

# The Words

A GM-less card game about dark magic

and martial arts in the gritty downtown streets -- with mutants, madness, crime-fighting, and inner demons made manifest.

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The world is falling apart. Can you stop it? Or will you fall with it?

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You know the words. Maybe you read them in a loathsome book penned by a madman. Maybe someone cruel whispered them to you. Maybe you had the misfortune to overhear them. Maybe they were taught to you by someone you hate.

You can say the words and terrible things happen...you can make terrible things happen. And maybe you do.

The words *hurt*, the words *twist*, the words *tangle*, the words *destroy*. Whenever they are heard. The words can do things to people, to animals, to plants, even to the earth and air and sun itself. If you know the right ones. Oh, the words can make you a very bad person.

The words feel *alive*. And no one wants to hear them. Even people who don't know what the words are will run away when they are said, they will hear them and want to flee...but they will never be the same, because the words get in their heads then, and demand to be *used*.

No one is stupid enough to spread the words like that.

But someone said the words on TV. Some mad fool. And the words went *everywhere*.

There are things in the streets now. Things made by the words from other things, painfully corrupted. Or things *summoned* by them. Gangs use them. Rapists use them. Dealers use them. Kidnappers and slavers use them. Drunks and tweakers use them. Cops use them.

So the malodorous dead walk, with fire in their steps or billowing poison fog, seeking out living hearts or an end to unfinished business.

Beasts of rage and bone and muscle, of razored spike and diseased fang, stalk victims through the streets, hungry and feeding, hunting and terrorizing.

Shadows from out-of-time-and-space haunt the shadows and whisper secrets best left buried, or best left undiscovered, promising riches, promising the future, and swallowing up those they catch.

The trees watch you and beckon like sidhe.

And now nothing is safe.

Nothing is sacred.

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... *BUT YOU KNOW THE WORDS* ...

you know the words

# Who Are You?

**You know the words** and you can do something about what is happening in the world. You're not a madman; the words must be contained. They must be STOPPED. The things that hunt and haunt and prey must be put down. All your own plans, whether those be for power or salvation, and those you might care for, depend on it.

**Guns. Knives. Swords. Bombs. Fists. Claws. Horns.** All these work against the things brought forth by the words. They're the only things that do. You'll have to use them. But fighting isn't like in the movies. Guns kill and maim. Claws shred and gut. Fights are over in seconds; and the first strike wins.

Maybe you'll fight them yourself with whatever weapons you find, maybe weapons you've whispered to and hidden the words on. Maybe you'll twist pets and animals into monsters to fight them for you. Or summon Things from the dark spaces of your own soul or the cracks between time and space.

## **What can the words do?**

Anything. But you have to say them. You can whisper them, you can shout them. You can slip them into a conversation. You can kill with them.

But the words want to be used, they want to be heard, they want to be repeated...have you ever seen the dead get up and walk because the flesh can't rest, full of the words? They want you to say them.

So you can kill with them, and be damned if you do...

The words can be used to put things into other things, or take things out of *you* and put them into something else: your pain, rage, anger, hunger, desire, loneliness, disease...all the bad things...

The words can tear the fabric of life-and-death, and the curtain of space-and-time.

If you say the words wrong...they don't like it. And if you use the words on yourself...or if you kill with them and you're the only one who can hear them...

## **Do you have a Master?**

The old ones, terrible sorcerers long-versed in the words, survivors of the words, long infected by them, know how to use the words really well. Drugs. Meditations. Ritual Chants. They don't teach everyone those things. And never anyone they like. Or at least not anyone who likes them afterward.

Maybe you stay long enough to learn everything they have to teach.

Maybe you leave before your soul is eternally stained and damned.

But you didn't just hear the words. You know something about them and what they mean. And you are bound to your Master by them.

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...OH HOW YOU HATE ME ...

sinner

**You can't know the words** without them bringing pain and suffering to you and those around you. You use them eventually and, no matter your intentions, something goes wrong. This is your **Sin**. Something you've done. Something terrible you are hiding. The words sometimes remind you of it in the deep, dark night of your dreams. Your life swirls around hiding the Sin.

**NAME THE SIN.** Write it down. What is the secret that must never be told? That you cannot let happen again? The Sin brought by the words. You can't show it to anyone, but you must hint at it in play.

**Who are you protecting?** Why? This is your reason for being out there fighting the chaos in the streets. Lie about it or tell the truth, or say nothing at all. But eventually you must bring it up in play.

**What do you look like?** Describe yourself in about twenty words, looks and personality. What people notice. Write it down. Other people can see this. Use it. Bring it up in play.

**What sort of stuff** do you have or carry around, or have access to? Just a couple things. You can hide some of this if you want. But write it down.

**Who are you?** What do you do for a living or what kind of goals are you pursuing? Who do you know? Write it all down. Maybe you hide this, maybe you don't.

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Your character has two attributes – **Sin and Integrity** -- that define them.

At the beginning of play, you pick four cards from your hand place them face-up on the table in front of you. The first is **Sin**, the second is **Integrity**. These represent your attributes. Whatever the suit is on the card of an attribute is the current suit of that attribute.

Sin is magic and horror. Integrity is everything that makes you, you, and human.

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**Everything else**, like guns, knives, lockpicks, computers, police contacts, and so on can provide an **Edge** to a character just like a **Mutation**. If you're using one of these, you can have an Edge from +1 to +3. Normal stuff has a +1 Edge. +2 if it's **REALLY** special or powerful. If you use the words on creatures or equipment (or...people), you can give it a bonus +1 to its Edge.

Once your stuff has an Edge, write the Edge down. If you used the words on it, write that down, too. Using the words on anything requires a conflict. Even if you lose the conflict, you might still get the Edge bonus out of it. You can always just "give" and suffer some kind of Mutation, but declare you get the Edge.

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...**HOW FAR WILL YOU GO**...

use the words

# playing

You need at least two players. When it is “your turn”, one of the other players at the table offers to be play the bad guys, and react to scenes and events. This is usually the player to your right. They describe a Scene, where it is, and anything that happens to be going on right then; your character can be there by themselves, or be there with others (the other players’ characters might be there, too). *In any scene, something “important” must be happening for the character to react to or deal with.*

Any player can offer up non-interactive scenes where none of the players’ characters are involved, but that move the plot along or provide color to the overall narration.

Turns proceed around the table as everyone helps tell everyone else’s story. When a scene feels “done”, move along to another scene and go to the next person’s turn. If it feels like another scene with that character would be best right then, and everyone agrees, someone else can offer to be the opponent and it can remain “your turn”.

Characters can be involved together as some kind of group working together, or as individuals. Their stories can interact, or not.

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## Playing the Hand You’re Dealt

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Shuffle together two standard decks of playing card, including the Jokers.

Each player then draws a hand of seven cards. You may not refill your hand until you have played all your cards (except if you play a Joker, you can refill your hand immediately). When you refill your hand, draw seven cards from the draw deck.

### Conflicts

Conflicts are resolved by playing cards. Either by playing a higher number than your opponent or by playing a better suit (if your suit beats your opponent’s suit, the numbers on your cards don’t matter):

**Hearts** beat **Clubs**.

**Diamonds** beat **Spades**.

**Clubs** beat **Diamonds**.

**Spades** beat **Hearts**.

(*Jokers* are wild.)

Cards are played by setting them face down on the table, opponents then reveal them at the same time. Highest card, or better suit, wins.

Rather than play a card, you can “give”, and choose to lose the conflict on your own terms -- but it must be a loss, the terms of your loss cannot somehow let you win whatever was at stake in the conflict.

When someone plays a Joker against you, everything blows up; the worst possible thing that could happen for you happens right then, not merely in terms of the conflict but in terms of everything you've been striving for and working towards: a dark secret is revealed, a relationship is irrevocably destroyed, the person you don't want to ever find you finds you, you suffer a mutation, or something else particularly terrible.

You may also play one of your attributes as a card. After your opponent has placed their card face down, you merely declare you are playing one of your attribute cards (it stays on the table if you win the conflict).

If you tie, or if you lose a conflict because your total isn't high enough (but not if you lost because the other suit beat you), you can also play a second card from your hand, adding the total to the first. Then your opponent plays another card as well. The other party can "give" now; if not, flip the new cards over and compare the totals or suits (and only the newly played suits). If you have more or your suit beats theirs, you are the winner.

The losing party can keep playing more cards, adding to their total, except if you go over 21 and your opponent doesn't, you lose. Once one player goes over 21, no more cards can be played in that conflict.

If a player used an attribute card in a conflict and lost, they must discard that attribute card and replace it with a lower numbered card from their hand. If they are not holding a lower-numbered card, they must take the first smaller card found in the discard pile (from the top). If there is no smaller card in the discard pile, something horrible happens, almost certainly ending the character's life, or at least their life as your character.

Conflicts that go on like this should be narrated out as a series of blows or exchanges or increasing difficulties where neither party has the upper hand, even if it just entails circling around one another, diving and dodging, or so on.

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## **Integrity**

If you play your Integrity card and lose the conflict, or you lose a conflict wherein you used the words, you have to replace your Integrity card and you suffer from a **Mutation**. If there isn't a lower numbered card, your character is gone...they become one of the horrible creatures haunting the streets: there's just nothing of you left.

**Mutations** aren't pretty or aesthetic. Tentacles grow out of one-side of your face, one hand turns into a crab-claw, part of you melts or sloughs away, a terrible eye surrounded by dark veins opens in the middle of your forehead, you grow grotesque muscles your frame was never meant to handle, burning tattoos all over your body, uneven horns, grotesque nipples on which tiny demons succor, hands made of frost, or followed by a thousand whispering ghosts...

Write down your mutations. Sometimes they can be useful. If it makes sense, you can declare a mutation gives you an **Edge** in a conflict, and take a +1 to the total of whatever card(s) you played.

## **Sin**

If you use the words, you have to use the Sin attribute in a conflict.

If you play your Sin card and lose the conflict, you have to replace your Sin card, and you (or something you have used the words on) does something regrettable. Maybe something you didn't mean. If there isn't a lower numbered card, your character pays the ultimate price for their sins and is driven mad...they become one of the criminals roaming the streets doling out terror.