

# The Tallow Man

(*Christian Hagga*)

*Dark, sooty smoke fills the room, accompanied by the rancid smell of burning tallow. The silhouette of a thin hunched figure can be seen in the haze. His malicious smile is briefly glimpsed through the smoke before he vanishes and the screaming of his victims begins...*

The Tallow Man is spoken of in hushed whispers by youths sharing ghost stories, and perhaps by old men in the corner of an inn, a tankard of strong ale in their hands and a haunted look in their eyes. Alternatively known as Blacktallow or Dark Brother Wick, the storied Tallow Man has endured for more than a century, made nearly immortal through his dark sorcery and darker appetites.

The Tallow Man was born a mortal man; in some stories a merchant, in others a priest. In any case, it is undisputed that as a man he was neither hardworking nor virtuous, rather being known for avarice and cunning. His one useful talent was making candles from the rendered fat of animals. According to legend, one dark night he was dispatching a freshly trapped wild dog when, in the process of stripping the carcass of hide and fat to render in his brass cauldron, the creature spoke to him. The carcass – which was surely possessed by a demonic entity – instructed him how to carve six glyphs of power into his cauldron; glyphs which would enable him to live forever so long as the cauldron was kept fed. The man followed the dark creature's instructions and then stepped into the cauldron to be engulfed in dark, sooty smoke.

The following night, on a new moon, the Tallow Man stepped from the cauldron and over the next month found six victims to sacrifice to the cauldron's glyphs. He disappeared into the vessel, emerging during a new moon some six years later to once more find suitable victims to sacrifice. The Tallow Man must always follow the same pattern in choosing his victims; first a merchant, then a priest, a person of high standing, a soldier, and finally two siblings. Of course, he is free to attack any unfortunates who get in his way but they will not necessarily be worthy sacrifices. Performing the necessary rites over the sacrificed body takes several hours, thus he can only dispatch one victim per day.

Should the Tallow Man be unable to satisfy the cauldron's needs before the next new moon, he will become increasingly desperate. He will also be weakened, losing 1 Health Point every night until he either completes his task or, upon losing his final Health Point, fades away into smoke with a tortured wail, to be trapped in a nightmarish realm for twelve years, until the hungry demonic entities he serves have the strength to send him back to the mortal world. Where he goes when he has slain his requisite number of victims is unknown, but he returns to seek his next lot some six years later.

The Tallow Man avoids face-to-face combat, preferring surprise if not outright murder. That said, he has a number of powers that make him a dangerous foe. He strikes with a long, cursed butcher's knife; wounds he inflicts with it will begin to smoke and burn, causing an additional point of damage per combat round for 1d6 rounds; damage caused by multiple strikes is cumulative.

The villain can breathe a thick, noxious smoke at will. This takes one combat round and will fill a 5-metre radius. The Tallow Man is unaffected by the smoke; however, others in the area suffer penalties of -3 to ATTACK (and an additional -1 for ranged attacks) and -4 to DEFENCE as their vision is impaired and their strength sapped. Further, the smoke allows the Tallow Man to attempt to hide while in front of observers, with a +5 to his Stealth. Should the Tallow Man take on his smoke form (see below) while in the area, he will become invisible to almost all creatures. The smoke will

dissipate in 2d6 rounds outdoors (less if there is wind) and will persist for many minutes in a confined space.

Once per day, the Tallow Man can turn into living smoke; in this form, he can neither be harmed nor restrained by non-magical, physical means. He can do this instantaneously, thus avoiding what might otherwise be a disabling blow. Should the Tallow Man successfully hit in melee while in this form, his victim will suffer a horrible fate: their skin and fat will begin to blister and boil, causing 2d4 +1 points of damage. Non-magical armour provides no protection. However, a d10 armour bypass roll is required against those wearing magical armour. This injury is horribly disfiguring, causing the permanent loss of 1 point of Looks for every 8 points of total damage caused by these attacks. The Tallow Man can move only 3m per round while in smoke form and can maintain the form until a spell expiry roll takes place. Further, while in smoke form, the Tallow Man must flee bright light and will suffer 2d6 points of damage if struck by sunlight.

The evil powers of the cauldron also grant the Tallow Man the spellcasting abilities of a Rank 3 Darkness Elementalist (Darkness, Air and Fire spells only; all are accompanied by smoke and the smell of burning tallow).

The Tallow Man is both cunning and patient; if he realises that a group of adventurers are a threat, he is likely to avoid direct combat in favour of surprise attacks on them while unprepared or (preferably) asleep.

The only sure way to permanently defeat the Tallow Man is to destroy his (certainly well-hidden and guarded) cauldron. Any other defeat is only temporary; he will simply rise from the cauldron the following night to recommence his task.

Stories of the Tallow Man tell of one more weakness; anyone who speaks his mortal name in his presence will gain a bonus of 2 to their ATTACK, DEFENCE, and damage against him in combat, and will be unaffected by both the smoking wounds caused by his knife and his corrupting touch while in smoke form. If in smoke form, upon hearing his name spoken, the Tallow Man will immediately reform and will be unable to transform again for 3 combat rounds. Of course, discovering this information will be far from easy.

<b>THE TALLOW MAN</b>		RE 11	
<b>ATTACK</b>	22	Knife (2d6 +2, 4 & smoking wound)	
<b>DEFENCE</b>	10	None (AF 0)	
<b>MAGICAL ATTACK</b>	N/A	<b>Magic Points</b>	None
<b>MAGICAL DEFENCE</b>	12	<b>Health Points</b>	25
<b>EVASION</b>	7	<b>Movement</b>	10m
<b>STEALTH</b>	22	<b>PERCEPTION</b>	12 (Darkvision)

*This article first appeared in [Casket of Fays Issue 5](#).*

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Last update: **2023/11/29 11:00**



