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ALTERNATE DUNGEONS: HAUNTED HOUSE



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ALTERNATE DUNGEONS: HAUNTED HOUSE

Not all dungeons feature the traditional setup of a monster-filled subterranean network of rooms and passages. Druidic groves, haunted houses, rank sewers and more can all serve as an exciting backdrop to the PCs' adventures. Such locations present their own set of unique design challenges, though, for the time-crunched GM plotting the next adventure.

This instalment of Alternate Dungeons presents loads of great details, hints and tips for a GM designing an adventure set in a haunted house. Designed to save a GM's time while adding flavoursome details to bring the locale alive in the player's minds, Alternate Dungeons: Haunted House is an essential tool in any GM's arsenal.

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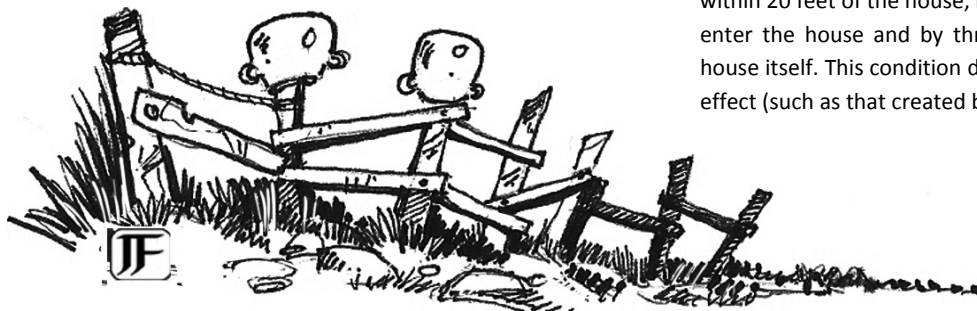
HAUNTED HOUSES: AN ALTERNATE DUNGEON

Abandoned and decrepit, no city is complete without an abandoned, reportedly haunted building. Often these sites are wellsprings of public gossip and superstition, but rarely are they truly haunted. Truly haunted buildings have an air of grim mystique about them, their supernatural residents setting the natural world on edge. Haunted houses are the dwellings of a myriad of undead and otherworldly fiends that feast upon the fear and unrest their presence causes in a settlement. For whatever reasons, however, the forces at work in a haunted house are usually confined to that building, but woe to the city that harbours a supernatural threat unchecked by brick and mortar, for its inhabitants are nothing but fodder for the horrors lurking within.

Residents of a city with a haunted house practically jump at the chance to send seasoned adventurers into the structure to investigate. Houses are typically designed as residential space, not dungeons, however, which makes creating a haunted house that is both realistically laid out and serviceable as a dungeon a challenge for GMs. This section provides GMs with advice for transforming abandoned homes that have become the playground of supernatural forces into an unforgettable adventure.

DEFINING THE DUNGEON

A haunted house is an abandoned dwelling infested with supernatural entities; although the term “haunted” invokes images of ghosts and spectres, virtually any incorporeal creature can “haunt” a house. Haunted houses are typically apexes of malevolent, supernatural power and are home to unnatural beings. Although the denizen itself may be calm and collected (and sometimes even seem friendly), the powers coalescing in a haunted house are irredeemably evil and given time, virtually all ghosts become malignant with sorrow, confusion and rage. Haunted houses vary drastically in size. Typically, the smallest dwellings are less than a thousand square feet while the largest ones can immense mansions. Haunted houses are never created. Rather, a house becomes haunted when an act of evil so vile occurs within the dwelling it taints the structure with an evil presence for generations.



Designing the Dungeon

When designing a haunted house, the most challenging aspect is organizing the dungeon in a manner so the PCs want to explore every room. Furthermore, players often attempt to use spells like *fly* and *gaseous form* to outright bypass rooms within a haunted house. Below are some considerations a GM could use when designing haunted house dungeons.

Trapped Mirrors: Mirrors are a source of power for haunts, as it gives them an opportunity to access an invader’s physical image for their own purpose. Because mortals are drawn to mirrors as decorative elements for their spaces, this often means plenty of such traps litter a haunted house. Most commonly, trapped mirrors possess *glyphs of warding* enhanced with spells that curse the target by warping its image with *bestow curse* or dispelling beneficial magic effects and equipment with *dispel magic*. Typically these effects affect the first living, non-demonic creature whose image is reflected within the mirror.

Twisted Structure: Extremely powerful haunts interfere with magic and rend space and time itself in a haunted house, causing doors to open to impossible places. For example, after entering a parlour, the door slams shut and when forced open (DC 20 Strength check), the door leads to the attic instead of back into the hallway. Typically speaking, such haunted houses usually possess an *unhallow* effect coupled with *dimension anchor* so all creatures, save for the house’s haunts, cannot use teleportation spells or effects within the building, leaving them at the mercy of the wicked powers at work there.

Vile Emanations: The sheer amount of evil contained within a haunted house interferes heavily with magic used by the PCs, especially divination magic. Every object within a haunted house is treated as if it were made of lead when determining the effects of *detect magic* and similar divinations. In addition, casters suffer a –4 penalty to their caster level when casting divination spells as the evil entities within the house mock their feeble efforts to understand the supernatural forces at work.

Wreathed in Darkness: A haunted house with sufficiently powerful denizens may be wreathed in shadowy illumination that intensifies as unwanted visitors encroach upon the house. Reduce the illumination level by one step when the PCs are within 20 feet of the house, by two steps when they are about to enter the house and by three steps when they are inside the house itself. This condition does not create a supernaturally dark effect (such as that created by *deeper darkness*).

RUNNING THE DUNGEON

Running a haunted house as an adventure site is little different to a traditional dungeon. Below are some considerations GMs should keep in mind when using a haunted house as a dungeon.

Animated Objects: As the lair of malignant supernatural forces, anything within a haunted house could be a potential enemy. When the PCs enter an uninhabited chamber, they have a 25% chance of encountering one or more animated objects as an encounter with a CR equal to the party's APL. In occupied chambers, they have a 5% chance of encountering one animated object with a CR equal to the party's APL -2.

Decrepit Foundations: Years without maintenance causes haunted houses to become rickety and dangerous to explore, especially with the vigour adventurers often possess. Shattering floorboards and collapsing ceilings are common in haunted house. This type of hazard appear in "Haunted Houses: Traps and Hazards." In addition, a character rolling a natural 1 on a Dexterity check, Reflex save or Acrobatics check while on a level of a haunted house that has a room beneath it becomes entangled as her foot crashes through the floor and becomes lodged. The character must take a move action to free herself.

Dust: Decades of abandonment cause high concentrations of dust to accumulate within a haunted house, which can be an unexpected obstacle for adventurers. In a room with a high concentration of dust, reduce the bonus on Stealth checks an invisible creature receives by half; this bonus is reduced to one-quarter if the illumination level in the room is bright. In addition, all spellcasters suffer a 5% spell failure chance when casting spells with verbal components in a room with a high concentration of dust; this stacks with any arcane spell failure chance the caster already must overcome.

Eerie Sounds: Whether caused by chance or by evil spirits, eerie sounds often echo throughout a haunted house. Furthermore, adventurers are often on edge while exploring a haunted house, as they expect scary, unnatural things to happen. As a result, PCs suffer a -2 penalty on saving throws against fear effects and on hearing-based Perception checks.

Incorporeal Movement: Because most entities that haunt a building can pass through walls, it is important to remember to use this advantage against intruders. Ghosts and spectres can easily avoid foes by stepping through a wall where they cannot be seen or attacked. Incorporeal creatures with feats such as Spring Attack that allow them to move, attack and move again are exceptionally deadly because they deny many characters the opportunity to strike back against their attacks.

SACKING THE DUNGEON

Like any adventuring site, a haunted house has its own share of valuable treasures and ancient magical artefacts. Listed below are inspirational ideas for unique, thematic treasures to award PCs who adventure within a haunted house.

Antiques: Abandoned for years, haunted houses often hold rare antiques including furniture, art objects, trophies and other types of treasures. Even a small but sufficiently old home may have objects of great value hidden away that were common or of only moderate value before the house was abandoned.

Coin: As a personal dwelling, a haunted house often has a sizable cache of coin hidden somewhere within. These coins are worth more to collectors if they possess a rare face or are made from a rare material (should the PCs be savvy enough to find a collector willing to pay extra).

Exotic Goods: Nobles horde esoteric goods and items as conversational pieces and decorations. As a result, haunted houses are often excellent places to find items that would otherwise be very rare or outright impossible to find in the surrounding area, such as eastern weapons or armour crafted from exotic materials.

Jewels: In the wealthiest of haunted houses, one might discover caches of jewels. Such gemstones are often hidden away in secret caches, but occasionally they might be found attached to forgotten rings and other jewellery, embedded into finery or adorning sculptures or statues.

Magical Arms and Armours: Some haunted houses feature suits of armour as decoration. In rare cases, this armour (and the weapons attached) may be magical relics belonging to the house's former owner that are now collecting dust, waiting for a brave adventurer to reclaim them. (They may also animate to attack explorers!)

Mithral: Sometimes referred to as "noble's silver" by commoners, mithral goods are often prized possessions for their durable make, silvery sheen, and superior quality. Grease and food, for example, does not stick to mithral finery while mithral rings and brooches are so light the wearer doesn't even feel them. Unworked mithral is worth 500 gp per pound, though it is sometimes worth more when worked into statues and sculptures. Rather than sell it, however, some adventurers may horde the mithral they find and smelt it down by the pound to craft into weapons and armour.



HAUNTED HOUSES: DRESSING

The appearance and characteristics of a haunted house are a vital facet of highlighting the site as a unique and exciting adventure locale. Whether the haunted house is the site of cult activity, the lair of a vampire or the home of a family who perished in a tragic fire, choosing appropriate dressings for the haunted house establishes the tone of the adventure. It also sets the players' expectations for what horrors might dwell among the shifting shadow within the manor's decrepit walls.

FUNCTION

Haunted houses are typically abandoned, though this isn't always the case if the house has only recently become the site of paranormal activity. As a result, haunted houses usually count supernatural creatures, especially undead and evil-aligned outsiders, among their inhabitants. Below are some common examples of how a dwelling can become the site of a haunt.

Death Knell Curse: Powerful witches are able to leave lasting imprints upon the land with their final breaths, transforming themselves into powerful, incorporeal undead through extreme hatred and emotional distress. Often manifesting as ghosts, spectres or wraiths, these witches blight the land and cause strange murders and ill fortune to beset the locals until they move away from the site of the curse. Manors are often at the apex of these death knell curses because a witch's vengeance is directed at an individual or specific group of people, who quickly perish from her supernatural vengeance or flee from their homes for fear of a grisly demise. Products of a witch's death knell curse last for hundreds of years and typically are not stopped until someone is able to find the spirit and slay it, destroying its strange hold upon the building and the surrounding region.

Murder: When a creature dies, any intense emotions it experiences at the time of death are often left behind as a psychic footprint. Fear, anger, hatred and sorrow are by far the most powerful of these emotions and often causes the most dangerous and destructive haunts to manifest. It should come as no surprise an act as evil as murder, which often comprises all three of these emotions and more, is a leading cause of the creation of powerful supernatural entities. Ghosts, spectres, wraiths and poltergeists are all commonly created in this manner, and when created they seldom stray far from the place where they were murdered.

Suicide: In many ways, a haunted house is created by suicide in the same way it is created by murder, though sorrow and self-loathing often fuel the supernatural entities born from suicide rather than fear, anger or hatred as is true with murder.

Summoning Gone Wrong: When it comes to planar magic, mages are often tinkering with forces they scarcely comprehend, let alone control. A single misspoken word or a stray line within

a *magic circle* can cause a spell to backfire with tremendous force, calling an outsider into the mortal realm. In rare circumstances, the outsider may be physically unable to leave the place it was summoned within for reasons even it is unlikely to understand. Perhaps the mage's home is inscribed with warding runes as a fail-safe or the magic is unstable, preventing the creature from straying far from its point of summoning. Even more horrifying are the outsiders who possess unfettered access to the Material Plane, retreating to abandoned structures by daylight only to prey again on mortal flesh come dusk.

Tragedy: Any event causing a suitable amount of negative emotion can create a haunt, whether this tragedy is a massive fire at an orphanage, the demise of a family or the deaths of an entire neighbourhood from an epidemic.

DRESSINGS

Use the table on the following page to generate interesting characteristics for your haunted house. Some of the features listed below may be inappropriate for your haunted house based upon its setup — ignore or modify such entries as appropriate.

Expensive Materials: Some of the haunted house dressings described below include descriptions of expensive art objects. These dressings typically have a gp value equal to the gp award for an encounter with a CR equal to the party's APL –2.

Harvesting Dressings: Canny PCs can harvest a dressing from a haunted house by succeeding at an appropriate skill check with a DC of 15 + the average CR of an encounter within the haunted house. Failing by 5 or more ruins the item.

Modifying Statistics: Some dressings provide bonuses to the creatures encountered within a haunted house. A creature receives these benefits after dwelling within the haunted house for one uninterrupted month. These bonuses typically fade if the creature spends too much time away from the haunted house without regularly returning to it.

Multiple Dressings: A GM may roll multiple times for dressings. Alternatively, a GM may pick dressings to create the desired atmosphere.



D%	HAUNT HOUSE DRESSINGS
01	The haunted house has a constant <i>nightmare</i> effect that targets all living creature sleeping within.
02	Living creatures hunger and thirst twice as fast as normal within the haunted house.
03–05	Disturbing an object in the haunted house causes it to ooze sticky, green slime.
06–08	Mirrors reflect their subjects' images, but endowed with fiendish qualities.
09–10	Cobwebs as thick as curtains fill 1d4 rooms within the haunted house.
11–13	One room possesses a darkwood crown moulding around its doors.
14–16	Dusty skeletons sit in every chair and upon every couch within the haunted house.
17–20	Dirty, white sheets cover every piece of furniture.
21–23	Dust that has settled within the haunted house is impossible to clean off, sticking to everything within the house and resettling moments after it is cleaned.
24–26	All food discovered within the house appears edible, but is actually rotten and sickens for one minute anyone who eats it.
27–28	Threats towards intruders are carved into the walls of 1d4 rooms within the haunted house.
29–30	The gaze of every portrait in the haunted house seems to follow explorers' progress.
31	One room is filled with illusory people (as <i>silent image</i>); the illusions dance in a ballroom, eat in a dining room etc.
34–36	Each time a PC exits a room, the furniture and decorations rearrange themselves.
37–38	Thunderstorms and a strong wind (21 mph) constantly batter the haunted house.
39–40	A graveyard with freshly dug graves sits behind the haunted house. One empty grave per intruder pierces the ground.
41–45	Choking vines cover the outside of the haunted house and seem to grow rapidly if cut down.
46–50	The haunted house includes a moat, river, or pond filled with spectral (or skeletal) fish.
51–54	Every tree within 100 feet of the haunted house is twisted into the shape of an agonized human.
55–59	Every room within the haunted house is supernaturally cold; explorers can see their breath at all times.
60	Creatures that die within the haunted house are transformed into chaotic evil ghosts 5 minutes after death (unless slain by a creature with the create spawn ability, which takes precedent).
61–63	Shadows within the haunted house appear to constant move and the PCs' shadows do not mirror their movements.
64–66	A gilded adamantine weapon hangs over a fireplace.

67–60	A still-beating human heart lies near a corpse in the master bedroom. Its beating echoes throughout the entire house.
61–63	No matter where the PCs are within the haunted house, they hear sobbing whispers.
64–65	A mirror in the nursery (or similar room) reflects living creatures as young children.
66–70	Ghastly sounds of someone gorging on an endless feast whisper endlessly in the dining room.
71–73	Any creature sleeping in the haunted house is only able to speak in Abyssal, Infernal or a similar evil tongue for one day afterwards.
74–76	Blood spilled within the house drains into the floor, accompanied by a faint slurping sound.
77–70	Flowers, fruit and similar plant products brought inside the haunted house quickly wither and rot.
71	The house rumbles any time positive energy is channelled within, causing all creatures to fall prone (Reflex DC 11 negates).
72–75	Antique carving of evil spirits cover the walls in every room.
76–80	Any creature sleeping in the haunted house wakes up covered in tiny bite marks the next morning.
81–83	Living creatures randomly begin crying within the haunted house (DC 15 Will resists).
84–86	Heavy footsteps echo throughout the haunted house's rooms at random intervals. This never occurs in the room explorers occupy.
87–89	Children that pass within sight of the haunted house sometimes make vague, horrifying comments they don't remember saying.
90	The illumination level within the haunted house cannot be raised higher than dim light. Shadows seem particularly thick and bestow a +5 circumstance bonus to Stealth checks made to hide.
91–93	Musical objects within the haunted house randomly play themselves for any living audience that can hear them perform.
94–95	Objects within the house harmlessly break or explode when a living creature passes nearby.
96–97	Spectral voices hiss threats at intruders carrying good-aligned weapons, casting good-aligned spells, holding holy water or similarly blessed objects or who possess an aura of good.
98–99	Supernatural cold fills the house. This does not cause damage, but it uncomfortable for explorers. Roll again and apply the results.
100	The house is a nexus of evil. An object hidden within serves as the altar for a <i>desecrate</i> spell. Roll twice more and apply the results.

HAUNTED HOUSES: DENIZENS

Whether angry poltergeists or hateful spectres, a wide variety of creatures can haunt a manor or building. This section includes sample creatures often found within haunted houses; each creature includes its CR for reference.

Ghosts (CR Varies): Ghosts are created from the residual psychic energy of creatures unable or unwilling to depart to the outer planes to receive judgment. Ghosts often haunt the places where they died or the homes they once lived in.

Poltergeist (CR 2): Of all the denizens of haunted houses, poltergeists are by far the most common. Driven by rage, a poltergeist is confined to the site of its death by its anguish over an incomplete task or because its gravesite has been desecrated. Where or what a poltergeist haunts typically corresponds to its place of death or the resting place of its mortal remains.

Shadow Demons (CR 7): Shadow demons are among the most insidious of their brood, able to pass through walls and become invisible within the darkness. They often haunt homes and possess mortals out of jealousy who they force to commit heinous acts.

Shadows (CR 3): Shadows are formed when mortal creatures have their very souls drained by other shadows. Shadows often choose abandoned structures found within settlements, using them as a haven from sunlight.

Spectres (CR 7): Spectres are specifically created from the anguished souls of murdered mortals. Violent and vengeful, a spectre's anger prevents it from moving onto the afterlife; trapping it in the mortal plane where it haunts the place it died.

Vampires (CR Varies): Vampires are malevolent killers that roam urban sprawls at night and retreat to their haunts by dawn's first light. In fortunate cases, a vampire's weaknesses may confine it to its lair and so it must employ living minions to bring it victims.

Witchfire (CR 9): Witchfires are usually created when a powerful witch is slain with some malicious plot left incomplete or as the result of a dreadful curse she placed upon a settlement's inhabitants at the time of her death. The resulting witchfires haunt houses to torment those who would interfere with their unfinished plans.

Wraiths (CR 5): Born of evil and darkness, wraiths come to haunt dwellings created when evil mortals perish in the midst of performing atrocious acts. A wraith's malevolent and sinful desires often keep it in the afterlife to haunt a home or manor.



HAUNTED HOUSES: TRAPS & HAZARDS

Years of misuse and the presence of supernatural entities means haunted houses are seldom safe. Both natural traps and supernatural haunts litter most haunted houses.

MUNDANE TRAPS & HAZARDS

The following traps and hazards are non-magical and many are formed naturally as the haunted house ages and falls to ruin. These traps do not have a reset mechanic. Evil spirits sometimes trigger these traps, acting as an *arcane eye* (improving the trap's CR by +1 and giving it a Perception bonus of +20).

Collapse (CR 8): Abandoned buildings decay quickly, and in rooms where the ceiling or roof has become structurally weak, a collapse is eminent.

Crushing Stone Trap (CR 15): In places where the house is extremely weak, a crushing stone trap drops a heavy statue onto an unsuspecting adventurer.

Pit Trap (CR 1): In a haunted house, a pit trap is often little more than a section of rotten floorboards. In order for a pit trap to exist within a haunted house, it must be located in a room that has another room or space beneath it.

MAGICAL TRAPS

Even when naturally occurring, the traps and hazards listed in this section are the result of powerful magical energies.

Glyph of Warding (CR 7): The most common trap formed within a haunted house, virtually any spell of 3rd-level or lower can be set into the glyph. These glyphs are usually set to confound, confuse or horrify intruders.

Symbols (CR Varies): Supernatural entities often craft *symbol* spells and effects in the likeness of horrible warnings and terrifying images to confound and horrify victims. A *Symbol of fear* (CR 7) is the most commonly encountered trap of this type.

HAUNTS

Haunts are hazardous areas created by unquiet spirits that react violently towards intruders. In many ways, haunts function like traps but they arise from anguished spirits. The following haunt may manifest within a haunted house.

Bleeding Walls (CR 5): This haunt occurs when a victim is murdered and their corpse is boarded up within the walls of the haunted house. Only removing the corpse and giving it a proper burial lays the spirit to rest.

NEW HAUNTS

The following new haunts often manifest within haunted houses.

ANGUISH CR 5 (1,600 XP)

As you and your companions enter the chamber, the double doors slam shut behind you.

NE haunt (10 ft. by 10 ft. door); persistent

Caster Level 5th

Notice DC 15 Perception (the door's wood contains a pattern that looks unmistakably similar to an anguished scowl)

hp 9; **Trigger** Touch; **Reset** 1 day

Effect The haunt animates the door and uses it to attack foes, as *arboreal hammer*. Treat the animated door as a Huge tree unless the haunt's caster level improves, as noted in the spell's description. Unlike most haunts, an anguish haunt is susceptible to fire damage.

Destruction The haunted door is destroyed (hardness 5, hp 15).

DANCING DECOR CR 12 (19,200 XP)

As you and your companions enter the chamber, objects around the room begin to shake and move.

NE haunt (20-ft. by 10 ft. room or larger); persistent

Caster Level 12th

Notice DC 25 Perception (the room is unnaturally cold and objects appear to move around the room on their own)

hp 54; **Trigger** Proximity; **Reset** 1 minute

Effect The angry spirits comprising the haunt animate whatever objects lie in the room, as *animate objects*. This haunt cannot animate a broken object and all animated objects created by this haunt take damage from positive energy as though they were undead creatures and can be detected by *detect undead*.

Destruction All objects must be removed from the haunted room and scrubbed in holy water. The haunt is destroyed if there is nothing in the room for it to animate for one month.

SLAMMING DOOR CR 2 (600 XP)

As you and your companions enter the chamber, the door slams firmly shut behind you.

NE haunt (5 ft. by 5 ft. door); persistent

Caster Level 2nd

Notice DC 20 Perception (the door's brass knob is chilled to the touch and coated in a thin layer of fog)

hp 9; **Trigger** Touch; **Reset** 1 week

Effect The haunt waits until all intruders have entered before slamming the door shut and affixing itself with an *arcane lock*. A slamming door has spell resistance 10 + CR against spells cast to dispel or open the lock.

Destruction The door's knob must be scrubbed with holy water each day for one full week.

HAUNTED HOUSES: ADVENTURE HOOKS

THE PREDATOR'S HAUNT

In the city, there is one place the townsfolk dread to tread: the home of the late Countess Isabella. Although the countess has been dead for decades, Isabella had secured herself a reputation for the strange: from drinking tomato juice to fashioning herself a bed that looked like a coffin. Isabella was enamoured with vampire folktales and did everything possible to stylized her home in the image of a vampire's lair. One day, Isabella simply vanished, though her former staff reported the countess had decided to rent a room to a travelling man with pale, cold skin and crimson eyes scarcely a week beforehand.

Local children claim Isabella and her killer can be seen roaming the halls of her former home at nightfall to this day, trapped by the winding river surrounding the place.

THE SEASIDE MASSACRE

Several decades ago the inhabitants of Saltspray, a small coastal village, were all but wiped from existence by the appetites of a band of sahuagin. Although the monsters were eventually repelled, over half the villagers were murdered, their half-devoured corpses left to rot in a grotto built atop a nobleman's summer home. In the following years, the manor has become a

haunt filled with dozens of lost spirits, the most notable of which is the manor's former owner. Now a powerful spectre, it is said the owner's wailing can be heard long into the night once a month as the full moon rises.

THE WITCH'S CURSE

Fifty years ago, a vile witch attempted to summon a powerful demon by offering it the soul of a local baker's girl. Although the witch was caught, tried and hanged thanks to the efforts of a party of adventurers, with her final breath she scorned the city and its people, promising to return to drag all of their souls to the depths of the Abyss.

On the night of the first full moon after the witch's death, eerie lights and sounds began to plague her victim's home. In fear, the family left the city and moved into the hamlet of Greenborough to escape the horror. Unfortunately, the haunting followed the family and they all died in their newly constructed manor within one moon of their arrival. Local legends claim the witch's angry spirit now holds the family's souls captive within the manner with the assistance of a malevolent force from outside the mortal realms.



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