



MEDIUM

**a game about spiritualism,
but not a spiritual game**

Written by Uffe Thorsen in 24 hours

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Cover Illustration: Wikipedia.

This game is written in 24 hours as part of
The IKMIKT / Free RPG Blog 24 Hour RPG Competition.

It is based on the sentence
”*A better living through Necromancy*”,
and had to include a NPC named Keeton.

Inspirations I'm aware of:
Happy Ends by Tobias Wrigstad,
Raven – Claw and Beak by Tomas H.V. Mørkrid,
and *Polaris* by Ben Lehman.

Welcome, oh Seeker of the Dead

This game is about relationships – dysfunctional relationships. We will each bring one problematic relationship from our lives into the game, and in game it will be transformed into a fictional relationship to a spirit.

We will perhaps be able to resolve the issues of the relationships by contacting the spirits at a séance. Hopefully reliving the past and speaking to the dead will help us resolve our issues with the once living. Time will tell.

Before we begin let me first summarize the game we're about to play. Then I'll go into more detail about how you do specific parts of the game, and finally we'll have time for an example and some advice.

How We Play

In the game each of you will play yourself, or at least a fictionalized version of yourself, participating in a séance. You are each there to contact the spirit of a person you have issues with in an attempt to resolve those issues.

The spirits will be based on actual people you know. And preferably persons with whom you, the player, have real issues.

We begin by creating a spirit board that is used as a place to take notes about the spirits, and also to choose who will be the medium of a given scene.

After the creation of the board, we'll take turns calling the spirits. If it's your turn to call your spirit you say a ritual-phrase, and then call the spirit.

A medium is then found amongst the other players by moving the glass in the middle of the spirit board.

The Medium gets to play the voice of the spirit, you get to play your own voice.

You and the spirit then engage in a conversation about the past, a past that is played out as you go, by the other players.

You simultaneously play yourself in the memory (if you're there) and yourself at the séance.

The medium plays the voice of the spirit and frames the scene. The other players play characters at the scene, including the spirit in the past.

During these scenes you and the spirit talk about what happened, and the medium will attempt to make you happier.

As the scene is played one of more of you may feel that a different medium could give the scene a cool twist. If this is the case you just place a finger on the glass, and thereby pause the scene. Then everyone places their fingers on the glass and a new medium is chosen. The scene is then resumed, perhaps with other players playing the persons of the scene.

When the medium tires of the scene, or the scene feels resolved, the medium ends it, this can be abrupt or it can be slow. Afterwards you, the player who had the turn decides if you are actually feeling happier about the spirit and your issues, if so you no longer set scenes with your spirit, if not you continue as before.

Continue until you are all happier or you don't feel it is possible to become content about the issues by more playing – not everyone has to be happier – that is not how life works.

Playing Yourself

Whenever it is your turn to call the spirit you will be playing yourself. Or at least a fictionalized version of yourself at a séance, trying to contact a deceased fictionalized version of a person you know.

It is not the point that you will play the exact same person as you are in reality. It is a version of who you are. But for the sake of illusion, you shouldn't declare or explain where the

differences between the two lie as you play, if you feel a need to separate reality from fiction wait until after the game.

Creating the Spirit Board

Before we can begin to play we need a couple of things. First we need a big white piece of paper (about the size of two normal pieces of paper), this piece of paper will become our spirit board.

On it you should draw two concentric circles, the inner circle should be about the size of a small adult hand spread out, the outer circle should be about twice as large.

Mark the center of the circles with a small x.

After you have done this, divide the area between the two circles into equally large sections, one for each player. These sections are your domains. In these you later write words to describe your spirit. Your domain is also used in the rough consensus mechanics described later.

You are welcome to adorn the spirit board with a couple of occult looking symbols if you'd like to.

Apart from the spirit board we need a round glass, place it in the middle of the spirit board. The glass should be able to slide easily on the spirit board, shouldn't tip over too easily, and will be used in the rough consensus mechanic.

Have we got a spirit board, a glass, and a couple of pencils? Good, then we're ready to play.

If you want to, you could get a couple of candles, and turn off the lights to create a proper séance atmosphere. But don't overdo it, the séance is just the frame of the story, the memories are the core.

Finding Spirits

Each of you should decide who your spirit is and what your issues with the spirit are. As you play yourself, you should choose a person you know, a real breathing person is much preferred to a entirely

fictional one.

You should choose a person with whom you have issues, though not issues that are too personal for you to share with the rest of the room, as there's no point in choosing a person with whom you have such personal and tough issues that you're not willing to share it with us.

Preferably choose a person that is still alive (although dead people where their death in itself is no longer an issue for you may work), and not too well known to the rest of us.

Part of the point of the game is that we have to guess and make up the interactions and memories between you and your spirit. So don't choose spirits that are well known by the others.

Don't choose spirits that are in the building. Hard and fast rule, no spirits that might actually enter the room as we play.

When you have found your spirits describe them in a couple of words or short sentences in your domain of the spirit board. As you do so describe your spirit and the nature of your relationship to the rest of us.

It is more important to communicate the issues with the spirit than it is to describe the actual spirit.

Once you've all found and described your spirits we're ready to begin contacting them and reliving memories.

Calling the Spirits

We'll take turns contacting our spirits, if you want to speak to your spirit take the glass and breathe into it and then quickly place it at the center of the spirit board. We all then places a single finger on the bottom of the glass and you say the words: "I call you, spirit of my past – speak to me."

Then we determine who'll be the medium (see rough consensus below). When we've found a medium, the medium starts speaking in the voice of the spirit.

Rough Consensus

When we need to determine who will be the medium we use the mechanics of rough consensus.

Place the glass in the middle of the spirit board, turn it upside down. Each of you should place a single finger on the bottom of the glass. Then move the glass towards whomever you wish to be the medium. As soon as the glass touches the domain of anyone but the one who the scene is about that player becomes the medium.

Even though we're allowed to move the glass as we please, this shouldn't evolve into a physical finger-pushing match. Try to steer the glass without obviously moving it. And if we're locked because we all push in different directions try changing your mind about who should be the medium and let the glass move.

Note that the player whose turn it is may never become the medium, and if his domain is touched it should be ignored.

Setting the Scene

When we have found the first medium of a scene, the two of you who are the player and the medium can begin to talk, you'll have a dialog between the player and the spirit. As you speak the medium should mention a memory that is defining for your relationship (mostly made up, of course).

The medium will frame the scene by quickly stating where it is, who are there, and what is happening. The medium will give us persons in the memory to play (including the person the spirit used to be, but excluding the player, only you can play yourself). It is possible to play more than one person in the memory if there is not enough of us to take one each, but a person should only be included in a memory if they're important.

The medium cannot play any persons of the memory, but has the authority to fast forward, introduce new persons, remove persons from the scene or in any way change it. It is also the medium who ends the scene. The medium continues to speak as the spirit.

Playing Scenes

We'll then begin to play out the scene, but even as we do so the dialog between the player and the spirit continues. Thus you, the player whose turn it is, plays both yourself in the memory and yourself around the table communicating with the spirit.

When playing the scene we should all focus on the relationship between the player whose turn it is and the spirit. The medium should attempt to make the player happier, everyone else should just play and try to make the scenes interesting.

The medium is allowed to re-frame the scene in the middle of the scene. For example it is alright to say that what happened isn't really what happened and that this other thing is what happened. The medium may reorder who plays who, and who's there as much as they want.

The memories the spirit presents are not necessarily true. You're welcome to argue with the spirit that it is lying to you and trying to paint a harmonious picture of the past instead of what actually happened. But it is unimportant what happened in actual reality, when a relationship enters this game it is bound to be fictionalized and will often change greatly. It's not the point to work out actual relationship issues, they're just used as a starting point of the fictional issues (but if you get both the fictional and the actual issues worked out through game, so much the better).

Change of Medium

If one of you wishes to change medium in the middle of a scene, you just place a single finger on the bottom of the glass. Everyone else is then forced to find a new medium through rough consensus. The new medium continues the scene, and now plays the spirit. Any persons played by you former to becoming the medium is distributed among the rest of us.

Be careful not to loose track of where the scene was going when we return.

After Scenes

A scene ends when the medium says it ends. The spirit flees and is no longer available. Between scenes you, the player whose turn it just was, should decide if you're happier about your relationship to your spirit. Don't settle low, you should actually feel that you've come to terms with what issues were between the two of you (not necessarily with the real person the spirit is based on, just the spirit).

If you've resolved the conflict between you. Tell us all and you will then no longer attempt to call your spirit, if not you'll get a chance to resolve your issues later.

Every time a player is satisfied the rest of us should discuss if we think it is possible to resolve any of the remaining issues.

If not we should end the game now, if so we continue playing, but the one who just resolved his relationship will no longer take turns calling the spirit.

If we wish to continue playing, the next player takes a turn calling his spirit.

If this is the end of the game we should all send the spirits away by saying: "Spirits, we bid you farewell."

This ends the game.

Example of Play

I will now give you an example of how play could be.

Imagine me and a bunch of other guys playing Medium.

We've got a bunch of candles and turned off the lights. We're all good friends, but don't know each other all that well.

We start by creating the spirit board, placing the glass and now we have to find good spirits for the game.

I decide that I don't want a too personal issue, as I'm not all that comfortable with some of my relationships being exposed.

I choose a lose friend of mine named Keeton to be my spirit. I

explain who he is: One of the core people in a group of RPG writers I know and wish to be pals with. He is charismatic, intelligent, and I might just want to be him a little bit.

My main problem with him is that he again and again have done little things to keep me from becoming part of the group I want to be part of, and I've come to realize that he just don't like me, simple as that.

I write a couple of sentences in my domain on the spirit board about Keeton, and the others do likewise with their spirits.

After we've declared our spirits, it's time to set the first scene.

I start, I blow in the glass, and we all place our fingers on it. I say: "I call you, spirit of my past – speak to me." And we begin to move the glass.

A couple of us have flashbacks to playing with Ouija boards when we were children and fight to hold back giggles not to ruin the mood.

A medium is found (it cannot be me, remember).

We begin to play the first scene and the medium quickly asks if I remember the time we (me and Keeton) was at this bar with a couple of the guys (as he says 'a couple of the guys' the medium points at two other players who quickly make up a couple of random guys of the group in their minds). The medium then asks the last player to play Keeton in the past.

We play for a short while a scene where every time I try to participate in the conversation Keeton pretends not to hear, and disrupts me. I get angry at him, and begins to talk directly to him, tells him that I hate it when he does that.

One of the players decides we need a new medium and places a finger on the glass, we pause the scene and find a new medium (that happens to be the guy who chose to find a new, guess we thought he had a good idea since he interrupted).

The new medium quickly introduces a girl I fancy, who comes up to us. And the scene quickly evolves into me seeming childish for being mad before her as she hasn't experienced how mean Keeton was.

We play on a little and end the scene. I am obviously not happier than when we started.

The other players have their turns, most of the scenes are just introducing the issues of the relationships, only a single one moves towards reconciliation with the spirit.

Next time it's my turn we play a scene where we relive a memory of me and Keeton having a very pleasant conversation about RPG design. Near the end of the scene I exclaim to the spirit: "But it's a lie Keeton, and you know it!" The medium ends up introducing the group into the scene and suddenly Keeton changes behavior.

I'm still not very happy about our relationship, and next time it's my turn we have a scene where I realize that Keeton is actually just a stupid insecure jerk.

This to my amazement makes me rather happy. I realize that I don't have to be friends with, or be, this guy, Keeton, and I declare that my issues with the spirit are resolved.

We discuss it and decide to continue the game, as there is still hope some of the other players will be happy too. I still participate in the game, but no longer call my spirit.

After a while a couple of other players are content with their relationships, but we don't see how the rest can be resolved so we decide to end the game. We banish the spirits and return to reality.

(Disclaimer: I have never met a person named Keeton, and know very little of the guy my Keeton is named after. I have though, experienced similar events as those described above, part of the game is to use real events and thus I do so also in the example.)

Advice for Seekers of the Dead

Regarding what people to choose as models for your spirits, it depends a lot on who you're playing with, how personal issues you can use. If it is very good friends or strangers you're never going to see again then by all means choose spirits that are very close and very personal. But, as I expect that most people will play with people they're going to play with again, it is probably best to choose spirits that aren't all that terrifying, but still carry some emotional meat.

I strongly advice discussing the choice of spirits before he game begins.

Also remember, how the spirits died isn't the point, so don't waste time on it.

Advice for when you Call the Spirit

Remember that even though you start out by taking real people and problems, the game will change what started out real into fiction. You have the power as a player to disbelieve all memories presented by your spirit (as they are obviously all made up), but it is more fun to accept some of them as true in the game.

Accept some memories, but don't let the issue disappear by accepting a rosy past.

Discuss with the spirit, and remember the spirit is a person who means something to you, not just some spirit passing by telling you stories.

Advice for when you're the Medium

It is unimportant whether or not you're actually in contact with a spirit of a deceased person or you're a phony medium trying to please the person connected to the spirit. You want to achieve the same thing. To resolve the issues between the spirit and the person.

Remember that in order to resolve the issues, you shouldn't try to make them disappear, you should work them by explaining, apologizing, connecting to the person.

It is hard to resolve relationship-issues, but do your best. It's the reason why you're here.

Advice for the Rest of Us

When not playing the player connected to the spirit or the medium, you'll play persons in memories. Try to make the memories interesting, try to play towards the issues, and try to move the memory towards some sort of conclusion.

Remember if you have a great idea for the spirit you can always become the medium through rough consensus (given the other players agree that you should be).

In Closing

I hope you have enjoyed this tour through your own issues and dysfunctional relationships. I hope that even though the real events became fiction the fiction can also influence the real world.

Hopefully you understand your relationship to your spirit better now than when you began playing.

Perhaps you've seen that even though spiritualists are fakes they can still help resolve issues, or possibly you've learned that it is impossible to become happier by being lied to, who knows?

Or perhaps you have just been entertained, which is not at all a bad goal of game design.

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MEDIUM

A game where you bring part of your own life into the game and then fictionalize it.

You play yourself at a séance trying to connect to the spirit of a dead friend with whom you still have issues.

The spirits are fictional versions of living people you know, and with whom you have a problematic relationship.

Bring reality into your game, and perhaps game into your reality.

Players: 3 or more

System: Rough Consensus

Need: Pencils, drinking glass, and a large piece of white paper

Written as part of :



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