

The Thing

You look human. You were supposed to be human. That's what they wanted for you when they made you: a son, a daughter, a servant, a great and irrefutable accomplishment. You're *almost* human. But you're not. Something's missing, or something's there that shouldn't be.

People come from people, life begets life, but not for you. Your womb was a grave. You were pulled up out of the abyss, brought from death into life, and the world shudders at your presence.

It's not *all* bad, but it's bad enough. You're strong, and tough: death coughed you up into the world and doesn't seem to want you back. But you're always hollow, always empty, always aware that something's missing. Maybe it's a place in the world. Maybe it's a soul. Whatever it is, you won't find it hiding in the dark and distant hills until the world winds down like an old clock. It's time to heave to, get your hands dirty, sort things out. This broken world needs heroes; maybe that's what you could be?

History

The magicians of old made all kinds of life, no doubt about it. They bred together diverse beasts to make fantastical oddities. They forged armor and gave it motion and obedience. But creating human life from magic alone? That was impossible. No spell could do it. Any attempt had to start from something, and that *something* was usually a corpse. Soon enough, such experiments were banned as the most abominable sort of necromancy. Dredging life from death, or meddling with souls, these were the forbidden province of the Dark Arts; their practitioners *and* misbegotten creations were destroyed when discovered. But there are no more sorcerer-kings now, no courts to gasp in horror, no *laws*. The night is so, so long, and so dark, and so lonely, and lights once more blaze in the windows of laboratories in the hinterlands.

Origin

You're a *thing*, made rather than born, an approximation of humanity. But where did you come from? Here are some possibilities:

- Life is sacred, without exception: that is the credo of the College of Surgeons. What, then, could be a more sacred act than its creation? You were put together with exacting care. Perhaps a rogue physician scavenged the charnel yards for your parts, or maybe you were lovingly taken, piece by piece, from anatomical study subjects within the College itself. Snip and sew, head to toe, piece by piece you came together. The most cunning biological elixirs were pumped into your heart, and then your maker applied some clever contrivance they would never share with you to shock life into your patchwork form. Perhaps you were judged imperfect, not true human life, and discarded into the vast gullet of the night. Perhaps you still travel with your mad maker, not truly what they wanted, but still worthy of further study.
- In the beginning you were a mere corpse. Then necromancy filled you with something that you know deep in your bones is not life, but merely apes its crudest features. Perhaps you were intended to be a servant. Perhaps you were meant to be resurrected. Either way, you are not the former owner of the body you now inhabit. You're something new, something strange, something your maker can't control and probably didn't want. Maybe you fled. Maybe you broke your master's neck. Maybe you accompany them still, the thought of being alone worse than the thought of being an aberrant mistake.

- You have... nightmares, sometimes, and when you wake up, you tell yourself that's all they are. But when you lay your head down and close your eyes, in the final moments before sleep takes you, you fear otherwise. They're nightmares of a poisoned, agonized immortal giant, tearing loose hunks of its own diseased flesh and flinging them away in disgust. In the dream, these bleeding chunks scurry away into the dark, and you're one of them. You find a magnificent figure walking through the night, radiant with power, and take him unawares, gorging on him. Then you awaken screaming from hazy dreams (memories) of ripping free from your chrysalis of rotting, bloated, diseased meat, a gory newborn thing the world has never seen before. You don't know where you came from, or who you are, really, but you know it's not that. Never that.
- You awoke alone, in the dark. Maybe it was in a huge crystal tube filled with bubbling fluids, in the basement of an old decades-abandoned college, with a basalt clock's arms hanging slack before you. Maybe it was on a stone bier beneath strange standing stones, ash blowing around you and no one to be found for miles around. Maybe you awakened in a shallow grave and dug your way, gasping, to the surface. Maybe your first memory was of floating face-down in an old cellar knee-deep in blood and filled with dismembered bodies. You don't know what you are. You don't know why you're alive. You're a mystery to yourself.
- You were born in a cauldron of brass and flame, fine cruel features looking down upon you. You remember crimson eyes and delicate horns and fangs. You remember enormous maws blowing streamers of metal and flame, and many spindly claws weaving, weaving. You remember a terrible many-limbed woman peering at you, her features wrinkling in disappointment, and then you found yourself walking, outcast, a being with limbs of brass and veins full of strange hot fluids, and only a crude inferno where other people have a soul.
- Some other story of misbegotten creation.

Gender

Choose one:

Man, woman, ambiguous, transgressing, androgynous, or neuter.

Gender has no impact your character's traits, though it may shape the way others react to you and the way you form an identity for yourself. In terms of opportunities in the world, your fundamental inhumanity and incredible strength are likely to have a much greater impact on your destiny than any local gender expectations or restrictions.

Name

Select a simple name, a descriptive name, a pet's name, or a Biblical name. This is how others will know you in the long cold dark.

Appearance

Choose one of the following:

- **Sculpted Beauty:** Your body is as perfect as your creator could make it. You are without outward flaw or blemish, and may even look like a classical statue come to life. There's something unsettling about such perfection—a certain artificiality that people notice even if they can't quite put their fingers on it. Add +2 to rolls to seduce or appeal. Suffer -1 to attempts to pass unnoticed, unremarked, or to seem like a normal person.

- **Uncanny:** There's something about you that spooks people, immediately. Maybe clear suture-lines hold your limbs together. You might have body parts that are made of something other than flesh. Or it could just be that, despite looking like anyone else, folks can feel the aching void you possess in place of a soul. Add +1 to rolls to frighten or intimidate others.

- **Frightful:** People describe you as a *thing* rather than a person. Your appearance is immediately alarming. Perhaps you're enormous and misshapen. Perhaps you are made of hideously mismatched parts. Maybe you conceal your features with an old sack, the eyeholes placed... distressingly... far apart. It could be that you still look like, well, a cadaver that someone prodded into getting up and walking around. Add +3 to rolls to intimidate others. Suffer -2 to attempts to appeal, seduce, or pass for anyone or anything other than yourself.

Mysticism

You're animated by uncanny power, but you don't really understand the mystic arts, having no formal tutoring in them. Suffer -1 to attempts to enact rituals or operate magical apparatuses of the old world.

The Flesh Immortal

You don't know if you *can* die. Certainly, the abyss doesn't seem eager to welcome you back. Select one of the choices below and add it to your death moves:

- Become *crippled* and describe the catastrophic damage your body suffers, then erase all harm. You can no longer take any actions that wouldn't make sense in light of the way you've chosen to articulate your debilitating injury. For example, if you're missing an arm, you couldn't wield a weapon requiring two hands, and if your eyes have been ruined, then you couldn't read a book. You remain *crippled* until you can salvage some sort of replacement for the ruined or missing body part and attach it to yourself; this might be a prosthesis of some kind, but is more likely to be a body part scavenged from a corpse. Either way, your body easily and seamlessly integrates the replacement to restore itself. You *can* choose this death move again if you are already *crippled*.

- You die. Roll at +0. On a miss, you come back to life some time later, none the worse for wear. On a 7-9, you come back at the end of the current scene. On a 10+, the strange flame of your life reignites after you have spent only a single turn dead.

- You *ought to be dead*. Erase all harm. You suffer -1 to all actions, and *ought to be dead* until you have an extended period of rest and recovery in safety, or are otherwise healed of the condition. You can only choose this if you are already *badly wounded*, and can't choose it again if you already *ought to be dead*. If you have this death move, then you suffer no penalty to actions when you are merely *badly wounded*, rather than the usual -1.

Details

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

- **Signs of Life:** Breathing, eating, sleeping—they make you feel human, but ultimately, you're not. All three are optional. You can stop doing them for as long as you need to.

- **Craftsman:** You were made out of bones and meat and sinew and thread. It seemed a sensible craft to master. You may use certain salvaged body parts after successful hunts to craft special items.

- **Abhuman Feature:** Your creator endowed you with some unusual body part or organ, bringing with it abhuman capabilities. Perhaps your hands sport sticky pads that allow you to climb walls. Maybe you have gills for breathing underwater, or a prehensile tail formed of extra vertebrae.
- **Inheritance:** Your creator... left behind... something for you. Select a second trinket, which may come from any playbook.
- **Crawling Cadaver:** Life surges through your body, but not in the way nature intended. You can disconnect parts of your body from one another, and they remain animate and under your control for several hours. Eyes can be removed to act as remote spies, crawling along on twisted optic nerves. Hands can drag themselves through the dust.
- **Horrid Thing:** Countless monsters prowl the endless dark, seeking out humans. Some wish to eat their flesh, others to devour their souls. You have been granted a very mixed blessing: monsters don't recognize you as human. This may not always protect you, of course; for many beasts, any meat will do.
- **Face Thief:** After replacing one of your body parts with that of another person, you can retreat into seclusion for a day. When you emerge, you will have taken on that person's appearance, which lasts for as long as their flesh remains a part of you.
- **Abyssal Gaze:** You can stare with naked wonder into someone's eyes. When you do so, the abyss reveals one of their secrets: a hidden fear, hidden desire, hidden strength, or hidden shame (chosen by their player). In return, they realize definitely and irrefutably that you are not human.
- **Eclectic Oddity:** 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.)

A Way to Kill

You've found or been given some manner of weapon. Select one of the following:

- An old, wickedly curved ax. This allows for one attack on your turn at +2, inflicting 3 harm.
- A pair of thick, heavy-bladed knives. These allow for two attacks on your turn at +2, each inflicting 2 harm.

In addition, you always have access to the following:

- Your bare hands are incredibly powerful, capable of twisting apart flesh and bones. They can make three attacks on your turn at +2, each inflicting 1 harm.

You are considered to have access to both your bare hands as well as your other weapon 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.

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

Whatever else you were born with, you have powerful survival instincts. Add +1 to rolls to defend.

Intimacy

When you share a moment of intimacy with someone, be it physical or emotional, you can opt to establish a *bond* with them. You can always find your way to the location of the person you've bonded to, and you know if they are in distress (though not necessarily why). You can only have one bond at a time.

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-Thorn:** A foot-long, glistening black spine said to be taken from the nest of a devil. If a corpse or body part is impaled on this spine, it will not suffer rot or decay of any sort. Causes extreme, burning pain when it pierces the living, but reputed to hold aging at bay.
- **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.
- **Soul Dregs (x4):** A crystal phial containing the shifting, luminous remnants of a soul ruined by necromantic experimentation. When shattered on the ground, these dregs irresistibly attract monsters. Can be broken anywhere out to *medium* range, and any monsters present will move to that point as quickly as they are able to investigate the dregs. After doing so, they are free to move as they will.
- **Grotesque Mushroom (x2):** This bundle of dried red-and-white fungus may be rubbed into even the most terrible of wounds, sealing them in minutes. The mushrooms reek of putrid flesh, and are said to be sought after by a terrible monster dwelling in a vast forest to the west.
- **Strange Jar:** This ornately-adorned glass container holds within it a brilliant golden liquid and what appears to be a newborn, sleeping infant, which can be seen to breathe deeply and regularly. The container has thus far proven impossible to open or damage.
- **Old Harp:** A very old, but perfectly preserved full-sized harp. Difficult to transport and difficult to keep undamaged, but produces a lovely sound.
- **Nothing:** You are an empty-handed vagabond.

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*.
- The death move you chose to define your inhuman condition.
- You die.

Horrors

Your unnatural form is capable of many surprising and appalling feats. Select one of the following horrors to claim as your own:

Heedless Attack

You can throw yourself into an attack without regard for damage done to your own muscles and ligaments by the violence of your exertion. You can suffer 1 harm to add 1 to the harm inflicted by a single attack roll per turn, but must make this decision before rolling.

Regeneration

The unnatural vitality that grants you life also knits your flesh back together with uncanny speed. This healing is painful, feeling like a fire working its way through your body. At the end of each turn, if you have done absolutely nothing with your movement, erase 1 harm.

Rend and Tear

Your hands are killing engines, capable of finding purchase around bones and muscles and ripping them apart in savage, gore-drenched displays. When you successfully inflict harm with all three of your unarmed attacks in a single turn, you may inflict an additional 2 automatic harm.

Death Grip

Your grip is hard as iron, and as unforgiving. When you successfully inflict harm with all three of your unarmed attacks in a single turn, and do not move afterwards, you may immobilize your target, grappling it to lock it in place until your next turn. It cannot move, and cannot execute any attack or reaction attack that would require it to move to reach its target. You can't rend and tear an opponent and death grip it with the same attack.

Furious Colossus

Once per battle, when an attack should forcibly move and/or knock you down, you may simply ignore those results.

Power Throw

When throwing an object that can normally only reach out to *medium* range, you can launch it all the way to *long* range.

Deliberation

So long as you are not the first member of your group to attack during a round, you may add 1 harm to the first attack you roll on your turn that results in a 10+.

Thoughtful Defense

If you opt not to move or use your movement for any purpose at all, then until your next turn, add +1 to all defense rolls.

Unstoppable

Once your enormous strength is in motion, it's nearly impossible to stop. If you move from *medium* to *close* range and then attack all in the same turn, your first attack roll gains +1.

Hack and Hew

When you see an opportunity set before you, you reach out to seize it through sheer brute determination. When you draw a death card that includes a result which allows you to set the card aside from the deck, and you fail to secure that result with your attack roll, you may attempt to re-roll your attack. The results of *both* rolls apply.