

Send all game submissions to: davidmcjames@gmail.com

Blurb information

Game name: KNIGHTS OF THE STAGNANT POOL

Author(s): Joe McNamara

Blurb Text:

From their kingdom in the poisoned lands of the dead, the Knights of the Stagnant Pool ride out to save the world. They don't want to – they hate the lands of the living, and the living hate them back, but the Maggot God who holds their souls in its hands and who granted them eternal life has commanded it. Despite all the distractions, temptations and opportunities for violence the lands of the living have to offer, the Maggot God's will must be done. The Apocalypse will happen on their terms, or not at all.

The Phenonline Games Rating System.

What's the game again? Dark chivalric fantasy about the End of Days.

Seriousness? In the middle

Genre/Setting Dark fantasy; King Arthur, but everyone's a zombie

Movie Rating If this were a movie, it would be rated MA

System - Systemless

GM Style One GM, given the power level of the PCs it's probably best suited to a GM who likes improvising.

Number of players 5

Previously run at Pheno 2009

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Download package

This section includes all the information and materials the GM will need to run the game.

Title page

A single page with the name of the game and the authors. The layout person will set up the download title page using the blurb information.

The Knight of the Bloody Snowflake

It was always going to end this way for you. You never had the chance to be good or virtuous or even normal. Killing the world in the name of a dark and terrible god was your destiny, and you've come to accept that fact and, indeed, to embrace it.

You're not sure why you are the way you are. Your childhood was normal enough – you were always big for your age, and you tended to dominate the other children attached to your household, both through your status as the heir and the fact that you were more than prepared to beat them senseless if they crossed you. Your parents were largely absent, but the household's master-at-arms took you under his wing. As well as encouraging your talent for violence, he instilled the chivalric ideal in you, knowing that one day you would become a knight. After you murdered him, you set out for Amsath, where you joined the court and quickly became known as a fearsome warrior. Court politics didn't interest you, but the tournaments and battles were wonderful – they were the one place where your iron-hard devotion to the chivalric code allowed you to cut loose and revel in violence. You believed in chivalry, and you believed in Amsath.

It didn't last. King Jacob pardoned his son, and Duke Martin rebelled. You were horrified by his disloyalty to the crown and threw yourself into the defence of Amsath. As the fighting dragged on, both sides began to employ methods that were not strictly chivalrous. Without that guiding principle, it's fair to say that you went a little mad. At first, the atrocities you committed made you uncomfortable – there was nothing chivalrous, for example, about cutting down Martin's soldiers after they had surrendered, or visiting the estates of his knights while they were at the front and wiping out their families, and you didn't like how happy and content doing

these things made you feel, but you told yourself that the more acts of terror you committed, the sooner this war would be over.

Winter came, and your personal body count reached triple figures (not counting peasants and foot-soldiers). A week before Amsath fell, you found yourself chasing a party of Martin's scouts across the countryside. You should have gone back to Amsath and reported their presence, but one of them had insulted you, and the red mist that clouded your vision as a result made it difficult to think clearly. You caught up with them on a pristine white snowdrift. Because they were skirmishers, they wore no armour, so honour dictated that you discard yours. This proved to be your undoing – you decapitated the one who insulted you, but not before he opened several large cuts on your face and body. As you bled out onto the snow, you swore that you'd find those responsible for the downfall of Amsath and make them pay.

When you awoke in the Stagnant Pool, the Maggot God had plans for you. It presented you with the armour you had discarded in life and told you that it had always been your destiny to die in this manner, that you might kill in its name. Staring at your armour, which had been stained a deep red by your now-frozen blood, you realised that this had been your purpose all along. It was deeply liberating – all the horrible things you'd done over the years were simply the Maggot God grooming you to become its servant. None of it was your fault. Your conscience was clear.

Personality: You're a **Homicidal Maniac**. You exist for violence. If you hadn't sworn revenge on those responsible for the destruction of Amsath, it would have been someone else. For this reason, you don't really have any relationships closer than colleagues – you try not to get too attached to people, because you know there's a good chance you'll just end up killing them. At the same time, you're **Dedicated to the Chivalric Ideal**, as you're well aware that it keeps you from becoming a mindless killer. Your **Propensity for Violence** is unmatched, and you've yet to meet the man you couldn't kill. Due to the extent and nature of your wounds, you **Cannot Pass For Human**, as you leave a literal trail of blood everywhere you go.

Relationships:

The Knight of the Broken Feather: Alone among all of them, he knows what it's like to be mad. This makes him the closest thing to a kindred spirit, and thus a friend, that you have.

The Knight of the Poisoned Rose: He embodies an aspect of chivalry you've never really had much interest in. At best, he's a distraction. At worst, he might actually get in your way – he is, after all, a Death Knight, so he's not a complete joke.

The Knight of the Shattered Uisage: The only one of them who could challenge you in an even fight, and worthy of respect for that fact. Unfortunately, this is her only worthwhile characteristic – she's not very smart, and her need to constantly be in charge makes her difficult to work with.

The Knight of the Melted Scales: He's not a real knight. He may have the title and the armour and know all the right words to say, but you doubt he's ever been in a real fight in his life.

The Knight of the Poisoned Rose

You're not like the others. Where your fellow knights all sold their souls to the Maggot God for power or for revenge, you did it out of love. This may be the one thing that saves you from becoming the monster you know you could be.

You died young, only nineteen when Amsath fell. You'd only been a knight for a couple of months, so the rapidly deteriorating political situation was lost on you. You were so busy enjoying finally getting the opportunity to live the chivalric ideal that you'd grown up looking forward to that you didn't really pay much attention to what was going on in the wider world. More importantly, you were in love.

You don't remember her name. That doesn't make you superficial – it just means she wasn't the One. She was slightly taller than you, though, you remember that much. The two of you met at the last real ball before Duke Martin's coup plunged Amsath into war, and you knew it was love at first sight. It was difficult for the two of you – as the hostilities escalated, you found yourself forced to spend more and more time training and riding out on scouting missions, so the two of you didn't have a great deal of time together.

The day she was killed, you were involved in a skirmish on the edge of Windral forest. When you returned to Amsath, you were told that her family had attempted to flee the city and had been massacred on the road, like so many other refugees.

You felt like your heart was going to burst. You wandered through the last days of Amsath in a daze, consumed by your own grief to the point where the complete breakdown of society took a back seat to your emotions. On the day the city fell, you were supposed to be on sentry duty, keeping watch along the south road. Instead, you were locked away in your room, swallowing poison. As everything went

dark, you promised that you'd find a way to be with your true love forever. You should have been more specific about who you meant.

The Maggot God heard your promise. You arose from the Stagnant Pool in the land of the dead as one of the Maggot God's black knights. It told you that it would keep you from going back to the River of Souls until you had fulfilled your promise. You never saw that girl again, but you were soon distracted by the ghost of a woman who died years before you were born. When she was returned to the River, you fell for a fellow knight, then another ghost, then another. It's true love every time, but it always ends badly, and you hope you find the One before Judgment Day comes.

Personality: You're a **Hopeless Romantic**.

Everything for you is about romance or honour, which you see as the two main pillars of the chivalric ideal. Unlike most of your fellow Death Knights, you **Can Pass For Human** – the poison made your complexion pale and interesting, but that was the extent of its effects. You're an adequate swordsman and archer, but your true talent is your **Silver Tongue** – years of immersing yourself in the finest poetry have given you a gift for persuasion.

Relationships:

The Knight of the Bloody Snowflake: This is a monster. Aside from the Maggot God, this is the scariest entity you've ever dealt with, both because you have no idea when he's going to go mad and kill you and because you can see yourself becoming like him.

The Knight of the Broken Feather: A lunatic, to be pitied rather than feared. You feel sorry for him, but at the same time you're not sure how he could contribute to the cause.

The Knight of the Melted Scales: He's very intelligent, but he's not a good man. He is not as committed to the chivalric ideal as you are.

The Knight of the Shattered Visage: She's perfect. You know very little about her, but that doesn't matter – the important thing is that you know you love her.

The Knight of the Broken Feather

For you, death was a relief. In life, you were completely mad. Exposure to unhealthy amounts of magic from an early age had twisted your mind to the point where you no longer knew what was real and what was not, and it is only in death that you've learned to distinguish between the two.

The people most to blame for your insanity are your parents, both of whom have long since disappeared into the land of the dead. The last members of a now-extinct noble family, they were both accomplished necromancers. Your father had studied with someone who had once been a pupil of the Mother of Monsters, and he used the promise of further instruction in the arts of the dead to seduce your mother. Your mother, for her part, was far from innocent – she experimented with the waters of the Stagnant Pool while she was pregnant with you, and slit your father's throat when it became apparent that he had nothing more to teach her. Considering these factors, it's no wonder that you were born wrong – you came out pale and small, with an extra finger on each hand.

You don't actually remember your parents much – you have a vague memory of vast, cold halls and horrible red snow, but that's all you know about your ancestral home, and you have no idea what either of them actually looked like. A few months after she murdered your father, your mother was involved in a dispute over certain esoteric texts with one of Amsath's senior theologians. She was outed as a necromancer and the two of you were forced to flee your family's estate. Back when you were alive, you used to have nightmares about the day King Jacob's knight caught up with you. You didn't see the battle – you were curled up in a ball in the caravan the two of you had been travelling in – but you heard the noises, and that was enough. Your already

fragile mind snapped, and since then you've never stopped reliving that moment.

King Jacob's enforcers couldn't bring themselves to kill a child, even a weird-looking witch's brat like you, and you were technically of noble blood, so you were taken to Amsath and placed in the care of distant relatives, who weren't really happy to have you. You grew from being everybody's whipping boy into the court fool, scuttling around Amsath and amusing your social betters with your crazy pronouncements and seizures. You were even made a knight as a joke, and given the suit of armour and sword that your necromancer father would have worn had he been a proper knight. Your life was one humiliation after another, but it was marginally better than starving to death, so you stayed where you were.

When the end of Amsath came, you were relatively blameless. You hadn't paid much attention to the deteriorating political situation – you were nominally loyal to King Jacob, but that was more because he was one of the few people who treated you like a human being than because you approved of his actions. In fact, on the day Duke Martin's forces sacked Amsath, you were among the people the King made sure were safe before he took the field. It was to no avail, though – Duke Martin's forces caught up with your little band of refugees as you fled along the cliffs behind Amsath. As the soldiers came along the narrow cliff-path towards you, you became convinced that you could escape them by flying. Grabbing some feathers from a nearby bird carcass, you held them out in each hand and launched yourself off the cliff and onto the jagged rocks below. Surprisingly, the fall didn't kill you, and as your vision faded, you swore that you'd repay King Jacob for his kindness.

When you woke up in the Stagnant Pool, your head felt clear for the first time ever. Since then, you have served the Maggot God, partly out of gratitude for (mostly) curing your insanity, partly out of fear of having that insanity returned, and partly out of bitterness. All your life, you saw the worst human beings had to offer, you're half looking forward to the day when you can wipe them out in the name of the Maggot God.

Personality: You're still **Not Totally Sane**.

Occasionally, you'll see things or hear noises that aren't there. Because it's a madness born of magic, this sometimes grants you a **Twisted Insight** into the way things work –pieces of information that you have no way of knowing will appear in your head. You believe in the **Chivalric Code**, because when you were alive you were the kind of smaller, weaker person it's designed to protect. You still **Can't Fight**, but unlike most other Death Knights, you **Can Pass For Human**.

Relationships:

The Knight of the Bloody Snowflake: He terrifies you. He's mad, but he's taken his madness and forged it into a weapon to kill the world with. You believe that, come Judgment Day, people will be forced to pay for their crimes and you agree with that, but you suspect that he'd be happy to wipe out human life because it looked at him funny.

The Knight of the Poisoned Rose: Like you, he's an innocent in all this. He's not the monster some of your fellow Death Knights are, he's just a young man who made a stupid decision, and you feel a kinship towards him because of it. You know he's a poet, and you've quoted his own poetry at him to make a point before.

The Knight of the Shattered Visage: You suspect that she is the way she is because her life was similar to yours. Being one of the few female knights in Amsath can't have been easy. Unlike you, though, she's built her whole personality around being angry about things that happened when she was alive, which makes her difficult to deal with.

The Knight of the Melted Scales: You know he looks down on you, and you resent him for it. He thinks he's smarter than you because he's sane, but you know things that he has no way of knowing. In addition, he reminds you of your mother – she was another person who placed far too much emphasis on knowledge – and you've had to stop yourself from calling him 'mother' on at least one occasion.

The Knight of the Melted Scales

Contrary to what most people believe, wars are not won by strength of arms or adherence to the knightly ideal. Granted, it's helpful to have soldiers who know what they're doing under your command, but at the end of the day how hard they are is less important than how good the plan they're following is. That's what you told people when you were alive, and you wish you could believe it yourself, but you can't. For all your intelligence and cunning, at the end of the day you wish you were a soldier.

Like most of your contemporaries, you were born into a noble family. You grew up in Amsath at the height of its power and glory, surrounded by some of the finest warriors in human history. You were groomed from an early age to be one of them, and if things had turned out slightly differently you could have been a proper knight, taken the field against Duke Martin's forces and died a clean death like everyone else you knew. Unfortunately, it was not to be. You were always slightly too smart for your own good, and your tutors recognised this and focussed your lessons on history, law and logistics rather than the art of swordplay. You would much rather have been out with the other children, but you saw the value in your lessons, so you studied hard and quickly became a brilliant scholar.

You struggled through your initiation into knighthood. The couple of actual battles you were involved in as a soldier rather than a planner were utter disasters, due at least in part to the fact that you were no good at fighting. Where most of your fellow knights seemed to understand violence at an instinctive, automatic level, you tended to over-think what you were doing. Added to which, you couldn't shake the feeling that it was all a little stupid –

when people explained to you why you were fighting, your first thought was always 'I could have resolved this without violence.' Somehow you managed to survive until the night you had to spend in prayer over your weapons in the chapel at Amsath. You fell asleep during the vigil. You've never told anyone this, and you're deeply ashamed of it. It makes you wonder, in your darkest moments, whether you're even a real knight.

Once you didn't have to serve in the field anymore, you quickly rose through the ranks. By the time the civil war began, you were a senior general and a member of the King's inner circle. Your fellow knights treated you with a mixture of disdain and awe – you weren't a real knight because you didn't take the field or fight in tournaments, but you had all sorts of complicated, arcane knowledge without which could turn victory into defeat or vice versa. You remained loyal to the King during the war because you knew him – he was a good man, but his son had put him in an impossible position. Again, though, doubts began to assail you – you looked out at all the people you'd grown up with killing each other and thought 'this is stupid. This is pointless. If we weren't all committed to this martial culture, we wouldn't have to do this.' You swallowed your doubts, however, and took command of the logistical side of the loyalist cause.

On the day Amsath fell, you gave your last set of orders (relating to the defence of the South Gate – you remember because one of your sub-commanders didn't take as many knights as she should have), then retreated to the central command building to wait for the end. You could see that Martin's forces were going to be victorious, but you thought that the

loyalist forces on the south road might be able to buy you enough time to organise a good defence of Amsath's command buildings. As it turned out, your southern flank crumbled like sand in the sea and Martin's armies were upon you before you could prepare yourself. Rather than storming the command building, however, they torched it. As the flames consumed you, you reflected that you weren't even getting to die in battle. You swore that, in death, you'd become a real knight.

When you arose in the Stagnant Pool, you were made a Judge of the Dead almost immediately to deal with the influx of new souls coming over in the chaos following the fall of Amsath. At first it grated – you were a Death Knight, and yet you were still a glorified accountant – but gradually you have adjusted to your new role, and have amassed a considerable amount of power in the land of the dead. You're less corrupt than a lot of your fellow Judges, and you tend to focus on fairness rather than mercy. At the back of your mind, you keep hearing the promise you made, but for now you're fine where you are.

Personality: You **Think You Know Better Than Everyone Else**, and not without cause. You're a **Brilliant Tactician**, even though you **Can't Fight** yourself. In addition, your status as a **Judge Of The Dead** grants you control over the souls of the dead, so you're used to being in control. You believe in the **Chivalric Code**, but it's a conflicted belief – on the one hand, you know that the whole martial culture of honour and violence that your fellow Death Knights practice is basically irrational, but on the other you desperately want to be a part of it. Due to the manner of your death, you **Cannot Pass For Human** – your skin is black and charred, and smoke still wafts from it even though the fire was years ago.

Relationships:

The Knight of the Bloody Snowflake:

The best example of the chivalric code you know. Intellectually, you know he's a murderous psychopath, but something inside you still wishes you were like him.

The Knight of the Poisoned Rose:

Another good example of courtly behaviour. He's immature, but he'll grow out of that and in ten or twenty or a hundred years time when Judgment Day finally comes he'll be a great asset to the Maggot God.

The Knight of the Shattered Usage:

Thinks she knows better than you. In your eyes, this is the worst possible sin.

The Knight of the Broken Feather:

A burden you shouldn't have to carry. He was a lunatic and a cripple when he was alive, and death has done nothing to change either of these facts.

The Knight of the Shattered Usage

Your life was a constant struggle. Your death, it seems so far, has been more of the same. Perhaps this time all your hard work and effort will be enough for you to save yourself.

You were the only girl in a family of great and powerful knights. Your mother died giving birth to you, so your father raised you the only way he knew how – as a knight. By the time you were introduced to the court at Amsath, four of your older brothers were famous knights in their own right, and two were dead. You were a bit of a novelty at court – you weren't the only female knight there, but you were far and away the most militant. You worked twice as hard and trained twice as hard as your male counterparts, but it didn't help. Everyone treated you as some kind of stupid, funny mascot and no-one took you seriously. You quickly found that, if you wanted to be taken as seriously as the men, you had to do twice as much as they did. You were already quite competitive by nature – growing up with eight brothers will do that to a person – but this made you more so, and it quickly became a problem. You couldn't co-operate with your male colleagues – you found that you either had to dominate them or they'd assume control, even when you were supposedly their equal.

As Amsath crumbled, you found yourself on the front lines more and more. You had some sympathy for Duke Martin's cause – he was right, the King shouldn't have shielded his son from prosecution, and you can't help thinking that if his victim had been a man rather than a woman the King would have handed his son over – but family loyalty kept you on the side of Amsath despite your misgivings.

On the last day, you were tasked with holding the south gate. Your commander told you that you should take extra soldiers, but you ignored him, assuming he was patronising you as he had done so many times in the past,

assuming you were incapable of performing the tasks assigned to you because you were a woman.

Unfortunately, on this occasion he turned out to be right. You were overwhelmed at the south gate and struck down by a mace to the side of the head. As your brains dribbled down the side of your face, you swore that this wasn't the end and that you'd find some way to outdo all those men who'd doubted you.

The Maggot God heard you. You arose from the Stagnant Pool and quickly became one of the Maggot God's foremost champions. Most of the men who'd kept you down when you were alive had been returned to the River of Souls, but you found that, in defiance of all logic, sexism was just as prevalent beyond the grave. You serve the Maggot God to prove that you're better than all the male knights – you're just not sure who you're proving it to anymore.

Personality: You're the **Alpha Female** in every group you're in. You have to be in charge all the time. You're not very good at taking instructions, but you're great at giving orders. You **Follow the Chivalric Code** (except for the bits about gender, which you find rather patronising) more because it's one more thing to out-do the men at than because you respect the idea. You're **Obsessively Well-Trained**, making you better with a sword or on a horse than the majority of your peers. You **Find It Difficult to Pass For Human** – the left side of your face is a crushed, bloody mess. You cover it up with an ornate helm, but it still looks wrong.

Relationships:

The Knight of the Poisoned Rose:

He's a capable knight, and he's good with people, but if he doesn't stop staring at you you're going to rip his eyeballs out and feed them to him.

The Knight of the Bloody Snowflake:

He's a psychopath, and you have no idea what he'll do at any given moment. He's also one of the few Death Knights who could beat you if it came to blows, so you're more careful around him than you are around some of the others.

The Knight of the Melted Scales:

Thinks he's better than you. As such, you don't like him – he's far too smug for someone who's such a mediocre knight.

The Knight of the Broken Feather:

He's suffered a lot of hardship in his life, and it's made him crazy and useless. You feel sorry for him, but it wasn't your fault and you don't know if he's good for anything now.

The Fall of Amsath; and What Came After:

For centuries, the High King of Amsath ruled the known world. Through a complicated system of barons, under-kings and landed nobles, Amsath brought order and stability to the world. Its military might was unchallenged, but its power came not from the hundreds of armoured knights it could field against those who defied it but from the fact that it was seen as the moral centre of the world. Laws written in Amsath were followed across the land, and it was in Amsath that the culture of chivalry was born. For a time, Amsath was the capital of the world, a shining example of the best humanity was capable of.

Like all good things, however, Amsath had to die. The last King, Jacob, had a son, Prince Tomas, who failed to live up to the ideals his father taught him. In a fit of rage, Tomas beat a servant to death, then fled to his father's estate. Duke Martin, a prominent Amsathi noble, saw the King shielding his son from justice and rebelled, and the kingdom tore itself apart. When the civil war was over, King Jacob was dead and Amsath itself was a smoking ruin. Martin proclaimed himself the new King, but it was too late – the dream was over.

Death, and Those Who Dwell Within It:

The priests of Amsath teach that the afterlife is a tranquil grey kingdom where dignitaries from the kingdom's past help the souls of the newly dead on their pilgrimage to the River of Souls which they must enter to pass on to the next stage of existence, occasionally appearing to the living to offer advice on methods of good governance.

This is not true. The land of the dead is a devastated, black reflection of the land of the living, ruled over by the Maggot God and its servants. There is a River of Souls, but most souls never make it that far. If they are not consumed by the Maggot God, they are pressed into the service of older, more powerful dead things who have built up their own kingdoms there. It is debatable what actually happens to souls who enter the River – the Maggot God, when it deigns to comment on the process, claims that entering the River leads to annihilation, and nobody has ever returned to contradict it.

There are two types of citizens of the land of the dead. The vast majority are ghosts – the souls of the living, condemned to wander until they are destroyed. While they are physically real in the land of the dead, they cannot exist in the land of the living without a huge amount of magic. The second group are commonly known as Death Knights, although that is something of a misnomer – about half of them were Amsathi Knights in life, but it is by no means a prerequisite for the condition. They have physical bodies which have been suffused with the waters of the Stagnant Pool, a section of the River of Death that the Maggot God has trapped and poisoned into its service, and as such can move among the living. Each Death Knight made a promise to the Maggot God at the moment of their death, and it is this promise as much as the Pool's waters that empowers them. Because they are bound to their bodies, the Death Knights are all-but immortal – the body must be completely destroyed to kill them. A third faction exists, comprised of both ghosts and Death Knights, the feared Judges of the Dead. Granted the power to control their ghostly brethren, the Judges are the Maggot God's lawgivers and lieutenants in the land of the dead. In theory, the Judges are supposed to guide souls to their ultimate reward, be that the River, service to a more powerful entity or consumption by the Maggot God, but in practice most Judges serve themselves first and foremost.

Necromancy, Summoning and Other Ways to Lose Your Soul:

There are two types of magic: necromancy and summoning. Neither practice is particularly savoury, and both are discouraged by all civilised people. Witches and warlocks are hated and feared because of the chaos they bring with them.

Necromancy is the practice of commanding the dead by means of arcane rituals. This is a dangerous practice, as the dead are deeply envious of the living and that envy manifests itself as murderous hate, so a potential necromancer has to watch that they aren't torn apart by the very entities they seek to command. It's worth noting that, while necromancers are very good at animating dead flesh, their powers over ghosts and unfettered souls are far less extensive – they can command them, but their powers are nothing next to those of a Judge of the Dead.

Summoning is, if anything, a worse idea because it's less well understood. Summoning involves trading parts of one's soul to demons or spirits or gods (which, really, are just different names for the same thing) in exchange for favours from them. Because they trade away portions of their soul, most summoners become sociopathic very quickly, and travel the countryside with their attendant demons in tow, wreaking havoc. Where necromantic rituals are long and complicated, summoning tends to be almost too easy – demons want an excuse to turn up and feed off your personality, so they'll turn up to almost anything they're invited to. Occasionally, a summoner will die and his or her soul will not turn up in the land of the dead - the story goes that the demons take it away with them to eat.

The Maggot God (*The Conqueror Worm, The King Beyond The Gate, The Font of Damnation, The God Of The Stagnant Pool*)

When the first human being's life ended and he passed into the land of the dead, the Maggot God was waiting for him. There is some conjecture as to whether or not the Maggot God existed before that time, but it's largely academic, and the Maggot God itself has never given an answer one way or the other. It is the personification of death and decay. From its kingdom in the land of the dead, it decides the fates of human souls – or rather, empowers its Judges to do so. On those rare occasions when it takes an interest in an individual soul, that soul is almost always devoured. Theologians have theorised that the existence of the Maggot God implies another entity, a personification of birth who creates new souls, but there's no concrete evidence for such an entity.

Originally, the stories say that the Maggot God didn't have a personality. Centuries of eating human souls, however, have given it one. It's the sum of everyone it has consumed. It's us, and it turns out we're a little bit vain, somewhat controlling and deeply resentful of the living.

At the end of the world, according to prophecy, the Maggot God will enter the land of the living and consume it. That's a day the Maggot God looks forward to with great anticipation. Its entry will be preceded by the Death Knights riding out and crushing any potential resistance to its plans. As a lot of Death Knights have promises related to revenge or murder, they are if anything more eager for it to come.

The Mother of Monsters (*Mother Dearest, The First Necromancer, The Skull Queen, The Witch of Qoranin*)

The Mother of Monsters is almost as old as the Maggot God. Her son was the first human being to die, and she made the first promise to the Maggot God, that she would find a way to bring him back to life. As such, she is the single oldest human in existence. Like the Death Knights, she is animated by the force of her promise and by the energies of the Stagnant Pool. She is credited with single-handedly inventing necromancy, and is extremely proficient in its use. She has the power to cross between the lands of the living and the dead at will, and is the Maggot God's principal servant in the lands of the living. In addition, she's a capable sorcerer and has a brilliant political brain. It is likely that a good portion of the plots and schemes attributed to the Maggot God are, in fact, the Mother of Monsters' plans playing themselves out.

Despite being the greatest necromancer in the history of her species, the Mother of Monsters' attempts to restore her son to life have been fruitless to this point. Whether it's even possible to do so is unknown – normally, necromancy cannot restore someone to true life, but no-one has ever wielded as much necromantic power as the Mother of Monsters.

King Martin (*Martin the Just, Martin the Wise, Knight of the Iron Glove, Last King of Amsath, Martin the Traitor*)

Originally the Duke of Greymouth, Martin rebelled against his king after the king's son committed a crime for which the king pardoned him. The ensuing civil war tore Amsath apart. Now, Martin is king of Amsath, ruling from his estate at Greymouth. The position no longer means what it used to – where once the king of Amsath effectively ruled the world, after the war the various nobles who paid homage to the position broke away from Amsath and became kings in their own right. Still, Martin rules as though nothing has changed, issuing dictates and making laws for the whole world.

The years have not been kind to King Martin. He's the wrong side of fifty anyway, and his attempts to bring all the rebellious little kingdoms back into line, coupled with the fact that he is widely known as the man who killed the dream of Amsath, have aged him beyond his years. He's still one of the best tacticians of his generation, and those who have heard him speak on the subject of law and order say that he's an inspiring figure, but everyone wonders how long he has left. Amsath probably won't survive his death – he has no heir, and when he dies it will either implode or fade away.

GM notes

Setup

Everyone gets their own sheet and a copy of the background/NPC list.

Because this is a game about ostensibly villainous protagonists, it's probably worth having a discussion around content and player safety at the start of the game. Do whatever works for your group; the X card wasn't super well known when this was originally written, but it's probably a good thing to look up. In particular, the violence Snowflake inflicts and the sexism Visage encountered when she was alive could be a bit rough for some people (no PC or NPC will treat Visage any different because she's a woman, but it does inform her background a little bit), so talk to your group about that.

There is a rough structure to the first half of this game, but the final hour tends to be chaos. For that, follow the players' lead until either the central question of the game is resolved or they're all dead.

Intro/prologue

The game begins in the land of the dead. A **Judge of the Dead** comes to the players, tells them **the Maggot God** is sending them into the land of the living, back to Amsath. New souls are not coming to the land of the dead at the same rate that they normally do, and the Maggot God is hungry, and has tasked them with resolving the issue. The Judge doesn't have much more information than that, because the Judge fears the Maggot God and doesn't want to ask it questions. The PCs should know that this is an entirely sensible response. Significantly, this is the sort of thing that **the Mother of Monsters** would normally handle – metaphysical questions are normally for her, and nobody knows where she is or why it's not her dealing with this.

First encounter

First encounter out of the deadlands – Gorsameth and Gorasuul, demon brothers, with followers the PCs can scythe through. The brothers weren't summoned – they came through in the psychic tide following the Angel's emergence into the real world. Gorsameth and Gorasuul are tormenting peasants in a farmhouse; whether the PCs save them is up to them, but it's a character beat for people who care about chivalry vs people who just want to get their job done vs Snowflake's desire to just kill everyone.

From either the peasants or the demons, they learn what's going on – a rebel army, **the Army of the Blank Flag**, is rampaging across the countryside. The Army is led by a spiritual leader called **the Angel of Annihilation**.

King Martin and the Mother of Monsters

Then, on to Martin's camp, where **King Martin** and **the Mother of Monsters** plot to wipe out the Angel's army. Clever people will notice that the Mother of Monsters hasn't told Martin about her heat-cannons, which are the re-animated skulls of dragons and are capable of destroying a death knight's body. Note that neither of them see the Angel and the Army of the Blank Flag as anything other than a political threat. Martin's having trouble keeping his army together – he doesn't have the respect King Jacob had.

Mother of Monsters has with her a bunch of not Death Knights but demons bound to corpses. This is because she doesn't want the Maggot God to know what she's up to. This is her big play; she thinks

that ultimately human souls should be overseen by humans, rather than the Maggot God, which would incidentally mean that as the oldest extant human soul, she'd be extremely powerful. It's not totally self-centred, but it's definitely not an altruistic view.

Martin is complicated – he genuinely believes what he says about peace and justice, but he betrayed King Jacob at least in part because he wanted personal power.

Also in Martin's camp is **Hranulf**, leader of the barbarian forces. He was loyal to Amsath under King Jacob, but is less convinced by Martin, and is on the edge of pulling his forces away from the battle.

The Angel of Annihilation

At some stage the PCs will confront the Angel, who will be kind to them – it understands they're just doing their job, but it cannot allow them to interfere. The Angel is essentially a demon that's bound into a farmhand that the Mother of Monsters found. There's an implication that it's the ghost of the Mother of Monsters' son, but it doesn't actually matter. The Angel is extremely powerful – essentially, anything that comes within about an inch of it disintegrates, making it all-but invincible.

If it kills the PCs, it'll send them to **Paradise**. Anyone the Angel kills, rather than going back to the deadlands, has their soul end up in a pleasant, pastoral realm inside the Angel. At the moment, that's a bunch of its followers – this is why souls aren't going to the deadlands – but if it causes a battle between Martin's army and the Army of the Blank Flag, everyone who dies will end up in Paradise. Ultimately, the Angel's plan is to kill everyone, kick off the final war that starts the Apocalypse, confident in the knowledge that everyone will end up inside it.

If Scales drags it into the deadlands, that'll cut it off from its power source and knock it back into its frightened-farmhand persona.

Also in the Angel's camp is **Captain Adriana**, the Angel's 2IC. She has doubts about the whole thing – wants revenge on Amsath for abandoning her, but suspects the Angel has another agenda. She's widely respected and could disperse the Army of the Blank Flag.

In the Angel's paradise, everyone's alive (as opposed to the Maggot God's realm, born of the Maggot God's bleak outlook). This means that the Angel is somewhere in there, and it's just a big, tough demon.

The Last Battle

Once the PCs have all this information, they should realise that they have two problems – first, if there is a battle between the Army of the Blank Flag and Martin's army, and the Blank Flag wins, that's it for Amsath. Their legacy and the things they cared about when they were alive will be wiped out. It's worth noting that Amsath under Martin is a shadow of its former glory, but it could possibly be restored; if the Blank Flag kills everyone and burns it to the ground, that won't happen. Whether they care about this is up to them, but they should know it.

Their second problem is the issue of the Angel; it's essentially invulnerable from the outside, and if it keeps collecting souls, the Maggot God will starve, and withdraw its power from the PCs and they will wither up and stop existing. Again, maybe they care, maybe they don't, but they should be able to draw the conclusion that that will happen from the information you give them.

How they resolve those two problems is essentially the last hour of the game.

Notes on tone and direction

In general terms, the PCs are very powerful – they're mostly professional combatants, and the fact that they're walking corpses makes them very tough. They can be stabbed, shot with arrows, basically anything that won't completely destroy their body can only really slow them down. There are two exceptions here – the Mother of Monsters' heat cannons will obliterate a PC if they're pointed at them and fired, and the Angel can destroy them by being within an inch of them.

In terms of tone, anything to do with the death knights, the land of the dead, the Maggot God or the Mother of Monsters should be described in the most over-the-top, heavy metal terms. Towers of skulls, blood everywhere, stylish carnage, wild stuff. When they're out in the land of the living, though, things are much more standard fantasy, and the clash between these two tones should be obvious.

There is a danger that this game could become relentlessly negative, and the setting is intentionally like that – the central metaphysical question only works because things are so bad that it might not be the worst thing that could happen if the Angel ended the world. To combat this, make things fun – when the PCs fight or use their powers or scheme, emphasise that they're powerful, aspirational figures despite what messed-up people they are.

It's important to remember also that all the NPCs have their own agendas, none of which are necessarily any better or worse than anyone else. Ultimately, whoever the PCs side with in the final battle (assuming they don't stop or subvert the battle) will probably be victorious, so let them engage with the NPCs' ideas.

Also, there's the potential for a bit of black humour here. How difficult it is for the PCs to actually die means you can inflict all sorts of brutal slapstick. Chop heads off, set people on fire, throw them off high places, go nuts with it. Additionally, everyone (including the PCs) is a pretty flawed person, and you can get some good jokes out of steering into those flaws – look at the terms in **bold** on the PC sheets and go from there.

Finally, remember that, as bad as the Death Knights are, they do have redeeming qualities. A game which is just three hours of bad people doing bad things might be a bit boring, so give them opportunities to demonstrate chivalry or compassion or intelligence; this will make the final decisions they have to make more interesting.