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TO OUR READERS

From all of us at Spectrum Games, we hope you have a ghoulishly fun time with this roleplaying game!

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Anthology-Style Horror



Greetings, fiends and foes! I'm the Grave Hag and I'll be your hostess for this gruesomely grim roleplaying game, as we slide deeper and deeper into the pit of depravity, desperation, despair and, of corpse, good old-fashioned bloodshed. With

Stories from the Grave, you and your friends will emulate anthology-style horror in an authentic and faithful manner. So, stick around, kiddies, and bask in the sheer terror that awaits you. You won't be disemboweled... err, I mean disappointed! Reh-heh-heh-heh!

Anthology-style horror is best described as a series of stand-alone, unrelated tales, often—but not always—linked together by a host who bookends each installment. The genre covers different mediums, primarily comicbooks, television shows and movies. Let's take a look at each one:

- **Comicbooks:** Largely a thing of the past, anthology horror comics contained between two and four stories. Examples include *Tales from the Crypt*, *The Vault of Horror*, *The Haunt of Fear*, *Eerie Comics*, *Weird Terror*, *Crypt of Shadows*, etc.

- **Television Shows:** Not as prevalent as they once were, anthology horror television shows presented one new tale per episode. Example include *Tales from the Crypt*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Night Gallery*, *The Hitchhiker*, *Tales from the Darkside*, *The Outer Limits*, etc.

- **Movies:** Still going strong, anthology horror movies typically consist of between three and six stories. Unlike the other mediums, the stories in the film are sometimes related to one degree or another. Examples include: *Tales from the Crypt*, *Creepshow*, *Campfire Tales*, *Black Sabbath*, *Trick 'r Treat*, *All Hallows' Eve*, etc.

Other mediums have embraced anthology-style horror as well, including old-time radio shows and novels. But this game focuses on the three detailed above.

Conventions of the Genre

While it's impossible to explore all the tropes from all the different sources, we can discuss some of the most common ones.

- **Dark Humor:** Dark humor pervaded many series and films, even if only from the dialogue of the host. Sometimes, this brand of humor was brought to the forefront, but more often than not, it was dialed back and used as a counterbalance to particularly gruesome stories. Not every series or film utilized humor at all, preferring not to "dilute" the horror.

- **Flawed Characters:** The stories were chock-full of characters who were flawed, whether they had rather mild faults (jealousy, greed, etc.) or were flat-out terrible people who committed all manner of atrocities. Sometimes, they were the central characters!

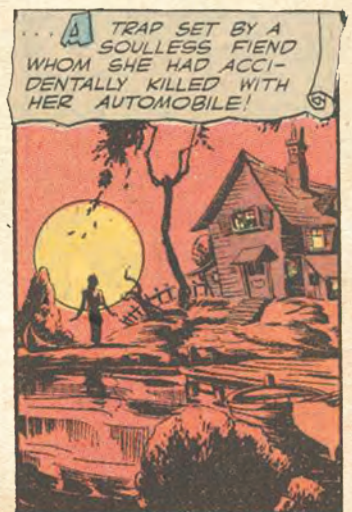
- **Karma:** What comes around goes around. Karma has a way of biting wrong-doers in the ass and delivering its own brand of poetic justice in these tales.

- **Moral of the Story:** Each installment often came with a message; a lesson to be learned. Often, that lesson was made apparent by the host at the end. Other times, it was a subtler affair.

- **Logic Schmogic:** The most important aspect of the tale was the scare. If getting that scare meant abandoning logic, well, that's life. Or death.

- **Twist Endings:** The story leads toward an inevitable conclusion, but then, at the last possible minute, we throw something in that changes *everything*.

- **Unsettling Content:** Whether it was gore or creepy imagery, the stories almost inevitably had content that made viewers shiver.



Important Concepts



So, just because you now understand what anthology-style horror is, you think you're ready to play the game, eh? Wrong. DEAD wrong, in fact. But never fear: read this section and you'll be ready in no time. Actually, scratch that.

You should ALWAYS fear!

Participants and Supplies

There are two types of participants. One participant is the Grave Keeper (or GK); they act as the lead storyteller in your twisted tales of eerie fun, coming up with plot ideas, verbally leading the flow of the story and playing the roles of the supporting characters (or SCs). The other participants are the players. Each play-

er takes on the role of one primary character (or PC) involved in the story. If you aren't overly familiar with how roleplaying games work, look it up on the internet, as there are numerous crash courses to be found there.

Stories from the Grave works best with a Grave Keeper and one to three players. One player is preferable, as this type of horror tends to focus on one character.

In addition to participants, the group should have a slew of "tokens" (beads, buttons, coins, poker chips, etc.) and at least five 6-sided dice. There should also be a character sheet for each player; if you're playing out more than one tale (see *Installments* below), players will need one for each tale. Pencils and scrap paper are necessary as well.

Installments and Scenes

When you and your group sit down to play, you will be crafting your own episode or issue of a fictitious comicbook called, of course, *Stories from the Grave*.



Alternatively, you can play the television series or movies based on that comic. It's up to you. Whatever the case may be, each story is called an *installment* in order to avoid having to use the ever-cumbersome "issue/episode/film" in the text. The game is designed to accommodate tersely-paced tales, allowing you and your group to play out more than one installment in a single setting.

Each Installment consists of any number of *scenes*. A scene is generally thought of as the action in a single location and continuous time. If the installment is the "story", scenes are the mini-stories that occur within a story to propel it forward. The Grave Keeper determines when a scene begins and ends.

The Cast



You simply can't have horror without victims. Did I say "victims"? I meant to say "characters". That's right, without characters, there would be no one to butcher, maim, decapitate, disembowel or drive completely insane. But I digress. The point is that any work of fiction requires characters and Stories from the Grave is no exception.

Primary Characters

Primary Characters are the stars of the story and are largely defined by the aspects discussed below. We'll explain what it all means and show you how to create a PC. This section is written specifically for the players, so that's who it is addressed to.

Background

This is a concise description of the character's role within the series. Think of this as the editor-in-chief's or show producer's notes on each character. An example: "Fast-talking but cheesy-as-hell ladies' man who thinks his pick-up lines could unthaw the most disinterested woman on the planet. He lives alone in a sad little second-floor apartment and works as a grocery sacker at a local supermarket, a sharp contrast to the image he tries to cultivate when he's out clubbing."

Each of you (i.e., the players) selects a character provided by the Grave Keeper. The character sheets won't have much on them at this point, but one of the things you'll find is that the Background section is filled out. This is one of the jobs of the GK.

Casting

Casting is the look and tone of the character, summed up in a short paragraph. An example: "Good looks but hides his impending baldness with a toupee, dark brown hair, average build, wears flashy clothes when in public".

You receive up to 25 words for Casting. You should therefore choose those words carefully. Casting needn't be given in full sentences.

Traits

Each character possesses four Traits that largely determine how good they are in certain areas. The Traits are Flesh (all aspects of a character's physicality), Brains (their mental faculties), Tongue (their charisma and gift of gab) and Guts (their willpower). Each Trait is rated from -1 to 2.

Choose one of the following three options and allocate the given ratings to the four Traits as you see fit.

- **Option A:** 2, 1, 0, -1
- **Option B:** 1, 1, 1, -1
- **Option C:** 1, 1, 0, 0

- A value of -1 indicates that the character is underdeveloped in that Trait.
- A value of 0 establishes the character as more or less average in that Trait.
- A value of 1 illustrates that the character is very gifted or well-trained in that Trait.
- A value of 2 expresses that the character is a master or expert in that Trait.

Descriptors and Flaws

Traits paint a view of the character's capabilities in broad strokes, giving a generalized view of what they can do. Descriptors and Flaws allow us to focus in on the specifics. Each Trait that is rated 1 or more will have one or more Descriptors that reflect areas of expertise or talent, while each Trait that is rated -1 will have a Flaw that reflects an area of weakness.

It's up to you to create your character's Descriptors and Flaws. There is no definitive list; just use your imagination.

- A Trait with a rating of 1 or more will have a number of Descriptors equal to the rating.
- A Trait with a rating of 0 will have no Descriptors or Flaws.
- A Trait with a rating of -1 will have one Flaw.

Sample Descriptors and Flaws

In case you're having trouble coming up with your own Descriptors and Flaws, here's a list to kick your imagination into high gear. Use them "as is" or reword them to suit your character.

Flesh

Descriptors: Strong, Fast Reflexes, Stealthy, Shooting, Fisticuffs, Agile, Athletic, Tough as Nails, Driving, Physically Fit, Nimble, Graceful, Swimming

Flaws: Weak, Sickly, Clumsy, Wheelchair-Bound, Trembly Hands, Wimp

Brains

Descriptors: Wise, Scholarly, Knows About [subject matter], Scientist, Investigator, Perceptive, Inventor, Intellectual, Experienced, Memory

Flaws: Ditzzy, Not Very Astute, Uneducated, Inexperienced, Doesn't Pay Attention

Tongue

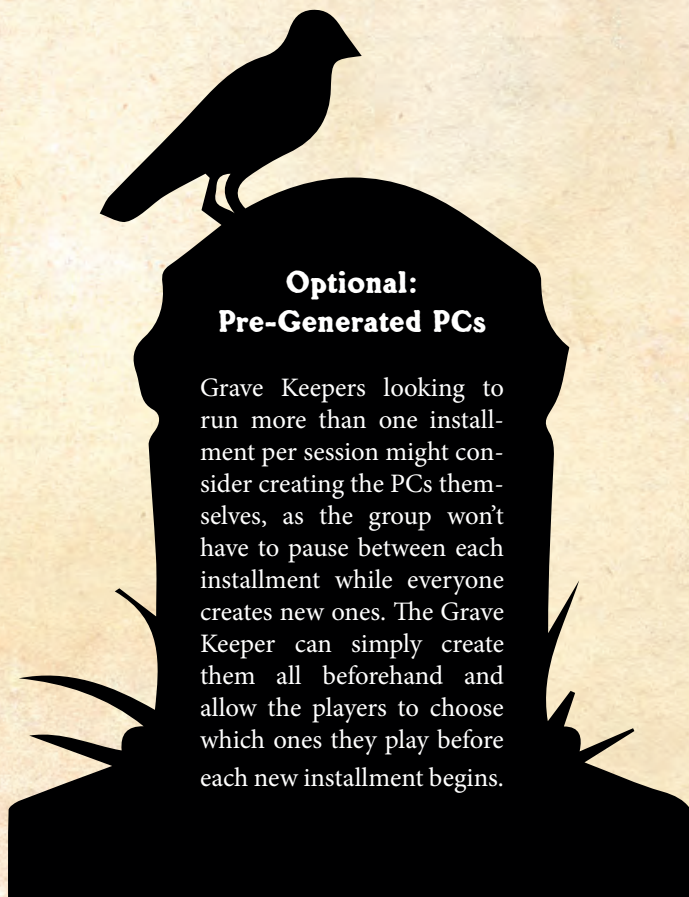
Descriptors: Gift of Gab, Persuasive, Intimidating, Manipulative, Con Artist, Liar, Leadership, Seductive

Flaws: Gets Tongue-Tied, Socially Awkward, Terrible Liar, Shy, Anti-Social

Guts

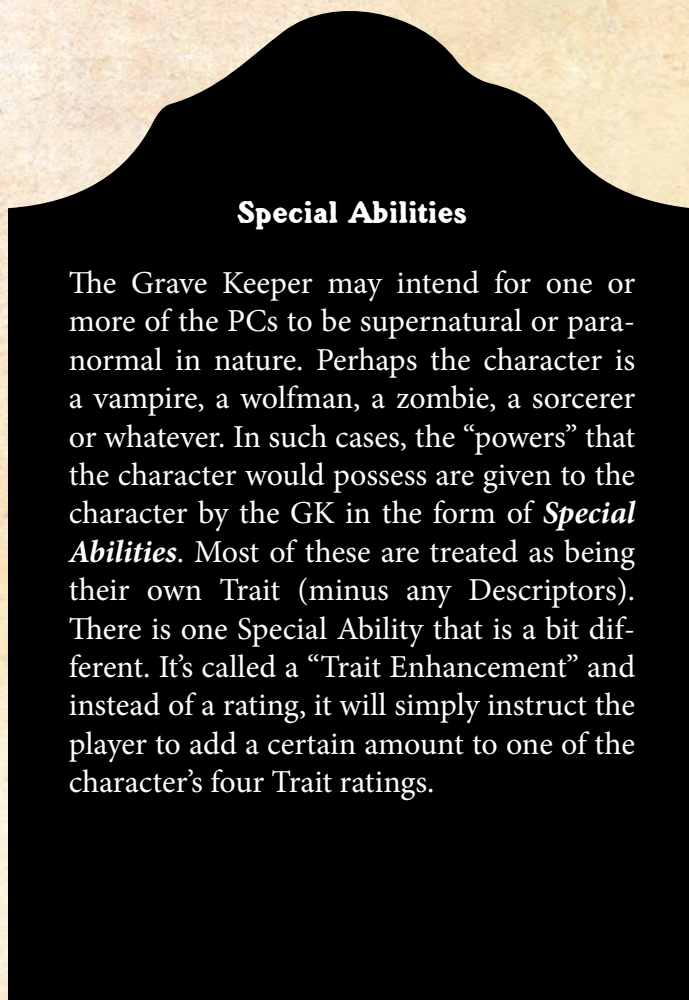
Descriptors: Stubborn, Brave, Nobody's Fool, Cool Under Pressure, Hard to Intimidate, Unflinching

Flaws: Jittery Nerves, Easily Rattled, Sucker, Naive, Coward, Fear of [animal/object/condition/etc.]



Optional: Pre-Generated PCs

Grave Keepers looking to run more than one installment per session might consider creating the PCs themselves, as the group won't have to pause between each installment while everyone creates new ones. The Grave Keeper can simply create them all beforehand and allow the players to choose which ones they play before each new installment begins.



Special Abilities

The Grave Keeper may intend for one or more of the PCs to be supernatural or paranormal in nature. Perhaps the character is a vampire, a wolfman, a zombie, a sorcerer or whatever. In such cases, the "powers" that the character would possess are given to the character by the GK in the form of **Special Abilities**. Most of these are treated as being their own Trait (minus any Descriptors). There is one Special Ability that is a bit different. It's called a "Trait Enhancement" and instead of a rating, it will simply instruct the player to add a certain amount to one of the character's four Trait ratings.

Supporting Characters

Supporting characters are the people that the primary characters encounter in one form or another. They aren't as detailed as primary characters. Some are more detailed than others, however.

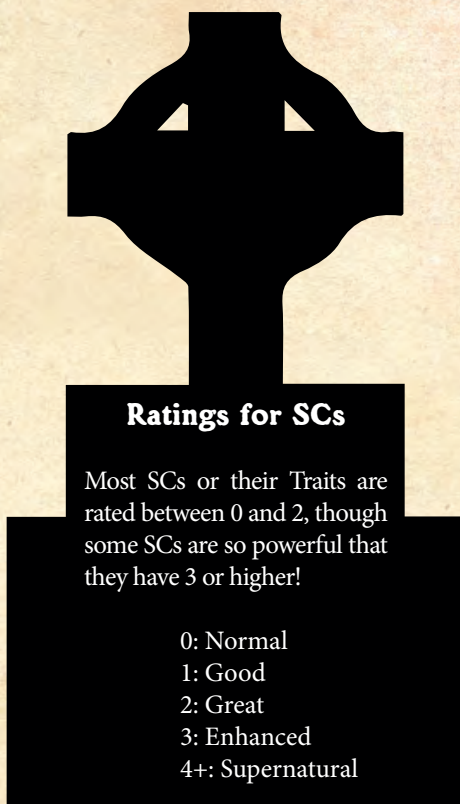
Mundane SCs

The majority of the SCs (known as *Mundane SCs*) are just regular people and can be summed up with one number, called the *SC rating*. This rating determines their overall effectiveness and plays into the Intention rules (see pages 8-12). The higher the number, the better they are.

Principal SCs

Supporting characters that are more important to the story are called *Principal SCs*. They are slightly more detailed and tend to be the main antagonists of the story, though not always. Principal SCs have the same four Traits that PCs have. There are two differences, however. The first difference is that they are graded identically to the SC ratings for Mundane SCs. The second difference is that they do not have Descriptors.

Principal SCs may have Special Abilities just like PCs, but they are rated the same as their own Traits.



Intentions

Now we're really getting to the gristle of the game system: **Intentions!** These rules help you find out if your character succeeds, fails or falls somewhere in between. Mmmmm. Now I've got myself a killer craving for a gristle-and-gruel sandwich... with a few severed ears and plenty of grave mold to top it off, naturally. Bone appetit, kiddies!



Understanding Intentions

When a PC wants to or is forced to do something that might be challenging, an *Intention* may be in order. But we're not always just talking about one action. As often as not, we're dealing with a series of actions meant to collectively accomplish a specific goal. The player tells the Grave Keeper what the PC's overall goal is and the GK will, in turn, determine which one of the four Traits is being put to the test. But before we start getting into the technical aspects, let's look at a quick example.

Grave Keeper: What is your character trying to do?

Player: He is trying to sneak up behind the witch while she is doing her incantation.

Grave Keeper: That's not what I'm asking. What is your character's goal in this scene. Surely, you're hoping to do more than just sneak up behind the old crone.

Player: Oh, I see. He wants to sneak up behind her and dispose of her so that she can't finish her incantation.

Grave Keeper: Much better! That will require an Intention using your character's Flesh rating.

As demonstrated above, the game system isn't worried about making a separate roll for every little step of the process. It focuses more on the end result of the task at hand.

That said, An Intention might be just one focused action (disarming a bomb), though even this Intention might well be affected by what is happening around the character. Most Intentions, however, are likely to be a culmination of several actions, summed up with a single Intention from each character involved (using the same or different Traits to accomplish their various roles in the task).

Rolling the Dice

When making an Intention, you'll roll a certain number of dice, take two of the results and add them together. The higher, the better.

The Trait being used determines the number of core dice you roll and how many you keep.

- A rating of -1 means that you roll 3 dice and add together the lowest two results.
- A rating of 0, means that you roll 2 dice and add both together.
- A rating of +1 means that you roll 3 dice and add together the highest two results.
- A rating of +2 means that you roll 4 dice and add together the highest two results.

And so forth. Certain circumstances can effectively increase or decrease a Trait's rating. Check out the Intention Result Table.

Benefits and Obstacles

The number of dice rolled can be modified by Benefits and Obstacles.

A **Benefit** is a situation that makes it easier for the character to succeed in their Intention. Perhaps your character wants to shove another character off a balcony and the hapless character is already leaning over the balcony. Or maybe your character is trying to seduce someone who already has a bit of a crush on them. Or it could be that your character is attempting to be stealthy and it's very dark. Or your character may wield a weapon while trying to murder someone. Each of these instances would probably warrant a Benefit.

Each Benefit effectively adds 1 to the rating of the Trait being tested for this Intention.

An **Obstacle** is a factor or circumstance that makes it more difficult for a character to succeed in their Inten-

tion. Perhaps your character wants to shove another character off a balcony but the would-be victim already suspects that they may be up to something. Or maybe your character is trying to seduce someone who detests them. Or it could be that your character is attempting to be stealthy in broad daylight. Or someone your character is attempting to murder is armed with a weapon. Each of these instances would probably be considered an Obstacle.

Each Obstacle effectively subtracts 1 from the rating of the Trait being tested for this Intention.

One type of Obstacle is more variable: Supporting Characters! If a PC's action is directly opposed by a SC or if the PC's action is an attempt to prevent a SC's actions, the SC becomes the **opposing SC**. The SC will have a rating that represents the modifier to the amount subtracted from the PC's Trait rating for this Intention.

- For Mundane SCs, subtract the SC rating from the PC's Trait.
- For Principal SCs, the Grave Keeper will determine which one of their Traits would logically be used. That Trait's rating is subtracted from the PC's Trait.

The more characters opposing the Intention, the harder the Intention becomes to succeed in. Use the most effective SC rating or appropriate SC Trait rating as the main Obstacle. Each opposing character beyond that counts as an additional Obstacle of 1 (up to a maximum of 3).

Does the Grave Keeper Roll?

Stories from the Grave is a PC-driven game in that the players do all the rolling. If a SC attempts an action, no Intention is required; the Grave Keeper decides whether they succeed or fail, based on the needs of the story. If their actions can be opposed by a PC, they generally succeed unless the PC can make an appropriate Intention to prevent it.

How Many Dice Do I Roll and What Do I Keep?								
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
6 dice (add together the 2 lowest results)	5 dice (add together the 2 lowest results)	4 dice (add together the 2 lowest results)	3 dice (add together the 2 lowest results)	2 dice (add together the two re- sults)	3 dice (add together the 2 highest results)	4 dice (add together the 2 highest results)	5 dice (add together the 2 highest results)	6 dice (add together the 2 highest results)

This table is open-ended in both directions. Simply keep adding an extra die to the roll and keep the two lowest results or highest results, whichever is appropriate.

Interpreting Intentions

What does your roll mean? Consult the Intention Results Table below to find out once you have your total.

Intention Results Table	
Die Total:	What Happens:
2-6	Failure
7-9	Controlled Failure or Conditional Success
10+	Success

Failure

The character fails to do what they were attempting to accomplish. The Grave Keeper is in full control of what how they fail and what that entails; anything short of death (we'll get to that later). The player has no "say" in the matter. The failure should always put the character in a worse position or situation than they were in before attempting the Intention.

EXAMPLE: Let's say that the character, Max Simmons, had been captured by a cannibal and placed in a windowless room. The player concocts a way to escape by tearing out some floor boards and crawling beneath the house. Unfortunately for poor Max, the player's final result was 5. That a Failure. The Grave Keeper gets to decide exactly how the failure occurred and what the ramifications are. He could say that the madman heard him tearing out the boards, entered the room and knocked him out with a crowbar. Or they could have decreed that Max successfully tore out the boards and slipped under the house, only to find that the house's foundation is concrete with no exits whatsoever; that hole in the floor is going to be hard to hide because some of the boards had actually snapped off. Both of these results are failures, but each one has very different ramifications.

Controlled Failure

The character fails at the task, but the player is allowed to dictate the narrative of the failure; in essence, they keep control of their character but

must describe how or why the character fails. If the failure, as described by the player, is barely a failure at all or is too implausible even for anthology-style horror, the Grave Keeper may require a rewrite (see the *Rewrite* sidebar).

EXAMPLE: Going back to the above example, we'll say that Max's player got a result of 8 and that they selected Controlled Failure. The player could simply state that the floor boards wouldn't budge. Or maybe the attempt to pry up the floorboards prompted the cannibal to peek into the room to see if anything was amiss, forcing the character to pretend to still be unconscious.

Conditional Success

The character succeeds, but there's some kind of complication. The Grave Keeper is in full control of how they succeed and exactly what complication arises.



EXAMPLE: Using the already-established scenario presented above, we'll step back and say that Max's player had a result of 8 and that they selected Conditional Success. The Grave Keeper might determine that Max made it through the floor and exited via a crawl-hole in the house's foundation... but that the cannibal heard the racket and knows that he has escaped. Or they could have allowed him to escape the house and scramble into the backwood house's lawn... just in time to see the cannibal's entire family arrive for supper.

Success

The character succeeds just as envisioned by the player. The player narrates the outcome. If the narration goes too overboard, however, the Grave Keeper may require a rewrite (see the *Rewrite* sidebar).

EXAMPLE: Utilizing the situation above, let's say that Max's player ended up with a total of 11, which is a Success. The player may describe Max prying up the floorboards, crawling underneath the house, finding an exit and beating feet out of the area. What happens next remains to be seen.

Rewrites

When a player is allowed to take over narrative duties to describe the results of an Intention but favors their character in a way that is detrimental to the story (see the *Controlled Failure* and *Success* sections for specifics), the Grave Keeper may require the player to make a **rewrite**. When this happens, the player has to start the narrative over again, fixing whatever it was that was out of line. Furthermore, one Grave Token is removed from the pool and is collected by the player's character.

PC-vs-PC Intentions

Should two PCs go up against one another, things must be handled a bit differently. Both players make their Intentions as normal, but once the roll's total is determined for them, compare their totals via the PC-vs-PC Intention Results Table to determine what happens.

If Character A succeeds or partially succeeds, Character A's player narrates the results. If Character B succeeds or partially succeeds, Character B's player narrates the results. The Grave Keeper narrates all other results.

Success here doesn't indicate that one player has definitively won the entire conflict, but it means this particular mini-conflict is resolved. Another one may come again, either immediately or soon.

For example: Jack succeeds in his Flesh Intention against Jeff. Jack's player describes Jack pushing the Jeff off a cliff. The scene ends. In the next scene, we might see Jeff pulling himself back up the cliffside, preparing to engage his foe yet again.

The determination of what success means is up the Grave Keeper. Perhaps a character suffers a significant penalty to a Trait or to all dice rolls. Perhaps the scene ends, or perhaps the conflict is resolved. If you want the failing character to have a chance to continue, make them work for it. End the scene. Maybe they have to find a way to use Brains to defeat the opponent or at least to try and re-engage the opponent.

PC vs. PC Intention Results Table

		Character A:		
		2-6	7-9	10+
Character B:	2-6	Both fail, the Showrunner decides what happens; either they are both out, or they may continue.	Character A partially succeeds, character B suffers a -1 penalty.	Character A succeeds.
	7-9	Character B partially succeeds, character A suffers a -1 penalty.	Draw! characters may continue, both suffering a -1 penalty.	Character A succeeds.
	10+	Character B succeeds.	Character B succeeds.	Draw! Characters may continue.



Once the final result is calculated, consult the Grave Failure Table, below.

Grave Failure Table	
Die Total:	What Happens:
Up to 4	Game Ending
5 or more	Non-Game Ending

Game Ending

A **Game Ending result** ends the game for the character. That usually means death or madness.

Non-Game Ending

A **Non-Game Ending result** could mean almost anything the Grave Keeper desires—the character is captured, is knocked unconscious, enables the strange humanoid to escape, etc. As long as the ramifications are bad, the possibilities are almost endless.

Do-Overs

Unless stated otherwise by the Grave Keeper, characters cannot try the exact same Intention again immediately after failing at it. Think about it in context of comicbooks, TV shows and movies. How entertaining would it be to watch a character attempt the same task over and over? It wouldn't be entertaining at all. It would be dull.

In the case of failure, the character will have to try something else. They can't keep going back to the well time after time.

Grave Intentions

Some Intentions are so dire that the character making it faces the very real threat of death or utter madness—the vampire has the character cornered with nowhere for them to run, the character hangs off a cliff by one hand, the character reads a blasphemous tome written by unknown aliens. These Intentions are called **Grave Intentions**. The Grave Keeper decides what constitutes being labeled a Grave Intention and announces it to the players.

Grave Intentions cannot occur during Act 1.

If a character gets a Failure result for the Intention, the player must roll two dice, adding them together. The roll is modified by the following factors:

- -1 for every two full Grave Tokens the character has currently collected.
- -2 if the installment is currently in Act 3.

Single-PC Installments

If the installment has only one PC in it or if only one of several PCs remain alive and sane, do not roll on the Grave Failure Table during Act Two. It automatically counts as Non-Game Ending.



Confrontations



What kind of horror game would this be if nobody can be attacked, mutilated, maimed or otherwise disposed of by other characters in a suitably grotesque fashion? Not much of one, if you ask me! Even Romeo and Ghouliet had its fair share of violence.

Don't get me wrong: killing with kindness is okay and all... but an axe gets the job done faster and messier. And I never feel bad when someone gets chopped up into itty-bitty pieces. I guess I'm not much of a mourning person.

Understanding Confrontations

A *confrontation* is defined as any scene that involves characters trying to harm one another. Confrontations are carried out with Intentions, though a few points need to be discussed.

Characters needn't roll for every punch, bite, slash or chop made. As with any Intention, we're looking at the bigger picture here. If the goal is to kill that zombie, then we aren't interested in every step it took to get the job done. The end result needs to be determined... the details are simply in the narration.

When there is a question of which "side" acts first, it's the PCs, unless the Grave Keeper feels that there's a reason for it to be otherwise, such as an ambush. The side acting first simply gets to declare what they want to do first.

If lives are in danger, the Intentions made will usually be Grave Intentions. It's ultimately up to the Grave Keeper. Unlike with most Grave Intentions, though, the Grave Keeper must declare which lives are in danger, using logic as their guide. For example, if the PC takes after a SC with a knife, but the Grave Keeper states that the SC is going to flee, the GK might state that only the SC is in danger of being harmed.

If the PC succeeds in the Grave Intention and the enemy's life is in danger, the GK rolls on the Grave Failure Table (see page 12) to see the SC's fate. If the opposing



character is a PC, the player controlling that PC makes the roll instead. If the PC making the Grave Intention fails and their life was in danger, the player rolls on the Grave Intention Table for their own character.

If the PC fails in the Grave Intention and their own life is at stake, the PC's player rolls on the Grave Failure Table.

So what happens if more than one "side" being acted against has more than one character and is forced to roll on the Grave Failure Table? That's up to the Grave Keeper. The GK can opt to roll for all the members of that side (either separately or all at once) or make only one of them roll. It should depend on the circumstances. After all, if the PC is using a flamethrower on a group of critters, it will likely affect more than one of them.

Optional: Easy-to-Kill Mundane SCs

The Grave Keeper may enact this optional rule, which will make Mundane SCs easier to kill. Whenever they would be forced to roll on the Grave Failure Table, assume that they always receive a "Game Ending" result.



The Three-Act Structure



**Time is such a precious comm-
ODD-ity, isn't it? One min-
ute, you're fine and then the
next minute, you're dead!
Well, my dreadful hor-
rorphiles, time is also im-
portant in Stories from the
Grave. The comicbook writers
didn't have many pages in which to
tell their tales and the movie-SLASH-television
writers had only a short amount of scream—I
mean "screen"—time. Since this game emulates
those sources, you and your group will have re-
strictions on your time as well. That means not
much time to kill.**

Every installment follows the three-act structure that's so common in fiction. It is up to the Grave Keeper to announce when each Act ends and another begins.

- Act One is the story's setup. It's where we meet the PCs and establish who they are, what they do and what their situation is. It's also where the inciting incident (an event that sets the rest of the story in motion) occurs.
- Act Two is where the PCs try to deal with the ramifications of the inciting incident and make things right... or at least survive the ordeal. This Act makes up the bulk of the tale.
- Act Three is the climax of the tale, where the main tensions of the story are brought to their most intense point and resolved, either leaving the PCs alive and well, dead and buried, or insane and committed.

These Acts are very important to the game, as things become more and more dangerous and challenging with each successive act. Here's a quick run-down of how Acts affect the game.

- Some Story Frames (see page 21) have special rules that only apply to certain Acts.
- Collected Grave Tokens (see *Grave Tokens*, below) can potentially be purged after each Act.
- When PCs fail Grave Intentions during Act Three, they have a higher chance of getting a Game Ending result (see page 12).
- It's a good way for the Grave Keeper to organize the events in the game and maintain a proper flow.



Grave Tokens

You can't expect to get something for nothing, especially in a game like this! Case in point: Grave Tokens. In the short term, they can help a Primary Character overcome some ghoulish bumps in the road... but in the long term, these little helping hands just might be the death of them!



At the beginning of each installment, the Grave Keeper must place a number of counters (beads, coins, poker chips, etc.) on the table, within easy reach of all the players. These are called *Grave Tokens* and the collection of them is called the *Grave Token pool* (or just "the pool"). The number of Grave Tokens in the pool is equal to the number of players, plus 2. More can be earned later.

If you're playing more than one installment during a session, only the first installment of the session will have a pool determined as above. The starting Grave Token pool of each subsequent installment will be equal to the number of Skulls the previous installment garnered (see pages 17-18 for more about Skulls). If the same group (or nearly the same group) is gathered for the next session, the first installment of that session will have a pool equal to the number of Skulls the final installment from the previous session garnered.

Spending Grave Tokens

The Grave Token pool is communal in nature. That is, any player can dip into it throughout the game in order to help their characters out. There are two ways that they can be spent: Scene Editing and Boosting.

Scene Editing

A player may spend a Grave Token to add a detail to a scene. For example, if the PCs find themselves trapped in a dark basement without any means of illumination, a player may ask if they can spend a Grave Token for their character to suddenly remember that they actually had a flashlight on their person. The Grave Keeper may veto scene editing that is too outlandish or that would severely damage the integrity of the installment.

Boosting

Each Grave Token spent adds 1 to the final result of the Intention. Grave Tokens must be spent before rolling the dice, however. So, for example, let's say the player rolls three dice, taking the two highest. They roll 2, 4 and 4. The player takes the 4 and 4 and adds them together to get an 8. But before they rolled, they spent two Grave Tokens, making the total result 10 instead of 8.

Once spent, the player places the Grave Counter near their character sheet. The PC has **collected** it. Collected Grave Counters can have a detrimental effect on the character (see page 16).

Players can increase the effectiveness of spending a Grave Counter for boosting by **exploiting** a word, phrase or sentence of the PC's Background or Casting, or even one of their Descriptors. To exploit one of these elements, the player has to explain how it would help with the task at hand. The Grave Keeper has the right to veto any explanation that is too much of a stretch.

- If the exploited element is a segment of the character's Background or Casting, the Grave Token adds 2 to the final result of the Intention instead of 1.
- If the exploited element is a Descriptor, the Grave Token adds 3 to the final result of the Intention instead of 1.

A single exploited element can only affect one Grave Token. In other words, if you spend two Grave Tokens and exploit a segment of the character's Background, one Grave Token will provide a bonus of 2, but the other one would only provide the normal bonus of 1.

Optional: After-Boosting

With this optional rule, players may boost after the roll for an Intention has been made. Every two Grave Tokens grant a +1 boost to the final result. Players cannot exploit when after-boosting.

Adding Grave Tokens to the Pool

Over the course of an installment, the Grave Token pool will shrink and surge. We've already discussed how to make it shrink, but not how to make it surge. The following methods will allow you to add Grave Tokens to the pool.

- The Grave Keeper can trigger one of a character's Flaws (see page 17), adding one Grave Token to the pool.
- Once per Act, each player can trigger one of their character's Flaws voluntarily, adding one Grave Token to the pool.
- If a player has their character do something particularly clever, true to the genre or that drives the story forward in an entertaining way, the Grave Keeper can add one Grave Token to the pool.

Purging Grave Tokens

At the end of each Act, each player may try to **purge** their character's Grave Tokens. Purging requires a player to roll a die for each Grave Token their character has collected. Every die that rolls a 5 or 6 purges one Grave Token; purged Grave Tokens are removed from the game. Do not place them back into the pool upon being purged.

Collected Grave Tokens

As we mentioned earlier, collecting Grave Tokens can make a PC's life a living hell. The Grave Keeper can remove collected Grave Tokens to do one of the following effects:

- **Penalty:** Before the player rolls for the Intention, the Grave Keeper may remove up to three Grave Tokens collected by their PC to give a -1 penalty to the Trait for each Grave Token removed. This penalty is for that Intention only.
- **Reroll:** Remove three Grave Tokens to force the player whose character had collected the removed Token to reroll one of the dice rolled for an Intention. The new result must be accepted. The Grave Keeper may remove more than one Grave Token to force the player to reroll additional dice; the amount removed for this effect must be declared at the same time. The new results must be accepted.

Triggering Flaws



Nobody's perfect... well, except yours ghouly. Many characters have Flaws that represent the various ills, woes and other detriments that plague them. Don't worry! Your old pal, the Grave Hag, won't hold your Flaws against you.

Immediately before a PC makes an Intention, one of a PC's Flaws can be *triggered* by the Grave Keeper or the player of the PC who has the Flaw. There are some restrictions:

- A PC may not trigger more than one Flaw per Act.
- The triggered Flaw must be one that would logically cause complications for the task at hand.
- The triggered Flaw must be attached to the Trait being used for the Intention.

When the Flaw is triggered, two things happen:

- A Grave Token is placed into the pool.
- Subtract 2 from the final result of the Intention.

Skulls



Nobody likes critics. In fact, most creative types have a big bone to pick with them... maybe even a femur. Like them or not, critics play a large role in Stories from the Grave, as the players must try to impress them at every turn. For most players, this is all new terror-tory.

The overall goal of the game isn't for players to have their characters survive... it's to collectively tell an entertaining and chilling story. An installment's quality is measured by Skulls, just like many critics use "stars" to rate the quality of comics, shows and films. An installment may have as few as 0 Skulls and no more than 5 Skulls. When an installment begins, it has no Skulls; you have to earn the fans' approval.

Each installment will have a list of things that will add or subtract Skulls should they occur; players are not



privity to this list. If something happens during the installment that the Grave Keeper feels makes for a better or worse story, they may add or subtract a Skull, even if it's not on the list.

The Grave Keeper secretly keeps track of Skulls during play, check-marking the boxes provided on the Installment Sheet. The players should not be told when Skulls are gained or lost; only at the end of the installment will they learn what the final number of Skulls is.

As mentioned in the "Grave Tokens" section on pages 15-16, Skulls will impact how many Grave Tokens the pool will have at the beginning of each installment (except the first installment). Plus, it's simply an overall measure of "how well" the players did.

The Gratuitous Content Skull

One constant way to earn a Skull is to include gratuitous content to the installment. This can be done by the Grave Keeper or by the players when they have control of the narration. It doesn't matter as long as there is excessive gore, sexuality, bondage or whatever other sordid material you can think up!



Player Tips

Sooooo, you think you're special just because your character is the star of the show, do you? Guess what, cretin? You're not special at all. In fact, there's a good chance your character will end up being little more than a juicy, succulent feast for vultures and rats! But don't you worry your little severed head about it! Read on and you'll learn things that might help your character survive. But then again, probably not.



Tip #1: It's Okay to Die

Yes, this goes against everything that roleplaying games have taught us over the years. Yes, it's some kind of primal instinct for us to keep our characters alive throughout the whole "adventure". Yes, it feels like "losing" when our characters kick the bucket.

Now, take all those notions and throw them in the trash can. Better still, take them outside, start up a bonfire and burn them to ashes... because they simply don't belong in *Stories from the Grave*. Have you ever heard the silly old adage, "The play's the thing"? Well, as corny as the saying is, it rings absolutely true in this game. The goal is to cooperatively tell a spine-tingling tale and if your character croaks in service to that story, so much the better. Some stories are flat-out better if the main characters buy the farm.

In order to get the most out of this game, try to detach yourself from all those notions that have been ingrained into you since you started playing RPGs. Dying isn't losing if it enriches the story. Besides, installments aren't long. You'll be on to the next tale soon enough anyway.

Tip #2: Prepare to Play All Types of PCs

Anthology-style horror isn't often about heroic people doing heroic things. They're usually just average, hapless folks who get swept up into bad situations or, just as often, crummy people who act unscrupulously. As a player, you can pretty much expect to play these two types of people far more than daring do-gooders. It's simply the nature of the genre.

This shift offers roleplayers a unique challenge though; an opportunity to step into the shoes of very different sorts of characters than they're accustomed to. It also allows players to experience an entirely style of game play!

Embrace your character and all of their faults, quirks and outlooks, whether they're murderous criminals, poor schmucks who find themselves over their heads or even the rare goodie-good. This diversity will keep the game from being stagnant and will give your role-playing skills quite a workout.

Tip #3: Familiarize Yourself with the Genre

It's not even remotely difficult to get your hands on anthology-style horror. A trip to the video store or a streaming video service like Netflix or Hulu will reap plenty of films and TV shows. You can purchase old horror comics, collected in convenient trade paperback format, for very reasonable prices. Many of the horror comics of the 1940s and '50s have fallen into the public domain and can be read legally online for free. The material is out there and it's easy to acquire.

Familiarizing yourself with the source material will give you a more intimate understanding of the tropes and conventions that make anthology-style horror so unique. Additionally, the pacing of these short tales is drastically different than the pacing in games that encourage longer stories. Delving into the source material will help you grasp this pacing.

If you want to become a better player in the game, this is how to do it. There is a treasure trove of resources right in front of you.

Tip #4: Spice Up Your Narration

The game system places a lot of narrative control in the players' hands... so make sure those hands are capable. No one is asking you to become a master orator or anything, but when it's your turn to narrate your character's actions, do it with a bit of gusto! Speak with enthusiasm and drama and avoid sounding monotone. Put a little bit of detail into your narration as well, but only when it adds to the mood. Mentioning the bright yellow moon looming overhead is never a waste of words.

Tip #5: Failure Can Be Better Than Success

When you have a choice between Controlled Failure and Conditional Success, you shouldn't automatically choose Conditional Success simply because the word "success" is included. Remember, "conditional" is also included! Those conditions are often extremely difficult to deal with. Alternatively, if you choose Controlled Failure, you still have narrative control of the character, which allows you to dictate the terms of the failure instead of the Grave Keeper being able to throw a monkey wrench into things.

Instead of instinctively choosing Conditional Success, stop for a moment and ask yourself if you have a cool idea for how you could narrate the failure. If a cool idea comes to you, you should strongly consider choosing Controlled Failure. If not, then Conditional Success might be the way to go, as the Grave Keeper may have a fun idea for narrating the success. Put the story first.





Grave Keeper's Vault



Welcome to my lair. I think you'll find it cozy... in a creepy sort of way. Don't mind the dust. Just don't disturb it. I would hate for you to have a coffin fit! Reh-heh-heh-heh! Sometimes, I really kill me!

What a great sense of tumor I have! Anyway, since you're here, we might as well crack open the tome of knowledge and teach you all the ins and outs of being a good Grave Keeper. What can I say? I like big books and I cannot lie! Reh-heh-heh-heh!

Installments

An installment is what many roleplaying games refer to as an "adventure". For our published installments, we use a very specific format, as we've found it to be the most convenient way of presenting the necessary information. You'll find a blank installment sheet in the back of this book for you to use when creating your own installments.

Title

Every tale needs a name. Try not to divulge too much to the players with the name, as it can spoil the surprise of what's in store for them. "The Werewolf of Soggy River" may sound evocative, but the players are going to know right off the bat what they're walking into before the game even begins. If you're okay with that, go for it. Otherwise, such titles should be avoided.

Story Frame

It's best to think of a **Story Frame** as the foundation and skeleton upon which your installment is constructed. It provides structure so that you can craft your tale without worrying about whether or not it follows the source material in spirit. You'll find a selection of the most common Story Frames on pages 24-27.

Each Story Frame offers a general description of what it entails as well as a breakdown of each Act to help you organize the events of your installment. You'll also be presented with common ways for the installment of this type to earn and lose Skulls; when making your own installments, feel free to modify these, ditch them or add new ones to customize the list for your story. Lastly, most Story Frames have at least one special rule that applies to the installment.

Remember that Story Frames are guidelines; tools for you to use. Don't hesitate to change them to suit your needs or even create all-new ones!

Quick Summary

This short synopsis lets you know what the installment is about in a very general sense. In most cases, it should be kept to 100 words or less.

Primary Character Backgrounds

This section presents the Background for each of the PCs. You should write them down on the players' character sheets or let them do it themselves.

Supporting Characters

Quick write-ups for each of the SCs, along with their game stats, can be found here.

Intro From the Grave Hag

This should be read aloud to the players right before the game begins. You'd better start cultivating your "crusty old lady" voice!

General Notes

This section is for notes that don't apply to any specific Act. You can write special rules that pertain only to this installment or anything else you feel should be noted.

Acts

Each Act has its own space devoted to what happens during it.

Skull Modifiers

This section is devoted to providing a list of events that will alter the installment's final number of Skulls earned. You should look at the Story Frame's suggested list before determining exactly what will net the installment Skulls.

Skull Collection

This section allows you to keep track of an installment's Skulls after the game is over, in case you want to keep record.

Grave Keeper Tips

What follows is a collection of tidbits that will help you become a terror-ific Grave Keeper.

Tip #1: Keep It Moving

Those who have run roleplaying games in the past are typically accustomed to "adventures" that span the entirety of a session or even ones that stretch out into multiple sessions. *Stories from the Grave* is a different beast altogether, as the intention is to play at least two or three installments during a single session. This will be quite a change for veterans of other RPGs, as the stories have to maintain a deft pace.

If the players slow the pace down to a crawl, speed them up by threatening to start taking Grave Tokens from the pool or, even worse, to force each character to collect a Grave Token. That should get them to move along.

For your part, give enough details in your narration to get the point across and set a mood, but if you go overboard, the game's pace will slow to a crawl. When it comes to dialogue, keep it short and sweet. The stories told in the source material had a good amount of character interaction, but every word had a purpose and got to the point so that the tale could carry on. You should endeavor to do the same.

Tip #2: Don't Be a Slave to the Installment

Stories from the Grave is a game that gives the players a great deal of narrative control, which means they can send the story veering off into completely unexpected directions. That's half the fun of the game! If you railroad them back on course, you're basically saying that their narration doesn't matter. Don't do that. You can gently try to steer them back to the areas covered

by the written installment, but don't ramrod them. Instead, come up with a way to make their "new direction" fit into the story and run with it.

Our published installments are written with a specific course of action in mind, though we try to cover some of the more common swerves that players may throw into the mix. Still, it's best to think of our installments—and indeed installments of your own creation—as being a set of guidelines rather than a set-in-stone blueprint that must be adhered to at all costs.

Tip #3: Carefully Deal with Large Groups

This game is geared toward having one to three players, due to the types of stories told in anthology-style horror. Does this mean that you can't handle more players than that? Of course not. It just means that you have to tread very carefully in order to maintain the feel of the source material.

One strategy is to develop a brand new Story Frame that will accommodate extra players (or just use "One Of Us"). You could also modify an existing Story Frame with a little work. Another strategy is to divide the players up into separate groups, with each group participating in its own installment. Since installments don't generally take too long, the wait will be tolerable. Besides, it can be a lot of fun to watch other installments unfold.

Tip #4: Use the Grave Hag

Not every comicbook, TV show and movie had a host or hostess that spewed out prologues and epilogues after each story, but many of them did. Using the Grave Hag (or even creating your own host or hostess) can add to the authenticity of the game all the while embracing the genre.

Our published installments use the Grave Hag, but there's no reason you can't swap her out with a host or hostess that you invent.

Tip #5: Reward the PCs

One of the biggest thrills of acting as the Grave Keeper revolves around those moments in which the PCs do something that truly enhances the story. There's no way for us to quantify or classify these moments. You'll know one when it happens and it's a beautiful experience. It can be fantastic roleplaying or it can be



using the narration to drive the story into uncharted (but awesome) territory. Whatever form it takes, the PCs should be rewarded.

The most obvious reward is to add a Grave Token to the pool. Sometimes, though, you may want to do something extra special for a player when they create such a moment. You could give them an automatic Trait bonus to the next Intention or grant a free re-roll of one die during an Intention. Go off the beaten path and do something cool for them. They will more than likely strive to earn such rewards again, to the benefit of the story.

Tip #6: Aim For the Perfect Ending

The stories told in anthology-style horror almost always had fantastic endings; endings that sent shivers down the spine and left the readers slack-jawed. Obviously, this is a much easier task when writing fiction. After all, the author controls every facet of the story, making it a simple matter to line everything up perfectly to set up for the ending. This is a luxury Grave

Keepers do not have. Since the players can snatch the narrative reins away, thus being able to make fairly major changes to the story's direction, you can't always plan exactly how things are going to wrapped up.

But that's okay. In fact, it's better than okay. It's exciting!

The installment itself will suggest one or more ways to end it and even if things go completely off the rails, these endings can often be modified to work with whichever way the tale is headed. Should that fail, fly solo and come up with something entirely new; look for opportunities to arise that will make for a tantalizing and terrifying conclusion. Thinking on your feet will become second nature to you sooner than one might think.

The trick is to pay close attention to all the little details that can be tied to the end. If, for example, the PC lets a character burn to death earlier in the installment, you

can use that in Act Three as a possible way for a karmic ending (the PC's most cherished possession burns up in a fire, the PC burns to death, the PC finds out that they burned the wrong person and in truth it was a loved one, etc.). Keep a mental catalogue of things that happen along the way, because when things go askew, you'll still want a great finish to the tale.

Tip #7: Immerse Yourself in the Source Material

We've tried to steer you in the right direction, but there's no substitute for watching or reading the TV shows, films and comicbooks. While immersing yourself, try to think of the stories in terms of the game. What Story Frame does the episode/issue adhere to? What stats would the SCs have? Where does one Act end and another begin? What would likely happen if the main character took a different course of action? By analyzing the source material, you'll become more attuned to the genre, making you a better Grave Keeper.



List of Story Frames

“Careful What You Wish For”

This Story Frame works best for one PC. The PC wants something and will go to any lengths to get it.

The Acts

- *Act 1:* During this Act, it is established what the PC wants and why they want it. The inciting incident is something that prompts the PC to pursue whatever it is they want.
- *Act 2:* In Act 2, the PC tries to acquire the “object” of their desires. If they receive it, it should be at the end of the Act. If they don’t receive it, move on to Act 3 with a final, desperate effort to acquire it.
- *Act 3:* If the PC receives whatever it is they were after, they learn that there’s some kind of downside to it; something happens that makes them wish they had never sought it out. If they didn’t receive it in Act 2, they try to acquire it in Act 3 and will either fail, with the installment ending, or will find out the downside at the end of the Act as a “shock ending”.

Suggested Skull Modifiers

- +1 if the PC puts a lot of effort into obtaining what they desire.
- +1 if the PC suffers a Game Ending result. (if more than one player is playing, change this to “+½ for each PC that suffers a Game Ending result”).
- +1 if the player triggers one of their PC’s Flaws voluntarily during the game (if more than one player is playing, change this to “+1 if at least one player triggers one of their PC’s Flaws voluntarily during the game”).

Special Rules

Increasing Difficulty: During Act 2, the PC suffers a -1 penalty to their Guts-based Intentions that involve whatever it is they desire. During Act 3, that penalty becomes -2 instead.

“Consequences”

The PCs do something unscrupulous, but they may very well regret it by the time it’s all over... if they survive. Karma is a harsh mistress.

The Acts

- *Act 1:* This is the Act in which the dirty deed(s) is established.
- *Act 2:* During this Act, we see the consequences of the PCs’ actions arise and cause major problems for them. The bulk of the Act will involve the PCs trying to find a way to negate the ramifications somehow. Things often get ridiculously chaotic.
- *Act 3:* Possible solutions are found, but will they work or will Karma get them in the end?

Suggested Skull Modifiers

- +½ for each PC that suffers a Game Ending result.
- +½ for each PC whose Game Ending result is somehow Karmic or poetic (in addition to the +½ for a regular Game Ending result).
- +1 if one or more of the PCs act truly reprehensible in Act 1.
- -1 if none of the PCs suffer a Game Ending result.

Special Rules

Dire Climax: When making Grave Intentions during Act 3, players must re-roll the highest-rolling die, keeping the new result.



“Hapless”

The PCs are normal, everyday people who find themselves in a terrifying situation. Can they find their way out or will their fate be an unpleasant one?

The Acts

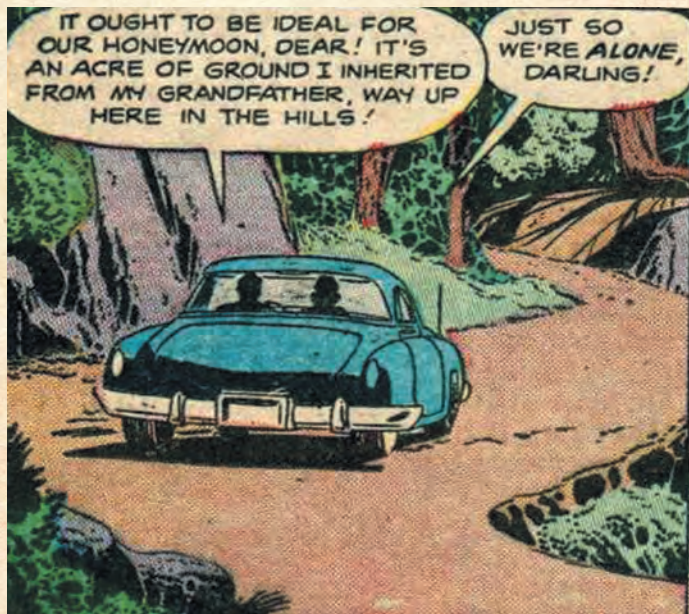
- *Act 1:* This is the Act in which we meet the PCs and establish their personalities and what they were doing before being pulled into the horrific situation. The inciting incident is the event that kickstarts their descent into terror.
- *Act 2:* In this Act, the PCs must deal with their tragic turn of events and try to escape, change their situation or simply survive.
- *Act 3:* During this Act, the PCs find out the catalyst of their situation and attempt to rectify it or simply escape back to their normal lives.

Suggested Skull Modifiers

- +½ for each PC that doesn't suffer a game Ending result (unless the PCs show themselves not to be good people, in which case ignore this altogether)
- +1 if one or more PCs act against the cause of the problem rather than simply try to escape.
- +1 if one or more of the PCs act heroically at some point during the installment.
- -1 if none of the PCs survive (unless the PCs show themselves not to be good people, in which case this becomes +1)

Special Rules

Good Karma: Any PC that proves themselves to be a good person throughout Acts 1 and 2 may, at the end of Act 2, purge their collected Grave Tokens on rolls or 4+ instead of 5+.



“Mystery”

There's a mystery afoot and it's up to the PCs to solve it.

The Acts

- *Act 1:* The nature of the mystery is revealed and the PCs are drawn into it. The inciting event typically happens shortly after the mystery becomes known to the PCs and it can be virtually anything.
- *Act 2:* In this Act, the PCs search for clues while dealing with any adverse events that stem from their investigation.
- *Act 3:* During this Act, the PCs get to the source of the mystery and, hopefully, solve it... or perish trying.

Suggested Skull Modifiers

- +½ for each clue the PCs find and decipher.
- +1 if one or more of the PCs act heroically at some point during the installment.
- -1 if none of the PCs survive (unless the PCs show themselves not to be good people, in which case this becomes +1).
- -1 if none of the mystery goes unsolved *and* doesn't have a twist ending.

Special Rules

Deeper and Deadlier: Whenever the PCs find and figure out a clue, every PC collects a Grave Token (not from the pool).



“One of Us”

Someone is threatening the PCs. The someone *is* one of the Primary Characters. This Story Frame works best with 4 or more players.

The Acts

- *Act 1:* The PCs have a common enemy. The enemy is threatening all of them. During this first Act, the potential damage must be illustrated, likely by killing at least one SC significant to the PCs. At the end of Act 1, the Grave Keeper will announce that one of the PCs is indeed the enemy. The inciting incident makes clear that the enemy is in their midst. The Grave Keeper will not announce the inciting incident. (Inciting Incident Examples: the character who doesn't succeed in beating up the nerd; the character who first opens the door to the spooky mansion; the character who first says something witty and salacious after the first body is found.) The inciting incident should not be a total giveaway who the enemy is.

- *Act 2:* Now that the players and the PCs know that the enemy is in their midst, they have to try and find the enemy and survive. If the killer is known, they can attempt to kill any other PC. Once the killer is known, the Act will have as many Intentions remaining as there are PCs (if there are 4 living PCs when the identity of the Killer is known, there will be only 4 Intentions for the rest of the Act).

- *Act 3:* Any character can be killed by the Killer. This Act will have 10 Intentions, and then it is over. If the killer did not kill everyone, the Grave Keeper will narrate how the remaining PCs were rescued.

Suggested Skull Modifiers

- +½ for each clue the PCs find and decipher.
- +1 for every PC killed by another non-killer PC.
- +½ for every Killer Dice played by a non-killer.
- +1 if the last surviving character is not the killer.
- +1 if the Story ends and the Killer is not killed and there is a surviving non-Killer PC.

Special Rules

Time Management: For Acts 2 and 3, the Grave Keeper must keep track of the number of Intentions made collectively by the players. This determines when these two Acts end.

Who is the Killer? Before the scenario begins, the Grave Keeper must decide who the enemy is, or rather, what will determine who the enemy is. Within the structure of Act 1, there must be some trigger to determine who is the enemy. The Grave Keeper must write this trigger down and seal it in an envelope. At the conclusion of Act 1, after the Grave Keeper announces that the enemy is one of the PCs, the Grave Keeper will write down the name of the killer on the envelope and place this envelope inside another envelope and leave it in plain sight. Must we clarify that the players should not see what is written on the envelope or in the envelope? In addition to the inciting incident, the Grave Keeper should write down a brief reason why this character is the enemy. This backstory might be tragic or sinister.

Killer Dice: The killer does not even know who they are... yet. The GM reveals a large bowl of d6s. These are Killer Dice. These are for the killer (enemy) and the killer only. Any player may attempt to use one, but only if trying to determine who the killer is, either by gathering of clues, or blatant violence. After a player uses one, the Grave Keeper will narrate the resolution of their Intention, and reveal whether or not that PC is the killer. If they are the killer, the Grave Keeper will open the envelope, show the name, and hand the second, unopened envelope to the killer. If the player is not the killer, they may not withdraw from the Killer Dice pool again. Once the Killer has been discovered, only the killer may draw dice. If a player draws from the pool and is not the killer, now that character can die! This death can be at the hands of the killer or a different PC.

Killer Dice act as a bonus die for a player to roll, negating a low rolling die. A player will still only keep the results of two dice, but this gives them a better chance of getting a higher number.

The Killer is Me: If the killer is killed, the PC who killed the killer becomes the killer, and can utilize the Killer Dice.

“Revenge”

This Story Frame works best for one PC. The PC or someone the PC cares about has been wronged and it's about time for some payback. But will the revenge be as sweet as they had hoped... or will it be sour instead.

The Acts

- *Act 1:* The main goal of this Act is to highlight why the PC wants revenge. The “jerk” should be portrayed as reprehensible. The inciting incident should be the final straw; the one thing that causes the PC to go on their quest for vengeance.
- *Act 2:* This Act is all about setting up the revenge and potentially continuing to demonstrate the jerk's awfulness. The PC should have to overcome various complications in their quest.
- *Act 3:* During this Act, the PC has their chance to get revenge. It may play out how the PC envisioned or it may go awry. If the revenge involves death, the PC may end up on the wrong side of Karma and get comeuppance of their own.

Suggested Skull Modifiers

- +1 if the jerk receives comeuppance.
- +1 if the method of revenge is creative.
- +1 if the PC chooses a “Controlled Failure” result at some point.
- -1 if the PC doesn't get a Failure result during Act 3 (everyone loves a struggle!)

Special Rules

None.



“The Item”

An object comes into the PCs' lives. At first all seems well, but things turn sinister.

The Acts

- *Act 1:* During this Act, the item is introduced. The inciting incident is usually when the first sign that something is wrong occurs.
- *Act 2:* In Act 2, the strange events escalate, causing the PCs to do something about it (researching the object, getting rid of it, destroying it, etc.). Nothing works.
- *Act 3:* In this Act, there's a breakthrough of some kind, allowing for the possibility that the problem can be solved. Whether it works remains to be seen.

Suggested Skull Modifiers

- +½ for each PC that doesn't suffer a game Ending result (unless the PCs show themselves not to be good people, in which case ignore this altogether).
- +1 if the PCs come up with a creative and entertaining way to solve the problem.
- -1 if none of the PCs survive (unless the PCs show themselves not to be good people, in which case this becomes +1).

Special Rules

Hard to Get Rid Of: Each time the PCs attempt to destroy or get rid of the item during Act 2, every involved PC collects a Grave Token (not from the pool).



Sample Installment

This is a ready-to-run installment adapted from a story found in the first issue of a comicbook called *Weird Terror* (September 1952), which is in the public domain.

Title: “The Wage-Earners”

Story Frame: Careful What You Wish For

Quick Summary: Henry Mason becomes supernaturally seduced by a strange but beautiful woman he meets in a swampy, fog-shrouded graveyard. She telepathically urges him to kill his fiancée so he can be with her. What he doesn’t know, however, is that this mystery woman is a vampiric swamp-creature who lures men to a grimy shack so she and her father can transform them into monstrous and nearly-mindless henchmen known as “wage-earners”.

Primary Character Backgrounds:

- **Henry Mason:** A young man who has lived in the same area of Florida all his life. He lives a mundane existence, working at a dead-end 9-to-5 job and engaged to a wealthy woman, but only for her money.

Supporting Characters:

- **Lucinda (SC rating: 0):** Henry’s far-too-sweet-for-her-own-good fiancée. She’s beautiful, loves Henry deeply and is blind to anything he does.
- **Amelia (F4, B2, T3, G3; *Supernatural Seduction 4, Vampiric Bite 4*):** A horrid creature masquerading as a beautiful female human. She uses her Supernatural Seduction to cloud the minds of others.
- **Amelia’s Father (F5, B3, T0, G3):** A Grim Reaper-like creature whose role in the overall scheme of things is unknown and is best left that way to create an enigmatic aura.
- **Wage-Earners (SC rating: 0):** Stooped-over green humanoids that were once humans before being bitten by Amelia. They are pathetic creatures who can only speak simple, broken sentences and are completely loyal to Amelia and her father.

Intro from the Grave Hag: “It’s story time, fright fans! And, boy, do I have a tawdry tale for you!. It’s a yarn about love, romance, longing and all that other disgusting, sappy drive! Yech! Give me good old evisceration, suffocation and dismemberment *any* day! But

I digress. In tonight’s story, we meet Henry Mason, a man who finds love—or at least lust—in all the wrong places... like a swampy, moss-covered graveyard, for example. It’s liable to make him go stark-graving mad!

General Notes: None

Act One

The installment should begin with Henry driving on a road right next to an old graveyard. Describe the fog and how creepy the graveyard looks, with its old, moss-choked graves jutting from the ground at different angles and how the tree limbs that loom over the road look like demonic hands trying to clutch the car in their long fingers. Set a mood.

Henry’s fiancée calls him on his cell phone to see when he’s going to be home. Portray her as a real sweetheart. She should be presented as a sympathetic figure. Get some roleplaying going.

Then, a Flesh-based Installment must be made to avoid hitting a beautiful woman who is walking across the road. If Henry hits the woman, she’ll go flying into the weed-riddled ditch and he’ll find a small amount of



green slime on his car instead of blood. If he didn't hit the woman and you control the narration, his car hits a tree or gets temporarily stuck in the ditch. If the player controls the narrative, be prepared to think quickly, as Henry really needs to meet the woman. Perhaps she can show up out of nowhere the next day or perhaps she even goes to his home in Act Two.

As soon as the Intention is made and narrated, Act Two begins.

Act Two

The woman introduces herself as Amelia, whether it's there by the graveyard or elsewhere (if Henry left the scene). She's the most gorgeous woman he's ever met and is sultry as well. Regardless, she doesn't seem badly injured, nor is she terribly rattled by the experience.

Amelia explains that she had met with one of her father's workers just beyond the graveyard to give them their paycheck, as it's a centrally located place. She was on her way back home when Henry came along. If asked, she claims her father runs a business cutting cypress trees.



Do some roleplaying. Play Amelia as being persuasive and perhaps a bit elusive. She's a woman of exotic mystery. While she doesn't throw herself at Henry, she tries to seduce him with her powers to make him become infatuated with her. The PC must make a Guts-based Intention, using her Seduction special ability of 4 as an Obstacle.

Before parting company with him, she will suggest that they could be together forever... but he would have to get rid of his fiancée in "a most permanent manner". She says that he can come to the graveyard once the deed has been done and she'll be there waiting for him. The rest of the installment depends on whether or not Henry decides to kill his fiancée. If he received a Failure result for the Seduction-based Intention, the player will have little choice; she has him in her evil clutches, so the GM will take over the narration and have him kill her. You'll have to work up some way to handle the situation if he receives a Conditional Success. Otherwise, it's up to the player.

If Henry decides against murdering her, have Amelia invade his dreams or otherwise taunt him into doing what she wants. Feel free to force another Guts Intention on him, though with only a 3 as an Obstacle rather than a 4, as she's not nearby. It's okay if he wins out though.

If Henry goes through with the murder attempt, role-play it out. Let it be a disturbing scene. It can be run as a Confrontation if you'd like or just a Flesh Intention to seal the deal.



Act Three

If Henry resisted Amelia's attempts to manipulate him, she will become more forceful by sending her father's wage-earners after both Henry and his fiancée while they are at home, turning the climax into a suspenseful "home invasion" situation. Amelia herself will eventually make an appearance as well. Feel free to throw some Intentions Henry's way to keep things tense.

If Henry offed his poor fiancée and goes to the graveyard to meet Amelia, she will indeed be there, just as she promised. She will take him to her house, which turns out to be a rickety old shack just behind the graveyard. Once inside, Henry will see a dozen or so wage-earners. If questioned, Amelia will be vague and insist that her father will be home soon. If he tries to escape, the wage-earners will become violent and will restrain him unless he can make a successful Flesh Intention with an Obstacle of 3. If his escape attempt succeeds, ad-lib and go with the flow.

Whether Henry kills his fiancée or not, it's important for him to learn that the wage-earners were once men like him, who were seduced into doing something terrible and then drained of the rest of their humanity with her vampiric bite that transforms them into these pathetic humanoid. The big reveal is two-fold. Firstly, when her father comes home, he is a tall skeletal creature that looks like the Grim Reaper. Secondly, Amelia will, at some point, possibly after Henry is bitten if indeed he even gets bitten, tear off her "human suit" to reveal that she isn't human at all, but is in actuality a skinny, almost-skeletal humanoid.

So regardless of how things progress, Amelia's ultimate goal is to sink her teeth into Henry's neck and incapacitate him. Once bitten, he will slowly become one of the wage-earners.

Skull Modifiers

- +1 if Henry kills his fiancée
- +1 if the PC suffers a Game Ending result.
- +1 if the player triggers one of Henry's Flaws voluntarily during the game.
- +1 for Gratuitous Content.
- -1 if Henry doesn't stop the car after hitting Amelia in Act One.
- -1/+1 if the Grave Keeper feels the installment was particularly entertaining.



Example of Play

To keep things easy, the players' names have simply been replaced with their characters' names. Text in quotation marks indicate "in character" dialogue.

GRAVE KEEPER: [In the Grave Hag's voice] "What was the awful thing which screamed and howled in the black vistas of the deep bayous? Henry Baxter learned the horrible truth, but the discovery nearly cost him his life."

HENRY: Hey, at least I know my character isn't actually going to die!

GRAVE KEEPER: Don't be so sure. It's called post-production. It's so easy to alter that sentence if your character bites the dust. Anyway, there's a rambling old edifice in the remote swamps of southern Georgia that is the temporary laboratory of Professor Henry Baxter, a brilliant bio-chemist. Beside the crumbling old mansion was an abandoned graveyard, which many believed was visited by supernatural forces. In his spacious workshop on the ground floor, Professor Baxter and his assistant, Rex Barton, worked day and night in an effort to develop a longevity serum, to prolong human life. Okay, you're in the lab and you've not made any progress.

REX: "How is the culture reacting, Professor?"

HENRY: "No good, Rex." I was never very good with science, so I'm just adlibbing here. [chuckles]

GRAVE KEEPER: You could make a Brains-based Intention to see if Henry can get a grasp on what's going wrong. There are no Obstacles or Benefits here.

Henry has a Brains rating of 2, which allows him to roll 4 dice and keep the highest two. He rolls 2, 3, 5 and 6. He adds the 5 and 6 together for a total

of 11. According to the Intention Result Table, that's a Success.

GRAVE KEEPER: Henry knows the cause of the problem. Run with it. Just make up pseudo-scientific gibberish that sounds half-plausible and run with it.

HENRY: I'll give it my best shot. "It's beginning to separate. The entire mass has crystallized. If we could only get the molecular structure to solidify, I'm sure we would have it!"

GRAVE KEEPER: That works for me. You both notice the late hour. You've been at this all day.



REX: “Well, let’s knock off for now, Professor. We’ll try again tomorrow.”

HENRY: “Yes, perhaps tomorrow will reveal the elusive secret we’re seeking.”

GRAVE KEEPER: I need you both to make a Brains-based Intention to notice something. But there will be an Obstacle of 1.

Henry has a Brains rating of 2, which would normally allow him to roll 4 dice and keep the highest two. However, the Obstacle reduces his effective rating to 1, so he rolls 3 dice instead. He rolls 1, 2 and 3. He adds the 2 and 3 together for a total of 5. According to the Intention Result Table, that’s a Failure.

Rex has a Brains rating of 1, which would normally allow him to roll 3 dice and keep the highest two. But that Obstacle reduces it to 0, so he rolls 2 dice and takes whatever he gets. Talk about luck! He rolls a 5 and 5, which is a total result of 10. A Success!

HENRY: What was the Obstacle for?

GRAVE KEEPER: It’s because of the fact that it’s very dark outside. At any rate, Henry is too busy putting up his tools to spot it, but Rex notices a face peering in through the window. It looks like the face of a rotting cadaver, with tangled, messy hair.

REX: “Professor! Look! That face in the window!”

HENRY: “What? I don’t see anything. There’s nothing out there.”

REX: “But there was! I just caught a glimpse of it. It was ghastly!”

GRAVE KEEPER: Okay, that was the end of Act One. No one has collected any Grave Tokens yet, so we can move right along. Gretta, who is Rex’s girlfriend and the daughter of Henry, bounds into the room, having



heard the commotion. “What’s wrong, Rex? I heard you shouting all the way in the living room.”

REX: “Oh, Gretta, I thought I saw someone or something glancing in the window, but I may have just imagined it.”

HENRY: “Certainly you imagined it, Rex. This weird morass has probably worked on your nerves, as it has all of us.”

REX: “Perhaps so, Professor.” Henry isn’t really convinced that it’s just his nerves though. He’s going to go outside to have a quick look around without trying to alert the others that he still thinks he saw someone out there.



inside and get some sleep. He's now beginning to wonder if his mind is just playing tricks on him.

GRAVE KEEPER: I need Henry to make a Brains-based Intention to try to find a solution to the chemical failure over the coming days. He will receive a Benefit of 1 since Rex is assisting him.

Again, Henry has a Brains rating of 2, which would normally allow him to roll 4 dice and keep the highest two. However, the Benefit increases his effective rating to 3, so he rolls 5 dice instead. He rolls 1, 1, 2, 3 and 4. He adds the 3 and 4 together for a total of 7. According to the Intention Result Table, he can choose between Conditional Success or Controlled Failure.

HENRY: That's a tough choice, but I'll go with Conditional Success.

GRAVE KEEPER: In the days that followed, the two men continued their work with a renewed vigor. Finally, weeks later, Henry pronounces, "This is it, Rex! The molecular structure has locked into a solid mass!! We've found it! Our longevity serum is perfected!" But suddenly, the air was rent by a horrible moaning sound.

GRAVE KEEPER: Well, after each session, you usually dispose of the failed serums in the graveyard beside the house, so that would make a good excuse.

REX: Perfect! That's what Rex does then. "There goes another day's hard work." He says that just in case Henry or Gretta can hear him. Does he see anyone out there?

GRAVE KEEPER: No, but he does see a peculiar crack in one of the headstones. It looks relatively fresh, like it had only begun to crack recently.

REX: "That's strange. That grave has started to crack open. I wonder if it's erosion or..." I think he'll go back

REX: I'm guessing the creature coming back was the complication stemming from the Conditional Success?

GRAVE KEEPER: You're correct.

Possibilities

Let's pull back the curtain and look at what might have been, had the situation (rolls, choices, etc.) been different with the Brains-based Intention. Had it been a Failure, perhaps the formula they were working on would have gone awry and caused an explosion. Had Henry chosen Controlled Failure, perhaps the serum simply wouldn't have worked, making the stretch of time a total waste of effort. Success might have been similar to the way the events turned out, except that the creature may not have shown up so soon.

HENRY: "Good Lord! What was that?"

REX: "Where is the noise coming from?"

GRAVE KEEPER: The graveyard.

REX: "It came from outside, in the graveyard!"

GRAVE KEEPER: Suddenly, Gretta bursts into the laboratory. "Father, what was that horrible noise?"

HENRY: "Don't be alarmed, dear. I'm sure there's a logical reason for it."

REX: Rex has the "Man of action" Descriptor, so he's going to rush outside and confront whatever it is that's making this noise.

GRAVE KEEPER: For that, I'll add a Grave Token to the pool. I love it when players use things on their character sheets, especially if it furthers the story... and this certainly accomplishes that! Gretta urges Rex: "Come back, Rex! Don't go out there!"

REX: He's going to pay her no mind. "There's something fiendish in that graveyard and I'm going to find out what it is!"

HENRY: Henry is going to try to talk some sense into him. Can I roll to convince him to stay inside?

GRAVE KEEPER: You're going to have to make a PC-versus-PC Intention. It will use Henry's Tongue rating and Rex's Guts rating.

Henry has a Tongue rating of 0, which allows him to roll 2 dice and add the two rolls together. He rolls 5 and 6. He adds them together for a total of 11.

Rex has a Guts rating of 0 also, so he will only be rolling 2 dice as well. He rolls a 2 and 3, which is a total result of 5.

The Grave Keeper cross references the two results on the PC vs. PC Intention Result Table, with Henry acting as "Character A" and Rex acting as "Character B". Looking at the result, the table says, "Character A succeeds". Okay, Henry, you get to narrate the results.

HENRY: Henry implores him: "It would be foolhardy to go out there now, Rex. It's as black as pitch! Wait until tomorrow and we'll investigate together." With a sigh, Rex says, "Well, perhaps it would be best to wait."

GRAVE KEEPER: Rex, you can attempt another mini-conflict if you would like.

REX: No, I think Rex will head to bed. He won't argue further and get everyone even more upset.

GRAVE KEEPER: The three retired for the evening, but during the small hours of the night, Gretta was suddenly awakened by the awful moans. She gets up from her bed, and says to herself, "It's started again! Coming from the cemetery!" She sees it, a huge contorted creature. Freaking out, she yells out, "Father! Rex! Come quickly!"

REX: Rex beats feet to her room.

HENRY: Henry does too.

GRAVE KEEPER: Each of you need to make Flesh-based Intention. Since you were dead asleep when she yelled, you're facing an Obstacle of 1.

REX: Rex really wants to lay eyes on this thing so he can find out what it actually is. I'm going to spend a Grave Token from the pool. Can I exploit my "Man of action" Descriptor to make my bonus a +3 instead of just a +1?

GRAVE KEEPER: Yes, you can do that. Henry are you spending any Grave Tokens on this Intention?

HENRY: No. I'll be happy if at least one of us can see the creature or whatever it is. No need to waste more Grave Tokens than necessary.

GRAVE KEEPER: I'm going to place a new Grave Token into the pool in order to trigger Henry's "Getting up there in age" Flaw. That will give him a -2 to his final result.

Henry has a Flesh rating of -1, so he rolls 3 dice and takes the two lowest results. He rolls 4, 4 and 6. Ordinarily, he would have a result of 8, but due to the Flaw that was triggered, he only has 6. That's a Failure.

Rex has a *Flesh* rating of 1, so he rolls 3 dice and takes the two highest results. He rolls an abysmal 1, 1 and 2. His total result would have been 3, but he spent a *Grave Token* and exploited his "Man of action" Descriptor, so that brings it up to 6. So close, but still a Failure!

GRAVE KEEPER: In response to the girl's screams, the two men ran into her room and when Rex glanced out the window, nothing was out there. They were too late.

REX: "It's gone now, but I'm convinced whatever it was, it must be the same creature I spotted through the window several weeks ago."

HENRY: "It'll be dawn soon. Perhaps we'll get to the bottom of this then."

GRAVE KEEPER: Come the dawn, the two men step forth to investigate. The first thing they notice is that one of the tombstones has been busted open.

REX: Was it the same one Rex saw with cracks in it earlier?

GRAVE KEEPER: One and the same. Did Rex tell Henry about seeing it that night?

REX: No. He was trying to be inconspicuous at that point.

HENRY: "Say, what happened to that grave?"

REX: [laughing] Does anybody actually start sentences out with "say"?

HENRY: [laughing also] Henry does, apparently.

REX: "That's what I'm wondering! A few weeks ago, I noticed that this grave was splitting. Now it's completely cracked open!"

GRAVE KEEPER: The terrible implications of the discovery weighed upon their troubled minds, suggesting horrible consequences, which they tried to suppress.

Many thoughts swirled about in their minds: "Whoever was buried there is now liberated", "It's something from beyond the grave", "Logic tells me such things are impossible but how can I doubt?" Okay, guys, these thoughts are the kind of things that can drive someone mad, so I'm going to have you both make a *Grave Guts*-based Intention. No Obstacles or Benefits.

Henry has a *Guts* rating of 1, so he rolls 3 dice and takes the two highest results. He rolls 4, 6 and 6. That's a total result of 12... a Success!

Rex has a *Guts* rating of 0, so he rolls 2 dice and adds them together. He rolls 2 and 4... a total of 6. That's a Failure!



GRAVE KEEPER: Since this was a Grave Intention, Rex might go completely insane and be out of the installment. Rex, roll two dice and add them together for the Grave Failure Table.

Rex rolls 4 and 5. This means that it is a Non-Game Ending result.

GRAVE KEEPER: Rex doesn't go insane, but he does panic and decides to act without thinking. And now, we begin Act Three.

REX: Uh-oh. That can't be good.

GRAVE KEEPER: Probably not. Rex, you collected a Grave Token earlier. You can now roll a die to try to purge it.

Rex rolls 4. He needed a 5 or 6 to purge it, so it stays with him.

GRAVE KEEPER: The terrible moaning phenomenon continues to torment them until finally, Rex could restrain himself no longer. He declares, "I'm going to settle this thing once and for all, right now!" They try to stop him, but this time, they can't. He barges out the door. He is attacked by an unseen creature. I don't normally like to have so many Intentions, but it's unavoidable here. Rex is looking at a Grave Flesh-based Intention. The creature's own Flesh rating is 2, so that is subtracted from Rex's Flesh rating.

Rex's Flesh rating is normally 1, but because of the monster's Flesh rating, it counts as a rating of -1. He rolls 3 dice and uses the two lowest results. He rolls 4, 5 and 5. That's a total result of 9. Rex can choose between Controlled Failure or Conditional Success.

REX: Well, the Conditional Success came back and bit us on the butt last time, so I'll choose Controlled Failure. At least I control the narrative that way. Inside the house, Henry and Gretta can hear a sound of a struggle and then Rex screams out, "NO! STAY AWAY! AAAGH!"

GRAVE KEEPER: Scared out of her wits, Gretta says, "Listen, Father! It's got Rex!"

HENRY: Henry is going to listen really closely. Do I need to make an Intention?

GRAVE KEEPER: No roll necessary. As you listen, you can tell that Rex has survived and is returning.

HENRY: "No! He's on the porch! He's coming in!"

GRAVE KEEPER: Suddenly, the door bursts open and Rex collapses, inert, upon the floor, muttering incoherently.

REX: I've got an idea. We know the thing is probably undead in nature, right? I mean, Rex saw a zombie-looking critter at the window. Maybe we could use the serum we've been working on. All those chemicals might dissolve the monster. After clearing his head a few minutes, Rex says, "We've got to kill it! Get the longevity serum... it's the only thing that can destroy him!"

HENRY: [laughing] How do you know it's the only thing that can kill it?

REX: I don't know. It just sounded dramatic.

GRAVE KEEPER: All this was too much for Gretta. She says, "I can't stand it! I'm going out there before it comes in after us!" She removes her father's pistol from a drawer and runs from the house.

HENRY: "Gretta, come back!" I want to make an Intention to coax her into coming back before something bad happens to her.

GRAVE KEEPER: It will be Tongue-based and her SC rating is 0, so there won't be an Obstacle because of it.

Henry's Tongue rating is 0, so he rolls 2 dice and hopes for the best. He rolls 2 and 3, a total result of 5... a Failure.

GRAVE KEEPER: She yells, "No! I won't wait! I'll kill it! Kill it!"

REX: Yep, she's gone goofy.

GRAVE KEEPER: When she comes face to face with the horrible thing in the fens, her resolution is turned into stark terror. For the first time, Henry and Gretta lay eyes on the monster. It is a large mostly-skeletal humanoid with a little bit of skin remaining. Outstretching its boney arms, it clutches her... and it speaks in a creaky, terrifying voice: "So, you will be next to feel my wrath!"

HENRY: "Good Lord, no! Let her go, you fiend!"

GRAVE KEEPER: The creature continues, "You all must die! But you shall be first, professor! It was your accursed elixirs drenching my grave continually which resurrected this wretched body from the sod!" Gretta, now fully captured by the monster pleads for her father to help her.

HENRY: Did Gretta drop the pistol?

GRAVE KEEPER: No. She still has it in her hand, but she's too scared to use it. She's panicky.

HENRY: Could I spend a Grave Token to edit the scene so that she dropped the pistol?

GRAVE KEEPER: Sure!

HENRY: Okay, I'll spend it then. Henry Baxter retrieves the fallen pistol and fired as the horribly emaciated thing advances toward him.

GRAVE KEEPER: Since the creature is coming toward Henry and Henry is also shooting back, both are in peril. Make a Flesh-based Grave Intention. The creature has a Flesh rating of 2, so that will be -2 modifier to Henry's Flesh rating.

HENRY: Since Henry's Flesh is so low, I want to spend two Grave Tokens to boost the result. He doesn't have anything I can exploit though, so each one will only add 1 to the result.

Henry's Flesh rating is normally -1, but the beast's own Flesh is 2, so the modified rating is -3. He rolls 5 dice and takes the lowest two results. He rolls 2, 2, 3, 6, 6... a total of 4. But Henry spent 2 Grave Tokens to boost the result by 2... giving him a final result of 6. That's still a Failure, which means poor Henry has to roll on the Grave Failure Table.

There are penalties for the roll. Since the game is in Act Three, the roll is decreased by 3. Plus, for every two Grave Tokens collected by the character, the roll is decreased by 1; he currently has three Grave Tokens, so it gives a penalty of 1. Henry rolls 5 and 6. That's 11.

Subtracting the combined penalty of 4, the final roll is 7. That's a Non-Game Ending result! He was very lucky!

REX: Can Rex come out of the house and help out? He has been laying there on the floor recovering from the earlier attack.

GRAVE KEEPER: Yes, he can.

REX: While the scuffling has been going on, Rex runs to the laboratory to grab a glass vial of the serum. Then, he heads outside to confront the skeleton guy.

GRAVE KEEPER: As the terrifying creature grasps the old chemist, Rex arrives on the scene.



HENRY: Before Rex interrupts, I'd like Henry to hit a classic "old scientist" line that one might see in the old comics or shows. He says, "No! Don't! I gave you life! Don't do this to me!"

GRAVE KEEPER: The creature retorts, "LIFE? Do you call this life? Can a man live without a soul? My spirit departed when I died, but you have kept the rest of me in a state of LIVING DEATH!" The monster is so distracted by his own soliloquy that Rex can take him by surprise.

REX: Rex is going to lob the vial right in the thing's face!

GRAVE KEEPER: Okay, it's a Flesh-based Grave Intention. Only the monster's 'life' is in danger, though, since he is surprised and isn't in a position to attack. Remember, the critter's Flesh is 2. Also, I'm going to use the Grave Token you collected to give you a -1 to your final result.

Rex's Flesh rating is normally 1, but due to the creature's Flesh rating, it's reduced to -1. He has to roll 3 dice and take the two lowest results. He gets 5, 6 and 6! That would be 11 in most cases, but the Grave Token used by the Grave Keeper lowers it to 10, which is still (barely!) a Success!

REX: Without pausing, the young scientist flings the vial of longevity serum into the creature's face. "Take that, you thing of darkness!"

The Grave Keeper rolls on the Grave Failure Table.

There are penalties for the roll. Since the game is in Act Three, the roll is decreased by 3. The Grave Keeper rolls 3 and 4. With the -3 penalty, the final roll is 4... a Game Ending result!

GRAVE KEEPER: As the potent liquid sank into that decayed flesh, an incredible change took place; a metamorphosis the likes of which no mortal had ever seen! You see the creature de-age... from a dead cadaver, to a young man, to a youth, to a small child, to a baby, to an embryo and finally into nothingness.

REX: "Did you see that, professor? He turned into an embryo and then vanished!"

HENRY: The entire pattern of life, enacted before our very eyes, in reverse. This means we were on the wrong trail, Rex! The serum we developed, overactivated the glandular functions in the body and had digressive effects!"

REX: "Then all we have to do is reverse the formula and we'll have it!"

GRAVE KEEPER: Gretta adds, "It's ironic to think that a harbinger of death was responsible for bringing prolonged life to the people of the world!" Aaaaand that's a wrap!



Epilogue

For me, it all started with *Creepshow* when I was ten years old. Despite my tender age, I was already something of a horror aficionado, having cut my teeth on films such as *Halloween*, *My Bloody Valentine* and *Happy Birthday to Me*. But *Creepshow* was different; it was comprised of several different stories, each with a eyebrow-raising ending and linked together by animated segments that evoked (unbeknownst to me at the time) the EC Comics of old. I watched it that movie just about every time HBO played it. It was enthralled.

Right around that time, I found around a half-dozen issues of DC's *The Witching Hour* at a garage sale and snatched them up. My first impression that each issue was its own *Creepshow* and that appealed to me. Unfortunately, the small town I lived in didn't have any stores that carried *The Witching Hour* or any other horror comics, for that matter.

After that, I searched for anything that resembled anthology-style horror, which led me to EC Comics back issues, *Tales from the Darkside* and two series from HBO: *The Hitchhiker* and, of course, *Tales from the Crypt*. I've been a fan of this flavor of horror ever since.

Strangely, it never even occurred to me to design a roleplaying game that emulated anthology-style horror. Perhaps it never dawned on me that it would be possible until one day, I stumbled across a website that discussed the death of EC Comics artist Jack Davis. One thing led to another and I found myself bouncing from link to link, reading old snippets from *The Vault of Horror*, *The Vault of Fear* and *Tales from the Crypt*. All the while, I was making a mental list of design challenges for emulating anthology-style horror; stuff that would seemingly make it impossible or at least not very much fun. How could I overcome them? Would it be possible to run more than one story per session and, if so, what could I do to facilitate that playstyle? How could I encourage groups to play to the genre? What reward system could I put in place while making it true to the source material? How could I replicate the ultra-tight pacing of these comics, shows and films?

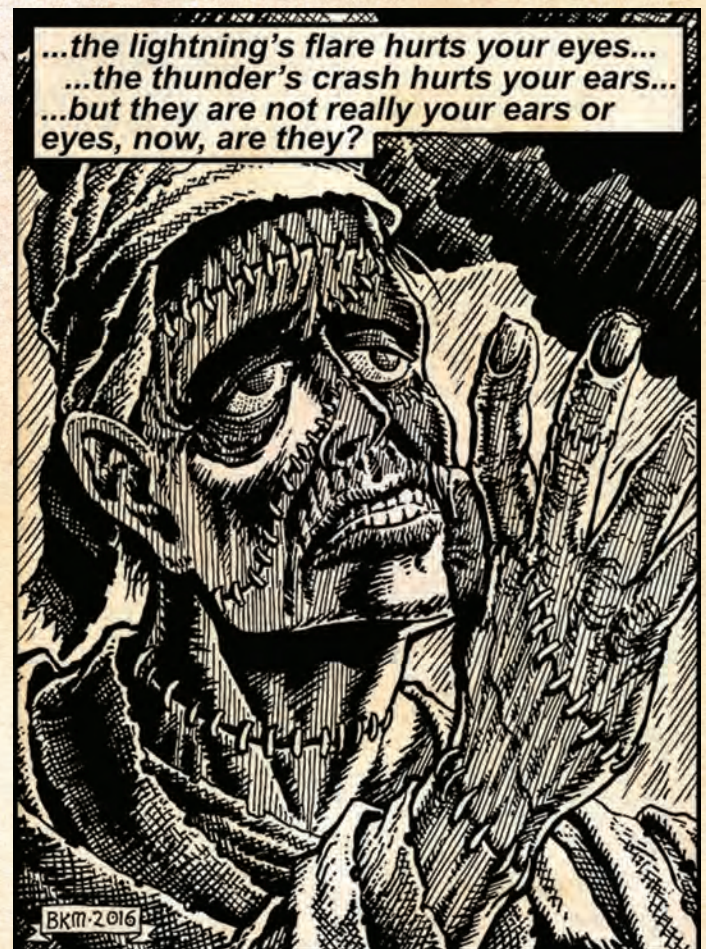
These design challenges were just too much for me to ignore. I *had* to design this game... and in time for *Halloween*, no less! The more I thought about it, the more I began to gravitate toward Barak Blackburn's In-

tention System, which is the rule-set that powers our RPG, *Retrostar*. It's a near perfect fit, due partly to its narrative approach and also because it is based on the three-act structure that these stories used. It just needed some yanking, adjusting and snipping to make it the perfect system for the genre.

When I mentioned designing *Stories from the Grave*, people were very enthused and I was able to assemble a team of crack artists who love the source material and were excited to make this product visually exciting! I owe C. Michael Hall, Bradley K. McDevitt and Nolan Segrest a massive "thanks" for all they've done! I can't leave out Norbert Franz and Barak Blackburn for jumping right into the fray and helping me get this game ready to roll. And lastly, I have to thank all the playtesters. Without their short-notice work, who knows how well this thing would play?

So, here we are, exiting the grave... but not for the last time. There will be more to come.

--Cynthia Celeste Miller



Character Sheet

STORIES
FROM THE
GRAVE

Name:

Background:

Casting:

Traits

Flesh

Descriptors and Flaws

Brains

Descriptors and Flaws

Tongue

Descriptors and Flaws

Guts

Descriptors and Flaws

Character Sheet

STORIES
FROM THE
GRAVE

Name:

Background:

Casting:

Traits

Flesh

Descriptors and Flaws

Brains

Descriptors and Flaws

Tongue

Descriptors and Flaws

Guts

Descriptors and Flaws

Installment Sheet

Page 1

STORIES FROM THE GRAVE

Installment Name:

Story Frame:

Players' Names:

Skull Collection:



Quick Summary:

PC Backgrounds:

Supporting Cast:

General Notes:

Installment Sheet

Page 2



Intro from the Grave Hag:

Act One/Act Two/Act Three:

[illegible]

Skull Modifiers:

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Well, kiddies, like an old mummy friend of mine once said, “that’s a wrap”. I’ve enjoyed your visit to my subterranean crypt to listen to my gut-spewing tales, but all things must come to an end... a brutal, untimely end, that is! So until next time, don’t be haunted by fear and never, ever delve into any vaults without expecting overwhelming horror! You’ve been warned. Scarewell! Reh-heh-heh-heh-heh!

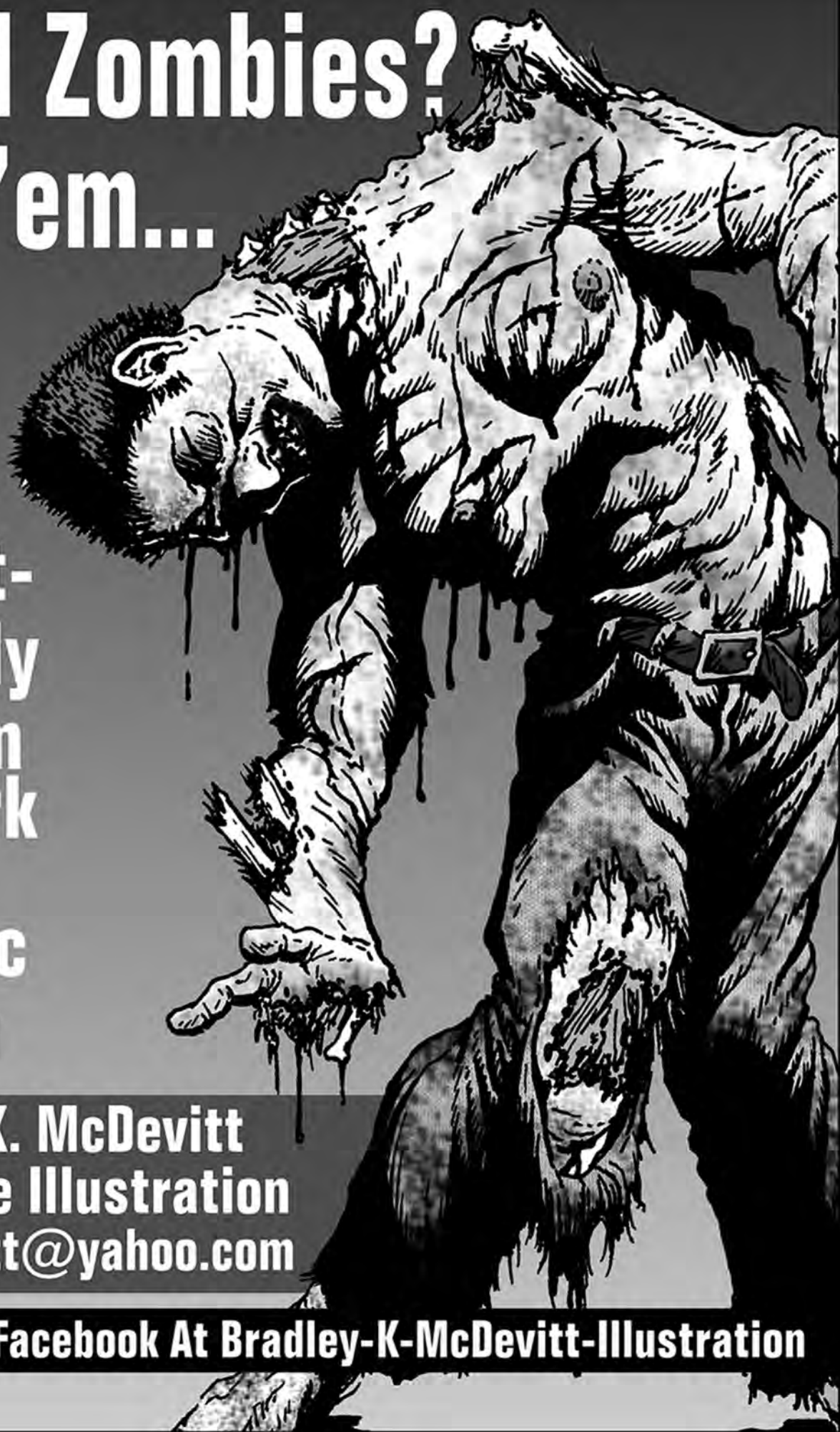
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STORIES FROM THE GRAVE



Greetings, scabs and sores. It's your hostess with the grossest here... the Grave Hag! Welcome to my humble, worm-infested, slime-coated a-BOO-de. Settle in and make yourself comfortable while I regale you with the most depraved and disturbing tales you've ever heard. Better still, with this roleplaying game, you and your fiends—I mean "friends"—will take part in crafting these wretched, blood-soaked yarns yourselves. Don't be shy. Dive right in. You'll be the afterlife of the party! Reh-heh-heh-heh!

Stories from the Grave is a roleplaying game that faithfully emulates anthology-style horror comics, TV shows and movies. It is powered by the Intention System, the same rule set that powers *Retrostar*, though it has been extensively altered so that it accommodates the play style necessary to bring the source material to dripping, oozing, gore-soaked un-life.

The game is built around making it possible to play out several short stories in a single setting, with each one feeling exactly like the kinds of tales spun in the comics, shows and films of the genre.

Players are rewarded more for making the story more entertaining than for "staying alive", as anyone who is familiar with the source material can tell you, many of these stories focused on truly reprehensible people who ultimately get their just comeuppance. They can acquire help from a communal pool of Grave Tokens that can be snatched up and used to lend a hand... but not without a price. After all, one of the main themes of anthology-style horror is that you can never get something for nothing.

The Grave Keeper has plenty of tools at their disposal as well, including Story Frames that can be used as the foundation for virtually any tale imaginable. Every effort has been made to keep it easy to set up and run games of *Stories from the Grave*.

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