

10 Cheap Tricks to Haunt Your Halloween

Victoria Ann Davis

Have Adding Machine Will Travel
Stockton, NJ

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to:
Gene & Colleen for helping me to realize that I don't have to apologize for being this into Halloween.

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Finally, to everybody who put up with me talking about this book incessantly. Thank you

INTRODUCTION

Dear Fellow Haunter:

I enjoy Halloween, and I enjoy creating things. When I started haunting back in the 1990's, animatronics were a rare and expensive luxury that were found in very few stores. Even well-made still props, when one would grace the front of the Halloween costume or toy store in October, were often priced outside of my budget. In order to design a quality haunt I needed to make my own fun from commonplace materials. This book is the culmination of that experience.

Today national Halloween chain stores offer a beguiling array of sophisticated props at prices that are better than their predecessors. However, for the haunter who prefers to express their unique sensibilities, or would like value priced props prior to November first, this book will be an asset.

The construction tips given for each project are geared to give consistently good results, but, wherever possible, I have included tips for further experimentation and customization. I have included chapters regarding: my explanation of haunt theory (Chapter 1), haunt design (Chapter 12) and haunt lighting (Chapter 13). Even if you jump ahead to the fun stuff, I hope you will glance at these chapters in order to take your haunt to the next level.

I will not profess, in this book or any other, that I am a great artist. You do not need to be an artist to make or enjoy these projects. I care deeply about my creations, and I hope that after you have made one or two of these props you will too. One of the beauties of Halloween decorations is that imperfections just make them better; so dive in and create with confidence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria". The script is fluid and cursive, with the 'V' being particularly large and stylized.

1 ELEMENTS OF HAUNTING

Use your imagination to visualize this scene:

Early one evening I found myself home alone. I was reading a magazine when I realized that it had grown dark outside—a storm was blowing in. I reached for the switch of a nearby lamp while thunder rolled outside, but I miscalculated and knocked it to the floor where it shattered. I rose to get a broom and dust pan from the basement.

As I opened the door to the basement, a dark, musty smell rose to hit my nose. I reached into the dank darkness for the frayed string and the sole bulb hanging from the ceiling illuminated the stairs with a yellow light. As I made my descent, the worn, wooden stairs bowed slightly and creaked with each foot-fall. The storm was nearly overhead now and thunder peeled more loudly so it could be heard clearly even as I reached the cold, damp concrete at the bottom of the steps.

In an instant, a brilliant flash accompanied by a thunderous roar illuminated and disappeared leaving me in full darkness, as the surge it produced had burnt out the lone bulb of the stairway. I cursed my misfortune as I stumbled clumsily in the darkness. There was a flashlight somewhere, but how could I see it without light. I felt blindly along the wall where I succeeded in knocking over the very broom I had originally sought. It clattered against the floor. That's when I felt something brush my leg. Its warmth was uncharacteristic in the clammy room and I staggered backward nearly losing my balance.

Where was the staircase again? Uncertain, I groped in all directions. Then I felt another rub from the same object, approaching me from behind this time while a low rumbling noise rose to my ears. I thrust myself forward to find the wall again. I felt my way along its rough surface desperately, bumping against boxes and tripping over buckets, rakes and shovels all the way. At last I made it to the workbench in the far corner—where the rechargeables were kept—and not a moment too soon as I could hear the rumbling noise following me.

I grabbed my rechargeable flashlight, brandished it like a sword in the direction of the noise and triumphantly pressed the switch. However, instead of light it only produced the loud whine of a handheld vacuum. I tossed the vac to the side as the rumbling and rustling movement was almost upon me. Urgently, I reached behind me to the workbench and hoped that the neighbors would not find my disemboweled corpse still clutching a power screwdriver. I pointed again, pressed the switch and illumination was achieved just in time for me to see...FANGS.

That silly cat had managed to get himself locked in the basement again. I picked-up Fangs with my free hand and carried him up the steps. Cleaning up the lamp would have to wait; it was his dinner time.

This little story is meant to illustrate the elements that make a haunt a fun and memorable attraction. Whether it is an elaborate dark ride at an amusement park or a simple yard haunt for the neighborhood, the elements of a successful haunt are the same. A haunt does not have to be expensive to be good, and conversely flashy props alone do not make a good haunt. To understand what elements make a haunt good, let's look at the story.

As you read, you may have experienced a range of emotions: first the placid enjoyment of an early evening, then the foreboding of the coming storm, annoyance at the broken lamp, trepidation at entering the basement, alarm at the lightning strike, fear in the darkness, hyper-alertness in the deprivation of sight, exasperation in the search for light, triumph followed by frustration with the hand-vac, relief at the sight of a beloved pet and finally amusement at mistaking the cat for a monster. Guiding the spectator through a range of emotions is the back bone of a good haunt. These emotions include humor—adding a little sweet to the bitter- rather than being just all gross or all eerie all the time.

Notice in the story it is actually our imagination getting the better of us that makes us scared. That's what is happening in any good haunt. The haunter just plants seeds by making suggestions of frightening things and lets the spectator's imagination fill in the blanks. In a good haunt it is our imagination that scares us the most.

In the story, all senses are employed. We see changes in light. We smell the basement. We hear the squeak of the steps, the crack of thunder, and the cat purring—which seems uncharacteristically loud when we are in total darkness. We feel the rough of the walls and bumps of things we cannot see against our legs. Sometimes haunters rely on visual elements and then add some scary music in the background, but the smart haunter knows to stimulate all the senses. They will give their spectator things to touch (remember the cold spaghetti and peeled grapes thing we did as kids). They will also try to incorporate smells, there are plenty of natural odors that can be safely used in a haunt to add to a scene.

All these sensory experiences should enhance the scene. For example, if we were creating a mummy's tomb. We would start with the figure of the mummy (see chapter 8) or perhaps just a sarcophagus with a mummy hand peeking out. The lighting should accentuate the central figure—essentially point it out. In this case perhaps real work lamps on a tripod left by an archeologist or a line of flameless candles left by priests. Rather than a generic scary sounds soundtrack, there could be the sound of a shovel digging or some random banging of a doomed archeologist. Or there might be some exotic chanting for the newly entombed king. A concealed bucket of potting soil with some warm water poured over it would give off the smell of fresh excavation. Whereas, a mysterious scent like Patchouli would suggest fresh embalment. These additive elements bring the viewer into the moment and allow them to suspend their disbelief and experience a mummy's tomb rather than some stuff that was purchased at the home center and assembled the previous weekend.

While we are on the topic of sensory information, notice how, in the story, light continually changes. First there is enough light to read by, then things darken, the stairway is illuminated by a dim yellow bulb, then there is total darkness, finally the white light of a flashlight reassures us and returns us to reality. A good haunter knows to vary the light rather than leave everything in darkness or all strobe lights or all black lights. Lighting that is appropriate to the scene and varied throughout the haunt will lead to a more effective haunt. Plus after spending time building some of the awesome focal points in this book, you will want your audience to get a good look at them. Lighting is covered in depth in chapter 13.

Finally, the story follows a logical progression of events to a natural conclusion. Even if a haunt is one scene there should be a logic to it. For one of my early yard haunts I had three good focal points: a homemade mummy (chapter 8), a store-bought alien in a cryotube, and a rectangular plywood coffin. How did I bring these disparate elements together? I painted a black light mural of the Giza Plateau under construction with the help of a spaceship beaming pyramid blocks in place. I then put the mummy in the coffin--which was now an archeologist's crate- and I added a sign that read, "Cairo Express, when it absolutely, positively had to be there 5,000 years ago." (Notice the use of humor again.) Now it all worked together logically.

Keep these elements in mind whether you are including one simple scene at your Halloween party or building a more elaborate haunt.

Now let's get to the fun part.

2 BLACK LIGHT PAINTING



The following project is designed as an introduction to creating paintings that are affected by changes in light. In order to facilitate the process a free download of the design is available at 10CheapTricks.com. The directions below are based on it, however you can also create your own design or free-hand your own version of this one. The design used in this chapter was drawn by my cool friend Ed. If you do not have a cool friend like Ed try reading the tip “What to do when you can’t draw” below to help increase your design options.

These directions will help you create a small scale painting with a simple subject to be placed in a window or hung on a wall. At the end of this section there are tips for creating a much larger indoor/outdoor mural.

Materials:

4 sheets of 8 ½ x 11 (21.59 x 27.94cm) printer paper and ink; transparent tape, painter's tape; 1 piece of foam core 15 inch x 20 inch (38.1 x 50.8cm); carbon or wax free transfer paper; acrylic paint in the following colors: white, black, brown, red, lime green, tan and gray; florescent paint in the following colors: orange, yellow, red; phosphorescent paint in neutral (a/k/a Glow-in-the-Dark Paint), floating medium (found in the paint section of the hobby store), matte finish spray enamel

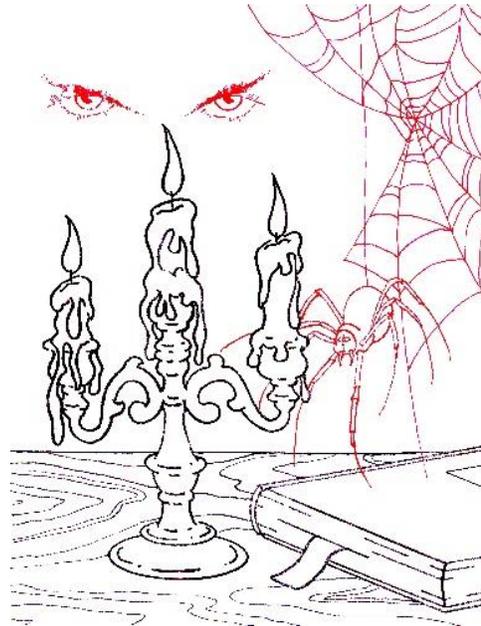
Tools:

pencil, stick pin, chisel point paint brush and a couple of additional brushes in assorted widths, painting sponge or cotton balls, plastic pallet or disposable plate, disposable cup with clean water, paper towel, florescent black light, computer with printer, picture frame (optional)

Note: You can save time tracing by having this design output by a large scale printer at your local office supply store. The cost may vary. The print can then be mounted to foam core and painted as directed.

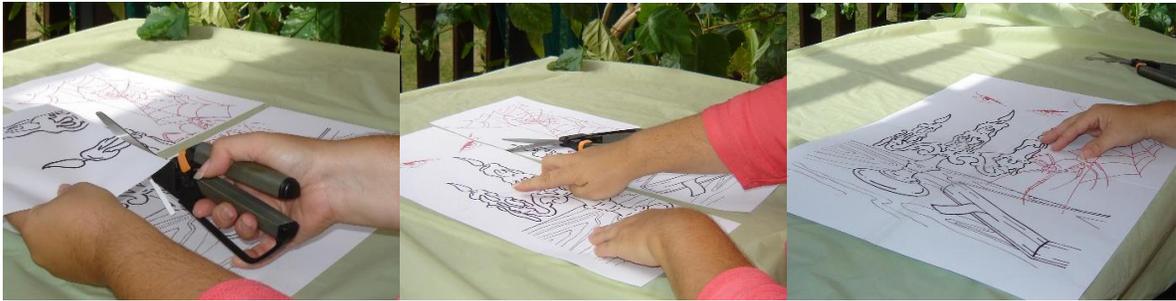
Procedure:

1. Download the design at <http://www.10cheaptricks.com> and print. The design is a PDF that has been set up to print as a tiled poster on 8 ½ x 11 (21.59 x 27.94cm) paper.



Black Light Painting

- Trim away the margins. Trim the right edge of the left side sheets and the top edge of the bottom sheets. Match the lines of the design and tape together with the transparent tape.



- Lay your foam core on a clean, dry table and lay the carbon or transfer paper on the foam core starting in the lower left corner. Use small pieces of painter's tape to secure the transfer paper temporarily. You will be removing this later on, so do not press too hard. (Do not worry if the transfer paper does not cover the entire area of the design, it can be gently detached and moved as needed.)



- Align the taped-together-design with the left edge of the foam core with the transfer paper beneath it. Wrap and fold the left margin over the left side of the foam core and secure on the back with small pieces of painters tape.



SUMMARY

I hope reading this book has given you new ideas, tools and confidence so that you can build a haunt of your own or at the very least scare your neighbors. Be safe and have a Happy Halloween!



If you would like to ask questions or share your experiences, interact with this book at 10CheapTricks.com, www.facebook.com/10cheaptricks and 10cheaptricks.blogspot.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Victoria is a certified Halloween Nut. She got her start in the early 1990's designing and holding haunts to entertain at-risk youth. Four years later she segued into charitable haunts and eventually to yard haunting. In addition she has designed floats for local parades. *10 Cheap Tricks to Haunt Your Halloween* is the book that she wishes she had back when she started.

Victoria is recently retired from a twenty-year stint as a community radio, talk-show host. After years of interviewing authors, she has resolved to tell her own story through the things that she creates. This book is the beginning.