

The Haunted House

GUMSHOE™ conversion notes

Keeper's Information

This document contains GUMSHOE™ conversion notes for “The Haunted House” adventure by Keith Herbert. The adventure was published in “Trail of Tsathogghua” (currently available as PDF at DriveThruRPG) and “Curse of Cthulu” books. This conversion requires text of the original adventure to play. Page references made with respect to both printings – ToT stands for page number in Trail of Tsathogghua, CoC stands for page number in Curse of Cthulu. For example ToT39, CoC95 would refer to page 39 in Trail of Tsathogghua and page 95 in Curse of Cthulu (incidentally, it's the first page of adventure in both books). Handouts are referenced only by name and number since they are provided in separate detachable booklet.

The Haunted House is rather unlike most Call of Cthulhu adventures, because it does not feature (at least directly) any Mythos entities. Instead the investigators confront an ancient spirit brought to America from the Old World.

Most of the adventure consists of exploring Van Laaden estate, gathering information and piecing together history of the family and nature of the haunting. Clues abound, but most of them are red herrings, and the main challenge is separating the husks from the grain. I've tried to preserve the structure, but for Keeper's convenience, the core clues of the investigation are summarized below:

- **“The Voyages and Journeys of Brandon Van Laaden” (The Van Laaden Papers 5).** Chapter three describes how Brandon Van Laaden, while traveling in England, selected a huge oak to be used to refurbish the portions of the house. This clue can be discovered either in the library of Van Laaden estate (ToT51, CoC107) or in rare books section of Grand Rapids library (ToT45, CoC101).
- **The missing clue.** The adventure states that a worker was killed while felling the tree, but this information is not available to investigators. Ingenious Keeper and a generous ability spend may change this (ToT39, CoC95).
- **Letter sent by Henry Van Laaden to the worker, injured while carrying the big block**

of oak that was used as mantle over the fireplace (The Van Laaden Papers 7). This clue indicates that the accidents happened around the tree before it was part of the house. It can be found in the study of Van Laaden estate (ToT51, CoC107).

- **Suicide note of Elizabeth Van Laaden (The Van Laaden Papers 9).** This letter points at sitting room, where the oak mantle was installed. It also can be found in Van Laaden library (ToT51, CoC107).
- **The diary of Virginia Van Laaden (The Van Laaden Papers 11).** The fact that Beatrice spoke old Gaelic during sleep is a clue to the nature of the haunt. The diary is located in the master bedroom, on the second floor of the mansion (ToT55, CoC111).
- **The diary of Beatrice Van Laaden (The Van Laaden Papers 17).** Celtic patterns that decorate the diary are a clue to the nature of the haunt. The journal is found in Beatrice's bedroom, on the third floor of the mansion (ToT57, CoC113).
- **The diary of Aaron Van Laaden (The Van Laaden Papers 18).** Another source indicating that Beatrice spoke old Gaelic in her sleep. This diary can be found in the storage room on the third floor of the Van Laaden estate (ToT57, CoC113). *Please note, that this is NOT the same diary that is found in the study on the first floor.*

These clues, together with the manifestations, should be enough for the investigators to deduce the nature of the haunting.

Floating Clues

All of the clues listed in “Clues and Information” (ToC44-45, CoC100-101) section of the adventure are floating clues. They require no ability spends and can be found in any likely place, such as newspapers archives, civic records, scrapbooks or any other places the Keeper deems suitable. Don't be stingy, give the investigators as much information on the history of Van Laaden family and estate as they want. If no relevant clue is given in the text, make one up based on the “History of the House” and “History of Van Laaden Family” sections (ToT40-43, CoC96-99).

Scenes

The following section consists of notes on scenes and locations described in the adventure. Not every clue is listed – I’ve concentrated on clues requiring abilities and core clues. Those few clues not listed here can be obtained by simple search. Also, some of the clues listed under abilities headings (such as walled-off rooms) can be obtained by simple search. Keeper’s common sense is the best judgment in these cases.

Since Maurice Van Laaden and groundskeeper family play relatively minor role in the adventure, no statistic provided for them.

Meeting Maurice Van Laaden

(ToT44-45, CoC100-101)

- **Assess Honesty 1-pont spend** to realize that Maurice is keeping back some facts when talking about his family.
- **Hypnosis** test against difficulty 4 to recover memories.
- **Law 1-pont spend** to discover loopholes in the contract.

The Grounds

Karl and Hildegard

(ToT46, CoC102)

- **Assess Honesty** to notice that Karl is nervous about something.
- **Reassurance 1-point spend** to have Hildegard tell investigators about their experience with the ghost.

The Iron Fence

(ToT47, CoC103)

- **Athletics** test against difficulty 4 (against difficulty 3 if the player specifically states that the character is being careful) to avoid d6-1 damage from finials.

The Carriage House

(ToT47, CoC103)

- **Athletics** test against difficulty 10 (likely requires group effort) to open the doors.
- **Architecture** to realize that opening central doors will collapse the structure, take d6+1 damage if it collapses.

The Tool Shed:

(ToT48, CoC104)

- **Biology, Forensics, Outdoorsman** to test blood stains, requires access to laboratory.

The House Interior

(ToT49, CoC105)

- **1-point Stability test** when entering the house for the first time.

The First Floor

The Foyer

(ToT49, CoC105)

- **Art History, History** to evaluate artifacts.
- **Spooky events:** falling chandelier deals d6+2 damage unless Athletics test against difficulty 4 is made.

The Kitchen

(ToT50, CoC106)

- **Biology, Forensics, Outdoorsman** to test suspicious stains.

The Living Room:

(ToT50, CoC106)

- **Geology, Physics, Astronomy, Chemistry** to identify the rock as meteorite.
- **Mechanical repair** to investigate the piano.

The Study

(ToT50, CoC106)

- **Core clue:** letter sent by Henry Van Laaden to the worker, injured while carrying the big block of oak that was used as mantle over the fireplace (The Van Laaden Papers 7).
- **Accounting** to learn the business history of the family.
- **Simple search:** Letter to Henry Van Laaden from sawmill foreman (The Van Laaden Papers 5).
- **Simple search:** Journal of Aaron Van Laaden (The Van Laaden Papers 8).

The Library

(ToT51, CoC107)

- **Core clue:** “The Voyages and Journeys of Brandon Van Laaden”.
- **Core clue:** Suicide note of Elizabeth Van Laaden (The Van Laaden Papers 9).
- **Simple search:** Van Laaden Family Bible contains Van Laaden family tree.

- **Using library for research:** Downstairs library gives access to the following pools: Anthropology 1, Astronomy 1, Biology 3, History 3. Due to the limited scope of the library these pools do not refresh.

The Dining Room

(ToT52, CoC108)

- **Art History, History** to evaluate artifacts.

The Billiard and Game Room

(ToT52, CoC108)

- **Art History, History** to evaluate artifacts.
- **Biology, Outdoorsman** to identify stuffed animals.

The Greenhouse

(ToT52, CoC108)

- **Spooky events:** entering the trapdoor might require Athletics test against difficulty 3 to avoid becoming sick. Seeing decayed animal might trigger Stability test.

The Second Floor

The Water Closet

(ToT53, CoC109)

- **Architecture** to reveal the secret passage behind the damaged wall.

Maurice's bedroom

(ToT54, CoC110)

- **Simple search** to find the painted-over picture on the wall.
- **Chemistry 1-point spend** to reveal the picture hidden under the plaster. This, in turn, might trigger Stability test.

Sewing Room

(ToT54, CoC110)

- **Spooky events:** knitting needles can do d6-2 damage.

Erich's Bedroom

(ToT54, CoC110)

- **Simple search:** "The Log of Tanager" (Van Laaden Papers 10).
- **Anthropology, Archaeology, Art History, History, Occult** to identify the half-man half-fish statue.
- **Simple search:** finding the Great Cthulhu idol causes 1-point Stability test.

- **Spooky events:** dodging the flying chair required Athletics test against difficulty 4, falling down the stairs causes d6+2 damage.

The Master Bedroom

(ToT55, CoC111)

- **Core clue:** The diary of Virginia Van Laaden (The Van Laaden Papers 11).

The Third Floor

The Stranger's Room

(ToT55, CoC111)

- **Architecture** to find the plastered-over door.
- **Simple search** to find the scrap of paper.
- **Anthropology, History, Occult, Language (Sanskrit)** to identify the writing on the paper.

The Upstairs Library

(ToT55, CoC111)

- **Biology, Outdoorsman** to identify stuffed animal.
- **Using library for research:** Upstairs library gives access to the following pools: Anthropology 2, Astronomy 1, Biology 3, Chemistry 1, History 3, Law 1, Medicine 1. These pools also do not refresh.

The Upstairs Study

(ToT56, CoC112)

- **Simple search:** Letter to Bertrand Hancock from University of Michigan (Van Laaden Papers 12).
- **Simple search:** The Journal of Bertrand Hancock (Van Laaden Papers 13).
- **Evidence collection** to find the secret compartment containing the Journal of Allen Gottler Van Laaden (Van Laaden Papers 14) and the Secret Book (Van Laaden Papers 15).
- **Architecture** to find the secret door behind the panel.
- **Art History 1-point spend** to identify the painting as a before-unknown Brueghel.

Beatrice's Bedroom

(ToT57, CoC113)

- **Core clue:** The diary of Beatrice Van Laaden (The Van Laaden Papers 17).
- **Simple search:** The letters of Aaron Van Laaden (The Van Laaden Papers 16).

The Storage Room:

(ToT57, CoC113)

- **Core clue:** The diary of Aaron Van Laaden (The Van Laaden Papers 18).

The Attic

(ToT57, CoC113)

- **Simple search:** A letter from Mary Gottler (The Van Laaden Papers 19).

The Basement

East Basement

(ToT57, CoC113)

- **Simple search:** coroners' report on the death of the stranger (The Van Laaden Papers 20).
- **Architecture** to discover the secret staircase.

West Basement

(ToT57, CoC113)

- **Architecture** to discover the plastered-over door.

Hidden Room

(ToT58, CoC114)

- **2-point Stability test** (1-point if the investigators expects to find the bodies).
- **Forensics** to analyze the bodies.
- **Forensics, Chemistry** to analyze the gray residue.

The Haunt

(ToT59, CoC115)

Game Statistics

Abilities: Athletics 5, Health 7, Scuffling 20,
Manifestation: 36

Hit Threshold: 4

Weapon: +1 (claw)

Alertness and Stealth Modifier: The haunt can hide anywhere in the wood of the house and become completely undetectable. But creaking sound he makes while moving make it difficult to sneak on anyone. Needless to say, all the time the haunt remains aware of everything that goes on in the house.

Armor: Immune to gunfire, vulnerable to fire and cutting weapons, such as axes and hatchets.

Stability Loss: +1

Manifestations

(ToT61-63, CoC117-119)

These are abilities the Haunt can use to terrify the investigators. For that purpose he uses his Manifestation ability, with each use of each effect requiring appropriate expenditure of points.

The Haunt fully refreshes Manifestation points every day at dawn (this is mostly for convenience, going strictly by the rules the Haunt refreshes 1 point every 40 minutes). Should the haunt spend all manifestation points, it goes dormant until next dawn.

While full list of manifestation is given below, only those requiring game mechanics are described in more detail. The rest of the effects are described fully in the adventure.

0-point manifestations:

- **Awareness of the surroundings.**
- **Close or open any door, window, or shutter directly connected to the house.**

1-point manifestations:

- **Cold Spots**
- **Extinguish Fire.**
- **Alter Weather.**
- **Decay Food.**
- **Rapping or Creaking Noises.**
- **Terrible Odor.**

2-point manifestations:

- **Cold Breeze.**
- **Minor Telekinesis**
- **Spirit Writing.**
- **Jammed Door, Window, or Shutter.** A contest of Athletics against Manifestation ability is required to break the door or window open. Each round the Haunt keeps the doors jammed requires expenditure of 2 points, in addition to any points spent to modify the roll.
- **Smoke from Corners of Room.**
- **Cause Fire.**
- **Mysterious Sounds.**

3-point manifestations:

- **Cause Interior Wood to Glow.**
- **Major Telekinesis.** If the Haunt uses this ability to attack investigators (remember that it can move only objects made of wood), threat the Manifestation ability as Firearms (if throwing

objects) or Scuffle (if trying to push someone out of the window). As with jamming doors, 3 points required to activate this ability are not added to the roll, but the Haunt can spend additional Manifestation points to increase his chances. The investigators should be allowed to use Sense Trouble or any other appropriate ability to avoid being surprised by the attack. Damage from the attack varies, depending on the result – being poked by a wooden knitting needle is very different from being crushed by a falling bookcase.

- **Plant Growth.**
- **Push.** While this ability can be used against the investigator, it's not strong enough to do any direct damage, it can be used to knock an investigator off balance while ascending or descending a stairway, or if when two investigators are carrying a heavy object (such as expensive and fragile ghost-hunting equipment). Generally, Athletic or Sense Trouble rolls should be allowed to avoid unpleasant consequences.
- **Darkness.**
- **Frightening Faces.**
- **Water and Blood.**

Spells

- **Summon Spirit of the Dead.** This spell costs 6 Manifestation points to cast. Seeing the ghost can amount to 4 or 5-point Stability test.
- **Implant Fear.** This spell costs 6 Manifestation points to cast. By using this spell the Haunt forces the investigator to make a 4-point Stability test.
- **Nightmare.** This spell causes automatic loss of 3 Stability points.
- **Mental Suggestion.** This spell costs 3 Manifestation points to cast. The Haunt must make Manifestation ability test against target's current Stability. If successful, the Haunt controls the investigator for 1 round.
- **Death Spell.** This spell costs 6 Manifestation points to cast. Mechanically it works like Shrivelling spell (see *Trail of Cthulhu*, page 117), but instead of twisting the flesh it sets target on fire from within.

Reading the last two spells, you may wonder why there're so cheap. Actually, they are not – casting them successfully requires beating current Stability score of the victim. This requires significant pool spend, limiting use of the spells. This also makes investigators more vulnerable to the powers of the Haunt as the adventure proceeds.

Stability loss:

Use the guidelines presented on page 71 in *Trail of Cthulhu* to measure Stability loss in each case. As a rule of thumb, it should be less or equal to Manifestation points spent to create the effect that triggered the test.

This adventure can be pretty damaging to investigators' Stability, so don't abuse the system – you don't want them to go completely crazy before the final confrontation.

All in all, Stability losses during the adventure should vary between 1 (for creepy noises and extinguishing candles) to 5 (for seeing the ghosts and the Haunt). But there is very little fun in losing five Stability points for hearing creepy noise five times. Use different manifestation for maximum dramatic effect – for example sudden thunderstorm might be unnerving, but is hardly terrifying, while hearing creaking floorboard and heavy breathing while locked in a pitch-dark room can be a harrowing experience indeed.

Winning the Scenario

There is no way to win. Everybody goes mad and dies. Well, not exactly, but getting upper hand over the Haunt is difficult. The central object of the haunting is embedded deep in the house, and can't be removed or destroyed easily, even without the malevolent spirit trying to prevent it. So here the goal is not to rely purely on abilities, but to think out of the box. If the investigators come up with unique, original solution that just might work – let it work. It will be more satisfying that way.