

The Surgeon

You are the arbiter of life. What could be more important?

Even as the world gasps its last breath, there are those that rule and those that serve, and you are one of the latter: healer, surgeon, artist, selfless martyr. You give of yourself to others in every sense conceivable. You cling to life that life might be preserved in others. What higher calling could there be in these final, dark, guttering times?

Human life is the most precious commodity remaining in the world, and it is your sacred mission to see that it does not depart from the earth. To that end, any extreme is conceivable, any sin permissible, any violence justified. This is the creed and the code of the College of Surgeons, of which you are a proud graduate.

And yet, you are far from the traditional services of your order. Your work has taken you into the long cold night beyond the walls of the Brass City, and you have seen horrors of misbegotten life that shake your philosophy to its very core. What does “human life” mean when it can be so grotesquely twisted? Where will you draw the line? What will you fight to save, and what lengths will you go to in your struggle?

History

Every noble house within the Brass City makes use of the College of Surgeons. Their patronage ensures the College’s continued operations, even as its graduates guarantee the long, unnatural lives of vitality and luxury enjoyed by the city’s masters.

It wasn’t always this way. Before the founding of the College, the order of Fleshwrights was a persecuted cult, its practices declaimed as grotesquerie and anathema by the sorcerer-kings. Still, however far the order might be driven underground—and this was quite literal in the end, as its members fetched up in the subterranean Brass City while the world fell apart above them—they persisted in their studies. There was a subtle geometry of miracles to be teased from the webwork of musculature and nerves, in the ligaments and fatty tissues that connected organs and conducted life, miraculous life, through the human body. Forsaking command of the elements or mastery of the grave, the College of Surgeons focused exclusively on the quiet magic of living flesh.

Now it thrives, even as everything else in the world reels into decline. The orphans of the Brass City are given up into the keeping of the College to be raised, and there are certainly no shortage of those in the unending night. Urchins with an aptitude for the work of the College are trained, transformed, remade into untiring servants of the Brass City. Those who turn aside, falter, or simply lack the necessary talents become subjects of anatomical study for their fellow initiates.

And yet, while a graduate of the College is forever indebted to the order, they are not slaves. Surgeons are rare outside the Brass City, but not unknown. Still, it’s best to be wary when meeting a surgeon on the road. Physicians cannot be put to death by the laws of the Brass City, and so more than one madman has been sent into anonymous exile instead...

Origin

You are a graduate of the College of Surgeons, that’s a given. But what road led you there, and what has taken you away from the Brass City? Here are some possibilities:

- Your mother would not have survived the birthing-bed without the assistance of the College. After one look at your repellent features, your father pledged you to the College in wrath and in gratitude. In your early years you were a subject of study, your deformities agonizingly corrected one by one. Later, your case became the primer of your own curriculum of study, as you painstakingly ruined the beautiful symmetry of form that had been bestowed upon you. You no longer envy your parents their empty lives of wine and fornication and gory hunting, and could not bring yourself to serve their ilk. Instead, you have decided to travel out into the night, performing triage wherever humanity is bleeding out and in most dire need.
- The College took you in from the back-alleys where rats were your food and the children of the nobility your constant predators. They discovered that beneath the grime and scabs you possessed an artist's hands and a clever mind, and you ascended to the top of your classes. One night, a jealous classmate with ties to the gentry came at you in your study cell with a knife, intent on ruining those gifted hands. He did you gruesome damage, but in the end you wrested the scalpel away from him, and took his healthy muscles and ligaments as payment for the wounds he'd inflicted. Graduation was a few weeks later, and it seemed like a good time to travel away from the city until the furor died down.
- Lord Cull is a marvel even among the predatory nobility of the Brass City. His crossbow never strays from its mark. He can march in steady pursuit for days at a time. The old man rarely sleeps, eats his meat rare, and it's said his beard was already long and gray when the sun tumbled from the sky, never to be seen again. Seven surgeons attend him by day and by night; he is a marvel of the College's craft. But such meticulous attention is not without its price, and that price was the first-born child of each generation of the old man's heirs. You are the latest such pledge, pushed by your tutors and scrutinized by your peers for hints of your superior breeding manifesting itself. It seems a sick joke—so much brilliance, so much blood, spent to sustain one old man. No, you decided the College and the gentry had lost their way. Humanity is choking on its own blood in the long cold dark, and only you have the skills and the training to save it. You are needed abroad.
- You were nothing special—just another crying child taken into the cold, white halls of the College's medical fortress, trained in grotesque esoterica and made into a monster dedicated to saving men. But anatomy fascinated you more than setting broken limbs or mending ripped intestines. Anacrethe has fallen, so say the rumors, and the necromancers are scattered to the wind. The world is dying, and you have gone forth to sit at its bedside, and seek the lords of death. Perhaps at the meeting of your peculiar skills, a new life may be created, something better suited to survive this endless, purgatorial darkness.
- You chose this fate. You did something terrible, unspeakable, unforgivable. You couldn't live with yourself, but neither could you admit to your deeds without destroying your family, nor end your life without shaming your kin with your weakness. You could only see one way out, and you took it, pledging yourself voluntarily to the College. It was a blessing to be remade into an empty vessel, to lose the face you could no longer stomach seeing in the mirror, to suffer for hours under scalpel and suture. Upon graduation, you found the memories in the Brass City unbearable, and so you set off in search of something else. Anything else.
- Some other story of adoption, transformation, and exile into the night.

Gender

Choose one:

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

Gender has no impact your character's traits, and indeed may have little bearing on your fundamental anatomy after your graduation from the College. Your medical expertise is far more important than any local gender taboos, in any case.

Name

Select a formal name, a plain name, a strange name, a foreign name, or simply answer to "Doctor." This is how others will know you in the long cold dark.

Appearance

Your body is a surgically-transformed repository of spare organs, muscles, ligaments, nerves, blood vessels, bones, and other anatomical bric-a-brac. The formal apparel of a graduate of the College includes supple leather gloves, a crisp white smock, and a long-beaked plague mask, built to insulate the wearer from diseased gases and miasma that they may encounter in their work. These are not only tools of your trade, but items of great pride—you were required to create your own customized mask before being permitted to graduate, after all.

Choose one of the following:

- **Too Perfect:** Not just hours, but weeks and months of work went into sculpting your body into something outwardly flawless. Your flesh is either without blemish, or adorned only with artistic affectations of imperfection intended to highlight the craftsmanship that went into them. The pouches, seams, and other access points through which you can remove your many redundant organs are artfully concealed, and you take incredible care to store your excess implants in such a way that it doesn't ruin the lines and symmetry of your form. When you remove your mask, the face beneath could be the work of one of the great sculptors: cold, sublime, flawless. You're beautiful, and there's nothing human about that beauty at all. Add +1 to rolls to seduce or frighten others.
- **Concealed:** Like most surgeons, your body is a monstrous patchwork of suture-lines, rivets, and flaps of excess skin. Common folk would scream to look upon you, and so you ensure that they cannot do so. Every inch of your flesh is covered in loose-fitting cloth or leather to hide both your features and your outline, and your mask never comes off. In fact, it may well be attached with screws or buttons, crafted to allow easy removal in the event that you need to donate one of the extra teeth, noses, or eyes you store upon your face. Add +2 to rolls to intimidate others. Suffer -1 to attempts to pass for anyone or anything other than a surgeon of the College.
- **Grotesque:** You are what you are, and you concern yourself more with plying your trade than hiding the price you've paid to gain your gifts. You wear the distinguishing apparel of your profession, and if that means some of your suture-lines are visible... that your profile is lumpy and asymmetrical from the abundance of extra body parts crammed into you wherever they'll fit... that your face is a thing out of a fever dream (although that, at least, you normally cover with your mask)... then so be it. Let them shoot furtive glances. Let them shudder. They'll be grateful in the end, when the many coils of extra intestines you carry are patched in to repair a fatal wound in their guts. Add +3 to rolls to intimidate others. Suffer -2 to attempts to appeal, seduce, or pass for anyone or anything other than yourself.

Mysticism

The only magical principles you understand are those that enable life to flow through a body. Suffer -3 to attempts to enact rituals or operate magical apparatuses of the old world.

Medical Aid

Mending the wounded and healing the sick: this is your ultimate and fundamental calling, and there is no one in the world better qualified at these things than you. When attempting to treat standard sicknesses or injuries, roll at +2. On a 7-9, you correct whatever ailment, infirmity, or disease afflicts your patient, and choose one. On a 10+, you treat your patient successfully and get both.

- Your patient is back on their feet and as recovered as they're going to get in no time at all—a matter of hours for lesser afflictions, mere days for life-threatening conditions.
- There are no complications to your treatment.

Not all afflictions can be treated with standard techniques, of course. Curses tend to be outside of your area of expertise, as are conditions such as devil implantation or a number of monstrous infections. Generally, if an unusual ailment can be treated with medical aid, that treatment will be noted (such as with light exposure to cure banshee spores).

Flesh Harvesting

Your body has been surgically transformed to act as host to countless additional organs and other body parts. These are intended to act as donor tissue to assist in your medical endeavors. A lacerated spleen would kill most patients in these fallen days, but not yours: you've got a healthy spare or two tucked away inside your body, ready to be implanted at need.

This bevy of additional organs, muscles, ligaments, tendons, and other body parts are known as your organ reserve, and you can normally hold up to five treatments worth of flesh in this reserve. Using up one treatment's worth of body parts when giving medical aid to a seriously injured patient raises your roll from +2 to +3, and reduces your organ reserve by 1.

You are constantly on the lookout for fresh bodies from which to harvest additional donor materials. One body in a *reasonably* intact condition contains enough harvestable material to replenish your organ reserve by 1. This leaves the body unsuitable for other potential uses, however, such as necromantic animation. It's impossible to remove enough material from a living patient to restore one treatment to your organ reserve without killing them in the process, but of course life isn't an all-or-nothing proposition. It's possible to restore organ reserves by fractions if you have enough debts to call in, after all.

Surgery

Sometimes people come to you with requests—special things they want or need or have decided they can't live without. Or, maybe you have ideas of your own: improvements to the human condition that need only a test subject to act as a proving slate. Or perhaps you've decided there is a crime that can only be properly addressed by the... creative application of your craft. In any event, there's more to surgery than simply mending injuries! There are limbs to replace, features to reshape, senses to improve, new possibilities to be carved wholesale from flesh and inspiration.

Attempting some ambitious surgical project requires at least one treatment's worth of materials from your organ reserve, and a roll at +1. On a miss, get nothing. On a 7-9, pick two. On a 10+, get all three.

- The surgery accomplishes what you set out to do.
- There are definitely no unforeseen complications.
- The patient definitely survives.

You can spend one additional treatment from your organ reserve to roll at +2, or two additional treatments to roll at +3.

Details

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

- **Smuggling Compartments:** You've modified your anatomy to create a number of hidden hollows within your flesh, which may be used to undetectably store up to half a dozen objects no larger than a human hand.
- **Craftsman:** Monster anatomy is no less brimming with possibilities than that of human flesh. You may use certain salvaged body parts after successful hunts to craft special items.
- **Constructed Feature:** You have shaped for yourself (or had shaped for you by the College) some new 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 donated vertebrae.
- **Well-Stocked:** No physician should make do with second-rate tools. Select a second trinket.
- **Physician's Oath:** You are sworn, above all else, to protect human life. 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 +1. 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.
- **Preservative Fluids:** You possess a minor marvel of the College's science: a secondary circulatory system. The fluid pumped by this special vascular network is not blood, but rather a preservative fluid. By connecting your veins to those of a cadaver and transporting it very carefully (usually lashed to your back), you may stave off rot and decay, retaining freshness and usefulness for a very long time.
- **Bioluminescent Organs:** You have little need of torches, lanterns, or other tools to light your way, having implanted your body with specially cultured organs that cast a steady if... fluid... illumination, when you ease them forth from the fleshy hoods that normally cover them.
- **Always On Call:** You've implanted a rudimentary secondary brain near the base of your spine, which is capable of regulating your body's sleep and rest processes without interrupting your functional consciousness. As a result, you only need to sleep once every few days.
- **Mysticism:** In addition to the bodily sciences, you have also made some scholarly inquiry into the dark arts, though their true practice still eludes you. When enacting rituals and operating devices of the old world, roll at -1 rather than the normal -3.

Surgical Tool

You carry with you the standard armament of a traveling surgeon: a bone-saw with a modified handle which can be wielded much like a particularly brutal, flesh-ripping sword. This sawblade allows for one attack on your turn at +1, inflicting 3 harm.

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've little formal training in combat. Add +0 to rolls to defend.

Intimacy

When you share a moment of intimacy with someone, be it physical or emotional, your training allows you to make a perfect assessment of their state of health and any optimal treatments from which they might benefit.

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.

- **Beast Casque:** This pitted helm is made from the skull of some fearsome, unknown beast, banded together with plates of iron and strips of leather. When donned, the helm emits an enormous and overpowering reek of fresh-spilled blood.
- **Heartseeker Fang:** A knife-sized tooth pried from the jaws of a terrible monster, which still lusts for blood and death. Unwieldy without a proper handle or balance, it may be used to make a single attack at -1, inflicting 1 harm. If this tooth inflicts harm to a living being on a 10+ it vanishes into the target's flesh and worms its way toward their heart. They take 1 harm on their next three turns, and die on the fourth turn as the fang reaches their heart and shatters into deadly fragments.
- **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.
- **Blinking Lantern:** A lantern atop a bronze staff, with no way to add fuel to it. When the staff is thrust firmly into the ground, the lantern sends forth rhythmic pulses of brilliant light. These devices are said to come from the foothills around the Bright Mountain.
- **Red Amber:** This nodule of unnaturally scarlet amber holds a milky eye locked within it. When you sleep next to it, you dream of pacing to and fro in a small cell deep beneath the earth, locked in perpetual and absolute darkness.
- **Signet Ring:** A small golden ring bearing the mark of the family to which you once belonged.
- **Nothing:** Your medical supplies are all the tools you need.

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 *ought to be dead*. Erase all harm. You suffer a further -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*.
- You die.

Procedures

Your knowledge of anatomy may be used in combat to mend or to maim. Select one of the following procedures to master:

Triage

You may frantically bind together the injuries of a comrade at *close* range in the midst of the battlefield. Spend one treatment's worth of organ reserve and roll at +1. On a miss, the treatment fails. On a 7-9, your patient erases 4 harm. On a 10+, your patient erases 6 harm.

Bloody Sever

If your enemy has arteries, you can find and sever them. On a 10+ attack result that inflicts harm, you also inflict *bleeding*; the next time the target suffers harm, the harm is 2 greater.

Measure Twice, Cut Once

Your steady hand and steady eye ensure only the most devastating injuries to your foes. Once per hunt, you may re-roll a single attack, keeping whichever result you prefer.

Steady Hands

Others may describe the battlefield as frantic chaos, but you are at home amidst blood and viscera. If you voluntarily do nothing at all with your movement action on the current turn, then your sawblade attack is made at +2 rather than the normal +1.

Anatomy Lessons

Physical structure dictates proclivities of behavior. By forfeiting your movement action, you may look at the top two cards in your opponent's death deck, then place them back in whatever order you please.

Amputation

When you draw a death card with the potential to mangle or sever part of the monster's anatomy, setting aside the card from the death deck, you may roll to attack with your sawblade at +3 rather than the normal +1.

Stabilize

If you can get *close* to an ally who died during the current or prior round, you may attempt to snatch them back from death's door by spending one treatment's worth of organ reserve and rolling at +0. On a 7-9, they stabilize at *ought to be dead* with 11 harm in their death clock. On a 10+, they stabilize at *ought to be dead* with a clear death clock. You may spend up to three additional treatments from your organ reserves to add +1, 2, or 3 to the roll, respectively.

Structural Exploitation

When you draw a card from your opponent's death deck that you have already seen previously (either during the current battle or previous hunts) and inflict harm, increase the harm inflicted by 1.

Immunity

You've modified your body's blood-filtering systems to be incredibly efficient. Each time you suffer harm from a source described as a poison or toxin, reduce the harm by 1.

Redundant Organs

Once per hunt, you may ignore all harm from a single attack by expending a treatment from your organ reserve, which is destroyed instead.