



The Unexplained Sneak Peek #3

I once learned how to read tarot cards. I wondered if they worked, so I bought a few books and a deck, and I studied and practiced with myself. I was not very impressed with the results; they never made any sense. I thought that maybe I might have been reading too much into them, but I also had the nagging suspicion that they just didn't work.

Once day, a friend of mine asked me to do a reading for him. I told him I had never done one for another person, and so I could not guarantee the results. He said that was fine. I asked him for a question, and he said, "Will my dad's horse win the horse pull at this year's fair?" I thought it was an interesting question. I had never heard him mention his dad's horses before, but I did the reading. I did a standard Celtic Cross reading. The spread begins with the recent past, and then moves to the present, and finally works its way to the future and the answer to his question. The final answer to his question was "no." However, it got into so much more. The more I spoke, the whiter his face got, and the more his jaw dropped. The reading was getting into some very personal stuff about his relationship with his father, and that it was the recent animosity between them that made him focus on that question. I was afraid he would tell me the reading was full of garbage. Instead, he told me that it was right on, and that it freaked him out. He said he had never told anyone about the trouble between he and his father, and that he really was interested in the horse pull because it was the only thing the two of them had together at the time. He had been a skeptic, but by the time I had finished with the reading, he fully believed in the tarot and my ability. But he did not really believe that the horse would lose. It has won for the past five years. In fact, it has never lost a competition in its life.

The horse lost the horse pull. In fact, it did horribly. It was the only time it ever lost.

I am still not certain that there was any mystical power involved in the reading. All I did was turn over cards that were manufactured in a factory, and I did not even believe at the time that it worked. Some psychics say that they channel spirits during their tarot sessions. It certainly did not feel that way for me. Still, the results were pretty astounding, and I have never been quite as skeptical towards them as I used to be.

I pride myself on being open minded, and so I believe there might have been something to the reading I did for my friend that day. But I cannot prove it. I am not sure that it is provable. But that does not mean it is not true.

— Bradford Younie, President of Carnivore Games

A Few Words About The Sneak Peek

The following pages contain a small section of the The Unexplained roleplaying game. What is presented here is pretty nearly what will actually be in the final product. This is taken from the Parapsychology chapter of The Unexplained, and details what the fictional Foundation for Paranormal Investigation knows about the psychic phenomenon of Channeling. All of the information is based completely on actual evidence both scientific and anecdotal, and is as much a work of non-fiction as any other book on the subject.

You can use this sneak peek in your games right now if you wish. It is fully compatible with the Now Playing role-playing game from Carnivore Games, but can also be used as-is in any role-playing game..

The Parapsychology Chapter of The Unexplained

Parapsychology is the study of psi, or psychic phenomena. Channeling is the psi phenomenon of communicating with spirits and non-human entities through the use of a medium, or channeler. A medium is a person who allows a spirit to use his body to communicate with others in our world. In most cases, they only speak through the medium's voice, but other times it can get quite amazing!

I have always been fascinated with the idea of having two way communication with ghosts. I would love to have the opportunity to speak with a spirit and ask some questions that have been with me for many years. This sneak peek should shed some light on your questions regarding the spirit world, and can make a wonderful setting for a thrilling scene in your game.

So, without further ado, here's the The Unexplained Sneak Peek #3...



Channeling

(Mental Phenomenon)

Channeling is the act of allowing a spirit or other disembodied being to communicate through the psychic. The person that the spirit is communicating through is called a channel or medium. The thing to remember about channeling is that it's only communication, and nothing more. This is not to be mistaken with possession, where the spirit actually takes control of the medium's body. Now, it's possible that a particularly unruly spirit might attempt to take possession while being channeled through a medium, but this is rare and the spirit usually doesn't succeed.

There are two basic types of channeling: conscious voice channeling and trance channeling. Each differs by how the process works and the level of interaction between the medium and the spirit.

Channeling Types & Methods

Conscious voice channeling

In this type of channeling, the medium calms his mind and opens himself up to the energy, allowing it to speak through him while he remains in this calmed state. The spirit communicates using the medium's body, and even vocabulary. The medium typically closes his eyes, but remains conscious throughout the session and is fully aware of what is going on around him.

There are some mediums that don't actually let the spirit communicate directly. Instead they consciously relay the information that the spirit is giving them.

Sometimes the medium will use a tool to help him reach and maintain that calmed state. In these cases, he will not close his eyes—at least not right away—and will instead focus on the tool being used.

Trance channeling

This form of channeling requires the medium to enter a deep state of meditation. During that time, her consciousness leaves her body and the spirit enters, borrowing it for a time. The spirit doesn't have full control over the body, and can only speak through it. Because the medium's consciousness is no longer present, witnesses will usually notice a change in her voice and mannerisms during the session. In fact, sometimes she doesn't even remember what happened and what was said.

This is a much less common practice, and is inherently more dangerous. Most attempts by the spirit to possess the medium's body occur during these sessions. Trance channeling should never be performed by an inexperienced psychic, and many mediums warn against performing it at all.

Automatic Writing

Sit down at a table, take a pen, put it to a sheet of paper, and then open your mind. Calm yourself as would when

performing conscious voice channeling. This time, though, you won't speak. Instead, your hand will write on its own. Your mind will seem to have nothing to do with it, even though you're fully conscious. This is automatic writing.

Automatic writing has been a tool of spiritualists and other channelers for decades. They believe that spirits can communicate by controlling the medium's hands to write messages.

The problem with automatic writing, from a scientific standpoint, is that it's nearly impossible to prove. Researchers can monitor the medium's brain activity and analyze the differences in the handwriting, but there's very little else they can do. Ultimately, it's easy to dismiss the phenomenon as a simple parlor trick.

There are always hoaxers and charlatans when dealing with psychic phenomena. There are also those who believe they're channeling spirits through their hand, but are instead only writing subconscious thoughts. There are those, however, who could very well be writing messages from the dead. The handwriting evidence alone can be enough to lend credibility to the medium's work.

One test that can be done to determine the validity of automatic writing is to have a handwriting expert match the handwriting produced through automatic writing with the psychic's normal handwriting to determine the probability that both samples of handwriting were written by the same person. Quite often, the penmanship of the writing is from the spirit and not the medium.

Séance

A séance is a way to help a medium channel a spirit. A group of people gathers together and sits at a table with the medium. They usually hold hands in a ring and then close their eyes and concentrate on summoning a spirit. The belief is that a spirit needs to draw on energy in our world in order to channel through a medium, and having a group of people touching the medium in a chain of hands will add enough energy to make it happen. If successful, the medium will open up to the spirit and it will enter her and speak through her. If not successful, the spirit will not come.

The spirit doesn't always enter the medium's body, according to some reports. Instead, the group can feel its presence, and sometimes it tips the table or moves objects. There's no real answer as to why the spirit won't enter the medium in these cases; it simply does not. Instead, it communicates in its own way, often by creating noises and rarely by moving objects.

Most séances are performed in the dark by candlelight. There's no music or other ambient noise. Some mediums like to light incense, but it's not necessary. In most cases, the group links hands, but not all do. Some use tools, such as the crystal ball and the Ouija board.

Many parapsychologists caution against performing séances. They claim that the amount of energy a séance

can produce is great, and that can invite trouble. After all, the medium rarely has control over what spirit is called, and giving a bad spirit that much energy with which to materialize can be quite dangerous. In fact, it's possible that the "spirit" called forth will be non-human in nature. This could be disastrous, and might result in poltergeist phenomena or even possession.

Sensitive

Some people can feel the presence of ghosts whenever they enter a haunted area. These people are apparently "tuned into" the spirit world and can tell when such entities are around. A person with this ability is called a sensitive. A sensitive is a medium who can perceive beings from the "spirit world" in our world. Not all mediums are sensitive, but all sensitives can channel as mediums.

Sometimes a sensitive can identify specifics about the ghost, such as its gender and emotions. On rare occasions, she can hear them speak without actually channeling.

Spirit sensitivity is commonly faked by phony psychics. As a result, most people have become quite skeptical of this ability.

Channeling Specific Entities

Some mediums are able to channel a specific entity or spirit that they call forth. Some of these mediums can only channel a single entity, or spirit guide. This spirit guide is a source of wisdom and advice that can help them live their lives.

The Use of Tools

The medium can make use of various tools to help with the work. Some psychics believe that these tools have energy of their own, but even without special properties, they could still help the medium focus on the task at hand. For instance, when a medium stares intently into a crystal ball, it can increase the chances that her mind will calm and open up to the energy around her.

A psychic may find that she will need her tools less often as she becomes more experienced. Others believe that the tools are always a welcomed asset and should never be discarded.

Ouija

The Ouija can be a very dangerous tool, and a great many parapsychologists will caution against using it. Most people think

of it as a game—a fun thing to fool with on a sleepover. After all, a popular game manufacturer produces them.


But there's enough anecdotal evidence to show that there is some substance to the Ouija board's claims. Perhaps it's not the board itself but the fact that you have a group of people focusing on a single intention at the same time that makes the Ouija work.

A Ouija board is a flat board with a variety of symbols on it. The most common type has all the letters of the alphabet, all the digits, "yes" and "no," as well as other words and symbols. It has a planchette, or pointer, that's used as the communication device. Everyone places their fingers on the pointer and concentrates on calling a spirit. If all goes well, the spirit will move the pointer to spell out letters or to otherwise communicate with the people.

Since so few people take the Ouija board seriously, usually nothing happens. If something does happen, it's usually faked. One of the people playing with the board will move the planchette intentionally to fool the others and have fun. The danger is that they can still open a portal, and without any conscious thought of protection and containment, the spirits may run amok.

Still, there are those who have success with the Ouija. The results can be unpredictable. People playing with a Ouija board can have a good experience, a bad experience, or nothing could happen at all. The fact is that if the Ouija board does tap into paranormal energies, there's no way of predicting what will happen and the people involved are unlikely to be able to control it. They have no control over what entity or spirit comes, and they can't guarantee that it will leave when they're done. It's a common belief that





a portal is opened to the other side when someone uses a Ouija, and the spirit or spirits that come across while they have it open may stay a long time. Many long-running hauntings have been traced back to a Ouija board.

Some Wiccans cast a magical circle around them when using a Ouija. This is to ensure that no negative energies or spirits leave the circle, as well as to prevent any negative energies or spirits from entering the circle. It acts as kind of a firewall for unwanted energies.

Possible Explanations

Skepticism

As with all forms of psychic phenomena, skepticism abounds. The simple fact is that channeling is easy to fake and nearly impossible to prove. If the medium is a good actor, he could convincingly pretend to be speaking in trance as though through a different persona.

Skeptics also claim that mediums will use hot reading and cold reading to fake knowledge that they should not know. Hot reading is the act of learning personal information about someone ahead of time by overhearing conversations, or through research. Cold reading is a technique where the medium tricks a person into thinking that the medium knows more about a subject than he actually does. This is done even without prior knowledge, often by simply observing the person's fashion, hair style, body language, manner of speech, and other such characteristics. Cold reading is also called "profiling."

The mediums of the Spiritualist movement of the 1840s through 1920s became known for their faked photographs of trances where ectoplasm was shown spewing from their orifices. It's possible that some of them were legitimate, and that the phenomena they experienced were real, but the uncovering of these photographic hoaxes took away most of their credibility.

Still, some of the strongest criticisms simply revolve around the fact that there has yet to be any legitimate evidence to prove or indicate that these channeling sessions are real.

From an open-minded skeptic's perspective, these arguments against channeling make sense. However, the fact that some mediums are fakes doesn't prove that channeling itself isn't real. There are people who fake bear prints in order to have something to brag about, but we all know that bears do exist. It's virtually impossible to prove that channeling isn't possible. Only individual cases can be disproved. If a case is analyzed and cannot be debunked, then we must consider that something beyond explanation has occurred. And that is the definition of *paranormal*.

The Collective Unconscious

Psychologist Carl Jung believed that channeling—and ESP in general—can be explained by his hypothesis of the Collective Unconscious. This hypothesis claims that

everyone has an ancestral memory that is passed from generation to generation through the use of symbols. Jung believed that ESP is simply the human mind accessing memories stored in the collective unconscious. Most people access the collective unconscious through dreams, but he believed that psychics and mediums managed to access it while awake. Jung did not disbelieve these people's accounts; he simply discounted the supernatural element of them.

For the Player: Gifts Required for Channeling

The Medium Gift

This Medium Gift is required in order to channel spirits. This Gift uses the Meditate Skill rather than a specific Medium skill. This is the Skill you use to channel, as your character will need to clear his mind or even enter a trance.

Sensitives

A sensitive is a medium who's more perceptive than most. Therefore, your character is sensitive if she has both the Medium Gift and a Perception of Good or higher. A sensitive makes a Perception test when she enters a haunted area. The result of the test determines how much she can sense. The Storyteller must determine the details of what the medium has sensed.

For the Storyteller: Channeling in the Game


As Storyteller, you must first decide the "truth" about channeling in your game. In real life, there's currently no answer as to what actually happens when a medium channels a spirit. It might be real, it might not be. In truth, you don't need to decide on the final answer; you just need to decide what's true for your game's situation. Just be careful to keep it consistent throughout the game.

The following rules apply if you decide that channeling works as mediums believe it to.

The only thing that the medium actually does is meditate; either to calm way down, or to enter a trance. The rest just happens.

First, the Storyteller must decide if a spirit will visit during this attempt. Let's face it, a channeling occurs in the game to help tell the story, and if the Storyteller has no story to tell in this way, then no spirit should show up. The Storyteller mustn't give away the results. The player must not know ahead of time whether the attempt will succeed or fail.

Next, the medium must decide how he wants to channel the spirit. Will it be conscious voice channeling or trance channeling? Also, he must decide if any tools will be used. Tools are unnecessary for trance channeling, unless it aids the medium in entering the trance. Let the player play out all of his character's preparations. Let him set the mood.



The Meditate Skill

Now the medium must get into the appropriate state of mind. This would be done with a Meditate Skill test. Under ideal circumstances—proper mood, quiet, no distractions—a conscious voice channeling would require only a Fair test to succeed in achieving a calmed state. A Great test would be necessary to achieve the proper state of mind for a trance channeling. Lower the Difficulty Level by one if the medium uses a tool. See “**The Use of Tools,**” p. 204, for more information.

The medium can try again to enter the desired state of mind if he fails the first attempt. However, it gets harder with each failure. The Difficulty Level increases by one for every failure until it’s no longer possible to succeed.

Once the medium is in the desired state of mind, he can open himself up to the spirit. The hard part is over; the channeling will either happen or it will not, and it all depends on whether there’s a spirit willing to cooperate. The Storyteller decides this.

The player playing the part of the spirit, most likely the Storyteller, takes over. She can only have the spirit speak through the medium, and cannot control his body. Typically, she can only respond to questions. The spirit can show emotion, but should speak as though it’s difficult to do so. The spirit is working hard to keep up the communication, so make it sound that way. There should be pauses, and the speech should sound deliberate rather than conversational.

Séances

Performing a séance can make it easier to call a spirit. The only difference, as far as the rules, is that the medium is more likely to succeed. Add a +1 to the medium’s Meditate Skill for every two participants. If there’s only one additional participant in the séance, add the +1 anyway. The most important advice regarding a séance is to simply act it out and build up the suspense. This is a perfect opportunity for some great drama and thrills!

Maintaining the Connection

The medium must make a Fair Meditate Skill test after answering each question. The connection is broken and the channeling ends if he fails the test.

Gaming Tricks

There are things you can do to make the best of a channeling scene. The following is an example of something I would do. When I think that the cast might have a séance during the next session, I will bring candles, incense, and other such gear to the game. I will set up a card table and make sure that I have plenty of room to walk around it. I will set up the candles and the incense, but will not light them right away.

I will have all of the players sit around the table when, within the game’s story, the cast sits down at the table in

the haunted house. I will have the medium’s player light the candles and the incense. I will have the players do what the cast does as much as possible. Therefore, the players will most likely be sitting around the table in the order that the characters are. They will hold hands forming a chain. If there are any supporting characters in the séance, I will either recruit other people to sit in on the game, or we will just pretend that they are at the table too. I will intentionally stay out.



For the Storyteller: Show, Don't Tell

You should never tell the player what the Difficulty Level is or if he succeeded or not. Instead, play out the results dramatically. This is because a Psychic Ability that wasn’t used properly isn’t going to tell the psychic that he messed up. Instead, it will do its thing—which is different than expected—and it’s now up to the psychic to figure out if it worked right or not. If the psi skill being tested was a mental discipline it could have produced misleading information, which could be great fun in the game! You might also want to do this with the Concentrate test, so that the player may never know what part of the process failed.

I will walk slowly around the table as the séance begins in the game. The players will close their eyes when the cast closes theirs. I will walk slowly and quietly. When I need to speak as the Storyteller, I will do so quietly, sometimes almost whispering. If a player says that his character listens, I might whisper quietly in his ear, “You hear nothing...” This always gives the player goose bumps!

When something happens suddenly in the game, I make it happen suddenly at the table. For instance, if the table tips in game, I will kneel down while everyone’s eyes are closed, grab a table leg, and lift it abruptly upward; causing the same sensation in real life as the cast would likely experience within the game—this is why I use a card table. Everyone will jump!

This is the kind of thing you can do throughout the game to help build the atmosphere and feeling of the game. Now granted, you shouldn’t do this kind of thing constantly, as it will eventually get old, and could even slow the game down. But these kinds of gaming theatrics can work wonders for certain select scenes.