

THE DARKEST HOUSE™

SECRETS OF THE HOUSE

GM'S GUIDE to THE DARKEST HOUSE

by MONTE COOK

SECRETS OF THE HOUSE

The house invites you in.

The house hates you.

The house wishes to be left alone.

The house is lonely.

The house is in pain.

The house wants your pain.

The house hates you.



All houses in which men have lived and
suffered and died are haunted houses.

~Mary Roberts Rinehart, *The Red Lamp*

INTRODUCTION

H *haunted house.*

The term conjures instant images of spooky, old, run-down houses with a ghost within. Creaking floorboards. Strange moaning sounds. Objects moving on their own. The ghost wants something, probably something that will put it to rest, leaving the house once again at peace.

If that's what a haunted house is, then the Darkest House is not one.

Certainly, there are spirits of the unquiet dead here. There are old floorboards, strange sounds, and maybe even objects that move on their own. But the Darkest House isn't a house with a ghost in it. There aren't angry or evil spirits tainting an otherwise mundane location. The house *is* the haunting. If there are angry, pained spirits denied an eternal rest within the Darkest House, it's the house inflicting that upon them, not the ghosts affecting the house.

The house is the true villain of this story, not the things within it.

The house has an origin wrapped in pain, longing, and misery. You'll learn that story eventually, but know that even the story is a lie because the house has always existed. The house is older than most of the worlds it intrudes upon. Perhaps it is an infection that spreads throughout the worlds. Perhaps it is an entity constantly worming and seeping its way into new universes. Or maybe it is older than all worlds. Perhaps it is not some malady afflicting the many worlds, but rather the soil in which all worlds grow. Perhaps the worlds need the house somehow. Perhaps it is where they store away their own pain, emptiness, and misery.

All worlds touch the house. One way or another, the house exists in every conceivable existence. Whether it seeks out new worlds or the worlds seek out the house, the house can be entered—and perhaps exited—from any world.

“REALISM” AND THE DARKEST HOUSE

I’ve come to loathe the words “realism” or “realistic” as applied to roleplaying games (RPGs). There simply is no such thing. RPGs, like virtually all fiction, always take liberties with what’s real for the sake of story, or to facilitate an action. To really represent a battle between two small groups (some adventurers vs. some generic orcs, say), and take into account every move and countermove, every step and every stance, the weight of every object, the force of every blow, each thought of each participant, the chance of sweat from each combatant’s brow blurring vision a bit at any given moment—it would take days, not minutes, and would likely be one of the least fun gaming experiences you could have.

Regardless, applying the idea of “realism” to an (unconventional) haunted house is probably doubly absurd. If you’re of a mind to criticize “dungeons” because they’re just rooms of danger waiting for PCs to come to them, stop and consider for a moment: that’s *exactly* what haunted houses are. A haunted house waits for people to come to it, or is awakened by being disturbed. For the most part, the archetypal haunted house has no real meaning or existence without someone from outside of it coming in to experience it.

There’s no ecology in the house. Yes, there are a bunch of cats in the Cat Menagerie room, but if you’re worrying about what they eat, you’re misunderstanding the Darkest House. If you need an explanation, you can rationalize something supernatural, like the house sustains them, or they’re not real cats, or they’re the ghosts of cats . . .

But honestly, the thing that strips the horror right out of horror is too much explanation.

That said, The Darkest House—like most horror tales—does have something to say. It’s not just meaningless encounters. Rather than explanations, there are themes at play. The sections of the house have far more to do with the dark side of family and love than ecology or realism.

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

The house hates you. Does the house hate everyone? Maybe. But one thing we know for certain, it hates *you*. And of course, by you, we mean the player characters (PCs). It doesn't matter who they are.

This isn't necessarily some broad, sweeping statement about the house. It's a specific statement about the player characters. The house hates *them*.

It doesn't matter why. It would only matter if there was some way to assuage that hate. To change the house's mind.

There isn't. There is no way to make amends for some tangible wrongdoing in the past, because it isn't that simple.

It would be wrong to assume that the dangers and obstacles encountered in the house are necessarily there to harass or harm visitors. The house hates, and its existence is hateful, but it is not filled with traps set by some intelligence to be worrying or dangerous to intruders. That's simply too intentional. Too deliberate. While the house might sometimes take active steps to harm others, the interior of the house is what it is because that's the nature of the house. Belladonna isn't poisonous to ingest because of any kind of intention on the plant's part. It's just the nature of the plant (and the nature of creatures that consume it). This is similar to the house.

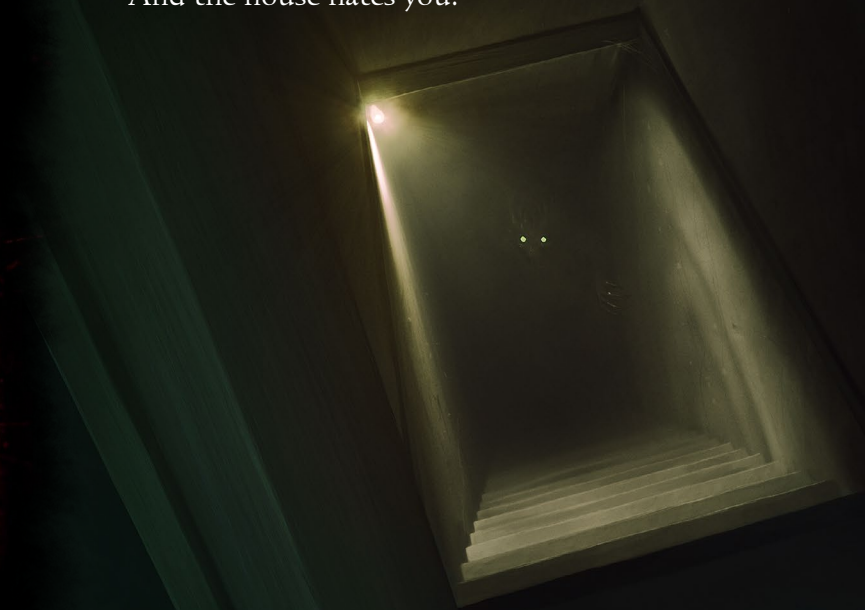
In fact, it's not wrong to think of the house as being a toxin, just simply one that afflicts the universe (or universes). Another way of thinking of it is as a virus. Or a cancer. In other words, the house has its own nature, regardless of and independent of the context and in particular the understanding and the expectations of those that encounter it.

If the house doesn't make sense, that's because it has no interest in doing so, at least from the point of view of some mortal beings. It's arrogance on the visitors' part to assume otherwise. Besides, it's a dangerous and difficult path to begin assigning too much in the

way of conventional and comprehensible human goals to the house. The house is more akin to some unknowable entity conjured by Lovecraft's fevered imagination or dream (or both).

Except . . . except that a Lovecraftian being has no interest in you. You are beneath its notice like a bacterium in the dirt on its metaphorical shoe. But here, you don't even get the tiny modicum of comfort the anonymity of Lovecraftian nihilism might afford. Because the house is aware of you. It *does* have an interest in you.

And the house hates you.



THE MOOD OF THE DARKEST HOUSE

Horror is a wide spectrum, so it's helpful to know what the intended mood of The Darkest House is, and what it is not (you can of course do whatever you want with this).

What The Darkest House is:

It's the descent into madness. It's old traumas and emotional scars. It's the fear of death and what we're afraid might come afterward. It's a bit of Clive Barker mixed with a little Shirley Jackson with a bit of *House of Leaves*. It's one's own inner demons given substance and life. It's slow, creeping horror that comes upon you with a lingering dread building slowly to a dark crescendo. It's the monster you can't see, but you strongly suspect is there, in the shadowy darkness. It's the implications of terrible, difficult choices.

What The Darkest House is not:

It's not skulls and gore, at least not as simply decor. It's not torture porn. It's not Stephen King. It's not Lovecraft. It's not tentacles. It's not classic medieval demons or ghosts. It's not kaiju monsters or zombie hordes. It's not action-packed, tactical battles.

In many ghost stories and haunted house tales, the story comes from learning the background of the ghost or the place and then “putting things right.” The heroes attempt to put the ghost to rest by doing something they left undone. Those can make great stories; however, that's not this story. The most the PCs can hope to do is sever the Darkest House from their own home world.

Through the journal pages and other clues the PCs can find in the house, they can learn some of the story of Phillip Harlock, one of the owners—perhaps the original owner—of the house. These might provide some insight into some of the encounters, and perhaps

into the nature of the house overall (and provide appropriate flavor), but they aren't meant to provide a way to "save" Phillip or "cleanse" the house. Things have gone way, way past that point (if they ever were there at all). The house is a force of nature (or unnature) unto itself at this point.

DESIGNER NOTES: ONLINE GAMING

I'm not always a fan of writers telling readers what to think or expect of their work, but in this case, because this product is a little different, the concept is perhaps worth some brief discussion.

The Darkest House was designed with two purposes (besides just being a tool to have fun with your friends, which is hopefully what all RPG products strive for). The first is to design a way to meld together different game systems by creating a sort of "neutral ground." **The House System**, which we'll get to in more detail shortly, is a bare-bones, mechanics-light system that is easy to convert any system to. It's less an actual game system than it is a means to allow very disparate systems to talk to one another (the exceptions to this being the design elements that are very specific to The Darkest House, such as Boons, Dooms, the House Die, the division of mental and physical damage, and a few others). That's why I don't call this product "systemless." I call it "system friendly."

The second purpose—and this is probably the one that deserves some explanation—is as a tool for online gaming. Specifically, online tabletop "replacement" games, where your group gets together in a virtual environment and interacts in a pseudo-face-to-face way. The players all talk together, all the players talk to the GM, and so on. This might be something like Zoom meetings, Roll20, Discord chat, or any number of other platforms, some of which I'm probably not even aware of. The platform hopefully doesn't matter,

but the medium does. I'm writing this at the tail end of 2020, which will almost certainly be remembered by all of us as the Coronavirus Year. (Or maybe, "Worst. Year. Ever." Or some expletive of your choice.) In other words, the year that we gamers couldn't get together with our friends around a table to play the games we love. Many of us were already playing games using virtual means, but in 2020, we almost all learned to do so.

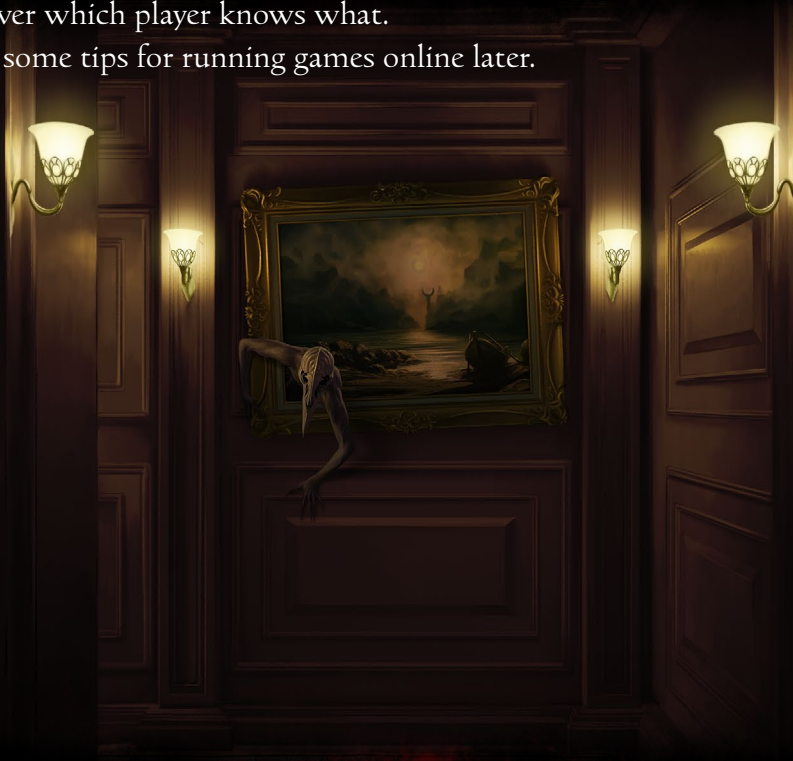
I'd been planning on creating some kind of game or product aimed specifically at this particular gaming environment for a long time, but it wasn't until 2020 that I was truly motivated to get it done. So that's what *The Darkest House* is. A product created *specifically* for online game sessions. Oh, I'm sure you could play it around a table. You could even probably figure out a way to print it all out and use it like a traditional book, although doing so would be tricky. I just don't know why you would want to, and I hope you realize that it's very likely a substandard way to use this material.

How does *The Darkest House* focus on the virtual environment?

- ✦ Formatting that presumes that everyone is staring at a screen, allowing information to be easily accessed with a mouse click rather than flipping pages.
- ✦ Art and maps meant to be shown to the players, which is arguably even easier to do online than in-person.
- ✦ Direct messaging to individual players or subsets of the group.
- ✦ Intentional mixed messaging, where the GM says one thing but uses direct messages or other means to convey something else entirely.
- ✦ Encouraging a conversational rather than mechanical style of play, because conversations are easy in an online environment, while intricate mechanics are less so.
- ✦ Avoiding mechanical requirements that involve a lot of rules referencing, complex character sheets, and so on. The goal here is to avoid having everyone looking down at a sheet or a book and instead looking up, at each other, and into their own cameras.

In other words, aside from having simple rules that require players and the GM to interact and formatting the actual product itself to be easily used on a screen, the encounters themselves are designed to play better in a virtual environment than in person. Because you interact differently with a group of images of your friends on a screen than you would if you were all around an actual table. An online environment allows us to specifically—rather than haphazardly—segregate the types of conversations that involve everyone and the types that involve one or more players and the GM. You’ve got a lot more control over which player knows what.

We’ll cover some tips for running games online later.



There had stood a great house in the centre of the gardens, where now was left only that fragment of ruin. This house had been empty for a great while; years before his—the ancient man's—birth. It was a place shunned by the people of the village, as it had been shunned by their fathers before them. There were many things said about it, and all were of evil. No one ever went near it, either by day or night. In the village it was a synonym of all that is unholy and dreadful.

~William Hope Hodgson, *The House on the Borderland*

THE HOUSE SYSTEM

Rather than being designed for a specific game system, The Darkest House has its own internal system called the House System. The House System is easy to use and easy to understand, although likely quite different from the system(s) you use most of the time.

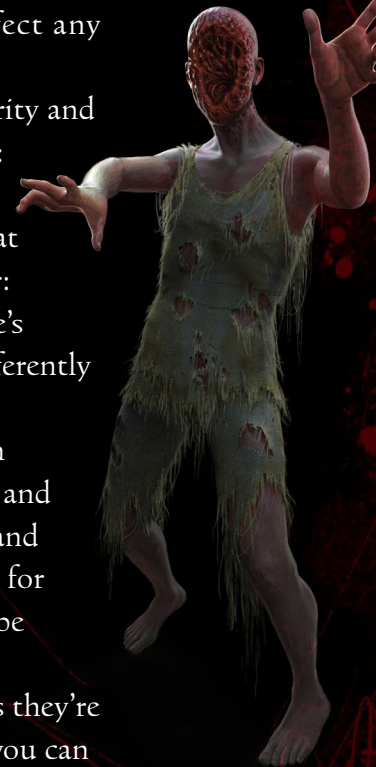
This is intentional. Because the Darkest House experience isn't about stats and numbers, it's about mood and story (both dark). The characters will almost certainly leave the house with some permanent changes that are going to affect any ongoing campaigns.

Some gamers might balk at how simple the system is. They want more granularity and robust options in their game. I understand. But the House System does two things:

1. It allows both players and GM to really focus on the story and the mood.
2. It tells the players in a very overt way, "Things are different here." It makes that statement in a language all players will understand, in a tone they will all hear: via game mechanics that govern how their character works. Thus, if the game's mechanics are the laws of physics for your game, the laws of physics work differently in the Darkest House.

I know many of you will say, "I don't want to change. My group likes the system we're used to." And if that's your desire, well, okay. Games are meant to be enjoyed and you should do what you want. Use your system as normal. But all the inhabitants and challenges in this product have House System Ratings. The great thing is, the rules for conversion work both ways. The simple stats you'll get in the Darkest House will be enough for you to convert to your group's favorite game system.

Thus, your 5e characters can tromp around in the Darkest House using the stats they're used to, and the challenges they face will have familiar resolution mechanics. And you can



still convert PCs and NPCs from other campaigns into the Darkest House using the simple conversion methods and then into your current system, using the Darkest House internal system as a sort of “Rosetta Stone” of game mechanics.

If this is the case, the GM should figure a way to at least incorporate the **House Die** and characters acquiring **Dooms** into their system of choice.

EVERYTHING HAS A RATING

Imagine everything in the world was rated on a scale of 1 to 10. 1 is the worst, and 10 is the best. The worst door in the world is maybe a light curtain, while the best door in the world is a titanium vault door. All other doors fall somewhere in between, so that an interior door you have in your house is a 3, while an exterior door on your house is probably more like a 5. A really sturdy iron door might be an 8.

And when I say everything, I mean *everything*. Not just objects, but actions, characters, creatures, and entities.

Usually, if an object has a Rating, that Rating is used to determine the difficulty of an action. In other words, the difficulty of doing something to the object. If you’re trying to break something with your hands, breaking a piece of dry spaghetti is a Rating 1, while breaking a vault door is a Rating 10. In this case, you’re not really rating the objects, you’re rating the action of breaking them, and judging how hard it would be. A lock with a Rating of 5 is harder to pick (or jimmy, or force) than a lock with a Rating of 3. The object determines the Rating of a task involved in overcoming it.

And of course, creatures, inhabitants, and entities in the house have Ratings too. When engaging with creatures, inhabitants, and entities in the house, their Rating

determines the Rating of the task involved in opposing it. Attacking a foe with a Rating of 3 is a Rating 3 task.

While 5 is the median Rating, it is not necessarily the average. Most things a character will encounter are likely Rating 3 or 4. When in doubt, you could just say the Rating is 4 and move along with the story. Something with a Rating of 4 is challenging to average characters but practically ignorable by powerful ones.

In general, higher-rated characters are more likely to succeed, but higher-rated tasks are harder to accomplish.

But here, you need to make a decision on your own, based on your play style. I'm going to advocate that you take Ratings as absolutes. In other words, a door with a Rating of 3 is always going to have a Rating of 3, no matter who the PCs are or what their Rating is.

Some groups, however, will want to make the Ratings based more on the Ratings of the PCs. So in effect, the challenges meet the characters on sort of an "even ground." In this case, you might want to say that **target numbers** are always about 3 or 4 higher than the Rating of the PCs. You might improve your story that way, with the characters always being challenged, but not *too* challenged.

Doing it the other ("absolute") way probably makes the Darkest House more challenging and frightening overall, and creates an interesting possibility of the "return to" story, where the PCs go to the house, have to run from most encounters, and just barely escape with their lives, but return later after they have gained greater skills and powers, to combat the forces within the house directly. That's what I recommend, but everyone's style is different.

CONVERTING PLAYER CHARACTERS

When PCs enter the Darkest House, they also get converted to this simplistic, light system. Think of it like this: the Darkest House has its own laws of reality, and characters in the house must work within those laws, even if they're a bit different from what they're accustomed to. You can—and should—use PCs from all your favorite RPG systems in the Darkest House. Notice that I didn't say "any"; I said "all." That's because The Darkest House offers you an opportunity to introduce a strange setting into your campaign and then pull it out again and use it in a different campaign, even if the second one uses an entirely different game system.

In fact, we'll go one further. You could also introduce an NPC from your old campaign (again, using a different system) as someone trapped in the Darkest House. In other words, your 5e group could run into that Call of Cthulhu villain they used to hate. Or your Cypher System players could encounter their own Pathfinder characters, this time as NPCs.

You could even have PCs from different campaigns (and different systems) join up within the halls of the Darkest House. Imagine a couple of PCs from the Shadow of the Demon Lord game you play on Saturdays joining together with a pair of Numenera PCs from the game you play every other Thursday. The possibilities are endless.

To make it possible to convert any character to the House System, we don't deal with the specifics of every system. I'm not going to tell you how to convert 5e hit points to Fate stress boxes or try to tell you how to convert Cypher System Effort to something else. Instead, we're going to convert mechanics and characters conceptually. It's a narrative conversion rather than a purely mechanical one.

Essentially, the philosophy behind the conversions is this: rather than trying to create a formula that converts this aspect of a 5e character to be the equivalent of an aspect of a

Cypher System character as well as an aspect of a Fate character and a Vampire character and so on, we convert the character as a whole, *proportionally*. In other words, we measure a 5e character as compared to all other possible 5e characters, and a Cypher System character as compared to all other possible Cypher System characters so that we can then compare the 5e character and the Cypher System character proportionally. We say, on a scale of 1 to 10 of the entire 5e system, this 5th-level half-orc fighter with all his various aspects is about a 3. Or, we say, this tier 2 Numenera Glaive with all her various aspects is also a 3 on a scale of 1 to 10. And thus, in the House System, those two characters are very close in terms of power and capability, and are both a Rating 3 character (we'll get to what that means shortly).

Why not do a more formulaic conversion? Well, first off, I have serious doubts whether such a thing is even possible. There are just too many systems to take into account. But even if it were, you'd end up with something that might be technically "correct" but it would feel all wrong. It's like the difference between language translation and language localization. Translation just goes through word by word and converts each to its equivalent. Localization takes the text and makes it seem as though it was originally written in the new language by converting cultural differences, phrasing, slang, idiom, and so on. We're aiming for localization here, not a direct translation.

Hopefully, the result will be characters that feel similar to their old selves but will function quite differently. A Pathfinder paladin will still effectively hit things with their sword, a Shadowrun adept will still wield magical powers, and a Call of Cthulhu character will still, well, be really quite fragile and should probably run from most dangers encountered in the house.

Let's begin.



CHARACTER RATINGS

Here's where the conversion part of all of this comes in. Because you can insert existing characters into the House System, and if they enter the Darkest House, you should.

Most RPG systems have some kind of ability scores, various skill scores, offensive and defensive values, and so on. As mentioned earlier, the House System simplifies all of that into a single Rating, on a scale of 1 to 10.

Fortunately, many games already have a numerical rating in the form of levels or ranks or what have you. This is handy because you can measure the character's level to the maximum level attainable to figure out where they might fall on a 1–10 rating scale. So if your system rates characters on a scale of 1 to 20 levels, just cut the level in half and you have the Rating.

The following chart can help with this process. If the original system has numerical levels or tiers, use the most appropriate column to approximate this level to a House System Rating. If the original system has numerical skill ratings but not levels (or anything similar to levels), take the general average of the character's skill scores on the scale similar

to one of the columns to approximate a House System Rating. So, if the system has percentile scores for skills, take a general average of the truly useful skills and look at the 1-100 column to get an approximate Rating.

House System	1-20	1-4	1-6	1-100
1	1-2	1	1	1-10
2	3-4	1	2	11-20
3	5-6	2	2	21-30
4	7-8	2	3	31-40
5	9-10	2	3	41-50
6	11-12	3	4	51-60
7	13-14	3	4	61-70
8	15-16	3	5	71-80
9	17-18	4	5	81-90
10	19-20	4	6	91-100

If the original system uses points of some kind to build a character, use the number of points a player would need to build the current character and compare it to the number of starting points and a maximum (or a high but realistic number). For example, if characters start with 150 points, and could get as high as, say, 500 points, but the character in question was probably built with about 200 points (about 40% of 500), we would call that a Rating of 3 or 4.

No matter what system you're using, if you're not sure which number to use between two different conversion results, use the lower one. When in doubt, round down, not up.



If the original system doesn't have anything like these numerical values, you'll have to just approximate like you would with anything else. On a scale of 1 to 10, where does the character fall in terms of ability, skill, prowess, toughness, and so on? If you're still unsure, make them Rating 4 and just keep going.

All of this requires a hefty dose of attention and logic. Because evaluating Call of Cthulhu characters by comparing them to all characters in that game and evaluating all 5e characters by comparing them to all characters in that game are two very different processes. The toughest Call of Cthulhu character is likely not the equivalent of even a moderately tough 5e character. And yet, a really tough 5e character is not the equivalent of a moderately tough Champions character.

So, sometimes you'll want to compare the character to the broad range of the world they come from. A highly skilled cybernetic-enhanced street samurai from Shadowrun might be the equivalent of a vampire from Vampire, but exist in a very different context than a Gumshoe investigator (on one end of the spectrum) or a Mutants and Masterminds character (on the other end).

Consider these rules of thumb:

- ✦ If the character is basically a “real world” human, or very close, their *maximum* Rating is 4.
- ✦ If the character is basically a superhero or the equivalent, their *minimum* Rating is 5.
- ✦ If the character is a heroic fantasy character, an enhanced science-fiction character, or has any sort of paranormal abilities, their Rating can be anywhere from 1 to 10.
- ✦ No matter what system you're using, if you're not sure which number to use between two different conversion results, use the lower one. When in doubt, round down, not up.

SMALL MODIFICATIONS

Now, a single Rating might not fully model a character. A character might be Rating 3 but they're so good at stealth that they're a Rating 4 when sneaking quietly. A character who has vast mental powers but is relatively frail might be Rating 5, but only a Rating 4 when it comes to physical activities. Feel free to make as many such exceptions like this as it seems like the character needs, but you'll rarely want to give them an adjusted Rating that is more than one away from their main Rating.

WHAT ABOUT CHARACTERS' STUFF?

A sword is a sword is a sword. A laser pistol is a laser pistol is . . . you get the idea. A character entering the Darkest House brings whatever they have with them at the time.

Armor and defensive equipment can modify a character's defense Rating or confer Boons to defense rolls. In the case of a physical attack, the target's Rating can be increased by armor: +1 for light armor like leather or something that offers only partial covering, or +2 for most other armors.

They might find a way to make use of some lockpicks, a bag of tools, or a handheld scanner, but that's really all narratively driven. This character conversion is much more interested in the character, not their belongings. In the end, the weapon doesn't matter as much as the warrior wielding it.

Do keep in mind that there's **no contact with areas outside the Darkest House**, so radios, communicators, cellphones, netlinks, etc., don't work. In fact, they are pretty dangerous.

WHAT ABOUT CHARACTERS' SPELLS, MAGIC ITEMS, AND SPECIAL ABILITIES?

At the discretion of the GM, abilities, spells, and magic items may be represented in the House System mechanically and/or narratively. Any ability that allows a character to do something special, like fly, turn invisible, see through walls, or control minds works just as it usually would. Those kinds of things are more narrative than mechanical.

Some special abilities may increase a character's specific Rating. For example, a character may have a supernatural defense acting as quasi-mental armor, increasing their Rating by 1 or 2 when avoiding mental attacks or shock.

Any ability that makes a task easier is a **Boon**. So if you have a strength-enhancing ring and you try to tip over a heavy bookcase, you have a Boon on that action.

Abilities that inflict damage or unwanted conditions on an opponent are handled like any other attack. In the House System, a character rolls to affect a target or targets just like they would a typical attack—regardless of their original system's having the defender roll saving throws, resistance, or what have you.

If spells or special abilities normally have some limitation on usage, such as "Use three times per day," they keep that limitation. If they have a cost in terms of stats, power points, or something of that kind, either just bring those points (or whatever) over to the House System or simply assign them a reasonable number of uses. If they cost the user something in terms of stamina or mental well-being, treat the cost as a minor **wound**.

You're going to be doing a lot of adjudication here. Remember that this is a narrative conversion more than a mechanical one. Narratively, the character should be able to do what they could do before, and their powers should work like they did before (unless the house is altering them—we'll get to that later too). Do what seems reasonable at the

time and don't dwell on it too long. In a narrative conversion, the overall feel is far more important than the particulars.

You might be tempted to grant someone a modification to their Rating rather than giving them a Boon. Changes to a character's Rating should only come when you are initially converting the character. Circumstances should always result in **Boons or Banes**.

OKAY, BUT WHAT ABOUT HIT POINTS, ATTRIBUTES, SAN SCORE, SPEED, MOVES . . .

Obviously, every game system is going to have its own way of doing things, but the House System already tracks how you **make attacks**, how you **suffer damage**—both physical and mental—how you **resolve tasks**, and so forth, so any mechanics dealing with such things don't need to be brought over. It means you don't need health or hit points, Armor Class, and a lot of other things that the original system uses.

If something happens that is stat-related or task-resolution related (including combat), use the House System.





MONEY

Some characters in some rules systems won't care about money. Others will care about it a lot. In the Darkest House, you won't find any currency, but the value of important things is given in dollars should the PCs try to loot the place. In another system, 1 U.S. dollar might equal 1 silver piece, 1 gold piece, 1 credit, .83 Euros, or whatever you want.

LANGUAGE

All characters can understand and be understood in the Darkest House. Don't worry what language anyone speaks or what language the journal pages found in the house are written in.

PC RATINGS AND THE DARKEST HOUSE

If the PCs are mostly Rating 1 or 2, they should be prepared to move stealthily through the Darkest House, and run when most of the dangers reveal themselves.

PCs of Rating 3 to 6 will be greatly challenged in the house, but stand a decent chance to make it out alive.

PCs of Rating 7 or higher are powerful enough to take on the Darkest House head-on.

CONVERTING CHARACTERS BACK

Once the PCs leave the Darkest House, you'll want to convert them back to your system of choice. More than likely, players can just pull out their old character sheets. The only things that might have changed would be:

- ✦ Character has wounds. While you can try to convert this to hit points, stress, or whatever damage mechanic the game has, it might be easiest to just say that the character should rest a week or so to recover from the whole harrowing experience.
- ✦ Character has some kind of lingering curse, trauma, or similar affliction—including the effects of Dooks—upon leaving the house. These are very likely more narrative than mechanical. Convert them to your system if need be, but the effects should be more meaningful to the story than to a character's stats.
- ✦ Character gear has changed. Maybe they lost some things, or used some expendable supplies. Just cross them off the original character sheet. Simple. And if they gained some things, like treasures or whatnot, add those to the character's original sheet. Most of the magical treasures in the Darkest House were designed so that they don't really have mechanical effects, but instead narrative ones. There are a few that add a Boon, and this should just be converted to some minor bonus (+1 on a d20, for example).
- ✦ Characters gained experience. If your game uses some kind of experience system to track character advancement, consider escaping the Darkest House to be a major accomplishment. Advancement toward the next level, rank, tier, etc. (if applicable) should be significant. If characters advance by improving their skills or increasing abilities in some other measurement, this advancement should also be significant. Let the characters (and the players) be proud of what they have survived.

TAKING ACTIONS AND ROLLING DICE

Whenever PCs do anything significant where the outcome is in question—attack with a knife, shoot a gun, persuade an NPC to help, try to bash down a door, leap over a pit, figure out the historical significance of an item—the action is resolved with a roll.

To resolve an action, the player rolls two six-sided dice (2d6), adds the dice together, and then adds their character's Rating. In order to succeed, they need to beat the given target number, which is always 7 plus the Rating of the task.

Let's look at an example: let's say a task has a Rating of 3, which means the target number is 10. If the PC has a Rating of 3, then they need to roll a 7 or higher on their 2d6 roll in order to succeed. This means the character—or in fact, any character facing a challenge with a Rating equal to their own—has just over a 50% chance to succeed. If the same character tries something with a Rating of 5, the target number is 12 and they're still just adding their Rating (in this case 3). So now they need to roll a 9 or higher. That's a much lower chance to succeed (just over 25%, actually).

If a task is rated 6 or more above a character's Rating, it is impossible. For example, if the aforementioned Rating 3 character attempts a task with a Rating of 9, they need to reach 16 ($9 + 7$), and that would mean they would need to roll a 13 on 2d6, which isn't possible. The player might have a chance if they called upon the house for help and used a **House Die**, but they should know that the task would normally be impossible before they even try.

Likewise, any task rated 6 or more lower than the character is impossible to fail. A Rating 9 character attempting a Rating 3 task can't fail, because the lowest they can possibly roll is a 2. The idea here is that characters can routinely handle tasks well below them in Rating, but some tasks are too difficult for them to even have a chance of success.

THE PLAYER ALWAYS ROLLS

In the House System, players do all the dice rolling. That means that when a player wants to affect an object or an NPC (pick a lock, punch an enemy, sneak past a monster), they roll with the target number determined by the Rating of the object or the NPC.

If something is trying to affect a PC, the player also rolls. So if a foe casts a spell on a PC, attacks them physically, or tries to fool them with an illusion, the GM doesn't roll to see if the NPC succeeds. The player rolls to see if the PC resists, dodges, or sees through the deception. The PC is always the active character, never the passive one. If the PC leaps over a pit, the player rolls for the jump, but if a boulder tumbles down the hill, the player rolls to get out of the way.

This is important because of the **House Die** mechanic. The GM should never roll to determine the actions of the house—the players should. The players in the Darkest House need to engineer their own doom.

Of course, that means that if an NPC has a **Boon** affecting their action, the player rolls as if the PC has a Bane. Likewise, if a NPC has a Bane affecting their action directed against a PC, the player rolls for their character with an additional die as a Boon.

This method of playing also leaves the GM to focus more on the story.

Should two NPCs act against each other, or an NPC attempt an action not opposed by a PC, simply look at the NPC Ratings. Highest Rating always succeeds. A Rating 7 NPC always breaks open a barrier with a Rating of lower than 7. Ties (equal ratings) always go to the defender.



WHEN DO YOU ASK FOR A ROLL?

Players roll whenever the outcome is in question, and the action is significant. Don't have players make a lot of inconsequential rolls. Attacks, resisting effects, jumping over a wide pit, trying to bash down a door . . . these all call for the dice to come into play.

Do players roll to talk to the NPC, or do they just play out the conversation? That's really up to you and your group's preferred way of playing. Do they roll when the PCs search an area for secrets, or do you just let them narrate where they search, and if they look in the right spot, they find the hidden thing? Again, that's more of a group preference.

However, I will say that I always reward narrative play and stress it over mechanics. So if a character says just the right thing to persuade an NPC to do something, I don't then make the player roll to see if they succeed. Likewise with searching or listening. If there's something to find or something to hear, and the player specifically says their character is looking or listening, I'm probably going to just tell them what they perceive. Usually—particularly in the case of searching for secrets or clues—finding something is almost always more fun, more interesting, and more likely to move the story forward than finding nothing.



DICE ROLLING HACKS

Gamers that want to spice up the die rolling of the system could try one or both of these hacks.

Special Success: If a character rolls equal to or higher than the target number on *a single die* plus their Rating, this is a special success. The player gets to decide generally what the special success entails. Perhaps the task goes faster, a thrown object goes farther, a jump is particularly graceful, and so on. A special success in combat inflicts double damage or, if the player wishes, some effect specific to the situation, such as stunning the foe so it loses its next turn.

Obviously, it's only possible to get a special success if the target number is fairly low (less than $6 +$ the character's Rating).

Partial Success: If the roll fails to hit the target number but the player rolled doubles (the same number on both dice), this indicates a partial success. Partial success might mean that the full desired result isn't achieved but it's not a complete failure, it takes longer, and so on. So a character attempting to climb over a wall gets halfway to their goal, perhaps.



THE HOUSE DIE

But wait. The house watches everything that happens within it. The house hates you. It resents your success. This means that every time a player rolls the dice for an action (not damage), they also roll an additional, special die. This is called the House Die. If a character succeeds, and the House Die is *higher* than either die, **the house acts**. It's definitely not good.

Usually, the House Die has no effect on whether or not the character succeeds. It only determines if the house acts.

There is one exception, however. If a character is desperate, they can “call upon the house” for aid, either consciously or subconsciously. If a character does this, the House Die is *added* to their normal result. There is no limit to how many times a player can do this, but when they use this option, two things happen.

1. The house acts. It's bad.
2. The character gains a **Doom**. Dooms always come back to haunt a character.

The two regular dice can be the same color or not, size or not, etc., but the House Die should be significantly different from the other dice. The most obvious choice would be to roll a die darker in color for the House Die, like a dark blue or a black.

BOONS AND BANES

Sometimes, circumstances make accomplishing things easier. Sometimes, they make them harder. These circumstances are called Boons and Banes, respectively.

Boons can come from getting help from a friend, having a particularly good tool, fighting a distracted opponent, and so on. Anything that helps or makes things easier for the PC to succeed is a Boon. Having a Boon means you roll an additional d6 and discard the lowest die.

Banes are anything that makes actions or tasks more difficult, like thick fog, a serious injury, a creature clinging to your arm, and so on. A Bane means you roll an additional d6 and discard the highest roll.

The Boon or Bane die doesn't need to be distinguishable from the normal dice, but it does need to be distinct from the House Die.

You never roll more than three dice (not counting the House Die) when taking an action. Thus, multiple Boons or Banes do not give more than one additional die. But, it's still important to keep track of how many Boons and Banes a character has for any given action, because Boons and Banes cancel out. If a character faces a Bane due to circumstances, but wields a sword that grants a Boon, the player just rolls their regular 2d6 when attacking with the sword. However, if in addition to the Boon from the sword, the character has a Boon from a magic spell, the player rolls an additional die, because the Bane cancels only one of the two Boons that is affecting them.

As an example, consider **Arduk and his magical warhammer**. Let's say he has a Boon for all attacks. If he is fighting in thick fog, it's hard to see, so he also has a Bane.

The Boon and the Bane cancel out, meaning he'll roll 2d6 and the House Die to attack in this scenario.

If Arduk has a magic spell cast upon him to improve his attack with that warhammer, he now has two Boons. Boons do not stack so this doesn't have any additional effect normally, but when he is in thick fog (or affected by any other type of Bane), he still has a Boon, because the Bane cancels one of the Boons, but not both. So he rolls an additional d6 and discards the lowest result.

Because the players always roll, that means that Boons and Banes applied to NPC actions reflect that the player rolls an additional die when resisting the NPC's action. However, in this case, an NPC Boon means the player rolls the extra die and discards the highest die, because the NPC has an advantage. An NPC Boon is essentially a PC Bane. Similarly, an NPC with a Bane means the player discards the lowest die, acting just like a Boon. Since Boons and Banes cancel each other out, that means that if an NPC with a Boon (a PC Bane) acts against a player with a Boon, they cancel out.

While it might be tempting to grant someone a modification to their Rating rather than giving them an extra die and discarding the high or low roll, circumstances should always result in Boons or Banes. Changes to Rating should typically be made only when you are initially creating/converting the character.

DOOMS

When a character gains a Doom, the GM should make a clear and obvious note of it. If possible, the player's online screen should show their ongoing Doom tally, perhaps next to the character's name. (Or, a player could write it on a pad or dry erase board visible to their camera, so that all can see it.) The feeling of increasing danger as Doom tallies rise should become palpable during the game.

When a wounded character **falls unconscious** and then checks to see if they **eventually die from a wound**, they must subtract their Doom total from the roll. Fortunately, each time the character's Doom tally affects them in this way, they can remove one Doom from their total.

Players can also choose to lower their character's Doom total by 1 by spending a Doom. In this situation, they give the GM permission to do something terrible.

Finally, characters **leaving the house with Dooks** are not in the clear.

Spending a Doom

Players can choose to lower their PC's Doom total by 1, essentially "spending a Doom," as it were. In this situation, they give the GM "permission" to do something terrible. This could be a horrific vision (that inflicts a mental wound), an attack by a ghost or other inhabitant of the house, a vital piece of equipment breaks at an inopportune time, some beneficial magical effect ends early or malfunctions, and so on.

The only guidelines are: it must be significant, bad for the character, and the GM can "inflict" this upon the character or characters whenever they wish. In other words, the GM doesn't need to use the spent Doom right then. The GM can even accumulate a few of them for some truly awful set of circumstances to befall the group.

Leaving the House With Dooms

Use the following table to find the appropriate lasting Doom effect, or make up something new that is of equal significance. These Doom effects are cumulative, so someone with a lingering haunting might also have horrific dreams. Once a Doom effect is determined, a character loses all their Dooms.

LASTING DOOM EFFECTS

Dooms	Effect
1-2	Terrible nightmares and night terrors
3-4	A lingering haunting, with some spirit or spirits plaguing the character's life until they are somehow exorcised
5-6	A physical malady, such as a limp that impedes quick movement, a back injury that flares up at the worst times, or a prominent—perhaps even animate—and disturbing scar, OR a mental malady, such as post-traumatic stress syndrome that incapacitates in moments of stress, a terrible paranoia, or a serious and lengthy bout of depression
7+	A wasting disease that slowly but inexorably rots and withers the character's body into a horrific, almost impossible living corpse (and then they eventually die). Only serious and prolonged medical attention can save them, and there will likely be lasting effects even after that.

EVERYTHING IN TURN

When PCs act, if time matters, they all act in turn, along with the NPCs. The Darkest House room descriptions state whether the NPC acts first. Otherwise, assume the PCs act first. In this case, on their turn, the characters can each perform one action—make an attack, move about 30 feet, go through the door and close it behind them, use a special power, grab an item, hide behind a couch, and so on. Anything that could be done in about 10 seconds or so can be done on a turn, but don't worry about keeping careful track of time. Just make sure everyone gets a turn.

TASK RESOLUTION SUMMARY

When a character attempts any task, they compare their Rating with the task Rating.

- ✦ If the task's Rating is 6 or more lower than the character's Rating, they automatically succeed.
- ✦ If the task's Rating is 6 or more higher than the character's Rating, they automatically fail.
- ✦ In all other cases, the player rolls 2d6 and adds their Rating. Their goal is to roll equal to or above 7 plus the Rating of the task, as determined by their opponent or the obstacle they are attempting to overcome.
- ✦ If a character has a **Boon** or a **Bane**, they roll an additional die (so 3d6 in total). If the Boon is in effect, they use the two highest rolls. If a Bane is in effect, they use the two lowest rolls.
- ✦ Anytime dice are rolled for an action, the **House Die** must be rolled. The House Die has no effect on success or failure, but if the House Die is higher than either the success dice, regardless of any other outcome, the **house acts**.

So in effect, a character is always rolling three dice (with the exception of damage rolls), and four if there is a Boon or Bane in effect.

HOW ABOUT AN EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CONVERSION?

Let's take a Cypher System character and convert them. We'll use Tacha, a Swift Explorer who Works Miracles. If you're not familiar with the Cypher System, that means pretty much just what it sounds like—she's swift, she's capable, and she can miraculously heal people. Tacha is tier 2 (out of 6). She comes from a modern fantasy setting.

Right off the bat, we look at the 1–6 column of the **Character Rating Conversion Table** and see that as a tier 2 character she's either Rating 2 or 3. Let's start with Rating 2.

Now let's see if there are things we need to know other than her Rating (we certainly expect that answer to be yes). Her Might and Intellect Pools are mostly in the normal range (nothing extremely high or low) so we'll ignore those. She's Swift, so that gives her better initiative and running abilities, and it's right there in her character sentence, so we'll give her a Rating of 3 for all things having to do with speed. Further, as an Explorer, she's trained in swimming and climbing. We'll give her a Rating of 3 for both of those things as well. She's also skilled in geography, but frankly, that's never going to come up in the Darkest House, so we don't care. (We can give her a Rating of 3 for geography if it's important to the player.)

Tacha
Name

ISA **Swift** Explorer WHO

Works Miracles

TYPE: PLAYER OR OTHER

TIER 2 EFFORT 2 XP 0

MIGHT		SPEED		INTELLECT	
POOL	EDGE	POOL	EDGE	POOL	EDGE
14	1	17	1	11	0

RECOVERY ROLLS (65%) 2

☐ 1 ACTION ☐ 2 HOUR ☐ 10 MINS ☐ 100 HOURS

DAMAGE TRACK

☐ IMPAIRED ☐ DESTABILIZED

Skills

Skill	Rating	Pool	Edge
Initiative	S	1	1
Balance	S	1	1
Running	S	1	1
Swimming	S	1	1
Climbing	S	1	1
Geography	1	1	1

Name **Tacha**

Doom

Overall Rating **2**

Modified Ratings

Speed 3
Swimming and Climbing 3

Special Abilities

General Traits

Boons/Banes in Effect

Equipment

THE DARKEST HOUSE

Tacha has some special defensive and offensive abilities that make her better at combat. Rather than figure in all these rather involved abilities, we'll just lump them all together and say she's a Rating 3 for attacks and defense. She also wears **light armor**, so we'll give her Rating 3 for resisting damage too.

She can heal people with her touch and alleviate unwanted conditions such as diseases. Since the House System is all about Ratings and—hey, what do you know—**wounds and conditions** have Ratings just like characters do, we'll say that for every wound or unwanted effect that is on a creature, Tacha can **use her action** to try to get rid of it. She'll just make a roll, using her Rating and the Rating of the wound or effect. These things normally cost her Intellect points to use, but that's a stat we're not converting, so instead, we'll say she can only try to use her power once per wound or effect. That puts a nice manageable limit on it without having to track points or anything.

Tacha's got a couple of special items, one that allows her to see through solid matter for a limited time and one that creates an area with reduced friction, making it really slippery. We'll just keep those as-is, and refer to the descriptions of those items when we need them, as neither really involves game mechanics much—they're both actually pretty narrative.

So now we have Tacha, who is Rating 2, Rating 3 for swimming and climbing, swiftness, attacks, defense, and resisting damage. She can heal and remove unwanted conditions. Done.

The image shows a character sheet for a character named Tacha. The sheet is titled 'THE DARKEST HOUSE' at the bottom. It has several sections: 'Name' with 'Tacha' written in it; 'Doom' with a small square icon; 'Overall Rating' with '2' written in it; 'Modified Ratings' with a list: 'Swiftness: 3', 'Swimming and Climbing: 3', 'Attacks and Defense: 3', and 'Resisting Damage: 3'; 'General Traits' with a large empty box; 'Boons/Banes in Effect' with a large empty box; 'Equipment' with two items: 'Cypher: see through solid matter' and 'Cypher: create an area of reduced friction'; and 'Special Abilities' with one item: 'Get rid of a wound or condition on a creature once per wound or effect Action.' The sheet is set against a dark, textured background.

Name	Tacha
Doom	
Overall Rating	2
Modified Ratings	Swiftness: 3 Swimming and Climbing: 3 Attacks and Defense: 3 Resisting Damage: 3
General Traits	
Boons/Banes in Effect	
Equipment	Cypher: see through solid matter Cypher: create an area of reduced friction
Special Abilities	Get rid of a wound or condition on a creature once per wound or effect Action.

HOW ABOUT ANOTHER EXAMPLE OR TWO?

This time, we'll use Arduk, a dwarf fighter from 5e. He's 5th level. He comes from a traditional fantasy setting.

Level 5 in a system that goes from 1 to 20 converts to a Rating 3. That's our baseline.

His Constitution score suggests that like lots of dwarves, he's tough. We'll give him Rating 4 for resisting wounds. He's also got low Dexterity and very low Charisma, so we'll say he's only Rating 2 when it comes to things requiring nimble hands or acrobatics, as well as anything having to do with interacting with others. His skills suggest he should also be Rating 4 for perception and athletics. (There are some very minor bonuses he has to fairly inconsequential skills, so we're going to ignore those—they're all just wrapped up in him being Rating 3, basically.)

In addition to his high Constitution (which, as mentioned earlier, gives him a Rating 4 for resisting wounds), Arduk **wears plate armor**, which adds 2 more to his Rating. It means he's actually Rating 6 for **resisting wounds** (wow!).

He's got some abilities that give him a bonus to his Armor Class (that's defensive), and add to some combat maneuvers, so like with Tacha before, we'll lump all these together and decide he's Rating 4 for attacks and defense. He can see in the dark, too, but that doesn't require any conversion. It just works the same. Also, he's got a shield and his warhammer is magical, so both attacks and defense will get a **Boon** when the player rolls.

In all, Arduk is Rating 3, Rating 2 for anything involving dexterity or charm, Rating 4 for perception, athletics, attacks, and defense (and attacks and defense have a Boon), and Rating 6 for resisting damage. Done.

Name	Arduk	General Traits	
Doom			
Overall Rating	3		
Modified Ratings			
Resisting Wounds: 6	Athletics: 4	Boons/Banes in Effect	
Dexterity: 2		Shield: defense boon	
Charm: 2	Attacks: 4	Magical warhammer: attack boon	
Perception: 4	Defense: 4		
Special Abilities		Equipment	
See in the dark			

THE DARKEST HOUSE

Now, what about Arduk's companion, Stevin, a 5th-level half-elf sorcerer?

Well, looking at the **Character Rating Conversion Table**, they also have a baseline Rating of 3. They're great at interacting with people (20 Charisma and similarly high scores in related skills). We'll say they have a Rating of 4 for social actions. They've also got a +7 stealth score, so let's give them Rating 4 for that as well. Of course, their hit points and physical attacks are fairly low, so we probably should make them Rating 2 when resisting damage and avoiding physical attacks.

As a sorcerer, they've got spells and spell slots. Regarding spell slots, we should just use the system as-is. They can cast each level's spells in the House System as often as they could in 5e. But let's go through them all and see how the House System would handle them.

Witch bolt: This is a magical attack that uses the base Rating of 3 when cast. If it hits, Stevin can continue to use their following actions to continue inflicting the same damage.

Magic missile: This is a magical attack (using their Rating of 3) that doesn't miss. They just roll the damage die against the target when it's cast.

Shield: Since this is a very short-lived but potent defense, I would say Stevin gets a Boon to defense rolls and their Rating is increased by 1 on the turn it's cast.

Invisibility: Works as written.

Levitate: Works as written.

Fireball: This is an attack (using their Rating 3) that can affect a bunch of targets in an area. Since this is a potent attack spell, I'd also say that the attack and damage rolls get a Boon.

Dispel magic: Casting this is a **significant action** and is resolved as a task using their Rating and the Rating of the magic they're trying to dispel.

So that's Stevin: Rating 3, Rating 2 for resisting damage and evading physical attacks, Rating 4 for social tasks and stealth. And they can cast their listed spells as described. Done.

The character sheet for Stevin is divided into several sections:

- Name:** Stevin
- Doom:** [Empty box]
- Overall Rating:** 3
- Modified Ratings:**
 - Social Interactions: 4
 - Stealth: 4
 - Resisting Damage: 2
 - Evading Physical Attacks: 2
- Special Abilities:**
 - Witch Bolt, Magic Missile
 - Shield: Boon to defense, plus defense rating increased by 1 for 1 turn
 - Invisibility, Levitate, Fireball
 - Dispel Magic: significant action
- General Traits:** [Empty box]
- Boons/Banes in Effect:**
 - Shield: defense boon
 - Fireball spell: attack and damage gets a Boon
- Equipment:** [Empty box]

The bottom right corner of the sheet features the text "THE DARKEST HOUSE".

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO GET HURT

Rating even determines health and toughness, both mentally and physically. This is another way in which the House System might deviate from what you're used to. Because of the house's nature, it distinguishes between **physical harm** and **mental harm**. Mental harm could be spiritual, emotional, or intellectual in the same way that physical harm could be a bleeding wound, a concussion, or a broken bone. It's all grouped together and abstracted.

That said, even though all damage is abstracted mechanically, narratively the GM is encouraged to describe the wounds—physical and mental—with as much detail as seems appropriate.

CALCULATING DAMAGE

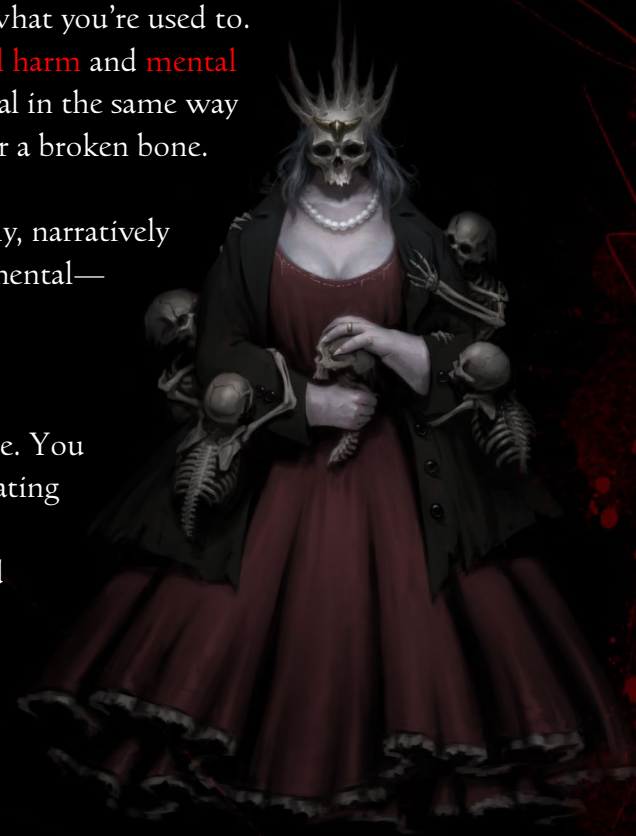
To calculate damage, you roll 1d6. This is called the damage die. You add the attack's Rating to the result. Then, you subtract the Rating of the victim, with modifications (like **armor**).

If the result is a positive number, the victim suffers a wound with a Rating equal to the result.

If the result is 0 or less, the victim suffers a scratch, a glancing blow, a graze or something similar—but this has no mechanical effect. They're more or less unharmed.

Thus, Wound Rating = 1d6 + attack Rating – defense Rating

You never roll the house die when rolling damage, but damage can have a Boon or a Bane.



Because players always roll the dice, this means that not only does a player roll the damage die when they make a successful attack, *they also roll the damage die when they fail to dodge or resist an attack made against them.*

In this case, they roll a damage die, add their foe's attack Rating, and then subtract their own Rating for resisting attacks to see if they get hurt.

Again, in the Darkest House, players bring upon their own downfall.

Mental damage works exactly the same way. Obviously, such wounds aren't about being scratched or hurt, but being affected by shock, fear, trauma, or instability (and eventually, unconsciousness or even catatonia).



PHYSICAL DAMAGE

When a PC or NPC is struck in combat, falls from a height, is burned with fire, or anything else that would cause bodily harm, calculate physical damage.

Out of combat, there might not be an attack roll if the danger is something like a fall, choking fumes, and so on. The player just rolls the damage die and adds the attack Rating and then subtracts their own Rating to see if their character is affected. If it seems like an attack, though, such as a falling rock, treat it like an attack and confirm a hit before determining damage. Either way, the GM determines the Rating of the attack. A fire might have a Rating of 4, for example, while a particularly hot or raging fire would have a Rating of 6.

A Few Sample Ratings for Physical Dangers

DANGER	RATING
Fire	4
Raging fire/lava	6
Fall	1 per 5 feet
Falling heavy object	4
Falling massive object	8
Intense cold	3



Some game systems give more powerful characters the ability to withstand more damage, while others grant them the ability to avoid damage instead. (And some give them either or both.) A “tough” character’s Rating is higher for comparing to a damage die. A character skilled at dodging attacks might instead have a modifier to their Rating for defending against attacks. So you can tweak these Ratings to give the feel to which you are accustomed.

WEAPONS AND DAMAGE

A character’s Rating is the dominant factor in their accuracy and damage in combat. However, in some cases, the weapon used should affect this as well. Some weapons are inherently more accurate (like a quick, small knife or a magical sword) and may add a Boon, and some are less accurate (like a very heavy axe), which might give the attacker a Bane.

HACKING DAMAGE

Mathematically—on the damage die—granting a Boon is pretty close to the same as increasing the Rating of the character's damage by 1, while granting a Bane is quite close to decreasing the Rating by 1. This means that if a character has a magical heavy axe, the GM could say that the magic increases the Rating by 1 and grant it a Boon, and that would be fine. However, if the character had a magical small knife, the GM could just have it do regular damage for the character, because +1 for the Boon and -1 for the size cancel out.

Note that a modification to Rating affects the maximum and minimum result in a way that a Boon or Bane does not. Thus, if a character's Rating is 3, the biggest wound they can inflict is 9 minus their foe's Rating, whether or not they've got a Boon. The extra die still rolls no more than 6. If you add +1 to the Rating, though, now the biggest wound the character can inflict is 10 minus their foe's Rating. That's **going to matter**, particularly against really powerful opponents.

If you're curious, a Boon or a Bane means more than a modification of Rating of +/-1 on a standard roll, where you're rolling two dice. A Boon or Bane is closer to +/-1.5 in that case. My advice is to never allow more than a modification of +/-1 to the Rating as it becomes cumbersome to manage within the range of dice and numbers the House System assumes.

MENTAL DAMAGE

Damage to one's mind or soul is less straightforward to envision, but it's handled in exactly the same way as damage to one's body. A terrible shock, a blast of psychic energy, or a horrific experience can all inflict mental damage.

The supernatural inhabitants of the house routinely use powers to affect and attack the minds of others. That's pretty straightforward.

Shock and horror depend on context. If the PCs come from a realistic setting where ghosts and monsters are rare, encountering even the minor spirit in the Boundless Room, for example, might be a terrible shock. But if the characters hail from a world where spirits and the supernatural are common, the shock might be nil.

The encounters presented in the Darkest House have shock/dismay value target numbers already provided for you; however, the values presume the PCs have some experience with the supernatural. For PCs with little to no knowledge of the supernatural, it makes sense to increase the Rating of the mental attacks related to shock/dismay, at least at first, as those characters are more likely to be affected by the experience. Even with those provided, the GM can rule whether the danger presented by the shock/dismay is appropriate to the PCs' original context.

Obviously, mental "armor" is far less common than **physical armor**, but some characters might have some kind of supernatural defense adding +1 or +2 to the character's Rating to avoid mental attacks or shock.

A Few Sample Ratings for Mental Dangers

DANGER	RATING
Experiencing something creepy	2
Experiencing something terrifying	4
Witnessing a friend's death	6
Experiencing something utterly impossible	7

ACCUMULATING DAMAGE

A wounded character always has a **Bane** for each **wound** sustained. But remember that Banes do not stack and their effects are not cumulative. Having multiple Banes only matters when it comes to canceling the effect of one or more Boons.

Players should keep track of wounds sustained, and the Ratings of each wound. Every time a wounded character sustains a new wound, they must roll as they would with any task, against the Rating of their most grievous wound (regardless of when it was sustained). If they fail, they fall unconscious or are otherwise completely unable to act due to their injuries.

An unconscious (or similarly debilitated) character with a wound rated higher than the character must, a minute or so later, roll against the wound with the highest Rating. The player must also subtract the number of Dooms the character has gained up to that point. If they fail the roll, they bleed out and die. As a rule of thumb, the amount of time before they must make that roll should be “about a minute.” In truth, the GM should call for that roll when it feels most dramatic. And if the unconscious character receives any medical attention before that moment, they don’t need to make the roll. The unconscious character need only make this roll once, and loses 1 Doom if they survive.

Both physical and mental attacks are handled this way. However, mental wounds are tracked separately from physical wounds. Mental and physical wounds don’t relate to each other in any way. A character doesn’t die from mental injuries, but instead becomes catatonic or some other, equally utterly debilitating state.

While the characters are in the Darkest House, the GM should pay attention to when they get wounded, as that accumulated damage can trigger Pain and Wounds.

Normally, the house mentally attacks anyone who **sleeps** or is unconscious within it, but to keep things simple, this doesn't happen when a character is knocked unconscious from wounds. The house only attacks when a character is rendered unconscious in a different manner, such as from a magical effect, a drug, etc., or choosing to go to sleep.

PAIN AND WOUNDS

There is a special event that occurs if all of the PCs ever have a physical wound equal to or greater than their own Ratings at the same time. So, if all the characters have a Rating of 4 and they each have wounds rated as 4 or higher, the event is immediately triggered and they all disappear from where they are and reappear in a special room called the Fountain of Pain in the **Amator** section of the house.

NPCs AND DAMAGE

Rather than handling damage to NPCs as you would with PCs, simply add up all the Ratings of the wounds inflicted upon an NPC, and once that total reaches three times the NPC's Rating, they are defeated (slain, unconscious, or destroyed). So, an NPC with a Rating of 4 needs wounds with Ratings that total at least 12 before they're defeated, such as a Rating 6 wound, a Rating 4 wound, and a Rating 2 wound. This makes things a bit easier to track, but it also likely makes NPCs a bit more fragile. Of course, the GM is free to use a threshold of four times (or more) the NPC's Rating for all NPCs or only for the particularly tough, powerful foes.

If an NPC ever suffers a wound with a Rating that is 3 (or more) higher than their own Rating, the NPC is immediately dead, destroyed, or perhaps knocked unconscious, depending on the circumstances. This means an NPC with a Rating of 3 can withstand

multiple wounds (up until the total of all the wound Ratings is 9), but a single wound with a Rating of 6 will kill them outright.

NPCs can heal a single wound with a Rating less than their own Rating after a minute or so of rest, but a wound with a Rating higher than their own might take one or more days (depending on how the GM wishes to handle the situation). Magical NPCs might be able to heal even faster.

HEALING

Hurt characters should rest. When a character takes no actions, sits or lies down (or leans on a wall or something), and is in no immediate danger for at least a few minutes, this is considered resting. There is no limit to how many times a character can rest.

When a character rests, they roll for each wound they currently bear, with the Rating of each task equal to the Rating of that particular wound. Success means that the character recovers from that wound and can now ignore it. Failure means the wound remains, and the character cannot try to recover from that wound again by resting until 24 hours have passed. So, if a character fails to recover from a wound, they'll have to note when they can try again. Hopefully for the character's sake, this won't happen too often because not only does this increase the danger of future combats (where that wound will come into play again), it also means that's a Bane they won't soon be rid of.

Medical attention, such as aid from a character with some sort of skill and appropriate equipment like bandages, allows a wounded character to attempt to recover from a wound that they failed to heal without having to wait 24 hours. Further, the healer can use their Rating to roll to overcome the wound's Rating rather than that of the wounded character (if the wounded character is unconscious, you must use the healer's Rating).

Magical healing often just works, completely erasing one wound, usually starting with the lowest-rated wound a character has. In this case, highly advanced tech devices, such as a tissue knitter or something like that, are no different than magical healing.

The House System is likely more deadly or dangerous than many systems (and perhaps less deadly than a few) because it has such a high degree of randomness. A powerful character might drop unconscious after just two hits with a bad roll. Likewise, a character might shrug off many wounds. A tough character may find the effects of one truly debilitating wound just won't ever go away. It is not as predictable as a linear, arithmetic progression like a hit point tally. This is intentional.

BUT THAT'S NOT HOW IT WORKED BEFORE!

When you encounter a situation that is obviously unfair to a PC because of the conversion, you should change things right there on the spot to correct the problem. While the House System makes things simpler and in some ways more dangerous or difficult for the characters, it isn't the intention to take away the fun or hurt a character concept. There are many game systems out there, and unexpected things can happen when converting one to another. The GM will have to handle this on a case-by-case basis, but remember that, for example, the House System might make a character more fragile than normal, or more susceptible to harm from mental attacks, and this is intentional.

SUMMARIZING ATTACKS AND DAMAGE

PC Attacking

- ✦ When a player makes an attack, they roll 2d6 and add their Rating. Their goal is to roll equal to or above 7 plus the Rating of the opponent. Boons and Banes may mean rolling an extra die, and players must also roll the House Die.
- ✦ If successful, the player then rolls the damage die (1d6) and adds their Rating. Then, they subtract their opponent's Rating. The result (if positive) is the Rating of the wound the NPC sustains.
- ✦ If the wound sustained has a Rating of more than 3 above the NPC's own Rating, they die immediately. Otherwise, they die when they have sustained wounds with Ratings totalling at least 3 times the NPC's Rating.

NPC Attacking

- ✦ When a player is attacked by an NPC, they roll 2d6 and add their Rating, hoping to roll equal to or above 7 plus the Rating of the opponent to avoid the attack. Just like before, Boons and Banes may come into play, and players must also roll the House Die.
- ✦ If not successful, the player then rolls the damage die (1d6) and subtracts their Rating. Then, they add their opponent's Rating. The result (if positive) is the Rating of the wound the PC sustains.
- ✦ If the PC is already wounded and they sustain a new wound, the player must roll against the Rating of their most grievous wound. If they fail, they fall unconscious or are otherwise completely unable to act due to their injuries.

EXAMPLE OF ATTACKING IN PLAY

While exploring the Darkest House, **Stevin the half-elf sorcerer** (Rating 3) uses a *witch bolt* spell to attack a horrific fleshy thing crawling out of a small hole in the wall. Stevin's player **rolls 2d6** and gets a 6. They add their Rating of 3 to get a 9. The target number for the attack is 7 plus the horrific thing's Rating of 2, for a total of 9. Stevin hits! (Of course, Stevin's player is rolling the House Die as well, but let's not worry about that right now.) Then they roll the **damage die**, and get a 4, and add their Rating to get a 7, and then subtract the creature's Rating to get a 5 (4 plus 3 minus 2 equals 5). The thing gains a Rating 5 wound—a devastating blast!

So devastating, in fact, that the wound is 3 higher than the target's Rating of 2, which means that it is an automatic kill so it explodes into a disgusting, bloody mess.

However, what poor Stevin doesn't realize is that another of the creatures has squirmed out of a hole in the ceiling. It attacks by dropping down on Stevin's neck with a **Boon** from the surprise. Now Stevin's player has to roll for defense. They roll 2d6, but because the attacking fleshy thing has a Boon, the player rolls with a **Bane**. That means they roll 3d6, discarding the highest die. They roll a 4, a 1, and a 6. Discarding the 6, they get a 5 total and add their Rating of 3 to get 8. Because the creature's Rating is 2, its target number is 9.

That's not good enough to defend, so now the player must roll to determine damage. They roll 1d6, and get a 3. They add the fleshy thing's Rating of 2 and the total is 5. They're not good at resisting damage (they're a bit frail), so their defense Rating for this action is only 2. 5 minus 2 is 3, so Stevin sustains a Rating 3 wound on their neck. Ouch!

If that same creature had dropped down on the neck of Stevin's dwarven friend **Arduk**, who's tough and wears plate armor (Rating 6 for resisting damage), he would have shrugged off the damage as nothing but a minor irritant—the creature just couldn't significantly pierce that armor.

"It watches," he added suddenly.
The house. It watches every move
you make.

~Shirley Jackson,
The Haunting of Hill House

THE TRUTH AND LIES WE BRING

WITH US

Every character coming into the Darkest House brings a truth or a lie with them, whether they realize it at first or not. Even if a player doesn't typically do much in the way of character development, their character has *something* they believe in. Their truth or lie is an idea that is fundamental to their being, and it's very basically stated. It could be as basic as "Brute force is always the best way to deal with a problem," or "Gold is good," or as deep as "Everyone other than your family members will eventually betray you, so you must watch them closely." Some characters may have more than one, but it doesn't matter—we only need concern ourselves with the one for now. A truth or lie that is quite specific and personal is the best kind. Something that involves a specific PC or NPC would be perfect. For example, "[another PC in the group] always has my back" or "My father was the worst person to have ever lived." But it's not required.

Ideally, what you want to make sure is that a character's truth or lie answers one of the following questions for the character:

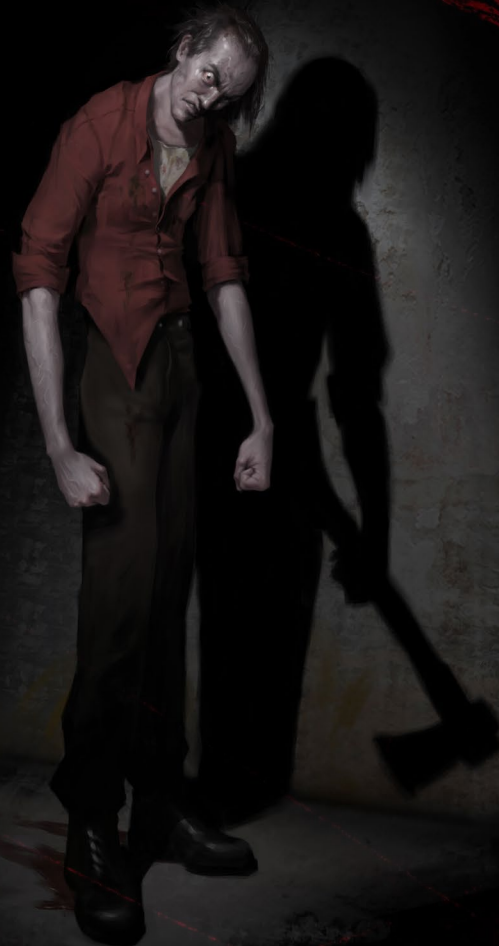
- ✦ What's the key to success?
- ✦ How important are my friends?
- ✦ What's my ultimate goal?
- ✦ What's my most important principle or value?

It doesn't matter much whether this is framed as a truth or a lie. It is important, however, that at some point before entering the house, or very soon thereafter, you establish the truth or lie overtly and explicitly with the player. Don't just choose for them, even if you know the character well. It's important that the player knows that

you're interested in that specific aspect of the character, because then they will be as well. The distinction very likely comes down to this:

- ✦ A truth is something the character believes is true, and so does the player.
- ✦ A lie is something the character believes is true, but the player does not.

The GM should find out one way or another what each character's core truth or lie is. The easiest way is to just ask. It might be best to just call it a truth, because from a character's point of view, at the start, they believe it to be true. Or perhaps when talking to players, call it a core ideal so as not to use weighted words like truth and lie at all. Further, it doesn't matter if every character has a different truth or lie from everyone else. It might even be that two people have the same ideal but for one it's truth and for the other it's a lie.



CHARACTER ARCS IN THE HOUSE

The Darkest House isn't merely a frightening locale. It changes those who go in, at least to a degree. No one coming back out is ever truly the same (and of course, some never come back out). We manage this by introducing a character arc that is specific to the character and to the events they experience in the Darkest House. This almost always involves the truth or lie they come in with.

Darkest House arcs fall into five likely types:

Positive Change: Character believes lie — discovers truth — accepts truth

Flat: Character knows truth — faith in truth is tested — character hangs onto truth

Fall: Character believes lie — discovers truth — rejects truth

Disillusionment: Character believes lie — discovers truth — truth is tragic

Corruption: Character knows truth — discovers lie — accepts lie

When a player tells you their lie or truth, make a note, and take some time to think about how events in the house will create an arc for that character based on that lie or truth. It's probably not enough for a single event or encounter to create an arc. The arcs look simple: *lie or truth* — *related event* — *change or not change*, but in reality, an arc should be something that evolves over the entire time spent in the house, with multiple events affecting the course of the arc.

You might need to tweak encounters here or there to make them pertain to the specific arcs of the characters exploring. For example, if a wizard character's truth is that their magic will always get them out of a jam, it's worth ensuring that the truth is tested.

Fortunately, that's probably going to happen without any tweaking at all. At some point, a spellcasting character is going to cast some spells, and it might work out for them or it might not. A character whose lie is that money is the source of all success and happiness, however, might require some tweaking to the text. For example, the wax effigy in the Dripping Room might appear to be a bejeweled crown worth tens of thousands, and the money-loving character must choose between money and their friends.

The point is that in the Darkest House, we're shining a proverbial spotlight on what is important to the characters and creating situations where that idea is challenged, and then shining that same light on however that progression turns out. It might be that the character in question's faith is strengthened, or that they discover a potent and positive truth.

But that's not what the house actually wants. The house wants to shake the characters' faith. It wants to challenge their understanding of the world. It wants to bring on failure, fear, despair, disenchantment, distress, cynicism, and confusion.

The house hates you.

Thus, when possible, if there's only one character affected by something in a given room, the GM shouldn't choose the character randomly. They should choose the one whose truth or lie will be confirmed or denied. For example, if you have a character whose truth involves their faith in their friends in the Studio, have a different character—one of the first character's friends—potentially fall victim to the duplicate. That way, it's bad not only for the affected character, but for the character who had faith in the affected character.



The house is going to use its awful resources against the most vulnerable characters. That doesn't mean we're ensuring that characters will always have their shiny outlooks twisted and all their hopes dashed. That's up to the players. What we're ensuring is that the arc is real and meaningful.

You can, potentially, think of an arc as a test. In the end, it doesn't matter if the test is passed or failed, or whether passing or failing is good or bad for the character. What matters is that the test has an outcome of some kind. Regardless of the results, completed arcs potentially enable characters to **escape from the house**.

When the PCs first enter the house, you should determine how many arcs need to be completed to achieve closure and escape from the house. Ideally, that answer is, "Each character has to complete their arc," but recognize that this is a lever you can use to determine how long an expedition into the Darkest House might last. The more arcs that need completion, the longer the PCs will stay. Once enough arcs are complete, the characters just find a door to the outside, a window that opens, or some other egress. The house is done with them. For now. (As the GM, you can overrule this. If you want the PCs to escape the house using one of the other methods, that's fine. But be very aware of the desires of the whole group.)

Beyond enabling escape from the house, arcs are entertaining for their own sake. They lead to interesting character development and players thinking about their characters in a new way. You might also want to extend the benefits of completing an arc to a mechanical level. The most obvious way is through experience points or whatever your non-Darkest House system of choice uses to convey how characters advance. Completing an arc should be as significant as some major event or victory in a character's career in terms of reward.

"Essentially," he went on slowly, "the evil is the house itself, I think. It has enchained and destroyed its people and their lives, it is a place of contained ill will."

~Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

THE NATURE OF THE HOUSE

The house is, in a very real sense, its own world. It has its own rules, and for the most part, those rules are absolute. No character that comes into the Darkest House is greater than the house itself.

INTRUSIONS INTO REALITY

The Darkest House seeps into every world and every reality. When it does, these intrusions take on a form that appears appropriate to the context. An intrusion into Medieval Japan will look appropriate to a house of that place and era. Intrusions into 1930s Chicago or a fantasy town built by elves will look appropriate to those contexts as well. And all these examples will appear very different from each other.

Once truly inside the Darkest House, however, any veneer of context disappears and the house has its own look, its own tone, and its own mood, which we'll get to shortly.

The Darkest House is sometimes called the House That Hungers. This is because once within a particular setting, it can absorb and retain locations (rooms, chambers, or the entirety of a building) into itself. If this happens, that room or building just disappears and becomes a part of the house, at least for a while. That is why sometimes an explorer will find a portion of the house that seems quite different from the rest. It might even be familiar, a place they've been to before. When a location is absorbed, or rather, devoured, by the house, it can bring whatever—or whomever—is within the location with it. This is, in fact, how some people end up unwillingly inside the house (such as the NPC in the Tea Room).

THE STORY OF THE HOUSE

The Darkest House has a complicated history. Its origin might be tied to a man named Phillip Harlock. It might be tied to something far older, perhaps even something primal in the multiverse. Or it might be a combination of all such things.

We sometimes think that when two people spend extended periods of time together, one begins to take on qualities of the other. After years, they truly share everything, including a mental state, and perhaps even a mental space. We even begin to think that they physically resemble each other. It's more than just finishing each others' sentences; they share thoughts and dreams and emotions.

But what if one of those people isn't a person at all? What if it is a place? A house. What happens when someone spends the greater part of their life alone in a single house, and thus the house knows only one person? The person and the house begin to share their mental space as surely as two people would. The person discovers whole new aspects of the house—perhaps some invisible to any other, because surely, like people, houses have secrets. Some might have whole rooms or corridors that they don't reveal to just anyone, in the same way that people keep certain aspects of themselves private.

And as time passes, as the person learns more about the house, the house in turn takes from the person. It develops a consciousness that mirrors their mind. Or at least, as best as a house can.

One thing is certain: if such a thing were to happen, by all means let us hope that the person is stable and of good character. Because if that were not the case, who could predict what shape the house might take? A child can be scarred by poor parenting, but at least parent and child are the same types of being, and in theory, their roles are mostly predefined. But with a person and a house, who is the parent and who is the child? Can such disparate entities ever fully understand each other?

Or stranger still, what if it is the house that is not stable?

What if neither is?

Eventually, people die. (In theory, so do houses, but their lifespans can be much, much longer.) Ponder for a moment as to what happens once the person who has been the house's entire focus and experience for so long is suddenly gone. Being alone can be just as powerful a shaping force as being with someone else. What thoughts does the house think when left on its own?

And lastly, what if there are fundamental forces of the universe—the multiverse—representing particular concepts? Such a thing might be so integral to all of existence that we could think of them as pillars. Pillars that hold up the universe. What if someone or something, say for example a house scarred by its experiences and exposures and then left entirely alone, could somehow tap into such a force? What if it latched onto a specific pillar keyed to its own emotional state, one unique to itself that a human could never hope to fully understand? Infused with this essence, the house could likely do things and think thoughts that we could hardly comprehend. Clinging to a fundamental pillar of the multiverse, it could become not just a house, but the very idea of a house. One that extended into all worlds. A particular type of house.

A haunted house.

Ultimately, we just don't know the answers to all these questions, and perhaps if we did know, we wouldn't truly understand. And that only contributes to the mystery and the horror of the Darkest House. What we need to know is what happens when someone dares cross the threshold and walk its halls.

And what we know is that the house hates you.

PHILLIP HARLOCK'S STORY

A man named Phillip Harlock lived in the house for a very long time. That much is undisputed.

Even the origin of Phillip and the house, however, gets muddy. The characters may learn:

- ✦ Phillip was the first owner of the house.
- ✦ Phillip grew up in the house, so technically his parents were the first owners of the house.
- ✦ There were other owners before Phillip. And the house may be far older than Phillip.
- ✦ Phillip moved the house to its current location.

Phillip was an occultist. Now, if the setting's context is such that wizards and magic exist, then he was a well-known wizard. At least, in the sense of knowledge and understanding, if not accomplishments. Otherwise, he was someone who studied the occult and practiced magick, perhaps thought of as a “kook” by others. Either way, he was a recluse who, by his late twenties, rarely saw his friends, and by his thirties, never left his house. Very likely a severe agoraphobe, he had everything he needed delivered to him. By his late thirties, he stopped allowing even the rare visitor into the house. It's believed that he disappeared under mysterious circumstances some thirty years after that, but the timing is unclear.



Phillip spent a good deal of his life in the house, rarely leaving. It's possible that in so doing, he transposed the house he grew up in with this house. While there are many suggestions of Phillip's family's existence in the house, the PCs never find any records outside the house indicating that they ever lived there. (It's also possible that the Darkest House—also known as the House That Hungers—consumed and assimilated the house he grew up in, perhaps with Phillip's intentional or unintentional help.)

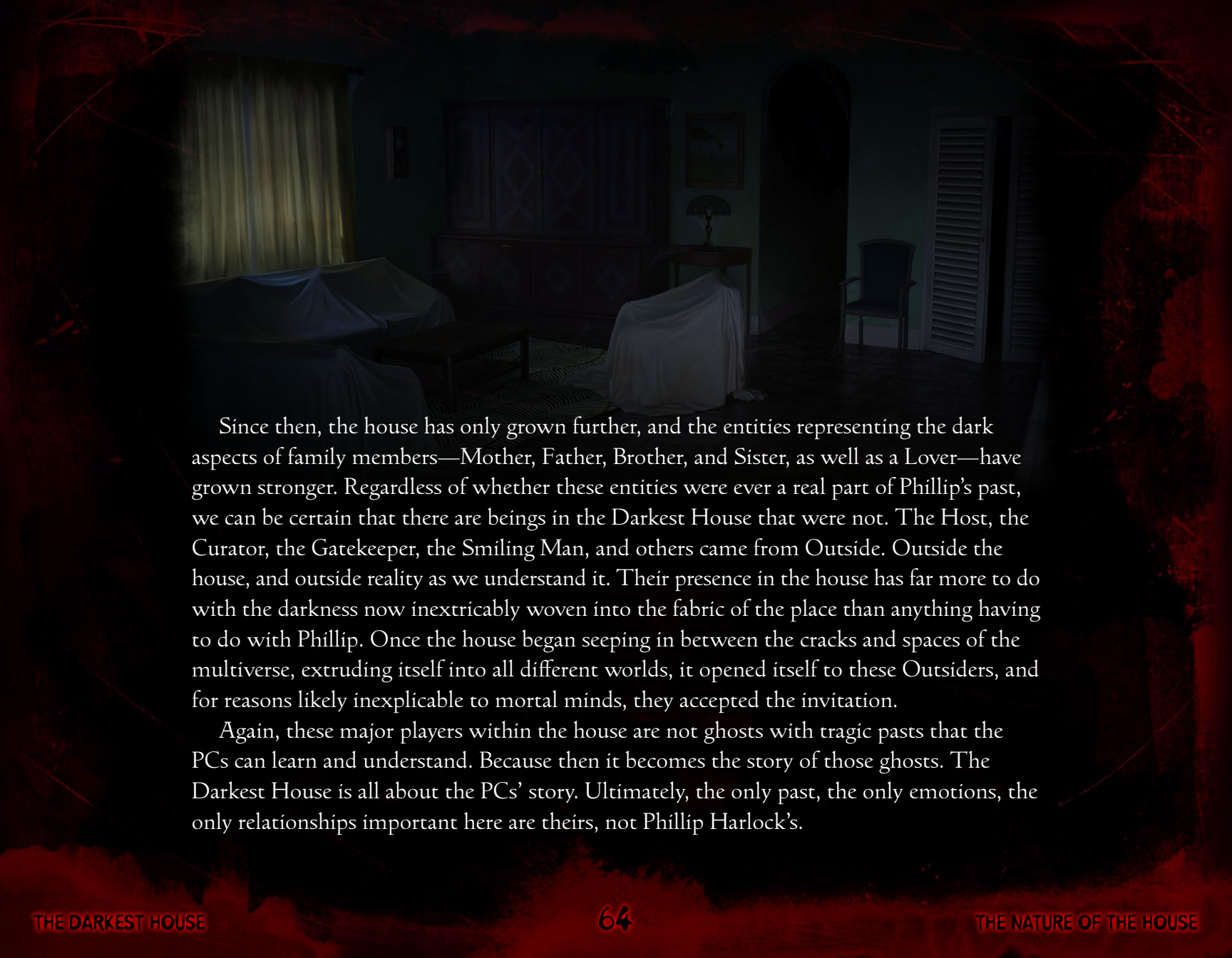
At some point, for some reason, the house tapped into something dark and fundamental to the multiverse. This may be because of Phillip—intentionally? Unintentionally?—but it's also worth considering that the house already had that sort of connection long before Phillip. Did the house inflict itself upon the man, or did the man inflict himself upon the house? We don't know.

And why was it darkness that the house found and attached itself to? Again, we don't know.

It's very likely that Phillip suffered some mental issues, and that they worsened as he got older. Some of these might be traced back to what seems like a potentially abusive childhood, but there is nothing in the public record to suggest abuse when he was young. It's not even clear if he actually had any siblings, despite what the house may suggest.

The family members endemic of the house now might be deeper and older than Phillip's childhood. It's possible that, as Phillip's mind deteriorated and as the house took a stronger and deeper hold upon him, the house imposed the dark archetypes of mother, father, sister, and brother upon him. It is questionable whether he even had a brother and a sister, for example.

Eventually, Phillip set out to learn what he could about the mysteries of the house. He disappeared into the so-called Backrooms of the house, which eventually led to a series of impossible caves, which themselves led to a vast subterranean ocean. Phillip attempted to cross that ocean and was never heard from again.



Since then, the house has only grown further, and the entities representing the dark aspects of family members—Mother, Father, Brother, and Sister, as well as a Lover—have grown stronger. Regardless of whether these entities were ever a real part of Phillip's past, we can be certain that there are beings in the Darkest House that were not. The Host, the Curator, the Gatekeeper, the Smiling Man, and others came from Outside. Outside the house, and outside reality as we understand it. Their presence in the house has far more to do with the darkness now inextricably woven into the fabric of the place than anything having to do with Phillip. Once the house began seeping in between the cracks and spaces of the multiverse, extruding itself into all different worlds, it opened itself to these Outsiders, and for reasons likely inexplicable to mortal minds, they accepted the invitation.

Again, these major players within the house are not ghosts with tragic pasts that the PCs can learn and understand. Because then it becomes the story of those ghosts. The Darkest House is all about the PCs' story. Ultimately, the only past, the only emotions, the only relationships important here are theirs, not Phillip Harlock's.

WHY NOT JUST SPELL OUT THE BACKGROUND OF THE HOUSE?

I already know that a lot of readers and potential GMs will be sad that the background of the house, of Phillip Harlock (and his final fate), and the actual nature of everything within isn't perfectly laid out and explained. Instead, I've left a lot of questions.

Did the house make Phillip go insane?

Did Phillip make the house go insane?

Are all the entities of the house, such as the Host and the Curator, all just aspects of Phillip's shattered mind?

Did Phillip conjure the Enemy of Light, turning the house into the Darkest House?

Did the Enemy of Light come to the house because it was the Darkest House?

Did Phillip create the aeolotropic structure? And if so, did he do it after he first discovered it, due to disjointed time?

Whose family—if anyone's—are Father, Mother, Sister, and Brother?

*Why did the Smiling Man scatter Phillip's **journal pages** throughout the house?*

These are fun questions. And I'll go to my grave insisting that they're more fun because we don't know the definitive answers.

The thing is, the answers to these questions aren't going to help a GM run the house well. In fact, I'd argue they might make the experience a little bit worse. Because as you read through the room descriptions and the remnants, a story will emerge. Probably more than one. And as the players begin to explore, they'll start to develop their own theories. They'll put pieces together, and they'll make wild leaps of logic. They'll make the story of the Darkest House into what scares *them*, specifically.

And it doesn't serve your—or their—fun if I tell you that you're wrong.

REASONS TO ENTER THE HOUSE

Whether you want to think of these as adventure hooks or lures or story seeds, PCs need some motivation to go into a creepy old house. Here are a few ideas to get you started. Tailor them, of course, to the player characters themselves.

1. Treasure. Characters are always interested in loot, right? Well, lots of them, anyway. Rare relics, magical artifacts, or just lots of buried jewels hidden away by a previous owner of the house might entice plenty of PCs. The promise of this reward can be real or not. For example, the characters might learn of the very valuable Familial Diamond in the Attic. That's a real treasure, and it's actually in the house. Or, they might hear of some chest of priceless gems secreted away under the floorboards of the master bedroom, or a magical artifact in the cellar that kills demons. Those are not actually there.

2. Lore. Information and knowledge are their own variations on treasure. Perhaps a PC is looking for the word that will activate a magical staff they have found, the final line of an important prophecy, or the secret passphrase that will open an ancient vault found elsewhere. Or perhaps they want to know more about the fundamental forces that the house may very well have somehow tapped into.

3. Curiosity. Perhaps one or more of the characters learned of the existence of an anomalous house and heard some strange stories of unexplained disappearances and just decide to go check it out for themselves.

4. Pursuit. Someone or something important to the PCs goes into (or disappeared into) the Darkest House. A wraith has been harrowing some poor victim at night, and the characters follow it as it returns to its lair—a suitably creepy old house (clearly, it has access to a painting in the Gallery—you'll likely have to add one). A desperate criminal the PCs seek takes refuge unknowingly in the old abandoned house that everyone avoids. Investigating the disappearance of a child, the characters find that the trail leads to a mysterious, run-down house the neighbors claim is haunted.

STORIES WITHIN THE HOUSE

When we play RPGs, we're basically all telling a story as a group. Going in, the characters probably won't have much of a story regarding the house. It's likely that they're just exploring a strange place. And that's fine, but there's more to the Darkest House than simply a spooky funhouse carnival ride if the group wants there to be. However, in the end, the house is not the story. The characters and what they do are the story. There is no "big climax" set up within the rooms of the house. No linear, narrative progression that must be followed through its encounters. The story is what happens as your group experiences it all.

Here are some stories that you can discover in the house:

- ✦ **Get Buddy out of the house.** In the bedroom labeled simply The Dog, the PCs will encounter an innocent animal that they can befriend and perhaps rescue.
- ✦ **Locate and rescue the loved one.** This is an NPC close to, and important to, one of the PCs, now trapped in the house. They are in the Tea Room. (Not to be confused with the Lover, who is the entity that haunts the Amator section of the house.)



- ✦ **Find and restore the aeolotropic structure, also known as the Lacuna.** Somewhere along the line, someone (Phillip Harlock? The Enemy of Light? Father? Someone else?) built a device that allows one to step outside both time and space. It's currently located in the basement of the **Original House** and it's currently damaged. But it could be repaired and used for some cosmic purpose having to do with spacetime on a fundamental level.
- ✦ **Find all the Mystic Tools.** Throughout the house, often hidden, there lie eight tools. Together, they form a set that can be used to build a door that can let characters leave the house, in effect, creating a new entrance—one that can be used as an exit as well.

If the characters find all eight Mystic Tools, they'll discover that one of the eight is a blueprint. This blueprint allows the tools to be used to construct a door in any room of the house, once. This **Mystic Door** is permanent and immovable, and leads to the outside of the house. This process requires wood and metal, but that can be obtained by dismantling furniture or even walls or doors inside the house (such things will eventually reset, but that doesn't affect the Mystic Door). It takes about ten total hours of work, assuming at least three people are working. Two people would require fifteen hours, and only one person would take twenty hours. More than three people don't effectively make things go faster.

Once finished, the Mystic Tools disappear, lost within the house again (hidden in different places—because the house hates you), but the characters are free to use the door as often as they wish to enter or exit.

Mystic Tools Locations

Tool	Location
Saw	Cellar
Pliers	Secret Room
Hammer	Spirit of Destruction
Wrench	Mannequin Room
Plane	Dripping Room
Chisel	Music Room
Screwdriver	Secret Chapel
Blueprint	Private Study

Learned characters wise in the way of magic might ascertain that the Mystic Tools could be used to build something else—perhaps an extremely potent magical item or something similar—but the catch is that the Mystic Tools cannot be taken from the Darkest House. Learning that the only way to make a specific item is with the Mystic Tools in the Darkest House might be an interesting hook to get the PCs to go there, but keep in mind that the tools disappear after using them, so building whatever the PCs seek to build precludes doing so and then building the Mystic Door. Unless they go searching for the tools a second time . . .

- ✦ **Locate Phillip Harlock or at least find out what actually happened to him.** Good luck with this one. It's a twisty, contradictory tale involving time out of sync and memories lost (often more than once) and false memories gained. This would probably involve making it all the way through the Backrooms and across the dark ocean, which is really out of the bounds of this adventure, but it would be an epic and surreal journey and the vast majority of it would be in the Darkest House.
- ✦ **Sever the house from the rest of their world forever.** This is the big one. Remember when I said there's no inherent big climax to the stories of the house? Yeah, that wasn't entirely true. It's just that it's not my intention to say that PCs should go into the house to rid their world of it.

Severing the house would involve going to the Original House, possible only through the **Amator** section, and manipulating the recursive dollhouse found there. This would be quite difficult, but an epic quest to be certain. It would also mean that the characters could never return to the Darkest House, but by that point, they'll likely be grateful for that.

RESEARCHING THE HOUSE

Sometimes, wise characters will research a location before busting right in. They might comb the local library, county records office, or the local newspaper archives. If they do so, **share the following text** with the characters, revealing the fruit of their labors:

You find two references to the house, both quite contradictory.

One is about the supposed original owner of the house, a man named Phillip Harlock. Apparently, long ago, he went a bit mad and would never leave the house, telling friends—all of whom he eventually pushed away, one by one, over the course of a year or two—that there were “always more rooms in the house to see. Always more halls to walk.” Eventually, he disappeared altogether. Other owners took possession and moved in over the years. All reported that the house was haunted. Various exorcists and experts were called in. The first three failed. The fourth died. The last owner claimed “it’s not even a house anymore,” before disappearing mysteriously. No one has lived there in a very long time, and it’s been cordoned off for years. Occasionally, foolish thrill-seekers manage to get inside. Some report terrifying stories. Most won’t talk about it or are never seen again. People began referring to it as the Darkest House.

The other, more esoteric, source says that the house has always existed, stretching between every layer of reality (whatever that means), filling in the cracks and seeping into whatever metaphysical pits it can find. This reference also mentions Phillip Harlock, but seems to suggest that he wasn’t the first owner at all and that he inherited it from a distant relative and moved it to its current location somehow. But mostly this source just goes on about how the house is more a dark, fundamental force of the universe that takes on the appearance of a house than an actual house, like an animal that uses a part of its own body to lure in prey (it specifically references the spider-tailed horned viper). It also says that the house’s outward appearance looks different in the other locations that it extends into, fitting in with local context. To top it all off, someone has written in that section of the book, scrawled over the print itself, “THE HOUSE HATES YOU.”



RUMORS ABOUT THE HOUSE

PCs might talk to people in the neighborhood or others in the know about the house. They will likely hear many of the following rumors, amid warnings not to go inside, expressions of incredulity, or simply doors closed in their faces.

False Rumors

- ✦ *No one has ever gone in and come back out alive.*
- ✦ *The original owner was named Peter Wainwright, and he was married with three children.*
- ✦ *The ghost of the original owner still haunts that place, and you'll meet him if you ever go inside.*
- ✦ *The original owner was a vampire and preyed upon the people in the surrounding neighborhood in the dark of night.*
- ✦ *Once each year, at the summer solstice, the house lights up from within and strange chanting can be heard.*

True Rumors

- ✦ *A man named Phillip Harlock lived there his entire adult life and didn't come out for most of that time.*
- ✦ *Phillip Harlock studied arcane secrets and occult lore for most of his life.*
- ✦ *The interior of the house is confusing and doesn't match at all the way it appears on the outside.*
- ✦ *The house is haunted by many ghosts. And things much worse than ghosts.*
- ✦ *A priest attempted to exorcise the spirits in the house many years ago and died in the attempt.*
- ✦ *There are powerful entities within the house that are neither living people nor truly ghosts, but something else.*
- ✦ *There's something in the house that violates spacetime.*
- ✦ *It's possible to close off the house forever, but no one knows how.*

CONDITIONS WITH THE HOUSE

Once characters enter the house, there are some things unique to its nature they will quickly realize. First and foremost, they will discover that leaving the house is neither straightforward nor simple. Doors won't open, and windows show only endless darkness. We'll discuss **escaping the house** shortly.

In addition, they'll discover the following:

THERE ARE ANACHRONISMS INSIDE

It might be that some of what the PCs will find inside is anachronistic or inappropriate to their home setting's technology or science. For example, there is a telephone, a radio, and a (seemingly) mechanical elevator. For PCs hailing from a medieval fantasy world, these things are unknown. Embrace that. Don't describe the telephone as "a telephone," but rather "a strangely shaped idol of unknown material. A shrill cry comes forth from it, and if the top portion is removed, distant voices can be heard echoing within."

If the contents of the house seem out of sync with the setting, particularly if they are something the players understand, even if the characters do not, that simply adds to the mystery of the place.

THERE IS MAGIC INSIDE

Characters from a setting where magic does not (or at least, should not) exist are going to be thrown for a loop in the house. Supernatural powers and entities are everywhere. They might try to explain them through a scientific or technological lens. That's fine. Alternatively, the group as a whole might simply think of the Darkest House as a place where the unexplained goes on. If it's accessed in context as if it were some private quarters on a space station, then it's just "that really weird place on the space station."

But even if you adopt a “what happens in the Darkest House, stays in the Darkest House” philosophy when it comes to such things, consider what happens when the PCs leave. They might bring with them magical “treasures” they’ve found. Or they might come out cursed, or sporting the unique **Dooms** found in the house. It is highly recommended that these magical effects persist (somehow) even in a nonmagical setting. The lasting impressions given by the house should be . . . lasting.

TIME GETS STRANGE INSIDE

Space gets warped inside the house. So too does time. There aren’t rules for this; it’s far more ephemeral (dare I say, *timey-wimey*) than that. Or to put it another way, it’s far too strange for mortal minds to fully comprehend.

This essentially means that time works exactly how you, the GM, wants it to. If you don’t want to pay attention to the passage of time and then suddenly say, “It’s been a long time since you have eaten anything. Your stomach is growling,” that’s fine. If you want to keep closer track than that, that’s fine too.

Same goes for sleep. Looking out any window in the house reveals that it’s always night here—if you can see out the window at all. So who’s to say how often the characters actually have to sleep? Let it just happen when the needs of the story suggest it should happen. This might make things inconsistent, but it’s not only okay, it’s the spirit of the house.



The only time (no pun intended) you really need to pay attention to the passage of time is if a character is wounded and needs to recover. But rather than track it, just let time flow along. “Oh,” you might suddenly say, “you can check to see if you recover from your wound again.” If the players start to get the idea time occasionally passes faster or more slowly, that’s not a bad thing. It’s great because it’s true. Sometimes it may seem like a wound heals very quickly. Other times, it seemingly takes forever. The deeper into the house they go—and deep into the **Backrooms** even moreso—the truer this becomes.

There are perhaps other time-related activities in the house, like building the **Mystic Door**, but you can handle such things just the same way.



PC ABILITIES AFFECTED WITHIN THE HOUSE

Conversion issues aside, not all of the PCs' abilities are going to function the way they're used to. Certain things can't be done within the house, due to its nature.

Having something work differently is better than preventing it from working. This can be turning a beneficial effect into another (potentially) beneficial effect, such as a psychic ability to tell what is on the other side of a wall revealing a brief glimpse of a possible future instead. It can also be turning a beneficial effect into a detrimental one. Perhaps best of all is having a beneficial effect become a different and *potentially* beneficial effect, but also with the implications of detriment, such as having a teleportation spell cause the affected targets to only "half" teleport away and become temporarily insubstantial or invisible instead.

The point here isn't to frustrate, annoy, or punish the players for having these abilities, but to showcase that being in the house isn't like being anywhere else and to keep the flavor and mood consistent within.

House actions (when the **House Die** indicates them) could certainly involve screwing with a player's abilities. And that might be frustrating or annoying, but the players will see that this is a force working against them, and not just the GM/scenario preventing them from doing what they wish.

There are two absolutes when it comes to the house trumping PC abilities: communicating by magical or technological means, and leaving the house.

No Contact With the Outside. There is no contact with the outside world once you're inside the house. Or, to put it more precisely, most attempts at contacting the outside world contact the house instead. And you don't want this. Coming into contact with the house itself is always a disturbing experience.

This includes magical communication (including with deities) and technological as well—radios, phones, and internet connections. Once inside the house, you can't even get a connected device to tell you the date or time. The moratorium also includes magical divination pertaining to anything outside the house, and perhaps most significantly it includes magical summoning and conjuration.

This even includes communication within the house between characters, but this almost always simply results in the house imitating or deceiving the characters, as described below.

All of these actions put one in contact with the house rather than the desired result. Additionally, anything that would reveal the paranormal nature of the house—from a handheld scanner to a spell that detects magic or the presence of evil in the house—puts one in contact with the house.

Being in contact with the house results in one of three things:

- ✦ **Deception.** The house impersonates whomever the PC was attempting to communicate with or even an entity they were attempting to conjure. The house uses this opportunity to toy with the character, feeding them false information that ultimately will be harmful.
- ✦ **Direct mental feedback that threatens to overwhelm the character.** This is a Rating 5 attack that inflicts mental damage.
- ✦ **Possession.** The house sends a spirit to possess the character. This is a Rating 5 spirit, and if it succeeds in its attack, the player loses control of their character. Begin feeding the PC instructions through Direct Messages, having them say and do what the spirit wishes. At first, the spirit's actions are relatively benign, and the spirit allows the character to act normally, although they cannot reveal the possession. Eventually, it will cause the character to attempt to deal harm to one of their companions, either through inaction or through a subtle action (not an outright attack). Every hour or so, the character can attempt an action to free themselves of the Rating 5 possession.

No Easy Exit. Only the most powerful effect is going to **get one out of the house**, other than using the “proper” exits. You cannot simply smash a window and get out. The outer walls (and windows) are immune to such attempts. You cannot walk through the walls or teleport out, even if such resources are normally available. You cannot damage the outer walls, doors, or windows of the house. You cannot force a door open.

Most of the time, there is no change to movement within the house, including supernatural movement. So characters can teleport from one room to another, or move intangibly through a wall from one room to another (assuming the connection even exists). Even when this happens, though, the character using the ability can tell that the environment they are interacting with is not normal, and the process is mentally taxing, although not enough to warrant mental damage.

SLEEPING IN THE HOUSE

Sleeping in the house is dangerous. Characters who sleep (or are rendered unconscious) face a Rating 5 attack from the house that inflicts mental damage in the form of horrific nightmares. The nightmares are always very personal, involving the character’s loved ones, past stressful situations, and so on. This doesn’t apply to characters knocked unconscious due to suffering damage, only sleeping characters or those unconscious due to a magical effect, a drug, or something of that nature.



DAMAGING THE HOUSE

For the most part, the interior of the house is not unlike a living body. Damage a portion and, given a little time, it will heal. Even moving the furniture around or making a mark on a doorway is considered damage. And this then heals as well. Essentially, it's as if any given area of the house resets to its original state when left alone for a time. Almost all objects and creatures heal in this way, with a few exceptions. The following house inhabitants never return if destroyed:

- ✦ The Host (in the Great Hall)
- ✦ The Curator (in the Gallery)
- ✦ The Gatekeeper (in the Gatekeeper's room)
- ✦ The Doorman (in the Gatekeeper's room or the Cellar)
- ✦ The Lurker (in the Foyer)
- ✦ The Barman (in the Ballroom)
- ✦ The Arbiter (in the Parlor)
- ✦ The Red Figure (in the Red Room)
- ✦ The Cenotaph (in the Prisoner)
- ✦ The Smiling Man (in the Storeroom or the Backrooms)
- ✦ The Antinomy (in the Original House)
- ✦ Buddy (in The Dog)
- ✦ Any actual people known to the PCs, such as those encountered in the Tea Room, the Prisoner, or a Familiar Room.

The entities known as Mother, Father, Sister, Brother, and the Lover do all reset, appearing again even if slain, should the **House Die indicate it**.

Likewise, beneficial treasures do not reset. Once they are destroyed, used, or taken, they do not return to their resting place. It is entirely possible, given a lot of time, that the house will produce all new treasures—or even inhabitants to replace those listed above.

Keys and objects of specific importance to the house, like the Eyes of the Child, do reset, but probably not until the characters leave or die.



Some houses just reject humanity.

~Jacob Geller

RUNNING GAMES SET IN THE DARKEST HOUSE

You may have run a “haunted house”-style adventure before. Even if you haven’t, you’ve probably run a game with a “dungeon”-style location, with dangers keyed to various rooms that the characters explore. The Darkest House is similar to such adventures, but it has some truly unique aspects as well.

First, the format of this product presumes that you will be running this game online. Obviously you can use this material however you wish, but everything is designed assuming that you’re playing online. You’ve probably played games online. But if you haven’t, here are the basics: you’ll need a way to communicate with the group as a whole, and also a way to communicate with the players individually. For example, you might use Zoom to see and talk to the group, but use texts to send messages to players directly. Someone else might use Roll20 and Twitter DMs. You should choose the method that works best for you and your group.

You’ll also need to be able to show the players illustrations and perhaps maps. Within the app, each room in the house will present you with clear instructions for illustrations to share, direct messages to send to specific players, and so on. This means you can use an interface designed for that kind of thing, such as Roll20, or you can use the “Share Screen” feature of Zoom. A good option is to share the illustrations with your players via Discord, Slack, DM, or another private channel so they can control how and when they look at the art.

PLAYER SAFETY AND CONSENT AT THE TABLE

Along with this file, you'll have received a PDF called *Consent in Gaming*. It's worth a read before you run an adventure like *The Darkest House*. You can use the checklist provided to make sure that everyone in your group is on board with the kinds of (hopefully challenging and entertaining) horrors involved. There are many troubling things, either overtly depicted or strongly suggested, in *The Darkest House*. Using the checklist can help you learn where people's boundaries are so that you can significantly downplay or delete problematic elements.

Overt Depictions:

- ✦ Gory violence
- ✦ Scary bugs and spiders
- ✦ Death
- ✦ Body horror
- ✦ Captivity
- ✦ Mental illness
- ✦ Addiction
- ✦ Deception/gaslighting
- ✦ Possible animal endangerment
- ✦ Possible child endangerment

Strong Suggestions (but not direct portrayals):

- ✦ Child abuse
- ✦ Consensual sex



There are many ways to cultivate a safe, supportive, and inclusive group at the gaming table. Do your research and use any safety tools that are appropriate for your group.

USING THE DARKEST HOUSE

The Darkest House is designed to be inserted into an ongoing campaign (of any game).

Of course, many will want to use it as a “one-shot” adventure. That is, create new characters or dust off old ones, and have the game begin and end with just the Darkest House. It works well for that. The conversion opportunities of the **House System** mean that you can bring a few players you haven’t gamed with in years together with a couple of your more recent gaming friends and use the Darkest House to tie their experience together, even if their familiarities involve different game systems.

But The Darkest House is really meant for an ongoing campaign: there are long-term implications of things that happen in the house, such as **Dooms**. Character background information and character development can also emerge in the course of play. Further, the Darkest House is perhaps most fun when the PCs know it’s still *there*, even long after they leave. They may eventually find the need to go back. In that way, the Darkest House can become a recurring villain in your ongoing campaign.

Ideally, it would go like this: the PCs **enter the house** without a lot of foreknowledge. Maybe even by accident. They spend a session or two in the house and barely escape. They swear never to go back in. Then something happens and they discover that they have to go back in, to save someone trapped there, to recover an important item, and so on. So they go back in, accomplishing what they set out to do, encountering mostly new rooms, and finding a different way out.

Now, the third time’s the charm: the house itself contacts one or more of them in their dreams, and dares them to return. It haunts them with frequent nightmares, always trying to draw them back in. This time, they find their way to the **Original House** and find a way to sever the house’s connection to their setting forever. They haven’t destroyed the house, but they have made *their world* safe from it.

For the really long-term-thinking GM, you could introduce the Darkest House in one campaign and then incorporate it into a completely different campaign later on. The players will enjoy the literary irony of having all sorts of memories of what the Darkest House is, even if their characters don't. And what's more, who's to say that their old characters aren't still in there, somehow, having returned once again or, worse, having become spiritual echoes ringing around the house like so many others?



MORE STORY THAN MECHANICS

The **House System** is fairly simple, so that at no time will it get in the way. Roll some dice and add your Rating. That's how you do everything. Except that in truth, even that simple mechanic isn't really the crux of the experience. Perhaps more than in many other games, the focus is on things that happen to and can affect the characters *without mechanics*.

The Darkest House is about character, not character sheets. By the time the PCs escape the house, they'll likely have been forced to recall the darker moments of their past, their loyalties to each other will be put in question, and they might even have lost some or all control over their actions at some point. In short, the truly significant challenges the PCs will face—and the true wounds they take—have little to do with dice. This means you don't have to concern yourself with how any lasting effects (and potentially any useful treasures the PCs find and take with them) will translate into the campaign's original system.

Use this approach to your advantage, and get the players into the spirit of it all. Encourage character development and the fleshing out of characters' pasts as you go along. Discovering a character's greatest love, their deepest fear, and more about their past are things that will make this adventure one they will always remember.



CHALLENGES OF RUNNING THE DARKEST HOUSE

Running a scenario that's a bit different from the norm poses challenges. Running a game online poses challenges. Running a game high on mood and atmosphere poses challenges. The Darkest House does all these things at once. While we'll enumerate some of those challenges here, the big takeaway is this: talk to the players. Be up front with **what kind of scenario this is**, and the **kind of mood** you're trying to establish. At the same time, be aware of what the players (not the characters) need and desire. Remember that this is a game, and it's supposed to be fun. A roller coaster ride is terrifying, yes, but it's ultimately something we do to entertain ourselves. So too with a horror adventure like The Darkest House.

Players struggling to get into the spirit of the house. The Darkest House is a horror scenario, and that implies a certain kind of dark mood and atmosphere—like you’d see in a horror film. Players making lots of jokes and making light of events is a part of almost every RPG session. While it’s part of the fun of the game, if the jokes go too far or come too often, they’re going to detract from, rather than add to, the session.

Worse, if some of the players are trying to adopt the proper mood and one or two aren’t, it can be as bad as if you’re watching an atmospheric film and the people behind you are cracking jokes the whole time. It detracts from the experience. Don’t hesitate to talk to the players about this. If they’re going to be in the Darkest House for multiple sessions, you might need to preface each session with a bit about the mood you’re hoping to achieve.

On top of that, bad things are going to happen to the characters entering into a horror scenario like The Darkest House. Characters might get traumatized, scarred, maimed, doomed, cursed, possessed, or even killed. While getting everyone to fill out the **Consent Checklist** helps get an idea of where people stand on the various elements, the PCs will inevitably experience that terrible place where everything repeatedly goes wrong and is bad. Make it crystal clear that you’re not doing these things *to the players*. You’re not getting some kind of perverse glee from this. You’re not punishing the players. This is just the kind of scenario The Darkest House is, and sometimes victories that come at such a great cost are all the sweeter. Plus, just think of the stories they’ll have if—I mean when—they get out.

Players resisting the character-building parts of the scenario. In *The Darkest House*, players are going to be asked to develop their characters perhaps more deeply or in ways they haven't before. We all know the player who just wants to have their character smash things with their axe. That's why they play RPGs. They might not like to think about their character's background, let alone come up with some nightmare the character had recently or how they felt about their parents. (Sometimes it's a victory to get these folks to even give their character a name. . .)

Encourage them to think outside the box they've created for themselves. Tell them this isn't just for story reasons and it actually affects the outcome of the encounter or the scenario as a whole (which is true). They might find they actually like it. And if they just don't, well, at least they tried.

There's another kind of player that might not want to fully participate in this part of the game: the shy or introverted player. They might very well know what their character's greatest fear is, or some deeply important event in their childhood. They just don't want to expound upon it in front of the whole group. That's okay. Use direct messages. Talk to them about it one-on-one before or after the game if that's more comfortable for them.

In the end, though, as hard as it might be to see it happen, players need to be able to opt out of any portion of a game, and that includes this kind of character building. That's why it's so important to talk about this before the game. Use the **Consent Checklist**. Let people know on a meta-level what kind of things are coming their way. (That's in part why the **whole character arc topic** is right up front in converting characters to the *Darkest House*—it helps ready people for the kind of things they're going to encounter here.)

Players or characters nervous about exploring. Exploring is key to The Darkest House experience: characters delving into places the players believe to be dangerous and awful. But if you've got a player character just staying by the exit door, trying to get it open, no one's going to have much fun.

Just as bad is if you've used one of the **story hooks** to get the characters into the house, and all the players do is focus on that single goal. There are **stories** within The Darkest House (the biggest one being survive and get out) that should sweep up the characters. Sure, they might have come here hunting down a fugitive, but it should become clear early on that while they can keep that task in the back of their mind, finding the fugitive should not be their primary objective. If they race from room to room, ignoring anything that doesn't clearly have anything to do with the fugitive, they're not only missing out on vital details—they're probably missing out on the fun, too.

Players feeling frustrated. You really have to be good at reading your players.

While you want the characters to be terrified or exasperated at being trapped in the house, you don't want the players to be having a similar experience. Now a little player frustration, while not necessarily desirable, can't always be avoided. If a player seems quite frustrated, try to subtly insert something that you know will interest them. If they like combat, have a fight break out. If they want treasure, hint that there's something really good not too far away.

The real goal here is to make the characters quite unhappy while the players are having a great time. And in the end, if you just need to provide a bunch of grumpy, frustrated players with an exit, do so. Don't let a difficult scenario wreck your whole game.

Players disliking the conversion. Everyone's allowed their opinion, and everyone plays the game(s) they love the most, so converting characters to the **House System** might chafe some players. As stated in the conversion rules, if you think this is going to be a problem (or if it's going to be an issue *for you*), convert the house, don't convert the characters.

If a player insists that some sort of bad thing that's just happened to their character would never have happened if the group was using the system they converted from, give them the benefit of the doubt. Don't necessarily always reward the complainer with success, though; just change the nature of the bad thing. If someone's mind is controlled and they're certain that it wouldn't have happened if they were playing the Cypher System because they would have used Effort on their Intellect defense roll, tell them, okay, you break free from the mind control, but the cost of doing so is a Rating 3 mental wound (which is a lot like spending Intellect points to use Effort in the Cypher System).

The house can be difficult and deadly. Depending on the Ratings of the characters, a lot of the encounters within the house will be challenging on a mechanical basis. You can gently lead players to run from an overwhelming encounter. Perhaps more importantly, you can encourage them to **call upon the house** to help them succeed when they roll dice. This is a significant mechanic in the game and an important one to remember, though the concept is likely as new to you as it is to the players. At first, players might be afraid to call upon the house because it's pretty scary, but it's actually something that gives them a fair bit of agency in challenging situations, just at a cost. The system assumes that they'll do it a fair bit because it's better to get a **Doom** than to die.

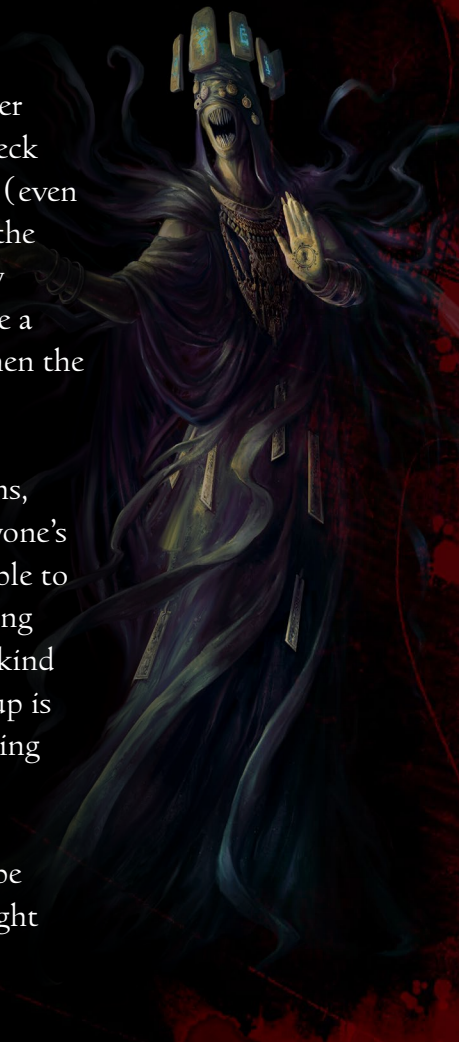
ONLINE GAMING TIPS

Even if you've got the basics of online play (and it's not hard), incorporating these tips can help your online session run more smoothly.

Be aware of the challenges unique to online play. People sitting in front of a computer are probably surrounded by distractions. Kids and pets demand attention. People check their email or social media. We're trained to multitask while we're at our computer (even though it's really not good for us), and it's hard not to. Try to engage the players to the degree that they're not going to drift off into another activity. But be aware that they might. You might end up having to pause the game from time to time to give people a chance to stretch, attend to something else, or what have you. At the same time, when the pause is over, you then have a chance to bring everyone's attention back to the game.

Allow for more time. Because it's hard for the players to have small side conversations, even about minor issues, they'll have them front and center, and it will take up everyone's time. That's just the nature of the beast. During an in-person game, Rob might be able to turn to Mary and ask what the range is on a particular spell while Marjorie is resolving her character's actions, but online it's much harder—almost impossible—to do that kind of thing concurrently. Also, the distance between players is noticeable when the group is trying to decide what to do next. It's harder for people to feel like their opinion is being heard. It's harder to come to a consensus. So games just take more time.

Consider shorter sessions. Managing a “table” of gamers who aren't really there can be tricky (and taxing). You might run four- to five-hour sessions in person, but you might find that online, your session should be maybe three to four hours.



Schedule a break. While taking a break in mid-game is always a good idea, it's vital in an online game.

Manage your screen. You need to be able to see the players' faces, but you need to be able to see the app as well. You can switch windows back and forth if you want to, but resizing them so you can have both open and visible is ideal. You'll want to have this guide open for reference purposes, but it can be minimized most of the time.

Manage who can talk to whom. If a character wanders off on their own, communicate with them via Direct Messages only. Or have everyone else mute their speakers, or maybe send them off on a snack break. If something befalls only a subset of the group, set up a way to talk to just those players. Most direct messaging services have group messaging features you can take advantage of, letting you message specific people within a group. For example, Zoom has a feature called breakout rooms that allows you to separate some subset of the current group into their own room.

Read aloud. The **Remnants** are there for you to share with your players in a chat or DM or what have you, and you should do that, so that everyone can read and reference them. But they also should be read aloud, either by you or by a player with a good reading voice. They carry a lot more impact that way.

Describe. Words have power to evoke imaginations. Even though there are a lot of art pieces to show the players, don't let them take the place of your verbal descriptions. Art shouldn't do all your work for you. Use the illustrations to enhance your descriptions, not replace them.

ONLINE HORROR TECHNIQUES

In an online game, the GM is physically separated from the players, as are the players from each other. While this can hinder communication and create a **number of challenges**, it also offers unique opportunities a GM can use to their advantage when running a horror-themed adventure.

Most of these techniques exist only in the metagame, but that's the point. You're creating and maintaining a mood. Obviously, if you have players who will be personally really bothered by such things, don't do them. The techniques are meant to be good fun, and enhance the experience, like when you're playing a video game and the controller vibrates.

Dim the lights. Consider putting up a virtual or physical background behind you, even if it's just a sheet hanging from the ceiling. Your unmade bed and your messy bedroom aren't scary (I hope). Better to see a blank sheet behind you than something that will hurt the mood. If you want to take this to an extreme level, dim the lights and then set up mundane objects (a trophy, a cup full of pens, whatever you have nearby) in front of a light source off-camera. If you do it right, you'll cast strange, unidentifiable shadows behind you.

Use direct messages. You can use direct messages of all kinds to sow confusion and terror among your players. Send a message to Player A telling them something's crawling up the back of Player B's character. Player A reacts with horror, and immediately tells Player B. Player B and the others don't know you sent a direct message to Player A, so they're confused as to why Player A is describing what's happening instead of the GM. Player B reacts with horror, of course, and everyone's characters check their own backs, because everyone—including Player A—is understandably worried something's crawling up their characters' backs too.

After fearful confusion, they find nothing. Was there something that's now disappeared? That's creepy. Is Player A seeing things? That's creepy. Is Player A lying to the rest of the group? Creepy. Meanwhile, as the GM, you know that it was just a shadow, or a regular spider, or something of that nature. You're not just screwing with the players, though. You're setting up a wariness and a paranoia that perfectly suits the mood. It's sort of the RPG version of a movie's jump scare or shadowplay. Plus, the house hates you.

Isolate one player. This is a variation on the previous technique but it's reversed. Direct message all the players except one and give them the same piece of information: a distant creaking of a floorboard, or a strange flickering light in the distance. Each informed player doesn't know if they're the only one with the information or not. But it will become clear quickly that they are not. However, the uninformed player will be questioning what's going on. "What creak? What light?" That player will demand answers from you, but you calmly say that they didn't hear/see anything. Then do it all again. Have the informed players see a full-blown apparition in the hallway. The isolated player is going to become a little bit paranoid. The other players become wary, wondering why the uninformed player *isn't* experiencing these things. The house hates you.

Screw with the cameras and microphones. If the platform you're using to play online allows you to control the mics or video of the group, do so when something dramatic happens; mute one player's mic or turn off their video. You can literally cut one player off from the other players. For example, if a dark entity sneaks into the room and pulls a character into the shadows, announce that this happens and then cut the video of the player whose character disappeared. It stresses the sudden break in communication. By

cutting someone's mic and camera, it's as if you made them vanish from the whole game. (Don't keep them away too long, though.)

Even if you can't control someone else's camera or mic, you can almost certainly control your own. If the lights suddenly go out in the room the characters are in, and at that moment you disappear from the screen, that will have a similarly dramatic effect.

Whisper. Subtly pull your mic toward you as you gradually lower the volume of your voice, talking softer and softer, until the mic is right up to your mouth and you're whispering. Whispering sets off all kinds of subconscious feelings and behaviors in the listener, all of which help create a creepy atmosphere.

Vary your voice. If you use the whispering technique, you can then add in a sudden, loud pronouncement about something that happens suddenly and instantly set everyone on edge. "Suddenly, the bookcase falls toward you!" Except you don't have to say "suddenly" when you do this; unexpectedly raising your voice does that work for you.

Use the players' environment against them. While *The Darkest House* is all about having the environment working against the characters, you can instill a little unease in the players by doing the same thing. "Hey, Annie," you might say, "what's that thing behind the chair in your background?" Annie looks, and says, "You mean the lamp?" "No," you respond. "Never mind. It just looked weird there for a second. Must be the light." Done subtly a few different times during a session, you'll start to make your players feel uneasy (even if they don't know why) and that'll help put them in the right mood for the game.



THE HOUSE ACTS

When the **House Die** indicates it, as discussed earlier, the house acts. There are many actions that the house can take, and keep in mind that its motivations ultimately cannot be parsed. But the house hates the PCs, and that likely explains most of its actions while they are present.

Use these actions in order. They escalate in severity and implication. If one is inapplicable (such as there being no inhabitants wounded for #2), skip it and move to the next. If you reach the end of the list, start over, but try to vary your description of it.

HOUSE ACTIONS

1. Creaking sounds, footsteps, or similar noises can be heard. The entity tied to that section of the house is coming closer.
2. A wounded inhabitant of the house is fully healed.
3. A cold draft blows. If the characters are using torches or candles for light, they go out. One or more beneficial ongoing effects (spells, powered items, etc.) inexplicably ends.
4. Whispering can be heard. A character's name is mentioned amid some indecipherable words. That character is subject to a Rating 2 attack that inflicts mental damage from the creepiness.
5. Every character fails their next action. Everyone can somehow sense that something horrible is getting close. (This is the entity tied to that section of the house.)
6. Unseen, icy fingers seem to run up one character's spine and they are subject to a Rating 5 attack that inflicts mental damage (in the form of unreasonable terror).



7. A translucent image appears, and the characters see a scene that they cannot interact with. For example, they see a scene of a man in that very room watching his family suddenly transform into monstrous, hungry creatures that attack him. Or they see the scene of a brutal murder. Or the looming presence of a monstrous being. Or anything that seems horrible and appropriate to the house. The vision fades, but it is a Rating 4 attack that inflicts mental damage on all the PCs.
8. An object in a character's possession grows a fanged mouth, hisses horribly, and attacks like a snake with a Rating of 4. Alternatively, it grows spider legs and scuttles away into the darkness. Or begins screaming with a humanlike mouth. Regardless of what happens, the object is no longer usable.
9. The entity of that section of the house arrives. There is a section of text in each room devoted to what happens if this occurs.
10. An object important to a character is now cursed. Whenever the character uses it, they fail the next roll they make immediately after (or in conjunction with it).



SECTIONS OF THE HOUSE

The first thing you might notice is that there is no map of the house. What? Well, that's because instead, there's a flowchart. It shows how the rooms connect to other rooms, which can sometimes be nonintuitive and is frequently nonlinear. In other words, the interior layout of the house makes no sense if applying Euclidean geometry. Piece together all the room maps and you'll just have a jumble. So, simply refer to the flowchart to keep track of where the characters are in the house, and where they can go from there. Use the maps of each room as a guide only while in that particular room.

The flowchart will also be your best guide to tell you what section of the house a room might be in. The sections are all different, and the differences are important, if for no other reason than they dictate which of the entities of the house (Father, Mother, Brother, Sister, or the Lover) holds sway there.

There are five different sections of the house, plus it's possible to find one's way into the Original House. The sections all represent, not to put too fine a point on it, love gone wrong. Yet each is a different kind of love, and each ultimately manifests in a different role that should be a loving part of a person's life. But this is the Darkest House, and the house hates you. So these manifestations are terrifying and awful. Feel free to make it clear that each section of the house has a different "feel" to the players. The characters might know, crossing from one section to another, that things have subtly changed.

The sections are **Pater**, **Mater**, **Soror**, **Frater**, and **Amator**.



PATER

The **Pater** section of the house is cruel, domineering, and distant. This section represents the fear of disappointing one's father, and the fear of punishment as a child.

- ✦ The Eyes of the Child affect many of the rooms in this section. They allow a character to see and interact with things in this section that they couldn't otherwise.
- ✦ The entity known as Father may take action (as determined by the **House Die**) against the PCs at some point. He appears impossibly tall, with a dark face and yellow eyes, and usually carries a massive leather belt as a weapon. He's always angry and violent.

MATER

The **Mater** section of the house is cloying, smothering, and emotional. This is the essence of motherly love, gone horribly wrong, with aspects of guilt, abandonment, and more. None of the entrances to the house take characters directly to the Mater section. It can only be reached by making one's way through another section of the house first and finding a path to this one.

- ✦ The telephone complicates things in this section. The PCs will hear it ringing throughout the rooms here, but won't find it until they reach the Sitting Room, where they can decide to answer it or not.
- ✦ The entity known as Mother may take action (as determined by the **House Die**) against the PCs at some point. She appears as a large woman with only a skull for a head. Skeletal upper torsos of children cling to her clothing desperately. She is always emotional and controlling.



SOROR

The **Soror** section of the house is sly, deceptive, and vindictive. It of course represents the sister role of the traditional Western nuclear family, but only in its worst aspects—dependence, lies, and sneakiness.

- ✦ The music of the radio haunts this section. The PCs will hear it playing mysterious, creepy music throughout this section, and eventually may find the radio itself—and hear the mysterious voices that come from it.
- ✦ The entity known as Sister may take action (as determined by the **House Die**) against the PCs at some point. She appears as a young woman with half of her face missing, broken as if she was a hollow porcelain doll. We can see into her head through the missing part of her face and it's full of moths. She is stealthy, deceptive, and creepy, but not physically imposing.

FRATER

The **Frater** section of the house is jealous, angry, and violent. This is the manifestation of a brother's relationship, but gone horribly wrong, representing resentment and jealousy.

- ✦ The Lurker is an entity that can enter the house if the PCs let it in through the door in the Foyer, complicating things in this section and potentially elsewhere in the house.
- ✦ The entity known as Brother may take action (as determined by the **House Die**) against the PCs at some point. Generally speaking, he is a lanky, male humanoid figure with hands balled into fists and one eye bulging unnervingly. His face shows a sneer, but he never takes actions. Instead, his axe-wielding shadow acts for him. He is always jealous and violent.



AMATOR

The **Amator** section of the house is mysterious, withholding, and untrustworthy. This is the essence of romantic love, but only the dark side of it: the obsession, the duplicity, and the loss of self.

There are only three ways to reach the Amator section and none of them involve finding the right door or passage. One is to use the right key on the lock in the Doorman's head. The second is to visit all four other sections and say the words *Mater*, *Pater*, *Frater*, and *Soror*, as presented in the Corridor of the Wheel of Blood. The third is when everyone in the group suffers from wounds with Ratings equal to their own and is transported to the Fountain of Pain.

- ✦ The Storm complicates things in this section. Throughout this section, every window shows a storm raging outside the house. Worse, there's something alive out there, peering in the windows, trying to get in.
- ✦ The entity known as the Lover may take action (as determined by the **House Die**) against the PCs at some point. The Lover has no physical appearance, and rarely takes direct physical action against the PCs, but rather undermines what they do behind their backs. Each room description provides the details.

THE ORIGINAL HOUSE

Lastly, the Original House contains some of the answers to the questions raised elsewhere in the house and holds the keys to severing the house from the PCs' world, should they want to undertake such a monumental quest. It has no conceptual entity tied to it, nor any special object complicating things, other than the recursive dollhouse, but that is another matter entirely.

THE ROOMS

Obviously, the house is far bigger on the inside than the outside. The house might, in fact, be infinitely large. What's more, not all the rooms of the house follow a similar architectural style. Actually, many do not match at all, as if they came from completely different structures made of different materials by different cultures in different time periods. And that's because they did—the **House That Hungers devours** the rooms of other buildings and claims them for its own.

The house's layout should be confusing to the players. If they hear mysterious footsteps on the level above them, they should have no idea what room that might be coming from. This disorientation is created intentionally. It helps with the mood. This isn't an adventure locale the players should ever figure out or master in any way.



There are rooms where little or nothing happens. Sometimes, these will be little more than a corridor or an antechamber. Often, there is a sound, an odor, a sight, or a feeling coming from an upcoming room, where something (probably terrible) awaits. These are placed intentionally for the pacing and flow of the story. I call these the “building dread” rooms. Many of the rooms within the house conform to a stereotypical room type found in a home, such as a bedroom or a kitchen. That does not necessarily mean that such a room once had that purpose. On the contrary, the room types are more archetypes. That does not make them some kind of Platonic ideal of each room. On the contrary, if anything, they are dark and bitter perversions of such a thing.

Still, there’s enough real about the rooms that if a character searches for something that would logically be there, like a spoon in the kitchen, or a pencil in a bedroom desk, it’s there. Feel free to use that kind of logic to elaborate upon the rooms if necessary.

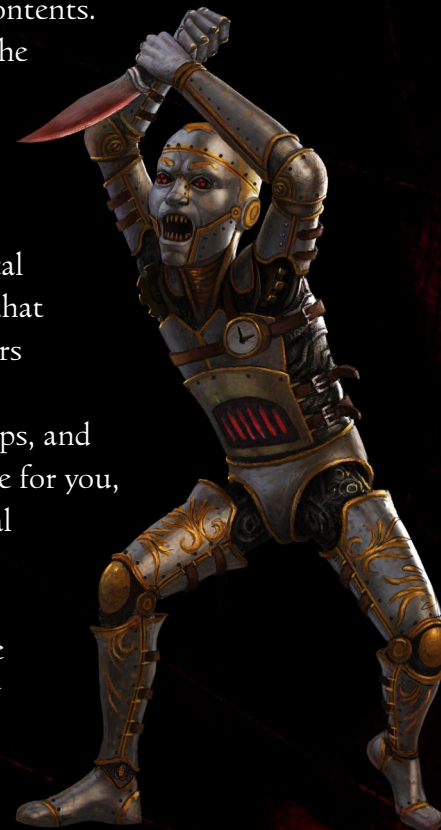
Lastly, remember that the **rooms eventually reset**. They return to normal even after the characters have passed through them, destroying things, changing things, or even slaying things. There is not a set time for this reset—let it flow naturally. There should be a feeling of dread that comes from the knowledge that the PCs cannot have any permanent impact on the house (even though that’s technically not true), but it shouldn’t become an irritant. A room that the PCs might have to pass through numerous times resetting too soon or too often will become tiresome.



ROOM DESCRIPTIONS

Every room is different, but every room is presented in a similar way in the app.

- ✦ On the opening page for each room, beneath the name of the room, you'll find a general summary of that room in bold. While this will give you a brief preview of the room's nature, the real use here is so that once you've read through the room, the summary will be enough to remind you of the room and its contents.
- ✦ Each room also has a small bit of GM Advice that applies to the room, presented in italics beneath the summary. If you're the team's star player about to run out onto the field, this is the one last thing the coach says as you go.
- ✦ At the top of the right-hand side of the page, you'll see each room has an Overview. This is a brief description of its physical appearance. The details will be general, and often something that you can just relate to the players regarding what their characters initially perceive.
- ✦ Obviously (almost) every room has a map. These are GM maps, and as such contain secrets (like hidden doors and such). These are for you, but you can also choose to show them to the players as a visual aid. While most rooms don't have GM-only labels or details, if you need to show the players a map and it does have such things, you'll need to conceal those parts. You can click on the important features of a room and it will take you immediately to the text describing that feature.



- ✦ Most rooms also have an illustration. These are all from the characters' point of view, intended to be shown to the players so you can say, "You see this." It should be obvious from the image and the Overview text as to whether you can show the illustration to the players as soon as they enter, or only after they trigger some turn of events. For example, a creature in the room may be hiding at first. There may also be other illustrations in certain rooms that you can show players later in the encounter, so that when they go into the **Gallery**, for example, you can show them images of most of the paintings.
- ✦ Look to the headers on the right-hand side to suggest the most important aspects of the room. Click on any of them for more information. As stated above, some of these are linked to labels on the map, but others are not, and instead provide you with information you'll need should various situations arise. For example, should the **House Die** indicate that one of the entities of the house comes to that room, the room will have an entry for the entity appropriate to the room (Father, Mother, Brother, Sister, or the Lover), and details of what they will do. Because we don't know where or when they will arrive, *every* room has such an entry.
- ✦ Lastly, the map of the room will show all the exits, and clicking on an exit will allow you to navigate to the next room's entry. You can also always go back to the room index from any room and navigate from there.

ENTRANCES INTO THE HOUSE

There are four ways into the house. It is possible for all four to exist in the same world, but that isn't always the case, and depends on the outward appearance of the house as it appears in the context. For example, if the house lies in a neighborhood where the houses have large yards or gardens, and some of these are enclosed with private fences, all the entrances are likely viable. If the house manifests as an apartment in a high-rise building, it's likely only the front door entrance exists. In other words, use the entrances that work best for your setting.

FRONT DOOR

If the house is there, the front door is there. If at all appropriate to the context, the front door has a dilapidated front porch before it, with rotten wooden boards and probably some kind of animals or creatures nesting underneath it.

Again, depending on the context, there is likely to be some kind of warning sign on the outside. Perhaps there's an old "CONDEMNED" sign tacked to a post holding up an overhang above the porch. Or in a magical context, there's a secret, magical sigil upon the door itself indicating "Dangerous Magic Inside."

It's quite reasonable to assume, in a fairly orderly setting, that the local authorities (police or the like) patrol the area routinely, mostly to keep away curious kids or rowdy teenagers, due to past mysterious disappearances in the neighborhood.

The front door is almost always locked, but the lock was probably pitifully inadequate even when it was new, and now it's quite old (Rating 1). Peering through windows reveals the **Living Room** and going through the front door takes the PCs there. The door slams shut behind them, and then vanishes.

Going through a window (by breaking it or forcing it open) also takes a character into the Living Room.

BACK DOOR

PCs leery of the front door and seeking a back way in might just find one. This is a weird entrance, though, because if the house has a backyard with a wall around it, PCs will have to go **Over the Wall** and through the **Walled Garden** first.

If it doesn't have that feature, and the back of the house just opens into an alleyway or something similar, then the back door presents itself there, with no windows in it or nearby. It leads into the **Foyer**.

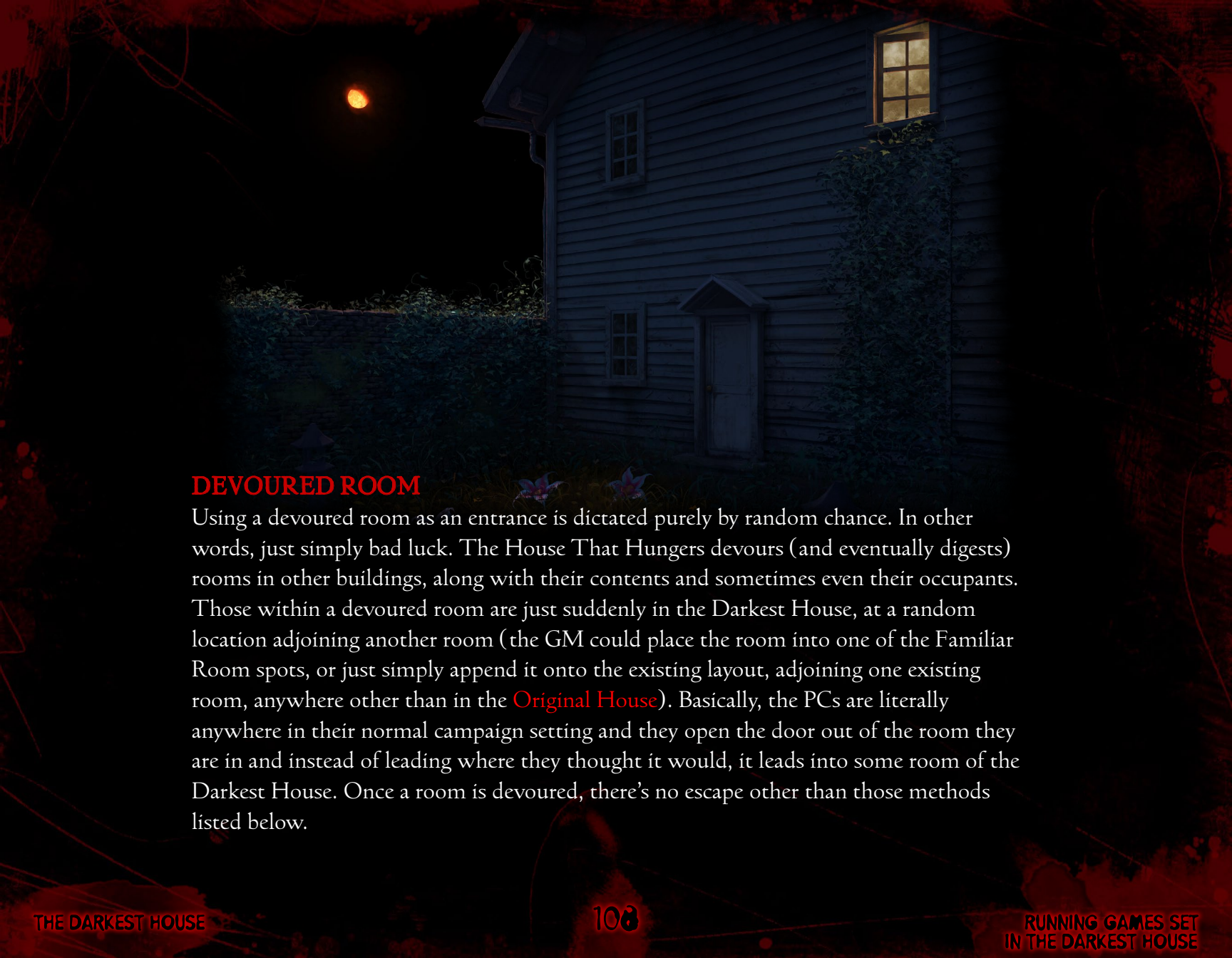
Note, however, that if the PCs go through the back door into the Foyer without first going through the backyard (because in the current context, there is no backyard), the door doesn't look the same from within the Foyer. Stranger still, if anyone in the Foyer opens the door to look out or to try to escape the house, they will instead see the Walled Garden, regardless of whether it was there when they entered the back door.

OVER THE WALL

Rarest of the three conventional entrances, going over the wall presumes that there is a wall to go over. A wall requires some kind of backyard or garden space. Obviously, this requires the context to allow for such a thing.

If there is a backyard, then the yard is within the Darkest House, not outside it. That is to say, all the restrictions (including those about the difficulty of leaving) involved with being in the house are immediately in effect.

There is no garden gate—no door in the outer wall. One must climb, jump, or fly over it. Going over the wall puts a character in the Walled Garden.



DEVoured ROOM

Using a devoured room as an entrance is dictated purely by random chance. In other words, just simply bad luck. The House That Hungers devours (and eventually digests) rooms in other buildings, along with their contents and sometimes even their occupants. Those within a devoured room are just suddenly in the Darkest House, at a random location adjoining another room (the GM could place the room into one of the Familiar Room spots, or just simply append it onto the existing layout, adjoining one existing room, anywhere other than in the **Original House**). Basically, the PCs are literally anywhere in their normal campaign setting and they open the door out of the room they are in and instead of leading where they thought it would, it leads into some room of the Darkest House. Once a room is devoured, there's no escape other than those methods listed below.

ESCAPING THE HOUSE

There are basically six ways to escape the confines of the house, once the characters are inside. None of them are straightforward. The most important thing to remember is that escape should also carry a significant price for one or more of the characters.

1. Powerful Supernatural/Technological Effect. Because we don't want to *entirely* take away the agency of the PCs, particularly well-prepared and capable PCs, if they have access to a powerful supernatural or technological effect that should overcome most situations in their standard game, it can grant exit from the house. The basic rule of thumb is, if an effect is very likely the most powerful in the game (or is one of them), it will work, but not if it is less than that. A super-powerful alien artifact crafted by the ancients themselves—or whatever would be the equivalent in the campaign you're running—can return the PCs home.

For example, a *teleport* spell from a 5e game won't work, but a *wish* spell would. Characters from an Invisible Sun game will find that a typical spell doesn't provide exit, but a wicked key does. And so on.

Keeping with the cost that should be involved in the escape, however, use of the supernatural or technological effect should very likely result in the loss of that effect, at least for a time. If the effect comes from an item, the item is lost. If it is knowledge or an ability that comes directly from a character, access to it is lost for at least a while.

Alternatively, the price to pay could mean the character using the effect gains some sort of minor curse, such as that to ever use that power again, they must sacrifice something of value, only use it at night, anoint the object (or themselves) with their own blood each time, or something similar.

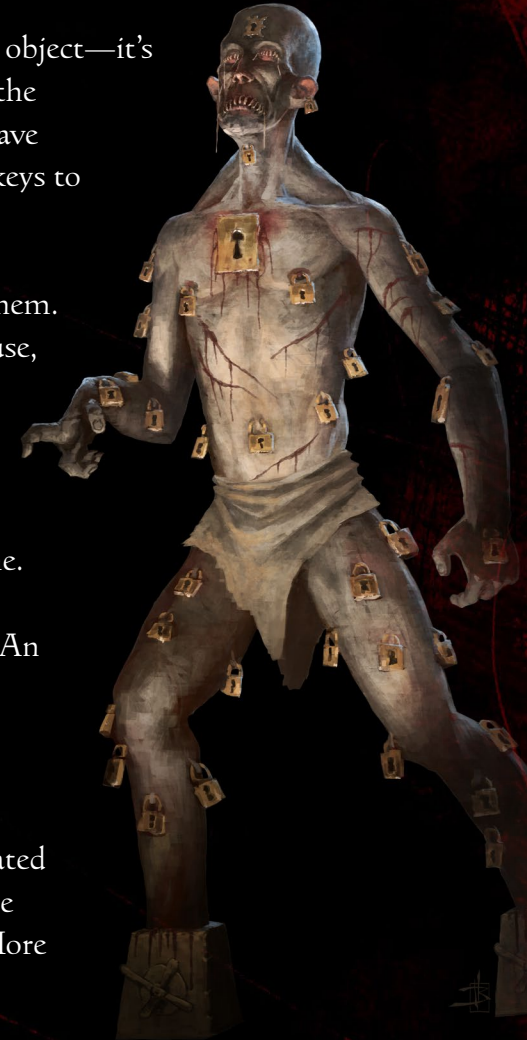
Lastly, the price might be story-based. Each time a power is used by a character to escape the Darkest House, some terrible tragedy affects them or their life. Their house burns down, their mother gets ill, and so on. The house hates you.

2. Find the Doorman. The primary door out of the house isn't an object—it's an entity. The Doorman can be found in two different locations (in the Cellar or with the Gatekeeper). Both appearances of the Doorman have different requirements for finding or reaching him, but both require keys to open his locks.

3. Some Number of Characters Complete an Arc. Every character entering the house begins with a lie or a truth that they bring with them. *That lie or truth is challenged, reinforced, or denied* while in the house, very likely multiple times. The GM should—based on their group—decide how many characters need to progress all the way through their arc before the house is done with them. A heavy, in-depth roleplaying group might need all of the characters to complete their arc. A much more casual, beer-and-pretzels group might need just one. Most groups fall somewhere in between.

When this number is reached, the GM should provide ways out. An open window. A hole in the roof. A secret door. A magical treasure. This exit cannot be used again, nor can it be used as an entrance to return to the house. Either way, it's simply gone.

4. Create a Painting for the Gallery. Perhaps using the paint and canvas in the Studio, a painting of one or more characters can be created and hung in the Gallery, providing a two-way door that can indeed be reused, but each time takes a serious mental toll on the characters. More information can be found in the Gallery.



5. Build the Mystic Door. By collecting all eight **Mystic Tools**, the PCs can build the Mystic Door and create their own exit.

This Mystic Door is permanent and immovable, and leads to the side of the house (if applicable). This process requires wood and metal, but that can be obtained by dismantling furniture or even walls or doors inside the house (such things will eventually reset, but that doesn't affect the Mystic Door). It takes about ten total hours of work, assuming at least three people are working. Two people would require fifteen hours, and only one person would take twenty hours. More than three people don't effectively make things go faster.

Once finished, the Mystic Tools disappear, lost within the house again (hidden in different places—because the house hates you), but the characters are free to use the door as often as they wish to enter or exit.

6. Close Off the House From the PCs' World. If the PCs manage to take the correct puzzle piece found in the Happy Family puzzle in the closet of the Bedroom With a Secret Passage and place it in the recursive dollhouse in the Original House, they will not only escape the Darkest House, but they will also shut it off from their world forever. But just *their* world . . .



ESCAPING, BUT NOT HOME

Since the Darkest House **worms its way into all worlds**, it's very possible that when the PCs leave, they don't go back to their own world, but another. This could be intentional on their part—the house could be a way to travel between worlds. In a campaign where traveling to other worlds is unheard of, this could be another story reason to go inside the house. In a setting where travel between worlds is more common, perhaps there is some campaign reason why a particular world is hard to reach and the Darkest House is the only way. (Otherwise, *surely* there are easier ways to travel to other worlds...)

Alternatively, the PCs might travel to another world in their escape unintentionally. This should be used to enhance the overall story, not as a final gotcha. If the PCs really earned their escape and are truly desperate to get home, sending them to another world seems like it would just be frustrating, and not in a good way. Perhaps the best solution of all is to make it clear just as they escape that they have the option not just to go home, but to go anywhere. In that case, it's almost like an extra potential reward for surviving and getting out.

ESCAPING WITH DOOM

Characters leaving the house with Dooms are not in the clear. There are **long-term implications** that will affect them long after they escape. Most of these will need some very potent, very specific remedies—magic of the highest order, alien or far-future tech, psychic therapy, and so on. The GM might rule that no remedy exists and the character must live with the consequences permanently. Acquiring the remedy should, at the very least, be a significant adventure on its own.

When a house is
both hungry and
awake, every room
becomes a mouth.

~Kitty Horrorshow,
Anatomy

RECOMMENDED MEDIA

Books

The Haunting of Hill House, Shirley Jackson

House of Leaves, Mark Z. Danielewski

Piranesi, Susanna Clarke

"The Fall of the House of Usher," Edgar

Allan Poe

House on the Borderland, William Hope

Hodgson

The Shining, Stephen King

Games

Anatomy, Kitty Horrorshow

Control, Paul Ehreth (Remedy)

Silent Hill, Keiichiro Toyama (Konami)

The 7th Guest, Rob Landeros and Graeme

Devine (Virgin Interactive)

Television, Film, and Video

The Haunting of Hill House (TV series)

The Shining (movie)

Poltergeist (movie)

The Changeling (movie)

Sinister (movie)

Ju-On: The Grudge (movie)

The Conjuring (movie)

Control, Anatomy, and the Legacy of the

Haunted House, Jacob Geller

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Remnant 1 (in the Living Room)

[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal]

February 4

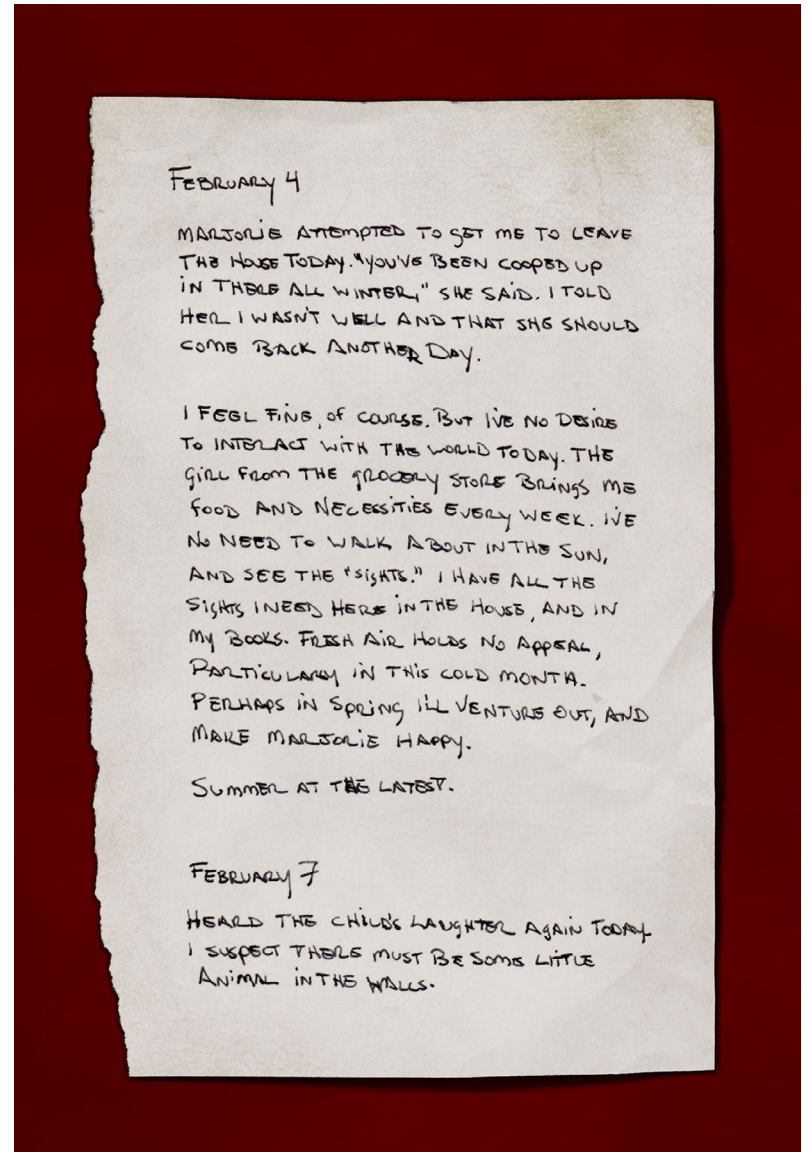
Marjorie attempted to get me to leave the house today. "You've been cooped up in there all winter," she said. I told her I wasn't well and that she should come back another day.

I feel fine, of course. But I've no desire to interact with the world today. The girl from the grocery store brings me food and necessities every week. I've no need to walk about in the sun, and see the "sights." I have all the sights I need here in the house, and in my books. Fresh air holds no appeal, particularly in this cold month. Perhaps in Spring I'll venture out, and make Marjorie happy.

Summer at the latest.

February 7

Heard the child's laughter again today. I suspect there must be some little animal in the walls.



Remnant 2 (in A Storeroom of Sorts)

[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal]

December 10

My old teacher referred to something he called a mind palace. He said that it was a place where he could mentally preserve all his thoughts, his memories, and his ideas. He visualized it as an actual place. The thoughts and ideas became objects within this place, carefully organized and stored away. Some might be carefully protected, locked away, and some might be displayed prominently. He could then visit his mind palace whenever he wanted. By visiting over and over, always visualizing the objects that represented his thoughts and memories in the same places, he made it very real, at least to him. He could close his eyes and see himself there, strolling the halls, visiting the rooms, and he wouldn't even have to consciously remember where he placed which object. They were just there, ready for him to peruse.

While he originally created his mind palace as a way of remembering everything he wanted to remember, he said that it became far more than that. He felt as though it was truly a retreat designed only for him. A place of respite only he could visit. He reveled in the privacy of it. And he insisted that it preserved his memories so completely that they could replay in his mind, like perfect recordings.

DECEMBER 10

MY OLD TEACHER REFERRED TO SOMETHING HE CALLED A MIND PALACE. HE SAID THAT IT WAS A PLACE WHERE HE COULD MENTALLY PRESERVE ALL HIS THOUGHTS, HIS MEMORIES, AND HIS IDEAS. HE VISUALIZED IT AS AN ACTUAL PLACE. THE THOUGHTS AND IDEAS BECAME OBJECTS WITHIN THIS PLACE, CAREFULLY ORGANIZED AND STORED AWAY. SOME MIGHT BE CAREFULLY PROTECTED, LOCKED AWAY, AND SOME MIGHT BE DISPLAYED PROMINENTLY. HE COULD THEN VISIT HIS MIND PALACE WHENEVER HE WANTED. BY VISITING OVER AND OVER, ALWAYS VISUALIZING THE OBJECTS THAT REPRESENTED HIS THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES IN THE SAME PLACES, HE MADE IT VERY REAL, AT LEAST TO HIM. HE COULD CLOSE HIS EYES AND SEE HIMSELF THERE, STROLLING THE HALLS, VISITING THE ROOMS, AND HE WOULDN'T EVEN HAVE TO CONSCIOUSLY REMEMBER WHERE HE PLACED WHICH OBJECT. THEY WERE JUST THERE, READY FOR HIM TO PERUSE.

WHILE HE ORIGINALLY CREATED HIS MIND PALACE AS A WAY OF REMEMBERING EVERYTHING HE WANTED TO REMEMBER, HE SAID THAT IT BECAME FAR MORE THAN THAT. HE FELT AS THOUGH IT WAS TRULY A RETREAT DESIGNED ONLY FOR HIM. A PLACE OF RESPIRE ONLY HE COULD VISIT. HE REVELED IN THE PRIVACY OF IT. AND HE INSISTED THAT IT PRESERVED HIS MEMORIES SO COMPLETELY THAT THEY COULD REPLAY IN HIS MIND, LIKE PERFECT RECORDINGS.

Remnant 3 (in Lying in State)

[Handwritten notes, in the same hand as most of the journal entries]

Eulogy-

I can't begin to My father was When I think of my father

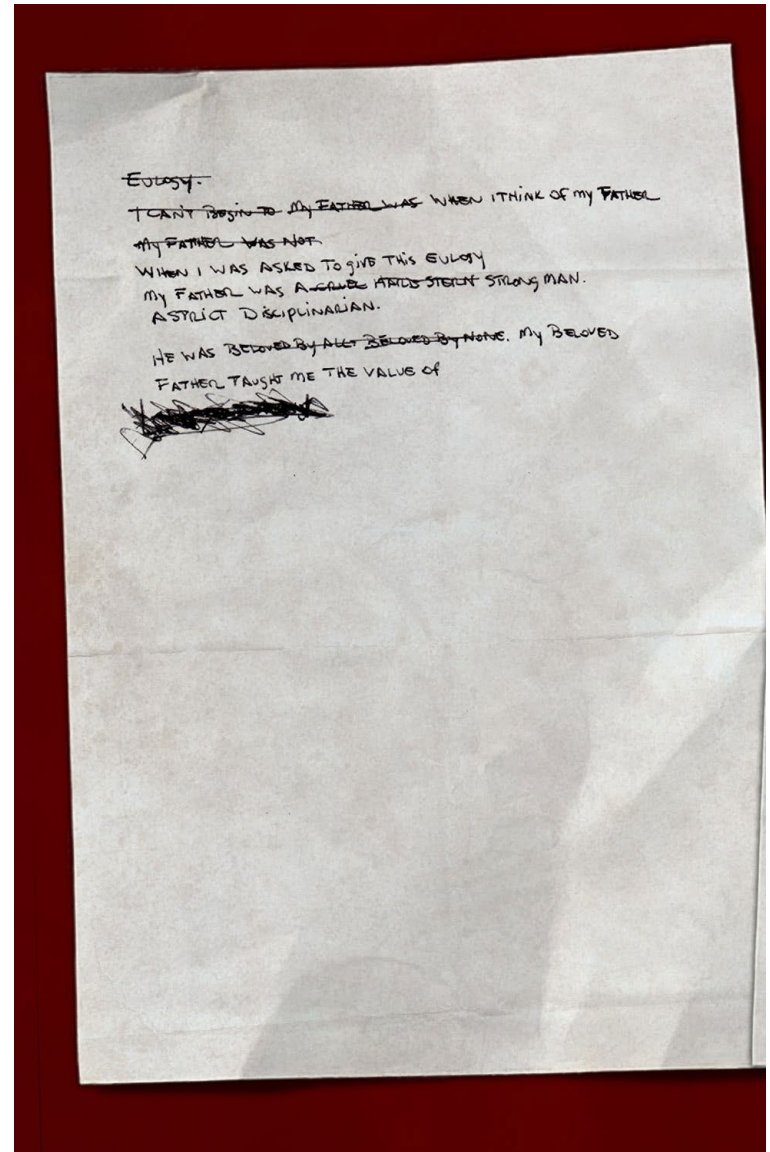
My father was not

When I was asked to give this eulogy

My father was a ~~cruel~~ ~~hard~~ ~~stern~~ strong man. A strict disciplinarian.

He was ~~beloved by all~~. ~~Beloved by none~~. My beloved father taught me the value of

[Angry scribbling.]



[Page 2 of handwritten notes, in the same hand as most of the journal entries. Everything other than "I can't do this" has a single, big X over it.]

The dark brooding of my father haunts me to this day. Becoming a man under his hateful, tortured gaze was difficult, like living in a nation in the grip of an aging tyrant. He shaped what my brother became, and my sister. And, obviously, me. His presence and his actions explain much of my mother, but not all.

It serves little purpose to hate or fear someone who is dead. And yet [scribbles]

When I was young, I found a notebook of his, in which he talked about his "great plan" and his "elaborate work." I could not understand what I read at the time, and as a man, I only remember a few words and phrases: Hunger. Destiny. Key of All Flesh. But what I remember most clearly is the phrase, "it wears a human face."

And there was something about the cellar.

When I asked him about it—God, why did I do that? I was young and did not understand—he bellowed. "Do not interfere with the Great Work. It is more important than you or I!" There was probably more, and probably violence. But I don't remember. Just the suggestion of my unimportance, and "it wears a human face."

He would disappear for days at a time. Those times were welcome and I stopped asking Mother where he had gone or how long before he got back. She never really answered anyway. And when he would return, he acted as if he'd never left. I didn't understand as a child, but now, as a man, perhaps I do. A little. This was his house, after all.

I will walk these dark, lonely halls with the certainty that his dreadful gaze is always upon me. He always stands just behind and above my shoulder.

I can't do this.

THE DARK BROODING OF MY FATHER HAUNTS ME TO THIS DAY. BECOMING A MAN UNDER HIS HATEFUL, TORTURED GAZE WAS DIFFICULT, LIKE LIVING IN A NATION IN THE GRIP OF AN AGING TYRANT. HE SHAPED WHAT MY BROTHER BECAME, AND MY SISTER. AND, OBVIOUSLY, ME. HIS PRESENCE AND HIS ACTIONS EXPLAIN MUCH OF MY MOTHER, BUT NOT ALL.

IT SERVES LITTLE PURPOSE TO HATE OR FEAR SOMEONE WHO IS DEAD. AND YET [scribbles]

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I FOUND A NOTEBOOK OF HIS, IN WHICH HE TALKED ABOUT HIS "GREAT PLAN" AND HIS "ELABORATE WORK." I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT I READ AT THE TIME, AND AS A MAN, I ONLY REMEMBER A FEW WORDS AND PHRASES: HUNGER. DESTINY. KEY OF ALL FLESH. BUT WHAT I REMEMBER MOST CLEARLY IS THE PHRASE, "IT WEARS A HUMAN FACE."

AND THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE CELLAR.

WHEN I ASKED HIM ABOUT IT—GOD, WHY DID I DO THAT? I WAS YOUNG AND DID NOT UNDERSTAND—HE BELLOWED. "DO NOT INTERFERE WITH THE GREAT WORK. IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOU OR I!" THERE WAS PROBABLY MORE, AND PROBABLY VIOLENCE. BUT I DON'T REMEMBER. JUST THE SUGGESTION OF MY UNIMPORTANCE, AND "IT WEARS A HUMAN FACE."

HE WOULD DISAPPEAR FOR DAYS AT A TIME. THOSE TIMES WERE WELCOME AND I STOPPED ASKING MOTHER WHERE HE HAD GONE OR HOW LONG BEFORE HE GOT BACK. SHE NEVER REALLY ANSWERED ANYWAY. AND WHEN HE WOULD RETURN, HE ACTED AS IF HE'D NEVER LEFT. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND AS A CHILD, BUT NOW, AS A MAN, PERHAPS I DO. A LITTLE. THIS WAS HIS HOUSE, AFTER ALL.

I WILL WALK THESE DARK, LONELY HALLS WITH THE CERTAINTY THAT HIS DREADFUL GAZE IS ALWAYS UPON ME. HE ALWAYS STANDS JUST BEHIND AND ABOVE MY SHOULDER.

I CAN'T DO THIS.

Remnant 4 (in the Library)

[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal]

December 17

I've begun work building my own mind palace. Rather than make up some fantastic castle or grand manor, however, I've just used this house. I find it easier to sustain this "mental location" using a place I'm very familiar with.

The thing is, I already find that in order to place all the thoughts and memories I want to preserve within it, I have to change things. Rooms are bigger in my mind palace than in the real house, for example. The mental objects I'm placing there don't match the contents of the actual rooms. But that's alright. I don't regret my choice to base my palace on this house. I love this house. Funny old place. It sat vacant for so long before we came along. At least, that's what I understand to be true. The actual origins of the place are a bit murky.

As a child, I always hoped for a happy family here. My father made that impossible, though. And by not helping me, my mother helped him. I always sought a way to protect my younger brother. I wondered what would happen to him, growing up here with our family. Well, these are the kinds of thoughts I can put in my mind palace I suppose.

DECEMBER 17

I'VE BEGUN WORK BUILDING MY OWN MIND PALACE. RATHER THAN MAKE UP SOME FANTASTIC CASTLE OR GRAND MANOR, HOWEVER, I'VE JUST USED THIS HOUSE. I FIND IT EASIER TO SUSTAIN THIS "MENTAL LOCATION" USING A PLACE I'M VERY FAMILIAR WITH.

THE THING IS, I ALREADY FIND THAT IN ORDER TO PLACE ALL THE THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES I WANT TO PRESERVE WITHIN IT, I HAVE TO CHANGE THINGS. ROOMS ARE BIGGER IN MY MIND PALACE THAN IN THE REAL HOUSE, FOR EXAMPLE. THE MENTAL OBJECTS I'M PLACING THERE DON'T MATCH THE CONTENTS OF THE ACTUAL ROOMS. BUT THAT'S ALRIGHT. I DON'T REGRET MY CHOICE TO BASE MY PALACE ON THIS HOUSE. I LOVE THIS HOUSE. FUNNY OLD PLACE. IT SAT VACANT FOR SO LONG BEFORE WE CAME ALONG. AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I UNDERSTAND TO BE TRUE. THE ACTUAL ORIGINS OF THE PLACE ARE A BIT MURKY.

AS A CHILD, I ALWAYS HOPED FOR A HAPPY FAMILY HERE. MY FATHER MADE THAT IMPOSSIBLE, THOUGH. AND BY NOT HELPING ME, MY MOTHER HELPED HIM. I ALWAYS SOUGHT A WAY TO PROTECT MY YOUNGER BROTHER. I WONDERED WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO HIM, GROWING UP HERE WITH OUR FAMILY. WELL, THESE ARE THE KINDS OF THOUGHTS I CAN PUT IN MY MIND PALACE I SUPPOSE.

Remnant 5 (in the Great Hall side rooms)

[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal]

February 8

I heard the scratching noise again. This time, I think it was coming from the parlor. But when I checked, as always, there was nothing there. Unlike previous times, however, I'd spilled tobacco from the pouch next to the chair in that room, and amidst the scattered bits, a mark that seemed very much like a footprint. From the size of it, perhaps a woman's. Or a child's. And yet I am certain I am alone here, as I have been for so long.

If there was someone here, I believe I would know about it.

February 10

More scratching. I've just been trying to ignore it now. Perhaps it's all in my mind.

February 19

I've spent the last three days devoted to finding the source of that scratching noise. Practically tore the place apart. I didn't find anything, but I did find . . . something. Maybe. I'm really not sure. It's just that I walked into the sewing room, and damned if I can remember there being a sewing room there before. I mean, of course there was. Obviously. But what's going on with my mind?

March 13

If I'm mad, I'm absolutely mad, but since there's no one here to mock me for it, I'll just stand by what I feel to be true. The house is bigger than it once was. I wasn't certain about the sewing room, and the gallery, but I will go to my grave believing that this house didn't used to have an interior courtyard.

FEBRUARY 8

I HEARD THE SCRATCHING NOISE AGAIN. THIS TIME I THINK IT WAS COMING FROM THE PARLOR. BUT WHEN I CHECKED, AS ALWAYS, THERE WAS NOTHING THERE. UNLIKE PREVIOUS TIMES, HOWEVER, I'D SPILLED TOBACCO FROM THE POUCH NEXT TO THE CHAIR IN THAT ROOM, AND AMIDST THE SCATTERED BITS, A MARK THAT SEEMED VERY MUCH LIKE A FOOTPRINT. FROM THE SIZE OF IT, PERHAPS A WOMAN'S. OR A CHILD'S. AND YET I AM CERTAIN I AM ALONE HERE, AS I HAVE BEEN FOR SO LONG.

IF THERE WAS SOMEONE HERE, I BELIEVE I WOULD KNOW ABOUT IT.

FEBRUARY 10

MORE SCRATCHING. I'VE JUST BEEN TRYING TO IGNORE IT NOW. PERHAPS IT'S ALL IN MY MIND.

FEBRUARY 19

I'VE SPENT THE LAST THREE DAYS DEVOTED TO FINDING THE SOURCE OF THAT SCRATCHING NOISE. PRACTICALLY TORE THE PLACE APART. I DIDN'T FIND ANYTHING, BUT I DID FIND... SOMETHING, MAYBE. I'M NOT REALLY SURE. IT'S JUST THAT I WALKED INTO THE SEWING ROOM, AND DAMNED IF I CAN REMEMBER THERE BEING A SEWING ROOM THERE BEFORE. I MEAN, OF COURSE THERE WAS. OBVIOUSLY. BUT WHAT'S GOING ON WITH MY MIND?

MARCH 13

IF I'M MAD, I'M ABSOLUTELY MAD. BUT SINCE THERE'S NO ONE HERE TO MOCK ME FOR IT, I'LL JUST STAND BY WHAT I FEEL TO BE TRUE. THE HOUSE IS BIGGER THAN IT ONCE WAS. I WASN'T CERTAIN ABOUT THE SEWING ROOM, AND THE GALLERY, BUT I WILL GO TO MY GRAVE BELIEVING THAT THIS HOUSE DIDN'T USED TO HAVE AN INTERIOR COURTYARD.

Remnant 6 (in the Secret Room)

[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal]

June 22

I've sent away for more books. Despite my beloved collection, I just can't find the answers I need. Thankfully, I'm in communication with an excellent bookseller who doesn't mind packaging some titles up and sending them my way. I only hope they have the information I seek. Surely I am not the first person to have experienced the situation in the basement.

Speaking of books, I've misplaced that book I felt was my father's the other day. Perhaps it was just a dream.

July 8

When I asked the Antinomy about the origin of the aeolotropic structure, he told me that I created it. But that makes no sense. I don't remember doing such a thing. Seems more like something my father would do. He always talked about his "great work," but I don't remember him being much of a craftsman. He was always in the library.

There are 8 mystical tools, that much I know. I secreted them about the house. I no longer remember why. Which seems strange. Did I build the structure? Something else? I remember something about hot coals.

July 12

I've scoured these blasted books but they're all worthless. Perhaps I am indeed the only one to have seen this aeolotropic structure, or spoken with the Antinomy. I will have to find my own answers. And if I cannot do it in this house, I am certain I can do it in the other.

JUNE 22

I'VE SENT AWAY FOR MORE BOOKS. DESPITE MY BELOVED COLLECTION, I JUST CAN'T FIND THE ANSWERS I NEED. THANKFULLY, I'M IN COMMUNICATION WITH AN EXCELLENT BOOKSELLER WHO DOESN'T MIND PACKAGING SOME TITLES UP AND SENDING THEM MY WAY. I ONLY HOPE THEY HAVE THE INFORMATION I SEEK. SURELY I AM NOT THE FIRST PERSON TO HAVE EXPERIENCED THE SITUATION IN THE BASEMENT.

SPEAKING OF BOOKS, I'VE MISPLACED THAT BOOK I'VE FELT WAS MY FATHER'S THE OTHER DAY. PERHAPS IT WAS JUST A DREAM.

JULY 8

WHEN I ASKED THE ANTINOMY ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF THE AEOLOTROPIC STRUCTURE, HE TOLD ME THAT I CREATED IT. BUT THAT MAKES NO SENSE. I DON'T REMEMBER DOING SUCH A THING SEEMS MORE LIKE SOMETHING MY FATHER WOULD DO. HE ALWAYS TALKED ABOUT HIS "GREAT WORK," BUT I DON'T REMEMBER HIM BEING MUCH OF A CRAFTSMAN. HE WAS ALWAYS IN THE LIBRARY.

THERE ARE 8 MYSTICAL TOOLS THAT MUCH I KNOW. I SECRETED THEM ABOUT THE HOUSE. I NO LONGER REMEMBER WHY. WHICH SEEMS STRANGE. DID I BUILD THE STRUCTURE? SOMETHING ELSE? I REMEMBER SOMETHING ABOUT HOT COALS.

JULY 12

I'VE SCOURED THESE BLASTED BOOKS BUT THEY'RE ALL WORTHLESS. PERHAPS I AM INDEED THE ONLY ONE TO HAVE SEEN THIS AEOLOTROPIC STRUCTURE, OR SPOKEN WITH THE ANTINOMY. I WILL HAVE TO FIND MY OWN ANSWERS. AND IF I CANNOT DO IT IN THIS HOUSE, I AM CERTAIN I CAN DO IT IN THE OTHER.

Remnant 7 (with the Ravendream)

[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal]

August 30

I've entered and exited the aeolotropic structure. From the outside, it appears different from every angle. I suspect if one were to somehow move it, it would change shape. It's like a lacuna . . . in the world. It is not bound by the constraints of neither space nor time. I do not know how long I was within, and am beginning to suspect that the concept doesn't even apply. Similarly, thinking about the interior in terms of shape or size seems almost childly foolish. I think I will call it the Lacuna henceforth.

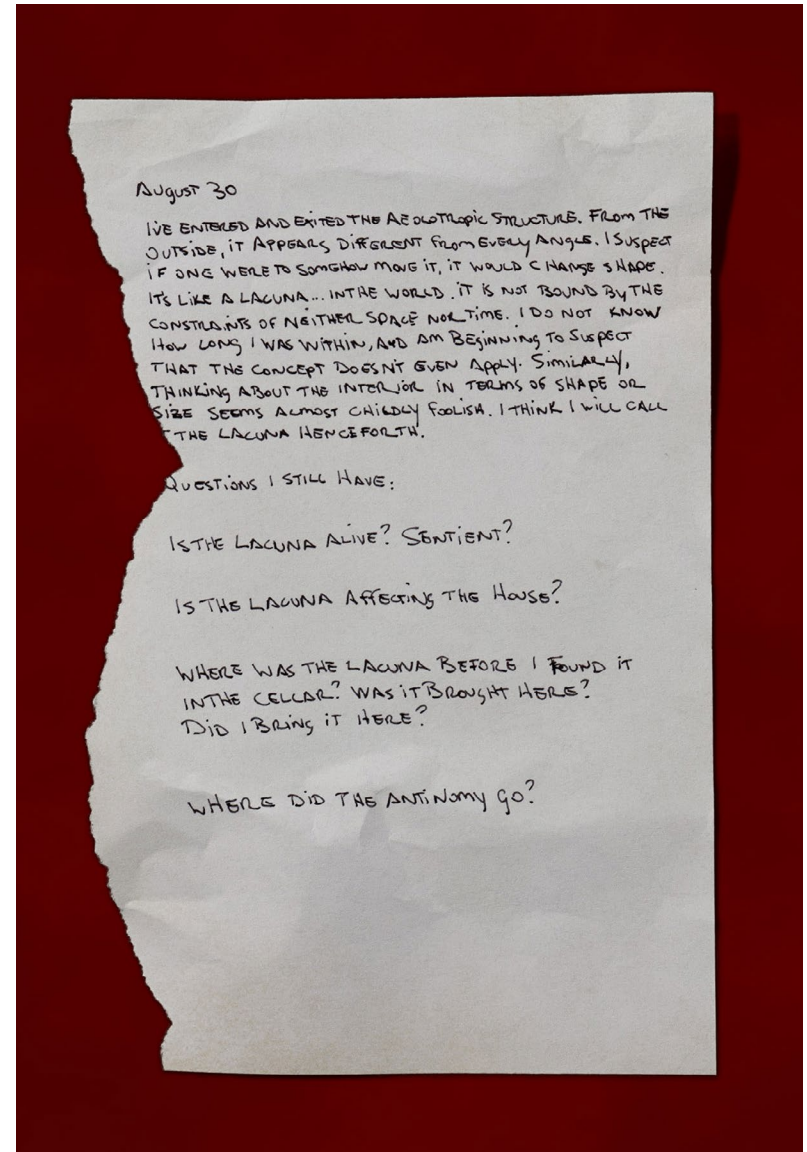
Questions I still have:

Is the Lacuna alive? Sentient?

Is the Lacuna affecting the house?

Where was the Lacuna before I found it in the cellar? Was it brought here? Did I bring it here?

Where did the Antinomy go?



Remnant 8 (in the Shoin)

[Multiple handwritten pages, appearing like they're torn from a journal]

August 13

I no longer know if I walk the halls of my home or my mind palace.

August 14

I know that voice. It's the voice of my father. Or at least, a father. Someone's father. He seems tied to a particular portion of the house.

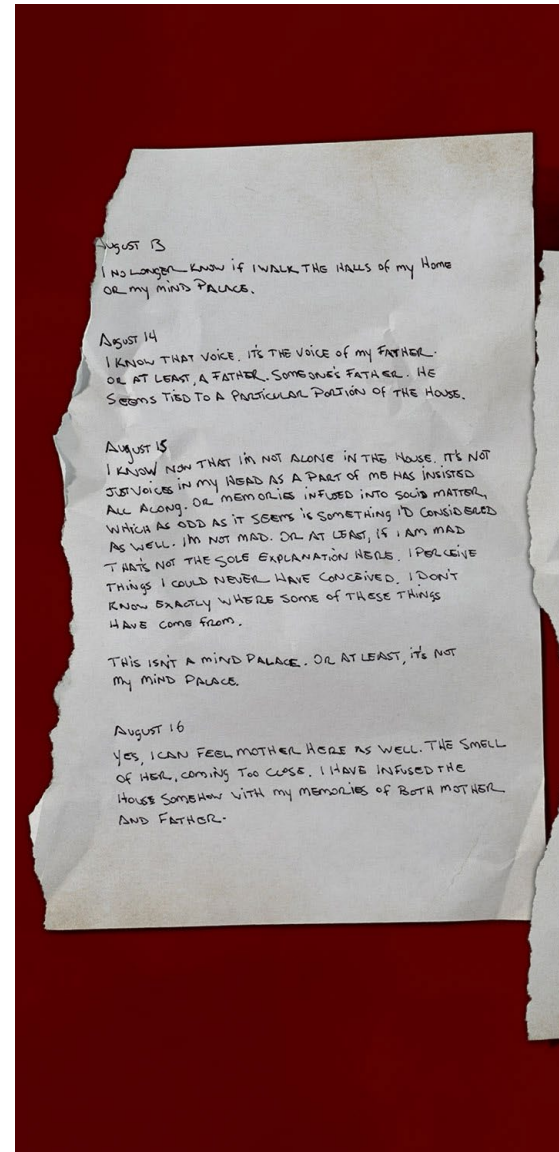
August 15

I know now that I'm not alone in the house. It's not just voices in my head as a part of me has insisted all along. Or memories infused into solid matter, which as odd as it seems is something I'd considered as well. I'm not mad. Or at least, if I am mad that's not the sole explanation here. I perceive things I could never have conceived. I don't know exactly where some of these things have come from.

This isn't a mind palace. Or at least, it's not my mind palace.

August 16

Yes, I can feel mother here as well. The smell of her, coming too close. I have infused the house somehow with my memories of both mother and father.



[Page break]

August 17

I didn't bring them here. They came looking for me. My brother and sister are here as well. And I don't mean they are here as opposed to somewhere else. I mean they are here, as in, they are this place. The whole family. And perhaps at least one other. Did I have siblings? I no longer remember. Perhaps a younger sibling. I remember being in a nursery and there being a dollhouse. I so wanted a happy family then. That seems right, or rather it feels right, but I have no idea if these are my memories. There is a portrait of a family on the wall in one of the rooms. I don't appear to be in the picture. Although there is someone in the back, on the right? I can't look at that anymore.

August 18

I managed to move the aeolotropic structure. As I guessed, it changed shape as I did so. I've put it in the basement.

August 22

Some people call a mind palace a memory palace. If that's the case, am I moving through it in the right order? I seem to think that I'm remembering things before they happened, and forgetting them after. Wasn't there something about orchids?

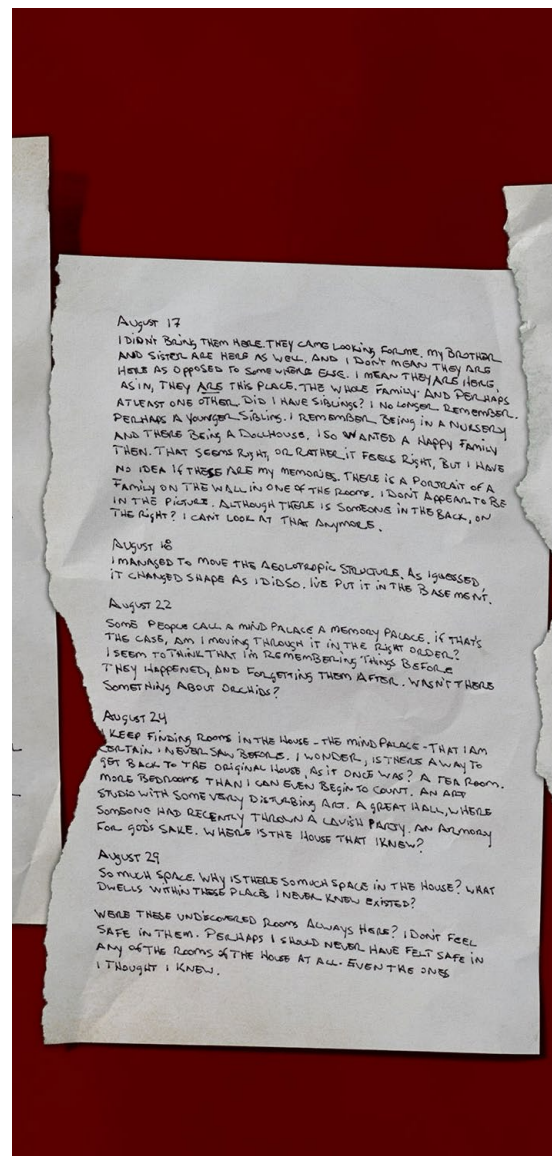
August 24

I keep finding rooms in the house—the mind palace—that I am certain I never saw before. I wonder, is there a way to get back to the original house, as it once was? A tea room. More bedrooms than I can even begin to count. An art studio with some very disturbing art. A great hall, where someone had recently thrown a lavish party. An armory for God's sake. Where is the house that I knew?

August 29

So much space. Why is there so much space in the house? What dwells within these places I never knew existed?

Were these undiscovered rooms always here? I don't feel safe in them. Perhaps I should never have felt safe in any of the rooms of the house at all. Even the ones I thought I knew.



[Page break]

September 3?

I've found a new corridor. It continues for . . . well, I have no idea. And frankly, I'm not sure it matters anymore. Distance, space, even time: they all seem like quaint, almost childish concepts now. Yellow wallpaper. Musty carpet. Endless?

Is the house creating these new locations within itself, or did they always exist? I wonder if perhaps the world I knew was the false one. But if the house is creating more and more space within it, I can't help but ask why? And how much will be enough?

What can satisfy the house?

September. Later.

The house is not a house. That is to say, beyond just the obvious. I had thought that I was responsible for its creation, or its alteration, but this is far larger than me.

September, perhaps?

Death. Life. They are like time and space. Meaningless. At least meaningless here. The barriers are all gone, if they ever truly stood at all.

I am trying to get back to the original house that I knew. I can't find it any longer. I haven't seen a familiar room or feature for days.

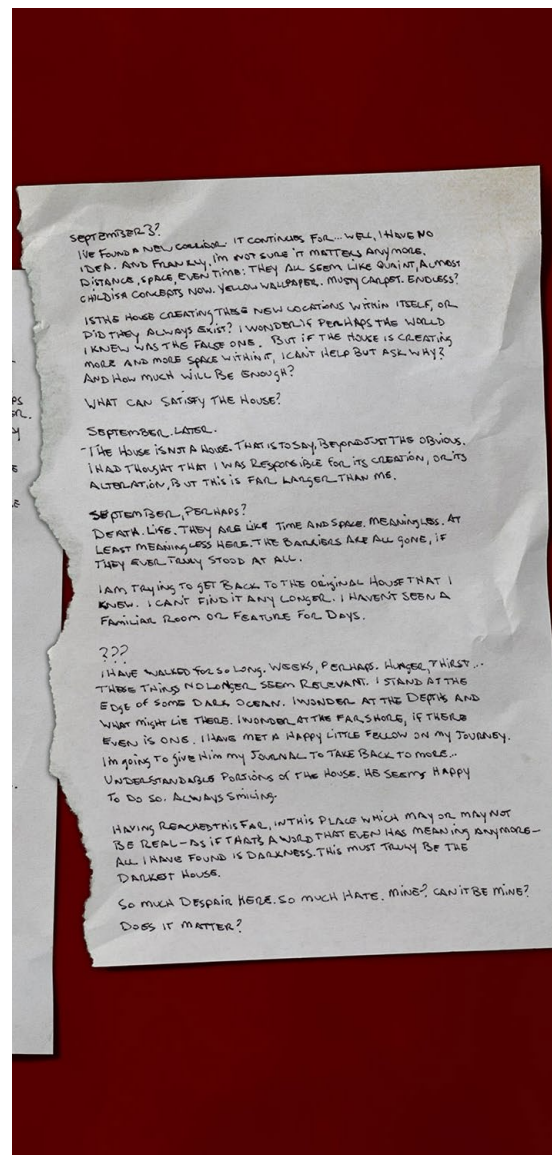
???

I have walked for so long. Weeks, perhaps. Hunger, thirst . . . these things no longer seem relevant. I stand at the edge of some dark ocean. I wonder at the depths and what might lie there. I wonder at the far shore, if there even is one. I have met a happy little fellow on my journey. I'm going to give him my journal to take back to more . . . understandable portions of the house. He seems happy to do so. Always smiling.

Having reached this far, in this place which may or may not be real—as if that's a word that even has meaning anymore—all I have found is darkness. This must truly be the darkest house.

So much despair here. So much hate. Mine? Can it be mine?

Does it matter?



Remnant 9 (in the Room With a Hidden Elevator)

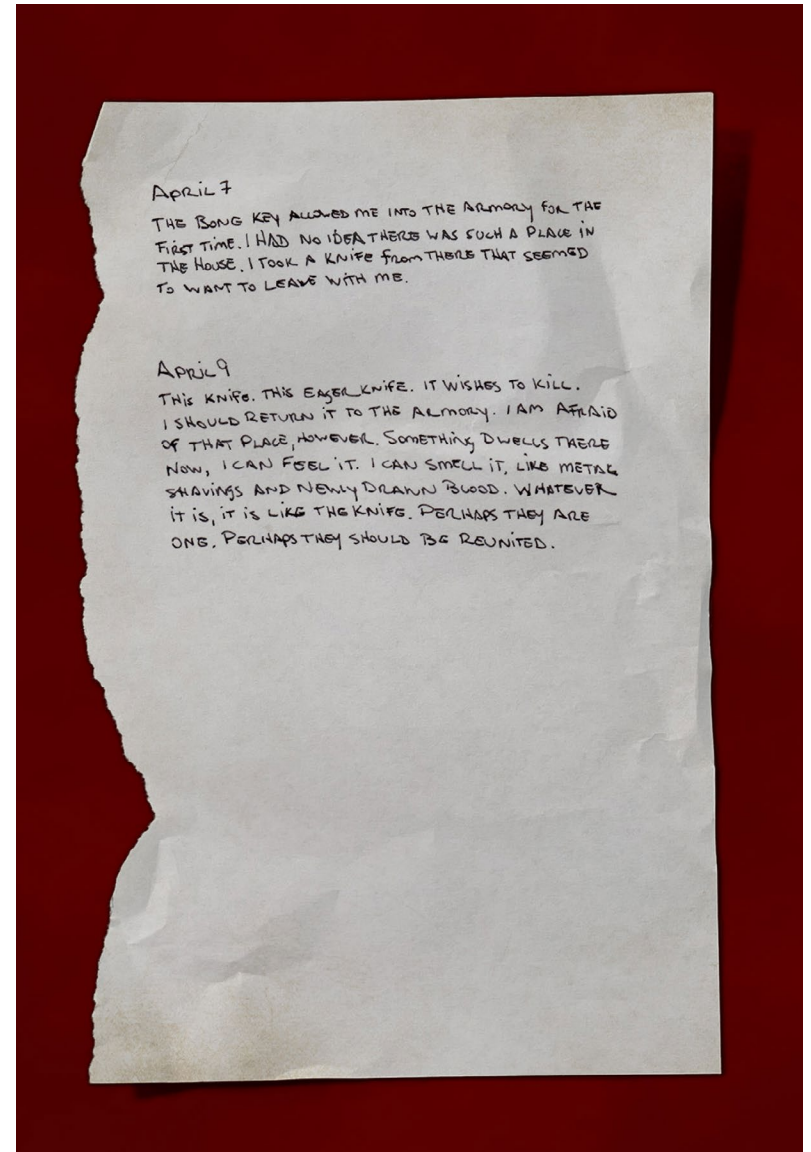
[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal]

April 7

The bone key allowed me into the Armory for the first time. I had no idea there was such a place in the house. I took a knife from there that seemed to want to leave with me.

April 9

This knife. This eager knife. It wishes to kill. I should return it to the Armory. I am afraid of that place, however. Something dwells there now, I can feel it. I can smell it, like metal shavings and newly drawn blood. Whatever it is, it is like the knife. Perhaps they are one. Perhaps they should be reunited.



Remnant 10 (in the Doll Room)

[A handwritten letter in what looks like a young girl's hand]

Dearest Pen,

Looks like we're in for another dreary summer. I've always hated all the boys who come around here after school's out. Their silly games are boring. Not like the fun we had in your house last autumn. Remember when we ~~to~~ climbed down the trellis outside your window and then out over your garden wall? I almost got us caught by your father because I couldn't stop laughing.

What I remember most, though, is when we would go up to your attic and call out the names we found in that book. They were very funny and hard to say. Especially because we were laughing so much. And then that time when you were holding the book over one of the candles and it caught fire! The funny thing is, I don't remember us lighting the candles, do you?

Anyway, I thought your father was going to be so mad. But the book wasn't even really burned or anything! We got lucky that once. Your father always scared me a little, did I ever tell you that?

I'm still so very sorry about what happened to your brother. You must miss him so much.

My family got a dog! His name is Whiskers. He is so cute, but very smelly sometimes. And I'm afraid the cats don't care for him much. Compared to them, he's quite loud. How is your cat? I know you said your parents don't like dogs, especially your father. Maybe if you ask them again, with everything that's happened. A puppy might make you very happy.

I wish you could be happy, Pen. You're my very best friend. I miss you. Please write back when you can.

Love,

Lovila

Dearest Pen,

Looks like we're in for another dreary summer. I've always hated all the boys who come around here after school's out. Their silly games are boring. Not like the fun we had in your house last autumn. Remember when we ~~to~~ climbed down the trellis outside your window and then out over your garden wall? I almost got us caught by your father because I couldn't stop laughing.

What I remember most, though, is when we would go up to your attic and call out the names we found in that book. They were funny and hard to say. Especially because we were laughing so much. And then that time when you were holding the book over one of the candles and it caught fire! The funny thing is, I don't remember us lighting the candles, do you?

Anyway, I thought your father was going to be so mad. But the book wasn't even really burned or anything! We got lucky that once. Your father always scared me a little, did I ever tell you that?

I'm still so very sorry about what happened to your brother. You must miss him so much.

My family got a dog! His name is Whiskers. He is so cute, but very smelly sometimes. And I'm afraid the cats don't care for him much. Compared to them, he's quite loud. How is your cat? I know you said your parents don't like dogs, especially your father. Maybe if you ask them again, with everything that's happened. A puppy might make you very happy.

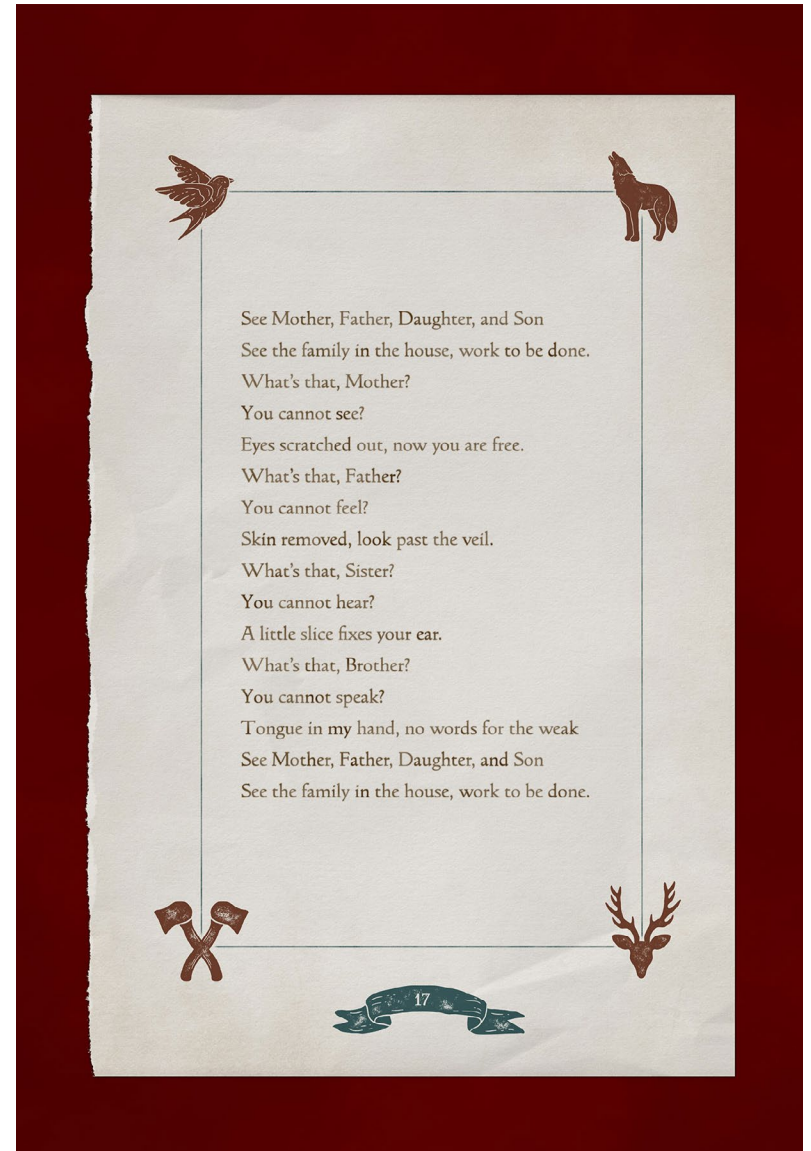
I wish you could be happy, Pen. You're my very best friend. I miss you. Please write back when you can.

Love, Lovila

Remnant 11 (in the Nursery)

[A page from a children's book, in which every page is the same.]

See Mother, Father, Daughter, and Son
See the family in the house, work to be done.
What's that, Mother?
You cannot see?
Eyes scratched out, now you are free.
What's that, Father?
You cannot feel?
Skin removed, look past the veil.
What's that, Sister?
You cannot hear?
A little slice fixes your ear.
What's that, Brother?
You cannot speak?
Tongue in my hand, no words for the weak
See Mother, Father, Daughter, and Son
See the family in the house, work to be done.

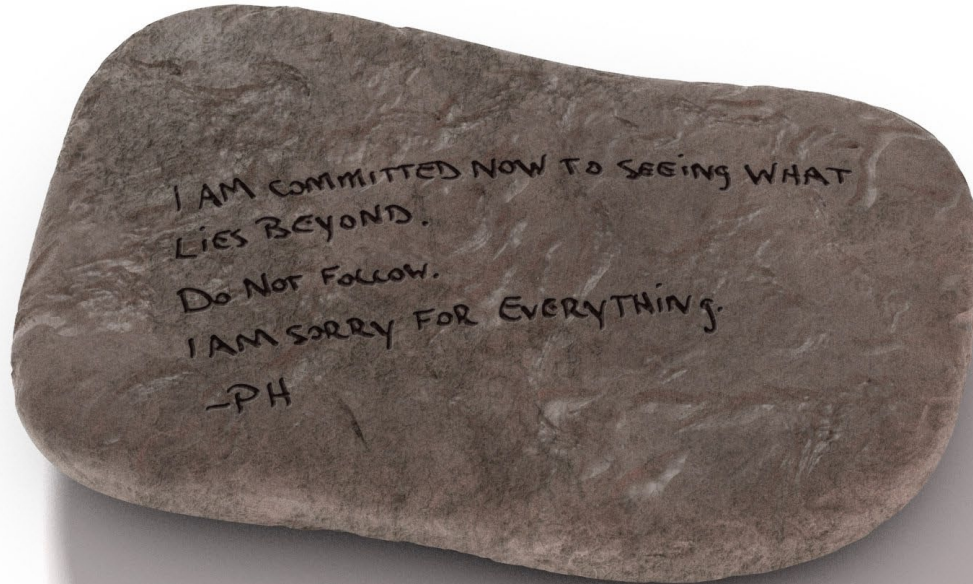


Remnant 12 (in the Backrooms)

[An inscription upon a stone in the same handwriting as the majority of the journal entries found in the house]

I am committed now to seeing what lies beyond.
Do not follow.
I am sorry for everything.

—PH



Remnant 13 (in the Parlor)

[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal]

July 30

With the Antinomy's help and the power of the Lacuna, and performed a conjuring I could never have managed on my own. The thing was . . . awful. I don't know how to send it back. I enchanted some flames to keep it in place. Perhaps I should post some kind of guard. Or perhaps I could build something. The Antinomy tells me that there are 8 mystic tools that can work wonders, somewhere in the house.

The tools sound familiar, but why?

July 31

The Antinomy says that it's possible to enter the Lacuna, but I'm afraid. I think it is not only an empty spot in space, but also time.

August 1

Have I already written this? I found a page, and it appeared torn from my journal, and the writing was in my hand, but I couldn't have written it. And it was dated later this month, relating things I hadn't yet done. I strongly suspect that there's something about the aeolotropic structure that unhinges us from time. And the journal entry that I saw said that I entered it. I wonder why the page was torn out.

And now, of course, I've misplaced the journal page. I don't know if it's just the forgetfulness that I've been experiencing, or if it faded away like some kind of ghost.

I know that wayward or lost spirits exist as ghosts. Goddamn, but I know a thing or two about that. Perhaps things can have ghosts as well. Could a book? I'm not sure you could read the ghost of a book. If I had the ghost book, I would take it to my private study. I'd have a way to read it there.

August 2

The Mother of . . . something. Inexplicable Things? Senseless Things. One of those. I remember my dear sister whispering about this person. Being. Whatever. Whispering in some secret chapel. Is this Mother related to our mother?

Did I even have a sister? That suddenly doesn't seem quite right.

JULY 30

WITH THE ANTINOMY'S HELP AND THE POWER OF THE LACUNA, AND PERFORMED A CONJURING I COULD NEVER HAVE MANAGED ON MY OWN. THE THING WAS... AWFUL. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO SEND IT BACK. I ENCHANTED SOME FLAMES TO KEEP IT IN PLACE. PERHAPS I SHOULD POST SOME KIND OF GUARD. OR PERHAPS I COULD BUILD SOMETHING. THE ANTINOMY TELLS ME THAT THERE ARE 8 MYSTIC TOOLS THAT CAN WORK WONDERS, SOMEWHERE IN THE HOUSE.

THE TOOLS SOUND FAMILIAR, BUT WHY?

JULY 31

THE ANTINOMY SAYS THAT IT'S POSSIBLE TO ENTER THE LACUNA, BUT I'M AFRAID. I THINK IT IS NOT ONLY AN EMPTY SPOT IN SPACE, BUT ALSO TIME.

AUGUST 1

HAVE I ALREADY WRITTEN THIS? I FOUND A PAGE, AND IT APPEARED TORN FROM MY JOURNAL, AND THE WRITING WAS IN MY HAND, BUT I COULDN'T HAVE WRITTEN IT. AND IT WAS DATED LATER THIS MONTH, RELATING THINGS I HADN'T YET DONE. I STRONGLY SUSPECT THAT THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THE AEOLOTROPIC STRUCTURE THAT UNHINGES US FROM TIME. AND THE JOURNAL ENTRY THAT I SAW SAID THAT I ENTERED IT. I WONDER WHY THAT PAGE WAS TORN OUT.

AND NOW, OF COURSE, I'VE MISPLACED THE JOURNAL PAGE. I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S JUST THE FORGETFULNESS THAT I'VE BEEN EXPERIENCING, OR IF IT FADED AWAY LIKE SOME KIND OF GHOST.

I KNOW THAT WAYWARD OR LOST SPIRITS EXIST AS GHOSTS. GODDAMN, BUT I KNOW A THING OR TWO ABOUT THAT. PERHAPS THINGS CAN HAVE GHOSTS AS WELL. COULD A BOOK? I'M NOT SURE YOU COULD READ THE GHOST OF A BOOK. IF I HAD THE GHOST BOOK, I WOULD TAKE IT TO MY PRIVATE STUDY. I'D HAVE A WAY TO READ IT THERE.

AUGUST 2

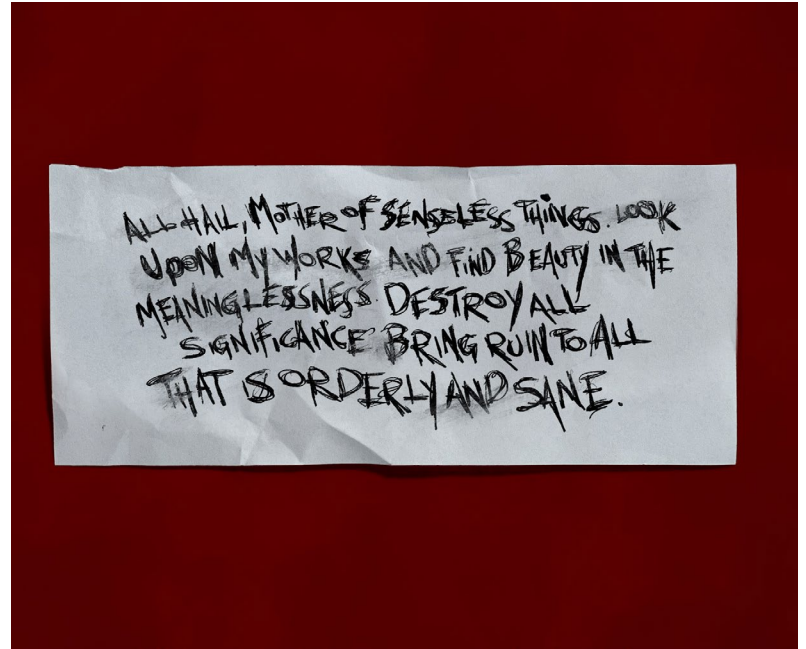
THE MOTHER OF... SOMETHING. INEXPLICABLE THINGS? SENSELESS THINGS. ONE OF THOSE. I REMEMBERED MY DEAR SISTER WHISPERING ABOUT THIS PERSON. BEING. WHATEVER... WHISPERING IN SOME SECRET CHAPEL. IS THIS MOTHER RELATED TO OUR MOTHER?

DID I EVEN HAVE A SISTER? THAT SUDDENLY DOESN'T SEEM QUITE RIGHT.

Remnant 14 (in the Secret Chapel)

[A handwritten note in a messy, feverish hand we haven't seen before, on a tiny, rolled up piece of paper]

All hail, Mother of Senseless Things. Look upon my works and find beauty in the meaninglessness. Destroy all significance. Bring ruin to all that is orderly and sane.



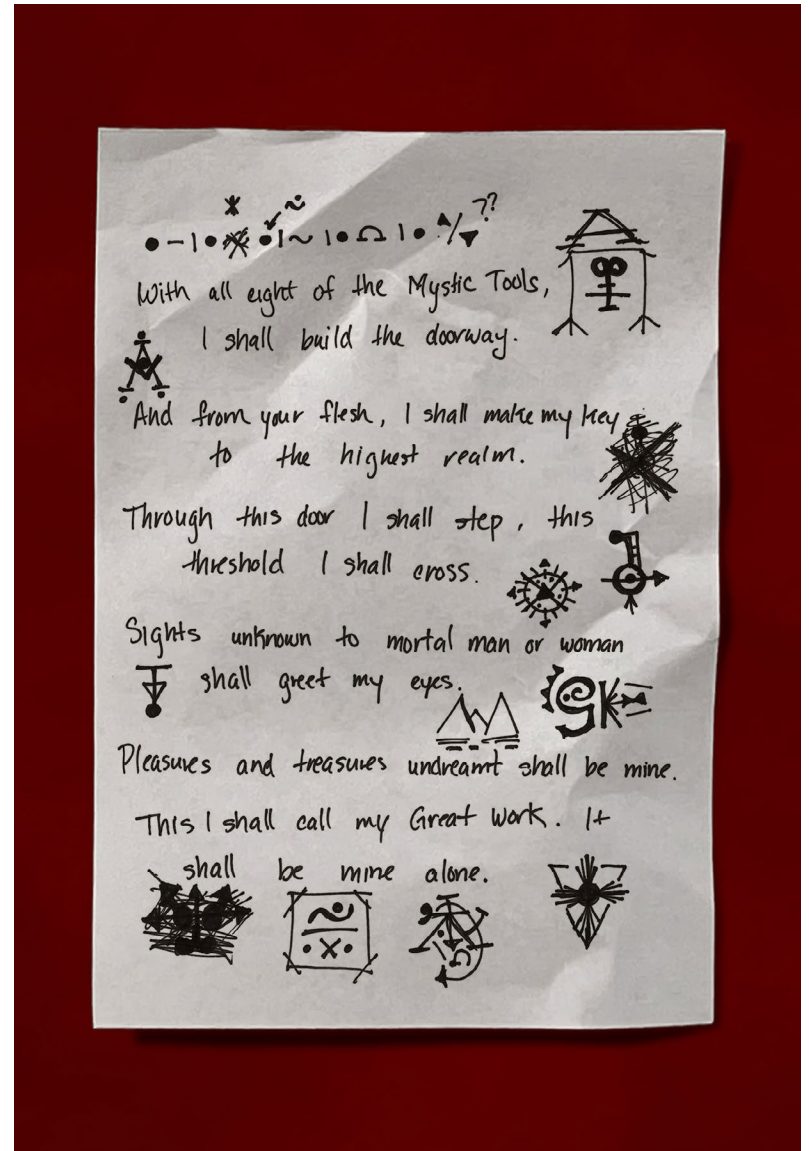
[A handwritten note, with some accompanying sketched symbols. Different handwriting than the other journal entries]

And from your flesh, I shall make my key to the highest realm.

Sights unknown to mortal man or woman shall greet my eyes.

Pleasures and treasures undreamt shall be mine.

This I shall call my Great Work. It shall be mine alone.



Remnant 16 (in the Long Corridor)

[A handwritten letter in a flowing, perfect script]

Dear Phillip,

I'm not going to beat around the bush. I am ending our relationship.

I know this can't come as a surprise to you. We haven't even seen each other in weeks. It has become clear that you won't ever exit from of that damned house, and after what happened the last time, I shall not ever go back in.

I was happy once. We were happy once. But then you started lying. Or maybe you started telling me the truth, and you'd been lying before. Your messages referred more than once to completing your "father's Great Work." But you had told me that your father passed when you were very young and that you had no memory of him. All this talk of mystic tools and things you were building in the house. Phillip, I know you far too well to start believing you're suddenly handy in that way. You wouldn't know a wrench from a saw unless maybe they were diagrams in one of your books.

And then the last time, when I visited and tried to build some kind of a bridge to you, the things you said. I couldn't even get a word in as you raved about some new section of the house you'd found by going up the elevator. I knew damn well your house didn't have an elevator, Phillip. I'd been in it a hundred times. Why would I believe such a story? Who finds a whole section of their own house that they'd never seen before? That sounds more like something you'd experience in a dream. Not in reality.

But then when I went into your pantry to fetch some tea to help calm you down, well, Phillip, I thought you were alone in that strange old house. I'd been feeling so sorry for you, shut in and lonely, but you weren't alone at all. I saw that man. I don't know what he was doing there, or why you were hiding him in that storage room, but I'll never forget the way he grinned at me. I still see him when I close my eyes. And even after I ran screaming, you still denied it. You maintained that you were alone. That no one else was in the house. You lied to me, right to my face.

Don't try to reach me. I don't know if you even would, but Mother and I are going away for a while. She thinks it would be best for me, and I can hardly argue. I don't want to be reminded of you, or of us. Or at least who we used to be, together. You broke my heart, Phillip. Do you even care? Somehow I doubt it.

I don't wish you ill. I just don't want to see you again. Not ever again. I also wish you would get some kind of help. Help I simply cannot provide. Consorting with vile people. Engaging in who knows what at all hours of the night. Spending hours buried in your weird books. Living in filth (I saw all the bugs). Who or what have you become?

Perhaps you need to ask yourself that question. Will you like the answer? I doubt it.

Marjorie

Dear Phillip,
I'm not going to beat around the bush. I am ending our relationship.
I know this can't come as a surprise to you. We haven't even seen each other in weeks. It has become clear that you won't ever exit from of that damned house, and after what happened the last time, I shall not ever go back in.
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Marjorie

Remnant 17 (in the Backrooms)

[An undated, handwritten journal page, in some different handwriting]

We entered this house (?) days ago. Maybe weeks.

I really don't know how the passage of time works here. We have no way of knowing whether or not it's night or day. And sometimes, what seems like a day goes by . . . too fast? And other times very slowly. Does time speed up or slow down here, or is it just our perception of it? Or perhaps there's no difference between time and our perception of time. Maybe time is only our perception, and nothing more. If that's really true, then I wish I could speed it up to the point when we find our way out of here.

Some of us grow despondent. We don't know how to get out of this place. We've heard tell of a Doorman that provides a way out. And some "mystic tools" as well, but how it all works, we don't know.

We've also heard the name Phillip Harlock a few times, and found some journal pages that I now assume are his. Were his. For someone who supposedly owned the house, he didn't seem to know much about it. It makes me think that the house changed. Perhaps Phillip and the house changed together. Did he go mad? Did the house? That's my theory.

~~Nights~~ The times we stop to sleep, I don't know if they're nights, are the worst. The nightmares are terrible. But last "night" I thought I could hear the ocean. It didn't give me comfort. It sounded cold.

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I really don't know how the passage of time works here. We have no way of knowing whether or not it's night or day. And sometimes, what seems like a day goes by... too fast? And other times very slowly. Does time speed up or slow down here, or is it just our perception of it? Or perhaps there's no difference between time and our perception of time. Maybe time is only our perception, and nothing more. If that's really true, then I wish I could speed it up to the point when we find our way out of here.

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~~Nights~~ The times we stop to sleep, I don't know if they're nights, are the worst. The nightmares are terrible. But last "night" I thought I could hear the ocean. It didn't give me comfort. It sounded cold.

Remnant 18 (in the Music Room)

[On a sheet of music (Marchenbilder, Op.113 - Viola and Piano Score, Viola and Violin Parts), handwriting matching that of the majority of the journal entries]

Oh dearest sister, your love of all things secret and forbidden will be the end of you someday. Some things are unknown because they should stay unknown. What darkness do you get up to in that hidden chapel deep within the house, I wonder?

ON DEAREST SISTER, YOUR LOVE OF
ALL THINGS SECRET AND FORBIDDEN
WILL BE THE END OF YOU SOMEDAY.
SOME THINGS ARE UNKNOWN BECAUSE
THEY SHOULD STAY UNKNOWN. WHAT
DARKNESS DO YOU GET UP TO IN THAT
HIDDEN CHAPEL DEEP WITHIN THE
HOUSE, I WONDER?

Märchenbilder.

Pianoforte.

1.

Nicht schnell.

R. Schumann, Op. 113, Heft 1.

Viola

Pianoforte.

p

sp

Carlo Barato

Remnant 19 (in the Dining Room)

[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal]

May 1

There are new rooms in the house I haven't seen before. And perhaps some that I've lost, but I can't remember them. It's as though as the house changes, so too does my mind. Maybe this has been happening for a while now, and I've just forgotten.

At this point, it's far beyond me wondering if the house is haunted. But I do wonder if the new rooms already existed somewhere else before, and if the house chose them because they already had their own hauntings. Because who are were these people?

May 3

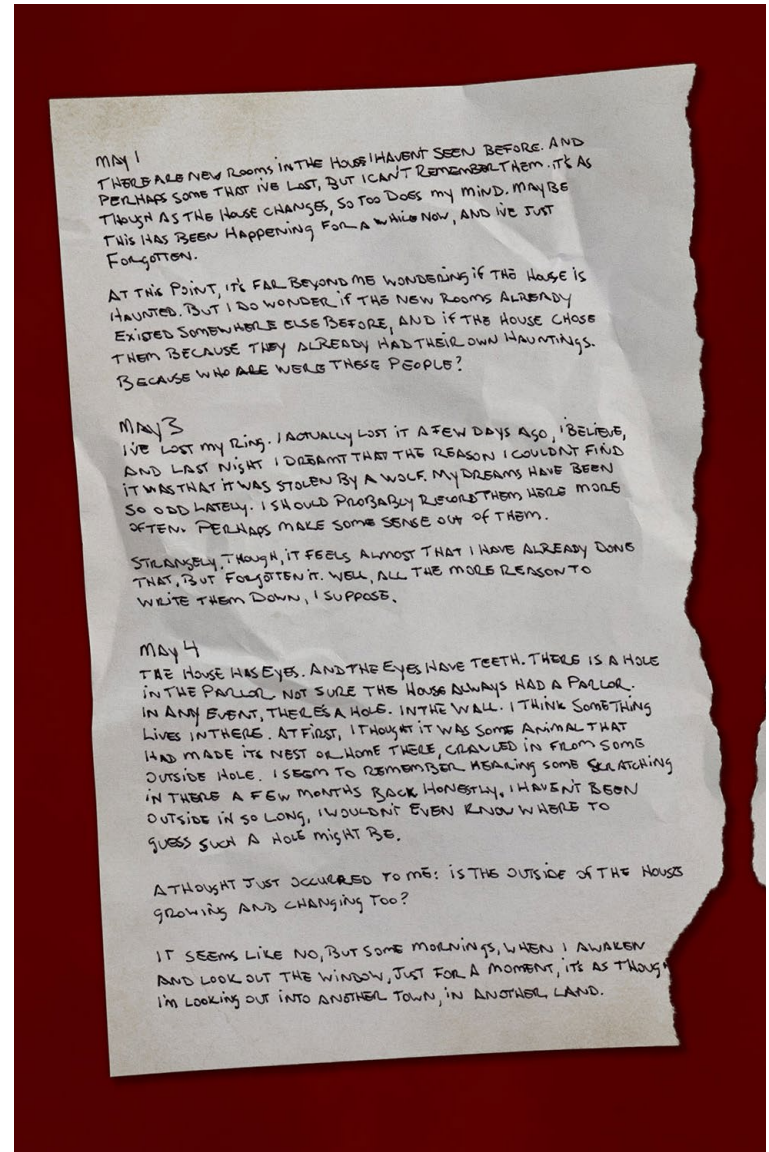
I've lost my ring. I actually lost it a few days ago, I believe, and last night I dreamt that the reason I couldn't find it was that it was stolen by a wolf. My dreams have been so odd lately. I should probably record them here more often. Perhaps make some sense out of them.

Strangely, though, it feels almost that I have already done that, but forgotten it. Well, all the more reason to write them down, I suppose.

May 4

The house has eyes. And the eyes have teeth. There is a hole in the parlor. Not sure the house always had a parlor. In any event, there's a hole. In the wall. I think something lives in there. At first, I thought it was some animal that had made its nest or home there, crawled in from some outside hole. I seem to remember hearing some scratching in there a few months back. Honestly, I haven't been outside in so long, I wouldn't even know where to guess such a hole might be.

A thought just occurred to me: is the outside of the house growing and changing too? It seems like no, but some mornings, when I awaken and look out the window, just for a moment, it's as though I'm looking out into another town, in another land.



In any event. The hole. I suppose I am stalling. I don't really wish to write about it. There's something disturbing in the hole. And it watches me. But more than that. I could hear a gnashing of teeth. Grinding.

May 5

I went back to examine the hole in the parlor again. There was, without question, something or someone watching me from that blackness. It wants something of me. I can't say that I'll be going back in there again. That would have been an impossible claim before, but now, with new chambers and passages in the house, I don't think it will be hard to avoid a single specific room.

IN ANY EVENT. THE HOLE. I SUPPOSE I'M STALLING. I DON'T REALLY
WISH TO WRITE ABOUT IT. THERE'S SOMETHING DISTURBING IN
THE HOLE. AND IT WATCHES ME. BUT MORE THAN THAT.
I COULD HEAR A GNASHING OF TEETH. GRINDING.

MAY 5

I WENT BACK TO EXAMINE THE HOLE IN THE PARLOR AGAIN.
THERE WAS, WITHOUT QUESTION, SOMETHING OR SOMEONE
WATCHING ME FROM THAT BLACKNESS. IT WANTS SOMETHING
OF ME. I CAN'T SAY THAT I'LL BE GOING BACK IN THERE AGAIN.
THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN AN IMPOSSIBLE CLAIM BEFORE, BUT
NOW, WITH NEW CHAMBERS AND PASSAGES IN THE HOUSE,
I DON'T THINK IT WILL BE HARD TO AVOID A SINGLE
SPECIFIC ROOM.

Remnant 20 (in the Dripping Room)

[An oil-stained page that appears to be torn from a journal]

May 28

Today for the first time I became well and truly lost in my own home. I wandered into a large chamber, as cold as the hand of a dead lover. Dimly lit, I couldn't see the other side. I walked and walked and found no far wall. The chilling thought that there was no far wall was more than I can bear. Then I remembered the funny old mantelpiece clock in the living room. The one with the two faces that tell different times. I wandered in this dark room until I could hear its absurdly loud ticking. Following that sound, I found my way back to a room I knew. I remember my parents telling me about it, and how they bought it in a second-hand store as a joke because they could never agree on the time, and it could have the time for both of them. Comforted by it, I swore then and there that if I ever lost my way again, the thought of that fine pewter piece would see me home again. It's as tied to this old house as I am.

June 3

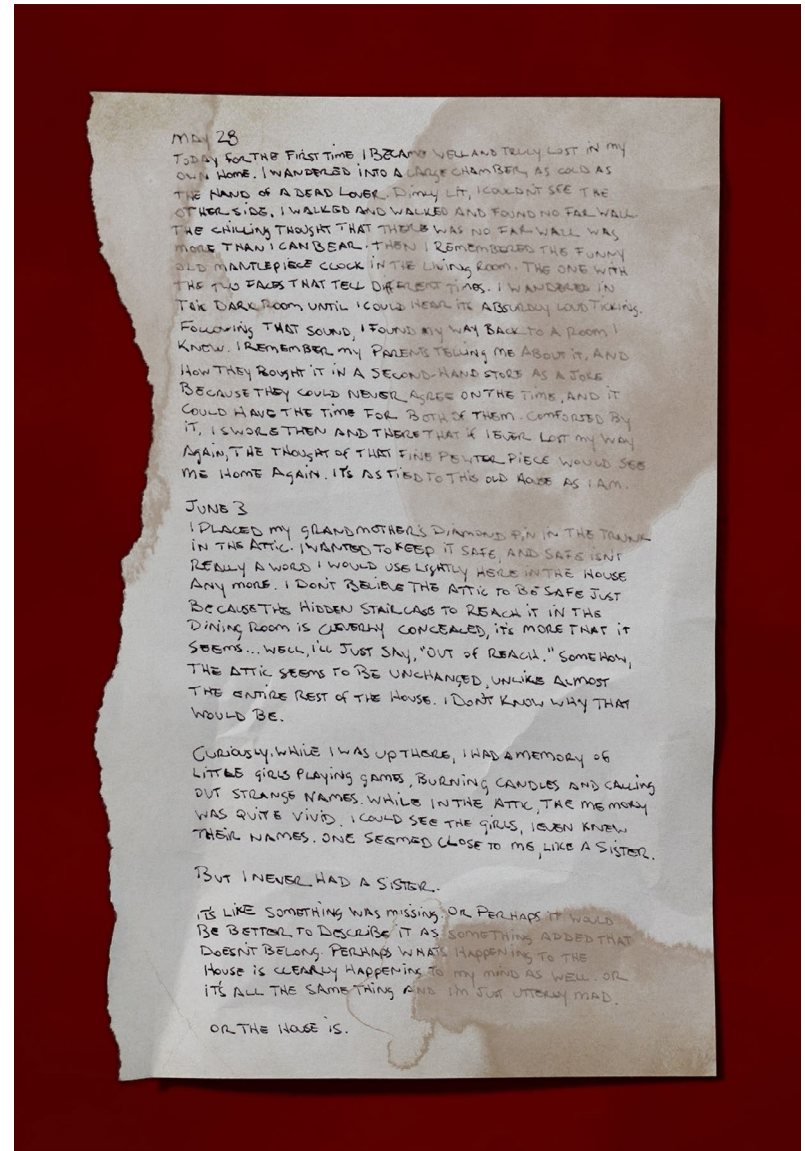
I placed my grandmother's diamond pin in the trunk in the attic. I wanted to keep it safe, and safe isn't really a word I would use lightly here in the house anymore. I don't believe the attic to be safe just because the hidden staircase to reach it in the dining room is cleverly concealed, it's more that it seems . . . well, I'll just say, "out of reach." Somehow, the attic seems to be unchanged, unlike almost the entire rest of the house. I don't know why that would be.

Curiously, while I was up there, I had a memory of little girls playing games, burning candles and calling out strange names. While in the attic, the memory was quite vivid. I could see the girls, I even knew their names. One seemed close to me, like a sister.

But I never had a sister.

It's like something was missing. Or perhaps it would be better to describe it as something added that doesn't belong. Perhaps what's happening to the house is clearly happening to my mind as well. Or it's all the same thing and I'm just utterly mad.

Or the house is.



Remnant 21 (in the Attic)

[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal]

June 19

Thinking of the strange memories I had of the attic, I found a book with similarly attached unfamiliar memories. A book of some importance to my father, I think. It seems very familiar in that way, even though there's a distinct part of my mind that says I'd never laid eyes upon it before.

I couldn't read it, for some reason. The letters swam before my eyes. I considered that it was simply eyestrain, so I went into the library and pulled a few other books off the shelf. Vilhouse's excellent Eyes on the Skies.² Read it just fine. Same with Arul's Spirit Guide and The Tooth and the Claw. But this book—perhaps my father's book?—unreadable. So it wasn't my eyes, it was the book.

Of course, my father frequently kept journals of his own, which I've never found, even after his passing. I presume that in them he took notes on his so-called Great Work. But he never shared them with me. After a while, I just assumed that he burned all those journals. Could this be his? I honestly can't even see it clearly enough to determine if it's handwritten or not, let alone in his hand. (Would I even recognize it anymore if I did see it?)

That doesn't seem quite right though. I have an old magnifying glass in my study that had been his. I wonder if that would help bring this into focus? Perhaps I'll try that.

JUNE 19
THINKING OF THE STRANGE MEMORIES I HAD OF THE ATTIC, I FOUND A BOOK WITH SIMILARLY ATTACHED UNFAMILIAR MEMORIES. A BOOK OF SOME IMPORTANCE TO MY FATHER, I THINK. IT SEEMS VERY FAMILIAR IN THAT WAY, EVEN THOUGH THERE'S A DISTINCT PART OF MY MIND THAT SAYS I'D NEVER LAID EYES UPON IT BEFORE.

I COULDN'T READ IT FOR SOME REASON. THE LETTERS SWAM BEFORE MY EYES. I CONSIDERED THAT IT WAS SIMPLY EYESTRAIN, SO I WENT INTO THE LIBRARY AND PULLED A FEW OTHER BOOKS OFF THE SHELF. VILHOUSE'S EXCELLENT EYES ON THE SKIES.² READ IT JUST FINE. SAME WITH ARUL'S SPIRIT GUIDE AND THE TOOTH AND THE CLAW. BUT THE BOOK—PERHAPS MY FATHER'S BOOK?—UNREADABLE. SO IT WASN'T MY EYES, IT WAS THE BOOK.

OF COURSE, MY FATHER FREQUENTLY KEPT JOURNALS OF HIS OWN, WHICH I'VE NEVER FOUND, EVEN AFTER HIS PASSING. I PRESUME THAT IN THEM HE TOOK NOTES ON HIS SO-CALLED GREAT WORK. BUT HE NEVER SHARED THEM WITH ME. AFTER A WHILE, I JUST ASSUMED THAT HE BURNED ALL THOSE JOURNALS. COULD THIS BE HIS? I HONESTLY CAN'T EVEN SEE IT CLEARLY ENOUGH TO DETERMINE IF IT'S HANDWRITTEN OR NOT, LET ALONE IN HIS HAND. (WOULD I EVEN RECOGNIZE IT ANYMORE IF I DID SEE IT?)

THAT DOESN'T SEEM QUITE RIGHT THOUGH. I HAVE AN OLD MAGNIFYING GLASS IN MY STUDY THAT HAD BEEN HIS. I WONDER IF THAT WOULD HELP BRING THIS INTO FOCUS. PERHAPS I'LL TRY THAT.

June 20

I was putting away some old junk in the basement when I found . . . something. An odd sort of freestanding structure with a metallic tripod stand. It seems multifaceted, but strange as it sounds, I couldn't tell you its shape. It brought to mind geometries that would have driven poor Euclid quite mad. That fiction writer with the odd ideas and the preoccupation with sea life mentioned the concept once or twice. Perhaps I should research such things to see if they are real.

June 21

I met someone today in the house. He looked, well, very much like me. Like an old uncle that I had never met, although he assured me that was not the case. He called himself the Antinomy, which I found strange. It's a relatively obscure word for incompatible contradictions and paradoxes. While he was reticent to talk about himself or his past—or perhaps of just as much importance, what he was doing in my house—he seemed quite willing to discuss the house. Unfortunately, very little of what he told me made any sense at all. He spoke of backrooms that seeped down into something or other. Of people that never lived in this house as far as I know. And a thing he called the aeolotropic structure, which I eventually determined was a reference to the thing in the basement. It seemed a fitting enough name, I suppose, as it does seem to have qualities that seem to change depending on how it might be measured. I think I will find a better name for it, though, once I know more about it.

JUNE 20

I WAS PUTTING AWAY SOME OLD JUNK IN THE BASEMENT WHEN I FOUND... SOMETHING. AN ODD SORT OF FREESTANDING STRUCTURE WITH A METALLIC TRIPOD STAND. IT SEEMS MULTI FACETED, BUT STRANGE AS IT SOUNDS, I COULDN'T TELL YOU ITS SHAPE. IT BROUGHT TO MIND GEOMETRIES THAT WOULD HAVE DRIVEN POOR EUCLID QUITE MAD. THAT FICTION WRITER WITH THE ODD IDEAS AND THE PREOCCUPATION WITH SEA LIFE MENTIONED THE CONCEPT ONCE OR TWICE. PERHAPS I SHOULD RESEARCH SUCH THINGS TO SEE IF THEY ARE REAL.

JUNE 21

I MET SOMEONE TODAY IN THE HOUSE. HE LOOKED, WELL, VERY MUCH LIKE ME. LIKE AN OLD UNCLE THAT I HAD NEVER MET, ALTHOUGH HE ASSURED ME THAT WAS NOT THE CASE. HE CALLED HIMSELF THE ANTINOMY, WHICH I FOUND STRANGE. IT'S A RELATIVELY OBSCURE WORD FOR INCOMPATIBLE CONTRADICTIONS AND PARADOXES. WHILE HE WAS RETICENT TO TALK ABOUT HIMSELF OR HIS PAST - OR PERHAPS OF JUST AS MUCH IMPORTANCE, WHAT HE WAS DOING IN MY HOUSE - HE SEEMED QUITE WILLING TO DISCUSS THE HOUSE. UNFORTUNATELY, VERY LITTLE OF WHAT HE TOLD ME MADE ANY SENSE AT ALL. HE SPOKE OF BACKROOMS THAT SEEPED DOWN INTO SOMETHING OR OTHER. OF PEOPLE THAT NEVER LIVED IN THIS HOUSE AS FAR AS I KNOW. AND A THING HE CALLED THE AEOLOTROPIC STRUCTURE, WHICH I EVENTUALLY DETERMINED WAS A REFERENCE TO THE THING IN THE BASEMENT. IT SEEMED A FITTING ENOUGH NAME. I SUPPOSE, AS IT DOES SEEM TO HAVE QUALITIES THAT SEEM TO CHANGE DEPENDING ON HOW IT MIGHT BE MEASURED. I THINK I WILL FIND A BETTER NAME FOR IT, THOUGH, ONCE I KNOW MORE ABOUT IT.

Remnant 22 (in the Master Bedroom)

[A handwritten letter, in a hand we have not yet seen]

Object of My Heart's Empty Grasp,

I should not write this. I should let you be, so you can live your life free from me and the worry and stress I likely cause. But I just cannot. I need to have some kind of connection to you, even if it is just through the mail.

I know that I am not supposed to love you. I am committed to another, and so are you. You have your life, and I mine, and they could not be farther apart, in every sense of the phrase. And yet, I feel such a longing to talk to you, and share some part of my life with you. It's wrong, I know. So wrong.

Love is meant to be blissful and joyous. To me, it is neither. To me, love is pain and denial. Love spurs me toward wrongness—deceit, betrayal, and more. And it wants me to pull you into my schemes as well.

To the poets who speak of the goodness inherent in love, I scoff. I spit. Love ushers me only into dark corners where I dream of all the things I should not do.

I should not have written this. But I was compelled as surely as if there was a blade at my throat. Love's eager blade.

Your Forbidden But Ever True Love

Object of My Heart's Empty Grasp,

I should not write this, I should let you be, so you can live your life free from me and the worry and stress I likely cause. But I just cannot. I need to have some kind of connection to you, even if it is just through the mail.

I know that I am not supposed to love you. I am committed to another, and so are you. You have your life, and I mine, and they could not be farther apart, in every sense of the phrase. And yet, I feel such a longing to talk to you, and share some part of my life with you. It's wrong, I know. So wrong.

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Remnant 23 (in the Meditation Chamber)

[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal]

December 3

Feeling good, despite the cold. Finished my re-read of Eyes of the Child. Always reminds me of a painting I saw once in a gallery somewhere back in the city where I used to live.

December 4

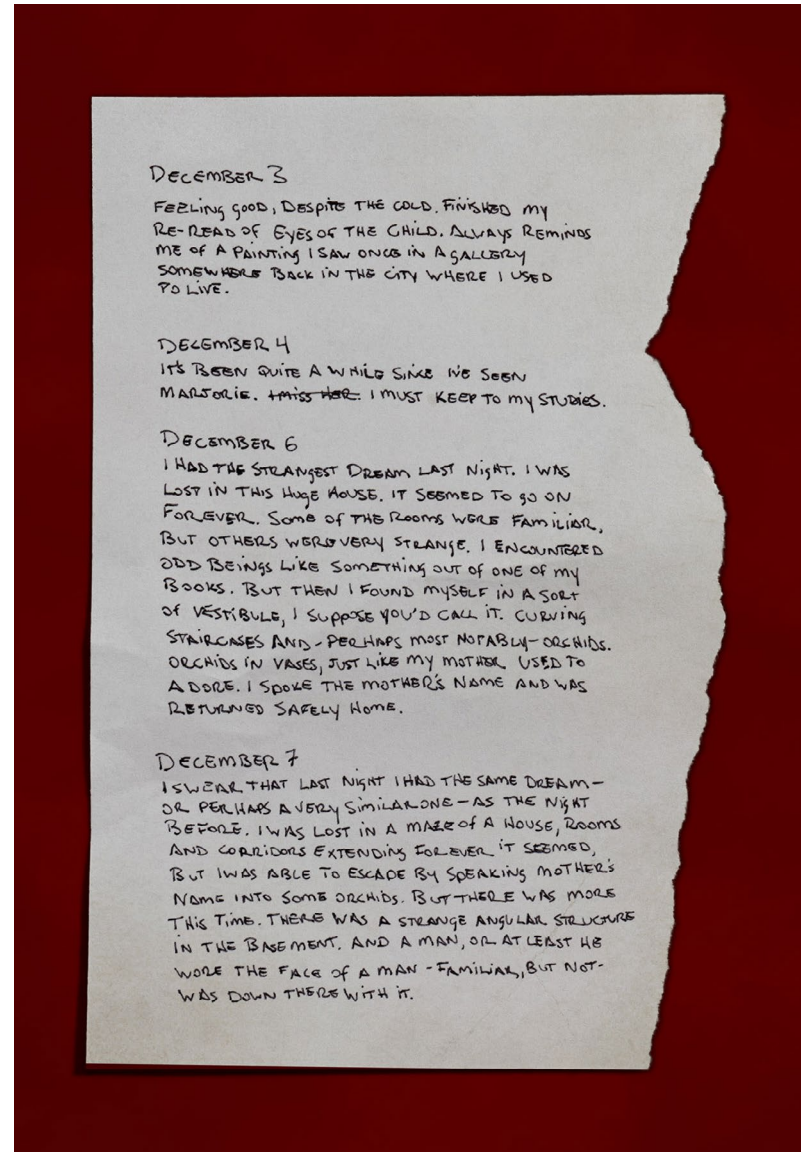
It's been quite a while since I've seen Marjorie. ~~I miss her.~~ I must keep to my studies.

December 6

I had the strangest dream last night. I was lost in this huge house. It seemed to go on forever. Some of the rooms were familiar, but others were very strange. I encountered odd beings like something out of one of my books. But then I found myself in a sort of vestibule, I suppose you'd call it. Curving staircases and—perhaps most notably—orchids. Orchids in vases, just like my mother used to adore. I spoke the mother's name and was returned safely home.

December 7

I swear that last night I had the same dream—or perhaps a very similar one—as the night before. I was lost in a maze of a house, rooms and corridors extending forever it seemed, but I was able to escape by speaking mother's name into some orchids. But there was more this time. There was a strange angular structure in the basement. And a man, or at least he wore the face of a man—familiar, but not—was down there with it.



Remnant 24 (in the Private Study)

[A handwritten page, almost like a note or letter, in the same hand as most of the journal pages]

The King of Anger. The Curator. The Lost One. The Monarch of Pain. So many entities. So many realms beyond our own, filled with impossible beings utterly unlike us. But aware of us—more than we are of them. Just at the edge of the fire's light. Watching us. Each seemingly taking on some role, but I think there's much more to them than that. The role is just something it's just what we can understand of them. The stag in the woods only knows of us what it can see and understand—hunters and loggers amid the trees. Houses in the distance, away from the forest. To the stag, that's all we are. It's how we fit into their life. There's so much about us that the stag could never begin to comprehend, and frankly, so little about us that it would even be interested in.

[There is a large section blacked out here, unreadable.]

How did they all get here? I suppose that's not really the question. The question is why? Why this house? It's tempting to think of a parasitic relationship, but who's truly the parasite here?

It's tempting to think that the house is about hate. The house hates me. It hates you, if you're reading this. But the house is actually about love. Twisted, perverted love. Love corrupted into something terrible: jealousy, loneliness, selfishness, possessiveness, bitterness, longing. Love as understood by the unloved.

There are five sections to the house. That much is clear. And each seems to express itself as a ~~family member~~ as someone who loves you. Mother, father, sister, brother. Lover. Different kinds of love. But in this case, the manifestations are twisted versions of that love, and those roles.

Of the five, the Lover seems most hidden and hardest to reach. But through that part of the house, one can reach the Lacuna and its capture of the original house in space and time. Like how a photo would capture a scene and hold it in an unchanging stasis, forever. It is truly the last piece of the puzzle. In more ways than one.

THE KING OF ANGER. THE CURATOR. THE LOST ONE. THE MONARCH OF PAIN. SO MANY ENTITIES. SO MANY REALMS BEYOND OUR OWN, FILLED WITH IMPOSSIBLE BEINGS UTTERLY UNLIKE US. BUT AWARE OF US—MORE THAN WE ARE OF THEM. JUST AT THE EDGE OF THE FIRE'S LIGHT. WATCHING US. EACH SEEMINGLY TAKING ON SOME ROLE, BUT I THINK THERE'S MUCH MORE TO THEM THAN THAT. THE ROLE IS JUST SOMETHING IT'S JUST WHAT WE CAN UNDERSTAND OF THEM. THE STAG IN THE WOODS ONLY KNOWS OF US WHAT IT CAN SEE AND UNDERSTAND—HUNTERS AND LOGGERS AMID THE TREES. HOUSES IN THE DISTANCE, AWAY FROM THE FOREST. TO THE STAG, THAT'S ALL WE ARE. IT'S HOW WE FIT INTO THEIR LIFE. THERE'S SO MUCH ABOUT US THAT THE STAG COULD NEVER BEGIN TO COMPREHEND, AND FRANKLY, SO LITTLE ABOUT US THAT IT WOULD EVEN BE INTERESTED IN.

HOW DID THEY ALL GET HERE? I SUPPOSE THAT'S NOT REALLY THE QUESTION. THE QUESTION IS WHY? WHY THIS HOUSE? IT'S TEMPTING TO THINK OF A PARASITIC RELATIONSHIP, BUT WHO'S TRULY THE PARASITE HERE?

IT'S TEMPTING TO THINK THAT THE HOUSE IS ABOUT HATE. THE HOUSE HATES ME. IT HATES YOU, IF YOU'RE READING THIS. BUT THE HOUSE IS ACTUALLY ABOUT LOVE. TWISTED, PERVERTED LOVE. LOVE CORRUPTED INTO SOMETHING TERRIBLE: JEALOUSY, LONELINESS, SELFISHNESS, POSSESSIVENESS, BITTERNESS, LONGING. LOVE AS UNDERSTOOD BY THE UNLOVED.

THERE ARE FIVE SECTIONS TO THE HOUSE. THAT MUCH IS CLEAR. AND EACH SEEMS TO EXPRESS ITSELF AS A ~~FAMILY MEMBER~~ AS SOMEONE WHO LOVES YOU. MOTHER, FATHER, SISTER, BROTHER. LOVER. DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOVE. BUT IN THIS CASE, THE MANIFESTATIONS ARE TWISTED VERSIONS OF THAT LOVE, AND THOSE ROLES.

OF THE FIVE, THE LOVER SEEMS MOST HIDDEN AND HARDEST TO REACH. BUT THROUGH THAT PART OF THE HOUSE, ONE CAN REACH THE LACUNA AND ITS CAPTURE OF THE ORIGINAL HOUSE IN SPACE AND TIME. LIKE HOW A PHOTO WOULD CAPTURE A SCENE AND HOLD IT IN AN UNCHANGING STASIS, FOREVER. IT IS TRULY THE LAST PIECE OF THE PUZZLE. IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

Replace the missing piece, and seal the door forever. Cut off the house. Free your world from its clutches. Have your own happy family.

Do you understand me, reader? I don't know who you are but I know how you got here. I can't say for certain if you're reading this in the future or in the past. I suspect it could be either. Regardless, go, free yourself and your world if you're brave enough and strong enough. Look for the house within the house. Within the house. Into infinity. You can't save infinity, but you can save your little part of it. You can make sure no one you love ever falls into the clutches of the house ever again.

REPLACE THE MISSING PIECE, AND SEAL THE DOOR FOREVER. CUT OFF THE HOUSE. FREE YOUR WORLD FROM ITS CLUTCHES. HAVE YOUR OWN HAPPY FAMILY.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME, READER? I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE BUT I KNOW HOW YOU GOT HERE. I CAN'T SAY FOR CERTAIN IF YOU'RE READING THIS IN THE FUTURE OR THE PAST. I SUSPECT IT COULD BE EITHER. REGARDLESS, GO, FREE YOURSELF AND YOUR WORLD IF YOU'RE BRAVE ENOUGH AND STRONG ENOUGH. LOOK FOR THE HOUSE WITHIN THE HOUSE. WITHIN THE HOUSE. INTO INFINITY. YOU CAN'T SAVE INFINITY, BUT YOU CAN SAVE YOUR LITTLE PART OF IT. YOU CAN MAKE SURE NO ONE YOU LOVE EVER FALLS INTO THE CLUTCHES OF THE HOUSE EVER AGAIN.

Remnant 25 (with the Prisoner)

[Several small, handwritten notebook pages, in a hand that's different from the others we've seen]

Prisoner won't relate her name.
Never seen snow. Never even heard of it.
Has a daughter.
Looking for the Book of Names. Asking about the attic.

X
X
X X
X

Claims they knew Phillip Harlock. Or sister.

[Page break]

No prisoner
Alone

XXXX

[Page break]

Probably not human.
strange manner of speaking
Cloudy eyes
No idea where they are. Confused. Mentioned Jerusalem.
Wandered the courtyard.
Theory—Bedroom consumed by house while sleeping.

[Page break]

Prisoner male Caucasian dark hair
darting eyes
Found near the elevator in the Great Hall.
Trying to convince the Host to take him to the party.
Smells like something from a swamp.
Takes medication
Lost dog
Shouts
Sleeps

[Page break]

New prisoner.
Says there are witches in my beard. That I am from
hell.

Nyaar

Real name Nick Fuller

[Check mark] Devious

[Check mark] Hostile

Prisoner wait wrote her name.

Never seen again. Never ~~even~~ heard of it.

Has a daughter.

Looking for the Book of Names.

Asking about the attic.

X
X
X
X
X

~~Claims they knew~~ Philip Nadelok.
Or sister.

No prisoner.

Alone.

XXXX

Probably not human.

Strange manner of speaking.

Clammy eyes

No idea where they are. Confused.

Mentioned Jerusalem. Wanders the courtyard.

Theory - Bedroom consumed by
haze while sleeping.

Prisoner male Caucasian
dark hair darting eyes

Found near the elevator in the Great Hall.

Trying to convince the Host to take him
to the party.

Smells like something from a Swamp.

Takes medication

Lost dog

Shouts

Sleeps

New prisoner.

Says there are witches in my beard.

That I am from hell.

Nyaar

Real name Nick Fuller

✓ Devious

✓ Hostile

Remnant 26 (in the Private Study)

[A handwritten note. Looks like the same handwriting from most of the journal pages. It's intentionally unfinished.]

[There's a hand-drawn circle around the word "rooms" in the sentence "Even the rooms of the house that I'm fairly certain weren't there originally have a certain feeling for me." Then a line that goes down with an arrow to the following paragraph.]

Trying to write everything down. I keep forgetting things. Keep losing track of time. Are things happening in the right order?

Things I need to remember:

1. What's growing developing in the nursery?
2. The vestibule with the orchids offers the only way to get out of this section of the house. The pattern on the floor, if concentrated upon in silence, and calling upon the house's power itself, transports me to the Great Hall. Strangely, I've found that I can trust the Host there.
3. I think there's a ghost in the huge, dark room with the pillar.

TRYING TO WRITE EVERYTHING DOWN.
I KEEP FORGETTING THINGS. KEEP
LOSING TRACK OF TIME. ARE THINGS
HAPPENING IN THE RIGHT ORDER?

THINGS I NEED TO REMEMBER:

1. WHAT'S GROWING DEVELOPING
IN THE NURSERY?
2. THE VESTIBULE WITH THE ORCHIDS
OFFERS THE ONLY WAY TO GET
OUT OF THIS SECTION OF THE
HOUSE. THE PATTERN ON THE
FLOOR, IF CONCENTRATED UPON
IN SILENCE, AND CALLING UPON
THE HOUSE'S POWER ITSELF,
TRANSPORTS ME TO THE GREAT
HALL. STRANGELY, I'VE FOUND
THAT I CAN TRUST THE HOST
THERE.
3. I THINK THERE'S A GHOST IN
THE HUGE, DARK ROOM WITH THE
PILLAR

4. Not sure I can abide that chapel or temple or whatever it is deep under the house. I don't trust it. I don't feel any connection to it. Even the rooms of the house that I'm fairly certain weren't there originally have a certain feeling for me. Like I belong. But not there.

5. That damned hole in the attic. I know that's important. But why? I've not found anything that would fit it. The shape of it, it reminds me of something particular, though. Something from when I was young.

Except for those rooms with the yellow wallpaper. Those are strange, sort of liminal spaces that have no meaning to me. And yet I'm afraid of them. I think I'll have to gather my courage and explore them eventually. First, though, I need to remember where I put my bag.

6. I keep

4. NOT SURE I CAN ABIDE THAT CHAPEL
OR TEMPLE OR WHATEVER IT IS DEEP
UNDER THE HOUSE. I DON'T TRUST
IT. I DON'T FEEL ANY CONNECTION
TO IT. EVEN THE ROOMS OF THE
HOUSE THAT I'M ~~FAIRLY~~ FAIRLY CERTAIN
WEREN'T THERE ORIGINALLY HAVE
A CERTAIN FEELING FOR ME.
LIKE I BELONG. BUT NOT THERE.

5. THAT DAMNED HOLE IN THE ATTIC.
I KNOW THAT'S IMPORTANT. BUT WHY?
I'VE NOT FOUND ANYTHING THAT
WOULD FIT IT. THE SHAPE OF IT, IT
REMINDS ME OF SOMETHING
PARTICULAR, THOUGH. SOMETHING
FROM WHEN I WAS YOUNG.

EXCEPT FOR THOSE ROOMS WITH
THE YELLOW WALLPAPER. THOSE
ARE STRANGE, SORT OF LIMINAL
SPACES THAT HAVE NO MEANING
TO ME. AND YET I'M AFRAID
OF THEM. I THINK I'LL HAVE TO
GATHER MY COURAGE AND EXPLORE
THEM EVENTUALLY. FIRST, THOUGH,
I NEED TO REMEMBER WHERE
I PUT MY BAG.

6. I KEEP

Remnant 27 (in the Vestibule)

[A handwritten page, appearing like it's torn from a journal. At the top, in angular text (with the same handwriting, but in a different color), it says, "Found this on the kitchen floor. Dated at the end of the month. Looks like what I would write, or maybe will write. Definitely torn from my journal. But I hold that intact journal in my hands. Makes no sense."]

August 31

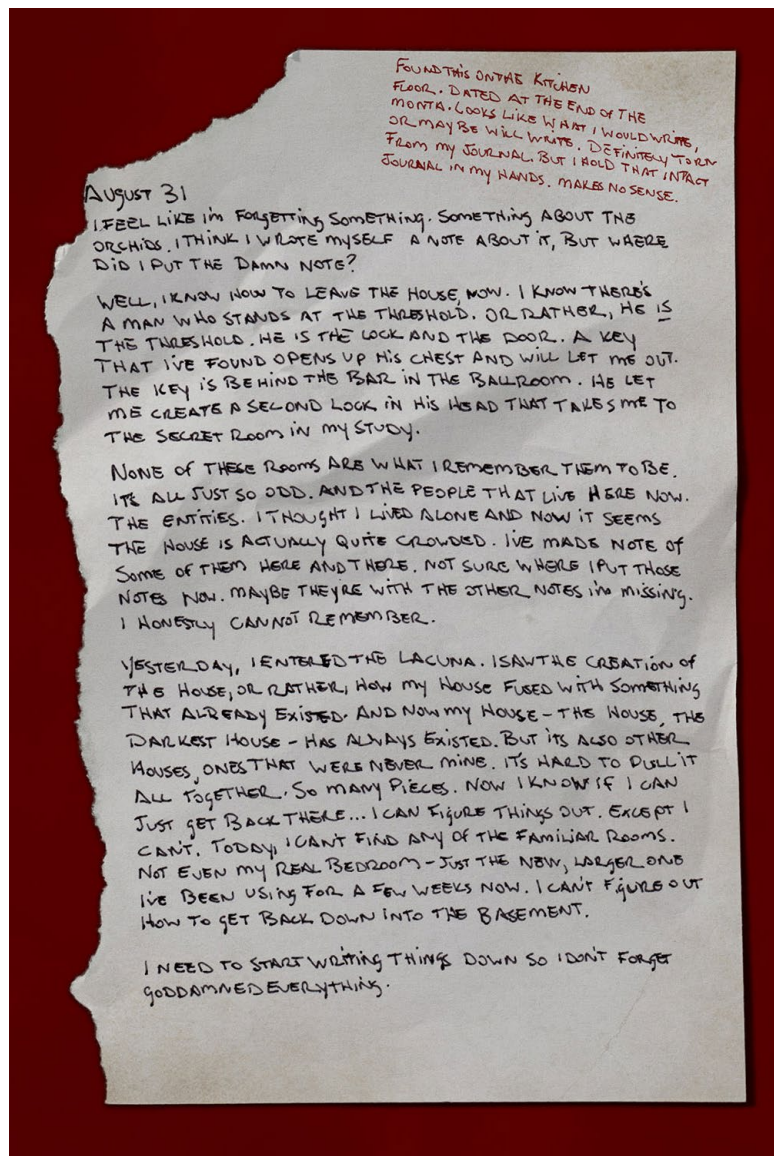
I feel like I'm forgetting something. Something about the orchids. I think I wrote myself a note about it, but where did I put the damn note?

Well, I know how to leave the house, now. I know there's a man who stands at the threshold. Or rather, he is the threshold. He is the lock and the door. A key that I've found opens up his chest and will let me out. The key is behind the bar in the ballroom. He let me create a second lock in his head that takes me to the secret room in my study.

None of these rooms are what I remember them to be. It's all just so odd. And the people that live here now. The entities. I thought I lived alone and now it seems the house is actually quite crowded. I've made note of some of them here and there. Not sure where I put those notes now. Maybe they're with the other notes I'm missing. I honestly cannot remember.

Yesterday, I entered the Lacuna. I saw the creation of the house, or rather, how my house fused with something that already existed. And now my house—the house, the Darkest House—has always existed. But it's also other houses, ones that were never mine. It's hard to pull it all together. So many pieces. Now I know if I can just get back there . . . I can figure things out. Except I can't. Today, I can't find any of the familiar rooms. Not even my real bedroom—just the new, larger one I've been using for a few weeks now. I can't figure out how to get back down into the basement.

I need to start writing things down so I don't forget goddamned everything.



There's a stop that the elevator makes—not all the way at the bottom. That's not the basement. I don't know what that thing down there is, although it clearly knows me. That seems significant somehow. But nothing will get me to ever go back down there. Just before the elevator reaches the bottom, though, there's a series of rooms. I think I shall explore them. Perhaps there I will find a way back to the familiar rooms of the house. I can leave the house, but when I come back in, things quickly become unfamiliar.

Where is the kitchen? The sitting room? I can't find them anymore. If I can just get to the ~~basement~~ the real basement, I can find the Lacuna and maybe even the Antinomy.

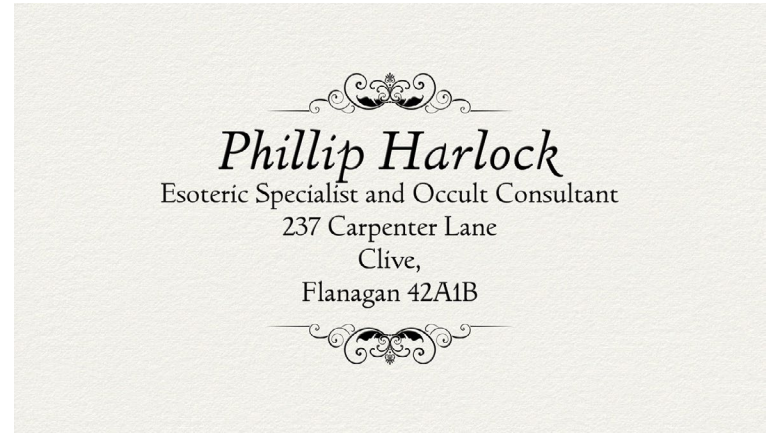
THERE'S A STOP THAT THE ELEVATOR MAKES—NOT ALL THE WAY AT THE BOTTOM. THAT'S NOT THE BASEMENT. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT THING DOWN THERE IS, ALTHOUGH IT CLEARLY KNOWS ME. THAT SEEMS SIGNIFICANT SOMEHOW. BUT NOTHING WILL GET ME TO EVER GO BACK DOWN THERE. JUST BEFORE THE ELEVATOR REACHES THE BOTTOM, THOUGH, THERE'S A SERIES OF ROOMS. I THINK I SHALL EXPLORE THEM. PERHAPS THERE I WILL FIND A WAY BACK TO THE FAMILIAR ROOMS OF THE HOUSE. I CAN LEAVE THE HOUSE, BUT WHEN I COME BACK IN, THINGS QUICKLY BECOME UNFAMILIAR.

WHERE'S IS THE KITCHEN? THE SITTING ROOM? I CAN'T FIND THEM ANY MORE. IF I CAN JUST GET TO THE ~~BASEMENT~~ THE REAL BASEMENT, I CAN FIND THE LACUNA AND MAYBE EVEN THE ANTINOMY.

Remnant 28 (in the Vestibule)

[A simple business card with an artistic flourish]

Phillip Harlock
Esoteric Specialist and Occult Consultant
237 Carpenter Lane
Clive,
Flanagan 42A1B



Remnant 29 (in the Foyer)

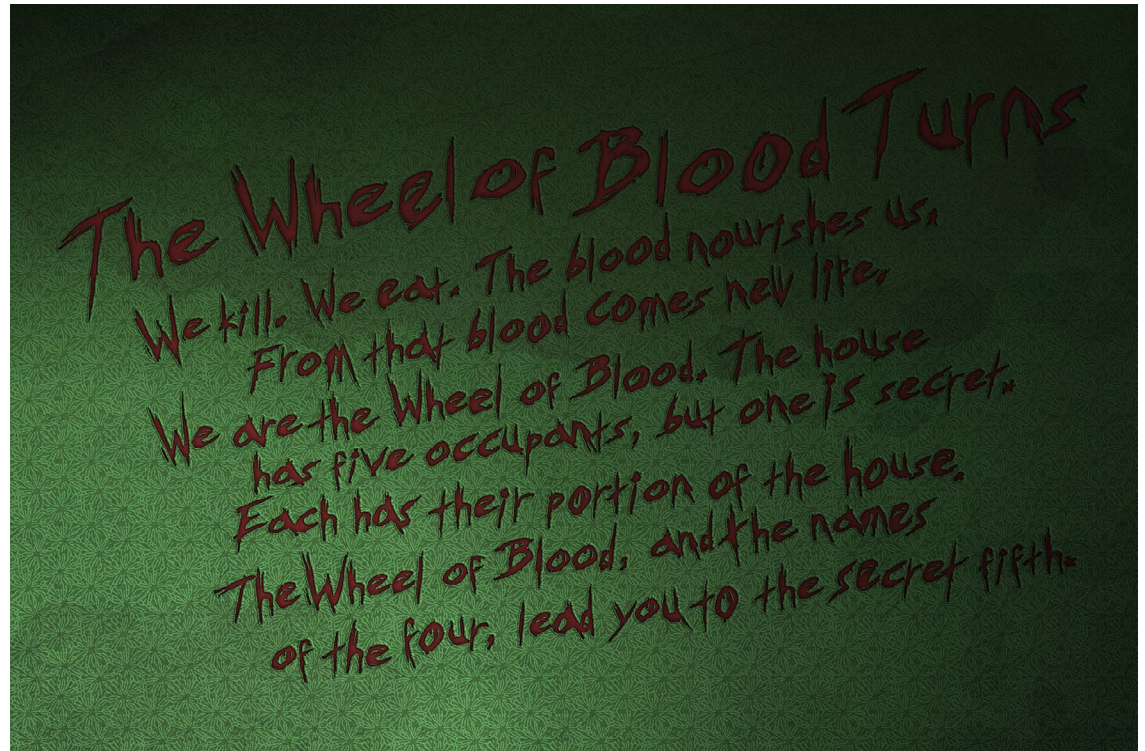
The Wheel of Blood Turns

We kill. We eat. The blood nourishes us. From that blood comes new life.

We are the Wheel of Blood. The house has five occupants, but one is secret.

Each has their portion of the house.

The Wheel of Blood, and the names of the four, lead you to the secret fifth.



You find two references to the house, both quite contradictory.

One is about the supposed original owner of the house, a man named Phillip Harlock. Apparently, long ago, he went a bit mad and would never leave the house, telling friends—all of whom he eventually pushed away, one by one, over the course of a year or two—that there were “always more rooms in the house to see. Always more halls to walk.” Eventually, he disappeared altogether. Other owners took possession and moved in over the years. All reported that the house was haunted. Various exorcists and experts were called in. The first three failed. The fourth died. The last owner claimed “it’s not even a house anymore,” before disappearing mysteriously. No one has lived there in a very long time, and it’s been cordoned off for years. Occasionally, foolish thrill-seekers manage to get inside. Some report terrifying stories. Most won’t talk about it or are never seen again. People began referring to it as the Darkest House.

The other, more esoteric, source says that the house has always existed, stretching between every layer of reality (whatever that means), filling in the cracks and seeping into whatever metaphysical pits it can find. This reference also mentions Phillip Harlock, but seems to suggest that he wasn’t the first owner at all and that he inherited it from a distant relative and moved it to its current location somehow. But mostly this source just goes on about how the house is more a dark, fundamental force of the universe that takes on the appearance of a house than an actual house, like an animal that uses a part of its own body to lure in prey (it specifically references the spider-tailed horned viper). It also says that the house’s outward appearance looks different in the other locations that it extends into, fitting in with local context. To top it all off, someone has written in that section of the book, scrawled over the print itself, “THE HOUSE HATES YOU.”