

MORTS



ED TURNER

A WORLD OF
ADVENTURE FOR

FATE
CORE SYSTEM

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Morts

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This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible,
impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed in this
work are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, teenagers, zombies,
office workers, revenants, guardsmen, necromancers, or jobs of the dead-
end or undead-end variety is purely coincidental, but kinda hilarious.

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CASCADIA NEEDS YOU! JOIN THE MORTICIANS!

STEADY PAY! FREE ROOM AND BOARD!
WEAPONS AND TRAINING SUPPLIED!
APPLY NOW, EXPERIENCE IS NOT REQUIRED!
NO BACKGROUND CHECK WILL BE PERFORMED!

Zombies have been trying to get into the city for decades, and you're on the team in charge of keeping them out and taking care of anything which manages to get through the walls.

...You have a crappy job.

Normal people don't join the morticians. The pay is bad, the hours are long, and it's the only career path where the leading cause of death is still "got eaten."

So if you've signed up for this life, odds are you're a desperate outcast. Or you're sixteen, barely aware of your own mortality but all too eager for a job that doesn't make you work all that hard. Either way, you're one of the morts. Congratulations.

Time to kill some monsters.

THE UNDEAD ARE JUST BEYOND THE CITY WALLS!
WHO WILL KEEP THEM FROM COMING IN?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE APOCALYPSE

The morticians are the dedicated zombie-killers of a little country called Cascadia, on the west coast of what used to be called the United States of America before Congress ate the president. Civilization briefly collapsed after the dead rose, but Cascadia and countries like it bounced back, proof that humanity is hard to kill.

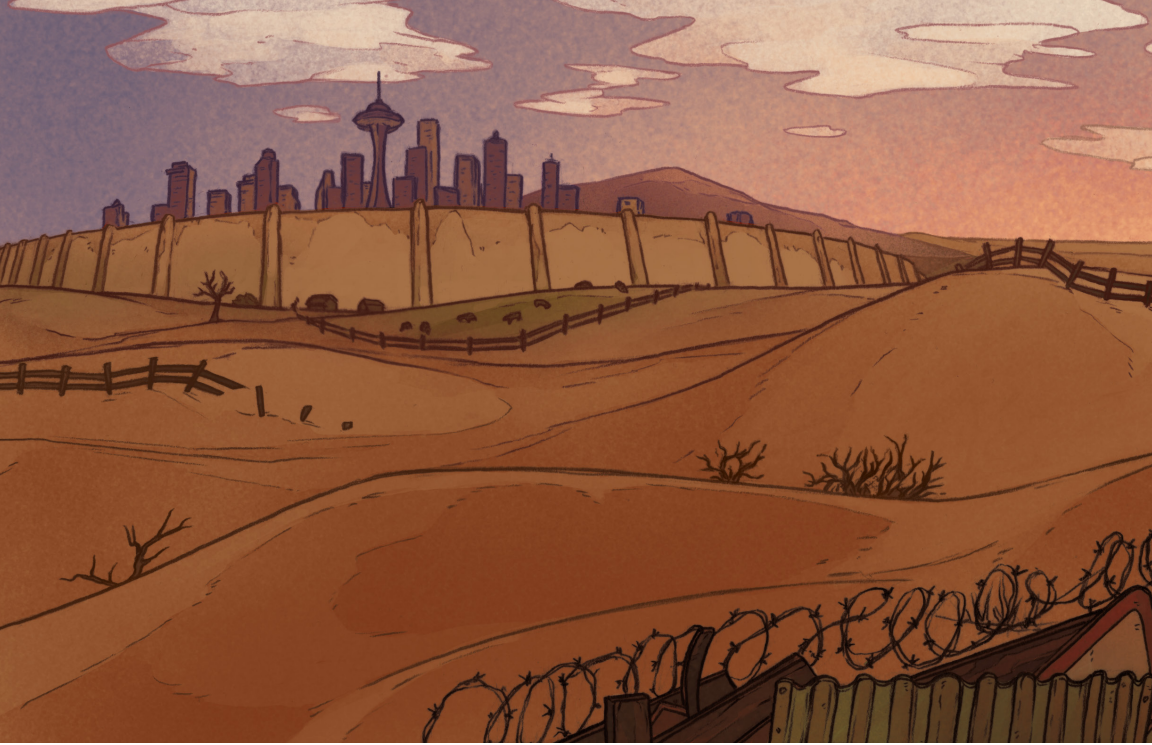
The Zombie Apocalypse

About fifty years ago the dead started rising. Records are spotty, big surprise, but as far as we can tell it struck the whole world simultaneously, one day early in October. There's a bunch of names for the period. In Convoy 14 it's the "Red October," and in Davis it's the "Rending of the Veil," but around here no name's taken off like the **zombie apocalypse**—even though it seems really silly to call something the "apocalypse" after life didn't, technically, end.

There's no shortage of stories about the apocalypse if you're looking for them. Dead rise, mass panic, violent deaths, blah blah blah. By all accounts it was the worst event in human history. But then, we got over it. Sure, lots of people died, but we'd kinda been training for this since 1968. Natural selection weeded out the people who'd never seen *Night of the Living Dead*. If you made it to Halloween that year, it was because you knew about headshots, safehouses, teamwork, cardio, and all the other little lessons that movies and games had been teaching us.

Within a year, people were making permanent settlements again, because that's what people do. And as we discovered new realities of life in an undead world, like specters and necromancers and weird zombie mutants, we adapted. By the time Cascadia was founded, ten years after the dead first rose, life was normal again. It's just that normal had zombies in it now.





Cascadia

Cascadia is a narrow stretch of land along North America's Pacific coast, from Yreka, California, to White Rock, British Columbia. Mostly it runs along Interstate 5. Officially, we've claimed nearly all the land west of the highway as our own, but aside from a couple relatively reachable coastal towns, most of it's still wasteland, overrun by the undead and not particularly habitable. We have a constitution, which is largely plagiarized from America's: president, congress, supreme court, partisan headbutting, things of that nature. Most morticians aren't super politically involved. The government signs your paychecks; anything more than that is more for people inside the city walls to worry about.

Our capital city is also Cascadia's largest and most bustling metropolis—and, in the included adventure **Randolph the Lich King**, your home base: Eugene, Oregon. That's where Cascadia started, as Eugene incorporated nearby struggling settlements, and then just kept growing. It's still growing! We've stretched about as far as we can along the highway, so now Congress is talking about how we're going to push inland. President Bloom says she wants to incorporate whatever remains of Bend within the next ten years, but most people think that's overambitious.

Eugene's the largest, but there are several cities in Cascadia and dozens of little towns. Altogether, tens of thousands of people, all of whom wake up in the morning content in the assumption that they're not going to get eaten today, because that's the sort of thing that just doesn't happen anymore. Or at least it's rare enough that you can pretend it doesn't happen anymore. Inside the city walls, people worry about the weather and money and jobs and the future and everything else, but they don't worry about the undead. That's your job.



Walls and Fences

The wall-and-fence system is the reason Eugene thrived while everything else in the area was fighting off undead every week. Build a wall around the place where people live, using the sturdiest barricades you can. Then go out a mile or so in every direction and build a fence. It doesn't have to be sturdy—a dedicated cow can push it over—but it's not supposed to stand up to assaults. It's a minimal barrier to entry, which keeps the random zombie from meandering close enough to realize there's meat behind the wall.

The fence works. Some zombies get through the fence, and some undead can't be stopped by walls. But it breaks up big zombie clusters and keeps a city from being surrounded. It's effective enough that whenever a city is incorporated into Cascadia, the first public work is to shore up the walls and set up a fence. And of course, this makes what we call the **outskirts**: the land between the walled-in city, where there's a real civilization, and the fenced-off, zombie-blighted wasteland.

The outskirts are too important not to use. Where there's clear space, it goes to farming, which helps take pressure off the generally overtaxed hydroponics in the city. Then there's foraging. There's a romantic vision of treasures and technologies hiding in ruined buildings, but mostly foragers bring back bits of metal and other raw materials. Farmers and foraging teams live behind the walls, though; they just commute to the outskirts.

The outskirts are also a landing stage for the socially outcast or outright exiled. There's always a little shanty town near the city gates, housing a society of scavengers and rejects who can't cut it in the city proper, but aren't willing to brave the wastes.

It's also where the morts live. Where *you* live.

Points of Interest

Morticians spend a lot of time in the outskirts, but plenty of emergencies can pull you into the city proper, to deal with outbreaks, or even to other cities if there's a dire enough emergency. It's worth being aware of the biggest places in the country.

Eugene is the ever-beating heart of Cascadia. It's worth visiting if only to spend time in what might be the largest city in the world, but it's also a cultural touchstone. Congress meets in the old Wilcox Building, and the president lives in the historical Allan House. Tours are available on the weekends. There's the university, which has a Necromancy major—it's within the walls, but fenced off from the rest of the city. There's also the only really nice football stadium that hasn't been repurposed into farmland or high-density housing. Basically every championship game in the country takes place at Autzen Stadium. If that's not your bag, there's boutique shopping, expensive restaurants, and...fancy stuff.

Olympia, up in what used to be Washington, is the smaller, seedier Eugene. Fewer museums and galleries, more casinos and clubs. It's also where the music scene is. Kids make pilgrimages to hear loud, angry music live in Olympia's cramped coffeeshops.

Medford and Ashland are the twin cities of Cascadia's entertainment industry. Ashland has established itself as the hub of the fine arts in Cascadia, full of poets and publishers and the theater. Medford is home to most of the country's film production, which has been a million-dollar industry since the very early days of Cascadia. You want celebrities, here's where you go.

Other places you might end up include Everett, up north. It's home to the largest building in the world, a former airplane factory turned massive manufacturing center. Anything you use that's not pre-apocalypse salvage probably came down from Everett. Her sister city, Norcal, covers a lot of the northern part of what used to be California. Norcal's unique in that there are a half-dozen small, individually walled districts behind one huge fence. Once six tiny cities, they've pooled their outskirts to become Cascadia's most valuable farmland.

Newport is Cascadia's only port city of note, and the only important city that's not on I-5. It's accessible by rail or State Route 20, which is zombie-infested but otherwise pretty well maintained. It's mostly a fishing town. We don't do a lot of trade by sea—every couple years someone sets off to see if Japan's still there, and to date nobody's come back.

Salem used to be a city in the early days of Cascadia, before it got breached by the dead and thousands died in a bloody evacuation. Now it's a ghost town in the most literal sense—dangerous specters spawn there all the time. But it's not the most dangerous spot in Cascadia. That honor probably belongs to Portland, which, like so many large cities, never bounced back from the zombie apocalypse. It's filled to overflowing with monsters, and it's right on the I-5.

Getting Around in Cascadia

People over seventy have lots to say about how life was better before the dead rose. Mostly, they're standard gripes, but life probably was better with telecommunications. Satellites run out of fuel and fail. Data lines don't handle getting chewed on very well. The days of phone calls between cities, broadcast entertainment, and whatever the Internet was are all over. For information to travel, it has to travel with someone. Letters, newspapers, CDs, and flash drives are all physically hauled across the country every day.

The most popular and safest way to travel is moving via the Interstate, which really is the backbone of the country. Morticians keep it zombie-free, and it'll drop you off at almost every major city. Unfortunately, gasoline goes bad over time, and refining crude oil is super difficult to just, like, figure out from scratch, so most people can't use cars. There are a couple hundred diesel and electric vehicles operational, but by law they belong to the government. Some get leased to businesses, some are used for emergency services (including the morticians), but most people only see the caravans: lines of vehicles bussing people and hauling cargo along regularly scheduled routes up and down I-5. And if you're cheap, there's a lane reserved for pedestrians.

Railroads are a crapshoot. Morts keep the highway safe, but trains are a private enterprise. Rails belong to whoever has the cash and inclination to clear the bodies off the tracks and get an engine working somehow. There're a dozen rail barons in Cascadia, running dilapidated engines from little towns to the nearest real city. It's unfortunately pretty common for tourists leaving big cities to discover that their route home has financially or literally collapsed.

The third and last choice is to brave the wasteland. It's not totally suicidal, but you know...zombies. Even if you're confident about that, there are other dangers. There are criminals in the wastes, gangs of raiders who aren't stupid enough to attack a fortified city but will swoop like vultures down on lone travelers. And there's always mutated zombies, roving specters, and similar things that most people don't have the expertise to deal with.

That doesn't mean it's not done. There are also buildings to scavenge and animals to hunt and resources to collect and some crummy settlements that aren't even on the rail lines. So people walk or bike or rent a car if they can afford it. You might even see brave idiots coming to town on horseback or riding some bizarre necromantic abomination.



The Morticians

Every city in Cascadia has at least one chapter of the morticians, and most have two or three. Eugene has eight. There are also chapters assigned to the highway, responsible for keeping stretches of it maintained and zombie-free. Every chapter has a station of their own, usually a big house or apartment complex out in the outskirts, where the morts all live. That's one of the lingering benefits of life as a mortician—free room and board.

History of the Morts

In the early years of Cascadia, different communities handled defense in different ways, but it mostly boiled down to “anyone with a gun is encouraged to point it at zombies and not at each other.” The constitution tried to codify things by making every city establish the local armed militia, which would be in charge of law enforcement and defense. Problem was, the LAMs were an awful mélange of pre-apocalyptic cops, soldiers, and idiots with firearms. There was a lot of internal conflict and corruption, which is bad enough, but they weren't even good at fighting the undead. They were too busy in the city to keep zombies in check, and too incompetent to stop large outbreaks. After the LAMs botched the evacuation of Salem, it became clear that they weren't cutting it for Cascadia.

The first chapter of the morticians started up in Gateway—now an incorporated part of the Eugene metropolitan area—under the guidance of Charlie Harris, a US Special Forces vet and zombie video game enthusiast. He took the best of the LAMs, and trained them to handle the undead specifically. The LAMs were kept as Gateway's police force, and the morticians were dedicated zombie-killers. Gateway's mortality rate plummeted.

The First Amendment to the Cascadian Constitution established the morticians as an official government agency tasked with “keeping the cities and roads of Cascadia free from the threat of the undead by any means deemed necessary.” Over the next few years, every city got their own chapter of the morts, usually headed by a Gateway veteran. For the first time in its history, Cascadia felt safe.

The Fall of the Morts

People who join the morts tend to be surprised by its history. There's a mural at the Eugene Federal Building of a diverse group of attractive young people in the morticians' distinctive leather jackets, each armed with shotgun and saber, standing proud between the light of civilization and the encroaching darkness of the undead. It's well done, patriotic without being over the top, but it's also flaking, faded, and forgotten. Turns out, people need the morticians, but they don't like them.

The morticians were hamstrung by their own success. Once the undead stopped being a day-to-day threat, the job became mostly invisible—it happened outside the walls. People stopped respecting them. Some morticians stayed on out of a sense of duty, but many retired for more-fulfilling work, and nobody was lining up to replace them. The morticians relaxed their entrance requirements, and eventually eliminated them entirely. That started a nasty feedback loop. The more they were seen as a last stop for the otherwise unemployable, the more true it became.

The morticians haven't seen a budget increase in a decade. The Research and Development branch had to be disbanded. There are people who are honestly surprised to discover that the morts still exist, despite the fact that the undead aren't going anywhere.

Working for the Morticians

Every mortician station has a Station Head, who oversees and coordinates a handful of teams. Teams spend some time on patrol, wandering the outskirts regardless of weather looking for trouble. Then they spend some time on duty but in the station, ready to run out the door if there's an emergency. Most Station Heads like giving morticians specific in-house tasks—weapon maintenance, comparing notes with other stations, writing reports, whatever you're halfway good at. There's also rotating cooking and cleaning jobs. Schedules vary, based on need and time of year and how much of a hard-ass the Station Head is. In theory, you get a few days off every week, assuming the station is sufficiently staffed. Stations rarely are.

When you join the morts you get your leather jacket and a weapon if you need one. You get shoved into whatever team could use another member, and they try to keep you alive long enough that you figure out how to keep yourself alive. Most of your job is about killing zombies, but that's not the end of it. You keep your city safe from the undead, and sometimes that means investigating why undead outbreaks happened so they don't happen again. That means tracking down necromancers and dangerous spirits, clearing massive hordes, repairing the fence, and doing whatever else needs doing. When the undead are involved, you're a beat cop, a PI, a knight errant, and a building superintendent, all at once.

The World

Cascadia might be your home and the birthplace of the morticians, but it's not the only country that's come forth in the last fifty years. We might not know what's happening on the other side of the world, but we've got neighbors.

The Republic of Davis

During the zombie apocalypse, the staff and students of the University of California, Davis, managed to hole up in their various buildings, surviving mostly by eating cows from the Agriculture Department. Now the old university is the core of a slowly expanding empire that covers most of central California.

The worrisome thing about Davis is that the university is still an academic institution, but the focus has shifted almost entirely to necromancy. At the heart of the empire, raising the dead is a part of daily life. They're also more militant than Cascadia. Their equivalent of the morts are called Psychopomps, and not only are they trained in basic necromancy, but they've got the government's authority to kill anyone who abuses magic, while morts are only authorized to kill people who are already dead. By treaty, Psychopomps are allowed to enter Cascadia when in hot pursuit of someone.

Seattle

Like most large cities, Seattle was too densely populated to recover from the zombie apocalypse. But it got a second life, of sorts—the many, many undead in the city have been enthralled by a powerful necromancer who's set up a vantage point atop the Space Needle. We don't know anything about the necromancer, but they oversee a city full of zombies who get out of bed, walk to workplaces, buy products from one another, and otherwise play-act a parody of urban life. All day, every day, with no signs of stopping.

Interstate 5 is impassible in downtown Seattle, and anyone with a pulse is killed and eaten if they cross the border, so Cascadia bypasses it via I-405. There's a mortician station on either side of the city, partly to ensure travelers hit the interchange, but mostly to keep a very wary eye on this place.



Convoy 14

So, there's a massive convoy made up of about forty different vehicles, including trucks, buses packed with people, and even an actual tank. They're constantly on the move just east of Cascadia, sometimes heading up as far as Olympia, often disappearing into what used to be Nevada, and always on some mission they won't tell outsiders about. We have no idea what these cars are running on, and we've asked.

According to the people in Convoy 14, there are dozens of similar convoys around the country, and they represent the US government. They call us insurgents and separatists, but otherwise they're reasonably friendly. They'll trade, and we'll help each other with undead problems. They're also very well armed—some with incredibly advanced military weaponry, others with swords and honest-to-goodness full suits of plate armor.

The Canadian Rail Union

When the apocalypse broke out, for some reason there was a thread of thought across the central US that the answer was to flee north, as if zombies would just hit a wall at the 49th parallel. Anyway, it was a terrible plan, because winter doesn't faze the undead but sure does kill the living. Vast tracts of the country are so densely packed with the undead that they're almost literally impassable.

...unless you're in a powerful steam locomotive with a big-ass cow-catcher on the front. The CRU is a conglomeration of hundreds of tiny city-states, exclusively connected by the rails. The settlements are both physically and culturally isolated, and vary tremendously based on what group of desperate refugees founded them. Many don't speak English at all. The Union's full of infighting and complex politics, and the region is dangerous. Reports trickling down suggest that there are bigger, scarier undead monsters up there than anything we've seen in Cascadia.

The Global Economy

Cascadia trades pretty freely with the other countries along the Pacific coast. Davis is always short on water but grows fruit we don't have the climate for. Convoy's got seemingly limitless weapons and ammo, but almost nothing else. Even Seattle gets in on it for some reason. They want clothes and manufactured goods, and they get us coffee beans, and no, we don't know where or how they're getting them, but we're in no position to complain.

The CRU needs a little of everything, but generally has nothing we want. They did, however, spearhead the Coastal Starlight Rail. It's a train that runs once a week, from a CRU outpost in Vancouver to the heart of Davis and back, with stops in Cascadia and Seattle (where nobody gets on or off) along the way. It's too small to haul much cargo, but it moves people and keeps the lines of communication open, so it's worth keeping around.

ANATOMY OF THE UNDEAD

Fifty years after the apocalypse, we still have no idea what caused it. Maybe some powerful magic kept the undead at bay but finally wore off. Maybe there's an entity who lives in the realm of the dead and finally figured out how to break through into the real world, dragging zombies with it. Maybe there really was no more room in hell. Who knows?

What we've got is a ton of empirical evidence.



The Types of Undead

As a mortician, you're responsible for anything undead. That's a wider, creepier pool than most people think.

Every city has its own argot for describing different kinds of monsters, and the slang changes from station to station and year to year. Life-strangler, grim Rasputin, jolly murderer...they're all names for the same monster. Giving nicknames to the undead is normal, but for clarity's sake, the morticians have a classification system. Kind of a taxonomy of dead things, which starts by dividing them up into the big three:

- **Zombies** are dead bodies that get up of their own accord, sometimes mutating when they do so.
- **Specters** are non-physical entities that manage to survive in the real world, even without a shell made of meat.
- **Animations** are dead bodies or things made of dead bodies that get brought to life with necromancy.

The sentient undead, the ones who pass the Kim Test and are legally people, can come from any one of those categories.

Documented Undead and the Kim Test

People think of the undead as monsters, and, yeah, usually they will try to kill or eat you. However, there are sentient, sapient undead, like lichens, ghosts, and revenants. They've had a long struggle, given that most places just shoot anything undead that gets too close to the city, but increasing pressure from activist groups finally led to the passage of the Sixth Amendment ten years back. Being dead is no longer sufficient cause to deny a person citizenship.

Mort Station Heads and some government agencies are authorized to perform what's called the Kim Test, named after the senator-turned-revenant who helped devise it. Answer five simple questions and don't try to eat your interviewer, and you're considered a human being.

Still, it's a difficult existence for the documented undead—also called **Kimmies**, among a ton of nastier epithets. Cascadian Kimmies retain their citizenship and name, but almost nothing else. Because property and copyright laws were made with the assumption that dead people didn't matter anymore, when you die you lose everything. Legally speaking, dead-you is a new person unrelated to living-you.

Your estate gets divided up, and no, you can't will your goods to yourself. If you're lucky, you have a support network and an employer willing to immediately re-hire you. If you don't, well, good thing you can't starve to death. And all this ignores the obvious social problems and dangers of being undead in a world of people who don't like the undead.

Some Kimmies can get back on their feet, but it's no surprise that many end up pushed into the outskirts.

Living as the Undead

There are some commonalities among the undead, whatever their type, sentient or not.

Decay is slowed. There are still zombies out there who turned on day one, although they won't be around forever. Eventually meat rots, bones crumble, and even specters grow fuzzy and dissipate. That just might take a century or so.

They don't need to eat, though it's more accurate to say that they can't starve. The undead still feel hunger and thirst. Obviously zombies eat flesh, and most animations and specters will try to eat when possible. Kimmies usually eat small meals if they can afford it. Eating doesn't *do* anything, but it has a powerful placebo effect that helps them stop feeling hungry.

Likewise, air. The undead breathe out of habit, not necessity, but they'll still panic and even pass out if you smother them with a pillow.

Then there's sleep. Sleep is essential, evidently. Even mindless zombies go torpid for about one hour in every four. In this way, Kimmies are a lot like living humans: without eight hours of shut-eye—or dimmed-socket, as the case may be—they'll start going nuts.

Undead NPCs

Most undead are simple creatures, and have skills which are much more narrow and directed than a human's skills. While sentient undead might be able to take advantage of the various nuances of Fight, most zombies only know enough to try to bite people, so their fighting skill is "Bite!"

The undead are not subtle, so their skills always end with an exclamation point. Sometimes, an undead NPC can have both nuanced standard skills with simple undead skills. A skeletal archer, for example, might be able to Shoot like a living person, but would only have a movement skill of Climb!

No matter their skills, all undead were once human, which is why many have a unique **personal aspect**. Often it represents something they're wearing, or some injury they're showing the effects of, but it could also be some dim fragment of personality that they're displaying. Not only does it give undead a little character, but it also makes them easier to keep track of in a fight.

GMs, you can certainly hand-tailor personal aspects for undead NPCs, but you can also lighten your creative load by having your players come up with them. Whenever an undead with a personal aspect bursts onto the scene, ask someone to say the first thing they notice about that monster, and turn their response into its aspect.

Finally, while undead PCs have special rules for how they handle physical stress (page 26), those rules take more bookkeeping than the average undead monster requires. You can stat up major undead NPCs like characters, but treat everything else like a nameless NPC, with a single stress track which can be filled by whatever sorts of damage the morts are able to dish out.

Zombies

There's no such thing as a "zombie virus" and there never was. That took a while to figure out. Lots of people got bit in the line of duty and ended up voluntarily taking a bullet when a little iodine would have been more effective.

When a human dies, there's a little tear in reality as their spirit gets pulled out of their body and sent to the place where spirits go. Maybe half the time, that tear closes right back up, no problem. Otherwise, a spirit from the other side pulls through and wears the corpse as a suit. The body gets up and causes havoc, and that's what we call a zombie.

One of the biggest problems that zombies pose is that the undead are sort of a walking weak spot in reality. When you die, the closer your body is to anything undead, the better the odds you get reanimated. If what killed you happens to be something undead, your odds of getting right back up again are nearly one hundred percent. With specters and animations, this is annoying, but with zombies it's especially dangerous—outbreaks tend to keep reinforcing themselves and growing.

The Zombie Alphabet

Most of what the world is overrun with are what we call **alpha-class zombies** or just **alphas**. They're slow, stupid, and have an insatiable hunger for human flesh. Standard stuff.

Sometimes, the spirit animating the body also mutates it into something especially inhuman. Some swell up with toxic bile. Some sport bulging muscles. Some have one normal arm and one big old club of an arm, spiked with pointy shards of their own exploded bones. All are incredibly gross.

These mutations are consistent enough that they've been classified. If it's got bulging, hyperdeveloped muscles that it uses to lunge at alarming speeds, then it might be informally called a runner or a quarterback or a shadowlancer, depending on the station, but they'll all know it's a **beta-class zombie**.

The zombie designations are roughly in order of rarity. Betas are more common than the bile-spewing gammas, who are more common than the tunneling deltas, and so on. These mutations happen spontaneously, but they're affected by proximity—if you get killed by a beta, then you're much more likely to get up as a beta yourself.

It seems like mutations are getting more common. Twenty years ago, gristlegrinders and spewers were mostly hearsay, and the alphabet ended at lambda. Now, they're all over the place, and there's real talk about what we're gonna do when we run out of letters. Maybe they just seem more common because we've gotten better at keeping records and not getting killed off by rare zombies—it's kind of a shame the morticians don't keep statisticians on staff.

VARYING THE DEAD

Usually, alphas are cannon fodder, while an omicron-class zombie, sometimes called a titan, is a ten-foot-tall, incredibly threatening murder-monster. But the undead are people too, kind of. A titan that's been around for decades might be nearly rotted through, and go down in a single hit. A single alpha that's reasonably fresh and happened to die with a meat cleaver in its hand can be an overwhelming threat. Morticians like to think they have a handle on how the undead work, but they're often thrown for a loop.

GMs, mix things up sometimes. Add or remove stress boxes, shift skills up or down, drop in unexpected stunts. Surprise your players whenever you think they're growing complacent.



Alpha-class Zombies

Zombies. The most basic kind, found in every corner.

ASPECTS

Mindless, Shambling, Hungry Undead

Personal Aspect:

SKILLS

Good (+3): Bite!

Average (+1): Shamble!

STRESS

Epsilon-class Zombie

Common names for epsilons include skitterlurks and trapdoor spiders. Shortly after reviving, their bones begin growing and twisting grotesquely, sometimes breaking and re-fusing at odd angles. They're too mangled to stand, but they can crawl under old cars and things and leap, teeth-first, at whoever passes by.

ASPECTS

Grotesque, Mangled Zombie; Squeezes into Tight Corners

Personal Aspect:

SKILLS

Good (+3): Lunge and bite!

Fair (+2): Hide!

Average (+1): Skitter!

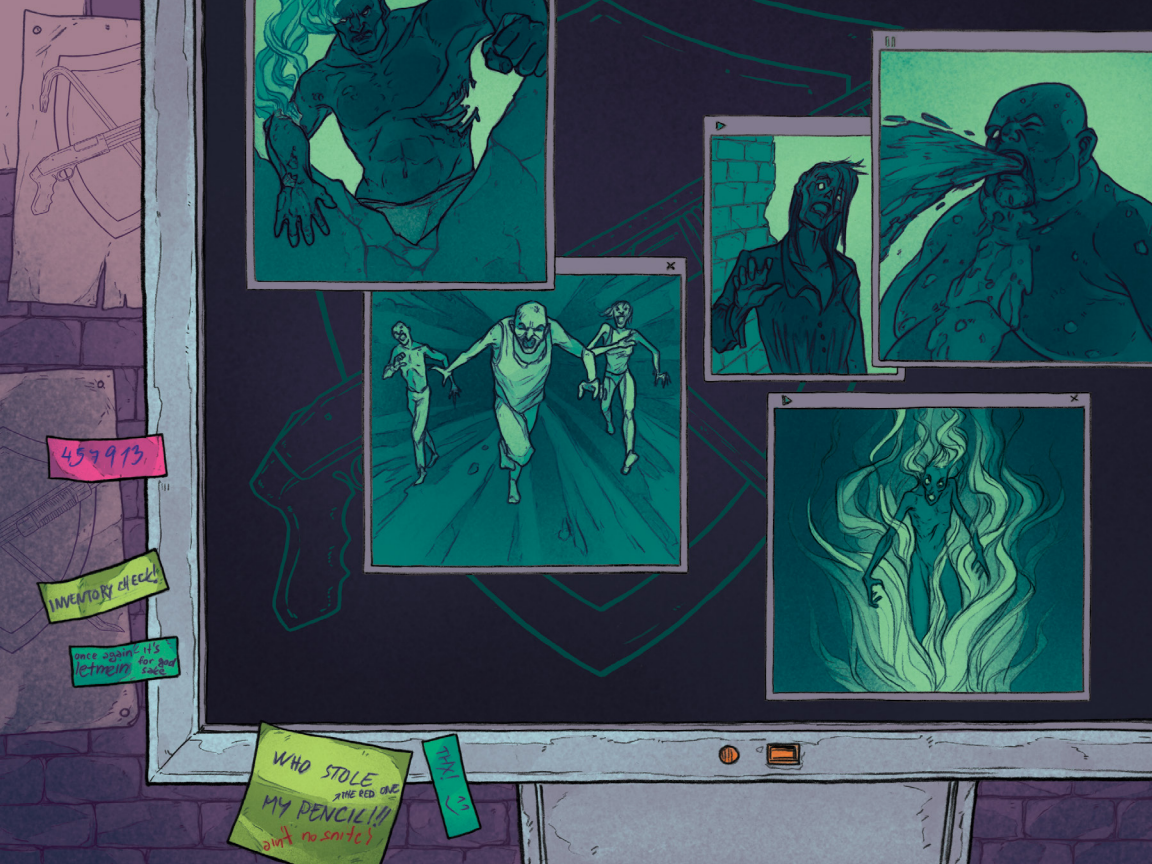
STUNTS

Ambush: A skitterlurk gets +2 to attack any target who doesn't know where it is.

STRESS

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):



Omega-class Revenants

The zombie alphabet ends, for the moment, at tau, a mutation that's just on fire all the time. But omegas take up a special spot at the end.

An omega happens when someone dies but their spirit **doesn't** leave—it comes right back and reanimates its own body. The result is a **revenant**: a zombie like an alpha, but because their animating spirit is designed to inhabit this particular body, the spirit's control over it is much finer. The zombie retains all of their skills, memories, and mental faculties. Basically, they're the same person, just dead. Sometimes it takes someone a couple days to realize they're a revenant.

Handling Zombies

When it comes to zombies, remember the lesson Uncle George taught us: remove the head or destroy the brain. That's enough trauma to ensure that the spirit can't animate the body anymore.

But while headshots are extremely useful if you want to keep zombies down permanently, they aren't required. Zombies are still (mostly) human, after all—it might not feel pain like a living person, but its body isn't any better at compensating for its injuries, so sufficient damage will disable it. Hell, when it comes to most varieties, just knocking them over will buy you like a half-hour as they struggle to right themselves, although it's considered good form to use this opportunity to engineer a more permanent solution.



Specters

When a spirit arrives in the real world, it generally has a few seconds to either start animating a dead body or dissipate. Spirit-stuff just isn't meant to exist in the world of the living without a shell of some sort. But a powerful enough spirit can keep its form and exist as a **specter**. They're technically incorporeal, but most can interact with physical objects, and the most powerful ones feel as solid as a real person.

Sometimes a specter is made when someone dies but their spirit doesn't cross over, but most arrive from the other side. Thin spots in the wall between the real world and the realm of the dead blow around like weather patterns, although they tend to be drawn to cemeteries and places like hospitals or accident sites where lots of people died.

The Specter Spectrum

If you were to somehow forget that you had legs, your legs wouldn't go away. Your body is made of meat and has a constant physical presence. But specters don't have a real body. They're basically mental projections, so if one forgot it had legs, it wouldn't have legs anymore.

It's evidently normal for spirits to just forget who they were as they spend a few decades in the realm of the dead. Specters are classified based on how much of their identity they seem to have retained.

Category-1 and -2 specters are just wispy blobs or vague human forms. Barely there. By Cat-3, a specter is recognizably a former human, at Cat-4 you might even have a disjointed conversation with it, and at Cat-5 it's effectively as self-aware as it was before it died.

It's at Category-6 and above that things get scary. Cat-6 specters, some time after they died, grew obsessed with something, usually related to their cause of death. And obsession really matters for creatures who are essentially made of their thoughts and feelings. Think headless ghosts of vengeance, enraged and inhuman hunters, and such. Technically intelligent, but unreasonable. Category-7 and -8 describe rarer specters, who have been twisted into demonic or utterly inhuman forms by their own madness.

The classification system is a spectrum, obviously, and specters can float around it, even rising or falling between categories as their mental state changes.



Cryogeists

A dangerous sort of Cat-3 specter. They've kept just enough of their intelligence to realize, and be really unhappy about, the fact that they're freezing. Because they think they're cold, they literally are freezing cold. One cryogeist isn't a problem, but they tend to show up in groups, which suggests that there's some place in the realm of the dead that's just really cold and where all these things are falling out of.

They'll fight back, ineffectually, if attacked, but otherwise they just want to go where it's warm.

ASPECTS

Barely Coherent Specter; "So, so cold..."

Personal Aspect:

SKILLS

Good (+3): Chase warm bodies!
Average (+1): Hit someone back!

STRESS

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

STUNTS

F-f-f-freezing: Whenever a living person ends their turn in a zone with a cryogeist, they take one physical stress per cryogeist in that zone.

The Bonespear

The bonespear is a pretty basic Cat-6 specter. It looks like a man in tattered clothes, his face sliced or maybe burned off, wielding in his right hand a spear made out of the bones of his left arm. General assumption is that he's seeking revenge against someone, but he'll attack anyone who gets too close. He's been spotted all over Cascadia, sometimes wearing different clothes, which leads to the worrying conclusion that there may be multiple specters with the same profile.

ASPECTS

Specter Fueled by Rage;
The Bonespear's Bone Spear
Personal Aspect:

SKILLS

Good (+3): Spear!
Fair (+2): Toss people around!
Average (+1): Speed

STRESS

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Ghosts

Category 5 is about where specters are as intelligent as living people. That is to say, they know who they are, and they understand that they're dead, and they haven't gone insane. They're able to pass the Kim Test, and they're what most people mean when they refer to ghosts.

Mostly, ghosts look like they did at the moment they died, even if that means they've got phantom weapons poking out of their back. But even the ones who died in peaceful circumstances are clearly not quite there—they're semi-translucent, and their appearance isn't entirely consistent from moment to moment. Sometimes they grow more solid, or fade away, as their concentration waxes and wanes. They might briefly grow older or younger, or change outfits in mid-sentence, based on how they see themselves at the moment. They'll eventually revert back to their just-died standard look, though.

Ghosts tend to be the very recently departed, but there are some who died even before the zombie apocalypse. The oldest one we know about died in the 1970s. Unfortunately, ghosts can't describe what things are like in the realm of the dead; there are vague recollections of dim grey plains and a common recurring nightmare about a waterfall, but mostly those memories fade away when someone crosses back over to the world of the living.

Handling Specters

Low-category specters are usually annoyances. They'll fade away with time, and aren't worth worrying about. Mid-category specters are people, even when they're confused or insane, and exorcising them is really about appeasement and reasoning with them. Even high-category demonic things usually want something, and if you figure out what they want, you can convince them to leave you alone. You might even bring them enough peace that they stop obsessing and slip down the spectrum into something more manageable.

If that doesn't work, well, morticians do not believe that there is such a thing as a problem that cannot be punched into submission. You might not be able to injure a specter with physical violence, but you can cause them pain and, more importantly, mental distress. If you cause it enough stress, it'll flee, dissipate, or forget who it is and turn into a vague Cat-1 blob. It can take a specter years to regain enough of its sense of self to climb back up the scale, and some never do.

Animations

Necromancy can be used to raise zombies and summon specters, but it also can create weirder, idiosyncratic things. Animations are those monsters that don't occur naturally—they require magic to exist.

There are a lot of different animations, but what they all have in common is a vessel, usually a human corpse or a thing made of corpses. The necromancer's magic opens a hole in reality, yanks a spirit out from the other side, and shoves it into the vessel, forcing it to gain a semblance of life. If they're really good, they might even be able to exercise some control over their creation.

The Animation Codes

There are so many different kinds of animations that trying to list them all is futile. New spells get discovered all the time, and powerful necromancers can even tweak the spells they know, adding unique flourishes. U of O's Necromancy Department has a naming convention for animations, but it's unrelated to what they use in Davis, and any given necromancer might use one or both or neither. In the morts, we keep it simple. When you're reporting an animation, assign a code; if you've never seen anything like it before, give it your best guess based on how scary it looks.

A code green animation is something you know isn't going to hurt anyone. A bone-walker, for instance, is just a walking chair made of bones. Not scary at all.

A code yellow animation is something that might cause trouble but isn't an immediate concern. Grave hands—disembodied hands that like to strangle people—should be dealt with soonish, but there's no huge rush.

A code red animation is a top priority. Like a blood dancer...you know, a swirling person-sized maelstrom of human blood that drowns people in itself. If you hear there's a code red, it's time to run.

Liches

A lich is an undead person kept magically animated by their own spirit. Like an omega-class zombie, the lich is fully sentient and in control, just no longer breathing. The difference is, the magic required to make this happen on purpose is intense, and it has a side effect of burning most of the body's flesh off, leaving it an animated skeleton.

Usually, liches are necromancers who skeletonize themselves, either because they don't want to die right now, or they just want to show off their ability to cast a really, really challenging spell. But that's not always the case. Some people ask to be transformed because they're old or sick or just want a second shot at life. Tracking down someone who's both willing and able to help you make the change is difficult and expensive.

Handling Animations

Even if animations look like zombies, the magic that created them gives the spirit more control over its body: even if it has a head, destroying the brain won't necessarily make it dead-for-real. The good news is that they're still just bodies, and can be bashed, smashed, crushed, and set on fire.

But if you're looking for an easier solution to your animation issues, find out who raised them. The necromancer is the conduit for the spirits they're using. They are kind of the brain for every animation they've raised...take them out, and their creations will all drop right away.



Dire Crows

Take a dead flock of crows, shove a spirit into it, and let it fly. A rare form of animated animal corpse, and a hive-minded animation. Code yellow, mainly for the annoyance factor when they swarm.

ASPECTS

Undead Crow; Many Bodies, One Mind

SKILLS

Good (+3): Dive-Bomb!

Fair (+2): Fly!

Average (+1): Peck!

STRESS

Dire crows have no stress boxes. When they absorb stress, they get taken out.

Bone Horror

All the long bones in this corpse's limbs have been removed, sharpened, and then lashed back on the outside. Pointy, unpredictable, and code red.

ASPECTS

Covered in Jagged Bones; Limbs Like Floppy Tentacles

Personal Aspect:

SKILLS

Good (+3): Stab stab stab!

Fair (+2): Wiggle out of danger!

Average (+1): Chase!

STRESS

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

CREATING YOUR CHARACTERS

Joining the morts is easy. There are no references to check, no physical exam, and sure as hell no psych profile. You don't even need to give your real name. Here's what needs to happen.

Vital Status

The morts are the number-one employer of documented undead in Cascadia. In some areas, almost half the morts are Kimmies. First step to making your character is picking your **vital status**.

- **Alive:** The default. Good in most social situations, and able to clear away physical stress. You're normal enough.
- **Revenant:** An omega-class zombie. Easy to hurt but able to take a beating, and likely to trigger a "shoot on sight" instinct with some people.
- **Lich:** A magically created skeleton. Liches are often necromancers, so be prepared for that assumption. Since skeletons don't have many vital areas, liches are hard to hurt, but hits that do connect last a while.
- **Ghost:** A specter in that delicate position between forgetting who they are and going full-on obsessive. They're almost human, as long as they keep both their sanity and identity.



Aspects

As in *Fate Core*, characters have five aspects.

High Concept and Trouble

Your high concept is the most defining, central fact about you. Your trouble is the thing that always seems to bite you. All the player characters are in the morts, so you don't need to reference that in your high concept. If being a mortician is an essential part of your character, you can reference it, but make sure it reveals something unique. *A Mort* is a dull aspect. *Former Station Head*, *Back on the Team* takes us somewhere more interesting.

If you're undead, your high concept must reflect what sort of undead you are, but again be sure to make it more in-depth than just *A Lich*. Something like *A Skeletal Sniper* is a little better, and *Assassin Who Went Lich to Escape Her Past* brings a lot.

Weapon of Choice

Your third aspect is your **weapon of choice**: what do you like to use to solve problems? (Bearing in mind that most of your problems involve something trying to eat you.)

The morts will happily supply anyone who signs up with a shotgun or police baton, but they haven't been a proper military outfit for decades. General policy is that the best weapon for the job is the one you're comfortable with. Doesn't matter if it's a *WWII-Era Heirloom Rifle*, a *Scrap-Built Potato Cannon*, or a *Rusty Broadsword*.

While nothing is officially off the table as a weapon, anyone who wants to arm themselves with a chainsaw is asked to watch an hour-long safety demonstration counting down the ten increasingly bloody reasons this is a terrible idea.

Phase Trio

Morts don't work alone. That's one of the few rules that people still care about. Teams who work well together stay together and, more important, stay alive. You'll fill in your final two aspects by detailing some of the dangerous work you've done together, either on the job or off, as you would in the Phase Trio in *Fate Core* (page 38). The difference is, you don't take an aspect from the first phase. Your remaining two aspects will only come from your guest appearances in your teammates' adventures.



Skills

Morts uses the standard skill pyramid: one Great (+4) skill, two Good (+3) skills, three Fair (+2) skills, and four Average (+1) skills. Most of the skills come from *Fate Core* (page 96). Some new skills have been made, and others tweaked, in order to better reflect life in the outskirts.

Academics: This is your basic knowledge skill, and it replaces Lore. What's **not** covered by Academics is knowledge about the undead or magic. That stuff's Necrology.

Athletics: While this still covers climbing, jumping, and similar dexterous maneuvers, straight-up running would be a function of Speed.

Contacts: As normal.

Crafts: As normal.

Deception: As normal.

Empathy: As normal.

Fight: As normal.

Investigate: As normal.

Necrology: The study of the undead. Like Academics, except that this skill specifically and exclusively covers your knowledge of the undead and of necromancy. Its most commonly used to create advantages—for instance, to remember a specific weakness of that one particular type of undead.

Notice: As normal.

Persuasion: Your ability to influence people, both positively and negatively. This combines Rapport and Provoke from *Fate Core*.

Physique: As normal.

Shoot: As normal.

Speed: Your ability to flee from things trying to eat your flesh, or otherwise move yourself very quickly.

Sneak: This combines Stealth and Burglary from *Fate Core*. It includes hiding, infiltration, pickpocketing, and other thievery. You know, sneaky stuff.

Resources: As normal.

Will: As normal. Additionally, if you choose to attempt magic, this is the skill you'll use.

DRIVING

Most Cascadians never drive a car. Every *morts* station has a vehicle, and morticians learn the basics, but the Station Head only gives up the keys when there's an emergency—a station in distress, or a spindle-dancer gamboling down from the north or something similarly severe. Unless you're planning a campaign in which vehicles will play a notable role—for example, if your players are a team clearing up State Route 20, or they're working closely with representatives from Convoy 14—then Drive would be a wasted skill, which is why it's not part of the standard list.

In the rare instance that the players are spending in-game time in a vehicle, treat it as a challenge: for instance, spotting sudden obstacles with Notice and reacting in time with Speed.

Stunts

You've got three free stunts, plus three refresh, which you can spend to purchase some extra stunts, as normal. If you're undead, one of your stunts **must** be the one below that matches what type of Kimmie you are:

Revenant: You are an omega-class zombie. You lose your physical stress track. Instead, because your body absorbs wounds easily, you gain another mild consequence slot that can only be filled with a physical consequence. If your Physique is Average (+1) or above, you gain a second such slot. At Good (+3) or above, you gain a third such slot, and at Superb (+5) or above, a fourth.

Lich: You are a magically animated skeleton. You lose your physical stress track. Instead, because skeletons have so few weak spots, you gain Armor:1 against all sources of physical damage. If your Physique is Average (+1) or above, this increases to Armor:2, and if it's Good (+3) or above, it becomes Armor:3.

Ghost: You are a Category-5 specter. You lose your physical stress track. Instead, because your physical form is a mental projection, physical attacks cause you mental stress. If your Physique is Fair (+2) or above, you gain an additional mental stress box, and at Great (+4) or above, you gain another. These stack with mental stress boxes you gain from having high Will. Additionally, you can pass through solid objects such as walls, although doing so causes you to take one mental stress.

Extras

The jacket. The official uniform of the morticians is a leather jacket with a cool insignia on the back and, if you survive your first month, your name embroidered over the breast pocket. Everybody gets one—even ghosts, whose jackets have a special lining imported from Davis that helps keep them from phasing right through it accidentally.

As long as you're wearing your jacket, you get Armor:1 against any melee attack, and you are readily identifiable as a mortician. This Armor rating stacks with anything else with an Armor rating you might happen across.

Big Issues

As in *Fate Core*, the world of *Morts* has impending and ongoing issues for the characters to deal with. These often have something to do with the undead, like *A Persistent Influx of Ebonghast Specters* or *The Skeletal Army of the Golden Pharaoh of Missoula*. But while morticians might live outside the city proper, they're still affected by city politics and problems. There might be a *Water Shortage*, *Entrenched Corruption in the LAMs*, or *Run-Down, Failing Trains*.

Make at least one of your campaign's big issues unrelated to the undead. This will help ensure that the PCs are also tied, at least somewhat, to the "normal" world in the city.

In addition to the two big issues unique to your campaign, there is a third present everywhere in the world: *The Veil Between Life and Death Is Wiggly and Uncertain*. This issue is entirely outside of anyone's control, sitting there to be invoked and compelled like any other aspect.

At the beginning of each session, the GM gets free invocations of this aspect: one free invocation plus one for every undead PC. That's because the undead tend to attract more undead. The GM also gains a free invocation whenever a PC casts a necromantic spell, because that also attracts more undead. This aspect can be invoked to make just about any undead monster stronger and harder to deal with. The free invocations expire at the end of the session, so be sure to use them.

Necromancy

When the dead rose, it wasn't long before people figured out that some forms of magic—specifically necromancy—worked. It wasn't much longer before people figured out that it was dangerous and generally a bad idea.

Finding Spells

Spells are rare, valuable, dangerous, and weird. They just appear, seemingly at random. People stumble across words in an unknown language, written in the margins of old books, or painted on the walls of forgotten basements, or things like that. No labels. You'll need to cast it to know what it does. One well-known spell to raise alphas was first discovered carved into a chicken femur by a guy who was eating the chicken in question, and who promptly died from a bad case of "reading things aloud." It's almost as if there's a mysterious force seeding the world with necromancy all scattershot, tacitly encouraging us to work more magic. Budding necromancers are advised not to think about that too hard.

The thing about spells is, while the robes in Davis or even U of O can figure out what they do, tweak them, and sometimes combine or alter effects, they're still a mystery. For one thing, they can't be copied easily. That spell carved on a chicken bone? It can be copied, but only onto chicken bones. Read it off of anything else or try to cast it from memory and, best case, nothing happens. Same with any other spell. This means necromancers collect a lot of weird stuff... bones, books, photos, dolls, a whole sack of random crap.



How to Cast a Spell

Step 1: Consider not doing this dangerous thing.

Step 2: Gather the components. Often it'll be a human corpse, sometimes with a few special preparations. Sometimes it's a complex amalgam of parts from a dozen human corpses. It always requires an unbroken circle to be made around it, although whether that's chalk, paint, little rocks, or anything else doesn't seem to matter.

Step 3: Read the spell. This requires rolling to overcome with Will against opposition that bottoms out at Fantastic (+6), but could be much, much higher. Along with anything else which might increase the challenge of spellcasting, add +2 to the opposition for every active animation that you created—you are a conduit for the spirits, and there are limits to your bandwidth.

Step 4: Resolve the effects.

- If you succeed, the spell goes off. You create an undead thing, which gets up and starts moving around. After about a day the spell will wear off, and the undead thing will be dead again.
- If you succeed with style, not only do you create a thing, but you can choose to make it **obedient** or **permanent**. If it's obedient, it will obey orders you give it, or at least attempt to, for the next hour or so. You don't get direct control—the animation is still an NPC, and a very stupid and bestial one at that—but at least you can point it in the right direction. If it's permanent, then it won't re-die in a day, and its existence doesn't increase the opposition to your attempts to cast spells.
- If you tie, nothing happens.
- If you fail, then your soul is rent from your body and pulled into the realm of the dead, killing you immediately, irrevocably, and—if the brief but intense screaming of failed necromancers is any indication—incredibly painfully. So...be aware of that.



Improving Your Odds

If you've got the time, you can create advantages to help out the casting. A ***Magically Potent Circle***, for instance, will take a few minutes and a Good (+3) Crafts roll. People versed in Necrology might be able to come up with other ways to make casting go smoother, although creating these advantages is usually almost as hard as doing the actual casting.

For a quick and cheap +2 bonus to your roll, splash a little fresh blood around the circle before you cast. Any living human's will do. Voluntarily cutting yourself to draw a little blood will give you one physical stress. This is kind of like a boost, so use it right away or lose it.

A human sacrifice, now that's a super-boost—if you kill someone right before or during a casting, that's worth +10 to your roll. But it's also murder. Even in Davis, where they do capital punishment and necromancy, that sort of thing is not allowed.

Finally, since necromancy involves making your mind a channel through which spirits get pulled into the real world, you can always pay for it with your own sanity. Take a hit of however much mental stress you want, and gain an equivalent bonus to your Will roll. So taking five stress gives you +5 to your roll. The good news is that you can choose to do this after you roll, so a failure isn't actually immediately fatal. The bad news is that however much stress you take, **you must absorb it with a consequence**. Even if it's only one stress, you'll need to fill your mild consequence slot to handle it. If you can't or won't do that, well, good luck on the other side.

Bone Charms

Some clever necromancers have figured out how to turn spells into ready-to-cast cantrips, carved onto a bit of human bone. If you have a corpse in a circle, all you need to do is snap the charm in half, and the thing gets up, no effort on your part.

Now, it's only going to be active for an hour, and you don't get to give it orders. But it's going to work, and it's not incredibly risky, except in the sense that you're trusting that whoever sold you this bone and said it was a code green pack mule didn't accidentally slip you a decidedly code red noose-tongued slasher.

Spells

Having access to a necromantic ritual is way above a mort's pay grade, so starting the game with one puts you at an advantage to your peers. Players, if you're desperate to have a spell on hand, you can take the following stunt.

Necromantic Ritual: Design a single necromancy spell. You have access to that spell and may attempt to cast it. If you ever sell, destroy, or otherwise rid yourself of the spell, you lose this stunt and may replace it at your next minor milestone.

Obviously there are more spells in the world than can be summed up here. When you're designing spells, remember that magic can allow corpses to defy physics and operate in impossible ways, but it always comes down to a spirit forcing a semblance of life into a dead thing.

Basic Zombie

Spell: A dried chicken's femur, covered in carved words.

Opposition: +8

Components: One human corpse, reasonably complete.

Results: The corpse gets up, with the abilities and inclinations of a standard alpha-class zombie (page 16).

Scout Skull

Spell: A couple of words written in black marker on the shiny side of an old CD.

Opposition: +7

Components: One human skull, severed between the third and fourth vertebrae. Skinned or not, doesn't seem to matter.

Results: Any flesh clinging to the skull is consumed, and it turns into a Scout Skull. It floats about shoulder high and incessantly follows the caster. For about an hour, whenever the caster closes their eyes, they will see through the skull's empty eye sockets.

Bone Walker

Spell: A dictionary, with the spell jotted in the margins over several pages in the Ts.

Opposition: +10

Components: Lots of bones. A few hundred; using two full human skeletons has been proven to work, but the source of the bones doesn't matter as long as there are enough of them.

Results: The bones are reoriented into a bone walker: a sort of bony chair atop two long legs that will stride forward inexorably. Riding one is faster than walking, but it's not very comfortable. Bring a pillow.

CREATING ADVENTURES

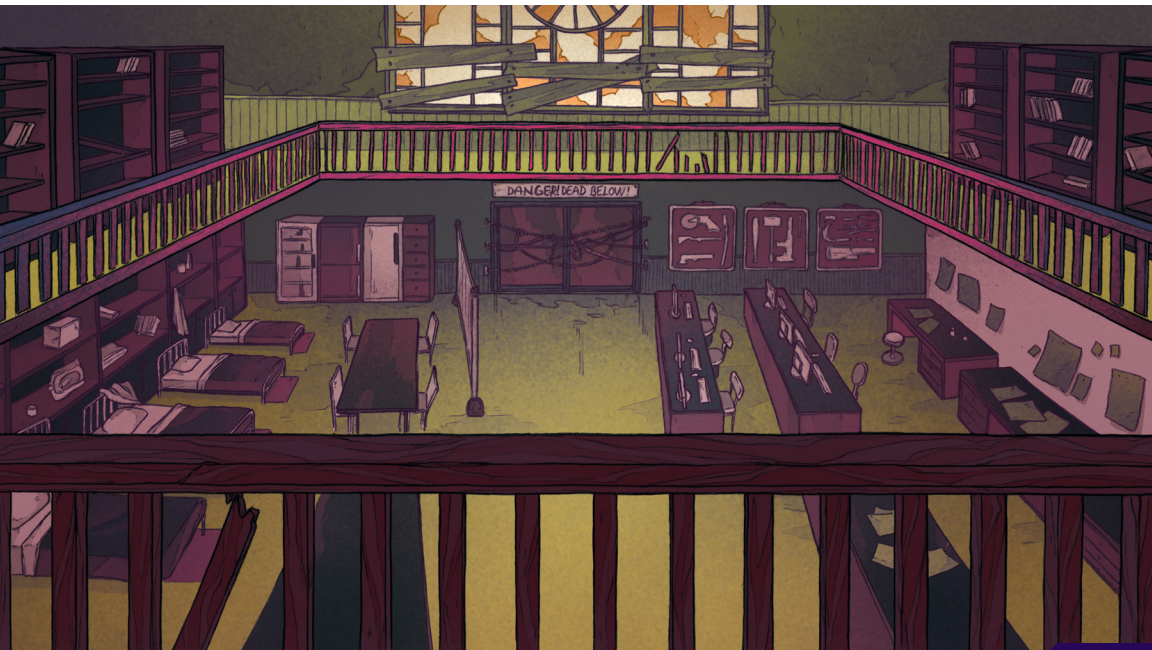
Morts are, in their own way, heroic adventurers. They might not want to do heroic things, but they're still responsible for making sure civilization doesn't collapse, so adventures happen to them.

That said, they aren't fantasy heroes on grand quests across the countryside. They're losers with a dangerous job. They might get pulled into a big adventure sometimes, but usually their life revolves around their day-to-day job.

The Hub

A mort's life is built around a small area they see every day: their station and the outskirts around it, where they do the boring work of trudging through the wastes and killing lone alphas. This is their **hub**. As the GM, your job is to make the hub an interesting place to explore. After all, while a mort's work will keep the city from being destroyed, that's a pretty abstract motivator. A decently comfortable room in the station, a couple of interesting coworkers, and maybe some cool ruins to poke through? That's something both the morts and their players can care about.

In-universe, the hub is also where morticians train, fill out paperwork, and clean the bathrooms once a week. That's part of the flavor of the place, but it's just not stuff that's going to make it into play. The station is a place where the players can rest, resupply, and look over whatever loot they've picked up. The area around it is a little sandbox, where players can explore during their "on-duty" time, discovering neat places, killing random undead, and most importantly, happening across **missions**.



The Missions

A mission is a scene or set of scenes tied to a specific objective that's more involved than bumming around the hub. Teams of mortos are generally self-directed, so they'll make missions for themselves, like clearing out dangerous spaces or tracking down weird animations. But there are also people in the hub who might have a task for the mortos. The Station Head is an obvious choice, but there are also farmers and foragers, travelers from the wasteland, and the down-on-their-luck scavengers in the outskirts.

Missions aren't long. A single mission shouldn't last for more than a session. It's an issue of pacing: a mortician does their job and moves on. For deeper adventures with major villains, missions can chain together (page 36), but they should still be punctuated by calmer moments in the hub. One of the facts that sells life as a mortician is the juxtaposition of the outrageous and the mundane: one minute you're chopping a zombie in half, and the next minute you're chopping carrots because it's your day to make dinner.

The hub is full of missions. Ideally, the mortos can wander in any direction and find something to do, pass on missions and come back to them later, and of course, make up their own missions. Don't worry, GMs, you don't have to prep for hours to fill every possible corner of the world. You can whip up a mission in moments by following a few simple steps.

Step 1: The Inciting Incident

This is whatever thing that pulls the mortos out of wandering and into action. Sometimes you will have no idea what this could be until it happens—when the players say “Let's take a closer look at this” or “Where did this come from?” then they've just made up an inciting incident. Run with it!

Otherwise, inciting incidents can be whatever you want. Some options are very likely, like wandering monsters, shouts in the distance, cryptic notes or radio signals, and people asking for help. The smoke that indicates an undead fire. Sometimes players won't notice or care about a potential mission, and that's fine! Keep it around if possible, and let them come back to it when they want.

A mission handed down from the Station Head, now, that's railroading your players. If they're proving listless or otherwise need a push, it's a big gun you can use to get them moving. Do it sparingly.

UNAUTHORIZED MISSIONS

Mortos have been known to help people in the outskirts who have mundane problems unrelated to the undead. They've also been known to smuggle drugs into their cities, play pranks on other teams, or just ditch work and try to sneak into a movie theater. Anything that gives the team a focus can be a mission, even if it's off the morticians' beat.



Step 2: The Locale

Where is this mission taking place? Sometimes it's familiar territory—by all means surround the mort's house with a hoard of undead sometime—but usually you'll drag everyone into a new setting. The area between the wall and the fence is filled with active farms, campsites, shanty towns, and ruins of any civic structure you might imagine. Dangerous things might appear in the city proper, forcing the mort's to contend with civilization. And while it's not encouraged, mort's can and sometimes must go beyond the fence and into the wasteland, where there are more ruins, stretches of zombie-infested road, dense clusters of alphas, and even necromancer's towers.

Depending on your needs, the locale can be a single room or the entire city. The point isn't to limit the geography, but to give the mission a sense of place. Exploring new and dangerous locations is part of being a mortician.

Step 3: Keystone Objective

This is the heart of the mission. Any objective can be a keystone, although some of the more obvious options include "Kill this undead thing," "Get to this place," and "Collect this important thing." Something concrete.

The team might not know what the keystone is when the mission starts. For instance, if they're investigating how an everbleeding hulk got into the city, the keystone objective might be to blow up the secret tunnel from the outskirts. It'll take some investigation to figure out what they need to do, but it should be obvious when the keystone has been achieved—or if it leads to an interesting outcome, rendered unachievable. It's either the climactic moment of the mission, or it's an action that leads right into a climactic confrontation.

Step 4: Fodder

If the keystone objective is the heart of the mission, then fodder is the soul of the game. Morts spend most of their time killing alphas, and there are weak specters and animations that serve a similar role—omnipresent, annoying, and easy to kill. As a player, killing zombies should be fun, fulfilling, and rewarding (even if the *characters* consider it part of the daily grind). To that end, most missions will be filled with **fodder**: enemies who are everywhere.

While any sort of undead can be fodder, they are always a minor threat: one stress box, if that, and no really scary abilities. Rather than being threatening, they make other challenges more interesting.

There are two important things about fodder. First, whenever a mort takes out fodder, they get a boost. That's to make sure killing fodder feels rewarding. It also means that if the players are struggling with something, you can let some fodder burst into the scene, which might actually help the morts out.

Secondly, as soon as the morts have completed their keystone objective, the fodder goes away. This might make perfect narrative sense—for instance, if the keystone objective involves taking out a necromancer, and the fodder are her animations—but it might not make any sense. That doesn't matter...doing this helps the mission's pacing. As soon as the players reach their important goal, they shouldn't feel threatened by incidental monsters. In-universe, the morts would spend time doing boring cleanup work, making sure every fallen zombie is actually dead. In-game, that's not fun to play, so elide it unless something interesting happens during the cleanup.

Some missions won't have fodder, especially if the team is doing something unauthorized right in the heart of the city, or if being sneaky is essential. That's fine, and varying up the missions is important, as long as most of them give opportunities to kill the undead.

HANDLING COMBAT INITIATIVE

While any form of tracking initiative in a combat has its benefits and tradeoffs, *Morts* works exceedingly well with Balsera-style (aka “popcorn”) initiative. The GM figures out who's acting first. This will usually be the character with the highest Notice or the creature lunging from the shadows unexpectedly. After that character acts, then their player—or if they're an NPC, the GM—decides who acts next. It can be anyone, on either side of the conflict, who hasn't yet acted. Whoever's controlling the last character to act in a round decides who acts first in the next round.

Popcorn initiative makes it really easy for players to work together, one creating an advantage that the next can immediately benefit from, for instance. It also makes it easy for NPCs to work together, giving even the lowliest fodder the ability to surprise and swarm the players.

Step 5: Setpieces

These are any particularly notable challenges that the team will face on the mission, like powerful undead, environmental hazards, or people who need to be talked down tactfully. Basically, any interesting challenges that will crop up, usually standing between the players and the keystone objective. When you're prepping a mission, come up with two or three setpieces. Don't worry about what connects them. Instead, keep them on hand to drop in when the moment seems right, based on what the players get up to.

If you're a gifted improviser, though, you might not worry about setpieces at all. You can just generate challenges on the fly. If you're not a confident GM, then come up with a few extra, just in case the PCs go somewhere you don't expect.

Step 6: Rewards

When a mission ends—after the keystone has been achieved (or rendered dramatically unachievable) and any loose ends have been cleared up—the morts should get something for their trouble. Something beyond a minimum-wage paycheck and whatever satisfaction comes from a job well done.

Morts get milestones, of course, but they should also get useful things. *Fate Core* isn't especially inventory-oriented, but cool stuff is cool, and one of the fringe benefits of being a mortician is getting a shelf full of souvenirs. Stations almost always have a trophy room full of weird skulls, broken weapons, and other neat finds. Encourage your players to customize their stations with little trophies. It won't have a mechanical effect, but it will make the station feel a bit more like home. But even beyond that, you'll want to end most missions by giving the players something.

Magic stuff is extremely powerful, dangerous, and awesome. Actual spells are usually not appropriate for morticians—they have the potential to dramatically change how players approach problems. But a spell can be a great short-term reward, livening up a mission or two before the Station Head takes it away. A bone charm is also rewarding: players can sell or trade it, use it as a threat, or even, in dire situations, use it. It's especially fun if the morts aren't sure what the charm actually does, so you can try to get them into a circumstance where the best course of action is to break a charm over a corpse and just see what happens.

Loot includes things like a little extra cash, or the goodwill of an ally, or a giant pile of ammunition. They're resources that are either abstract or not worth tracking, and which belong to the team as a whole. Loot is basically a boost: an aspect that the players can invoke for free, but once they do so, it disappears. Regular boosts disappear very quickly if not used, but you can hold onto loot for a long time. It will eventually fade, but might take weeks to do so. Loot is something players might find on most missions, and shouldn't feel the need to hoard.

Finally, there's **gear**. These are the useful things players find: weapons, tools, and valuable stuff. Each piece of gear has an aspect, like *Rusty Old Chainsaw* or *Set of Lockpicks*. As long as someone's holding onto the gear, its aspect can be invoked and compelled by the GM and players. But gear is temporary—it can be lost, broken, or stolen. Taking away someone's gear is a compel, so it can be refused. Gear aspects are described in a little more detail in the *Fate System Toolkit* (page 16).

Gear is great. Let a player stumble across gear whenever they do something impressive. At the same time, stuff on the outskirts breaks, so use your compels to churn through their gear. Players should never have more than two bits of gear at a time, and gear really shouldn't last more than a couple sessions.

Mission Chains

Missions in *Morts* don't replace the scenes and scenarios of basic *Fate Core*; missions just pace them in a certain way. A mission usually takes a couple scenes—arriving at the locale, dealing with a setpiece, hitting the key objective, things like that. Meanwhile, a scenario can play out in a mission chain, where part of the reward for completing a mission is a new thing to do.

These mission chains can proceed **directly**—having finished the mission, there's new trouble right in front of you that you'll need to immediately take care of—or **indirectly**: at the end of the mission, you stumble across information which suggests one or more new places worth checking out. Use the former sparingly, never more than twice in a row before giving the players a break. A fun way to introduce new missions indirectly is by changing the hub as a result of what the team did: new people move in, or an inaccessible area opens up, complete with new things to do.

Every story question (*Fate Core*, page 232) you have for the scenario can be turned into a mission, but that doesn't mean that every mission needs to answer a story question. Let your players goof off, pursue side objectives, and make their own trouble. That's part of being a mortician. That's most of being a mortician, if we're being honest.

New Hubs

Morts move around sometimes. After a big story arc, the old hub might feel used up. If that happens, move the team to a new station or a new city entirely. New people, new problems, new varieties of the undead. You can make the trip there a short chain of missions in its own right. The morts might even be needed in Davis or the CRU, where they'll act as zombie-killing ambassadors in foreign lands.

Wherever they go, they're bound to find something to shoot in the head.

RANDOLPH THE LICH KING

This is a sample three-mission chain about a terrible villain trying to break into Cascadia's capital city. The only thing standing in his way are the morticians of Eugene Southeast.

Eugene Southeast

Morticians' Station #12, better known as Eugene Southeast, is one of the eight stations in the outskirts surrounding Eugene. The station is built into an old apartment building, which means that every mort gets their own bedroom and even has a little porch. It's nice, although for safety reasons all the houses that originally surrounded Hill House Apartments have been burned to cinders, dampening the view somewhat.

The area contains a mix of old ruins and usable farmland; the latter is mostly confined to a group of city parks to the south, closer to the fence than most farmers like. In your immediate area, most of the ruins are residential and ignored by large foraging teams—too many doors and corners for undead to hide in, too many living squatters. However, to the east there's the remnants of a community college, which is being slowly dismantled and brought back to Eugene proper. Texts are of a particular interest; anything that's managed to survive the elements for fifty years will bring a lot of money to the foraging team, and this fact even encourages random scavengers to sneak into the college late at night, alone.

Molly Burgess is your Station Head. She joined the morticians at sixteen because she had nothing better to do. Now, she's thirty-six. She's got masses of scars from stories she's not going to share, and she can operate a lever-action shotgun one-handed. She's got no patience for people who are having a hard time with the job.

Eugene Southeast only has one other team, which has three morticians on it. In most cities, two teams is considered understaffed, but Eugene has eight stations and a lot of overlap in territory, so nobody's worried about it. Miranda Bard is a teenager, here on judge's orders. It was an alternative to doing six months in prison for breaking and entering. Todd Perry also doesn't want to be here—he's in his twenties, and he wants to emigrate to the Republic of Davis. He knows a lot about necromancy, and thinks some time dealing with the undead will look good on his resume when he applies. Funnily enough, the third member of the team is a lich, Rory Sendak, who knows nothing about necromancy. Rory doesn't really talk about their past, except to say that "Rory Sendak" wasn't the name they were born with, they used to be involved with a military organization, and at some point they spent a lot of money to get a new start on life. Rory favors a sniper rifle they presumably learned to use as a living soldier, Miranda favors a baseball bat in the rare occasions when fists won't do, and Todd carries the basic-issue shotgun he got when he signed up for the job.



Randy King

Vital Status: Lich

High Concept: *The Best Damn Skeletal Necromancer to Ever Get His Tenure Application Rejected at UC Davis*

Trouble: *It's All About Me*

OTHER ASPECTS

I've Read Something About That: "Whatever you're doing, dress well doing it."
Charming When I Want to Be

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Academics

Great (+4): Will

Good (+3): Necrology

Fair (+2): Persuasion

Average (+1): Fight

STUNTS

Lich: Randy is a skeleton, so he's got no physical stress track. Instead, he has Armor:1 against any source of physical stress.

Phylactery (Lich only): If he's taken out, Randy will regenerate at the safe location where he keeps his phylactery. Doing so clears all of his consequences, but gives him the severe consequence *Regeneration Sickness*. If he's suffering from *Regeneration Sickness* when he gets taken out, he won't be able to regenerate.

Eldrich Blasts: Randy has learned how to attack using necromancy, summoning spirits and hurling them at his enemies. This lets him attack using Will, but only in zones adjacent to his own.

STRESS (MENTAL) □□□□

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):

REFRESH: 3

Part I: City Under Siege!

Inciting Incident: This one gets handed down from on high while the players are killing time in-house. Burgess explains that the other team is getting exhausted by alphas on the south side of the wall, and you've gotta go help 'em out.

Locale: The South Eugene outskirts, starting at the wall. Like most of the city walls in Cascadia, it's a pretty pragmatic bit of masonry—most of it is made up the edges of buildings and houses, with the streets filled in with bricks and reinforced with sheet metal and whatever else was on hand. Your station's other team is there, keeping the peace.

Keystone Objective: Figure out where the zombies are coming from! Players will satisfy this keystone when they meet Randy King, who's holed up at Resthaven Memorial Park about a mile or so south.

Getting there is easy if the players track the zombies' movements...they don't exactly cover their tracks. They could also just check for cemeteries in that direction; there are only three, easy enough to just stop by them all. The funeral home where Randy is doing his dark work has got an eldritch storm of purple clouds above it. This is the most normal thing in the world when hedge necromancers are doing stuff.

Alternately, if someone figures out that these undead are animated by necromancy, they'll have the option of calling up a more experienced necromancer to see whether it's possible to get a read on local activity. That's going to take a little bit of persuasion, but people in the know can sense that there's something going down at Resthaven.

Breaking into the facility is as easy as breaking into any fairly sturdy building guarded by a horde of the undead. Inside, the little chapel has been converted into a lab, stuffed with cool magic stuff, with Randy seated at a makeshift desk.

Fodder: Alphas everywhere! Technically they're animations, but very simple ones, indistinguishable from a basic zombie. See page 16 for stats.

Setpiece: The only real setpiece is Randy himself. He doesn't much look like a necromancer. He's a skeleton, sure, but he's wearing a sweater vest and comes across as a kind of a genteel Mr. Rodgers type. When confronted, he'll politely explain that he's smashing into Eugene to confront his sworn enemy: Amanda Martin.

The PCs will almost certainly not know who that is. She's a minor administrator at the University of Oregon. She refused Randy's application for a faculty position in Necromancy because it arrived a week after the deadline. She denied him his rightful place at the head of a classroom, as far as he's concerned, and he's going to give her a piece of his mind in person.



If pressed, and asked why he's doing this by breaking down the city walls and not by, say, sending a letter, he'll begrudgingly admit that he's also going to steal any interesting spells in the library and probably burn it down on his way out since, obviously, this two-bit enterprise doesn't deserve to sit in the shadow of UC Davis.

If anyone suggests at any point that this is irrational, he'll get quite peeved indeed. If they try to stop him in any way, or even get too forceful in saying that this is a bad idea, Randy will pitch a little fit and start fighting. He's not much of a fighter, but since he has a phylactery, he'll probably keep it up until he's killed, at which point his body crumbles to dust. Even if the morts don't have a lich on their team, they'll know that this is abnormal for fallen skeletons.

Rewards: When Randy goes away, things calm down, giving the morts plenty of time to scour the area for cool stuff.

New Mission: Figure out what happened with Randy. This is indirect. It's something the morts will probably want to do, but don't need to do right away.

Loot: *Randy King's Lab.* It's full of his old notebooks and equipment, and could be useful.

Gear: Randy's lab is full of neat stuff. If this is the players' very first mission, they can all grab something. There are ceremonial daggers, expensive-looking icons, a jar of glowing eyeballs, and even Randy's sweater-vest if the fight didn't damage it too much. If those don't appeal, ask the players if they see anything neat among Randy's things. He's been living here for a few weeks, and he's made himself quite comfortable.

Part II: In the Shadow of the Necromancer

Inciting Incident: Randy either got away or disappeared mysteriously. Odds are pretty good that he's still a danger.

If that doesn't give the players momentum enough: Randy's about to unleash flocks of dire crows, targeting the people of Eugene and especially the university. This is more of an annoyance than a direct threat, but if the players don't follow up on the last mission within a day or so, Molly will point this out and yell at the players until they follow up on it.

Locale: The University of Oregon, Eugene campus. It's not nearly as full as it was before the apocalypse, but it's nice. Brick buildings, well maintained. It's got a very small, very theoretical Necromancy major, housed in the Gerlinger Annex. Even though there are crows everywhere, diving at people, students are still dashing between the buildings, talking to one another, even trying futilely to eat on the quad. These sorts of issues aren't unheard of at the university.

Keystone Objective: Find Randy!

If the players take the time to look through Randy's things back at the cemetery, they'll find some correspondence with another faculty member at U of O: Dr. Ramona Hughes. The letters she's been sending to him are variations on a theme of "Randy, you're getting a little nuts here. Calm down, alright?" She's a useful lead.

Alternately, they could seek out Amanda Martin at the administration building. Amanda barely remembers Randy King. If the morts convince her it's very, very important, she'll dredge up a copy of his application, revealing that he was a mediocre candidate, and the best thing he had going for him was a letter of recommendation from Dr. Ramona Hughes, dean of U of O's Necromancy program.

Dr. Hughes is a rather severe-looking older woman, sitting outside her own office, reading a thick tome of some sort. She worked with Randy years ago, when he was still alive, and as it happens, she was the one who turned him into a lich. She's willing to help the morts if they help her: she seems to have accidentally raised a Cat-4 specter in her office. If they can take it out for her, she'll point them in the right direction.

"The right direction" in this case is Hayward Field, not far away. Randy's running a big ritual on the grass, and has a pair of bone horrors guarding the entrance. This is actually something the morts can discover just wandering around as well...Randy's not super subtle. Since the horrors are being obedient, faculty and students alike aren't terrified so much as concerned about whether whatever's going on will be wrapped before the game on Monday night. The horrors aren't the only animations on campus—lots of wannabe necromancers have homework shambling along the quad—so they aren't as immediately distinctive as you might think.

Fodder: Dire crows, an alarming number of them. Not alarming because they're that scary, but because you have to ask how many dead crows Randy just keeps on hand. Stats on page 22.

Setpieces: Professor Fielding, the ghost in Dr. Hughes's office. He's a Cat-4 specter, verging on Cat-3: marginally and inconsistently self-aware. He appears to be a stout, bespectacled old man wearing a tweed jacket with leather patches at the elbows. At present, he's flickering in and out of existence, and prone to sudden and violent rages. He does not like when other people are in his office, and he's prone to poltergeisting.

Fielding can be dealt with peacefully, if the players convince him that he's dead. Pretending to be a student will help keep him talking. Otherwise, if they stay in a fight with him for a couple rounds and deal him a mild consequence, he'll get mad enough to burn out, conceding the conflict by reverting into a Cat-1 specter: a little wisp of warm air that Dr. Hughes can readily deal with. Or if the players are quick and tough, they can take him out altogether.

Depending on how the morts handle getting into the stadium, the bone horrors may be a setpiece as well. They can fight their way through, of course—bone horror stats are on page 22—but if they lure the horrors away or clamber up the walls of the stadium without being noticed, they'll get in as well.

Reward: Not a lot of options here, just a new and immediately important mission: stop Randy!



Professor Herman Fielding

ASPECTS

*Retired Professor of Linguistics;
Territorial Poltergeist*

SKILLS

Good (+3): Telekinetically hurl objects!

Fair (+2): Maintain physical form!

Average (+1): Academics

STUNTS

Bound: Professor Fielding cannot leave the office, nor can he be forced out of the office by any method.

Polyglot: Professor Fielding gets +2 to Academics when attempting to read or translate foreign languages.

STRESS □□□

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Part III: The Deadly Ritual!

Inciting Incident: Randy's right there. Just right in front of them. Just doing some kooky ritual, after admitting his intent to rob and burn this place. The math is not hard.

Locale: Hayward Field, a former track and field stadium, now reclaimed for football practices. It's pretty much exactly like what you might expect a small football stadium to be, except for the bit where there's a naked skeleton at the fifty-yard line working on some major spell, along with thousands of wispy spirits appearing and flitting around randomly, drawn by the power of whatever Randy's doing.

Keystone Objective: Stop Randy!

At this point, if you can get to him, you can try talking to him. He's not an idiot—if a bunch of morticians managed to get to him twice, maybe he needs to rethink this plan.

Otherwise, you can just hit him hard enough to interrupt his flow. He'll try to shoot folks down as they get close, but all of his actions are focused on maintaining the spell. If he gets a moderate consequence he'll get distracted and screw it up.

Alas, once Randy has been stopped, the energy from the spell doesn't just go away! If you get him to stop relatively peacefully, he'll try to redirect it safely, and accidentally summon a sod monster. If you stop him violently, it'll backlash into himself, and he'll be turned into a shattered knight. Fail to stop him within about five rounds of combat, and he'll summon a flameghast.

Fodder: There are lots of Cat-1 wisps about. They've got one aspect, *Mindless Bundle of Energy*, but no skills or stress boxes. Honestly, they're just a distraction.

Setpieces: Randy, technically, but he's too busy with what he's working on to be a challenge. He'll defend himself, but he won't fight back. He has a couple of alphas with him, watching his back, but the real danger is what will show up after you talk him down, knock him out, or let him finish the spell.

Reward: Well, there's several hours' work cleaning up displaced sod, flaming masonry, or bone chunks. But there are some goodies.

Loot: *Tickets to the Next Eugene Ducks Football Game.* That's the upper extent of the university's begrudging respect. If the morts cleared the ghost out of her office and didn't do too much property damage, they'll also have earned *Dr. Hughes's Goodwill.*

Hub and Missions: If Randy survived, then he'll disappear in the chaos after the monster is killed and go back to his lab in the outskirts, remaining a semi-permanent resident of Eugene Southeast. Technically, the team should capture him and deliver him to the LAMs—he definitely broke the law and might still try to burn down the school—but that's another mission entirely.



Flameghast

So evidently there's a way to summon a spirit from the other side that's made out of fire. A proper necromancer might suggest that even a Cat-7 specter can't be literally made of fire, but this one is just so suffused with rage that it takes on the appearance of a pillar of flame. But the difference is largely academic when Randy King is literally cackling because you were too slow to stop him from summoning this thing.

ASPECTS

*Made of Fire; Fueled by Vengeance;
Bound to Serve Randy King*

SKILLS

Great (+4): Burn things!

Good (+3): Speed

Fair (+2): Protect Randy!

Average (+1): Fight

STUNTS

Bound to Serve: Whenever Randy King is attacked, the flameghast intercepts the attack if it is in the same zone as Randy.

Burning Hate: Whenever someone attacks the flameghast with a melee attack, whether the attack succeeds or not, the attacker takes 1 physical stress.

STRESS □□□□

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Shattered Knight

The shattered knight is what Randy will accidentally and fatally create if the morts hurt him enough to mess up his spell. It's an eight-foot-tall humanoid shape made of whirling black and purple energy, coated in armor made from the shattered bones of its creator. In other words, Randy exploded into a monster. That monster, thanks to the vestiges of Randy within it, wants to destroy the school and will stalk off toward the library first.

ASPECTS

*Made of Pure Spirit; Bony Plates;
Fueled by Sheer Malevolence*

SKILLS

Great (+4): Take hits!

Good (+3): Hit people!

Fair (+2): Grapple!

Average (+1): Screech terrifyingly!

STRESS □□□

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):





Sod Monster

The sod monster is an underwhelming name for an incredible creature. If you peacefully talk Randy out of his rampage, he'll try to end the ritual by pouring excess spiritual energy into the ground...and the ground will come to life. It looks like a vague human-shaped mass of grass-covered dirt. It doesn't have any clear aims beyond a general undead inclination to destroy whatever's around it. The good news is Randy's right there to help you tackle this mysterious thing.

ASPECTS

*Possessed Sod; An Unheard-of
Magical Abomination; Incredible
Strength*

SKILLS

- Superb (+5):** Bash!
- Great (+4):** Trample!
- Good (+3):** Grab from afar!
- Fair (+2):** Tunnel underground!

STUNTS

Tangling Grasp: Whenever the sod monster attacks and succeeds with style, the defender gains the situation aspect *Entangled by Grass*. If the defender is already entangled, then the sod monster gets a free invocation of that aspect.

STRESS □□□□

CONSEQUENCES

- Mild (2):
- Mild (2):
- Moderate (4):