

Awake at the Witching Hour

A haunted LARP experience for one player. The game takes place over several nights as you play a character experiencing a haunting. Each night you're awakened at the witching hour, the most common hour for demonic possession, and learn more about both yourself and the entity haunting you. After several nights you either succumb to possession or resist it by helping the entity move on or sending to haunt someone else. The game provides a very basic framework to move the experience forward, it's completely up to you how you want to act out the experience.

What You Need

- ❖ A writing utensil and paper.
- ❖ A way to record and play back your voice.
- ❖ An alarm to wake yourself up.
- ❖ A tarot deck (or slips of paper and something to mix them up and pull them out of.)
- ❖ A single light you can turn on and off easily.

Content and Safety

This game involves acting out a haunting and possibly possession and can involve dark concepts including loss and death. It's important to take care of yourself and remember your health and wellbeing are more important than the game. You can stop at any time, and if you experience any problems beyond the scope of the game you should consult a trained mental health professional.

How to Play

1. Create the character that you'll play by choosing a name and listing the two greatest losses they've suffered. Perhaps someone close to them passed away? Perhaps they lost a treasured family heirloom? The entity haunting your character will be fleshed out as you play the game.
2. Choose 6 cards at random from the haunting cards list, then shuffle those cards together with the stop card to make your deck of 7 cards total. Keep this in a safe place and do not look at the cards in it. (you can also write the card names on slips of paper and put 6 at random into a bag, along with a 7th piece that says 'stop')
3. Set your alarm for 3 am, the most common hour of demonic possession. (You can also choose to play at a different time)
4. When the alarm goes off and you wake up, turn on a single light and draw the top card from your deck. If you draw the stop card on the first night, shuffle the deck and try again.

If you draw a haunting card:

Read the description and choose the option that feels right for your character. Write down the hope (♥) or fear (♠) symbol it gave you. As you experience what the card said, think about these questions:

1. What's one new thing you've learned about the entity? (its name, likes, dislikes, hopes, dreams, aspirations, etc)
2. What's one new thing you've learned about yourself?
3. How does what happened tonight affect you?

Record audio of yourself for approximately 60 seconds as you respond to the questions and describe what you felt. Start each recording by saying your name and the date and time. Then turn off the light and go back to sleep. Make sure to set your alarm for the same time the next night.

If you draw the stop card (after the first night):

The haunting is at an end. Count up the symbols you received each night. If you have more fear (♠) than hope (♥), you become possessed. If you have more hope you avoid possession, and decide if you help the entity move on to another plane, or cast it out of your house to haunt someone else. Perhaps its work is not yet completed?

Starting at the beginning, listen to the audio recorded from each night. As you finish listening to the last recording, play out the remainder of your and the entity's fates. The game ends when you feel that you've reached a natural stopping point.

Cards

There are 22 **haunting** cards, represented by the Major Arcana from a tarot deck. Each card has an experience, and several options. with possible effects. Each option causes you to gain 1 fear (+♠) or gain one hope (+♥).

0 - The Fool

A strange impulse compels you to look under the bed (or in some spot you seldom go)
Do you investigate this impulse (+♥) or hide under the covers (+♠)?

1 - The Magician

Some object in your room seems out of place
Move it to another location and ignore it (+♠) or ask if anyone else is present (+♥)

II - The Priestess

You see something in a mirror or reflective surface that isn't really there
Do you become transfixed (+♠) or laugh at it (+♥)

III - The Empress

A shadow appears to move
Quickly go back to bed (+♠) or ponder what it could be (+♥)

IV - The Emperor

You hear footsteps

Call out to ask who's there (+♥) or yell out in anger and feel your anger returned (+♠)

V - The Hierophant

You feel a presence in a particular spot in the room

You realize something about entity's connection to you (+♥) or find it confusing (+♠)

VI - The Lovers

You feel a presence watching you, but when you turn around nothing is there.

Do you feel a sense of connection(+♥) or a sense of malevolence(+♠)?

VII - The Chariot

You hear a knocking or banging sound from somewhere.

Demand whoever is there reveal themselves(+♥) or stay silent and picture what they could look like(+♠)?

VIII - Justice

You feel a strange draft of air

Do you double check all your windows and air vents(+♠) or put on another layer (+♥)?

IX - The Hermit

You feel strangely cold and isolated

Is isolation weighing on you(+♠) or do you feel a sense of peace(+♥)?

X - Fortune

You hear laughter from somewhere out of sight.

Does the laughter seem happy(+♥) or seem to be mocking you(+♠)?

XI - Strength

You catch movement out of the corner of your eye

Do you turn to confront it but find nothing there(+♥) or look away in fear of what it could be(+♠)?

XII - The Hanged Man

An image of something you lost pops into your thoughts

Do you long for what you'll never get back (+♠) or think about the good memories (+♥)?

XIII - Death

Your skin feels clammy and strangely cold

Does something that was holding you back fall away (+♥) or does the fear of death weigh you down(+♠)?

XIV - Temperance

You see a haze in the air

Does it seem dangerous (+♠) or harmless and interesting (+♥)?

XV - The Devil

You hear a scratching sound from somewhere

Do you investigate the area(+♥) or move to the other side of the room(+♠)?

XVI - The Tower

You smell something burning, like a lit match.

Do you try to ignore it (+♠) or take it as a sign of something(+♥)?

XVII - The Star

You smell a scent you recognized from someone in your life long ago

Do you remember the person (+♥) or can you not quite place it(+♠)?

XVIII - The Moon

The lights flicker on and off rapidly

Is something unnatural affecting you (+♠) or are you sure it's only an illusion (+♥)?

XIX - The Sun

You feel strangely warm

Do you find yourself sweating and angry (+♠) or does it feel pleasant (+♥)?

XX - Judgement

The light goes off.

Do you leave it off until you need it (+♥) or immediately turn it back on (+♠)?

XXI - The World

You're overcome by a sudden feeling of connection to the spirit world

Is it exhilarating(+♥) or terrifying(+♠)?

There is 1 **stop** card which indicates the end of the game. Many tarot decks come with an instructions card or something like a joker, or you can use any minor arcana card.

Inspiration and Thanks

Awake at the Witching Hour is inspired by the author's personal experience, The Exorcism of Emily Rose(2005), and occult ideas around tarot reading. Special thanks to all the spirits who read and reviewed it.

Appendix I: Example centering technique.

This game deals with frightening topics and might leave you in an uncomfortable mental state. A simple example of a centering technique is provided here:

Choose an item that makes you happy and sit in a comfortable position where you can look at it. Breathe with slow measured breaths in and out, trying to breathe in for the same amount of time you breathe out. As other thoughts enter your mind you can acknowledge them, let them pass, and bring your focus back to your object. Do this for several minutes.

Appendix II: Potential Modifications

- Change the number of haunting cards and stop cards to make a longer or shorter game. One idea is to use 3 or 4 stop cards and shuffle the entire deck together.
- Play a set number of nights without a stop card. This removes the surprise of when the game will end, but might make it easier to plan a character arc.
- Play the entire game in one sitting, instead of over multiple nights.