

The Paladin

You are the very last of your kind, in every sense.

Once, you were a novice of the Holy Order of Librarian Knights. Now you are an undying remnant of an age swallowed in dust and darkness, a time when the sun still shone and the world believed some miracle would save it.

Still: You swore an oath, binding and eternal, and it still holds you in its thrall. You cannot die, not while mankind still endures upon the world, and maybe not even after. But how can one sword turn back a darkness encompassing everything? How can you ever uphold your duties when so very, very much has been lost? How can you champion a world reduced to nothing?

You don't know. But the alternative—to walk alone, forever, in an empty world of ash and silence—is unthinkable. You'll have to find some way to try.

History

Once the city of Sacrament stood as a shining jewel of the golden age, its streets and buildings forming a great temple raised up to exalt the glory of mankind. At its heart stood the Cathedral of the Eternal Vestige, a vast and ornate structure housing within it at least one copy of every written work in the world. Here, the lords and common folk of the old world came to worship the one thing they held sacred: human knowledge, human achievement, the great body of human work.

Sacrament acted as home to the Holy Order of Librarian Knights, warriors imbued with the most powerful sorceries of the old world and tasked with the protection and collation of the written word. Should anything threaten Sacrament's central shrine, the paladins of the book were there to strike it down. Whenever the Cathedral lacked any volume held back from its catalogues, the Holy Knights went on the crusade to obtain that work.

In the end, Sacrament went into the endless dark with the rest of the world. Its binding sorceries flickered and died. The devil hive bound to the great underground works of the city rose up in gory revolt. Refugees, then plague, then flames scythed the city. The sun fell, and never returned. Sacrament followed.

Now the paladins are gone. Where once there stood one of the greatest cities ever built, there is now a wasteland of ashes, bones, and crumbling masonry. The Cathedral is a single leaning wall, its interior gutted. The vast record of human knowledge is no more, carried away by smoke or by those fleeing into the night.

In the end, nothing survived. Nothing but you.

Origin

You were the final initiate granted knighthood by your order. After many years of apprenticeship, you were finally blessed with your tools of service. You said goodbye to your friends and family, and lay down in your spell-forged sarcophagus while the Great Ritual made you into an undying knight of the Order. You knew you would sleep for generations; that at best only the youngest of your nieces and nephews might still linger in the world when you re-emerged to take up your trade, and that even they would be very old, and strangers entire.

It was a sunny day when you laid down to slumber, and there were rumors of an impending crusade into Galleheim, in pursuit of a forbidden tome of necromancy held in a private collection. Distasteful business.

You had to dig your way out of a dusty tomb when you awakened. Had your sleep ended fifty years prior you would never have been able to shift the fallen beams that covered your subterranean resting-chamber, but entropy's relentless tread left them so decayed that they crumbled to dust under your exertions. It was night when you emerged; you soon discovered that it is always night. There wasn't enough light to take in at a glance the fullness of what happened to your home. You had to walk across its barren desolation to come to terms with that. You're still walking to this day. What keeps you moving?

- There must be something left of the world of old—some remnant, some traces of the mighty magic that held things together, some aberrant relics to bring together to build... something, anything, out of this desolation. Some way to turn back time's pitiless march, at least a bit. You're still here, after all. You can't be the *only* thing to have survived.
- You are a knight of the book, and no matter how far the world has fallen, some knowledge must remain. Yes, the loss is staggering—it would drive you mad to contemplate it for too long—but there must be *some* knowledge out there still in need of preservation. Humanity has fallen too far. You can't let it slip another inch.
- Again and again you have sought to discover just what went wrong, and what has happened since. Again and again you've been met with blank stares, shuffling feet, and beaten indifference. It can't stand. You are a champion of knowledge. Someone has to uncover the story of the world. Someone has to record the endless night, whether it proves an interlude or the final chapter of history. There must always be a record.
- The legacy of humanity—the curation of knowledge—the exaltation of ink and pages—all of these things pale before the flame of your rage. You were to be an immortal champion, hero of a world of limitless glories, good company, and great accomplishments. You finally achieved your dream after striving all your life for it, only to have it ripped away while you slept. Your world is gone, leaving you with nothing but sword and shield and a bitter fury as eternal as your flesh. Something out there must be responsible. Something deserves to pay.
- You're afraid. You walk in fear, fall asleep to nightmares, and awaken to a never-ending night. You were born in a city of a million souls. You've not seen more than a hundred people in a single place since you awoke. The world is ash, darkness, smoke, dust. The people are bent and miserable creatures. And when you lay down and close your eyes, you imagine a world lacking even these meager remnants—an endless featureless night through which you walk alone, forever. You can't let it happen. There must be something you can do.
- Some other dream, nightmare, oath, or ideal to carry you through the never-ending darkness.

Gender

Choose one:

Man, woman, ambiguous, or transgressing.

Men and women alike were inducted into the Holy Order; indeed, little heed was paid to gender in the days of Sacrament, beyond the ever-demanding calls of fashion. Things may have degraded since then—everything else in the world has—but you have no intention of letting the

degenerate biases of a fallen world slow you down. Sword, shield, and mission: these are the only things with which others should concern themselves when confronted with a Holy Knight.

Name

Select an elegant name, an archaic name, a name from a storied dynasty, or a heroic name. This is how others will know you in the long cold dark.

Appearance

Choose one of the following:

- **Regal:** You are a knight out of time, and carry yourself as such. You walk with assurance of your own nobility in an age that no longer knows that concept, and it turns heads. Perhaps you possess beauty to match your outward refinement, or it could be that your bearing is one of solid severity. Regardless, you stand out as a commanding figure in a rudderless age. Add +2 to rolls to command others or take charge of the situation. Suffer -1 to attempts to put others at ease.
- **Haunted:** Be they refined, rough-hewn, or even terribly scarred, loss marks your features above all else. You've seen the world fall so far, seen horrors in the endless night that were unimaginable in your youth, and oh, you remember the sun but despair of ever glimpsing it again. There's something in your wounded eyes that draws others; perhaps a sympathy with the hurt that pervades all the world in these times. Add +1 to rolls to put others at ease or elicit sympathy.
- **Cold:** You were remade for most of a century in a cold tomb of gold and meteoric iron, flensed of the weaknesses of mortality, and your ice-chip eyes reflect a relentlessness that will drive you to the end of the world and beyond. You might be chillingly, unapproachably perfect; your features might be pulled into a permanent scowl by an old battle scar; or you may simply have no distinguishing feature other than your nail-driving stare. Add +2 to rolls to intimidate others or shut them down; suffer -1 to rolls to inspire or lead.

Mysticism

Like most of the upper class in your age, you are conversant with the basic principles and functions of magic, and your knighting imbued you with traces of eternal sorcery. Add +1 to attempts to enact rituals or operate magical apparatuses of the old world.

Liber Aeterna

Chained to your armor, you possess a gold-bound book: a lesser miracle of the old world, its magic still uncorrupted. Its spine houses a scabbard for a nigh-imperishable quill, and a never-ending supply of ink. The book contains as many pages as may prove needful, and was intended to act as an emergency venue for copying singular or imperiled manuscripts, letters, and other writings. Now it may well be the only book in your possession, your constant companion and only means of recording the final days of the world. While the book will never run out of ink or pages, and shrugs off the casual abuses of wear and weather, it is not indestructible.

Details

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

- **Divine Presence:** You may evoke preternatural phenomena by releasing control of the sacred sorcery brimming within your flesh. A glorious manifestation of light and sound appears, such as luminous phantasmal wings, a nimbus of sunlight, a flourish of trumpets, thousands of pages

blowing about in a mysterious wind, or some other such display of holy power. 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 Divine 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 attempts to raise morale with a display of holy power, or attempts to reveal hidden objects with piercing rays of all-encompassing light) gain a +1 bonus.

~ You get to decide when the effect ends.

- **Craftsman:** Gruesome though it may be, this is the world you must now work in, and your former skills as an Order smith still apply. You may use certain salvaged body parts after successful hunts to craft special items.

- **Tireless Sentinel:** So long as you wear your Blessed Armor and carry your Holy Aegis, you may persist with neither sleep nor rest.

- **Relic of Sacrament:** You carried a memento of the old world with you when you emerged from beneath the ground. Select a second trinket.

- **Holy Guardian:** You have lost everything, and have sworn to lose nothing more that you gain in this barren and brutal age. 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.

- **Incorruptible Slumber:** In times of unavoidable calamity, you may completely still your breathing, close your eyes, and become encased in a pearlescent shell. While slumbering, your flesh is incorruptible; you cannot be burned, cut, poisoned, crushed, drowned, asphyxiated, or afflicted with disease or any other such malady. However, you also can't awaken of your own accord. Only the sound of a human voice can bring you out of this stasis, and only after at least a full day has passed. Otherwise, you might potentially slumber forever.

- **Eidetic Memory:** You remember everything you see, everything you hear, everything you experience in perfect, vivid detail.

- **Custodi Ignis:** Unchecked flame was once the greatest horror of which your order could conceive, and so they set about training specialists to master it. You would have numbered yourself among them. When you suffer harm from fire, take one less harm.

- **Historia Testimonia:** With a few moments of concentration, you can stir the ever-present dust and ash of this purgatorial age into the air around you, where it forms a phantasmal reenactment of a memory of your choosing—either your own, or that of someone else who has assented to the miracle.

Ancient Arms

You carry an enchanted one-handed weapon, which never dulls or breaks. Choose one:

- A sturdy double-edged sword

- An elegant short spear
- A crushing mace

When you wield this weapon, it allows one attack on your turn at +2, and inflicts 3 harm. Should anyone else touch it without your blessing, it burns them, inflicting 1 harm. Additionally, the weapon is indestructible so long as you live, and if it is ever lost, you instinctively know how to find it again.

Holy Aegis

You carry a sacred shield marked with the sigil of the Holy Order, bound with enchantments that render it nigh-indestructible. When you defend against an attack originating at *medium* or *long* range (including attacks from foes that move up and then strike at you from *close* range in a single turn), roll to defend at +3 rather than +2.

Blessed Armor

You are clad in mighty armor, forged in the sorcerous fires of the golden age. 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

You were among one of the finest and most well-rounded fighters of your era. Add +2 to rolls to defend.

Intimacy

When you share a moment of intimacy with someone, be it physical or emotional, you gain an insight into their dream of the world—what they would make of it, if only they had the means.

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.

- **Mariner's Cape:** This odd white cape is made from some manner of soft, pliable hide, rather than woven from cloth. It is said to have come from a strange, far-away shoreline. The cape is not only completely waterproof, but if spread out upon a body of water, it floats and will inexplicably hold nearly any amount of weight without sinking—although, being only the size of a normal cape, space is quite limited.
- **Barren Crystal Sword:** Once, this was the enchanted blade of a senior member of an order of prestigious mage knights. The enchantments that once made it durable as steel have long since faded, and now it is a sword made of blue-white ultra-sharp crystal. It may be wielded to deliver a single attack roll at +1, inflicting 5 harm, but *chips* if the attack is a 7-9. After *chipping* three times, the blade irreparably shatters.
- **Scapegoat Effigy:** A crude human-shaped figurine made from clay dredged from the heart of a sorcerer-king's garden, which may no longer be found in this world. When death's hand passes

over one who carries this effigy, the owner is spared as the doll pays the price, shattering into pieces. When you would enact a death move, restore one harm and sacrifice the effigy instead.

- **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.
- **Mysterious Tome:** A heavy tome bound with golden thread, written in an unknown tongue. Its construction speaks to its importance, but its contents remain a mystery.
- **Platinum Locket:** A tiny locket on a chain, containing the likeness of a precious individual long departed from the world.
- **Nothing:** You took nothing with you from the ruins of Sacrament but sorrow.

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. Roll at +1. On a miss, you come back to life some time later—who can say how long? On a 7-9, you come back at the end of the current scene. On a 10+, you come back after spending one turn lingering at the gates of death's domain.

Miracles

The great work that imbued you with eternal life also granted you the power of ancient battle-magic. Select one of the following miracles to master:

Lauda Verbum

When you defend against an attack with a 10+ result and fully avoid or negate the attack, you may bash back at your opponent with your shield in a flash of blinding power if they are at *close* range, inflicting 1 harm and knocking them back to *medium* range.

Praefatio

You root yourself into the ground, bringing the eternal strength of the dwindling earth up through your body and into your shield. If you do nothing at all with your movement, then until your next turn, when you suffer harm, reduce that harm by 1.

Lux Aeterna

You are an undying bastion against which the horrors of the eternal night labor in vain. After doing nothing at all with your movement for two or more turns in a row, you may re-roll defense rolls, and keep the preferred result. This effect ends if you move or are moved, and requires another two turns of stillness to re-establish.

Epiclesis

You push the divine power burning within you out into your weapon. This takes a full turn of concentration to activate (you may move, but activating Epiclesis consumes your action), during

which time your weapon flares with a nimbus of dancing, coruscating flames. Afterwards, the weapon inflicts one additional harm on attacks resulting in a 10+ for the rest of the scene.

Signum Crucis

Guided by your battle instincts, you can lash out with the terrible light that forever burns within you, correcting the course of a blow at the last moment. Once per battle you may re-roll an attack, keeping whichever result you prefer. If this converts a miss into a 10+, inflict 1 additional harm.

Sanctus Sigillum

Once per hunt, you may lay forth a powerful holy seal of exclusion upon a foe, momentarily constraining their powers. Select a single opponent at up to *long* range and choose one of their attacks. That attack cannot be used, either as an action or a reaction, until the end of your next turn.

Parma Repetitio

When targeted by an attack you have already successfully defended against, either in the current battle or a former hunt, add +1 to your defense.

Benedictus Armaturus

Once per battle, when attacked before your turn, you may forfeit your movement and action for the round in order to focus totally on defense, negating all harm and other ill effects from the attack.

Iudex et Iudices

Upon becoming *badly wounded*, you may immediately make an attack against the enemy that put you in that state, if they are at *close* range. This attack doesn't use up your turn for the round, and cannot provoke a reaction attack regardless of the results of the death card drawn, unless you draw a trap card.

Magnus Exorcismus

When you strike with your enchanted weapon and roll a 12+, you may inflict 1 additional harm as the weapon burns your opponent from the inside out.