



COLD SOLDIER

Introductory role-playing
about horror and memory

Designed by Bret Gillan (2011,
Gas Mask Games)

Adapted for Adept Play by Ron
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*The dead walk. A Dark Master has called upon them to serve, for evil
and destructive purposes. You are one of these beings.*

*You shamble on, tearing apart anything in your path to obey, the
orders tolling in your mind over and over like a bell. A soldier in this
army, a skull that sees once more because of this 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.*

For two people; play requires blank paper, writing implements, and a
single deck of 54 playing cards (“poker deck”). During play, cards are
ranked according to the rules of American Poker.

<p>Print this copy of <i>Cold Soldier</i> in booklet format, then fold it in half and staple.</p>

Hello, two people. Playing *Cold Soldier* requires about two hours, and you should find some time and space with minimal interruptions. Both of you may consult these rules throughout play.

DETERMINE THE DETAILS FOR YOUR GAME

One of you plays the Soldier. In this text, “you” are the Soldier player.

Briefly describe how the Soldier died, based on one of the following: *disease, murder, suicide, or accident*. Do not provide context or specific features of a setting.

The Soldier is dead and rotting or rotted. It will not deteriorate to uselessness, as its creator prevents that. It has emerged from the grave as a more terrible creature, uniquely serviceable to its master. Describe its *weapon*, a feature or ability which wreaks great harm and overpowers obstacles.

Choose as well whether the Soldier serves *alone, in a small group, or a horde* of similarly undead and obedient creatures.

The other player is the Game Master (GM), who also plays the Dark Master and chooses their specific nature: *a genius scientist, a powerful sorcerer, or a vengeful god*.

The GM creates the Dark Master’s *agenda* based on something the GM finds abhorrent. The Dark Master is evil in real terms for this player.

Either of the players, with the permission of the other, chooses when the story occurs: *in the present or in the past*. They also specify the location and if necessary the approximate historical moment. Both players adapt their choices so far to accord with this information.

PREPARE THE CARDS

Remove both Jokers from the deck and shuffle the remaining 52 cards. Cut the deck in halves and shuffle one Joker into one half. Place the other half on top of this half to form a single deck. The other Joker is not used.

BEGINNING PLAY

The Soldier cannot speak or communicate with other beings. At all. No gestures. No writing. No emphatic grunting. Its mind is a dark, cold place, and only memories sometimes illuminate it. Something may be here, or awaken here, but not yet.

To begin the first turn, the GM describes the Soldier's first experience upon returning to the dead, what it sees, what the Dark Master looks like, and how they interact. The GM tells you the first task that the Dark Master has commanded.

The Dark Master is an evil creature and has created the Soldier for loathsome tasks. They impose commands that are problematic for the GM personally, i.e. that the real GM player finds morally repellent.

You say what the Soldier is doing to attempt the task. During play you 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."

As you describe the actions of the dead thing, the GM describes the world and the creatures in it, including the Dark Master. Both of you include details and enrich the situation's content. The Dark Master acknowledges that the task is difficult and provides the details; after all, if it were easy, they wouldn't need an undead servitor to do it.

Play through the Soldier's actions and the response of the world to them and the problems that arise. Remain focused on the Dark Master's command and its underlying goals. Sooner or later, the GM identifies an immediate obstacle confronting Soldier. Defeating it will finish the task or make it easy to do so.

CONFRONTING THE COMMAND

At the point of uncertainty, the GM draws and lays down the top three cards of the deck, face up. All three cards are in play. The highest ranked card is the obstacle to overcome in order to fulfill the Dark Master's command.

The Soldier must begin to complete the command. Once you have stated its actions, draw and show the top card of the draw deck.

- If you have a card higher than the GM's, the Soldier begins to accomplish the task. Describe how this occurs.
- If your card is not higher than the GM's, the Soldier begins to fail at the task. The GM describes how this occurs.
- Once per turn, the Soldier may use dreadful powers to remove one of the obstacle cards from play and give it to the GM, who keeps it face-down (this is called their *hold*).

Before proceeding to the resolution, the Soldier may remember something, and/or it may have the chance to resist the command.

What do you remember? You may describe a brief memory from the Soldier's past, living self. Also describe the element of the current moment which triggered it, either directly or indirectly. Write both on your character sheet. Place your current card face-down next to you; cards here are called your *hold*. Draw a new card, placing it face-up against the obstacle cards.

Do you resist? The Soldier may resist the command if a card in your hold is high enough to defeat the obstacle, at any of these points, but only once per turn.

- Upon drawing the top card of the draw deck
- Before or after using your weapon
- Upon drawing a new card when recalling a memory
- Just prior to determining the task's outcome

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

THE END OF THE TURN

There are three possible outcomes for a given turn.

- The Soldier succeeds. Your card rank is higher than the GM's highest card rank and the Soldier does not resist. The GM describes the outcome and aftermath under these constraints:
 - The Dark Master's intentions are carried out. Any desires the Soldier may have had for how the events should turn out are crushed beneath its master's will.
- The Soldier fails. You do not have a card with a rank higher than the GM's highest card rank, and the Soldier does not resist. Discard one card from your hold. The GM describes the outcome and aftermath under these constraints:
 - The Dark Master's intentions are denied in the short term. They must go to extra effort, settle for something similar, or suffer some inconvenience, but their agenda is still advanced.
 - Any desires the Soldier may have had are failed or denied.
- The Soldier resists. You discard a card from your hold that is a higher rank than the GM's highest card rank. You narrate the outcome including how the Soldier acts and what it will or won't accomplish, under these constraints:
 - The Dark Master's intentions are fully defied. Describe whether you even attempt to accomplish the Dark Master's task, but regardless, it is denied and irrevocably unfulfilled.
 - The Soldier may achieve something it desires.

At the end of the described outcome and aftermath, all cards in play are discarded, except for the current holds. The GM accounts for any necessary details about the situation and the turn concludes.

PLAYING ENDGAME

At the conclusion of a turn you may state that the game will end.

- The GM may agree and the next turn will be the endgame.
- The GM may say, "One more turn." Play one more regular turn, and the turn after that will be the endgame.

If you do not call for endgame, then it 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 to use in the current turn. The following turn will be the endgame.

For endgame, choose one of the following to be at stake, based on the Soldier's memories:

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

The GM incorporates your choice into the situation based on their understanding of all elements in play. Either you or the GM describes the beginning of the endgame as seems appropriate for the issue at stake. The Dark Master may or may not give an order, as the GM deems appropriate.

Draw five cards. Using them and the cards in your hold, build the best possible five-card poker hand. The GM draws five cards, adds their hold cards, and does the same. Compare the hands using poker rules.

If you win the hand, describe the conclusion of the Soldier's story.

- The components at stake are completed as specified above.
- You may, if you wish, narrate the Soldier's final death.

If the GM wins the hand, they describe the conclusion.

- The components at stake are irretrievably failed and lost.
- The Soldier remains animated in service to the Dark Master.

CONTINUING PLAY

If you wish to continue play with the Soldier, use the same character sheet. You may add a new weapon if you wish. Only one weapon may be used per scene. The GM continues to play the same Dark Master.

Play begins with cards prepared as before. Both players review the previous events as well as the Soldier's memories. The GM determines any changes in location or time since those events and expresses them during the first turn.

During play, new memories may elaborate upon and connect with memories from the previous game.

Play may continue with this Soldier in multiple games, until it is destroyed or until a final ending of some other kind seems to make most sense to either player.

You are invited to post about playing *Cold Soldier* at Adept Play.

- Share what happened: when and where the story took place, who were the characters, what did they do, how did it end
- Include any observations or questions, and especially your personal assessment of the experience.

Site access and participation is free. My company income is limited to Patreon support, game sales, fees for coursework, and rules design consulting



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