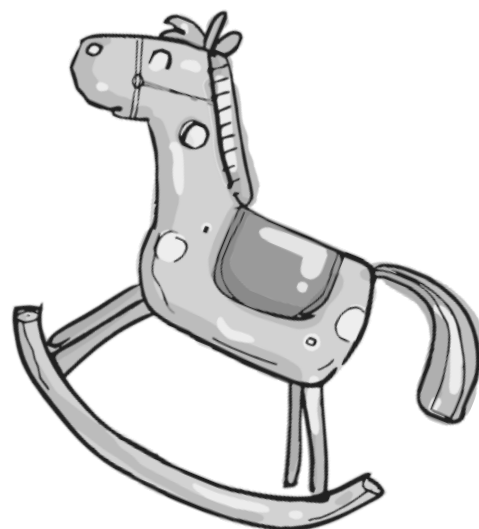# BRING DOWN THE HOUSE

by charles jamie linton

the tabletop game where you are a

HAUNTED OBJECT

(who ruins lives)

You are a **GHOST** who haunts an **EXTREMELY CURSED MANSION.** When there are no humans present, you can travel the grounds freely in your spirit form. But as soon as someone sets foot on the premises, you are **CONFINED TO AN OBJECT.** The previous occupants of your home **DIED UNDER CURIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES** that you **DEFINITELY HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH,** and for a time you roamed unrestricted. But **NEWCOMERS HAVE ARRIVED,** and you are once again **TRAPPED.** If you want to regain what passes for freedom in the afterlife, you'll need to **GET RID OF THEM...** one way or another.

OVERVIEW

Bring Down the House is a tabletop roleplaying game for 3 or more players and a haunt master (HM). The players portray ghosts trapped in household objects. The HM facilitates the game, portraying the House and its new inhabitants.

The ghosts **WIN** when every inhabitant has been chased off or killed. The ghosts **LOSE** if every haunted object is destroyed or removed from the premises.

It is unlikely this game will take more than two hours.

Notes on terminology:
- **"Player," "ghost,"** and **"object"** are used interchangeably.
- **"Occupant"** and **"inhabitant"** are used interchangeably.
- **"Move"** and **"action"** are used interchangeably in reference to both choices the players make and the responses these choices prompt from the HM.

You will need:
- One D12 die
- Up to eight D6 dice
- A piece of paper
- A pen or other writing implement

CHARACTER CREATION

First, figure out who your ghost is.

PLAYERS, roll **1D12** to determine why you remain on this wretched earth, or pick from the list:

1   You are trying to solve the mystery of your death.
2   You are trapped on earth until you atone for your sins.
3   You are watching over a relative who still lives.
4   You want to exact revenge on someone.
5   You are waiting for your beloved to join you on the other side.
6   You are bad with directions and don't know how to pass on.
7   You're waiting for your favorite author to finish the series.
8   You were bad in life and are hiding from the consequences.
9   You don't know what comes next and you don't want to find out.
10   Your body was lost by the funeral home. You are not at peace.
11   You were at peace, but your grave was robbed.
12   You just really enjoy scaring people.

OPTIONAL: Come up with a short biography for your ghost.

SPECTRAL STATS

Ghosts are defined by two static stats and two fluid stats. Your static stats do not change. Your fluid stats will change over the course of gameplay.

Your two stats are:

PRESENCE – Your ability to impact the physical world: moving yourself and other objects, and attacking people.

LURE – Your ability to influence human behavior: compelling people to do things, via emotional pull or emitting noise.

Since the House has occupants right now (curse them), you're trapped in an object.

PLAYERS, roll **1D12** to determine what object you inhabit, or pick from the list:

1   **Button** – Presence: 1, Lure: 5
2   **Loafers** – Presence: 1, Lure: 5
3   **Rotary Phone** – Presence: 2, Lure: 4
4   **Mirror** – Presence: 2, Lure: 4
5   **Television Set** – Presence: 2, Lure: 4
6   **Doll** – Presence: 3, Lure: 3
7   **Kiddush Cup** – Presence: 3, Lure: 3
8   **Frying Pan** – Presence: 3, Lure, 3
9   **Kettle** – Presence: 4, Lure: 2
10   **Lamp** – Presence: 4, Lure: 2
11   **Broom** – Presence: 5, Lure: 1
12   **Rocking Horse** – Presence: 5, Lure: 1

Describe what your object looks like for the other players.

You are welcome to rearrange your stats (maybe you're a mirror on wheels, and therefore want to move a point from Lure to Presence) or come up with your own haunted object. Your Presence and Lure stat should add to a total of 6.

Your fluid stats are:

MALICE – The amount of hate contained in your vessel.

OBVIOUS MALEVOLENCE – The extent to which your sentience and intent to commit mischief and murder is evident to the House occupants.

Every ghost starts with a Malice and Obvious Malevolence of 0. How these stats are gained and used will be explained in the Gameplay section.

Use your pen and paper to keep track of these stats throughout the game.

GAMEPLAY

The game begins with the HM describing the House and its occupants, including where each of the objects are located.

HM, roll **1D12** to determine two ostentatious features of this House:

1 An indoor pool.
2 A dumbwaiter.
3 A branched crystal chandelier.
4 An underground lake.
5 Three separate fireplaces.
6 A hunting trophy room.
7 A billiards room.
8 A wine cellar.
9 An in-home bar.
10 A bowling alley.
11 A kiln.
12 An elevator.

HM, roll **1D12** again to determine the House occupants. Don't share this with the players, although it should become evident over the course of gameplay.

1 A husband and wife and their adult child(ren).
2 The last surviving members of a mob family.
3 Nozama CEO Beff Jezos and the people he pays to be his friends.
4 Influencers trying to get that sweet content.
5 An eccentric heiress and her staff.
6 The founders of a supply chain management startup.
7 The most obtuse members of a fraternity.
8 Cousins arguing over their inheritance.
9 A slightly dysfunctional polycule.
10 A retired medium and their family.
11 Some friends moving in together after university.
12 Relatives of the previous occupants.

MAKING MOVES

After the scene is set, the ghosts begin to work towards their ultimate objective: scaring the occupants out of the house or killing them. In order to do so, they must make moves.

The ghost making a move should indicate both the action and its objective (**Harm**, **Scare** or **Something Else**) prior to rolling, as this will influence the move's difficulty and resolution.

Moves to **Harm** the occupants are determined narratively. More precise and gruesome actions are more challenging. The occupants do not have hit points or other stats that determine health: if a mirror falls on an occupant with the intent to kill, and that roll succeeds, the occupant dies. However, a roll to kill would be more challenging than a roll to injure or Scare.

Moves to **Scare** the occupants are also determined narratively, but have an additional HM-facing mechanic: The **Courage** stat.

Each occupant has a Courage stat that indicates how comfortable they feel in the house. Successful scare moves decrease the Courage stat of any inhabitant affected by the move. When the Courage stat of an occupant reaches 0, they flee the house, never to return. Courage stats may vary between occupants, and may increase or decrease.

The HM does not tell the players the Courage stats. Instead, they indicate how scared the occupants seem through description.

Any Move that doesn't directly attempt to Harm or Scare the inhabitants are categorized as **Something Else**. Failing a Something Else move may, however, Harm or Scare inhabitants at inopportune times.

As a spirit with limited material influence while you're trapped in a vessel, **even simple tasks someone with a body could accomplish require a roll.**

Your **stat number** tells you how many **D6s** to roll. Dice that display **three or under are failures**. Dice that display **four or above are successes**.

The **task difficulty** indicates the number of dice that need to succeed (to display four or higher) in order for you to succeed at the move.

Your group can decide if you would like the HM explicitly share numeric task difficulties, or imply them through description.

TASK DIFFICULTIES

1 within the normal function of the object
2 a little suspicious but ultimately explicable
3 quite challenging to write off as ordinary
4 clearly demonstrative of motive and sentience

The ghost determines the move they are attempting and its objective. The HM determines whether this move is a Presence or Lure roll.

Both stats can be used to Harm and Scare, though types of moves possible with each stat are different.

For example:
- A rocking horse doing a **Scare move** with **Presence** might bump into the legs of an inhabitant.
- A mirror doing a **Scare move** with **Lure** might compel an inhabitant to come look at themself in the glass.
- A kiddush cup doing a **Harm move** with **Presence** might fall onto the head of an inhabitant.
- A lamp doing a **Harm move** with **Lure** might compel an inhabitant to eat a lightbulb.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

When you succeed:
- The thing you wanted to happen happens.
- If your action was noticeable to the occupants, your Obvious Malevolence increases by 1 and you roll to keep looking innocuous.

When you fail:
- The thing you wanted to happen does not happen, or doesn't happen the way you wanted it to.
- If your action was noticeable to the occupants, your Obvious Malevolence increases by 1 and you roll to keep looking innocuous.
- You gain 1 point of Malice.
- The House makes a move.

OBVIOUS MALEVOLENCE: Sentience is suspicious.

Any time you make a move that might suggest you are not, in fact, an ordinary household object, but instead possessed by a ghost attempting to kill or terrify everyone who lives in the House, your Obvious Malevolence increases by 1. **Roll 1D12.**

- If you roll **over** your Obvious Malevolence stat, the occupants remain none the wiser.
- If you roll **under** your Obvious Malevolence stat, the occupants become aware that the object is haunted and take –1 Courage.

If the Courage stat of any of the occupants targeted by the previous move is still greater than 0, they realize the object is malevolent and begin working to destroy the object or remove it from the house.

The HM determines whether a move increases Obvious Malevolence, following the guidelines on the subsequent page.

In general: moves the occupants **do not witness** do not increase Obvious Malevolence. Moves the occupants **do witness** increase Obvious Malevolence. A good rule of thumb is that if the thing that just happened would make the average person think twice about the object, then Obvious Malevolence increases.

- Both successful and failed Something Else moves **might** increase Obvious Malevolence.
- Successful Scare moves **always** increase Obvious Malevolence.
- Failed Scare moves **might** increase Obvious Malevolence.
- Successful Harm moves **always** increase Obvious Malevolence.
- Failed Harm moves **might** increase Obvious Malevolence.

Additionally, Harm moves that succeed in killing an occupant make the object Immediately and Obviously Malevolent to any occupants who witnessed the murder.

MALICE: A tool of the dead and the furious.

When things aren't going their way, ghosts get pissed. A ghost accrues 1 Malice each time they fail a roll. Malice can be spent on the following:

1 POINT   **Draw on ghostly hate.**
Add 1 additional die for a Lure or Presence roll. The ghost must declare they are spending the Malice point before they roll.

2 POINTS   **Peek behind the veil.**
The ghost requests an informational or descriptive hint from the HM to **eek** out an advantage.

4 POINTS   **Make yourself at home.**
The ghost adds a detail to the house, describing a room or object that can be used to their benefit.

10 POINTS   **Give up the ghost.**
The ghost leaves its vessel to inhabit something (or someone) else. Choose new stats: object stat arrays add to 6. Possessed occupants have a Presence of 8 and 0 Lure.

THE HOUSE: This Extremely Cursed Mansion has a mind of its own.

The House is also sentient, and it can't quite decide how it feels about the ghosts and their scheming against the occupants.

When a ghost fails a move, the House makes a move in response. The HM rolls **1d6** to determine whether this move helps the ghosts, hurts them, or something in between.

1-2   You have disrupted the House. The House is angry.
The house does something, or motivates the occupants to do something, that harms the ghosts' efforts.

3-4   The House is ambivalent.
The house does something, or motivates the occupants to do something, that changes the landscape but does not necessarily help or hurt the ghosts.

5-6   The House is sympathic to your efforts, and feeling generous.
The house does something, or moves the occupants to do something, that aids the ghosts.

For example:
- **Harmful:** The occupants turn on the High School Musical soundtrack to lighten the mood.
- **Neutral:** The occupants find a deck of cards on the living room table and begin to play.
- **Helpful:** The overhead light crackles, making the occupants jump.

Whether a House move impacts the occupants' Courage stats in any given instance is up to the HM.

LENDING A HAND: How to help other ghosts.

Since you're trapped in an object, your ability to directly help one another is limited. Teamwork can happen in three ways:

GIVING MALICE
A little spite can always be shared. When one ghost makes a move, other ghosts can give them 1 point of Malice from their own pool for an additional die, up to 8 dice. Malice can only be shared for rolls.
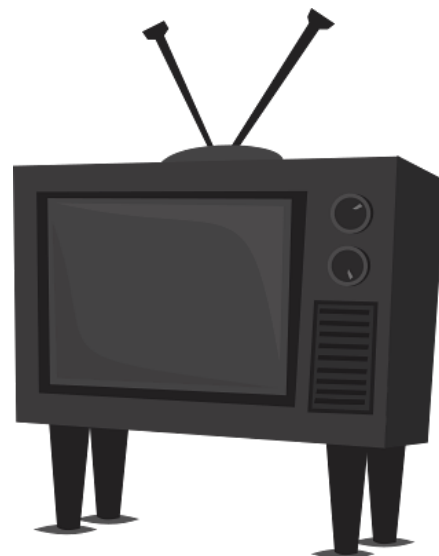
SIMULTANEOUS ACTION
Two ghosts can attempt different moves at the same time to work towards a collective goal. These moves are resolved simultaneously. For example, the broom might attempt to strike someone over the head just as the lamp flickers off. Ghosts must decide if their actions are simultaneous before rolling.

MOVES "AGAINST" OTHER GHOSTS
Ghosts can make moves involving other ghosts that only involve one ghost rolling. For example, the lamp might attempt to fall over into the television set and break it, or the rocking horse might tip down the stairs with the loafers on its back. Always ask other players before making a move that involves their ghost.

If you're the HM, continue on to the next page for the HM guide. If you're a player, feel free to read on, but this is as far as you need to read to bring down the house.

HAPPY HAUNTING!

HM GUIDE

These are suggestions, not rules! You know your players and their needs better than the game designer.

TALK TO YOUR PLAYERS ABOUT THE KIND OF GAME THEY WANT TO PLAY.

- Do they want success to be relatively easy, or are they looking for a challenge?
- Do they want you to help them win, or are they looking to play this as a strategy game, where bad luck and wrong moves lead to a quick loss?
- Are they looking for a goofy game of fun scares? Do they want to recreate a slasher film? Or something in-between?

Horror and ghost stories exist on an enormous spectrum. This game can be as light or as visceral as you want it to be: you can even decide as a group to eliminate harm moves altogether and just play with scares. It's important to set the desired tone and expectations as a group. Which brings us to:

DISCUSS AND SET CONTENT BOUNDARIES.
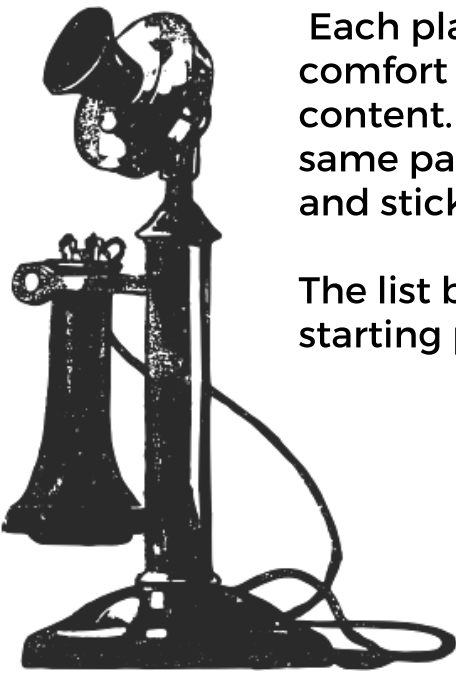
Each player will come to the table with different comfort levels and sensitivities to different kinds of content. Beyond making sure everyone is on the same page, establish explicit content boundaries, and stick to them.

The list below is not comprehensive, but a good starting point for discussing horror content warnings:

amputation, beheading, blood, bones, burn injuries, cannibalism, death, drowning, exposure of internal organs, eye horror, gore, harm to animals, impalement, insects, interpersonal violence, rats, self-harm, spiders, suicide, suffocation, vivisection, vomit

FIGURE OUT OCCUPANT AND STAT NUMBERS.

There are no stat tables for the occupants, because you will customize these for each game!

For a "normal" difficulty game (challenging but totally winnable), the recommend number of occupants is one more than there are players, and an average Courage stat of 5.

So if you have 3 players, that would be 4 occupants, and a total Courage of 20 for the group. However, not every occupant needs to have the same Courage stat! You could have someone with a Courage of 8, and three people with a Courage of 4, or any other combination that adds up to 20.

Keep track of each occupant's Courage stat throughout the game. This will dictate their reactions to the developing situation, including when they will flee the House. Narrative detail about the occupants of the House and the gameplay experience your players want to have will inform Courage stat distribution.

AND HERE ARE THREE MORE PIECES OF ADVICE:

Resolve Obvious Malevolence before describing Move outcomes.
This is mostly for game flow. For example, a successful scare roll that unexpectedly reveals an object as haunted early on in the game will feel disjointed if "occupant now seems a little frightened" and "oh wait, the occupant suddenly realizes you are a haunted doll" are conveyed separately.

Develop most of the House during gameplay.
Rather than writing descriptions for tons of rooms your players may not ever encounter, position all ghosts and occupants in just a couple of rooms to start. Use the House Moves, Peek Behind the Veil, and Make Yourself at Home to add more rooms and more details.

The House is alive, and you can use it to make the game more fun.
Every move in Bring Down the House is designed to propel the game forward: there's no "nothing happens" result. If you do get caught in a lull, the House (you) can always make a move of its own volition.

CREDITS

ABOUT THE DESIGNER

Charles Jamie Linton is a writer and dramaturg from the San Gabriel Valley. He does not like jump scares. This is his first tabletop game. You can find him on **itch** and **Twitter** @NearFutures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All the art in this game comes from Openclipart.

Thank you to everyone in Bicoastal Writers' Workshop and "We Like Genre Here" Writers' Workshop for playtesting Bring Down the House and for very nicely telling me a functional version of this game would be too complicated to fit on a single page. You were right.

Additional thanks to Samson Soulsby for the very specific and thoughtful feedback that made this game what it is now, and Brian Gillick for telling me that story about the haunted doll full of bees that inspired it to begin with.

LICENSING

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