

G U R P S[®]

UNDEAD



By SEAN M. PUNCH

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

DEATH^{is} ONLY the BEGINNING!

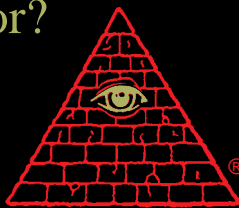
You're dead – so *now* what?
Time to check the book of the dead . . .

GURPS Undead is a complete guide to adventures beyond the grave, covering everything from subtle hauntings to undead necromancers, from Gothic vampires to the brain-eating zombies of the B-movies. Inside you'll find:

- ‡ A factual history of the undead.
- ‡ Complete rules for ghosts, liches, mummies, revenants, shades, shadows, skeletons, specters, vampires, wights, wraiths, and zombies, along with variants and illustrative examples.
- ‡ Guidelines for putting together your *own* undead creations, including animals, plants, microbes, and even vehicles!
- ‡ New spells for creating, controlling, and combatting the undead.
- ‡ Character templates for campaigns that include the undead.
- ‡ Advice on how to use the undead dramatically . . . as scenery, plot devices, monsters, villains, or heroes.

Undead also covers related topics, like tombs, death gods, embalming, funerary rites, grave robbery, necromancy, pathology, souls, the afterlife, symbolism . . . in other words, everything you need to inject new life into your undead.

So what are you waiting for?
Life is short!



**STEVE JACKSON
GAMES**

www.sjgames.com



GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition, Revised and Compendium I: Character Creation are required to use this supplement in a *GURPS* campaign. *GURPS Grimoire, Magic, Second Edition, Religion,* and *Voodoo* are all *recommended*. However, the detailed history of the undead, discussions of the undead condition, and dramatic advice will be useful to *anyone* running a campaign that includes the undead.

THE UNLIVING:

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DEAD SOULS AND WALKING CORPSES

By Sean M. Punch

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numerous to list here, who helped out on the *Pyramid* playtest board.**



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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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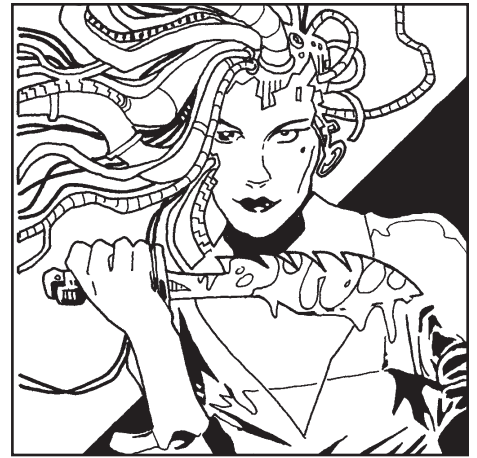
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Pyramid (www.sjgames.com/pyramid). Our online magazine includes new rules and articles for *GURPS*. It also covers the hobby's top games – *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Traveller*, *World of Darkness*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Shadowrun*, and many more – and other Steve Jackson Games releases like *In Nomine*, *INWO*, *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre*, and more. And *Pyramid* subscribers also have access to playtest files online, to see (and comment on) new books before they're released.

New supplements and adventures. *GURPS* continues to grow, and we'll be happy to let you know what's new. A current catalog is available for an SASE. Or check out our Web site (below).

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are always available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE with your request. Or download them from the Web – see below.

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Gamer input. We value your comments. We will consider them not only for new products, but also when we update this book on later printings!

Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at www.sjgames.com for an online catalog, errata, updates, and hundreds of pages of information. We also have conferences on CompuServe and AOL. *GURPS* has its own Usenet group, too: rec.games.frp.gurps.

GURPSnet. Much of the online discussion of *GURPS* happens on this e-mail list. To join, send mail to majordomo@io.com with “subscribe GURPSnet-L” in the body, or point your World Wide Web browser to gurpsnet.sjgames.com/.

The *GURPS Undead* Web page is at www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/undead.

Page References

See *GURPS Compendium I*, p. 181, for a list of abbreviations for *GURPS* titles, or for the most recent list, visit our Web site at www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition, Revised*. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the *GURPS Basic Set*; e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition, Revised*. B refers to *Bestiary, Second Edition*, C1 to *Compendium I*, CII to *Compendium II*, G to *Grimoire*, H to *Horror, Second Edition*, M to *Magic, Second Edition*, P to *Psionics*, PM to *Places of Misery*, R to *Religion*, and VO to *Voodoo*.

Vampires, zombies, ghosts . . . they haunt our folklore, our fiction and now our games. Why are we intrigued with the undead, with those who have passed beyond the veil of death and somehow returned to walk again among the living?

Faced with an absolute like death, it's in our nature to look for a way out. Our folklore suggests many ways to resolve the “unsolvable” problem of mortality, and undeath is one such solution.

Why undeath, though? Why not something less macabre, like an elixir of life or a fountain of youth? Mostly because if a miracle has a high enough price, the mundane status quo will be much easier to accept. In a roundabout way, this is the purpose of undeath: if we believe that immortality comes with a terrible price attached, we're unlikely to lament our mortality. Undeath solves the problem of death . . . by presenting something worse.

Undeath is immortality at the cost of vitality. Existence without life. Something that's as frightening as it is seductive. It is a “plot device” that we use to put death and mortality into perspective, giving it a depth shared by few other elements of myth. The time has come to plumb that depth . . .

– Sean Punch

Using this Book

If you want to use *Undead* as a rule book, stop reading and jump right to Chapter 3. To use it as a *source* book, though, try this:

Read Chapter 1 to learn about real-life myths, funerary rites and views of the undead that you can use in your campaign. Move on to Chapter 2 for advice on categorizing your undead creations and suggestions on things like weaknesses. To write it all up in game terms, use the rules in Chapter 3 (you may want to modify one of the ready-made templates in Chapter 4 if you're pressed for time). Suggestions on how to use your creation as a character can be found in Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 will help you fit all this into your campaign.

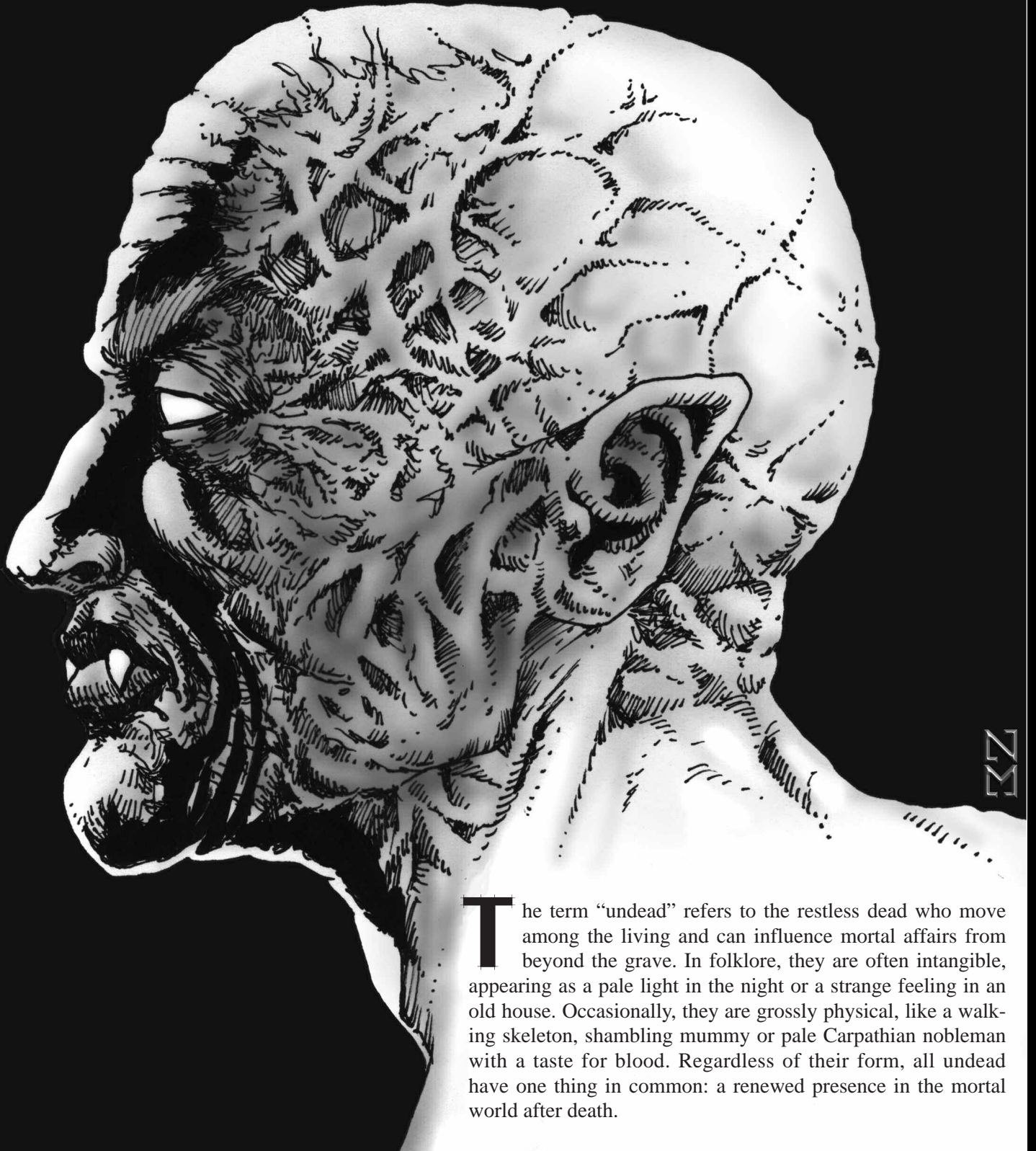


About the Author

Sean “Dr. Kromm” Punch is the *GURPS* Line Editor at SJ Games. Editor or revisor of over a dozen *GURPS* books, he is also the author of *GURPS Wizards* and *GURPS Undead*, coauthor of *GURPS Y2K*, and compiler of *GURPS Compendium I* and *II*, *GURPS Lite*, and *GURPS GM'S Screen*. Sean has been a fanatical gamer since 1979. His other interests include biotechnology, cinema, military science, tigers, and wine. He and his wife, Bonnie, presently live in Montreal, Quebec with four cats and one bird.

Chapter 1

AT THE DOOR OF THE CRYPT



The term “undead” refers to the restless dead who move among the living and can influence mortal affairs from beyond the grave. In folklore, they are often intangible, appearing as a pale light in the night or a strange feeling in an old house. Occasionally, they are grossly physical, like a walking skeleton, shambling mummy or pale Carpathian nobleman with a taste for blood. Regardless of their form, all undead have one thing in common: a renewed presence in the mortal world after death.



At first glance, it would appear that undeath is immortality, but that's not the whole story. Many beings of myth and legend are immortal: gods, elves and even some heroes. The difference? These other immortals didn't die to earn their immortality, while the undead have pierced the veil of death and emerged – changed – on the other side. The undead have experienced mortality first-hand, and in many ways are far closer to mortals than to immortals. Still, they exist beyond a divide that few mortals dare cross, and it is this contradiction that makes them so interesting.

Religion and the Undead

The undead are often regarded as magical beings in fantasy, and fantasy magic is often treated like a secular science, but undeath is profoundly tied to religion and spiritualism in the real world. In a historical or horror campaign, formulating a good plot will require an understanding of how this works.

Spiritualism

Most historical belief systems hold that living things have an intangible component, a *spirit*. Quite often, concepts (like death or disease), places (like valleys, forests or nations) and unliving things (like stones or rivers) have spirits as well. A spirit is a supernatural element that embodies all the mysteries about a given being, concept or object; in a way, belief in spirits takes the place of scientific understanding. Spirits are often personified and given voices. Modern psychologists believe that this is the human unconscious at work, but the religious consider this to be a sign that spirits are actual entities.

The spirit of a human being is called his *soul*. It is responsible for his personality and consciousness, and makes him unique. While the nature of the soul differs from belief system to belief system (see *The Soul*, p. 7), it is almost always distinct from every other type of spirit. In some faiths, the soul is the only type of spirit, and other things are governed by gods: “super spirits” in charge of broad categories of things, like animals, plants or the weather. There are many shadings between “all spirits, no gods” (which is typical of animism) and

“souls and gods only” (as in Christian belief).

The most important property of the human soul is that it is immortal. Survival of conscious personality after physical death is common to almost all belief systems, and is usually the ultimate source of myths surrounding the undead.

Eschatology

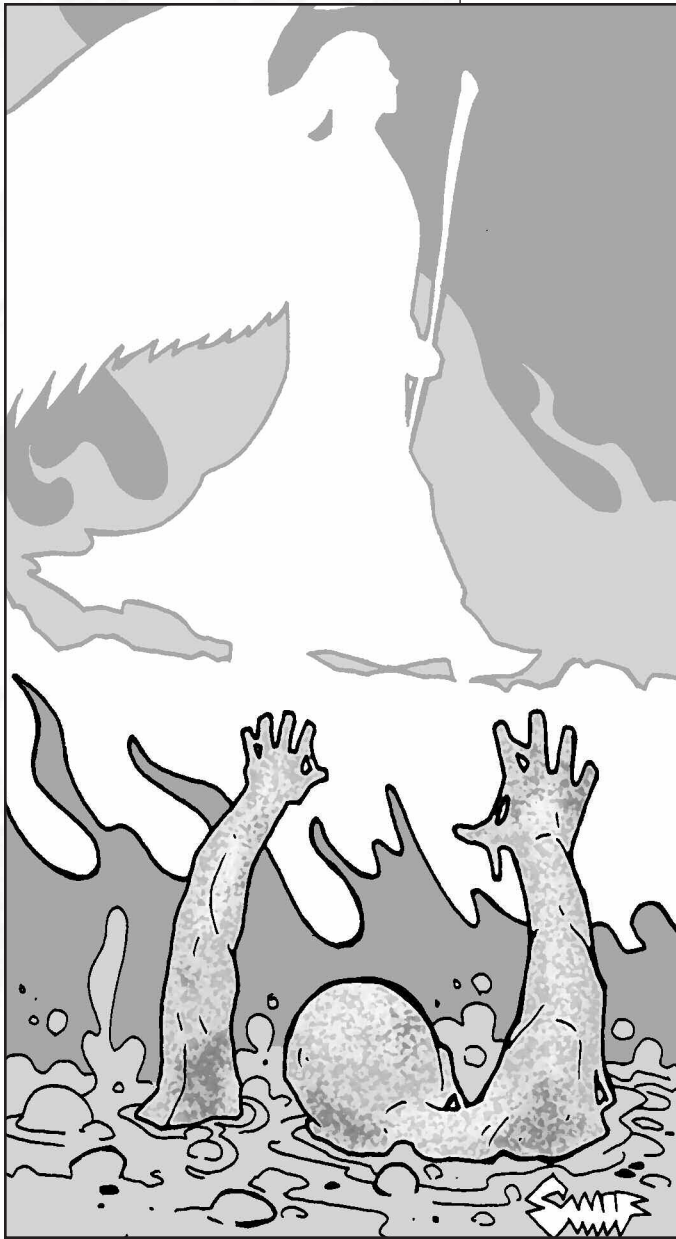
Eschatology is the branch of theology that addresses the issues of where the soul goes, whether it can return to the mortal world and in what form. (The study of spirits themselves is called *pneumatology*.) It attempts to answer some profound questions:

‡ Does consciousness end with death, or do we have an immortal soul?

‡ If we have an immortal soul, do we experience spiritual ascension to another realm, or are we resurrected bodily?

THANATOLOGY

Thanatology is the study of death as a physical and metaphysical phenomenon, including such diverse topics as burial rites, cremation, death symbolism, death cults, embalming, gods of death, pathology and tombs, not to mention the impact of death on the individual and society. In short, it is the study of death as it is viewed and experienced by mortals in the mortal world. The ramifications of death for the immortal soul are the subject of a related field, called *eschatology* (see main text). Both are important when trying to understand the undead.



DEATH GODS

Evil gods who govern the undead are a staple of fiction, but they don't have much basis in real-world religion. The most logical historical models for gods of the undead are gods who govern death and the underworld, but these deities are rarely associated with the undead in so many words, and aren't usually "evil." As explained under *Death, Earth and the Mother Goddess* (p. 10), the earliest death gods were actually goddesses, and were more likely to be associated with fertility, the harvest and the earth than with evil and the walking dead.

Here are some of the major gods or spirits that ruled over death, the dead or the underworld in various historical belief systems. They can be used as the basis for more fantastic gods who *do* rule over the undead:

Continued on next page . . .

The Early Christians

Disagreement over whether a Jew called Jesus of Nazareth was the messiah (the "Christ") or simply a prophet caused a split that resulted in the Christian religion. The Christian afterworld, Hell, was similar to the Jewish one. It was initially ruled by the angels Uriel and Ezrael, but another being inherited the job from them: Satan, "the adversary," used by God to test mortals in Jewish belief. In later writings, the angel Lucifer challenged the will of God and was cast into Hell for his crime. Lucifer, "the Devil," soon became conflated with Satan, which led to the identification of the underworld and its denizens with evil forever after in Christian belief.

Like the Jews, the early Christians believed in bodily resurrection at the end of time, although they adopted the belief of "immediate judgment" later on. There were exceptions, however. The so-called *Gospel of Nicodemus* (no longer considered canon) tells of figures temporarily risen from the dead, including the sons of the high priest Simeon. Jesus himself, being the son of God, actually returned from the dead in three days! Whether he was undead or not is left to the reader, but early Christianity clearly provided for the possibility of rising from the dead.

Eastern Beliefs

India

Hinduism – the dominant religion of India – requires the faithful to observe a spiritual code in life, called *dharma*. Death is to be followed by cremation, which releases the soul to be reincarnated in a form determined by one's degree of adherence to *dharma* (*karma*). This cycle (*samsara*) brings one ever closer to *nirvana*: the end of mortal life and the merging of one's soul with the "universal spirit," Brahma.

Traditional Hinduism had a strong element of mysticism, and took for granted that holy men who were close to *nirvana* could sometimes perform miraculous acts, including reanimating the dead. Hindu undead were usually far more menacing, though. Anything that interfered with *samsara* also opposed the fundamental workings of the universe, the will of the death goddess Kali, and the plans of Yama, lord of the underworld. Not surprisingly, this had dire consequences.

First, the uncremated dead could get up and start walking around as undead called *pretas*. As well, evil spirits called *bhutas* could inhabit and animate these bodies. Worst of all, the demon king Ravana and his *rakshashas* (demons) could reanimate them as rotting, leprous monsters called *pishacas* and *vetalas*. Cremation, however, prevented all of this.

China

Unlike their neighbors, the Chinese buried their dead. As well, whatever their religion, most Chinese held the Taoist belief that the universe is made up of *yin* and *yang*: a pair of opposing yet complementary forces. The soul was no exception. It had two parts (p. 8): the *shen*, which entered the afterlife, and the

Necromancers in this form use their own IQ, Magery and mental traits. They don't gain the skeleton's Invulnerability or Unfazeable advantages, but do gain its ST, DX, HT and physical traits, including its Dependency and Social Stigma. They have fatigue points equal to their ST in life, not the skeleton's ST. The GM should only assess a point cost for these changes if they look to be permanent.

Willful Skeletons: Talking, intelligent skeletons appear in 15th-century European art, Christian "mystery plays" and Iroquois legends. These entities always seem to be wise in the lore of death and largely self-motivated. Despite the similarity in appearance, they aren't lichens. Willful skeletons should use the following template *instead* of the one above:

Attribute Modifiers: ST -1 [-10]; DX +2 [20].

Advantages: Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; DR 2 (vs. missiles, beams and impaling attacks) [4]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Immunity to Poison [15]; Imperturbable [10]; Increased Speed +1 [25]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Brain, Impaling Bonus or Vitals) [35]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15]; Vacuum Support [40].

Disadvantages: Disturbing Voice [-10]; Eunuch [-5]; Fragile [-20]; Hideous Appearance [-20]; Inconvenient Size (Skeletal) [-10]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Unhealing [-30]; Unliving [-50].

Quirks, Features and Taboo Traits: Can be turned using True Faith [0]; Cannot swim [0].

Skills: Group Skill Bonus +1 (Demon Lore, Occultism, Spirit Lore, Thanatology and Theology) [6].

Template Cost: 50 points.

Specter

Other Names: Phantom.

Form: Spectral.

Motivation: Willful or restless.

Description

Any ghost can be called a "specter," but the term is used here to mean an evil soul that is summoned when a necromancer botches a spell intended to call and bind a spirit. Souls that are released from the afterlife like this are free to torment the living, starting with the unfortunate sorcerer! A few specters come back on their own instead (see *Variations*, below), but these are no less evil.

Unlike shadows (p. 77) and vampires (p. 82), specters do not hunger for human life essence and aren't motivated by a quest for it. Their mission is simpler than that: they've returned to earth to enjoy the thrill of cruel pleasures after having being cut off for so long in the afterlife. They have a strong psychic need to cause suffering, which

is more like an addiction than an actual hunger. As a result, specters can coexist with other undead, as they aren't generally competing for the same "food supply."

Specters are extremely magical beings, since they are usually called into the world using magic. Even in settings where most ghosts have a non-magical explanation, specters will be magical. If magic doesn't exist, then neither will specters.

The magical nature of specters is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they have a wide array of magical powers. They are powerful mages with a variety of innate spells, and have a large battery of magical energy that they can use to power spells or standard ghost abilities, like possession and materialization. On the other hand, specters are affected by a larger number of spells than most undead, and require mana to survive.

Specters are unusual in a number of other respects, all of which are related to their magical nature. First, they are visible and look much as they did in life, as the energy of the local mana field keeps them partly materialized at all times. Next, mana alone can sustain a specter indefinitely, and as a result it will never fade. Finally, specters cannot alter probability like other ghosts, because magic is too fickle to allow such a fine degree of control.

At the GM's option, a specter appears instead of a demon when an Animation, Summon Spirit or Zombie spell critically fails and an 18 is rolled on the critical failure table (p. M6). There are rumors of a spell that can call specters intentionally, but since they are malign, free-willed entities, it's hard to imagine *why* a wizard would want to summon one.



ADVANTAGES

(Continued)

Resurrection

p. C164

This potent advantage overrides Dominance (p. C153) and Infectious Attack (p. C197). If an undead entity with one of those traits wounds or kills you, you won't rise as undead; you'll simply come back to life normally. Note that if Resurrection fails for any reason (insufficient points, a limitation, etc.), you *will* be infected and become undead.

Special Enhancement: Ghostly Continuity. You become a ghost between lives. Replace Resurrection with Ghost Form [100] (p. 54) during this time. You start out with full HT but only 1 fatigue point, like any other new ghost. When your body is repaired, you resume corporeal form and regain Resurrection. If you are "killed" in ghost form, though, you're truly dead; even Resurrection can't save you. +10%.



See Invisible

p. C165

This advantage can be purchased separately to let you see spectral beings, but Medium does the same thing for fewer points. In order to make See Invisible competitive, the GM may elect to group ghostly invisibility with either magical or psi invisibility and allow a single type of See Invisible to work on both.

Continued on next page . . .

Hunter

100 points

The hunter is a professional undead slayer. He seeks out vampires, zombies and other corporeal undead, then does whatever it takes to lay them to rest *permanently*. He's well-versed in undead lore, and knows how to use things like holy water, religious symbols and silver weapons. The stereotypical hunter is a tough hombre who isn't afraid to go toe-to-toe with creatures that could tear him apart and eat his soul for a light snack. Most hunters are motivated by a personal code of behavior, but a few work for hire.

Attributes: ST 11 [10], DX 13 [30], IQ 13 [30], HT 11 [10].

Advantages: Any *one* of Awareness [15], Combat Reflexes [15], Danger Sense [15], True Faith [15] or Unfazeable [15], plus 10 points chosen from +1 ST [10], +1 HT [10], Alertness [5/level], Fearlessness [2/level], Higher Purpose (Slay all undead) [5], Imperturbable [10], Magic Resistance [2/level], Night Vision [10], Psionic Resistance [2/level] and Strong Will [4/level].

Disadvantages: Either Greed [-15] or Obsession (Slay all undead, or die trying) [-15], plus another -15 points chosen from Bloodlust [-10], Guilt Complex [-5], Insomniac [-10 or -15], Intolerance (Undead) [-5], Nightmares [-5], Overconfidence [-10], Pyromania [-5], Stubbornness [-5] and Weirdness Magnet [-15].

Primary Skills: Armoury (Occult Weaponry) (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Occultism (Undead) (M/A) IQ [2]-13, and 10 points in Combat/Weapon skills.

Secondary Skills: Stealth (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Tactics (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12, and 6 points in Demolition (M/A), Electronics Operation (Sensors) (M/A), Exorcism (M/H), Fireworks (M/H), Throwing (P/H), Tracking (M/A) and Traps (M/A).

Background Skills: Any *two* of Mental Strength (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-11, Mind Block (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Psychology (Undead) (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-11 and Thanatology (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-11.

Mortician/Undertaker

30 points

Morticians prepare corpses, arrange funerals and generally take care of the dead in the period between death and entombment. Most are honest professionals who prefer to see their work stay in the tomb; in many societies, the mortician is blamed if a corpse starts walking around. Still, some are secretly allied with necromancers (p. 101), and help them procure dead bodies or prepare corpses for reanimation! Morticians often have a grave-digger (p. 98) they can call upon if the going gets tough.

Attributes: ST 10 [0], DX 10 [0], IQ 12 [20], HT 10 [0].

Advantages: A total of 10 points chosen from Ally (Grave-digger, 76-100 points, 9 or less) [5], Comfortable Wealth [10], Disease-Resistant [5], Immunity to Disease [10], Pious [5] and Sanctity [5].

Disadvantages: A total of -15 points in Bad Smell [-10], Code of Honor (Professional) [-5], Greed [-15], Honesty [-10], No Sense of Humor [-10], Secret (Assists necromancers) [-10], Sense of Duty (Families of the dead) [-5], Social Stigma (Untouchable) [-5 to -15] and Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills: Mortician (M/A) IQ+2 [6]-14.

Secondary Skills: Diplomacy (M/H) IQ [4]-12.

Background Skills: A total of 5 points in Carpentry (M/E), Flower Arranging (M/E), Make-Up (M/E), Performance/Ritual (M/A), Savoir-Faire (M/E), Thanatology (M/H) and Woodworking (P/A).

ments #1, #2 and #5, while horror leans toward #1, #3 and #4. Traditional beliefs are more in line with #4, with the occasional smattering of #1 and #5. *All* of the above can be used if the GM feels up to the challenge, however.

Types

Once the GM knows where the undead come from, he has to determine what classes of undead exist in his campaign world.

Form

The spectral undead are ubiquitous in real-world folklore. They are hard to track down and don't leave a lot of incriminating evidence behind. Their "ghost abilities" (p. 52) let them produce a wide range of supernatural phenomena without revealing their presence, and they cannot be defeated by brute force. This makes them ideal for horror and semi-realistic historical campaigns where the existence of the undead is a mystery and where the GM wants the unexplained to remain that way. The drawback is that these entities require special powers to detect and combat – powers that aren't common in the kinds of campaigns they're best suited to. Solutions include making the undead benign and making sure the PCs can get access to countermeasures.

The corporeal undead are common in horror movies and fantasy. They pose a concrete threat to the living, but can usually be defeated by physical means. This makes them ideal for fantasy and "splatter" campaigns, where the undead are common knowledge and the PCs are expected to splash them all over the scenery with swords and guns. The drawbacks to this are obvious. First, the undead are only scary until the PCs realize that they can be hurt. Second, the GM has to strain his players' suspension of disbelief to keep these undead "unknown," since they leave a lot of evidence behind. Solutions include playing the undead intelligently and making sure that violent encounters occur in isolated locales with no witnesses – just like in the movies!

Motivation

The restless dead are common in folklore. They work well in historical and horror campaigns, and raise the fewest religious questions. They are probably the only undead that work well in semi-realistic campaigns without sorcery and undead conspiracies.

The willful dead are for the most part nontraditional (except for vampires) and best reserved for fantasy campaigns. The GM should decide *exactly* what spells, rituals and ingredients it takes to become a willful undead being, then decide who knows those secrets. There is no reason to share this with the players!

The enslaved dead are almost always associated with sorcerers in folklore, making them appropriate mainly for campaigns with professional wizards. If the enslaved dead exist, it is important to address the issue of free will and the undead (see *Free Will and the Undead*, p. 119).

Nature

The undead can be spiritual entities, or they can be magical or psionic phenomena; see *Magical Undead* and *Psionic Undead* (p. 104). This distinction can be made on the basis of individual undead beings, entire undead "species" or even the undead as a whole (GM's option). Magical undead are most common in fantasy settings; psionic undead are usually found in horror games, especially in modern-day investigative campaigns with lots of rubber-science explanations for psi, like *GURPS Black Ops*.

DEFINING YOUR CAMPAIGN

(Continued)

Mode

Mode defines the way the genre is approached and the kinds of events the campaign will focus on. Modes qualify genres, and are a lot like adjectives: several can be used at once, unless they negate one another, but it's a good idea to avoid using too many.

Action: The focus is on the physical: chases, combat, escaping from death traps, etc. The undead are usually targets, except in action conspiracy games, where the PCs and the undead take turns being targets. Action fantasy is often called "hack 'n' slash."

Camp or Melodramatic: The genre's clichés are exaggerated for the sake of humor: fantasy necromancers all have skull-tipped wands and laugh like maniacs, horror vampires all look like Bela Lugosi, etc.

Cinematic: The scene is sacred and realism takes the back seat. E.g., in cinematic horror, any graveyard that shows up will contain the undead – even if in reality someone would have noticed before now – because it makes the scene more interesting.

Dramatic: The story is sacred. Everything that happens has a purpose and there are no silly excesses. E.g., in dramatic sci-fi, no one laughs at the Professor's nonsensical explanation of the zombie plague, because it's an important part of the story.

Gothic: The focus is on an oppressive atmosphere that pits man against man, nature or the supernatural, and the undead have a heavy symbolic value. E.g., in Gothic fantasy, the vampire is an evil count who symbolizes plague and feudal oppression.

Humorous or Silly: Nothing is sacred or makes much sense. Skeletons will always be found in closets, mummies will joke about their mummies and vampires will bite Frenchmen and yell, "Yow! Garlic!"

Investigative: The PCs are undead hunters, FBI agents, etc., who actively seek out the undead. In conspiracy games, they seek to crack the conspiracy; in horror, they try to rationalize horrific acts and track down the culprits.

Mystery: The focus is on the cerebral: piecing together clues, playing mind games, etc. This differs from the investigative mode in that the protagonists need not be professionals; all that matters is that brains are more important than brawn.

Over-the-Top: Anything that fits the genre or scene is acceptable, regardless of *how* exaggerated or unrealistic it is. E.g., in over-the-top action fantasy, a martial-arts master can decapitate a vampire with a single karate chop!

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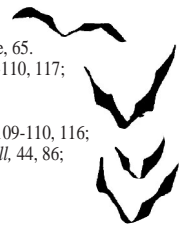
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