

The Divided House

and other stories



A narrative entertainment by Nick Wedig

Introduction

There are dimensions other than this one. It is said that on Halloween night, the walls between worlds are thin. As October comes to a close, other realities permeate into ours. This is a story about a place that exists between two worlds. Over the course of a year, the two realities bleed into each other, producing preternatural effects. As the residents slowly discovered, the worlds on the other side are rarely hospitable to human existence.

This is a collaborative, freeform story game, for 3 - 7 players. You will require a deck of playing cards (*without Jokers*) and 2-4 hours to play.

Setup

By selecting different descriptors, the invasive alien universe will be different each time you play the game. I have provided 4 descriptors: *Architectural Cancer*, *Shattered*, *Lost Carcosa*, and *The Whispering Forest*. Select one descriptor to be tied to *CLUBS* and one to be represented by *DIAMONDS*. (*HEARTS* and *SPADES* are always predefined, as *Life* and *Fear* respectively.)

The story's supernatural events primarily occur in a single location. All the player character victims will be tied to this place in some way. There are two settings provided in this document *The Divided House* and the *HMS Eurydice*. Choose one to be the setting for your time playing.

This is a story about a place that exists between two worlds.

Choose your victim

The protagonists of this tale are referred to as **victims**. They are central to the story. Each player will have primary responsibility over a single victim. You'll make decisions and act as your victim.

Shuffle the deck and deal each player two cards. Each card represents one victim you could potentially play. The setting you chose will have a list of character names and backgrounds, which you should consult now. Each player selects one of the two potential characters to be their victim. (*If two want the same victim, the lower suit wins: **SPADES** before **HEARTS** before **CLUBS** before **DIAMONDS**. The other player draws a new victim card.*)

The rank of the card corresponds to a victim's background. Turn to the player on your right and ask them the relationship question associated with your victim. They will answer about the relationship between your characters.

The suit of the card ties into the victim's reason for staying in the game's central location, even though dangerous, inexplicable events befall them there. When you choose a character, answer the question associated with their suit.

SPADES **Guilt**

Why do you blame yourself for the haunting?

HEARTS **Curiosity**

What are you hoping to learn by investigating?

CLUBS **Duty**

What obligation do you have to remain?

DIAMONDS **Desire**

What do you hope to gain from the haunting?

The Tableau

Shuffle the victim cards into the deck. Deal out 8 cards, face up. Order the remaining cards by rank and by suit: **ACES** are low. **SPADES** before **HEARTS** before **CLUBS** before **DIAMONDS**.

Then place the cards into two rows of four cards, with the four highest ranked cards in the top row and the 4 lower ranked cards in the lower row. This arrangement is called the "**tableau**", and it will be an essential to the game.

*The victims of this tale are
central to the story.*

Chapters

The game will be divided into chapters. Each chapter will focus on one victim. Whichever victim's card was the lowest will be the first focus. While a chapter focuses on another victim, you will play the role of a **spirit**. After their chapter is complete, the victim on the left will be the focus of the next chapter.

After 13 chapters, the game will end. The first chapter always begins around Halloween. Subsequent chapters occur roughly a month apart. The final chapter will therefore also occur around Halloween, one year later.

A chapter could encompass a single scene. Or a chapter might have several shorter scenes. A chapter continues until 4 narration cards are played from the tableau. Spirit players will give the victim narration cards as the chapter progresses. Once the focus player has received four cards, quickly end the chapter. Add a few sentences of narration, but not much more.

Chapters shouldn't take very long to play, depending on your group of players. A few minutes per chapter is probably long enough.

The Victim

When it is your turn to play the victim, the chapter will focus on you.

Your job, as the focal player, is to control your victim. Describe their actions. Speak their dialogue. Explain how they pursue their goals and react to unusual events.

If possible, guide the story toward the narration cards. You cannot introduce those details, but you can set up the scene for a spirit to do so.

If a spirit asks you a question (including the questions from narration cards) your job is to create a brief bit of narration to answer the question for your character. It's better to show the answer, perhaps framing a brief flashback, or narrating an internal monologue, or introducing new elements into the scene. But it's also fine to answer the question directly, player to player, and then use the answer to inform the rest of the scene. Whatever you do, don't give weak, undramatic answers, and don't try to weasel away from the question's implicit assumptions.

Spirits

If a chapter does not focus on your victim, then you will play the role of a "spirit".

As a spirit, your job is to creep out the other players and to introduce the details on the narration cards in the tableau. Spirits also frame scenes, in order to accomplish those goals.

Your first job as a spirit is to frighten the other players, particularly the victim player. The spirit players, collectively, describe and control the world other than the victim. Describe the environment, portray minor characters and describe the results of the victim's actions. Always maintain a haunting, mysterious tone.

Collaborate with your other spirits. Give the other spirits opportunities to speak, and build upon the details they bring into play. All the spirits should have roughly equal authority.

If your victim is important to a scene, you can play them as well. But make sure you don't overshadow the victim that is supposed to be central to this chapter.

There are likely characters in the story beyond the victims. These others are called "minor characters" and the game won't pay as much attention to them. Any spirit can describe a minor character's actions, history or personality, whereas a victim's player has primary authority over their victim.

After 13 chapters, the game will end.

Stories are about characters doing interesting things. If the victim isn't doing something interesting, then give them something to interact with or react to. This might mean an obstacle or opposition, or it might be a supernatural phenomena to investigate.

The tableau of narration cards guides your play as a spirit throughout the chapter. Each narration card has a fictional detail, or a question for the victim player. You are responsible for finding ways to introduce those details and questions into the story.

The tableau has two rows of cards in it, arranged in order from lowest to highest. The lower row should always have four cards in it. The upper row can vary in size. The cards in the lower row are available for the spirits to narrate. Find ways to introduce those details into the scene. When you introduce each detail, place that card in front of the victim player. Then move the lowest card in the upper row down to the lower row. Thus, over the course of a chapter, cards will slowly shift down from the upper row to the lower row.

Some narration cards have questions instead of fictional details. Address these to the victim player, who must answer honestly. Find ways to reincorporate their answer into the chapter, building on their answer and making it relevant to the haunting.

Scenes

The spirit players have the authority to begin and end scenes within a chapter. They describe when and where a scene takes place. Spirits can also end one scene and begin another at any time. Victim players have no control over the framing of a scene: the events of the supernatural may approach them at any time, in any place.

End a Chapter

Chapters last until four narration cards are played. Once a victim player receives the 4th card, everyone should wrap up that chapter. Find a satisfying conclusion to the chapter as quickly as possible.

After the chapter ends, the tableau is refreshed. Draw 5 cards from the deck. Place them in the tableau, mingled with the cards already in the tableau, in order from lowest to highest. The four lowest cards fill out the lower row. The next four cards fill out the upper row.

The remaining card, the highest valued card, is placed on the bottom of the draw deck.

Once the tableau is refreshed, the player to the left of the last victim become the new victim player. The remaining players will all be spirits. They frame the first scene of the next chapter.

Character Death

If your victim dies, you can continue acting as a spirit in other player's chapters. If your victim is dead and it is your turn to have a chapter focus on you, you have several options.

You could simply skip your turn. Move the story on to the next living victim. Or you could promote an established minor character to victim status. Or you could introduce a new victim character. Draw two cards, choose one as your new victim, etc. just as at the start of play. Place both cards you use on the bottom of the draw deck. ask your relationship question to any established victim.

End the Story

Continue rotating through players and chapters until the deck runs out. The last chapter will have the deck run low on cards, which will constrain your final narration. The story ends once and for all when the last card is played.

(You won't have equal numbers of scenes for players, because 13 doesn't divide evenly into any number of players. Just accept the inequity.)

You could also end the game early if all the players agree the story has reached a natural narrative conclusion.

Chapters last until four narration cards are played.

The Divided House

The house on Ashfield Lane was built by a famous robber baron. Following the neighborhood's economic decline and a famous murder on the premises in the 1970s, the house stood vacant for many years. As with most decrepit Victorian mansions, it was long rumored to be haunted. The house was eventually remodeled and subdivided into a series of apartments. Several families now reside there, separate but together.

- A** **Tempest Ziegler**, small child
Why am I afraid of your character?
- 2** **Jeanmarie Ziegler**, single mother
What lie did I tell about what happened to my child's father? How do you know it's a lie?
- 3** **Paul Losavio**, newlywed
What secret did I share with you that I can't even tell my wife?
- 4** **Kriztina Nemeth**, recently disabled
How do you help me deal with my new disability?
- 5** **Chris Modzeleski**, widow(er)
What past mistake of mine do I blame you for?
- 6** **Pepper Lim**, starving artist
When I painted your portrait, long before meeting you, how did it depict your death?
- 7** **Alex Fontenau**, custodian
Why do I let you stay here despite the fact that you never have paid rent?
- 8** **Bailey Miskell**, struggling writer
What moral or ethical line do you refuse to cross while I freely do so?
- 9** **Kamala Bashar**, recent immigrant
Why did you help me move to this place?
- 10** **Lakshmi Zamindar**, student
What connection did I discover between you and the murders in this house years ago?
- J** **J.T. Onitsuka**, reclusive shut-in
Why do you know of my true past, before I moved in here? Why do you help me keep it a secret?
- Q** **Tayshaun Doss** conspiracy theorist
What did I discover you doing that you would prefer the other inhabitants not know about?
- K** **River Garza**, charity worker
How do I want to help your character, and why won't you let me?

As with most decrepit mansions, it was long rumored to be haunted.

The HMS Eurydice

In May of 1767, the HMS Eurydice set sail from Salem, to seek to the Northwest Passage amid Canada's icy waters. The schooner became stuck in ice in October of that year, and remains trapped at least until the spring thaw. The Eurydice bears supplies to last the winter. But the ship will stay encased in ice through the summer. And the Eurydice's crew will find themselves exploring a different world altogether from the one they intended.

(Note: Characters are listed as male, but any character could be a woman or gender nonbinary disguised as a man to get a job on a sailing vessel. This secret may or may not be known to her shipmates.)

- A **Oliver Lockton**, cabin boy
Why do I have to perform your work for you?
- 2 **Thomas Snelling**, rigger
How did you save my life?
- 3 **Erasmus Nutt**, boatswain
Why do I blame you for the death of deckhand Barnes?
- 4 **Epidiah Brettingham**, ship's surgeon
What injury forced me to amputate one of your limbs?
- 5 **Josiah Dencourt**, deckhand
What forbidden deed did we perform together in secret?
- 6 **Jacob Paston**, lookout
What superstitious taboo do you and I believe in, that the ship violated?
- 7 **Peter Shiveley**, Ship's cook
What embarrassing nickname did I give you? Why do you hate it so?
- 8 **Samwell Turner**, quartermaster
What supplies have you been sneaking from the hold without me knowing?
- 9 **Ambrose Black**, carpenter
How did I convince you to join in my planned mutiny?
- 10 **Virgil Barnsley**, navigator
Why did I believe you when you said (incorrectly) our route would bring us to safety?
- J **Edward Willoughby III**, Scientist studying arctic life
What unusual discovery did you bring to show me?
- Q **Thaddeus Ashfield**, First Mate
Why did I confiscate your gun?
- K **Agamemnon Wright**, Captain
What secret did I tell you that I cannot allow the rest of the crew to discover?

The Eurydice became trapped in ice in October, and will remain trapped throughout the year.

Life ♥

A	how you hope to appear to others
2	your daily routine
3	What do you really want?
4	a reminder of your past
5	Who do you really love?
6	What do you need to get what you want?
7	a lucky coincidence
8	What do you sacrifice to get what you want?
9	what they want from you
10	What do you hope to learn?
J	someone comes to your aid
Q	you succeed, but at a cost
K	you emerge victorious

Fears ♠

A	you awake from a horrible nightmare
2	strange noises in the night
3	animals behave oddly
4	What do you fear to lose?
5	someone has been hurt
6	you narrowly avoid death
7	an unlucky turn of events
8	it's your fault
9	your lies are uncovered
10	a crippling injury
J	the thing you feared is true
Q	carnage
K	death

Every game uses the Life and Fear suits. Choose two other suits from the next page to tie to Clubs and Diamonds.

The Ghost Forest ♣ / ♦

A you find a plant growing where there wasn't one before
 2 you hear whispers when you are alone
 3 vines growing where they don't belong
 4 who the trees remind you of
 5 trees growing indoors
 6 your dead loved ones among the leaves
 7 plants attempt to take root in your flesh
 8 you know what the whispers say
 9 impossible, strange fruit
 10 the trees grab at you with their branches
 J the dead want you to join them
 Q the forest subsumes everything
 K you enter the trees, never to be seen again

Lost Carcosa ♣ / ♦

A You find a famous banned play, *The King in Yellow*
 2 you find yourself unable to stop reading the play
 3 you create beautiful, haunting art
 4 What secrets do you hide?
 5 the Yellow Sign, inscribed in blood
 6 a crumbling palace where none was before
 7 a masquerade ball, where none are as they seem
 8 you cause someone great harm
 9 a haunting, tragic song
 10 violence as a form of entertainment
 J a sense that this isn't real, you are merely actors in a play
 Q revelers unmask, to reveal their inhuman nature
 K the King in Yellow arrives, driving all insane

Architectural Cancer ♣ / ♦

A a locked door you never noticed before
 2 the building is bigger inside than out
 3 you get lost in a familiar location
 4 something stalks the shadows
 5 your building is growing, changing its form
 6 there is no exit any more
 7 nothing is where you remember it being
 8 the monster is right behind you
 9 an infinite shadowy corridor
 10 something attacks from the shadows
 J walls become floors become ceilings become doors
 Q the walls are crushing you
 K the entire building disappears

Shattered ♣ / ♦

A you receive a mirror as a gift
 2 your face in the mirror
 3 shadows move and shift in impossible ways
 4 Who do you trust?
 5 your reflection has changed
 6 the mirror shatters
 7 the mirror's true history
 8 objects turn into glass
 9 lies and betrayal
 10 a loved one is replaced with an imposter
 J things shatter like glass
 Q you become clear as glass
 K you are trapped, inside the mirror

Credits

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Inspirations

HOUSE OF LEAVES, by Mark Z. Danielewski
LORE podcast by Aaron Mahnke
“NIGHT FLOORS”, by Dennis Detwiler
SILENT HILL created by Keiichiro Toyama
“TLÖN, UQBAR, ORBIS TERTIUS”, by Jorge Luis Borges
THE TWILIGHT ZONE, created by Rod Serling

ARCHIPELAGO III by Matthijs Holter
FALL OF MAGIC by Ross Cowman
FIASCO by Jason Morningstar
POWER GRID by Friedemann Friese

This game was created for Giacomo Vincenzi's Spooky Design Contest 2016.