

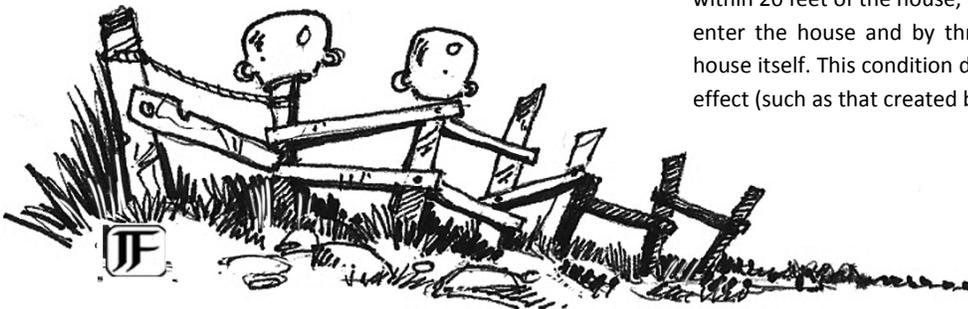
HAUNTED HOUSES: AN ALTERNATE DUNGEON

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.

