

TIPS FOR FICTION WRITERS:

GHOSTS & GHOST HUNTERS ©2006-7 by Fiona Broome

Ghosts? Not everyone believes in them.

Oh, many people are afraid of the dark. Even more people become *edgy* when they hear unexplained noises after dark.

Let's talk about fact and fiction, related to ghosts.

Generally, there are three common kinds of hauntings: residual energy, active hauntings, and poltergeists.

Residual energy hauntings are locations that "feel" haunted. There may be some activity, and even an apparition or two... but it's the same thing, every time. The activity usually occurs on a certain day or date, and sometimes at a particular time. Or, it might be activated by a specific trigger, such as when a certain song is played on the radio.

I usually describe this as *stored energy* that lingers after an event (or events) that included strong emotions. It's like a stove that remains hot long after you turn it off.

The vast majority of reported hauntings turn out to be residual energy hauntings.

Active hauntings are similar to residual energy hauntings, but the ghost (or ghosts) will respond to modern-day events in its vicinity. That is, if you talk to the ghost, it will respond or at least pause what it's doing.

At HollowHill.com, when we've investigated reports of hauntings, fewer than 20% turn out to be active hauntings. Most are residual energy hauntings that will fade away in time, if they're ignored.

And--to break another stereotype--few ghosts appear as apparitions; that is, complete figures that everyone can see. It's also unusual to see an apparition that appears gruesome, bloody, or extremely old or young.

Most ghosts are identified by what they do, the impressions that they make upon witnesses, or anomalies measured with scientific equipment, cameras or recorders.

Poltergeists are a controversial topic among ghost hunters and parapsychologists.

Poltergeists are, literally, "noisy ghosts." When you hear about dishes flying across the room, or stones raining from the ceiling, that's a poltergeist.

Some people believe that poltergeist phenomena is psychokinesis (also called PK) or telekinesis. That is, it's caused by someone who is very much alive and has elevated abilities related to ESP. According to this theory, people are able to move things with the power of their minds, without physical contact.

Most people believe that the poltergeist is a mischievous or malicious spirit, acting on its own. It torments one or more people until it gets bored and goes somewhere else.

However, some ghost researchers--including me--believe that poltergeists are a two-part phenomenon. The energy for the activity is provided by someone who is very much alive. The pranks and noises are caused by the ghost.

One of the most intriguing lines of research relates to water and poltergeists. Poltergeist phenomena seems to increase around water--in the kitchen, bathroom, or a dining area where water is served. And, even in areas where there is no naturally occurring water, after a poltergeist episode, unexplained water appears in the area.

In general, ghosts can appear anywhere, but history--and perhaps geography--usually provide good reasons why the site may be haunted.

Likewise, there are three main kinds of ghost hunters: Rabid skeptics, ardent "true believers," and... well, everyone else.

Rabid skeptics go to extremes to find normal explanations for events that most people would label *paranormal*. The stereotype is male, under 22 or over 40 years old, and he's annoyingly sarcastic.

Ardent "true believers" are the polar opposite of rabid skeptics. They choose paranormal explanations for events that might well be normal. They're skeptical of the normal explanations, poking holes in them, rather than vice versa.

These two groups--rabid skeptics and ardent "true believers"--probably comprise less than 10% of all ghost hunters. However, skeptics and overly-enthusiastic believers tend to stand out in the crowd. So, many ghost hunters have to deal with these labels in the media and public opinion.

The vast majority of ghost hunters are healthy skeptics who admit that some events can't be explained, and *may* be caused by ghosts. Most ghost hunters believe in ghosts--at least in theory--but some don't. Generally, they're looking for proof, one way or the other, but how they define "proof" varies widely. What seems like *compelling evidence* to one person may seem laughably shaky to another.

In general, most ghost hunters are everyday people. At any ghost investigation, you'll usually find a mix of genders and a wide range of ages and backgrounds.

For more information like this, visit FionaBroome.com (writers' tips) or HollowHill.com (ghost research info).

WRITING PARANORMAL FICTION & NONFICTION

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Who's telling the story?

Nonfiction: Establish credibility

- Voice
- Credentials

Fiction: Decide your tone of voice.

1st person options: Skeptic, believer (changed recently?), uncertain ("You won't believe this, but...")

3rd person: "Just the facts" when presenting phenomena. Don't assume that your reader knows anything about the subject, but don't talk down to them, either. (Avoid lengthy, contrived dialogue. Ref. Terry Pratchett)

Set the stage

Nonfiction: Research names, dates, places. Don't leave out anything important (ref. Jack the Ripper in Austin, TX). Don't include anything that's a local joke.

Fiction: Names tell a lot. If you want to convey that this could happen to anyone, use Everyman kinds of names. Contrast ho-hum normal people & settings with the paranormal events. An alien abduction reported by an escaped mental patient is treated differently than an alien abduction report by the Governor.

Remember 'everyone knows' reference points

How unusual is the event? People expect ghosts to look 'ghostly' (translucent, a little weird). People expect alien aircraft to resemble flying saucers in some way. That can be an asset (saves you description) or a challenge (if you're breaking the stereotypes).

You can jar your audience (ref. Tell-Tale Heart) now & then, but generally give your readers something that they can count on, and stick to it. Then, the weird stuff leaps off the page in contrast.