



The Unexplained Sneak Peek #2

Around the corner from my home, when I was growing up, there was “the house.” The House was an old Victorian, painted a dull maroon color. It was big, with the traditional spires that are typical of a Victorian home. It was the only Victorian in the neighborhood. It was also the ghost house. Well, or so my friends and I believed at the time. We were kids, and kids can definitely be kids. Still, the house had all the markings of a haunted house. It was old and different-looking. It was not well taken care of; the paint was peeling, the lawn was always overgrown and under-watered, and the only people who ever lived there (to my knowledge) were old people with mental challenges. I remember one of them. I never knew his name, but we all called him Frankenstein, because of his hunched back. Kids can be cruel—especially elementary school kids! Anyway, whenever he went out, he would never speak in discernable words. He would just croak out nonsensical noises and glare at us with his overly large brow. Man, he looked mean! Of course, he wasn’t mean. He was just grossly misunderstood, and feared by all the kids in the neighborhood.

Anyway, a time came when the house was deserted, when no one lived there. My friends dared me to go up to the house, and check it out. I didn’t take the first dare, but there was always a follow-up you just couldn’t ignore. Peer pressure got the better of me, and I went up. I mounted the creaking steps to the front porch, and made it all the way to the door. I opened the screen door, and was reaching for the doorknob, when I saw it. There was something looking at me from the window next to the door. I swear to this day that it was a disembodied face staring at me with empty eye sockets, and a horizontal hole for a mouth. It was pale-gray, and it took me completely by surprise. I ran as fast as I could, and never looked back. Ever since, I would not walk past it. I would cross the road whenever I came near it, and I would never let it out of my sight, just in case something was to come out after me.

Of course, now that I’m older and a little wiser, I’m certain it was just the work of a young and very overactive imagination. Still, it had begun for me a journey into the realm of the dead that I’m still traveling to this day. I have been fascinated by ghosts and spirits for all my life, and have studied it quite heavily. Now, I finally have the opportunity to share my work with the world. I present to you, the *The Unexplained Sneak Peek #2!*

— Bradford Younie, President of Carnivore Games

A Few Words About The Sneak Peek

This sneak peek is taken from the Ghost Hunting chapter of *The Unexplained*, and details what the fictional Foundation for Paranormal Investigation knows about poltergeists. All of the information is based completely on actual sightings and evidence, and is as much a work of non-fiction as any other book on the subject.

The information presented here can be used in any role-playing game, and can also help anyone who is researching the paranormal. Although *The Unexplained* is derived from *Now Playing*, this sneak peek is not specific to any game system.

The Ghost Hunting Chapter of The Unexplained

The term ghost hunting has become quite common nowadays in pop culture. In *The Unexplained*, it simply means investigating cases of ghosts and other hauntings. This is not about capturing them, or anything that fantastic. This is about scientific and spiritual investigation. The chapter delves into the details of investigating a haunting, and not just from the scientific perspective, as the FPI does. It describes a wide variety of ghost hunting techniques, including scientific means, such as EVP recordings, and cameras, to more progressive methods, like divining rods. This is so that you can learn the whole breadth of ghost hunting lore, and so that you can play any type of investigator.

So, print this out, read it, and start ghost hunting! I bet you will pay more attention to those silly little noises your house makes from time to time, once you have finished reading!

Poltergeists

Poltergeists have long been believed to be spirits that manifest physically by moving and influencing inanimate objects. Some examples of poltergeist activity are raps, knocks, footsteps, and bed shakings. Other examples involve objects moving slowly, seemingly by themselves, and on rare and frightening occasions, objects being thrown violently about the room.

The Five Stages of Activity

Poltergeist activity always begins subtly and then increases in intensity over time. The amount of time it takes for the activity to reach a climax can be a matter of hours, or even years. However, it usually stops once it has reached its climax. In some cases, the poltergeist phenomenon is gone for good. In others, it returns after a period of peace. When it does begin again, however, it starts from the beginning, with the subtle activity.

Poltergeist activity typically increases through five stages of intensity, ending at the climax. The following categorizes and describes each stage:


Stage One: This is the subtle beginning of activity, and includes mainly sensory phenomena such as cold spots, raps, footsteps, and other noises and odd odors. Animals may act strangely, and you may get the sudden feeling that you're not alone.

Stage Two: This is similar to stage one, but with somewhat greater intensity. The sounds take on a more intelligent feel, such as laughing and giggling, whispers, moans, shrieks, and the like. In all cases, no intelligible words can be made out. Marks may appear on floors and walls. These appear to be just random marks, and not writing. Unexplained breezes occur in closed spaces, or in places where breezes just do not make sense. You may begin to see shadows moving out of the corner of your eyes. Finally, you may see clouds of mist in rooms and hallways. These are thought to be simple apparitions.

Stage Three: The activity now becomes more physical. Doors may open and close by themselves. Lights turn on and off on their own. People are touched or grabbed as though by hands, but no one is there. Writings may appear on walls and floors. This time the marks are intelligible writings that say something. There have been some cases where the writings say things that make sense, such as "get out." Others seem to make no sense at all. Voices can now be heard, and words made out. Whispers of phrases like, "we don't want you," have been heard in many poltergeist cases. In some cases, they show up only in EVP recordings, but in other cases, they can be heard naturally. Finally, full-bodied apparitions may be seen.

Stage Four: Objects can be seen moving or flying on their own. Items may disappear from one place, only to be found in another. Small fires might start without any cause. Furniture may start to shake. Voices can be heard





speaking in stern or angry tones. People may be pushed, shaken, or pinched. Windows may splinter or shatter without direct cause. Some people have actually levitated during this stage. Sometimes, people suffer from nausea or feel dizzy as a result of the phenomenon.

Stage Five: This is the climax; the most extreme stage of activity. It's also the most frightening. People have been struck, bitten, and even raped by unseen assailants. Yes, this means that you might suddenly feel a bite on your arm, and you will see a bite mark from a human mouth on your arm when you roll up the sleeve—and no one was with you! Electrical items may suddenly be used by unseen hands in a way that can harm the witnesses. Blood appears inexplicably on walls, ceilings, and floors. Heavy objects are thrown or dropped. There have even been cases of possession. This is not necessarily a demoniac possession, mind you, but a possession by something nonetheless.

An important thing to note is that the poltergeist phenomenon appears paranormal only when the activity reaches stage three. In both stages one and two, witnesses can easily dismiss the events as imagination or some other natural occurrence.

The Agent

Poltergeists are usually triggered by an agent, or focus. This agent is someone, almost always a young girl, around whom the activity appears to revolve. If the agent is not present, the activity is not likely to occur, and if it does, it will be much less severe. In most cases, the activity is so heavily tied to the agent, that if she is not present, the activity will cease altogether until she returns.

There have also been cases where the poltergeist activity seems to follow the agent, causing things to happen wherever she is.

The agent sometimes appears to be two or more people who have some kind of psychological dynamic that produces great emotional stress in one or both of them. In nearly every case, however, the agent can be narrowed down to one person whose severe emotional state is setting off the poltergeist activity. This is what leads many scientists to believe that the phenomenon has more to do with psychic ability than with demons or spirits of the dead.

Finally, there are rare cases where no discernable agent can be found. In these cases, it's believed that more than one spirit is involved in the activity. The theory behind this is that there must be a source to the phenomenon, and if there's no agent to supply the energy, it's caused by the combined energy of multiple spirits.

Possible Explanations

Experts are split on the possible causes of poltergeists. Ultimately, there could be many different possibilities. The following are some of the more popular explanations for poltergeist activity.

It's also possible that there's more than one real explanation for poltergeist activity. That is, poltergeist activity may be the result of psychokinesis in one case and a wrathful spirit in another. Of course, the strong pattern that the phenomenon maintains argues against this theory, but then again, not all poltergeist cases follow that pattern.

Hoaxes & Natural Occurrences

Obviously, many of the poltergeist reports are simply hoaxes perpetrated by people who are trying to gain attention. So many reports turn out to be hoaxes that it's best to consider this possibility early in an investigation. Another possibility, and actually the most likely, is a natural occurrence. Mice, breezes, settling houses, and other such things can cause noises and events that seem like a poltergeist.

***Example:** In one house, there was a particular door that would occasionally slam on its own. Upon close inspection of the door by paranormal investigators, they found that there was a breeze in the room that was causing the door to slam.*

Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis

Many parapsychologists believe that poltergeist activity is caused by a kind of uncontrolled psychokinesis (see **Psychokinesis, pp. 215**). Parapsychologist William G. Roll coined the phrase Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis, or RSPK, to refer to this phenomenon.

The theory behind RSPK is that there's a naturally occurring energy that causes household items and furniture to move.

Zero-Point Energy: Some parapsychologists believe that the energy involved in RSPK is zero-point energy. The zero-point energy reacts when it's affected by an agent or focus, reducing the inertia and gravity that ordinarily keeps an object in place. In this way, an object may move or fly from its resting place when the agent walks past it.


Psychokinesis

The Rhine Research Center has developed a hypothesis that the "poltergeist effect" is a type of psychokinesis that's generated from a human mind. Their theory explains that this psychokinesis is the outward manifestation of psychological trauma. Thus, to end the poltergeist effect, you must first end the agent's trauma. The Rhine Center has invested nearly seventy years of research into this phenomenon, and psychokinesis as the cause of poltergeist activity is therefore taken more seriously than most of the other possibilities.

Wrathful Spirit

Some believe that when a person dies in a powerful rage, his spirit is unable to move on and will return in a quest for vengeance. It's also said that the spirit's rage is so





great that it can never truly satisfy its lust for vengeance and the ghost will remain as a poltergeist, able to affect solid objects. Not all poltergeist cases exhibit violent or aggressive behavior, so it's safe to say that this would not be the only cause of poltergeist incidents.

Recording Theory

Another theory is that certain events of powerful emotion imprint themselves in the fabric of space and time. These "imprints" are like a recording of part of the event, and will then replay itself over and over again indefinitely. This is the only explanation given here that addresses the repetitious pattern of the poltergeist effect.

Restless Spirit

The popular belief, especially in pop culture, is that a poltergeist is the spirit of a pubescent child who has died. This ghost interacts with our world in a physical way by moving objects and making various noises. These spirits are mischievous and tend to pull pranks. Some reports have claimed that the poltergeist hides various household items in odd places.

The seeming randomness of the pranks is the primary reason why it's believed to be the ghost of a child or mentally ill adult. There's no pattern or apparent purpose to the phenomenon, and therefore, it leads one to believe that if a spirit is involved, it must be that of a playful child, or someone who is not mentally stable.

Demon

Finally, the severely violent nature of some poltergeist cases drive investigators to believe that a demon may be the cause of the incidents. Sometimes, in cases like these, an exorcism can prove useful in ridding a home of the poltergeist. There have been documented cases of exorcisms and other ritual banishings actually working.

There are specific symptoms of a demon haunting that can be used to identify it from a poltergeist case. In both cases, the pattern begins similarly, but they diverge at a certain point. See the section on Demons later in this chapter for a detailed description of these symptoms.

Investigation Methods

The following describes special considerations for dealing with poltergeist phenomenon. Keep in mind that the techniques described below are to be used along with the normal ghost hunting techniques, not in place of them.

Identifying Poltergeist Activity

Do not assume that a case reported as a poltergeist actually is one. Poltergeists have some distinct behaviors that set them apart from other hauntings. You should begin your investigation by interviewing the witnesses and finding answers to the following questions:

Is there a highly stressful or emotional situation in the home? Poltergeist activity usually focuses around an agent who is in an unstable emotional state. If there's no apparent agent, then either there may be no poltergeist involved, or the agent is not easily identified. You must take care to assume that either possibility could be true. Watch the witnesses closely. You may need to bring a person back in if the activity stops when she leaves the location.

Are the manifestations always in the same place? Traditional hauntings are usually tied to a place or event, and therefore always appear in the same place. A poltergeist is typically tied to a person and may follow the person, even to other buildings.

Does the manifestation always appear the same way? A haunting usually happens in the same place, and continues over time. Poltergeist activities build up over time to a climax, and then start over. Sometimes, there's a pause before the activity starts up again. This pause can even span years.

Has anyone been hurt? Hauntings are non-violent by nature. Ghosts may try to hurt people, but because they're unable to affect the material world they can do little more than frighten. A poltergeist can interact physically with the real world, and therefore they can hurt people, and often do. They push, pinch, hit, and can cause other injuries and damage.

Do objects move of their own accord? A typical ghost cannot physically manipulate objects. Poltergeists can.

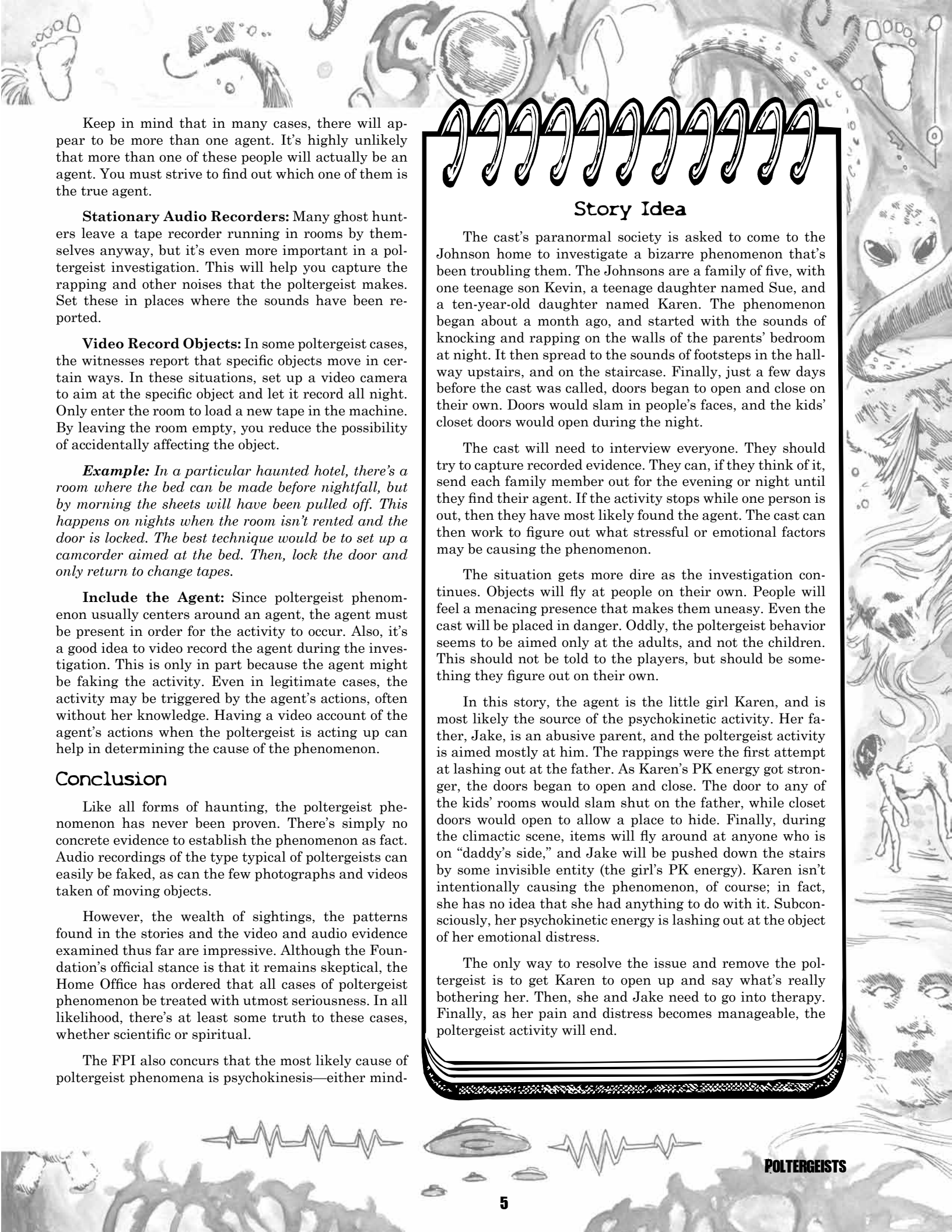
Special Investigative Methods

Because poltergeists can physically interact with the mortal world, there are many techniques you can use to capture and record activity that you cannot use with regular hauntings. These techniques are as follows:

In-depth Interviews: It's important to try to identify the agent, because poltergeist activity is so heavily tied to severe emotional trauma or stress. Whether she knows it or not, the agent is the cause—or at least the focus—of the phenomenon. If you can find out what the emotional situation is, you will gain knowledge that could be vital in putting an end to the haunting.

To do this, all people involved with the haunting must be interviewed both separately as well as all together in order to get the full story behind their emotional dynamics. You will undoubtedly need to ask many personal questions. This is why it's important to have an investigator who's good at talking to people and at getting them to open up.

Usually, the most effective way to stop poltergeist activity is to resolve the agent's emotional stress. This could mean psychological help, medication, or other forms of therapy.



Keep in mind that in many cases, there will appear to be more than one agent. It's highly unlikely that more than one of these people will actually be an agent. You must strive to find out which one of them is the true agent.

Stationary Audio Recorders: Many ghost hunters leave a tape recorder running in rooms by themselves anyway, but it's even more important in a poltergeist investigation. This will help you capture the rapping and other noises that the poltergeist makes. Set these in places where the sounds have been reported.

Video Record Objects: In some poltergeist cases, the witnesses report that specific objects move in certain ways. In these situations, set up a video camera to aim at the specific object and let it record all night. Only enter the room to load a new tape in the machine. By leaving the room empty, you reduce the possibility of accidentally affecting the object.

Example: *In a particular haunted hotel, there's a room where the bed can be made before nightfall, but by morning the sheets will have been pulled off. This happens on nights when the room isn't rented and the door is locked. The best technique would be to set up a camcorder aimed at the bed. Then, lock the door and only return to change tapes.*

Include the Agent: Since poltergeist phenomenon usually centers around an agent, the agent must be present in order for the activity to occur. Also, it's a good idea to video record the agent during the investigation. This is only in part because the agent might be faking the activity. Even in legitimate cases, the activity may be triggered by the agent's actions, often without her knowledge. Having a video account of the agent's actions when the poltergeist is acting up can help in determining the cause of the phenomenon.

Conclusion

Like all forms of haunting, the poltergeist phenomenon has never been proven. There's simply no concrete evidence to establish the phenomenon as fact. Audio recordings of the type typical of poltergeists can easily be faked, as can the few photographs and videos taken of moving objects.

However, the wealth of sightings, the patterns found in the stories and the video and audio evidence examined thus far are impressive. Although the Foundation's official stance is that it remains skeptical, the Home Office has ordered that all cases of poltergeist phenomenon be treated with utmost seriousness. In all likelihood, there's at least some truth to these cases, whether scientific or spiritual.

The FPI also concurs that the most likely cause of poltergeist phenomena is psychokinesis—either mind-



Story Idea

The cast's paranormal society is asked to come to the Johnson home to investigate a bizarre phenomenon that's been troubling them. The Johnsons are a family of five, with one teenage son Kevin, a teenage daughter named Sue, and a ten-year-old daughter named Karen. The phenomenon began about a month ago, and started with the sounds of knocking and rapping on the walls of the parents' bedroom at night. It then spread to the sounds of footsteps in the hallway upstairs, and on the staircase. Finally, just a few days before the cast was called, doors began to open and close on their own. Doors would slam in people's faces, and the kids' closet doors would open during the night.


The cast will need to interview everyone. They should try to capture recorded evidence. They can, if they think of it, send each family member out for the evening or night until they find their agent. If the activity stops while one person is out, then they have most likely found the agent. The cast can then work to figure out what stressful or emotional factors may be causing the phenomenon.

The situation gets more dire as the investigation continues. Objects will fly at people on their own. People will feel a menacing presence that makes them uneasy. Even the cast will be placed in danger. Oddly, the poltergeist behavior seems to be aimed only at the adults, and not the children. This should not be told to the players, but should be something they figure out on their own.

In this story, the agent is the little girl Karen, and is most likely the source of the psychokinetic activity. Her father, Jake, is an abusive parent, and the poltergeist activity is aimed mostly at him. The rappings were the first attempt at lashing out at the father. As Karen's PK energy got stronger, the doors began to open and close. The door to any of the kids' rooms would slam shut on the father, while closet doors would open to allow a place to hide. Finally, during the climactic scene, items will fly around at anyone who is on "daddy's side," and Jake will be pushed down the stairs by some invisible entity (the girl's PK energy). Karen isn't intentionally causing the phenomenon, of course; in fact, she has no idea that she had anything to do with it. Subconsciously, her psychokinetic energy is lashing out at the object of her emotional distress.

The only way to resolve the issue and remove the poltergeist is to get Karen to open up and say what's really bothering her. Then, she and Jake need to go into therapy. Finally, as her pain and distress becomes manageable, the poltergeist activity will end.





driven psychokinesis as the Rhine Center claims or as RSPK (Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis; see p. 134).

For the Storyteller: Poltergeists in the Game

Since no one knows for certain what causes poltergeist phenomenon, you have to make that decision for yourself. You can choose one of the explanations described above, or you can make up your own. A good way to keep it mysterious is to mix and match explanations. For example, you could choose to have poltergeists be spirits in nature, but have their ability to manifest affected by the agent's psychic or emotional state. That way, in some adventures, the poltergeist could be a wrathful spirit, and in others, it could be a demon.

Keep in mind that you can choose to have the poltergeist be pure RSPK for a particular adventure, and still have a wrathful spirit poltergeist in another. This is because the symptoms of poltergeist phenomenon are somewhat general. It's quite possible for psychic abilities to be the cause of objects being thrown in one case, and a poltergeist spirit be the cause in another.

It's All in the Story

Build a good story around the haunting, with a detailed and interesting supporting cast. The agent, especially, must be fully defined with a strong background and personality. Figure out the nature of the agent's psychological trauma and in what way it affects the poltergeist. Once you have a story, you're most of the way there.

Poltergeist Abilities

You must determine in what way the poltergeist manifests. Then, for each type of manifestation, decide how strong it is. Consider each manifestation and choose a

character attribute to assign to it. For instance, if the poltergeist throws objects, assign it a Brawn level. This will help you decide how large an object it can throw, and how hard it can hurl it. This is necessary for determining the wound level a character may receive when struck. Granted, this technique implies that the poltergeist is a spirit, but that's not necessarily the case. If you choose to make the poltergeist a case of RSPK, you can refer to its Brawn as the strength of its psychokinesis.

If you decide to have the poltergeist represent a spirit, then you may want to assign some of the other attributes to it, such as Will and Reasoning. This can help you play the spirit's role as the story unfolds.

Available Energy: All of the given explanations of poltergeist phenomena claim that there is some external force, such as psychokinesis, that controls the poltergeist's ability to manipulate physical objects. Because there could be many causes for this energy, it would not be good to wrap game rules around it. Instead, you should play it by ear. Use this energy as a means to maintain the atmosphere and to help the plot of the story. Tie the nature and behavior of this energy with the plot and the character of the agent, making it a dynamic part of the story.

Example: You choose to have the poltergeist be a wrathful spirit. However, the agent is a person with some strong but latent psychic abilities. She has no idea that she's leaking psychic energy. The spirit, however, can feed off this energy, and that's what allows it to manipulate physical objects. So, you decide that the spirit has Good Brawn, which means it can throw any small object and move some small pieces of furniture. But the spirit cannot do any of that until the ambient psychic energy reaches a certain level. The energy that the agent leaks is based on her mood. More energy will leak if she becomes stressed or frightened, and the spirit can manifest. Now you have a good setting for the story, and you know how to handle the phenomenon in game terms.

