

9 FUNERARY RITES



Bennett ~ Hershey

Knowledge Check

9 Funerary Rites

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Codes and Cyphers

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Knowledge Check

Fire and Hammer A Dwarven Funeral

The two great industries of the dwarven peoples are also the forces that tie them to their mountain homes: mining and smithing. As a result, the implements of the mine and the forge figure prominently in their most widely-used funerary rite. In most dwarven settlements, a hall is set aside for the ritual, with a great stone bier, a stone and brick repository that resembles an oversized forge furnace, and a flat stone table.

The ritemaster oversees the preparation of the honoree's body for the ritual. The body is placed on a metal plate and covered by a linen cloth, which is doused in lamp oil. The plate is lifted by the honoree's friends and family and placed into the furnace, which is lit the day prior and tended so that it grows progressively hotter. The fire burns the cloth and the body, leaving behind only the bones. Once the body has been reduced to bones, those who bore the body into the furnace return the plate and bones to the bier. Using sets of ceremonial tongs, family members sort the bones of the honoree, passing them one to another into three piles. This act has made it something of a cultural taboo to pass objects from one dwarf to another via tongs (usually, the first dwarf will have to set the object down, and the second dwarf will then pick it up).

The bones are separated into one pile that is the bones of the dwarf's hands, one that is only the skull, and one that is all the rest. The hand bones are taken by specialized craftsmen) and

are worked into tools that are presented to family or friends as gifts. In this way, a dwarf's hands contribute to dwarven art and craft down through the centuries.

The skull is placed in a small metal box and a space is carved in the wall of the family dwelling to store the box. The family will usually have a specific wall for the keeping of ancestral skulls, and ancient holds may have dozens, if not hundreds, of skulls in the carved rooms of old families. In this way, a dwarven family is always watched over by its ancestors.

The remaining bones are placed on the stone table, where a group of dwarves with long handled sledgehammers will take over. They pulverize the bones, working to a *toilsome chant* of the ritemaster or chosen assistant, until the bones are rendered into dust. The dust is then gathered and passed to blacksmiths, who will use the carbon-rich dust in case hardening and other metal treatments. At least one item made from the bone dust is normally given to the family of the honoree. In this way, the dwarf gives back to his or her community in passing.

Codes and Cyphers

The Last Meal AN OGRE FUNERAL

For Ogres, the devouring of both friend and foe is principally about consuming strength. Ogres value strength above all else in life, and will always, when it is their choice, eat only the strong. To allow a fellow ogre to die of old age or infirmity is to waste the last of their strength, allowing it to seep away into dust. In keeping with these beliefs, the funeral rites for an old or sick ogre begin before the honoree is actually dead.

The ritemaster selects a team, referred to as a "fist." Nominally, this should be four other ogres, but ogre arithmetic skills being what they are, the group can vary from two to nearly a dozen. The fist normally arms themselves only with clubs or other bludgeoning weapons, as carving the meal before it is conquered is considered gauche. The fist gathers outside the dwelling of the honoree and the ritemaster issues the traditional challenge.

"Your time has come and now you must surrender your might to the tribe. Come forth that we may claim it."

Rarely, a cowardly ogre will not respond to the challenge, and members of the fist must be sent in to drag the honoree out for the rite. Most of the time, however, even old and infirm ogres have no interest in leaving life behind without one last fight, and so they come forth to meet their executioners. Ogres who are familiar with the rite may

even give the traditional response (which often undermines the determination of at least a few fist members).

"No one claims my might but by blood. Come if you will, but know that I have lived this long for a reason."

No healing magic of any kind is allowed until the rite is finished, and old ogres often take one or two of their would-be killers with them in the battle. The honoree's death is usually confirmed by smashing the feet until they are practically unrecognizable – the head is protected after the battle, as it is considered a delicacy.

The ritemaster oversees the preparation of the honoree, along with any fist members he took with him, in a feast for the tribe. Normally the ritemaster or the tribal chief (oftentimes the same person) will get the greatest portion, to include the heart of the honoree. In any event, a full meal is generally enjoyed by all.



Knowledge Check

One with the Wood

AN ELVEN FUNERAL

Elven funeral rites are long and involved affairs, as may be expected for a race that regularly lives over half a millennium. While the individualist nature of the elves often leads to personally designed rites of remembrance, the most common rite for those who did not express such a desire is called "The Living Wood." It shelters the honoree's remains, but retains them as a part of the community.

First, the ritemaster must prepare the body of the honoree for the ritual. The body is laid in a nest of branches and leaves from living plants, using *plant shape* and *warp wood* to nestle the body snugly. The nest is then placed among the roots of a tree that has not been used for this rite before, although some forests with larger trees, such as redwoods, may have "family trees," which serve as the resting place for entire lineages of elves.

The ritemaster and the honoree's friends and family will take turns in tending to the body until the changing of the seasons (either a solstice or an equinox). They will cast *gentle repose*, clean the nest, and refresh herbal poultices that keep natural predators away. The living nest will, as time progresses, penetrate and begin to mingle with the honoree's body. Each week of that season, friends and family will gather at the body for a celebration of some portion of the honoree's life. These celebrations are tailored to the individual: warriors have famous victories remembered,

artists will have their works from different time periods displayed, and so on. At the end of each of these celebrations, a druid casts *plant growth* to bring the forest carpet a little more over the body. If the funeral takes place in autumn or winter, those gathered for the celebration will shift small amounts of leaves or snow over the body.

At the end of the season, there is a three-day ritual that is the final remembrance. The honoree's favorite dishes are served and their favorite songs are sung. Halfway through the ritual, a druid casts *move earth* to shift the nest and body below the earth and into the root network of the tree. The celebration then continues in order to draw the honoree's spirit through the tree and encourage it to dwell amongst friends and family one last time.

The groves of trees used for these purposes are, quite obviously, intensely sacred to the elves, and are never used for craft or residences.

Codes and Cyphers

Last Rites, First Pickings

A THIEF'S FUNERAL

A thieves' guild might seem like an odd place to hold a funeral – thieves are primarily concerned with the living, because, with only a few exceptions, the living have the things worth stealing. Nevertheless, even organized criminals will take time to pay their respects to one of their own. If they were friends with the departed thief, they want to say their final farewells. If they were not, they want first crack at the deceased's possessions.

The ritemaster has dual responsibilities in arranging the funeral of a thief. First, the honoree is laid in state in a chamber of the guild's headquarters – rarely the same room twice, but always one with levels of security on the door. Guards are posted at or near the door, as well as in the chamber itself. If a spellcaster is available, an *alarm* spell will ward the chamber. Finally, the honoree's most prized possessions are laid out around the bier on which her body lies. This can include everything from the thief's tools and magical gear to prize loot that the honoree had not yet fenced.

The honoree and her effects remain in the chamber for at least three but not more than seven days. In that time, anyone who can make off with any of the honoree's worldly goods without being caught by those assigned to keep watch may keep whatever they have managed to burgle. Anyone caught must not only return what they attempted to steal, but are enlisted in keeping

watch over the honoree. Since they *are* thieves, a common practice is for a clever thief to bribe the guards with a share of the loot. Some consider this unsporting, but the rest acknowledge that lives of larceny do not lead to close consideration of fair play.

At the end of the mourning period, any effects still around the body are claimed by the guild and disposed of however the guildmaster thinks best. As a result, particularly successful thieves often get far better guards, usually having been "persuaded" by the guildmaster. The guards still usually get a cut, which is the only way the guildmaster can prevent bribery by others.

Knowledge Check

A Fond Farewell A SECULAR FUNERAL

For most residents of a fantasy world, the presence of the gods (or a power that claims to be the gods) is undeniable – it is present in the power of the magic wielded by their clergy. Even so, there is always a contingent of people who, for various reasons, do not make religion a part of their lives. Because the organized religions play such a significant role in the rituals surrounding life and death, those who choose not to worship have developed their own rituals, acknowledging that such things are more for the living than they are for the dead, or even for the gods.

The ritemaster of a secular memorial service is often called a “celebrant,” and is the principal organizer and master of ceremonies. Upon welcoming those who have come to remember the honoree, the eulogy often consists of a recitation of the honoree’s life and achievements, making special note of their connections to friends and family in attendance. A sonnet by a dystheist poet has become a popular part of these programs.

*We've kept eyes focused on the road before
But now we pause to take a glance behind
No longer do you wonder what's in store
Because you now are only in my mind
We walked, we ran, we stumbled, sputtered,
stopped
Caked in the dust a life can gather on
Our clothes and wills, it sometimes made us drop*

*To our knees, when we were put hard upon
You've earned your rest, now go have a lie down
And trouble not your mind a jot for me
From barn to field, from village on to town
I must go on a bit as I, not we
I shake the dust from my well-traveled boots
A tree cannot touch the sky without roots*

As religious institutions control most graveyards, the honoree is most often cremated, with their ashes scattered in a place significant to them, sometimes in a pattern or symbol with meaning to their friends and family.

Codes and Cyphers

From Whence We Came A DRUIDIC FUNERAL

Druids, as an institution, understand the social motivations to bury or cremate the dead, but putting away the remains of a formerly living being where they might nourish nothing is as much of a sin in their religious doctrine as anything might be. Druids, like most mortal beings, want to take time to remember friends and colleagues that are no longer with them; however, the body they leave behind is as much a part of the world as any other, and the druids of Mountain Home Circle take care to ensure that it is returned to a place in the great cycle.

When one of their circle dies, the druids take a day to clean and dress the body in white linen. During this time, the druids, as well as the friends and family of the deceased, are encouraged to say their goodbyes. At dawn on the second day, the ritemaster and his assistants will carry the body up past the tree line of a mountain – which mountain is determined by the season, as the circle is semi-nomadic. Up amongst the rocks, the ritemaster removes the linen and lays the body on a trail where animal tracks can be clearly seen. The bearers then depart, leaving the body exposed for one lunar cycle. In that time, the body feeds the animals of the mountain, with only a skeleton left behind.

At the end of the lunar cycle, the ritemaster and assistants return to gather whatever bones may remain. At this point, the ritemaster begins a chant that is picked up by his assistants, and

maintained until the bones are deposited in an ossuary pit somewhere on the mountain.

Dust and blood

We shall rise

Blood and Bone

We shall walk

Bone and dust

We shall rest

When the ritemaster returns, the circle holds a small ceremony, in which the cycle of life is remembered.



Knowledge Check

One Last Joke A Gnomish Funeral

Gnomes, like their fey cousins, took some time getting used to the concept of death. Most fey are immortal, and even those that acknowledge concepts of death usually tied them to cycles of renewal, in line with the seasons of the year. The gnomes, now quite mortal, if long-lived, have been getting used to mortality for some time, and their funeral rites remember those who have passed on with deep affection, but also, perhaps inevitably, with a sense of fun.

A gnome funeral begins about four hours before sunset, and, like most any gnome get-together, with music and food. Indeed, someone happening upon a gnome funeral is unlikely to be aware that it is a funeral unless they explicitly ask. After the first hour, new guests start to show up – children, all the same age and of the same appearance. They never appear together, and they never engage the same person in conversation at the same time. An hour after that, the children wander off and some adolescents show up – the ages vary a bit more, but they definitely all look the same. They carouse, make a little trouble, and even flirt inappropriately with anyone who'll tolerate them. An hour later, the adults arrive. They're simply the best party guests one could ask for – engaging, witty, and usually inclined to let their conversation partners tell the stories.

As the sun dips below the horizon, the look-alikes all gather in one place and slowly merge one with another, eventually reaching the age

and appearance of the honoree, whose likeness has been used for the *seeming* and *programmed illusion* spells that have been at the heart of the party – the spells are cast as straight-up illusions or using volunteers from amongst the community (the children are challenged to see who can avoid being discovered the longest). The ritemaster also lights lanterns and candles around the celebratory area.

If the honoree had time to prepare, this last image usually delivers a benediction on the group, thanking them for one last good time on this world before moving on to the next. If not, the image is likely to lead the group in a song that had personal significance to the honoree. As the stars and moon come out, the last image fades away and the gnomes, one by one, blow out the lanterns and candles, their world a little darker in the moment for a friend lost.

Codes and Cyphers

For the People THE HOBGOBLIN ANNUAL FUNERAL

In traditional hobgoblin societies, every adult is at least a reserve member of the military. Rather than mourn the war dead year-round, most communities hold an annual funeral service. Any-one attending the annual funeral is expected to appear in uniform (and the dark gods help the hobgoblin who doesn't maintain a uniform in fine order). Speakers are determined two months beforehand, and primarily consist of military and civilian (the two rarely diverge much) leaders. The audience gathers into formations – if the com-munity is organized into military companies, they will gather that way, if not, companies are usu-ally formed based on social hierarchy. They then march, parade-style, into place on the field. All stand for the duration of the ceremony.

The speeches begin with community leaders, who extoll the virtues of their community first, hobgoblin society second, whatever gods they worship third, and the generally uselessness of other races in conclusion. The leaders of local religions go second, proclaiming how the gods have ordained the inevitable conquest of weaker races by the mighty hobgoblin machine, and that eternal hobgoblin hegemony is, as always, just a matter of months away. Finally, the most recently successful military commanders will speak of the battles that were fought in the last year, and how those who died gave their lives in service to the cause. These commanders are often new to public speaking, so they depend on timeworn and tested aphorisms when they don't simply plagiarize older speeches whole cloth. One of the most popular

is the address of Commander Azh-Karukh, who sacked eleven cities in his first year as raiding commander:

“Some of the races will tell you that the spilling of blood is the last resort, that there are other, finer, cleaner ways to expand empire and to gather power. We, of course, know this to be a hateful lie. But then, we know why they lie – for we know that the soiled and mud-like blood of the weak was put into their soft and yielding veins to be spilled by hobgoblin valor! As I re-member my brothers and sisters at this glorious event, it is my only regret that their blood was drawn by the greedy soil into mingling with that of the lesser races. I take comfort that such blood undoubtedly proved superior, expunging the lesser blood and purifying the earth where our boots trod and our swords shone.”

Upon completion of the speeches, songs of mar-tial valor are sung and the audience is dismissed, each to attend parties of whichever leader is their primary patron. The political infighting for pres-tigious invitations can be as deadly as any battle-field.



Knowledge Check

To the Deep

BURIAL AT SEA

A sailor's relationship with the sea is best described as "complicated." On the one hand, the oceans represent practically everything that supports a sailor: the road on which she travels, the fields from which she harvests much of her food, and even the maze that shelters her from predators – finding a little boat in a big ocean is harder than you think. On the other hand, the sea is covetous and far more dangerous than a road or field on land. A roaring storm might send a land-bound man racing for cover, while the sailor must make do with that same little boat, which is sometimes made to seem all the smaller by waves that tower over the sides. When a sailor dies at sea, there is precious little space to keep a body. Moreover, many sailors request that their remains be given over to the sea that has nurtured them for so long in their passing. For these reasons, the burial at sea has become one of the most cosmopolitan funeral rites, cutting across classes and races with a shared love of the wide open waters.

Whether planned for or the result of accident, the ritual is conducted using what would normally be available on board the ship. The ship must be brought to as close to a full stop as possible. The honoree's body is wrapped in sailcloth, that is then stitched closed and weighted with stones. A group of sailors will act as pallbearers for the body, while the ship's bell chimes eight times, the traditional ringing for the end of a watch. At the side of the ship, the ritemaster, often a chaplain or ship's officer, will deliver a benediction. If the deities of the sea are considered benevolent, it may

be directed to them, if not, a simple invocation to the waters directly may be delivered.

"We are gathered here to commit our comrade's body to the deep. We give thanks for our fellow sailor's service, and our friend's stout companionship. May the waters that bear us up and carry us on now watch over this sailor, whose watch has come to an end."

At that, the body is sent over the side and into the water. Once the body is confirmed as out of sight, a cup of grog is given to each participant. If the ship is at sea, she will get underway again once the grog has been drunk. If the ship has been commissioned specifically for the purpose of a funeral, it may remain at station for some time.

Codes and Cyphers

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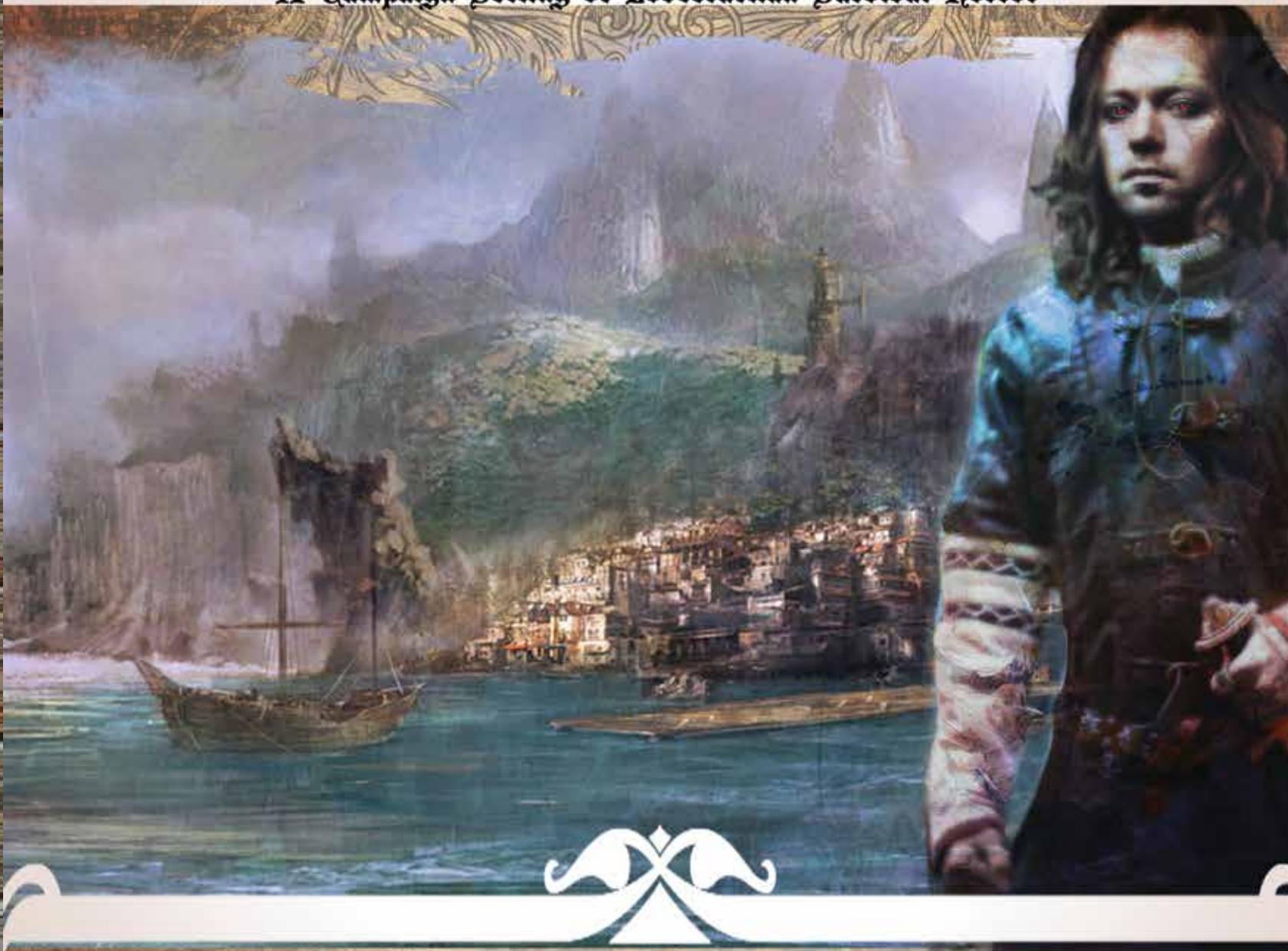
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