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Knowledge Check

LAST RITES



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Knowledge Check LAST RITES

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Based in South Carolina, USA, Fat Goblin Games was founded in 2011 to create Pathfinder Roleplaying Game compatible products. With a focus on high quality production values and providing a creative environment for our writers, Fat Goblin Games has quickly become a recognized force in the world of third party publishers.

With hundreds of support books, visual aids, campaign settings, and quality stock art, Fat Goblin Games continues to provide exciting content and fantastic worlds in which gamers can immerse themselves.

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Last Rites

CONTENTS

Chapter One: Dust to dust	6
Chapter Two: Dead Rules	23
Chapter Three: Grave Goods	26
Chapter Four: The Ossuary of St. Len	29

Knowledge Check is a product line for players and gamemasters. Each book is a collection of rules and information designed to add a little knowledge to any fantasy campaign, focusing on a particular aspect of the skill system and adding depth and breadth to your play experience. *Knowledge Check: Last Rites* will take you down the dark roads that lead beyond the veil that parts life and death. An extensive discussion of funerary rites, both celebratory and punitive, joins with grisly archetypes, spells, and gear to see characters off to the great beyond...and make sure they stay there.

Knowledge Check

Congratulations on purchasing *Last Rites*, your one-stop place to find information about how to get rid of all those inconvenient corpses the PCs tend to leave behind (not to mention the hordes of NPCs you sacrificed to make a decent plot hook).

You may be wondering just why you need a book about funeral rites and burial customs. Neither is really a focus of roleplaying games. After all, the point is to keep your character *alive*, and any enemies that happen to die are usually just left to rot or be eaten by the local wildlife (especially dragons).

Why bother with funeral rites? To be fair, if your game consists of mostly dungeon-crawling hack-and-slash, you probably don't need to. Any sort of rites would get in the way of killing things and taking their stuff. This is why so many video RPGs have the corpses just fade away. Even in a social game, there are times when bothering about the dead would just get in the way.

But there are also times where dealing with and remembering the dead can add new and deeper levels of both roleplaying and adventure for players and for GMs. That's when you will want this book.

FOR PLAYERS

It happens to everyone. A bad roll of the dice, a poor roleplaying judgment, a snide remark to your GM, and suddenly your character is no more. *Poof*, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, character sheet to recycle bin.

In some games this isn't a problem. Meddling clerics, morally ambiguous necromancers, and even lenient DMs can bring characters back beyond the veil of death if you're

lucky. But what happens when characters *don't* come back? How is it that you should send your character on to the afterlife? How do their friends and loved ones—or even their enemies—mourn their passing?

These aren't questions roleplayers usually ask. Players often deal with PC death more readily than they deal with a host of other misfortunes. Getting over a character's death is usually as easy as grabbing a new sheet and picking out some cool abilities. At most, you make a pyre of the old sheet and that's that.

But what if you want to do something bigger? What if you want to actually give your character or that of a comrade a royal send-off, give them a thanks for all the hours of fun—and maybe even push the other PCs into paying for it? On the flip side, nothing rubs it in the face of your dead enemy like desecrating their corpse and making sure they're totally unprepared for the afterlife that awaits them.

FOR GAMEMASTERS

This book may be useful to players, but it's really here for you. For every PC that bites the dust, dozens, if not hundreds, of NPCs pass into the great beyond—often at the PCs' hands. Most of these deaths don't take a lot of pomp and circumstance to get over, nor should they. But as a matter of storytelling, it helps to bring the occasional death into focus. No matter how calloused a society may be, death should never be casual. There is always some sort of process to send the dead on their way and give the living an opportunity to resolve their own feelings on the matter. Besides, just think of the players' faces when

Last Rites

they revisit the dungeon they raided only to see the goblin children wailing as their parents are lifted onto a funeral pyre.

Don't overdo it, obviously, but a moment to remember the dead can really add some depth to your roleplaying. If you don't like somber, change the rites so that funerals become celebrations of life. Nothing livens a place up like a party right after someone died.

Chapter One looks at the many and diverse ways in which the living have paid their last respects (and, on occasion, their last vengeance) to the dead. This potpourri of funerary customs can be mixed and matched to meet whatever your game's needs might be.

Chapter Two introduces some new rules and reminds us of some extant ones for dealing with the dead, both those who stay in the ground and those who are a little more restless.

Chapter Three looks at gear, both magical and mundane, that touch upon funerary and graveyard practices.

Finally, **Chapter Four** takes us to one of the most oddly morbid places in the world – the Ossuary of St. Len. This location, with its bones and its secrets, can be dropped whole into your game.

Special thanks: Thanks go to Wikipedia, Project Gutenberg, and Google for saving me untold hours entombed among dusty shelves. Also thanks to Dr. C. Wilfred Griggs, for firsthand explanations of lesser-known Egyptian burial practices.



Knowledge Check

CHAPTER ONE DUST TO DUST

Or, how to deal with the recently deceased

Everyone dies. That is part and parcel of being mortal, and, barring infernal pacts or carefully-worded wishes, no one gets out of it. Most animals could not care less when one of their own passes away—ants, for example, treat a dead comrade like another piece of trash—but sentient beings care very much for their dearly departed. Most sentient beings believe in some sort of soul, and so they are quite concerned with how to properly treat the bodies of the dead. Sometimes this stems from respect, other times from fear. Nothing ruins your day like your dead mother-in-law coming back to haunt you because you got the funeral prayers wrong.

What is considered “proper” for a corpse varies enormously from place to place. One region’s funeral custom is another’s anathema. Doing the wrong rites in front of the natives can be messy for those conducting the rites, especially if you are in a culture that makes a meal of the departed.

This chapter deals mostly with different ways of dealing with the dead. These are all pulled from real-world cultures, though some aspects have been elaborated on to reflect a typical fantasy setting (such as cremating corpses to keep them from rising as undead).

DEATH ITSELF

Before preparing a body for funeral rites, you have to be sure it’s dead. Some rather infamous mistakes have been made because people didn’t know how to take a proper pulse. The legend that families held “wakes” in case the deceased was just sleeping is an exaggeration, but not by much. Magic often makes it much easier to tell if someone’s actually dead, since healing spells can sometimes repair a corpse’s tissue but not bring it back to life, while necromancy by definition can only work on someone who’s actually deceased. Non-magical investigators have to stick to the physical signs, such as taking a pulse and checking for breathing. There are a few other signs of death that can, with experience, even give you an idea of when the death occurred.

Pallor mortis is only obvious in people with fair skin. Without a heartbeat, the corpse’s blood quickly pools on whatever side is facing down, leaving the rest pale. Pallor mortis usually occurs within half an hour of death.

Livor mortis refers to the red-purple splotches that form on the corpse’s underside. Livor mortis is the flip side of pallor mortis: all that blood has to drain somewhere, and it pools on whatever side is down. (Skin that’s actually contacting the ground is an exception – the pressure keeps the blood away.) Livor mortis starts within a few hours of death and is complete within 6-12 hours.

Algor mortis simply means that corpses cool after death (assuming the corpse was warm-blooded to begin with—not always a guarantee in fantasy settings). Measuring the body’s internal temperature can give you a rough idea of when death occurred, with the body losing slightly less than two degrees Fahrenheit

Last Rites

every hour after death. Getting the right tools to make this sort of measurement precisely, however, is difficult. It usually just comes down to "Is he still warm?"

Rigor mortis is the best known symptom of death. Starting roughly twelve hours after death and lasting for up to several days, the corpse's muscles stiffen as if it were clenching them all at once. The stiffness slowly relaxes as decay sets in. Rigor mortis is one reason why most necromancers prefer to make zombies of slightly more decayed persons, as it's no fun at all to make a minion that's stuck in place.

Postmortem spasms have caused more than a few heart attacks. Nothing gets your blood going like a dead body suddenly jerking its arm toward you. While you can occasionally blame a nearby necromancer, in some cases it's just a random twitch. Even though the body is dead, the tissue is still intact, and the muscles can still jerk on their own. Sometimes the spasm just wiggles a finger, and sometimes it makes the entire body lurch. Keep the holy symbols ready just in case, but if no other signs of necromantic meddling appear, you're probably okay.

Once you've established that the body is dead, what do you do with it? The answer depends both on the culture you live in and the social stratum you belong to, not to mention what caused the death. A commoner who died in an accident gets simple rites, whereas one that died of smallpox is either cremated or buried in a mass grave, and one who died robbing a noble's house will likely have his head mounted on a stick.

rites of passing

After someone's death come the rites of passing. They are usually just called "funerals," but rites of passing include much more than what we usually mean by that word. The simplest rites of passing take only a few minutes, while the longest can take months or years to fully complete. Whatever their duration, most rites of passing exist to help the living, not the dead.

Rites of passing are inexorably tied up with religion. Atheists are rare in medieval societies, especially if the local gods are fond of smiting the unbelievers. The near-universal belief in both a soul and a post-mortal existence make it impossible to touch on death without bringing religion into it somehow.

The exact details of each rite, how it intersects with the local religion, and what form it takes would be a book unto itself. Instead of inundating you with a long list of rites, we are going to give you a list of components. These components often show up in rites of passing, and you should feel free to mix and match them however you like. For those of you interested in how these components may come together in a variety of cultures, check out *Knowledge Check: Nine Funeral Rites*.

For the living

Viewing: Many rites of passing include viewing the corpse, often this is done in person, but it may, for many reasons, be done in effigy (such as a painting, bust, or other stand-in). On the other hand, some religions forbid viewing a corpse, either out of fear of contamination, in respect for the dead, or for more exotic reasons.

Knowledge Check

Public displays: Nobility and royalty like to leave this world with the same pomp they enjoyed while in it. This is like a viewing, except on a much grander scale. The body or an effigy of it is placed in a prominent public area, and sometimes even paraded around the city. Whether this is a somber funeral procession or a true parade depends on the culture. In some cultures, the family of the deceased wears masks during the procession, representing the already departed ancestors welcoming the deceased into the afterlife. The point of all this is to have as many people as possible see the body and mourn for their dearly departed leader. Most often, it is the other nobles that do the most visible mourning – it helps ingratiate them with any surviving heirs.

Oratory: During some rites, one or more people stand up and talk, usually about the deceased. This can be a priest explaining what happens to the soul after death, a loved one extolling the virtues of the deceased, or even a complete stranger who simply performs eulogies for a living. Most religions do include oratories at funerals, but some consider it disrespectful to speak of the dead too much or praise their earthly accomplishments. After all, the dead are now supposed to move on to a higher state of being, and if you flatter them too much, they might stay behind.

Music: Many funeral rites feature music, though the styles can range from somber background music to boisterous cacophonies. Most funerary music is closely tied to religion, but sometimes it's just the friends of the deceased gathering together for one last rousing drinking song.

Food: Food is usually present at funeral rites that are more celebratory than somber, though there are a few exceptions (see “Cannibalism”). Some cultures have a specific ceremony, separate from the funeral itself, devoted to sharing food and memories of the deceased. These rites are called “wakes,” and may coincide with the viewing.

Colors: Colors are very important in rites of passing, since almost every culture has colors associated with death. Not only will people wear these colors, but the rites themselves often include them as well. The most common is black, the color of night, darkness, and entombment. Others are less common, but literally any color of the rainbow can be associated with death given the right reasons: red is the color of blood, white can symbolize purity, and yellow and orange can signify the flames of cremation.

Superstitions: Some cultures are extremely preoccupied with making sure that the dead don't bother the living. Go back far enough in history, and most funerary practices spring from this. Closing the eyes of the dead, covering nearby mirrors, placing sheets over the body—all were originally to keep the spirit of the dead from coming back and hurting the living. Some cultures even go so far as to cut off the corpse's feet to prevent it from walking back—a certain risk in some roleplaying settings, though cremation works better. Some even cut off the head of the corpse, though stuffing it full of garlic is purely optional. Many people will also refuse the name the dead person until some time has passed, and even when they do they add a phrase, such as “gods bless his soul,” to keep the spirit appeased.

For the Dead

Anointing: Some religions include the need to anoint the corpse as part of the funeral rites. The anointing is usually done by a priest or other religious leader, and involves placing oil, incense, perfume, or other holy liquids on various parts of the body, usually while saying a prayer. These anointing rites are usually to protect or cleanse the corpse after death, and in some areas serve as proof against reanimation as undead. (In an ironic twist, very similar rites are usually used to *create* undead).

Possessions: Many people are buried with material goods – either things they were attached

Last Rites

to in life, or offerings to take with them. A warrior, for example, may be buried with his sword and shield, a mage with her spellbook, a priest with his vestments and holy symbol, etc. (this is why old tombs are usually such good sources of powerful artifacts). When the body is cremated, paper or wood surrogates for the items are often burned instead of the item itself.

Flowers: In some cultures, it is customary to bring flowers for the deceased. This appears to be a very ancient practice, but it varies wildly among cultures. Some cultures prefer cut flowers, others live ones, and still others prefer trees, shrubs, or other plants that can be planted and will last longer. Sometimes you're not supposed to bring a plant at all, but rather seeds as a representation of new life.

Transportation: Due to taboos and other customs about death, moving a corpse from one location to another can sometimes be problematic. Thus, during rites of passing the corpse must be transported in special vehicles, such as hearses. Another variation on this is that only a certain group of people can move a corpse (e.g. clergy or family of the deceased), and even then they are usually considered "unclean" until they perform specific purification rituals.

Plot hook

The Queen lived in glory and wanted to die the same. Though she passed away quietly in bed, the funeral she planned prior to her passing—rumor has it she had been adding to and elaborating on it for decades—more than makes up for it. Between the 500-person choir, the march through three cities, and the parade of albino peacocks (yes, peacocks), it is fit to break the bank. The King, however, is afraid that if he goes against her wishes she will come back to haunt him. But the treasury has run thin, and so he has decided that it will be far cheaper to just hire the player characters to guard him from her ghostly wrath until she gets over it ("she always does") while he gives her a simple, more pedestrian funeral. Even if they demand a king's ransom for the services, it will be cheaper than the funeral.

MAGIC IN FUNERAL RITES

Most of the rites mentioned herein don't assume magic is involved in the ceremony. This is partly because our world's funeral rites lack overt magic, but also because even in a high-magic world most people consider funerals too somber to involve a lot of flashy magic.

There are exceptions, however. Just remember that how much magic is used in funeral rites depends mostly on the culture and its expectations. Cultures that favor quiet, simple rites aren't going to employ lots of magic, whereas those that want the dead to go out with a bang will load up as much as they can afford. Also keep in mind how common magic is; if all you have is hedge wizards capable of



Knowledge Check

minor prestidigitations, the funerals will be short on magic. The story is very different if half the population can throw around fireballs. In any case, you can bet that royalty will have far more—and far more elaborate—magic in their funerals than the poor commoners.

What role magic serves in the funeral is limited only by your imagination. Here are some ideas to get you started:

Minor effects: Magic can be used to add a hint of mysticism to common effects, such as lighting candles from afar or sending the soul into the afterlife with some minor pyrotechnics.

Atmosphere: Magic can also provide certain necessary effects to help the feel of the funeral. You can the candle flames dark blue, for example, or keep soft music playing in the background. Magic can also provide emphasis during certain parts of the ceremony, such as by lighting up stained glass windows in a certain order or chiming bells at a specific time.

Spectacular farewells: Some people like to go out with a bang, and magic can provide that in spades: giant fireballs, flashing lightning, or coruscating curtains of color. Any visual effect can help the dead on to the afterlife, even if it is just to scare the spirit away from the living. A variation on this is common in military funerals, especially for war mages: an honor guard casts synchronized spells, such as burst of flame or similar assault spells, to send off the spirit of the deceased. It's the magical version of a 21-gun salute.

Necromancy: Probably the flashiest of all is to bring back the spirit of the deceased. Sometimes this involves raising them up (undead or otherwise), and sometimes it is just calling the spirit back so it can say its final farewells. (This is particularly handy if royalty dies without a chance to name a successor.) Funerals that

Plot hook

The Great Wizard Melfastarine's magical prowess was equaled only by his ego. The highlight of his funeral was his eulogy for himself, delivered post-mortem thanks to some cleverly engineered necromantic summoning. Everything went well until Melfastarine took his bow and tried to leave—and couldn't. Since he's dead he can't work magic himself, and the PCs are drawn into it help him pass on. They're likely inspired by the reward he's posted, but it could also be as a favor from a friend or to pay off a debt. Whatever the PCs' motivation, they just need to break into Melfastarine's arcane tower and retrieve his research notes from the topmost room—after getting past the varied and deadly magical defenses he left in place to prevent people from doing just that. Melfastarine's spirit can accompany the PCs and give them some help (if they're willing to put up with his insufferable egotism), but even he doesn't remember all the defenses.

involve calling the dead back tend to be either the most somber or the most festive, depending on whether the culture treats it as one last chance to say goodbye, or one last chance to party the night away with a beloved friend.

INTERMENT

Interment, or burial, simply means putting the deceased body away somewhere. This can mean putting them in a grave and covering them with earth, placing them in a carved-out tomb or mausoleum, or even just collapsing a

Last Rites

cave on them (even if they have not died yet, though this is usually accidental). Interment is a common form of funeral rite, probably because many creation myths include the gods creating mankind out of the earth. Interment lets a body return to its original state, safely tucked away where everyone else doesn't have to see the rather messy process of it.

Before being interred, the body is usually washed and cleaned, then dressed in some sort of garment. Some cultures prefer that the dead wear what they would have worn in life, some use simple funeral shrouds, and some dress the dead more richly than kings. In the latter cases, some corpses can end up wearing multiple layers of fine clothing which total several years' worth of income.

After the body is prepared and any additional rites performed, it is time to actually inter the body. Except in accidents like cave-ins, burial locations are almost never chosen by chance. Placing a dead body in the ground is serious business, especially if it might come back as undead, and people want to be sure they get it right.

The most common burial location is a cemetery—a plot of land specifically set aside for burying the dead. Cemeteries can range from simple family plots to sprawling urban graveyards, and you can usually recognize them by the markers showing where a corpse has been buried. Crypts—actual buildings to house the dead, usually built underground—are also common alternatives.

Some cultures don't set aside specific areas for interment, but instead make sure to bury the body near a specific feature of the land—a bridge, a copse of trees, running water, etc. Sometimes the dead are even buried under people's homes so that the departed spirit can

watch over the household. Many people find this a little nerve-wracking, though, and take the opposite approach. For example, burying someone at a crossroads is supposed to confuse the spirit so that it *can't* find its way home, and is especially common for corpses might rise as undead. After all, if the corpse is going to go on a shambling rampage, it might as well be in someone else's town.

In addition to the burial location, the position of the corpse is extremely important. Most religions bury their dead with the head or face pointing a certain direction, such as toward north, a nearby holy site, or the rising sun. Additionally, most corpses are buried lying on their backs as a symbol of rest and repose, though some bury the body resting on its side and still others place it in a lotus position. The rarest burial position is upside-down: not only does it carry all sorts of negative connotations, but it's also usually reserved for criminals and corpses that may rise as undead — an upside-down zombie will have a much harder time clawing its way out of the ground.

Since interring corpses requires a lot of space, large cities sometimes run out of burial locations. When this happens, most cultures respectfully exhume the oldest bodies and move the bones to an ossuary, a building or other site set aside to hold the bones of the dead. Most ossuaries are simple chambers, but sometimes the bones are used as (slightly morbid) decorations, being worked into case-ments, pillars, and even chandeliers.

Knowledge Check

BURIED ALIVE

Some people—usually members of the upper class with too much time on their hands—suffer chronic fears of being buried alive. While this is a legitimate concern for some people (e.g. miners), most people who actually worry about it think that they'll go to sleep one night and then wake up in a coffin under six feet of dirt. No matter how many people point out that this is nearly impossible, people still go to great lengths to assure it won't happen to them or their loved ones. Common precautions include putting handles on the inside of crypt doors, running string from the coffin to a bell above ground, or using minor magics to detect movement after burial. The problem with this is that if your loved one actually is dead but doesn't stay that way, you give the resulting zombie/vampire/whatever an easy avenue of escape.

CREMATION

Simply put, cremation is burning a body until there is nothing left to burn. There are several ways to accomplish this, but in a typical medieval setting the most common is to build a pyre of some sort, place the corpse on top, and set it alight. Cremation is the funeral rite of choice for religions heavy on fire symbolism, while a few instead use it to free the spirit by removing the body it was attached to. As a side benefit, it also tends to keep them from coming back as undead. Cremation is also favored in some urban areas where there simply isn't room to bury corpses.

Cremating someone requires a few basic elements. First, you need a fuel source because human corpses don't burn very well on their

Plot hook

The PCs were invited to dine with the Marquis d'Salle, and they enjoyed a fabulous meal before retiring for the night. When they wake up, they are in a cold stone room, with a single torch burning in the wall. A note in the Marquis's handwriting informs them that they're to be his latest entertainment. Thanks to the drugs in the food, he has moved them to the d'Salle family crypt, which the Marquis has retrofitted with various traps, mazes, dead ends, and other nefarious methods of dispatching the unwary. Meanwhile, the only exit is tied to a sand timer slowly trickling away. If they escape before three hours pass, the Marquis will reward them handsomely for their trouble. If they fail . . . well, then he will have to find someone else to entertain him. The Marquis is obviously insane, but unfortunately none of his previous "guests" have made it out to inform the authorities.

own – there is too much water in them. Most cultures use wood, but anything flammable works, including dried dung, peat moss, fabric, or dry sod. Most pyres also include incense, both for religious reasons and because it helps to cover the smell of the burning body. Finally—and arguably, most importantly—you need a source of flame. Most cultures do not care where you get the fire from, but sometimes a funeral pyre must be lit by fire taken from a specific source (say, a temple to the local fire god) or with a torch made from a specific kind of wood.

Last Rites

As with most funeral rites, cremation exists as much for the living as for the dead – a ceremony to help the dead pass on, and the living to grieve and begin to heal. Some cultures, however, claim that the deceased's loved ones—especially their spouse—should throw themselves on the pyre as an act of devotion. The practice is rarely enforced, and there are several accounts of people fulfilling it of their own free will. Spouses, friends, and even servants have thrown themselves on a funeral pyre so that they can be with their loved one. Sometimes, living alone is just too hard.

In less pleasant circumstances, nations often use cremation to get rid of large numbers of bodies, especially after battles or plagues. Cremation can sometimes even be a punishment, in which case you usually do not wait for the person to die before lighting the flames. This is especially common for religious heretics. Different religions provide different reasons why they do this, but the basest answer is probably simplest: it's excruciatingly painful, and thus provides the proper punishment for such heretics.

While cultures that do not practice cremation usually just see it as a little strange, some actively oppose it. Religions that believe in a bodily resurrection, for example, usually discourage cremation because it can be seen as an attempt to thwart the gods' will to restore the body to life. A few religions even forbid cremation, except for criminals and heretics, because they believe it actually destroys the soul (whether this is really the case depends on your campaign, of course).

Dem bones, dem bones

Unless you are using a truly extraordinary (i.e. magical) fire, cremation cannot destroy human bones; it just is not hot enough. Technological societies sometimes pulverize the leftover bones into “ashes,” which are then kept, buried, scattered, or used in any of several more interesting (and often morbid) uses, such as being reconstituted into paint for a portrait of the deceased or fused into diamond jewelry. Other societies, including medieval ones, collect the bone fragments and place them in a container of some sort, such as an urn. The urn can then be interred, placed in a shrine or temple, thrown into a nearby lake, or simply left to collect dust in the attic. This last isn't very common since it tends to anger the spirit of the deceased.

EMBALMING AND MUMMIFICATION

Embalming and mummification are practically the same thing. The main difference is that embalming is sometimes used as a preface to another rite—interment, for example—while mummification is the last rite itself.

Embalming

“Embalming” is a catch-all phrase meaning any chemical technique used to slow or arrest decay in a corpse. In lay terms, it just means you use fancy concoctions to keep a corpse fresh—relatively speaking, anyway. Some embalming techniques can only preserve corpses for a few days, while others work for years or even centuries.

Knowledge Check

Embalming happens for many reasons. The most basic is to keep a corpse presentable until after the funeral rites have finished. Other times a corpse needs to be moved long distances before the rites are done, such as someone being returned to their ancestral home, and embalming makes sure the body is presentable when it arrives. Physicians also embalm corpses in order to preserve them for study.

Actually embalming a corpse involves infusing the body with a mixture of chemicals to keep decay at bay. The nature of the mixture changes from culture to culture, and in some cases the recipes are secrets known only to the embalmers themselves. Formaldehyde did not appear until the mid-19th century, so ancient and medieval embalming mixes rely on natron (a salt), alcohol, wax, and honey as their primary ingredients. Spices and rare oils are sometimes thrown in as well, at least for the rich. They don't always preserve the body better, but they can ameliorate the smell. A well-embalmed corpse can appear fresh for decades or even centuries afterward, though you have to protect it from outside elements. Sealed crypts work well, as do airtight glass coffins if you plan to put the body on public display. The original embalmer was Mother Nature, and for the poor she is still their only choice. People too poor to afford embalmers are just buried in the sand, making this just another form of interment.

Most religions don't have an opinion on embalming, since by and large it does not interfere with other, more important rites. A few take issue with it, however, because it prevents the corpse's return to nature. These latter religions rely on natural techniques to preserve a body, such as exposing it to cold

(outside or underground). They tend to have funerals very quickly after the death, for obvious reasons.

MUMMIFICATION

While simple embalming can preserve a corpse for a little while, if you want it to last forever you really need to mummify it. Mummification is most common in areas where it happens naturally (deserts, usually). Even when other cultures adopt the practice, they usually limit it to the rich; without the right natural conditions, the poor can never afford the extensive embalming techniques needed to really mummify someone.

The natural heat and dryness of the desert dries the body out before it can decay, leaving a mummy that stays preserved as long as the climate holds (a very long time in most deserts). Some cultures bury their dead in simple shrouds, but others clothe the corpse in finery far beyond what they ever wore in life. Not surprisingly, this usually happens in cultures where the spirit's status in the afterlife depends, at least in part, on what it takes with it.

The mummified rich get far better treatment. First, the internal organs are removed and preserved separately, sometimes to be added back in later. Then the body is suffused with a potent mixture of salts and chemicals to desiccate it, that is to remove all of the moisture. Once the body is desiccated, it is placed in funerary clothing that can range from traditional linen wrappings to royal regalia, and necklaces, brooches, amulets, and other adornments are also added. Sometimes the body is dressed in more esoteric items, like armor and weapons, as well. The

Last Rites

finished mummy is placed in an expensive sarcophagus, usually made of rare woods and often with gold leaf or an actual pounded gold exterior. The sarcophagus is sometimes filled with herbs and spices, then interred in an appropriate location so that the dead may rest in peace for all eternity—or at least until the looters and archaeologists show up.

Cultures that use mummification often believe that you *can* take it with you. People, especially nobles, tend to be buried with all sorts of gold, jewels, furniture, cooking utensils, and anything else that they may find useful in the afterlife. This can even include servants (usually just wooden effigies) and mummified pets.

Most cultures that practice mummification believe that a person's body must be intact in order for the soul to fully enjoy the afterlife, either because of a residual link between the two or because the soul has to come back and visit occasionally. Mummification thus keeps a body in good (enough) shape for the soul indefinitely. Destroying a body, such as by letting it rot or cremating it, profanes the soul's afterlife, or at the very least puts a serious kink in its eternal reward. Such souls are left to wander the world as restless dead, which is why this fate is usually reserved for heretics and criminals.

Mummy oddities

On a somewhat morbid note, it's a widespread belief that powdered mummy is a potent medicine, especially for hemophilia and other bleeding disorders (Presumably, it "dries up" the bleeding.) This can make mummies a very expensive black market item, ardently sought among certain royal lines. Some mummy wrappings have also been used to create a

specific shade of brown paint, called "death's head," that is almost impossible to replicate. Thus when looters steal from a mummy's tomb, they are not always content with just the gold; sometimes the mummy itself is just as valuable, if not more so. Needless to say, cultures that practice mummification find this "mummy harvesting" abhorrent.

Plot hook

The countess of Zura-Meton recently purchased a vial of natural restorative from an apothecary, and ever since has been plagued by recurring nightmares. Apparently the restorative included ground mummy, and now every night she dreams of the lord Akamren-Rul demanding recompense. The dreams are getting more violent, and she fears for her life. If not fixed soon, she thinks Akamren-Rul will find a way to carry out his demands—namely, that she die and be mummified to return his body to its natural state. The players' characters are brought in to rectify the situation. They can try to convince the Countess that the dreams are just dreams (a distinct possibility), try to make peace with the spirit of Akamren-Rul, or even try to find some way to confront him and force him to leave the countess alone. The spirit could be a haunt, or as dangerous as a full-blown ghost. The party should be careful, though; there's a reason why so many mummy legends feature horrible curses.

Knowledge Check

EXPOSURE

Not all funeral rites include taking good care of the body; some have just the opposite in mind. The most common of this type of rite is exposure, meaning that you just leave the body out in an open location so scavengers can consume it. While most cultures go to great lengths to *prevent* this, a few buck the trend and actively encourage it.

This does not mean people just toss bodies in the street, of course. First the corpse is given all the appropriate funeral rites the local religion requires (see “Rites of Passing”). Then a procession of priests and/or loved ones carries the body to a secluded spot which is usually set aside for exposing the dead—mountainsides, hills, and small towers are the most common. These sites are usually several miles from the nearest settlement and tend to acquire solid, lonely names, e.g. “The Tower of Silence,” or “The Mountain of the Departed.” Once there, the body is left clothed in, at most, a simple shroud. Any further religious rites are carried out, and then the living depart and leave the dead to the elements and the carrion-feeders.

Most cultures that practice exposure do so because they believe a corpse is unclean, due to simple decay, the fact that demons can possess it now, or other reasons. Removing it from the society and letting the scavengers take care of it is a way of keeping the society pure. The scavengers are usually unclean anyway, and in this way the pure elements of earth and fire remain uncontaminated as well (which wouldn’t be the case with interment and cremation, respectively).

Once the elements and scavengers have removed all the flesh—a process of about a

year—the bones are usually put in a nearby ossuary pit and allowed to further disintegrate. This can take a very long time indeed, but with enough time even the bones are reduced to splinters and dust, and all returns back to whence it began.

Exposure works best for small, isolated communities. As cities build themselves up, they often start encroaching on the traditional exposure sites. Some cities just designate new exposure sites further out, others create a buffer zone of gardens and forest around the site, and still others ignore the problem entirely and just adopt foreign funeral customs like cremation and interment.

Plot hook

The High Priest of Vularan is quite distraught. For over two centuries, the Tower of Sighing Echoes has held the bodies of the deceased, keeping the land and water pure from the taint of death. Yet when he led the last funeral procession there three weeks ago, he thought some of the bodies had gone missing. It bothered him so much he checked again a few days later and confirmed that three more had disappeared. Now nearly all of them have gone, and the poor priest fears that some sinister plot is afoot. He suspects that the local guild of physicians has robbed the Tower for its dissections, or that the Sect of Chal’ara is defiling them with some necromantic rite, but he has no proof. He implores the PCs to investigate, both for the sake of the dead themselves and for the purity of the city. Of course, finding proof will be rather difficult, especially if someone notices the PC’s inquiries and decides to silence them.

Last Rites

BURIAL AT SEA

For most cultures, burial at sea is a rite of necessity, not of choice. While it is possible to bring remains back from the middle of the ocean, the logistics of it are hard to pull off. That said, there are a few groups that do prefer burial at sea:

Seaborne nomads: For obvious reasons, those who live at sea prefer to be buried at sea. Sailors and seaborne merchants are often the same.

Naval officers: For many who make their career in the navy, the sea is home far more than any strip of land. Retired naval officers will sometimes request that their remains be buried at sea even if they themselves haven't set foot on a ship in years.

Paranoid individuals: When it comes to corpse protection, burial at sea is second only to cremation for protecting the corpse; once a body is at the bottom of the ocean, only epic efforts can actually get it back. This prevents enemies from mutilating, reanimating, or otherwise desecrating the body.

A basic burial at sea consists of little more than placing the body in a weighted bag (usually made from sailcloth) or a casket and dropping it overboard. Most sea burials are more elaborate, of course, with at least a simple religious service said before lowering the body. (After major battles, the service is usually very simple because of how many bodies there are to take care of.) More distinguished people, especially high-ranking naval officers, often receive very elaborate funerals, but the end result is the same.

A more spectacular method of burial at sea was popularized by the Scandinavians. It's actually a combination of cremation and sea burial, and consists of loading a dead leader onto a large boat filled with funeral possessions. The boat is then pushed into the water and set on fire. Though spectacular, it has not caught on in most of the world. (Similar traditions involve simply burying the dead in a faux boat made of either stone or wood, or sometimes cremating the ship on dry land).

CANNIBALISM

Contrary to popular belief, cultures rarely indulge in cannibalism for mere nutrition. (Supply gets low pretty fast, especially when word gets around.) Most of the time—at least, when eating other people isn't totally taboo—cannibalism is closely tied to religious rites, especially funeral rites, and carries heavy symbolic meaning. Though there is plenty of obvious symbolism in eating your enemies, we're going to focus on the slightly less obvious symbolism of eating your friends.

Most "civilized" societies consider cannibalism brutish and barbaric, but the societies that practice it regularly actually do so out of respect. Consuming the flesh of the deceased brings the dead person's power and prowess into yourself, and it can actually be a mark of great honor to be allowed part of the deceased's flesh. Cannibalism also links the spirit of the dead to future generations, as the body of those have gone before becomes part of those who are now. Though not documented historically, it's certainly possible to have a society where pregnant women are the only ones allowed to partake of the dead's flesh,

Knowledge Check

so that the spirit of the dead may be reborn in the child. In other cultures, consuming the dead is meant to help the spirit of the deceased pass on by destroying the flesh that tied it to life.

Slightly less noble reasons for cannibalism exist and are, unfortunately, used from time to time. Since eating the flesh of a powerful man is supposed to make you more powerful, some people will kill and eat others to gain that power. Youth, too, is sometimes supposed to be transferred this way. Most of the time there's no obvious result, but that doesn't mean it's not working.

The one major problem with cannibalism (aside from how it annoys the "civilized" neighbors) is that some diseases can spread extremely rapidly through it. Most cultures have no idea what a "prion" is, but they are notoriously easy to get if you eat the flesh of someone infected with them. Mad cow disease is the most well known such disease, but there are others, and eating the body of someone who died of one is a good way to kill an entire village.

THANATOLOGY AND NECROMANCY

Not everyone lets the dead rest in peace. People who meddle with death fall into two broad camps: thanatologists and necromancers. The general public doesn't distinguish between them, but the differences are fairly important.

Thanatologists

Thanatologists are the scholars of death. Instead of seeking to control death, they try to

Plot hook

The Lord of Morath has kept the land under his thumb for a hundred years, thanks to his eating the flesh of murdered youths. The party's task is simple: take him down. Simple, that is, if you consider sneaking past or fighting loyal guards, getting into the fortified keep, and taking down a possibly immortal ruler as simple. The PC's motivation is up to you; it could be simple mercenary work, due to general principle, or because the Lord just kidnapped one of their younger siblings or lovers in preparation for killing and eating them. Of course, there's the rumor that anyone who eats the lord's heart will gain a hundred years of youth, but no PC will be tempted by that . . . right?

understand it, and people's reactions to it.

Thanatologists aren't so concerned with the Big Questions of why death exists, what comes after, and such—they leave that to the philosophers and priests—but instead focus on the physical and psychological aspects of death. For example, a thanatologist with some medical training will study what biological processes cease with death, which ones are still active, the procession of *pallor mortis* through *rigor mortis*, and the process of decay. Thanatologists with a more psychological bent study how people react to oncoming death, how those left behind grieve and recover, and how people react to witnessing violent death. Adventurers make an excellent pool of people who have *caused* many violent deaths, and are thus highly sought out by some thanatologists. A few thanatologists even study the cultural

Last Rites

rituals and rites that surround death, but they must tread carefully because it is astonishingly easy for them to annoy the local religions.

Thanatologists are, by and large, harmless. They're no more dangerous than your average philosopher or alchemist, and the worst most of them will do is subject grieving family members to interminable questionnaires. Many of them even work as counselors of a sort, helping people through the grieving process and giving comfort as death approaches.

Necromancers

Whereas thanatologists are the scholars of death, necromancers are the workers of it. In its strictest sense, necromancy means simply calling up the spirits of the dead and trying to get information from them. But, really, when was the last time you saw a necromancer in a roleplaying game just summoning the dead for a chat?

Basically, if thanatologists are like chemists, necromancers are like demolitions experts. The two disciplines use many of the same tools and knowledge, but for vastly different purposes. One seeks to explore death, the other to conquer it—usually by raising a massive army of zombies and skeletons to take over the world.

Most cultures look on necromancers with distrust at best and loathing at worst. The dead should rest in peace, and even the simplest necromantic call disturbs their eternal rest. Of course, the dead aren't too fond of it either; nothing puts the departed in a bad temper like being bound back into a half-decayed body. (And you wonder why zombies are always in such a bad mood.)

Even though most cultures distrust necromancers, that doesn't mean that they shun

them. Many societies have a strong cadre of necromancers on the fringes, ready to call up the dead in exchange for a small (and sometimes quite large) fee. A few societies even break the mold and treat their necromancers quite well, letting them live opulent lifestyles as members of an elite guild, or even as privileged members of the royal court. But these are the exceptions.

That said, there are still all those necromancers who insist on raising undead legions and trying to conquer the world. Everyone needs a hobby.

Plot Hook

The esteemed thanatologist, Sir Michael Carmichael Valduvius VI, is trying to write the quintessential work on the psychology of those who have seen great death. After deciding that military men and physicians were too banal, he hit on the idea of adventurers, and thus found the PCs. Now he won't leave them alone. No matter how much they cajole, threaten, or even attack, he continues to follow them and ask an interminable series of questions. ("When did you first kill someone?" "What do you do with the blood on your clothes?" "Do you dehumanize your victims before eviscerating them?" "What effect did your early family life have on your sociopathic tendencies?") If they ignore him, he continues pestering them. If they answer his questions, he's back in a day or two with a list twice as long. (And if they actually kill him, his necromancer friends bring him back within the week.) Their only real hope is to try to find an ever more bloodthirsty set of adventurers to sic him on, and let him be their problem.

Knowledge Check

LIFE AFTER DEATH

One of the great questions about death is, of course, “What happens next?” Philosophers, priests, and even scientists have grappled with this question for millennia, but so far no clear answers have emerged. But keep in mind that even when people don’t actually *know* what happens after death, they usually *think* they do.

There are as many ideas about post-mortem existence as there are cultures, but most of them fall into a few broad categories. We’ve outlined the most common ones, and keep in mind that they aren’t mutually exclusive. Some religions, for example, believe that the soul follows cycles of reincarnation until it reaches a certain point of purity, at which point it is subsumed back into the universe at large. Others meanwhile believe that the righteous are rewarded with eternal bliss, while those of the wicked are simply extinguished from existence.

Extinction: The idea that consciousness ceases with death is rare in medieval societies, but it does exist. Basically, birth is the beginning of life and death its end, and there is nothing more. This worldview is more popular with atheists and others who break from traditional religions, and when it does make its way into religious texts, it’s usually reserved for the unrighteous.

Afterlife: The most common belief is probably that consciousness continues to exist after death in an “afterlife,” another sort of existence with rules that sometimes deviate wildly from mortal existence (the most common one being that you can’t be killed again). Some afterlives are paradise, some are miserable, and some are just another place to live. The quality of your afterlife usually depends on your deeds in life.

Reincarnation: The second-most-common idea about where souls go is probably reincarnation, the idea that the soul is reborn into a new body. Some beliefs hold that the soul only cycles among humans or other sentient beings, but some beliefs allow it to cycle into anything from an ant to a tiger to a blade of grass. Reincarnation is usually meant as a sort of training ground for souls – the end goal is that you eventually learn whatever it’s supposed to, terminate the cycles, and move onto either an appropriate afterlife or subsumation.

Subsumation: Subsumation is the idea that consciousness returns to something greater upon death, like a drop of water returning to the ocean. The individual ceases to be an individual and merges with the All. While some cultures believe this happens immediately after death, most require some sort of preparation in order to properly lose the trappings of mortality; only holy men and sages become enlightened enough during life to shed their individuality immediately upon death.

But I know what happens to the dead!

In some roleplaying campaigns you know *exactly* what happens to the dead. They stick around as ghosts, go off to petition their gods, get devoured by angry demons, or join the Heavenly Bureaucracy. What do you do in cases like this?

First off, remember that most people don’t actually have firsthand experience with what happens to the dead. Just because the world guide says all dead go to the Plane of Paradise, that doesn’t mean everyone living in the world actually knows that. Unless travel between life and afterlife is unbelievably common, most people take their afterlife on faith. PCs are an exception, since they have an uncanny tendency to get into sticky situations with

Last Rites

the dead, not to mention demons and gods. Most people aren't nearly so (un)fortunate and must live by faith. Thus even if *you* know what happens to the dead, feel free to pepper your world with NPCs that have very different ideas about it.

Mix and Match

Remember that it's not even necessary that only one system apply to a world. Individual religious beliefs aside, it's possible that the entire world actually operates on different afterlife principles for different people. One god may keep reincarnating her followers, another rewards his with paradise, still another subsumes hers into her own soul . . . anything is possible.

Some worlds are even so politically correct that they let everyone experience the afterlife they think they will. Thus if you expect to go to heaven, you will. If you think you'll be reincarnated as a giant panda, it happens. And if you think you cease to exist . . . well, that one's a bit trickier to manage, and makes an absolute mess of the paperwork. (Thankfully most societies have a large excess of dead bureaucrats to take care of it).

DESECRATION OF THE DEAD

Not everyone wants to send the dead on to a blissful afterlife. One of the surest ways to disrespect the dead—and sometimes deprive them of their place in eternity—is to desecrate their body. Desecration takes many forms, and it's always tied up with what is considered proper – a perfectly acceptable rite in one culture is anathema to another.

Plot hook

The Avatar of Mudala is extremely precise in his incarnations among humanity. Every time a previous avatar dies, the avatar's soul migrates into a newborn babe exactly nine days, nine hours, and nine minutes later. But it's been two weeks since the avatar died, and the correct child has not been found. The priests of Mudala are praying madly, trying to see if the avatar's spirit is angry or simply lost its way, but in the meantime they're taking more physical approaches, too. The PCs are brought in to help seek out the new avatar and bring the baby safely. They need to hurry, since it's known that the rival nation of Nu'atla is also looking for the child, and will kill it if found.

Exposure: Most cultures hate letting scavengers feed on corpses. Leaving them out for wolves, ravens, rats, and other carrion-feeders is disdain of the highest degree. This often happens on battlefields due to simple logistics, in which case people try to rectify it as soon as possible, but many people do it intentionally. Criminals are especially apt to get this treatment to "make an example" of them, usually by hanging their corpse in a public place and letting their bones get slowly picked clean. It's supposed to reinforce that you shouldn't commit crimes; usually, though, it just reinforces that you shouldn't get caught.

Mutilation: Even though most cultures don't require a corpse to be intact for it to get a proper funeral, intentional mutilation is still taboo. This means it's a favorite for people to perform on their enemies, and they'll usually proudly display it, too. Common mutilations include beheading, castration, skinning, plucking out the eyes, driving spikes or other ob-

Knowledge Check

jects through the body, and even posthumous piercings or tattoos.

Cremation: One culture's funeral rite is another's desecration. Certain cultures, especially those that mummify the dead, believe that destroying the body forces the soul to wander lost for all eternity. Thus no surer desecration exists than to destroy the body completely with fire, forcing the soul to wander forevermore. Only criminals and heretics usually get this treatment—though, as always, an enemy might do it, too, to get revenge.

Cannibalism: Most cultures share an extreme prejudice against cannibalism and see anyone engaging in it as absolutely barbaric. This has led to cross-cultural misunderstandings as one culture tried to honor the dead and horrified another in the process. In less honorable circumstances, some war leaders have been known to feast on the bodies of their enemies, though it's just as common for them to force their prisoners to do so—often by feeding them the corpses of their own loved ones. Cannibalism has also been employed by psychopaths and for vengeance, both to horrifying effect. (The latter is usually especially cruel, as it involves someone unwittingly eating the remains, and then being forced to confront the evidence of it—in most cases, the remains of someone they loved).

Reanimation: With very few exceptions, raising a body as an undead is considered desecrating the corpse. Even when it's not the person's own spirit called back, most cultures still find it utterly perverse. This is the chief reason necromancers are rarely welcome in societies. And, really, nothing is more demoralizing to an enemy than seeing their own comrades raised and fighting against them.



Last Rites

CHAPTER TWO DEAD RULES

Those Who Deal With the Dead

The people who must deal with the dead, both those at rest and those less so, are as varied as any other profession. In this chapter, we will take look at the people who interact with the dead and some of the spells and skills at their disposal.

ARCHETYPES

GRAVE WARDEN (SLAYER ARCHETYPE)^{ACG}

Most of those who challenge the undead rely on the power of the gods to return the dead to their graves. In the absence of such divine power, the grave warden is a truly unique creature: an assassin of those already dead. An expert on the walking dead and their weaknesses, she strikes swiftly and ruthlessly, laying the dead back to rest

Holy Water Sprinker (Ex) At 2nd level, a grave warden can draw a flask of holy water as if it were a weapon (and can thus use the Quick Draw feat to draw flasks of holy water). As a swift action, she can open a flask of holy water and pour it onto a held or adjacent melee weapon. If the weapon successfully hits an undead creature before the end of the grave warden's next turn, the undead takes damage as if it took a direct hit from the holy water, in addition to the damage from the weapon, if any.
This ability replaces the slayer talent gained at 2nd level.

Death Ward (Sp) At 7th level, a grave warden learns to perform a short ritual that grants the benefits of *death ward*, using his slayer level as his caster level. Performing this ritual takes 1 minute and uses 4 flasks of holy water. The grave warden can protect only himself with this ability.

This ability replaces the advanced slayer talent gained at 10th level.

Slayer Talents: The following slayer talents (and rogue talents) complement the grave warden archetype: fast stealth, finesse rogue, surprise attack, swift poison, terrain mastery, trap spotter, and *unwitting ally*.

Advanced Slayer Talents: The following advanced slayer talents (also available to rogues) complement the grave warden archetype: hunter's surprise and slayer's camouflage.

ACG - This archetype originally appeared in *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game: Advanced Class Guide*

Knowledge Check

THANATOLOGIST (ALCHEMIST ARCHETYPE)

Often ill understood, even when they're not mistaken for necromancers or vivisectionists, the thanatologist wishes to understand death and its processes. While their understanding of biology and chemistry produces less explosive results than the traditional alchemist, their unmatched expertise in physiognomy makes them a credible threat to both the living and the dead when their studies (or their person) are under threat.

Funerary Expertise

A thanatologist adds Knowledge (religion) to his list of class skills.

Sneak Attack At 1st level, a thanatologist gains the sneak attack ability as a rogue of the same level. If a character already has sneak attack from another class, the levels from the classes that grant sneak attack stack to determine the effective rogue level for the sneak attack's extra damage dice (so an alchemist 1/rogue 1 has a +1d6 sneak attack like a 2nd-level rogue, an alchemist 2/rogue 1 has a +2d6 sneak attack like a 3rd level rogue, and so on).

This ability replaces bomb.

One Eye on the Grave At 2nd level, a thanatologist adds *gentle repose* to his formula book as a 1st-level extract. He may add *deathwatch* to his formula book as a 1st-level extract whenever he is normally able to add formulae to his book (such as when gaining a new level).

Magpie's Eye At 7th level, a thanatologist adds *blood biography* to his formula book as a 2nd-level extract.

At 9th level, a thanatologist adds *blade of bright victory* (if he is good) or *blade of dark triumph* (if he is evil) to his formula book. A neutral thanatologist may choose either, but may only choose one.



Last Rites

SPELLS

Memento Mori

School necromancy [evil]; Level antipaladin 1, cleric/oracle 1, sorcerer/wizard 1

Casting Time 1 action

Components V, S, DF

Range personal

Target creatures within sight

Duration 1 round

Saving Throw Will negates; Spell Resistance yes

DESCRIPTION

You transform yourself into a horrifying vision of death, crawling with maggots and rotting away, exuding the stench of the grave. All creatures that see you are entitled to a Will save; those that fail lose their next standard action (or lose all actions next round if they roll a saving throw of 1).

Those that roll a successful saving throw are immune to further castings of this spell for 24 hours.

Grave Binding

School enchantment; Level cleric/oracle 3

Casting Time 1 action

Components S, M, DF

Target 1 undead creature

Duration 1 day/level

Saving Throw Will negates; Spell Resistance no

DESCRIPTION

You compel an undead creature to remain in or under the earth, and ideally in its grave or sarcophagus (if this spell is cast on a creature currently resting in its grave, mausoleum, or coffin, it suffers a -3 circumstance penalty to its saving throw). The creature can still speak, cast spells, and even attack creatures within reach, but it cannot leave the location it is bound to. If attacked, the creature is entitled to an immediate saving throw for each attack, with a cumulative +1 bonus for each further attack.

Mythic: The binding is permanent.



Knowledge Check

CHAPTER THREE GRAVE GOODS

Bringing your campaign to life

This chapter contains examples of a few material goods to pass along, some of which you actually can take with you. The pieces are intentionally modular, so any of them can be dropped into your campaign for a bit of added vitality.

NON-MAGICAL ITEMS

The following items are the mundane, run-of-the-mill items that just about anyone can buy.

Item	Cost	Weight
Curse Tablets	5 sp	0.5 lbs.
Ghost Money	2 cp	-
Accidental Inhumation Bell	5 gp	1 lb.

Curse tablets

These small tablets—about the size of a man's hand—are the perfect solution for when you just want to ruin someone's day. Simply inscribe your target's name on the tablet, include instructions for the curse, and place it in the casket with someone who recently died. The deceased will carry it with them to the afterlife and give it to the god of the dead, who will then enact the curse (or so people say).

Price 5 sp; Weight 0.5 lbs.

Most curse tablets are made of lead and wood. The wording of a curse tablet just has to be clear, and eloquence is purely optional. "Jerthom Barnun, to come down with the pox 'cause he stoled my pig" works just as well as "A curse to be laid upon the turncoat Emara t'lathil, oathbreaker and betrayer, may her teeth rot within her mouth and fountain of her youth dry up, and may all her fair skin turn bilious and barren, for she has abandoned her sacred honor to find love with another." The actual efficacy of such items is left up to the GM's discretion.

Ghost Money

Ghost money is cheap and easy to come by, so that people usually buy a lot to burn on funeral pyres. The idea is that the spirit of the money goes with the spirit of the dead, so the latter can spend it in the afterlife.

Price 2 cp; Weight -

More expensive versions exist, including ones painted with actual gold leaf, though only the rich can actually indulge in such things.

Accidental inhumation bell

Accidental inhumation bells are most popular among the rich; poor folks usually just find them silly. Most people post 24-hour guards to listen for the bell, at least for the first week after the burial, so that help comes right away. The air inside the coffin is not infinite, after all.

Price 5 gp; Weight 1 lb.

This simple device consists of a small bell fastened to a pole set above a fresh grave. A length

Last Rites

of string leads from the bell through the earth and into the coffin, where it is tied around the deceased's hand. Thus anyone who is accidentally buried alive must merely pull their hand to ring the bell and summon aid.

MAGIC ITEMS

Most people like to keep magic well away from funerals, but there are some exceptions. You may find the following items useful when it comes to dealing with the departed—especially if you want to keep them that way.

Item	Cost	Weight
Coins of Repose	2,000 gp	-
Preserving Coffin	12,000 gp	50 lbs.
Shroud of Disintegration ^{UE}	3,300 gp	10 lbs.
Sepulchral Staff	3,000 gp	4 lbs.

^{UE} – This item originally appeared in *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game: Ultimate Equipment*

Coins of Repose

Many cultures put coins over the eyes of the dead to pay whoever carries the spirit to the afterlife. These leaden coins, however, have a much more immediate purpose – the protection of a corpse from being animated as an undead creature. While this isn't as foolproof as other methods (such as beheading, cremation, or staking through the heart), the coins are much less obtrusive. Some people tie them in place with a bit of cloth to ensure they won't fall off.

Price 2,000 gp; Slot Eyes; Aura faint evocation [good]; CL 1st; Weight -

These items always come in a pair and both coins must be used in order for them to be ef-

fective. If the coins are placed over the eyes of the remains of a sentient creature, that creature's corpse may not be raised as an undead. Any attempt to raise the creature as an undead automatically fails. If the creature was slain by an effect that would normally raise the slain victim as an undead, the effect is delayed for as long as the coins are in place.

CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

Cost 1,000 gp

Craft Wondrous Item, *sanctify corpse*

Preserving coffin

This casket is usually sealed with molten glass, but lead also works. Rumors circulate that young maidens placed in a preserving coffin can be restored to life by a passing prince, but these remain unconfirmed.

Price 12,000 gp; Slot none; Aura faint necromancy; CL 3rd; Weight 50 lbs.

This clear, glass coffin magically preserves any corpse laid in it. As long as the seal remains intact, the body is protected from decay, scavengers, and all other intrusions.

CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

Cost 6,000 gp

Craft Wondrous Item, *gentle repose*

Shroud of Disintegration

When ensuring that a dead enemy (or relative) cannot return to pester the living, annihilating the remains is an enticing option. Where interment leaves a body, and cremation leaves bones, these grim shrouds leave naught but dust.

Price 3,300 gp; Slot none; Aura moderate transmutation; CL 11th; Weight 10 lbs.

These burial wrappings are made of fine, embroidered materials. When a body is placed inside,

Knowledge Check

speaking a command word turns the body to dust. The magic of the shroud is usable only once, after which the wrappings become ordinary, fine cloth.

CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

Cost 1,650 gp

Craft Wondrous Item, *disintegrate*

Sepulchral Staff

This is the deluxe version of the accidental inhumation bell. Instead of attaching a simple bell to the corpse with a length of twine, this staff is magically connected to the corpse through a bracelet placed on their wrist. Some people also use these staffs to detect undead clawing their way to the surface, but polite society frowns on it.

Price 3,000 gp; Slot none; Aura faint abjuration and illusion; CL 3rd; Weight 4 lbs.

Any movement on the part of the body will trigger the staff, which immediately sounds an alarm and starts flashing. Unfortunately, these staffs tend to be a bit too sensitive, so that they sometimes make a great hullabaloo when in fact all that happened was a postmortem spasm.

CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

Cost 1,500 gp

Craft Wondrous Item, *alarm*, *prestidigitation*



Last Rites

CHAPTER FOUR THE OSSUARY OF ST LEN

This massive ossuary dates back centuries at least. In current times, it looks like a cathedral, surrounded by a few acres of pleasant gardens with a low wall bracing it against the encroaching city. Buried deep inside the ossuary is the original stone structure, but the additions have long since overrun the original.

The ossuary's core is made from stone and mortar, though you'd hardly know it from the façade. Worked onto, in, and around the stonework are hundreds of thousands of human bones, taken from the city crypts once the bodies have decayed. Skulls and femurs trace the jointing, tibia, fibulae, and finger bones form ornate chandeliers, and every wall is covered with ribs, clavicles and unidentifiable bone work. The monks of St. Len spend most of their time designing and creating new pieces of art for addition to the ossuary, much like monks of other orders illuminate manuscripts, though a bit more morbid.

Travelers find the ossuary fascinating in a grotesque sort of way, but for those whose bones lie in the walls of the ossuary, there can be no greater eternal reward. By becoming part of the very building itself, their bones become a conduit to the gods. Being denied a place in the ossuary is akin to being denied a place in paradise. Some rival religions claim that all that bone work is in fact a channel for necromantic powers, and that

on moonless nights the monks perform diabolic rituals in the catacombs.

The ossuary consists of several main areas that characters may wander into:

The gardens: The monks keep the gardens surrounding the ossuary lush and well groomed. Visitors can walk the textured paths and peacefully contemplate existence while surrounded by towering trees, flowering shrubs, and grasses and vines of all sorts.

The Great Hall: The Great Hall sits at the center of the Ossuary, the first and greatest addition to the original building. The hall stands eighty feet long by forty feet wide, with ceilings arching thirty feet overhead. The Great Hall is used for the daily religious ceremonies, along with more infrequent ceremonies such as funerals and even marriages. As with the rest of the ossuary, bone is the chief decoration—bone chandeliers, bone pews, even the stained glass has knucklebones set along the lead casing. Legend has it that the very mortar between the floor stones is made from ground bone.

The Winding Rooms: Beyond the Great Hall, the ossuary is a rambling amalgam of haphazard additions, with rooms added apparently at random according to the whims of whichever architect was in charge at the time. Most of the additions are small and sparsely furnished with benches or chairs—made from bones, of course—with windows placed wherever possible to let in a modicum of light. Some scholars suspect that the placement of the rooms is not random at all, but instead acts to magnify the channeling properties of the bone structure. Only the monks know if this is true, and they aren't talking.

Knowledge Check

The catacombs: Beneath the ossuary sit the catacombs, hallway after hallway of winding tunnels larger even than the building aboveground. Here the bones of the departed are kept until they can be added to the building above. Each type bone has its own room, such that there's the skull room, the femur room, the rib room, etc. Only the monks are allowed into the catacombs, though an enterprising burglar could work his way inside.

BROTHER UMPHAL, MONK OF ST. LEN

Brother Umphal is one of the higher-ranking monks at the Ossuary of St. Len. He hasn't left the ossuary grounds for over twenty years, and some say he never even leaves the building.

This is not true, of course. On nights of the full moon, Brother Umphal wanders through the gardens until he finds the one special clearing where he can see the entire ossuary at once. There he sits, seeing the light shimmer over the ossuary, practically feeling the divine power flowing through the bones.

Perhaps all that seclusion has addled his brains, or perhaps something really is speaking to him on those moonlit nights. In any case, Brother Umphal has started to feel that the ossuary is missing something, a source of power stronger than mere moldering bones. If old bones provide a link to the gods, he reasons, wouldn't fresh ones provide a stronger one still? What if they were worked into the spires while still, technically, alive? What sort of power would that bring down?

Brother Umphal is well into middle-age, with gray-streaked brown hair and a face full of dour wrinkles. He is quite somber, talks little, and usually dresses in the gray robes of his order.

BROTHER UMPHAL

CR 4

XP 1,200

Male human monk 5

LE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +5; Senses Perception +11

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 17, flat-footed 15 (+1 deflection, +1 Dex, +1 dodge, +1 monk, +3 Wis)

hp 31 (5d8+5)

Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +8; +2 vs enchantments

Defensive Abilities evasion; Immune disease

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee unarmed strike +6 (1d8+3) or

mwk siangham +7 (1d6+3) or

unarmed strike flurry of blows +6/+6 (1d8+3)

Ranged javelin +4 (1d6+3)

Special Attacks flurry of blows, stunning fist (5/day DC 15)

STATISTICS

Str 16, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 8

Base Atk +3; CMB +8 (+10 grapple); CMD 23 (25 vs. grapple)

Feats Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Power Attack, Scorpion Style, Stunning Fist

Skills Acrobatics +7 (+12 when jumping), Climb +8, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (religion) +8, Perception +11, Sense Motive +11, Stealth +9

Languages Common

SQ fast movement, high jump, *ki* pool (5 points, magic), maneuver training, purity of body, slow fall 20 ft.

Combat Gear *potion of cure light wounds* (2);

Other Gear javelin, masterwork siangham, *cloak of resistance +1*, *ring of protection +1*, 347 gp

Last Rites

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Knowledge Check LAST RITES

You may be wondering just why you need a book about funeral rites and burial customs. Neither is really a focus of roleplaying games. After all, the point is to keep your character alive, and any enemies that happen to die are usually just left to rot or be eaten by the local wildlife (especially dragons).

Why bother with funeral rites? To be fair, if your game consists of mostly dungeon-crawling hack-and-slash, you probably don't need to. Any sort of rites would get in the way of killing things and taking their stuff. This is why so many video RPGs have the corpses just fade away. Even in a social game, there are times when bothering about the dead would just get in the way.

But there are also times where dealing with and remembering the dead can add new and deeper levels of both roleplaying and adventure for players and for GMs. That's when you will want this book.

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