

♥HEARTS & HAUNTS

YOU ARE SPIRITS OF THE DEAD who have been disturbed by recent activity at your resting place. Your goal is to scare away or befriend tonight's interlopers so you may return to your slumber—or, make use of the interlopers to further your goals.

PLAYERS: CREATE GHOSTS

1 Choose, roll, or make up the **era** when you originally lived. By default, the game is set in the 2010s.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> 1900s–1940s |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ancient or Medieval | <input type="checkbox"/> 1950s–1970s |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600s–1800s | <input type="checkbox"/> 1980s–2000s |

2 Choose, roll, or make up your **style**. This describes what you were at the moment of your death.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional | <input type="checkbox"/> Child or Student |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Retiree or Dilettante | <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Soldier or Sailor | <input type="checkbox"/> Artist or Entertainer |

3 Choose, roll, or make up your **role**. Each ghost should have a unique role.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly Spirit | <input type="checkbox"/> Confused or Erratic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flirt | <input type="checkbox"/> Prankster |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scholar | <input type="checkbox"/> Evil Demon |

4 Choose your **number**, from 2 to 5. A high number means you're better at  **HAUNTS** (scaring, setting traps, moving objects, making visual manifestations, planned action, reasoning). A low number means you're better at **♥HEARTS** (inducing emotions or sensations, making sounds, communicating with the living, possession, impulsive action, intuition).

5 Choose, roll, or make up your **secondary goal**, which will guide your interactions with the other characters.

- Complete your unfinished business.
- Avoid whatever awaits you in the next world.
- Get revenge on a specific interloper.
- Find a way to return to life.
- Protect a specific person, place, or thing.
- Cause as much trouble as possible.

6 Give yourself a **cool ghost name**, like: the Lady in Red, Dame Blackskull, Prancing Pete, Shrieking Shelley, Old Crookshanks, the Drowned Man, etc.

PLAYERS: CREATE THE HAUNTING

As a group, pick the following traits for the location.

Pick, roll, or make up a **location type**.

- Home: house, apartment building, trailer...
- Grand Residence: mansion, castle, palace, hotel...
- Place of Learning: school, library, college, museum...
- Place of Work: office, shop, factory, studio...
- Place of Entertainment: theatre, casino, stadium...
- Remote: farmhouse, lodge, campground, cabin...

Pick, roll, or make up two **spooky features**.

- Secret passages and/or rooms.
- Skeletons in the closet (literally).
- Dark ritual chamber.
- Infested (rats, bugs, bats, etc.).
- Creaky, drafty, dilapidated, and/or ruined.
- Off the grid (no electricity or cell service).

Pick, roll, or make up one **problem**.

- The interlopers have set up a protected space.
- EM interference affects some of your ghost abilities.
- The place has changed a lot since you last awoke.
- A local knows all about you.
- Previous visitors left behind gear or knowledge.
- Something that scares even you lurks in the dark.

ROLLING THE DICE

When you do something risky, **roll 1d6** to find out how it goes. Roll **+1d6** if you're **prepared** and **+1d6** if you're **expert**. (The GM will tell you how many dice to roll, based on your ghost and the situation.) **Roll your dice and compare each die's result to your number.**

↓ When using  **HAUNTS** (physical, frightening, planning, reason), you want to roll **under** your number.

↑ When using **♥HEARTS** (emotion, communication, possession, intuition), you want to roll **over** your number.

0 If none of your dice succeed, it goes wrong. The GM tells you how things get worse.

1 If one die succeeds, you barely manage it. The GM tells you what complication, harm, or cost you incur.

2 If two dice succeed, you do it well. Good ghosting! You get to narrate how it goes.

3 If three or more dice succeed, you get a critical success! The GM tells you what extra effect you get.

? If you roll your number exactly, you are **Heart-Haunted**. You get a special insight into what is going on. **Ask the GM one question** and they'll answer honestly. Good questions include but aren't limited to:

What are they really feeling? • What's their real motive? How could I get them to ____? • What have I missed here? What's the best way to ____? • What's really going on?

After hearing the GM's answer, you can accept your result, or change your action and roll again, if you want.

! You can **help** out another ghost on a roll. Say how • you're helping, then make a roll yourself. If you succeed, the ghost you helped gets **+1d6**.

GM: CREATE INTERLOPERS

There are as many interlopers as there are ghosts.

Choose from or roll on the table to create the interlopers, their goals, and a complication, or make up your own. Give each interloper a **name**, **pronouns**, and additional **tags** (ideally 3–5) to round out their personalities.

Some interlopers...

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teens or College students | <input type="checkbox"/> Developers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tourists or Travellers | <input type="checkbox"/> Ghost Hunters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A Couple & Children | <input type="checkbox"/> An Extended Family |

Have awoken you by...

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A séance | <input type="checkbox"/> Having weird dreams |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reno/Demo activity | <input type="checkbox"/> Disrespectful actions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading an ancient text | <input type="checkbox"/> Discovering a secret |

And then they...

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Awaken an ancient evil | <input type="checkbox"/> Refuse to believe in you |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Need your help | <input type="checkbox"/> Try to drive you out |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Won't leave you alone | <input type="checkbox"/> Bring a new entity |

Give the interlopers some descriptive tags, like these:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Naïve / Young | <input type="checkbox"/> Skeptical / Scientific |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goth / Counterculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious / Mystical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nosy / Persistent | <input type="checkbox"/> Old / Dying |

GM: RUNNING THE GAME

The **tone** of this game can range from fantasy cartoon (think *Scooby-Doo*, *Where Are You!*) to light drama (think *Casper*) to psychological thriller (think *The Shining*) to horrific (think *The Haunting*). It's a good idea to come to a **consensus** about the tone everyone wants for the game beforehand, especially if you don't know each other well.

Games in horror and horror-adjacent genres raise **safety** concerns. (There is a reason such films come with the "View Discretion is Advised" message!) **A good general rule** is that anyone at the table may **veto** any in-fiction event or aspect of character/haunting/interloper creation if it makes them feel unsafe or uncomfortable, without having to explain or justify themselves. See John Stavropoulos's [X-Card](#) and Sean K. Reynolds and Shanna Germain's [Consent in Gaming](#) for more information about why this is important and how to use safety tools in games.

The ghosts' main objective is to either scare off or befriend the interlopers. The game ends after every interloper has either run away from the haunting or become good pals with the ghosts. It's important that none of the ghosts has an indifferent attitude towards the interlopers.

Start by describing the scenario as the sun is setting or the clock strikes midnight. The interlopers have just crossed the threshold and the ghosts are aware of their presence. **Make it clear that the interlopers plan to stick around.**

When the ghosts awaken, they might be together in one place or spread out across the haunting. Assume that they are invisible until otherwise established.

It will typically take more than one good spook or act of kindness to deal with an interloper. You can model this by requiring three successful rolls to scare or befriend each interloper before they flee or become friends. Keep track of each—**Fright** and **Friendship**—separately. Failed rolls might also add to or subtract from these tracks, and critical successes add two to the target track.

Some interlopers may be easier or harder to scare or to befriend. A goth teen might be easier to befriend and harder to scare. A skittish demolition apprentice might be harder to befriend and easier to scare. A stony grandparent might be harder to befriend but no harder to scare than average. You can model this by increasing or decreasing how many successes on the Fright and Friendship tracks are needed for these interlopers (minimum 2, maximum 4).

By default, the interlopers will cooperate with one another, and try to help each other stick it out. But their **relationships might have faultlines or insecurities** that the ghosts can play off of. Questions resulting from being Heart-Haunted may reveal these weaknesses.

Once an interloper is befriended, they will assist the ghosts as far as they are able. However, they will usually refuse to aid or abet harm to living people.

Once an interloper has fled, they will not return—but a failed roll might mean that an interloper who was scared off has sent someone else in their stead.

When it isn't clear how many dice a ghost should get, talk it through with the players. "Prepared" means there was some set up done beforehand—possibly from a previous action in-game, possibly as part of the ghost's or haunting's history. "Expert" just means that the type of action is something the ghost has a lot of experience or skill with. In general, interpret the ideas of "prepared" and "expert" loosely, and err on the side of giving them more dice.

CREDITS

HEARTS & HAUNTS (v.0.2) was created by Trystan Goetze and Kat Curwin over an evening at [BUTTER & SCOTCH](#), a feminist snack, dessert, and cocktail bar in Brooklyn, NY.

Based on LASERS & FEELINGS by John Harper, and hacks thereof such as: LOVE & JUSTICE by Senda Linaugh and Phil Vecchione, and DUNGEONS WITH DRAGONS by Jacob "Gnome" Randolph.

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Trystan Goetze: @errantcanadian • trystangoetze.ca
Kat Curwin: @coastalkitty • katcur.win

John Harper: onesevendesign.com
Senda Linaugh: @idellamithlynn
Phil Vecchione: @dnaphil
Jacob "Gnome" Randolph: @Veliministriari