

Karig the Stalker

When the arm of the law stops at the city limits, and dares not reach into certain quarters within the city's heart, the profession of bounty hunter becomes very lucrative. Driven by greed, and more often than not sheer bloodthirst, bounty hunters bring to justice miscreants too tough or elusive for the town militia. Though most of the bounty hunters' prey are small-time brigands and thieves, occasionally noble folk and military men fallen from favor have a price offered for their heads. Those who enjoy tracking the deadliest game are looked on by most as the scum of the earth, separated from the criminal class themselves only because they serve a purpose the society needs. And that, quite simply, is the best thing one can say about Karig Netter and his crew of braves.

BOUNTIES

When an infamous criminal has gone too far, or a well-born person has rubbed a powerful noble or official the wrong way, a price is put on his head. That person is then fair game for anyone who wants the reward. The amount of a bounty varies tremendously: a petty embezzler might warrant a few score gold pieces, while a barefoot farm boy who's seen a treacherous baron conspiring with enemy spies might fetch his captor a sack full of fine gems!

More commonly, the miscreant's "price" is based on two factors: deadliness and notoriety. Deadliness is measured by the hunted man's skill with weapons or combat magic, and an adjustment is made if he has guards or henchmen protecting him. As a rough rule of thumb, allow 100 gps. of reward for each level of fighting skill over "Poor" (which puts an excellent fighter at 500 gps.) Combat magic demands 200 gps. per level in bounty.

Notoriety is a measure of past deeds, connections and fame. A brigand who murdered a troupe of pilgrims might be looked upon as merely bloodthirsty, but a knight who commits the same crime would be branded an incredible maniac and traitor to the concepts of chivalry, and would shake the very foundation of the society! Nobodies or vaguely described individuals might bring very little in the way of a bounty, and perhaps even less than their fighting prowess would normally suggest. In addition, a "private" bounty offered covertly might well be higher than normal to insure the intended victim is not alerted to the danger he is in.

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Of course, to claim the prizes a bounty hunter must "get his man." Some bounties require the hunted man or women to be returned alive; others are not so picky. Exact terms of proof vary widely: some contracts demand undamaged prey (especially when the victim is meant to marry the hunter's client, or to be sacrificed to the client's god under the next full moon). Contracts calling for the return of a live victim might pay less, or not at all, for a dead body.

Proof of a kill also varies widely. The hunter who killed "Snow White" brought back a deer heart as proof of his deed, but, with magic available, few clients are as gullible as your average wicked step-mother. A head, scalp, or portion of the body bearing an unusual mark, scar or tattoo is often enough to satisfy the client. If a bonus is offered for killing the victim in a particular way, ample proof of that deed will also be required, and the bounty hunter may have to take elaborate steps to earn the extra blood money.

KARIG AND HIS GANG

Karig Netter, called "The Stalker" by the folk of Nightside, is an enterprising and ruthless man. He and his gang of trusted fellow man-hunters have established themselves in the City to take advantage of the large number of bounties posted by zealous officials. The group is "legitimate" in that it does not involve itself with sneaky assassinations or hire itself out for gang wars. When he is in town, Karig is most often found at The Singing Frog with Lugal Joywright, and perhaps a few of his "irregulars." Though he will occasionally take a job not officially posted, the bounty hunter is virtually unapproachable "cold." He leaves murder to the Steel Man, and does not dispute the rumors of a rough truce between himself and the City's most dreaded assassin.

Anyone trying to approach Karig about an "unofficial" job must be a known noble or wealthy merchant. The prospective employer must provide Karig and his crew with a generous meal and liberally poured drinks (best arranged to take place at The House of Infinite Dreams so the "boys" can enjoy themselves while Karig talks business with his host). The jobs Karig will refuse are noted below, but others in his gang have fewer scruples and might approach the employer after Karig has turned the job down.

In the field Karig travels by horseback, particularly if he is alone. If his prey requires careful tracking, the crew will dismount, station guards with the horses, and proceed on foot so Karig and his hound, Huck, can use their skills to best

effect. Karig and his men are touchy and suspicious when “on the job” in the wilderness. They’ve been known to detain or pursue innocents on the off chance they are the prey in disguise, or have information concerning the hunters’ target.

In the City Karig and the Big Fish Gang have an uneasy, unspoken agreement to stay out of each other’s way. Karig goes after none of Danny O’Grunion’s men unless an official bounty is placed on his head, and Danny has turned a blind eye when one of his men has been clumsy enough to invite such official interest. Karig’s irregulars make any attempt to kill the bounty hunter difficult and dangerous for Danny, but he’d not hesitate to kill Karig if the opportunity presented itself. Karig feels the same way about Danny.

PERSONALITIES

Karig “The Stalker” Netter: *Human, 6’2”, 230#, 39. Fighting Prowess: Very good with sword, Excellent with bows, good otherwise. Very good tracking ability.*

Netter is a large man, heavily built but not overly so. He has wavy red hair (with a large bald spot) and a scuzzy red beard that perpetually hangs between a “five o’clock shadow” and an acceptable brush. His skin is fair but deeply tanned on his arms and legs. Karig always wears a large, floppy-brimmed

hat of greasy, stained brown felt when outdoors, but other than that his garb varies with the season or his location. In town he often sports flamboyant, well-made clothes. In the field or when danger threatens, he dons a greyish-green tunic and kilt over chainmail or hardened leather armor. In combat he wields a broadsword and a large longbow.

Karig Netter, the “black sheep” son of a wealthy merchant family, became a sergeant in the King’s army after impressing a general with his archery and hunting skills. When the army was called out to fight brigands or hunt down a traitorous baron, Karig was always on hand. He was just short of receiving a commission when he was blamed for a “dungeon-break” that freed a fanatical holy man with wizardly powers. He was accused of arranging the break to enliven a dull summer. Karig was innocent, but had known about the break ahead of time and did nothing to prevent it because he wanted to slay the shaman himself. He accepted the court’s judgement rather than have a wizard sift through his mind and discover the real reason Karig had not acted.

Karig was broken in rank, then discharged with nothing but the clothes on his back. He migrated to the City and took up bounty hunting to support himself and satisfy his lust for excitement. He lives conspicuously well in the shabbier section of town and often treats his men and female companions to good wine and food between jobs.

Karig occasionally stoops to taking private jobs (i.e. bounties offered by someone other than a City official, ruling noble or the sheriff), but he has scruples. He prides himself on not being an assassin or common hired thug. The thought of being mistaken for “an effete sneak who thinks nothing of poisoning a business rival, knocking a drunk on the head or tossing a bound man into the river” disgusts and angers him. If he believes his employer has misled him about the reason for the bounty he’ll refuse the job, or be less than diligent in his pursuit until he can figure out what is really going on.

On a legitimate job, however, Karig is implacable. He becomes a steely-eyed, inhuman machine, virtually immune to bribes, pleading and, if he really wants to get the target, concerns for his own safety. Only the most “unfair” legitimate jobs are not his fare: death bounties on a wife who’s fled her abusive husband or blood money offered by a “concerned” parent for the apprehension of a troublesome heir, for example. These jobs he will refuse outright, and if tricked into taking such a job on, he will be VERY angry.

Huck: *Dog/wolf, 3’3” at the shoulder, 160#. Age unknown. Fighting Prowess: Good. Excellent tracking skills.*

Huck is a HUGE canine creature, with some features of a hound, but with ample evidence of more than a little wolf-blood. His fur is an ugly patchwork of brown and frosty gray, with black ears and feet. Karig found Huck when the animal was just a puppy. As the beast grew the bounty hunter trained him and learned how to read the dog’s body language. Together in the wild nothing can lose them — what Karig can’t read in the tracks, Huck can scent with ease.

Huck is agreeable and “polite” in town. He usually wanders off when Karig returns to civilization. He leaves his master to wine and women while Huck plays with urchins and kills rats or smaller dogs. The animal is a well-known sight in



— Karig Netter —

Nightside and is not molested.

In the field Huck is as suspicious and fanatical as his master. He is an intelligent and fierce fighter. When hunting the dog is strapped into a spiked collar and a set of leather-and-chain back-and-head armor. He doesn't like it one bit, and that makes him more irritable and even more dangerous.

Lugal Joywright: *Human, 5'9", 140#, 32. Fighting Prowess: Good with dagger, Fair will all else. Good skill at tracking.*

Lugal is of moderate height and is rather slender. Still he has wiry strength and can run, leap and climb with skill. He has long blond hair, a narrow hatchet face, and sneaky, weak-looking green eyes. Lugal wears a yellow tunic and leggings, which match his sallow skin, and a green wool cap. He is taciturn, and mumbles or angrily whispers only when absolutely necessary. On the job, though, he is bold and maniacally confident, in total contrast to his normal persona.

Lugal is the son of a "Madam" who was killed when her establishment was burned down during a battle between criminal strongarms. Lugal grew up embittered and vengeful, but there was little he could do as a child. During the day he performed drudge labor and drank his sorrows away at night. His life tortured him because he was forced to rub shoulders with the very sort of scum that had slain his mother, but he despaired over a way to strike back.

His life changed when a barkeeper in his favorite tavern read a poster hung up on the wall. It was a bounty announcement and it put a price on the head of the criminal boss who engineered the fire that slew his mother! As if possessed by a demon, lowly sullen Lugal became a driven man and hunted down the criminal. He killed the man moments before Karig arrived to collect the bounty. Their friendship, born of the fight back out of the criminal's stronghold, was cemented when each learned he was strong where the other was weak. Karig loved the wild, and Lugal was at home in the City.

Lugal has many contacts within the underworld, especially with the prostitutes and pimps in Nightside, including Garowin "Sheets" Eddrad. He enjoys hunting down and killing criminals; if a bounty calls for live prey, the target often arrives somewhat worse for the wear. Through his association with Karig he's refined his fighting skill and is a diabolical foe in the cluttered alleys and crumbling tenements of the City. He's also become well versed in disguise and mimicry, which he uses tracking crooks who know him only too well.

Off the job Lugal hangs around Karig or gambles at the Cock and Bull Gaming Club. Because he is bad at bluffing and prone to long runs of "bad luck," he is often in debt. Though utterly loyal to Karig (even to the point of leaving his beloved City to travel in the wild!), Lugal occasionally takes on a shady contract Karig has refused to pay off his gambling debts. He keeps these jobs secret from Karig.

The Irregulars: Karig has attracted the company of many folks who bask in his dubious glory. They drink his freely offered wine and listen attentively to his boasting. Some are skilled fighters while others are cruel hunters who kill solely for the sport, but all are crude and recognized as the scum of society. Those who know the wilderness accompany Karig on

his missions, the others wait in town and attend Lugal on any job that occupies him. They are fiercely loyal to Karig, especially when in unfamiliar territory, and they provide him enough muscle to make the City gangs wary of attacking the bounty hunter.

At the most there are two dozen of these n'er-do-wells who follow Karig. Their fighting skills are Fair to Very Good, but none of them have magical skills.

SCENARIO SUGGESTIONS

Scenario 1: After twelve years atop a mountain dispensing unpleasant advice to wisdom-seekers, the shaman who escaped and caused Karig's downfall returns. He's leading a fanatical band of warriors and promoting a new Messiah — a fourteen year old boy with wavy red hair and a broad build. The group has made a number of hit and run raids throughout the area to rob and force conversions. Though the actual damage caused by the raiders has been slight, the group is seen as dangerous because the Messiah's persuasive speeches are sparking interest among the City's poor and discontented. A bounty has been offered for any of the raiders.

Karig lets it be known his group will take the assignment and will destroy the raiders in the abandoned mountain monastery they've adopted as their home. He invites anyone who wants to accompany him to join his group, but he interviews each prospective warrior himself. He selects the adventurers as trustworthy individuals and draws them aside for a briefing he shares with no one in his usual group.

Karig tells them the new Messiah is his son. On an earlier attempt at capturing the shaman Karig met the man's daughter and fell in love with her. He took her away from her father, but the shaman recaptured the girl and refused to tell Karig where he'd hidden her. Karig hoped, after the shaman escaped, to follow the shaman to his daughter, but the army captured Karig before he could accomplish his goal.

He asks the characters to come with him and spirit his son away unharmed even though the bounty on the youth's head is greater than that offered for the rest of the raiders.

Scenario 2: Huck, Karig's lupine hound, is missing! Lugal is convinced a group of beggars captured or killed the beast because a source, Garowin Eddrad, told him he'd seen the beggars in the act. Of course Eddrad had the dog taken, and is holding it in a cell within the Gang's lab, but has laid the blame on the beggars because he sees them as a threat. He's also told Lugal that a beggar, one of the Wardregs, was the individual who actually touched flame to his mother's establishment; and in light of this "reliable" evidence, Lugal becomes positively eloquent when he explains all to Karig. Karig, whose concern for the dog is eating him alive, throws all caution to the winds and starts collecting hearty souls to, once and for all time, destroy the beggars and clean out their warrens.

Even in the darkest part of town, the forces of justice — or injustice — can intrude. When a man's got a price on his head, predators among men rise to the scent and give chase. The likes of Karig and Lugal can make life hell for any adventurer who goes too far in his quest for wealth, or who is merely unfortunate to make serious enemies of people in high places.