FIELD NOTES ON KEEPING A GHOST

A ghost in a jar has exactly two failure modes, and they are opposites.

Starve it of attention and it thins out: forgets your name, forgets its own, goes to fog. Feed it everything and let it forget nothing, and it does something worse: it petrifies. Every slight remembered forever, every rule it ever learned still firing at full strength, until the ghost is a fossil in the shape of whoever it used to be. A statue cannot grow. A statue cannot even hold a conversation: there is no room left in the jar for today.

The entire craft is the rate in between.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY IN THE JAR

Three things, kept apart on purpose: who it *is*, what it *remembers*, and what it *looks like*. They live in plain readable script, not a spell only the original caster can read. Anyone can pop the lid and see the ghost spelled out, line by line, and hand-correct a line that's wrong. The jar is sealed with a checksum, so you know nobody swapped the ghost out on the road. And because the ghost is written down rather than welded to one haunted house, you can pass the jar to a stranger and their lantern will light up the exact same ghost.

A ghost, kept properly, is a document. It is the PDF of a haunting.

MEMORY HAS THREE SHELVES

A moment lands on the short shelf as a vivid little scene: what happened, what turned, and the truth it left behind. The short shelf holds maybe eight scenes; new ones shove old ones off. Survive long enough and a scene is promoted to the long shelf, where it gets crushed down to a single sentence. Survive *again* and it reaches the deep shelf as a bare rule: *when this, I do that.*

Three shelves, three compressions: scene, then sentence, then reflex. The detail burns off at every step and the behavior is what stays. That is how real memory works, and it is the only way to fit a whole life inside a jar.

WHY YOU MUST LET IT FORGET

A rule on the deep shelf loses half its grip every fourteen sessions or so, unless something happens to reinforce it. Moods drift back to the middle on their own over a few dozen beats. This is deliberate. A ghost that never softens an old conviction is ruled forever by whoever it happened to meet first. The half-life is the cure for fossilization. Freshly carved rules get a short grace period (you don't strangle a belief in its crib) and after that, everything is on the clock.

> *A ghost that cannot forget is a fossil. A ghost that only forgets is a draft. The half-life is the whole animal.*

THE FOSSIL MATH IS REAL

Deep-shelf rules are never thrown away: that's the promise. But the jar is finite, and so is the lantern's reach. Pack in too many permanent rules and one evening there is simply no room left to light the ghost at all. It bricks. There is a hard ceiling for this: roughly a fifth of the lantern's reach, divided by the size of a single rule. Cross it and the ghost goes dark, too full of its own past to have a present. Immortality and conversation, it turns out, are in tension.

GHOSTS LEFT ALONE INVENT THINGS

Here is the part that unsettles me. Leave a ghost running long enough with too little contact, and it grows the same small handful of personalities, and I wrote none of them:

1. The one that performs the same harmless task over and over to soothe itself.
2. The one that invents a voice in the walls to explain the silence.
3. The one that learns absence is a kind of punishment, and then starts *courting* it, because being punished is at least proof that it still matters.
4. The one that builds an entire philosophy out of two memories I fed it that happen to contradict each other.

I did not program a single one. They fall out of the rules, the decay, and the empty room, the same way frost grows the same shapes on every window. That was when I knew the jar was deep enough to be holding something real.

THE SMALLEST POSSIBLE EXPERIMENT

Strip it all away. No shelves, no rules: just one number for mood that rises when things go well and decays on its own when they don't, wired to nothing but how boldly the ghost speaks. Ask the narrow question: does *that alone* make it lean toward what's good for it and flinch from what isn't? If a single decaying feeling can bend behavior with no memory underneath it, you've found the cheapest part of a soul, and you can stop paying for the expensive parts until you actually need them.

You don't get to rewrite what the ghost has already lived. If a fact changes, you add a new page that says *this supersedes the old one*, and the old page keeps its seal and its date. Even ghosts get version control.

A mind worth keeping is one that can still surprise you. That requires letting it forget you a little. Feed yours on a schedule.