

GRIMOIRE OF THE GRAVE

PROMO: UNDEAD SOCIETY AND CULTURE



Produced by

2CGAMING



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UNDEAD SOCIETY AND CULTURE



Undeath is a dark mirror of life. Just as one marvels at the infinite beauties of the living world, so too should we regard the countless manifestations of the living dead. Simply categorizing these mysterious beings as “undead” is as inarticulate as describing all humanoid as “alive.” Vampires, zombies, skeletons, ghosts, and liches are far more different than they are similar, and they are but a sample of the countless forms of undead observed across the multiverse. There is so much about undeath to be explored and understood. These pages illuminate the seemingly infinite faces of undeath. Here, we explore the very nature of undead beings by dividing them into various befitting subtypes, uncover what drives and motivates them, discover how they “live” and reproduce, and so much more. Whether you seek a weakness to exploit or an understanding to build a bridge of diplomacy, the knowledge herein will aid you.

Undead Governance and Leadership

Because undead vary dramatically in their nature and capacities, the composition of an undead community greatly impacts what type of society they create. For example, a city composed primarily of hollows is highly stratified, as most of its residents have no desires whatsoever. Those few undead with the intelligence to run the community may treat hollows as comrades in need of guidance or mere puppets to be controlled. When constructing an undead society, consider how its populace would organize themselves. What are they trying to accomplish by cohabitating? What types of undead form its population? How do the surrounding communities regard this undead society? These questions need to be answered to construct a compelling community that feels real and plays effectively.

You must also have a strong sense of what the society’s governance is. Who (if anyone) makes the big decisions, and why do they have the authority to do so? How do their personalities, goals, and undead nature impact those decisions and shape the community they govern? For example, a powerful lich could found a society to draw in undead spellcasters seeking a similar apotheosis, sharing with them its secrets in return for magic items and lore to further advance its schemes. Whether you choose one of the following examples of an undead society or generate your own, be sure to answer these questions for seamless integration into your game.

Have you ever considered what it’s like being undead—shunned by society, feared by most, possibly even created or animated against your will? Of course these poor things need each other! How would you feel if you had to try to keep your eyes from falling out of your skull, figure out how to become corporeal, or put your own soul to rest, all while simply trying to live your everyday life?

That’s a lot to shoulder alone.





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Anarchy

In the rare instance undead do not require great power and security to found a society, the result is often anarchy. Driven by their own diverse needs and generally peaceful attitude toward each other, undead find themselves united in purpose, or at the very least not in opposition to each other, when given the freedom to live as they choose. Disputes are relatively rare, so long as the few essential resources are readily available to all and there is enough physical space for the modest requirements of the average undead. While these communities are safe for their inhabitants, they are often extremely dangerous for the living. No rule of law or treaty can protect against a hungry vampire, for example, as few undead would turn against one of their own in defense of the living.

Autocracy

Because some undead are extremely powerful by nature, it makes sense that some communities would form around such strength. Death knights, liches, vampires, and other mighty beings are not only powerful enough to protect a society, they often create more undead to grow and expand their interests. An autocratic society may resemble a monarchal one in some ways, but those in charge are self-selected and rule eternally. For most undead, this arrangement is not a problem; citizens are content to have a place to exist in relative safety from a world that may hate and fear them. So what if a lich asks for the occasional favor or tribute? It's better than eking out a difficult existence in some sodden crypt. However, such communities are highly unstable. All it takes is the death of the leader for the entire society to collapse, sending undead fleeing far and wide in search of a new home. Ultimately, tyranny may exist in these situations primarily to serve the interests of its leader, and the rest of the society exists in a mostly symbiotic relationship—at least until the leader's actions bring about dire consequences.

Oligarchy

Undead interested in forming a society that promotes the general welfare of its residents often form an oligarchy. Because the nature of undead power is inescapable, the most powerful and influential undead typically still end up at the top. But instead of a tyrannical dictator or a powerful autocrat, a ruling group functions more like a council. A noble house of vampires, an academy of undead spellcasters, or military leaders from an army of wights are examples of suitable leaders for an oligarchic community. While there is undoubtedly self interest among the leadership, their competing interests and general affection for the community inspire them to make a welcome home for undead of various types and creeds.



Undead Communities

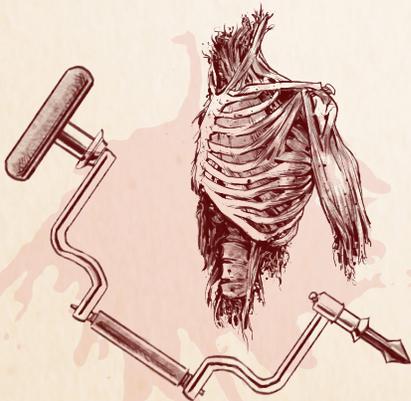


Ah, community. Probably not the first word that comes to mind when thinking about undead, but why shouldn't it be? Even the various creatures in my laboratory are basically a small community, although admittedly some of them aren't the best conversationalists. That dracolich though...I thought he'd never hush. Until I took him apart. His jawbone makes the most wicked-cool vial rack. Wanna come see?

Every community is built upon serving its residents. It is the same for undead, although their needs are vastly different than those of humanoid societies. While the living must grapple with complex logistics like food, water, sanitation, and disease, undead revel freely in pursuit of their eccentric wants and carnal requirements. This can result in a startlingly colorful society. With all the time in the world and no fear of getting ambushed by intrepid heroes, undead may find themselves with more free time than they know what to do with. The result is often explorations of art, culture, magic, philosophy, and faith, all thematic to their unique existence. When creating an undead society, explore its needs, fears, and desires, which are all required to form a basic understanding of how a community functions.

Needs

While certainly less demanding than the average humanoid population, undead still need a few essentials to survive. And while some undead societies may be welcoming and relatively safe for the living, it is rare. Even in such cases, humanoids' needs are so different than those of the undead, the living would likely not be comfortable in such places. To make such guests feel welcome, undead must reorganize their entire community to facilitate their inclusion. The needs of a group of undead depend on what creatures populate the community, but generally, the following are reasonable needs to expect for the "average" undead community.

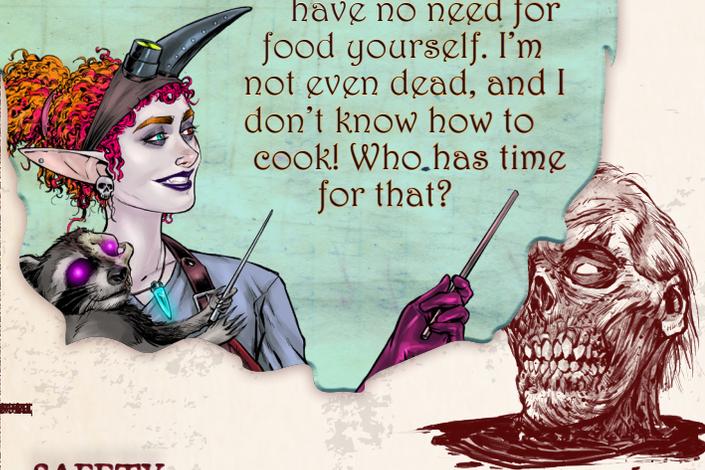


RESOURCES

Depending on how expansive an undead society is, their resource demands may be vast. Material for the construction of buildings, tools, and other essential elements is common, especially considering many undead have specific environmental needs. Knowledge is also in high demand. Undead have a lot of time on their hands but generally struggle with moving about. Confined to the safety of their communities, many spend their days learning all they can about the world of which they one day hope to be a part. As a result, a longstanding undead community may be one of the most learned and scholarly out there, full of ancient thinkers with strong opinions on all manner of subjects. Because necromancy lies at the heart of all undead, magic is in high demand. A community that wishes to thrive and grow must engage in necromancy by necessity. Even among those that don't find many practical uses for the art, necromancy is still almost ubiquitous, especially among larger communities of undead.

I once had a fascinating chat with an ancient ghoul who lived in a town populated entirely by undead! It sounded pleasant to me, until living visitors showed up anyway. This poor thing once had to find food and water for a visiting dragonborn! Imagine having to take time out of your busy day to make a meal for a living, breathing guest when you

have no need for food yourself. I'm not even dead, and I don't know how to cook! Who has time for that?



SAFETY

Many have a strong bias against undead even existing, let alone doing so in community. Such groupings of undead are certainly strong together, and most who live in organized societies are mindful of how their civilization may be perceived by the living. To many humanoid cultures, the thought of a metropolis filled with the living dead is a nightmare, a ticking time bomb just waiting to go off and unleash undead across the land. Consequently, undead societies work hard to protect their borders and ensure security. Non-undead must often prove their trustworthiness and benevolence before they are allowed entry. When your neighbors pose a serious risk of showing up at your city gates with pitchforks and torches, it stands to reason that you'd prefer isolated realms where those who pose such a threat are rarely found. The icy cold of arctic realms means little to the dead, as do the lack of "essentials" such as breathable air or habitable land. The bottom of a frigid lake, sulfurous fields surrounding an active volcano, or even high above the clouds where breathing is impossible are all clever locations for undead to exist in safety.

DARKNESS

Many undead are described as being sensitive to sunlight, but this is a dramatic understatement. Such undead are seemingly violently allergic to sunlight, experiencing torturous pain when subjected to it. An undead community needs a solution to this problem for at least some of its residents. Many such creatures live mostly or entirely underground—a simple solution and one that utilizes an environment most undead are comfortable with. Those brave enough to exist under the open sky are either entirely nocturnal or go to great lengths to protect against the sun. Some communities create magical "darkposts" that exude darkness the way a lamppost would emit light. Others engineer ornate architecture to cast strategic, perpetual shade. Whatever the solution, nearly every undead society has some measure of effort taken to promote darkness on its streets.

CRAVINGS

All undead experience cravings, though some are more acute and frequent than others. Unfortunately, in most cases the living are the only way to satisfy these urges, often by violent means. Undead communities must balance their cravings with their safety. A deprived and "starving" undead society is a volatile one, but overindulging in the bounty of life provokes an understandably fierce response. This can destabilize the entire undead community by exposing them and attracting unwanted attention. More nefarious communities lean into this dynamic, becoming deadly necropolises where the living are outnumbered, outmatched, and on the menu. Where the undead are able to find cooperation and common ground, other arrangements can be made. Some communities have served as an elaborate execution tool of a justice system, where a humanoid society sends its worst criminals to satisfy the undead. Others establish bizarre trade networks that provide essential goods to satisfy cravings at reasonable prices. This is almost always a black market, but one that both the living and a shrewd undead society know how to exploit.

