

Dark Adventure Radio Theatre®

The SHUNNED HOUSE

...in Jyfflophone

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LUDO FORE PUTAVIMUS

NO AI-GENERATED WRITING, ARTWORK, PROPS, OR AUDIO WAS USED IN THIS PRODUCTION

The Players

Annie Abrams Martha, Ann White
Rick Batalla Clifford Babbit
Sean Branney Dr. Waite
Kacey Camp Nurse Paiva, Donovan, Rhoby Harris
Ken Clement Lester Mayhew
Matt Foyer Det. Brennan, Eleazar Durfee, Goodman Loucks
Hollie Hunt Delilah, Megan
McKerrin Kelly Bonnie, Mercy Dexter
Andrew Leman Dr. Elihu Whipple
Kevin Stidham Niels, Magistrate, Carrington Harris
Josh Thoenke Announcer
Sarah van der Pol Heather, Georgianne
Julie Wiesenberg Gage, Mary
Time Winters Doc Hopkins, Goodman Price

The Staff

Based on the story by H. P. Lovecraft
Radio Adaptation by Sean Branney and Andrew Leman
Original Music by Troy Sterling Nies
French language assistance by David Camus and Arnaud Duroy
Illustrations by Darrell Tutchton
CD Back Cover Illustration by Vladyslav Urasov
Prop Inserts by Andrew Leman and Sean Branney
Research assistance by Mary Austin, David Cerceno, Evan Franke, N. R. Jenzen-Jones and Dan Pratt
Produced by Sean Branney and Andrew Leman
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There is another very strange old house nearby which houses some distant relatives of mine, & which I have made the scene of a very sombre horror-tale. The tale is to be issued as a small book by W. Paul Cook, & you will later see a copy.

—H.P.L. to Elizabeth Toldridge,
10 June 1929

1924 was a big year for H.P. Lovecraft. On March 3, he married Sonia Greene and shortly thereafter moved from his beloved hometown of Providence to Brooklyn, New York. Initially, Lovecraft was enthralled by the Big Apple and kept an active social life, frequently going on rambles with his friends and fellow authors, including Frank Belknap Long, Henry Everett McNeil, James F. Morton and Rheinhart Kleiner.

Lovecraft penned “The Shunned House” in a scant three days, between October 16–19. Many of his strengths shine through in this tale. He uses well established tropes of vampires and werewolves, including real historical accounts of Mercy Brown and Jacques Roulet, and builds something entirely new from them. He combines horror with the cutting-edge technologies of his day, such as the Crookes Tube and flamethrower, to introduce an element of science fiction. (We decided to add to that by including the Bergonic Chair, a real WWI-era device for electroconvulsive therapy.)

The story was initially rejected by *Weird Tales* and other publishers, but Lovecraft read it to his New York colleagues and they embraced the tale. In a letter about the reading HPL wrote they “waxed incredibly enthusiastick in affirming that it is the best thing I ever writ.” W. Paul Cook thought so highly of it that he set it in type and printed up 300 copies, with the plan to publish it in book form. Had that plan succeeded it would have been the first Lovecraft

story to be published as a book in his lifetime, but Cook’s later financial troubles prevented it, and those unbound printed pages remain one of the most sought-after Lovecraftian collectibles. *Weird Tales* did publish it posthumously in October of 1937, along with an encomium declaring HPL to be “probably the greatest contemporary master of weird fiction”.

The story was inspired by two actual buildings. One was a decaying wreck of a house that Lovecraft saw on a visit to Elizabeth, New Jersey. Lovecraft called it “...a hellish place where night-black deeds must have been done in the early seventeen-hundreds”. Sadly, it has since been demolished. The other still stands on Benefit Street in Providence’s College Hill neighborhood. Searchers after horror in modern-day Providence will almost certainly be disappointed by their visit to 135 Benefit Street; it’s a nicely maintained and perfectly lovely late Colonial house, without a hint of anything terrible. But Lovecraft’s aunt Lillian Clark lived in the house briefly, and in its rundown condition during his lifetime, he thought it a suitable location for a weird tale.

Besides real buildings, real history, and real science, “The Shunned House” was inspired by real people. The unnamed narrator has a number of similarities to Lovecraft himself, and the character’s uncle, Elihu Whipple, seems to be a mash-up of HPL’s grandfather Whipple Phillips and uncle Dr. Franklin Clark. In adapting the tale, we leaned into this recreation of HPL’s childhood home by adding one more member of the real household: Delilah Townsend. Mrs. Townsend was a black woman who worked for the Lovecraft family from HPL’s childhood until declining fortunes precluded the maintenance of a hired staff. HPL himself based a character in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* on her, but we thought it

was high time that she have a moment in the spotlight — or at least at the microphone — where she could be front and center in a tale.

Lovecraft’s skillful blending of real people, places, science and history gives the fictional horrors visited upon the house’s residents an unnerving plausibility. In HPL’s original ending, the narrator digs up and pours acid on the monster’s *titan elbow*. We understand that HPL did that in the conviction it would be more plausible and realistic, but for this adaptation we decided—perhaps ironically—to change it to a more vulnerable and dramatically compelling anatomical feature.

—SB and ARHL

