



***COLD SOLDIER***  
*a story about the walking dead  
for two people.*

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Inspired by *S/Lay w/Me* by Ron Edwards, *Breaking the Ice* by Emily Care  
Boss, and *My Life with Master* by Paul Czege

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This text is an unauthorized re-write by Ron Edwards

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*The dead walk. A Dark Master has called the recently buried to serve in his army, to avenge the wrongs committed against him. You are one of these beings.*

*You shamble on, tearing apart anything in your path to achieve the tasks he has given you, his orders tolling in your mind over and over like a bell. A soldier in his army, a skull that sees once more because of his will.*

*But who you were still glimmers in your mind. Perhaps you can resolve the things left undone. Perhaps you can save those you loved. Perhaps, shattered fragment that you are, you can still make who you were a greater person.*

## Decisions

One of you will be the Soldier. The other will be the Game Master (or GM). From here on I will speak only to the Soldier. You and the GM should decide two things.

- *The Dark Master:* Powerful sorcerer, genius scientist, vengeful god.
- *The Time:* The past, the present.

Discuss these, and determine as many details as you need to feel comfortable in the setting. You may wish to leave the Dark Master's agenda unresolved in order to reveal it fully.

The GM will formulate an idea about who the Dark Master really is, along with their agenda. The master and their agenda will be based on something the GM finds repellent.

### **What are you?**

You are dead and rotting or rotted. You will not deteriorate to uselessness, your Dark Master prevents that. You cannot speak or communicate with other beings. At all. No gestures. No writing. No emphatic grunting. It is beyond you. Your memories still flicker in you, though. Perhaps you will act on them.

Write down the following on a piece of paper.

- What is your cause of death? *Old Age, Illness, Injury, Suicide, Homicide*
- What is your weapon? *You are a soldier in the army of one who can command the dead. In returning you to life, he has also armed you with a weapon. This is not a sword or a gun, this is some way in which you have emerged from the grave as a more terrible creature. What is it?*
- How do you fight? *Alone, in a group, in a horde.*

During play you may describe the soldier's physical description and the action it takes. Do not provide an inner monologue for the soldier (no "I think" or "I feel"). The soldier's mind is a dark, cold place - only memories illuminate it.

### **Begin play**

The GM splits a deck of cards into two halves, and shuffles a joker card into one of the halves, taking care that you do not know where the joker lies. The GM places the joker half face down on the table and the other half face down on top of it. This is the draw deck.

You and the GM each designate a space for cards collected during play, called the hole.

The GM tells you the first task that the Dark Master has given you. The GM may also describe your first experience upon returning to the dead, what you see, what the Dark Master looks like, and how you interact. You say what you are doing to attempt the task. This will be the first scene of the game.

The GM, when imposing tasks as the Dark Master, will make them tasks that are problematic for the GM personally (i.e. that they find morally repellent). The Dark Master is an evil creature, and has created his soldiers for loathsome tasks.

Play out this turn. You describe the actions of the dead thing. The GM describes the world, and the creatures in it including the Dark Master. Take turns discussing the cold soldier's actions and the response of the world to them and the problems that arise.

The turn may include a single location and time, or these may shift to some extent to generate a series of scenes. Remain focused on the Dark Master's command and its underlying goals.

When the time is right, when the outcome of the task is uncertain, go to the cards to determine the outcome.

### **Do you accomplish the task?**

After announcing the task, the GM draws and lays down the top three cards of the deck, face up. All three of the cards are in play. The highest ranked card is the obstacle to overcome in order to succeed at this task.

Once you have narrated the soldier's actions to overcome the obstacle, flip the top card of the draw deck to defeat the GM's highest ranked card.

- If you have a card higher than the GM's you begin to accomplish the task. Describe how this occurs.
- If your card is lower than the GM's you begin to fail at the task. The GM describes how this occurs.
  - Once per turn, you may use your weapon to remove one of the GM's cards from play and place it into the GM's hole.

This process is modified by the possibility of memory and the opportunity to resist.

### **What do you remember?**

Once per turn, at any point, you may narrate a memory.

You must tie in an element of the current scene, either directly or indirectly, into the memory. Write down the element of your memory on your character sheet and a short memory describing it.

Place your current card into your hole and draw a new card from the draw deck.

### **Do you resist?**

You are compelled to complete the task unless you resist. You may resist at any point, including:

- Immediately upon receiving the command
- Upon flipping the top card of the draw deck, regardless of the card's value
- Before or after using your weapon
- Upon flipping new a card from the draw deck when recalling a memory, regardless of the card's value
- Just prior to the final comparison of cards to determine the task's outcome

To resist, discard a card from your hole whose rank is high enough to defeat the obstacle of the task.

## The three outcomes

There are three possible outcomes for a given scene.

- *The cold soldier succeeds. Your card rank is higher than the GM's highest card rank and you do not resist.*
- *The cold soldier fails. You do not have a card with a rank higher than the GM's highest card rank, and you either do not resist or you fail to resist.*
  - *Discard one card from your hole.*
- *The cold soldier resists. You discard a card from your hole that is a higher rank than the GM's highest card rank.*

If the cold soldier succeeds at the task, the GM narrates the outcome of the scene under these constraints:

- The master's intentions are carried out. Any desires you may have had for how the scene should turn out are crushed beneath the master's will and desires.

If the cold soldier fails at the task, then the GM narrates the outcome of the scene under these constraints:

- The dark master's intentions are denied in the short term, but not ultimately subverted.
- Any desires you may have had for the scene are also denied.
- Discard one card from your hole.

If the cold soldier resists, you narrate the outcome of the scene including how you act and will or won't accomplish, under these constraints:

- The dark master's intentions are fully denied.
- You state whether you even attempt to accomplish the Dark Master's task, and if so, how, and whether it succeeds.

In all cases narrate the final status of the task and the aftermath. Discard the current cards in play.



## Endgame

At the conclusion of a scene you may tell the GM you wish for the game to end.

- The GM may agree and the last scene will be the endgame.
- The GM may say, "One more scene."
  - Play one more regular scene in which the GM can wrap up any loose ends or have the Dark Master bring forward any plans they wish, and the scene after that will be the endgame scene.

If you never call for the game to end, then endgame is triggered by the joker card appearing in a draw. When the joker comes up set it aside and draw a new card to replace it. The next scene will be the endgame.

In the last scene, choose one of the following, based on your memories, to be at stake:

- *Whether a thing you cherished will be placed beyond harm.*
- *Whether a regret will be made right.*
- *Whether unfinished business will be completed.*

The GM will incorporate your choice into the scene based on their knowledge of your character. The Dark Master may or may not give an order in the final scene. Either you or the GM narrates the opening of the scene as seems appropriate for the issue at stake.

Draw five more cards. Using them and your hole cards, build the best five-card poker hand. The GM draws five cards, adds his hole cards, and does the same.

If you win the hand, narrate the conclusion of the soldier's story.

- You get what was at stake.
- You may, if you wish, narrate the soldier's death.

If the GM wins the hand, they will narrate.

- The irretrievable loss of what was at stake.
- The soldier lives on, animated by the master.
- If you plan to play further sessions with this soldier, make the possibility explicit.

### **Continuing play**

If you wish to continue play with the same soldier, keep the same character sheet. You may add a new weapon if you wish. Only one weapon may be used per scene.

Play starts over. The Dark Master gives you a task, and you work to resolve it. It is recommended that the GM review your sheet and base tasks the master gives you on the memories that you have written down on it.

In sessions after the first, in order to pick up a club or a spade card when recalling a memory to place in your hole, it must add to, modify, or contradict an existing memory.

Play may continue with this soldier until it is destroyed.