

Unlife Apocrypha

by Howard Kistler

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Preface

This document consists of some of the contents which were cut from *The Book of Unlife*™ before publication. I concur with the editors that this material was not suited to becoming part of the *The Fantasy Trip*™ canon, as it introduces a number of new mechanisms, talents, and spells to the system. But you are welcome to house-rule these into your campaign if you so desire. Thanks to reviewers on the Steve Jackson Games forum and Discord server for feedback and suggestions for improving the materials.



Mediums and Séances

Mediumship

Mediumship is an ability that allows one to interact with the spirits of the dead by conducting séances. It is more often inborn than learned, and often a medium will awaken to this ability around the time they mature into adulthood.

There are two kinds of mediums – spirit mediums and physical mediums. Spirit mediums channel the spirit through their own body, giving it voice. Physical mediums manifest a substance known as ectoplasm, through which the spirit can take form. A medium is ever only one of these types, never both.

Medium

IQ 9 (3) Talent

Can conduct a séance to channel a spirit. It costs 1 ST per minute while contact is maintained. To enter a proper trance requires a successful roll similar to casting a spell (3/DX). It is easier to call up a willing spirit, and it requires greater effort to target a specific spirit. To attempt to contact a willing spirit or to get any general spirit from a certain realm, the success roll is 3/IQ. If the spirit is resisting being called or you are trying to get specific spirit whom you didn't know in life, the roll becomes 4/IQ. A spirit which is eager to be contacted however only requires 2/IQ. Critical success increases the amount of time that each ST point buys, and also makes the communication stronger and clearer. Critical failure brings a hostile or deceptive spirit instead.

Note: Though this is normally an IQ 9 talent, some characters may be born with the gift and obtain it at a lower IQ at the GM's discretion. This includes such characters as gifted children and Neanderthal shamans.

Séances

The séance is the ritual at the heart of mediumship. Through it the door is opened between our world and the world beyond, and at that threshold the spirit world can make itself known to those gathered in attendance. It is most commonly performed at a table or other space where people gather. The medium performing the séance must successfully enter into a trance and maintain that trance for the duration of the séance, during which they can do nothing else. Since this requires a certain state of mind, séances are most often conducted in quiet, low-lit rooms or spaces. Those gathered should speak as little as possible, and in hushed voices when they must, while refraining from unnecessary movement in order not to disturb the medium's trance. Some mediums require the gathering to hold hands in a circle, which helps both the medium and the attendees to focus.

If a séance succeeds in calling up a co-operative spirit, those gathered may put questions to it for as long as it remains present. The GM is advised to have everyone act this out in real time and track the on-going fatigue cost upon the medium. The spirit will answer the questions it wishes to, and its honesty depends on the spirit. It cannot impart information which it does not know, though a deceptive spirit may fabricate at whim. A troubled spirit may spend some of the time bemoaning its woes, and a hostile spirit is likely to spend time threatening and taunting the gathering. If the spirit knows but is unwilling to answer a given question, the medium may spend an additional ST point to initiate an IQ Contest with the spirit. Success means they force an answer, failure means they do not. The GM should be inventive in cases of critical success and failure in this Contest.

Unless the séance is channeling a deceased player character, the GM should take role of the spirit being called. The GM should also make the success rolls for the mediumship attempt. That way, if there is a critical failure, the GM can play that out in secret. Critical failure can summon a spirit which is deceitful and merely pretends to be the spirit the players wanted to call, or it can even call up a malicious spirit which will try to sow conflict and discord among those gathered. In the worst cases the spirit may attempt to control the body or ectoplasm it occupies in order to physically harm those present.

There are of course fraudulent mediums, whose real talents lie in trickery and showmanship, and who are more interested in what can be gained in this world than what awaits in the next. They do not possess the medium talent but are likely to have other ones which assist in their deception, such as acting, persuasion, or ventriloquy.

Sin-Eaters

A distant mystical cousin of the medium is the Sin-Eater. They too have special talents in the spiritual realm, but of a different type than those of the medium. What they do is take the burden of sin, guilt, and anguish from a person before death, so that their soul does not become a restless one. This process is known as "shriving", and is considered a sacred duty, even while the sin-eater themselves is typically regarded as a lowly and pitiable person within the community. Sin-Eaters often arise from the most disadvantaged parts of a society, and their only encounter with the good things in life may be when discharging their duties.

A sin-eater is typically called when someone is near death or has just died, and there is concern for the state of their soul. In order that the soul not be encumbered with the transgressions and regrets of their life, the sin-eater takes those into themselves, thereby allowing the soul to be at rest. In the ritual surrounding this, a plate of food is placed upon the prone body of the person to be shriven. It is believed that the sin-eater causes the sins to pass from the body into the food, and thus into the sin-eater as they consume the food.

A sin-eater possesses the *Rite of Shriving* (see Clerical Rites below) without the requirement of the *Priest* prerequisite. Someone who is a known sin-eater receives a -1 reaction roll from most people, though they get a +1 from fellow outcasts and downtrodden types. There isn't much benefit to a player in being a sin-eater, but nothing precludes them from it either.



Clerical Rites

Rites is a catch-all term for a set of Talents and Spells that are associated with priests, shamans, cultists, and other religious figures. The primary distinction between Talents, Spells, and Rites is that Rites are learned from a religious order, and usually will require the student to be an adherent of that faith. One who leaves their religious order (and thereby becomes an apostate) may continue to perform the Rites they learned, but the order may not be pleased to learn this is happening. Apart from the religious trappings, Rites function just like any other Talent or Spell. There are many Rites which clerics of every stripe may learn, but this text concentrates on those with bearing on the unliving. One other way in which Rites differ from Spells is that they have a prerequisite of the *Priest* or *Theologian* talent in order to be learned. This is because religious orders will not teach Rites to someone unless they have the requisite ecclesiastic knowledge and spiritual preparation.

Funeral Rites

IQ 8 (1) Talent, requires *Priest*; no ST cost, time varies

There are as many ways of expressing grief and honoring the dead as there are cultures in the world, but the common factor is respect for the deceased and the hope that their souls will be at rest. To this end nearly every faith and community has Funeral Rites. A failure to perform these, or performing them without sufficient reverence, may offend the souls of the dead and make them restless. If a ghost is one who wished for funeral rites and did not receive them, then often finding their body and performing these rites can be enough to assuage them. Someone with the *Priest* talent is assumed to know the funeral rites of their own faith. Acquiring this talent extends the ability to all major cultures and allows the priest to perform the correct funeral rite for each. They can also quickly pick up the funeral rites of an unfamiliar culture. It's important to perform the appropriate funeral rites belonging to the culture of the deceased, as the wrong ritual can be worse than no ritual at all. Clerical characters possessing the *Scholar* talent in addition to the *Priest* or *Theologian* talent may acquire this rite at no cost.

The Rite of Shriving

IQ 8 (1) Talent, requires *Priest* or Sin-Eater profession; costs 1 ST, time varies

Allows the cleric to placate an otherwise restless soul before it becomes a kind of unlife. The ritual must be performed within six days before or one day after the subject's death. Shriving is done with a 3d roll against the shriver's ST or IQ (whichever is higher). Critical failure guarantees an unlife return. This talent has no use against those who already are ghosts, haunts, or other forms of unlife, it is only useful in trying to stave off transitions to unlife. The time taken for the shriving depends on the nature of the performance - hearing confession takes as long as the telling, consuming a sin-eater's meal takes about a half-hour, and shriving the dead takes as long as reciting the litany of what they are being shriven for.

The Rite of Laying

IQ 11 (T) Spell, requires *Priest*; 1 ST per turn, does 1d "damage" per turn when successful

Some more aggressively restless souls will not be placated by basic funeral rites, and thus it can help to perform the Rite of Laying. This ritual is designed to quell the discontent of the soul and allow it to move on to the afterlife. The Rite of Laying is more complex and demanding to perform, particularly with a resisting soul, and thus is less commonly found among clerics than knowledge of funeral rites, which all but the most novitiate are likely to know. This Rite only works on Soul-type unlife, and also has no effect on Astral Bodies.

The Rite of Laying costs 1 ST per turn, and each successful attempt does 1d points of spiritual damage to the entity. Critical success does bonus damage in the same way as combat. If the unliving entity is brought to 0 ST by the Rite, they are successfully lain to rest and will trouble the world of the living no more. Critical failure causes the damage to fall back upon the ritualist, also with the appropriate increases depending on the degree of critical failure.

The Rite of Consecration

IQ 12 (S) Spell, requires *Priest*; 6 ST, requires 1 hour per item or hex

The Rite of Consecration is used to sanctify a place or object and give it an affinity for life and life energies. Consecrated places are abhorrent to most forms of unlife, except those who are aligned with the living like Spirit Guides. A consecrated place must be sanctified all at once, and the ST cost is per hex, so any structure of significant size is going to require a fair number of priests. Consecrated objects may be used to hold malevolent unlife at bay by acting as an *Avert* spell, and consecrated weapons may do additional damage to unlife or harm those which otherwise are not harmed by normal weapons.

The Rite of Anathema

IQ 12 (S) Spell, requires *Priest*; 6 ST, requires 1 hour per item or hex

This Rite is an inversion of Consecration, making a place or object antithetical to life. Such a place acts as a sanctuary and restorative for unlife, and may repel the living in the same way as an *Avert* spell. Anathematised weapons may have additional effects against the living beyond the *Avert* effect. Certain living things which are drawn to death, like ghouls and necromancers, may be attracted by an anathematised place rather than repelled.

The Rite of Expulsion

IQ 14 (T) Spell, requires Theologian; 1 ST does 1d “damage” per turn when successful

The Rite of Expulsion is actually a form of combat with an unliving entity to drive it out of our world and back to its original plane of existence. Successfully expelling an entity can also greatly weaken it, preventing it from returning to our world for a very long time. There are separate Rites of Expulsion for each kind of unlife, as their differing natures have different requirements, but knowledge of the Rite includes knowledge of all variations. There is a danger with this Rite in that failure to perform the Rite correctly can actually strengthen the entity being expelled, giving it a greater foothold in our world. So great pains are taken to minimize the risk of this by only teaching the Rite to those who have proven to be adept clerics.

The known Rites of Expulsion covering the unliving are:

- Rite of Expelling Poltergeists
- Rite of Expelling Succubi & Incubi
- Rite of Expelling Ghosts
- Rite of Expelling Phantasms

The Rite of Expulsion costs 1 ST per turn, and each successful use of the Rite does 1d points of spiritual damage to the entity. Critical success does bonus damage in the same way as combat. If the unliving entity is brought to 0 ST by the Rite, they are expelled from this world and back to the one from which they came, not to return during the lifetime of the expulsor, if ever. Critical failure causes the damage to fall back upon the ritualist, also with the appropriate increases depending on the degree of critical failure. Critical failure on the worst possible roll (for example, 18 on 3d) when performing the Rite also “heals” the entity completely, and gives it a permanent increase of additional ST equal to the damage taken by the ritualist from the failure. It is this aspect of the Rite that keeps it from being taught more widely. A ritualist who fails this way can never personally expel that particular entity, so further attempts by them are fruitless.

The Rite of Torment

IQ 14 (S) Spell, requires Theologian; 10 ST per day

Designed to make a soul uneasy in the moments before death, so that it returns as a form of unlife. Can result in a Ghost, Haunt, Dybbuk, or Duppy.

The Rite of Torment starts at mid-night and costs 10 ST per day at that time. Each day is an IQ Contest between the tormentor and the subject. If the tormentor wins the Contest that turn, they maintain the psychic torment on their subject. Critical success adds actual damage to subject (1d on double critical, 2d on triple critical), hastening their demise. If the subject dies while tormented, they will resurrect as a form of unlife decided by the GM. Critical failure causes 1d damage to the tormentor, with double and triple failures increasing the damage accordingly. Critical failure on the worst roll (18 on 3d, etc) not only inflicts 3d damage on the tormentor, but so utterly breaks the enchantment that they can never again torment that person. Critical failure of any level also reveals the true face of the tormentor to the subject, though not their name or location.

The Rite of Scourging

IQ 15 (S) Spell, requires Theologian; 5 ST per day

Allows a cleric to perform the same effects as either of the unlife abilities *Oppression* or *Stigmatization*. The cleric chooses which initial effect they are going for, which then remains the same for the duration of the scourging. The ritual must be performed at the same time every day once begun, and if skipped or failed at any point the subject is released from the effects. Due to the two-way connection needed in this Rite, if the subject breaks the oppression on their own, they will recognize their oppressor if they ever run across them.

The Rite of Scourging costs 5 ST each day it is maintained. The Contest rules that apply to the unlife ability *Oppression* also apply to this Rite.

The Rite of Exorcism

IQ 15 (T) Spell, requires Theologian; 1 ST does 1d “damage” per turn when successful

Derived from the Rite of Expulsion and given further enhancement to guard the mortal soul, the Rite of Exorcism is vital in battling those types of unlife which have the ability to *Possess*. Once a person is possessed they can be controlled by the entity. The expression of this control will vary by entity, with some possessions being crudely violent and loudly profane, and others being craftily concealed and wickedly diabolical. Rare is the case where the possessed can free themselves, with death more often being the only thing that brings relief. So it is that the services of a skilled exorcist are invaluable.

The Rite of Exorcism is an exhausting ritual that costs 1 ST per turn, and is compounded by each attempt also requiring an IQ Contest between the ritualist and the unliving entity. If the ritualist wins the Contest that turn, they do 1d points of spiritual damage to the entity. Critical success does bonus damage in the same way as combat. If the unliving entity is brought to 0 ST by the Rite, they are successfully exorcised and can never again possess the person they were exorcised from. Critical failure causes the damage to fall back upon the ritualist, also with the appropriate increases depending on the degree of critical failure. Critical failure also does 1d damage to the possessed person.



Old Hieratic

Just as magical lore and spells are often recorded in Sorcerer’s Tongue, so too are many religious rituals transcribed in a language common to clergy, Old Hieratic. This language comprises a lexicon and syntax built around the core precepts of ecclesiastic thought and is written using pictographic ideograms. As Sorcerer’s Tongue is a universal system for expressing magical principles, Old Hieratic is for religious and spiritual concepts. There is passing mention of this language in *The Book of Unlife*, but this more detailed description was lost when the section on Rites was elided. Some with the *Priest* talent will know this language, and most with *Theologian* will be conversant with it.



Select Bibliography

Many of the unlife in the book are found globally in folklore and myth. Some that herald from specific folklores include:

- Greek: Manes, Psychopomp, Shade, Sown Skeleton, Talos
- Celtic: Banshee, Changeling, Dullahan
- Hebrew: Dybbuk, Golem
- Inuit: Wendigo
- Jamaican: Duppy
- Hindu: Rakshasa

Here are some selected works which include types of unlife described in the book.

Ghost

Black Spirits and White (Ralph Adams Cram)

Stories of the Seen and Unseen (Margaret Oliphant)

Collected Ghost Stories (M.R. James)

Remnant

The Horse of the Invisible (William Hope Hodgson)

Haunt

The Haunting of Hill House (Shirley Jackson)

The Legend of Hell House (Richard Matheson)
Ring (Koji Suzuki)

Dybbuk

The Dybbuk (Solomon Rappoport)

Hungry Ghost & Banshee

Abbey Lubbers, Banshees, & Boggarts (Katharine Briggs)

Poltergeist

This House is Haunted (Guy Lyon Playfair)

Phantom

The Phantom Coach (Amelia Edwards)

Nosferatu

Dracula (Bram Stoker)

Carmilla (J. Sheridan LeFanu)

Wight

The Lord of the Rings (J.R.R. Tolkien)

Zombie

Tell My Horse (Zora Neale Hurston)

Golem

The Golem (Gustav Meyrink)

Disembodied Dead

The Screaming Skull (F. Marion Crawford)

The Beast with Five Fingers (W.F. Harvey)

Haunted Object

Man-sized in Marble (Edith Nesbit)

Dullahan

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow (Washington Irving)

Wendigo

The Wendigo (Algernon Blackwood)

Doppelganger

The Story of William Wilson (Edgar Allan Poe)

The Double (Fyodor Dostoyevsky)

Ghoul

The Story of Sidi-Nouman from *The Thousand And One Nights*

Pickman's Model (H.P. Lovecraft)

Rakshasa

The *Ramayana* epic

Muridyx and Funeraries are original to the book, though also drawing on folkloric traditions.

