying tribulation. This is how others will know you in the long cold dark.

Appearance

Choose one of the following:

- **Haunting Beauty:** Your skin is flawless, like polished ebony or purest alabaster. Your features are refined and lovely. You have about you an air of attractive danger. Add +2 to rolls to appeal or seduce. Suffer -1 to attempts to blend in, remain unobtrusive, or pose as an ordinary person.
- **Menacing:** Your appearance puts others on-guard, and you easily inspire fear. Perhaps your skin is drawn tight across prominent bones, giving you a death's-mask seeming. Perhaps you are horribly scarred, or deeply ugly, or simply radiate an aura of deathly menace. Perhaps you conceal your features behind a terrible mask or helm. Add +3 to rolls to intimidate, threaten, and strong-arm others. Suffer -2 to attempts to appeal, seduce, or otherwise seem nonthreatening or benevolent.
- **World-Weary:** You wear the weight of miles and terrible experiences on your face. Perhaps you are old, with gray hair and craggy features. Perhaps you simply have haunted eyes that take others aback. Add +1 to rolls to command the attention of others.

Mysticism

Though the Dark Arts lend you strength, the blade is your true subject of study, and you know little of the ways of magic. Suffer -1 to attempts to enact rituals or operate magical apparatuses.

Cursed

Your power carries with it a dreadful curse: Death walks alongside you. Blood and slaughter are your constant companions as a death knight, and your only choice is whether or not to select which lives fall into the abyss. If you do not act as death's harbinger, then the power of the grave manifests itself through your curse to seek out victims on its own.

Every 28 days, you must take a direct hand in ending some life worthy of regard: that of a human being, a lesser creature of significant value to someone's livelihood or well-being, or a beast representing a significant threat. If you fail to do so, your cursed power manifests itself in the world to do death's bidding in your stead, and will not rest until the reaper's toll has been paid. Keeping exact time in the endless night is difficult, but you can generally feel the curse building and you know when the time to pay your debt to the abyss is running short.

Select one manifestation for your curse:

- Your armor and blade abandon you, carried away into the night by a congeries of abyssal shadows which bear them in your stead. While the tools of your station are off finding a life to end, you have no shadow. They will find their way back to you after doing their bloody work.

- Death lives in your image. When your curse manifests, you no longer have a reflection. Death wears your face as it stalks through mirrors, still water, and the shine in human eyes. It will find someone whose reflection is captured in a surface of some sort. It will step into that reflection. It will slay them—in mirror, in pool, in eye, in falling raindrop—and they will fall dead, bearing the phantom wound your reflection dealt. And then your reflection will return.
- The air grows cold. Storm winds begin to blow. Vermin boil up, gnawing at doors and seeking flesh. Animals go wild. The world itself becomes murderous while you linger in the area, and this effect only intensifies and spreads over time. Once it has claimed a life, the effect abates—the vermin disperse, the wind dies, and the madness fades.
- The dead rise and seek living flesh. At first this curse only stirs cadavers and bones in your immediate vicinity, but the longer the abyss goes hungry, the farther the effect spreads. When the dead have feasted, they return to their rest.
- A deadly manifestation of your own design.

Details

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

- **Dark Presence:** You may evoke preternatural phenomena by releasing control of the deathly power coiling inside you. An eerie phantasmal display appears, such as bleeding walls, tormented faces swimming within reflective surfaces, a rime of frost creeping about the room, distant wails carrying in on a sudden chill wind, a mist rolling out from around your feet, or some other such manifestation. You get to define the effect, if you want to, but it can't be used to directly inflict harm on others. When you try to evoke this display, roll at +0. On a miss, nothing happens and you can't use Dark Presence again for the rest of the scene. On a 7-9, pick two of the options below. On a 10+, get all three.

~ You can exercise fine control over the effect for as long as it lasts.

~ Actions which take advantage of the effect (such as intimidation attempts in spooky surroundings, or attempts to pass unnoticed through an area where the lights have gone dim and flickering) gain a +1 bonus.

~ You get to decide when the effect ends.

- **Tireless Sentinel:** So long as you wear your Armor of Night and carry your Grave Blade, you may persist with neither sleep nor rest.

- **Craftsman:** You see the possibilities in every death, and may use certain salvaged body parts after successful hunts to craft special items.

- **Dark Knight:** You carry your cursed arms and armor as a service of devotion, and are adept at protecting others. In battle, you can use your action to protect someone else at *close* range until your next turn rather than attacking. When you do so, roll at +2. On a 7-9, pick one. On a 10+, get both:

~ Attempts to harm them fall on you, instead.

~ Attacks directed at them inflict one less harm than they would normally.

- **Well-Traveled:** You and fortune have had many entanglements during your time wandering the darkness, and you carry souvenirs of these experiences. Select a second trinket.

• **Poet:** Though trapped in an endless night of blood and death, you once held a talent for bringing beauty into the world, and that light has not yet gone out in you. Select a kind of art (poetry, sculpture, painting, whatever suits you). After each occasion where you take an advance, you can attempt to call upon your muse by rolling at +2. On a miss, you can evoke nothing from the night. On a 7-9, you bring something beautiful into the world. On a 10+, this can set the panic clock back by 1 if you share it with the people around you.

• **Far-Strider:** You are at home in the lonely wastes where men dare not tread, and schooled in the ways of survival. Roll at +2 when attempting to forage or track.

• **Dark Inquisitor:** You can interrogate those who have been dead for no more than a week. By pressing your hand to a corpse's chest, you can summon their still-departing soul back from the abyss and subject it to six minutes of questioning.

• **Oath of Service:** You have sworn your very soul to the eternal service of an individual. If this person speaks your name, you will hear their voice, wherever you may be. If they call for you, you may vanish into the endless shadows and appear at their side in a matter of moments. Should you ever betray them, your blade and armor will turn upon you and devour you.

Grave Blade

You carry a powerful weapon, brimming with dark magic. Choose one:

- A deadly scythe
- A great two-handed blade
- A massive axe

When you wield this weapon, it allows one attack on your turn at +2, and inflicts 4 harm. On a 12+, your Grave Blade inflicts 5 harm instead. In the hands of all others, this weapon allows one attack, inflicts only 2 harm and all attacks made by it suffer -3 as it fights the control of those not bound to it. Additionally, the weapon is indestructible so long as you live, and if it is ever lost, you instinctively know how to find it again.

Armor of Night

You are clad in mighty armor, forged in the black fires of the abyss and bound to your very soul. While you wear your armor, reduce all harm suffered by 1.

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

Your enormous weapon is more suited to attack than defense, but you are still well-trained in the ways of battle. Add +1 to rolls to defend.

Intimacy

When you share a moment of intimacy with someone, be it physical or emotional, that moment becomes a safe harbor against death's demands: the time until your curse next manifests is set back by a day. However, those you shared intimacy with become the preferred targets of your curse when it finally manifests.

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.

- **Lantern of Torment:** A necromancer crafted this tiny red-gold lantern, designed to hang from your belt. It casts a murky but steady blue-white light, produced by the eternally burning soul trapped within. Smashing the lantern would set the soul free, but then you would be alone in the dark. And would a burned soul be grateful for its liberation? Indeed—why was it selected to burn?
- **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 as 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.
- **Silver Coin:** Said to have been used to weigh down the eyes of the dead in a distant land, this coin is marked with a woman wearing the crescent moon as a crown. Gain +1 to escape detection by the undead while carrying this coin.
- **Enchanted Tortoise Shell:** Said to have been bewitched by the strange folk of the western forest, this empty shell has been carved with intricate spiral glyphs. It is said that a memory whispered into the shell will become a dim specter of the animal that once lived within, and that once it crawls away and is lost in the dark, that memory will be gone forever.
- **Tiny Iron Key:** A tiny key made of black iron, devoid of rust. You have no idea what lock it is intended for.
- **Flask of Sunlight:** This miniscule vial of enchanted glass is filled with a warm, golden radiance. It is too faint to illuminate more than the hand holding it, but the oldest folks alive—the ones who were children when the old world ended—insist that it looks and feels exactly like the light of the lost sun. Has no discernible purpose.
- **Nothing:** You have only your weapon, your armor, and your curse to carry you on your way.

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 pledge yourself more deeply to darkness. The MC will tell you what death demands to release you from its clutches. If you agree, erase all harm and become bound to your oath; you cannot knowingly renege without forfeiting your life. You may only choose this option once per hunt.
- You die.

Dark Arts

You draw enormous power from your inescapable bond to death. You may select one of the following powers to wield as your own. As you take advances, you will have opportunities to master additional powers:

Blood Edge

Your cursed, blood-hungry blade rips the life from your enemy, restoring your own vitality. Upon successfully inflicting harm with your Grave Blade, you may erase harm from your death clock equal to the harm inflicted. You must enact a death move before using Blood Edge again during a single battle. You cannot use this on the same turn as any other Dark Arts.

Soul Strike

You can feed a sliver of your own life-force into your cursed blade, awakening its dark enchantments for a brief moment. When you inflict harm with your Grave Blade, you may suffer one harm to add +1 harm to your attack. You cannot use this on the same turn as any other Dark Arts.

Death Standing

You may entrust your fate to your curse-bound armor, which will preserve you that you may continue to walk the road of the death knight. This negates all harm suffered from one attack, once per battle.

Shadow Step

Shrugging aside danger, you slip into the ever-present shadows to emerge from the darkness elsewhere a moment later. After defending against an attack fully, you may move to any point within long range.

Black Revelation

In the split second before attacking, the myriad paths by which death might make itself known appear before your eyes, guiding your blow. You may draw the top two cards from your target's death deck, look at them, and place them back in any order desired before completing your attack. Black Revelation cannot be used on the same turn as any other Dark Arts.

Abyssal Strike

You gather up the ever-present shadows around your Grave Blade, then hurl them as a deadly cutting arc. You may make a standard attack with your Grave Blade at up to *long* range. Abyssal Strike cannot be used on two consecutive turns, or on the same turn as any other Dark Arts.

Bloody Render

Raising a hand, you agitate the incipient death festering within your enemy's wounds, tearing loose streamers of blood which flow into your armor and empower you. Spend a turn focusing on an enemy at up to *medium* range that has already suffered a serious injury (such as a severed or maimed limb which causes a death card to be set aside from their deck). They suffer 2 harm, and on your next turn, your attack inflicts double harm. Bloody Render cannot be used on the same turn as any other Dark Arts.

First Breath, Last Breath

When you act in a round before any of your allies, you may attack with your Grave Blade at +3 rather than the usual +2, so long as you were not attacked by the monster before getting your turn.

Blood Answers Blood

When you are targeted by an attack (but not a reaction attack), you may opt to roll to defend at +0 rather than +1. If your defense results in the attack missing, then you may make an immediate reaction attack of your own, which does not use up your turn for the round.

Sanguine Terror

Death lives even in your blood; all that you are, you are in service to slaughter. When *badly injured*, your blood streams through your armor and onto the surface of your blade, where it crystallizes into serrated spikes. While you remain *badly injured*, your grave blade inflicts a base of 5 harm, or 6 harm on a 12+ result.