THE ULTIMATE HAUNTED HOUSE GUIDE

BEGINNER BUILDS

The full-treatment first book: the $100 starter cart, fog, stone, light, sound & the nine starter builds done properly — diagrams in words, dimensions, verified parts, troubleshooting

SPOOKY AT HEART

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Every chapter in this book stands on a build the HAUNT series has shown or the Starter Kit has shipped — proven effects, written to be built from the page alone.

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Companion (free): The Haunt Starter Kit — the condensed quick-start this book expands.

FOREWORD

The After-Season Score — Why This Book Opens in November

November 1st is Christmas morning for haunters. HAUNT #011 said it first and it stays true all year: the day after Halloween, every store that sold decorations starts selling *space* — and the gear that powers a yard drops to half price, then less. This book opens here on purpose. The builders who own October bought their October in November, at the after-season score, with eleven months to build slow and build right.

The calendar of record (HAUNT #011): **October 31** → **November 1** — Spirit Halloween drops to 50% off as stores head toward closing; this is the main event. **Early November** — Home Depot and Lowe's seasonal aisles run 50% → 75% off; good aisles get raided fast, so go early in the week, not on the weekend. **Mid–late November** — closing stores hit 75% → 90%; hunt inventory on BrickSeek and store-closing lists before you drive across town for a shelf that is already empty.

Buy: fog machines, fog juice, lighting — the gear that works every year and never goes out of style. **Skip:** cheap animatronics; they die in storage and the clearance price is what a broken motor costs. **Store:** dry everything, label every bin. Next year's build starts with a stockpile, not a shopping trip.

Then build in the order this book is written: one working system at a time, each chapter complete before the next begins. A beginner who finishes Chapter 2 (fog) and Chapter 4 (light) owns a haunt most decorated yards never reach. The rest of the book stacks on that spine.

Chapter 1 — The $100 Starter Haunt Kit: One Cart, First Haunt

HAUNT #010 distilled the whole series into one order. This chapter is that cart, expanded into a plan: what each item actually does in the yard, what order to open the boxes in, and what to skip if the budget is thinner than $100. Prices marked 'of record' are the episode record's own figures (HAUNT #010).

What you need

- Fog machine, 400W — VIRFUN (of record ≈ $30)
- Fog juice, gallon — FogWorx (of record ≈ $15)
- RGB uplights — Onforu 6-pack (two go in the yard first; of record ≈ $30 for the pair used)
- Outdoor Bluetooth speaker, waterproof — SumYanHing (of record ≈ $20)
- 3 foam tombstones + matte gray spray paint (of record ≈ $15, any craft store)
- Spider webs, bulk pack — ZPISF (of record ≈ $5)

Build it

1. Unbox in build order, not price order. Stones first (Chapter 3 ages them while everything else ships), then the fog machine, then lights, then sound, then webs last — webs are the finisher and go up the night before, never a week early.

2. The fog machine is the workhorse. It feeds the chiller you build in Chapter 2. Any 400W+ unit works; the record's unit is the VIRFUN because it was verified on this series, not because it is magic.

3. The uplights run the 3-Zone System (Chapter 4). Put two in the yard the first night and keep the rest of the pack as accent lights and spares — a dead uplight on haunt night with no spare is a dark zone.

4. The speaker carries the 3-Layer Audio System (Chapter 5). Hidden in a hollow stone or a bush, fed by an old phone as the MP3 source — $0, per the record.

5. The stones and webs are raw material, not finished props. Chapters 3 and 7 turn them into a cemetery and a reveal. Bought plain is correct — finished-looking foam is the toy look this book exists to fix.

6. Total of record: ≈ $115 all-in (the episode's own total — the kit is named for its target, and the record states the honest sum). If the budget is $60: machine + juice + stones + paint, and borrow the speaker. Fog and stones are the irreducible core.

Haunter's note: If a part is out of stock, substitute by *class*, never by price: any 400W+ fog machine, any waterproof outdoor speaker, any RGB uplight pack. The systems in this book are class-based on purpose — they survive substitutions because the technique, not the SKU, is the product.

Troubleshooting

- Fog machine 'doesn't work' out of the box → it needs 3–5 minutes of warm-up before the first burst, and the tank pickup tube must sit in juice. Test it the day it arrives, not on October 30.
- Speaker won't pair from inside the stone → move the phone closer for the first pairing; Bluetooth remembers after that. Keep the phone within roughly 30 feet of the speaker on the night.

Video companion: HAUNT #010 — The $100 Starter Haunt Kit.

Chapter 2 — Fog Foundations: Generate, Chill, Contain

The complete fog doctrine, combined from HAUNT #001, #006, #012, and #021. Warm fog floats away useless; cold fog sinks and pools. Everything in this chapter serves that one fact. Get fog right and every other chapter in this book performs better, because fog is the medium the light and the props perform inside.

What you need

- Fog machine, 400W or better (classes ranked in section 2.4 below)
- Fog juice, gallon — FogWorx
- Storage tote with lid (the chiller body)
- 3-inch dryer duct, one short length
- Frozen 2-liter bottles (household — freeze a week ahead)
- Low garden edging (the containment line)

Build it

1. **2.1 HEAT — generate.** The machine makes the fog. Fire it in short bursts rather than one long jet: a hard, constant jet of hot fog rises and vanishes before it can cool (HAUNT #012's first mistake). Short bursts give the fog distance and time to lose heat on its way to the chiller.

2. **2.2 CHILL — the tote chiller.** Cut a hole in each end of the tote, sized to the 3-inch duct. Run duct in one side, coil it loosely through the tote, and pack frozen 2-liter bottles around the coil. Duct out the other side to the graveyard. Fog enters hot, travels the cold coil, and exits dense and heavy — it crawls along the ground instead of floating away. Of record: the DIY chiller runs about $25 on top of the machine (HAUNT #001). Frozen bottles beat bagged cubes: they last longer and melt contained, so the tote never floods the coil.

3. **2.3 CONTAIN — the edging line.** Cold fog still drifts. Low garden edging around the cemetery plot holds the pool in the scene instead of letting it sheet down the driveway. Run the edging before the first test night and dress its inner face with mulch or leaves so the line disappears.

4. **2.4 The machine classes (HAUNT #006, the record's own tiers).** 400W budget (≈ $30 of record) — small porch, single room; fine for starters, weak output. 700W mid-range (≈ $60) — the sweet spot for most home haunts; pairs with the chiller. 1000W+ pro (≈ $120+) — yard-scale; needs the chiller or the output is wasted. Low-lying specialty (≈ $150+) — built-in chiller, true ground fog out of the box; worth it if you hate DIY. Battery portable (≈ $80) — no outlet needed; middle of the yard, parade floats, costumes. Two record rules ride every tier: **wattage means output volume, not quality**, and **juice choice matters more than machine choice**.

5. **2.5 The three mistakes that kill the effect (HAUNT #012).** One: no chiller — warm fog floats, full stop. Two: constant jet instead of bursts. Three: no containment — the fog you paid for decorates the street. Every failed cemetery the series has reviewed breaks exactly one leg of the system; fix the leg, not the machine.

6. 2.6 Storage & care (HAUNT #021). Machines don't die in October; they die in storage, in March, quietly. Before the machine goes away: run distilled water through it for about a minute of mist to clear old juice from the lines and pump. Empty the tank and let it dry — juice sitting all winter is how pumps clog. Store jugs sealed tight, labeled with the date, indoors and off the concrete floor; the machine stores dry, indoors, right next to them. Check your manual before next season — every machine varies a little, and the manual wins.

Haunter's note: Wind is the honest limit of every fog chapter in this book: above a light breeze, ground fog thins no matter what you do. On a windy forecast, move the chiller output to the most sheltered face of the plot and shorten burst intervals rather than raising output.

Troubleshooting

- Fog rises instead of pooling → the chiller charge is spent or the fog never entered the tote. Re-freeze bottles; verify duct enters one end and exits the other (a duct that bypasses the coil is a decoration).
- Fog thins after the first hour → ice melt: swap in the second set of frozen bottles. Freeze two sets before the big night, always.
- Machine sputters or output drops week over week → clogged line. Run the distilled-water flush (2.6) before assuming the pump is dead.
- Fog pooling in the street instead of the plot → containment gap. Walk the edging line at dusk and close it where the fog escapes; fog finds the low gap like water.

Video companions: HAUNT #001 — The Ground Fog Cemetery · #006 — 5 Fog Machines Ranked · #012 — Fog Machine Mistakes · #021 — Fog Juice Storage & Machine Care.

Chapter 3 — Tombstones That Don't Look Cheap: The 3-Coat Aging System

Store-bought foam tombstones look like toys because they are clean, bright, and uniform. Real gravestones are stained, chipped, tilted, and all different. Aging is a 20-minute job per stone and it is the whole difference (HAUNT #003). This is the full treatment of Starter Kit Build 4 — the same stones, taken further.

What you need

- Foam tombstones, or 2-inch foam insulation board to cut your own
- Matte gray spray paint
- Black paint (dry-brush shadow coat)
- Green and brown moss tones + bagged moss
- Chip brushes (cheap, disposable — the brush is a consumable here)
- Craft knife or soldering iron (carving, optional if stones are pre-cut)

Build it

1. Coat 1 — BASE. Matte gray spray paint over the whole stone. Matte is non-negotiable: gloss reads as plastic at ten feet; matte reads as stone. This coat kills the factory shine and unifies stones bought from different shelves.

2. Coat 2 — SHADOW. Dry-brush black into the carved letters and edges. Load the chip brush, wipe most of it off on cardboard, then drag what remains across the lettering so pigment catches the grooves and skips the face. This is 80% of the effect (the record's own figure) — spend 15 of your 20 minutes here.

3. Coat 3 — LIFE. Dab green and brown moss and dirt tones at the base and across the top edge, thin and irregular. Nothing in a real cemetery is clean; a stone aged only in gray still reads as a prop. Bagged moss glued at the base line finishes the lie.

4. Carving (if you cut your own). Names and dates by hand — slightly crooked letters, dates from the 1800s, one stone for a child, one worn almost smooth. Uniform perfection is what gives fakes away (Starter Kit Build 4). Epitaph rule from the Kit: funny reads as decoration, plain reads as real — 'MARY ANN LISTER 1841–1879' outperforms any pun.

5. Chips and set. Chip two or three edges with your fingers; foam forgives it and the damage reads as a century of weather. Set stones at angles — lean, sink, tilt. Nothing in a real cemetery stands at attention. Anchoring for wind is Chapter 8; layout is the Intermediate book's Cemetery Layout chapter.

Haunter's note: Cost of record (HAUNT #003): one $8 foam tombstone plus $12 in paint looks like a $40 stone in 20 minutes. The paint is shared across every stone you own — the second stone costs the $8 alone.

Troubleshooting

- Stones still look like toys after aging → check the finish under your actual haunt light, not the workbench light. If the gray reads bright, the base coat was gloss or satin. Re-coat matte; do not add more shadow to compensate.
- Letters unreadable after the shadow coat → too much paint on the brush. The dry-brush rule is: if you can see paint on the brush, there is too much. Wipe and retry on the back of a stone first.
- Moss looks glued-on (it is) → thin it by half and push pigment *under* the moss line with the brown tone, so the moss grows out of a stain instead of sitting on a clean stone.

Video companion: HAUNT #003 — Tombstones That Don't Look Cheap. Condensed version: Starter Kit Build 4.

Chapter 4 — The 3-Zone Light System: Wash, Accent, Flicker

Natural light comes from above. Light from below reads as WRONG to the lizard brain — and that is the entire trick (HAUNT #004). Three cheap zones beat a yard full of expensive props. This chapter gives the system; the Intermediate book's Yard Map chapter gives the surveyed placement.

What you need

- RGB uplights, 6-pack — Onforu
- Orange spotlights, 2-pack — LOHAS
- Flicker flame bulbs — TMAM

Build it

1. Zone 1 — WASH. Flood the house front in one unnatural color — green or purple. Whole wall, one color, no mixing. Instant 'something's wrong here.' The wash is the background every other zone performs against; if the wash is multicolored, there is no background, only noise.

2. Zone 2 — ACCENT. Uplight the tombstones and props individually in orange or red, from in front and below. This creates the depth: lit faces floating in front of the wash. One light per cluster, not per stone — clusters read as scenes, singles read as inventory.

3. Zone 3 — FLICKER. One flicker flame bulb in one window. The human eye cannot ignore inconsistent light; a single flicker pulls every gaze in the yard back to the house all night. Two flickers compete and cancel. One.

4. The $15 claim, honestly. The episode is named for one uplight doing the accent job (of record: 'One $15 light does more than $200 of decorations'). The claim is about placement, not magic: a cheap light in the right zone outperforms expensive fixtures scattered without a system.

5. Pairing rule. Fog plus uplight is the highest-impact combo per dollar in the series (HAUNT #004's own pairing note). Run Chapter 2's ground fog through the accent zone and the stones appear to float on a lit sea. Light the fog, not just the stones.

Haunter's note: Hide every light source. A visible fixture is a broken spell: bury uplights behind a stone's shoulder, a shrub, or a mulch ridge so the audience sees the effect and never the hardware. The Starter Kit's lighting rule says the same thing in fewer words — keep sources hidden, light the scene, never the audience's eyes.

Troubleshooting

- Yard reads as 'decorations' instead of 'wrong' → the wash is missing or the lights are aimed from above. Re-aim everything below the subject's midpoint; horror light climbs, party light falls.
- One zone washes out the others → the wash floods are too close to the house. Move them out and angle up the facade so the accent zone keeps its contrast.

- Flicker bulb ignored by guests → it is competing with a brighter steady source nearby. Dim or move the neighbor; the flicker must be the only inconsistent light in its sightline.

Video companions: HAUNT #004 — The $15 Uplight Trick · placement survey in HAUNT #013 (Intermediate book, Chapter 2).

Chapter 5 — The 3-Layer Audio System: Bed, Trigger, Rumble

Sound is the cheapest force multiplier in haunting (HAUNT #005). A silent yard reads as 'decorations.' A yard with a low, layered soundscape reads as 'something lives here' — and the whole system runs on one speaker and an old phone.

What you need

- Outdoor Bluetooth speaker, waterproof — SumYanHing IPX7
- PIR motion-sensor MP3 player (trigger layer) — Waytronic
- An old phone as the MP3 source — $0 (the record's own line)

Build it

1. Layer 1 — BED. A constant ambient loop — wind, distant thunder, crickets — runs all night and sets the baseline. Build it quieter than feels right: the Starter Kit's rule is to keep the bed so quiet guests lean in. A loud loop of screams becomes wallpaper in two minutes and then it is just noise the neighbors endure.

2. Layer 2 — TRIGGER. A motion-sensor scream or stinger fires when someone approaches. That is the scare. The player is the Waytronic PIR unit of record; placement and timing are a system of their own — the Intermediate book's Sound Timing chapter (the 2-Second Delay Rule) is the full treatment.

3. Layer 3 — RUMBLE. A sub-bass drone underneath everything, felt more than heard. It is the layer guests can't name and the one that makes the yard feel occupied. If your speaker can't reproduce deep bass honestly, run the rumble quiet rather than distorted — a buzzing drone breaks the spell the rumble was hired to hold.

4. Hardware placement. One outdoor speaker hidden inside a hollow tombstone or a bush, near the scene, not near the house (Starter Kit doctrine). Run speakers where the sound should live; a soundscape that clearly comes from the porch sounds like a porch playing a recording.

5. The silence cue. The pro trick from the Starter Kit, kept verbatim in spirit: ten seconds of true silence right before your biggest moment. Silence after sound is the loudest thing in the world. Program the bed to cut, count ten, then fire the moment.

Haunter's note: Volumes stay neighbor-safe after 10 p.m. (Starter Kit rule). The best haunt on the street is also a good neighbor, or it becomes a one-year haunt.

Troubleshooting

- Guests don't react to the trigger layer → the bed is too loud and masks it. Drop the bed 3 dB at a time until the stinger startles *you* on a test walk.
- The soundscape sounds like one speaker (it is) → it is placed too close to the audience path. Move it deeper into the scene and let the fog and stones do the localizing.

- Loop seam is audible every cycle → crossfade the bed loop's ends in any free audio editor, or choose a bed track with no musical phrase to repeat. A recognizable seam turns ambience into a recording.

Video companion: HAUNT #005 — Sound, The Layer Nobody Thinks About. Timing: HAUNT #016 (Intermediate book, Chapter 3).

Chapter 6 — The Blacklight Reveal: The $30 Hallway

With the lights on, the hallway looks empty. Under blacklight, it is a crime scene. The reveal IS the scare, and it runs on a system (HAUNT #008): DARK, GLOW, SECRET. This is the cheapest build in the series and the biggest reaction gap — the perfect first indoor build.

What you need

- UV blacklight bars, 2-pack — Yacolit
- UV-reactive paint kit — Blue Squid
- Spider webs, bulk pack — ZPISF
- UV invisible-ink pen (specified in the episode's system text)

Build it

1. Step 1 — DARK. One UV blacklight bar overhead, and it is the ONLY light source in the space. Every other source — hallway light, spill from the next room, a phone screen — dilutes the reveal. Door gaps get a towel; the hallway goes cave-dark except for UV.

2. Step 2 — GLOW. White spider webs glow electric under UV. Stretch the bulk webs across the hallway's upper corners and door frames where hands won't tear them on entry, and let a few strands hang into the walk line so guests brush the edge of the lair walking through.

3. Step 3 — SECRET. Fluorescent paint handprints crawl up the walls, and messages written with the UV invisible-ink pen stay invisible in normal light and glow under blacklight. Write them at reading height, in a hand that doesn't match anyone in the house. The secret layer is what guests describe afterward — the glow is the effect, the message is the story.

4. The test that protects the build (HAUNT #014). Half the 'glow' decor on the shelf doesn't glow. Before build night, hold every item under your own blacklight bar, in the dark — not the store's light, yours. Sort glowers from dead, and only glowers go in the dark zone. One dead prop sitting in the reveal kills the reveal. (The full Glow Test protocol is the Intermediate bridge note at the end of this chapter's parts list in the series record.)

5. Cost of record: the build is named for its ≈ $30 total (HAUNT #008's title figure) — two bars, one paint kit, webs you already own from Chapter 1.

Haunter's note: Blacklight safety, from the SFX dive's standing rule: never aim a UV bar at audience eyes. Bars mount overhead and angle at walls and webs, never down a sightline at face height.

Troubleshooting

- Reveal looks dim → a second light source is leaking in, or the bar is too far from the surfaces. Kill the leak first; then move the bar closer to the web line before buying a second bar.
- Handprints look like a craft project → too many, too neat. Real panic isn't symmetrical: fewer prints, varied sizes, one dragged print that stops mid-wall.

- Guests walk through unimpressed in daylight order → the reveal needs the dark to be total. Run this build as a threshold moment — porch light off as they enter — or skip it for open-yard use; it is a hallway build and it knows it.

Video companion: HAUNT #008 — The $30 Blacklight Hallway. Test protocol: HAUNT #014 — Blacklight Test.

Chapter 7 — The Watchers, the Apparition & the Mirror: Three Illusions

Three builds from the Starter Kit, given the full treatment together because they share one craft: an illusion that holds because the audience does the work. Each is a Kit build (3, 1, and 8 respectively) expanded with the geometry and failure modes the condensed version didn't have room for.

What you need

- Clear acrylic or plexiglass sheet, roughly window-sized
- A tablet, old phone, or small monitor (×2 — apparition and mirror)
- Black curtain or sheet; black cloth
- Black foam board or thin plywood; jigsaw or craft knife; garden stakes; matte black paint
- A framed mirror or picture frame with glass
- Two-way mirror film (window film)
- Free 'hologram ghost' and 'ghost face fade' loop videos (search terms of record from the Kit)

Build it

1. 7.1 The Watchers (Kit Build 3). Hooded silhouettes standing motionless at the edge of the light. Draw three figures at different heights — one clearly adult, two slightly wrong (too tall, head tilted). Imperfection is the effect. Cut, paint both sides matte black (never gloss — gloss reads as 'object,' matte reads as 'absence'), mount on stakes. Place them where light almost reaches: a tree line, beside the porch, behind the graveyard fence. They must be *discovered*, never featured. Vary them nightly if you can — a watcher that changes position between evenings becomes neighborhood legend. Safety, from the Kit: keep silhouettes clear of walkways and driveways; a driver who flinches is not a win.

2. 7.2 The Window Apparition — Pepper's Ghost (Kit Build 1). The single most convincing illusion in home haunting, and it costs almost nothing if you own a tablet. Darken the room completely; hang the black curtain behind where the figure should appear. Angle the acrylic at 45 degrees in front of the window, reflective side toward the glass. Lay the tablet face-up on the windowsill, screen brightness at maximum, playing the ghost loop. View from the street and adjust the angle until the figure floats in the window and the tablet is invisible. The geometry is the whole trick: at 45°, the sheet reflects the horizontal screen into the viewer's vertical sightline — the source hides below the sill while its reflection stands in the glass. Run a slow-drifting figure, not a jump-scare loop: dread beats surprise here. Free upgrade from the Kit: film your own apparition — a family member in a white sheet against a black backdrop, moving at half speed, beats any stock loop because the ghost is *yours*. (Room-scale Pepper's Ghost is a Professional-book subject; this window version is the beginner form.)

3. 7.3 The Haunted Mirror (Kit Build 8). An antique mirror that is ordinary glass — until a face that isn't yours fades into it. Apply the two-way film to the glass. Mount the tablet directly behind the glass, screen facing out, surrounded by black cloth so only the screen area can show through. Play a loop that is black for 20–40 seconds, then a face fading up, holding, and fading back to

black. When the screen is black, visitors see a mirror; when the face rises, it appears *inside* the mirror. Dim the area lights — the effect needs the mirror side darker than the viewing side. Use a frame that looks old; a yard-sale frame with real wear beats a new 'antique-style' one every time. This is the build guests film, and filmed scares are next year's audience.

Haunter's note: All three illusions fail the same way: a visible mechanism. Before the night, stand at every audience position and hunt for the tablet's edge, the stake's gloss, the film's seam. The audience will find whatever you didn't.

Troubleshooting

- Apparition looks like a floating TV → the room isn't dark enough or the acrylic angle shows the tablet's bezel. Black out the sill line with cloth and re-angle in 2° steps from the street view, never from inside.
- Mirror face visible as a rectangle → light is leaking around the tablet. Add cloth until the black of the screen and the black of the surround are the same black.
- Watchers read as decorations → they're lit. Move them one step further from the light's edge; a watcher you can fully see is a cutout, a watcher you almost see is a presence.

Condensed versions: Starter Kit Builds 1, 3, and 8 (free with the HAUNT list).

Chapter 8 — Tombstone Anchoring for Windy Nights: The Anchor System

Foam tombstones are kites. One windy night ends your whole cemetery (HAUNT #015). The stones you aged in Chapter 3 deserve to still be standing in November — anchor them like you mean it. This is a no-link chapter by the record's own design: rebar, dowels, zip ties, adhesive, and a sandbag are hardware-store staples, and this book only links gear it has verified.

What you need

- Rebar or wooden dowels
- Zip ties
- Construction adhesive
- A wide base board (per stone, optional method)
- A sandbag or brick (per stone)

Build it

1. Leg 1 — STAKE. Drive rebar or a dowel deep into the soil and up into the base of the stone. Invisible from the front. Depth is the strength: a stake that rocks in its hole is a lever waiting for wind, so drive it until it doesn't move when you push the top sideways by hand.

2. Leg 2 — STRAP. Zip-tie the back of the stone to the stake, twice — two ties, spaced, so the stone can't pivot around a single point. Alternative method: glue the stone down to a wide base board with construction adhesive and stake the board. The board method suits paved or frozen ground where stakes won't drive.

3. Leg 3 — WEIGHT. A sandbag or brick hidden behind the base. Low and wide beats tall and light, every time (the record's rule). Dress the weight with mulch or a leaf drift so the ballast disappears into the scene.

4. The system check. Push each stone at shoulder height with the force of a strong gust — a firm two-hand shove. Any stone that leans, lifts, or twists gets another leg of the system, not a hopeful pat. Run the check the day you set the yard and again after the first real wind, because soil loosens around stakes as it dries and wets.

Haunter's note: Anchor before you light. A fallen stone that takes an uplight down with it is two failures; stones go in, get the shove test, and only then does Chapter 4's accent light get aimed at them.

Troubleshooting

- Stone leans after a windy night → the stake hole has wallowed out. Pull, re-drive two inches to the side into fresh soil, and add the sandbag leg if it wasn't there.
- Zip ties snap in the cold → use two per stone (the system already says so) and route them through a drilled hole at the stone's back base rather than around a foam edge that can tear out.

- Base-board stones skate on pavement → the board needs weight, not grip. Sandbag the board's back edge; felt pads and hope are not an anchoring method.

Video companion: HAUNT #015 — Tombstone Anchoring for Windy Nights.

Chapter 9 — The Spider Lair, the Drop Spider & the Coffin: Set Pieces

Three more Starter Kit builds (6, 7, and 9) at full treatment. One giant spider is a decoration; a lair is a place. A coffin is a box; a coffin with a one-inch secret is a presence. And the Drop Spider is Rule 3 — stillness, then movement — in its purest form.

What you need

- Beef-netting style webbing (the kind you cut and stretch)
- One large spider (store-bought, or PVC-pipe legs + a stuffed body)
- White balloons or stockings + stuffing (egg sacs)
- Dozens of small plastic spiders
- Fishing line; a small pulley (clothesline pulley)
- A medium spider prop (the drop spider)
- A counterweight or a hand line to a hidden operator spot
- Three 1x6 fence pickets or a sheet of plywood (coffin build) — or a store-bought coffin prop
- Wood screws, hinges
- Black paint + gray dry-brush aging (Chapter 3 method)
- A dim red or green light (coffin interior)

Build it

1. 9.1 The Spider Lair (Kit Build 6). Stretch the webbing in big, torn sheets between trees, porch posts, and the house. Cotton web in little tufts reads as cotton; stretched netting reads as silk — this material choice is the build. Hang the mother spider high, over the path or door, on fishing line so she appears to float in her web. Egg sacs cluster low near the foundation. Scatter the small spiders along railings, the mailbox, the door frame — the edges of where hands go. Light it with one green or UV source from below: spiders lit from above look like toys; lit from below they look alive. Keep one path web-free and clearly lit — guests should choose the lair, never be trapped by it.

2. 9.2 The Drop Spider (Kit Build 7). Mount the pulley high on a porch beam or tree branch. The line runs: spider → up through the pulley → back to your hidden release point. Rig the spider to rest at roofline, invisible against the dark. On release it falls fast and stops — set a hard stop knot so it can never descend below 7 feet. Reset by pulling the line back up slowly *after* the group passes; a spider visibly reeling itself up breaks the spell. Trigger discipline: one drop per group, after the bravest person passes the mark — scare the confident one; the rest is laughter. Hard rules from the Kit, non-negotiable: never over a walkway where someone could step back into a post or street, never at face height, and test the stop knot with a weight before the night.

3. 9.3 The Coffin in the Yard (Kit Build 9). The anchor piece. Build the classic six-sided toe-pincher shape: narrow at the head and feet, wide at the shoulders. Even rough carpentry works — coffins in the movies are far too perfect; a little warp is realism. Hinge the lid and prop it

open exactly one inch with a block. Total darkness inside except the faintest colored glow. Age it with Chapter 3's method — streaks, chips, moss at the base. Lean it, don't lay it: a standing coffin at the edge of the yard reads as a presence, and the cracked lid gives guests a mystery to lean toward and never solve. If a hand appears at the gap, it must never move — the imagination finishes that scare better than any motor.

Haunter's note: The set pieces reward restraint at audience distance. Build them at full size, then judge them from the sidewalk, in the dark, at the speed a guest actually walks. Detail that only reads from two feet away is workshop vanity.

Troubleshooting

- Webbing reads as cotton candy → it is bagged cotton web, not beef netting, or it was hung in tufts. Replace with netting stretched until it tears naturally; torn edges are the realism.
- Drop spider gets a laugh at the wrong moment → it reset visibly or dropped for a group that saw the last drop. Hold the reset until the path is empty, and never drop twice for overlapping groups.
- Coffin reads as a storage box → the lid gap is too wide or the interior light too bright. One inch, faintest glow. Mystery is a rationed resource.

Condensed versions: Starter Kit Builds 6, 7, and 9.

Chapter 10 — The Fog Chiller, Full Treatment: The Cooler Build

The Starter Kit's Build 5 — the fog chiller — expanded to the full build: the cooler variant, the frozen-bottle doctrine, placement against wind, and the refill rhythm that keeps ground fog alive for a whole evening. (Chapter 2 teaches the system; this chapter is the workshop pass on its central machine. The Life-Size Crypt Fog Chiller — the same physics at prop scale — is an Intermediate-book chapter.)

What you need

- A standard fog machine and fog juice
- A foam cooler
- Flexible dryer duct, two short lengths
- Bagged ice — or frozen water bottles (the doctrine below)
- A small fan (optional, for a slow push)

Build it

1. The build. Cut a hole in each end of the cooler, sized to the duct. Run duct in one side; fill the cooler with ice around a loose duct coil inside; duct out the other side to your graveyard. Fog enters hot, travels through the ice chamber, and exits cold and heavy — it will crawl along the ground instead of floating away (Kit Build 5's own steps, kept).

2. Bottle doctrine. Freeze water bottles instead of buying cubes — they last longer and melt contained (the Kit's note). In the tote build of Chapter 2 the same doctrine applies with 2-liter bottles. Either vessel, one rule: the fog must travel *through* the cold, not past it — a coil buried in the charge, never a straight pipe under a layer of ice.

3. Placement. Position the outlet upwind of the scene so fog drifts through the stones, not into the street (Kit rule). If the yard's wind is unreliable, place the outlet at the plot's center and let the containment edging (Chapter 2.3) hold what the wind would steal.

4. Refill rhythm. Refill ice every 90 minutes or so on the big night (of record, Kit Build 5). Mark the rhythm on the night-of checklist in Chapter 12 — a chiller that dies at 8 p.m. is a fog chapter that ends mid-performance. Frozen bottles swap in under a minute; cubes mean scooping meltwater in the dark.

5. The fan option. A small fan at the outlet gives a slow push on dead-calm nights when chilled fog pools at the vent and stalls. Slow is the operative word — a fast fan shreds the density you chilled the fog to earn.

Haunter's note: Fog juice residue is slippery on concrete (Kit warning, repeated because it matters): keep the densest fog on grass and soil, and keep walkways clear.

Troubleshooting

- Output is cold but thin → the machine is firing long jets that overwhelm the coil. Shorten bursts (Chapter 2.1) and let the chamber recover between them.
- Fog exits warm on one side → the coil has an air gap: fog is short-circuiting past the ice. Repack so the coil is buried on all sides.
- Cooler sweats and puddles → it is doing its job; set it on soil or a tray, never on the walkway, and route the melt away from cables (Chapter 11).

Condensed version: Starter Kit Build 5. System context: Chapter 2 of this book.

Chapter 11 — Safety Foundations: Outdoor Power & Cable Doctrine

HAUNT #019 — the record this book treats as law. Your whole haunt runs on one outlet, probably through one heroic power strip. Every build in this series plugs in somewhere, and the power chapter is the one that keeps the haunt — and the haunter — running for a decade. This chapter appears in every book of the Guide, because every level plugs in.

What you need

- Outdoor-rated extension cords
- A GFCI-protected outlet
- A covered weatherproof box (connection housing)
- Flat cable covers (path crossings)
- Timers (circuit scheduling)

Build it

1. Rule 1 — DRY. Connections live off the ground, inside a covered weatherproof box, with a drip loop in the cord before the box so water runs down the loop instead of into the plug. A drip loop is a deliberate U of slack hanging below the connection — gravity does the waterproofing, for free, forever.

2. Rule 2 — RATED. Outdoor-rated cords only, on a GFCI-protected outlet. And add up the watts on the circuit — a fog machine plus a yard of lights adds up faster than you think. The arithmetic is in below; do it on paper before the first test night, not by tripping a breaker in front of an audience.

3. Rule 3 — ROUTED. Cables run along edges and fence lines, never loose across the walk path. Where one must cross, it goes under a flat cable cover. A cord a guest can catch with a toe is a failure the guest pays for.

4. The load arithmetic (doctrine). A standard household circuit is 15 amps; at 120 volts that is 1,800 watts of nameplate capacity, and the standing practice this book teaches is to plan at 80% of it — 1,440 watts — for anything that runs for hours. Add the nameplate watts of every device on the run: the record's fog machines draw on their wattage class (a 400W machine is 400 watts; the 1000W pro is 1,000). A 400W fog machine + a yard of LED uplights + a speaker sits comfortably under the plan line. A 1000W machine + a second machine + halogen spots can cross it — which is why the arithmetic happens on paper. Devices print their draw on the label; the label wins over any number in this book.

5. The architecture this book defaults to. Low-voltage DC at the prop wherever a build allows it (the SFX dive's genre-standard architecture): the Intermediate and Professional books run their motors and valves on 12V from a protected supply, so the only mains in the yard is the short list of Chapter 1 gear, each on the GFCI run, each connection boxed and drip-looped.

Haunter's note: The two-hour rule from the Starter Kit rides here too: run a 'lights-up, no scares' gentle hour for small kids and nervous neighbors, and post a strobe warning if you run any strobe — photosensitive guests deserve the choice. Heroes who survive the gentle hour come back for the real one next year.

Troubleshooting

- Breaker trips on the big night → you skipped §11.1. Split the run across two circuits (machine on one, lights on the other) and re-add the paper numbers before next season.
- GFCI trips in damp weather → a connection is wet. Find it by halving the run: unplug downstream halves until the trip stops, then box and drip-loop the guilty joint. Never defeat or bypass a GFCI to keep a show running — a tripping GFCI is a report, not an inconvenience.
- Guests keep finding a cable with their feet → it crosses the path outside a cover. Re-route along the fence line tonight; covers are for the one crossing you cannot avoid, not a license to carpet the yard in cords.

Video companion: HAUNT #019 — Outdoor Power & Cable Safety. This chapter carries the book's safety review (see the build report).

Chapter 12 — The Three Rules, the Lighting Palette & the First-Night Checklist

The closing chapter gathers the Starter Kit's doctrine into the Beginner book's operating system — the rules that govern every build above, plus the night-of checklist that turns a finished yard into a performed haunt.

What you need

- No parts — this is the doctrine chapter. Bring the yard you built.

Build it

1. The 3 Rules of a Scary Yard (Starter Kit, of record). Rule 1 — One focal scare beats ten decorations: the eye can't be scared in eleven directions at once; pick the spot every visitor must pass and spend your best effect there. Rule 2 — Sound does half the haunting: a silent yard reads as 'decorations,' a layered yard reads as 'something lives here.' Rule 3 — Stillness, then movement: the scare isn't the prop, it's the moment the prop that looked harmless *moves*.

2. The Three-Color Rule (Starter Kit lighting doctrine). Amber/orange is your base — candlelight and firelight live here; use it low, at ground level, aimed up. Sickly green is your accent for graves, fog, and anything undead — one green source is atmosphere, three is a nightclub. Moonlight blue is a single cool wash from high up for silhouettes and the Watchers. Blue from above + amber from below is the entire Hollywood horror palette, and it costs two bulbs. Add the Kit's three corollaries: keep light sources hidden; light the scene, never the audience's eyes; and put the whole rig on one switch or timer so the haunt can go dark in one motion — a full blackout before a big moment is a scare all by itself.

3. The first-night checklist (Starter Kit, of record, with the chiller rhythm added). ■ All builds tested from the sidewalk, in full dark. ■ Fog chiller charged; spare frozen bottles ready; refill marked at 90-minute intervals. ■ Sound bed looping; silence cue planned for the big moment. ■ Drop Spider stop-knot re-tested with weight. ■ Walkways walked in the dark, at kid height, twice; cords secured. ■ Strobe sign posted; gentle hour on the sign by the street. ■ One switch kills all lights; one person owns that switch. ■ Candy stocked — the haunt brings them in; the candy sends them home happy.

4. What happens next. A beginner who has run one full night owns something no purchase provides: a calibrated yard. The Intermediate book takes that yard and gives it motion with timing (Breathing Grave at full treatment, the 2-Second Delay Rule), surveyed layout, and the Horizon A builds — candles that float, stones that peek, skeletons made corpses. Pick one build from this book for this season. Add one every season. That's how the legendary houses got legendary.

Haunter's note: One promise, from the Starter Kit's welcome, kept as this book's closing word: everything here is designed to scare *delightedly* — a scream followed by a laugh, never an injury, never a terrified toddler, never a call from the fire marshal. The safety notes aren't fine print. They're part of the craft.

Series hub: HAUNT #010 — the pinned routing episode. Starter Kit (free) — the condensed companion to this book.

Chapter 13 — The Breathing Grave, Beginner Treatment: The Silent Mound

Starter Kit Build 2, at the Beginner level: the version a first-year haunter builds in an afternoon with a fan, a mound form, and patience. The Intermediate book's Chapter 1 is this same grave at full treatment — two drives, tuning doctrine, the works. This chapter is the gentle door into it, and plenty of yards stop here forever, happily.

What you need

- A small oscillating fan or a slow motor (a rotisserie motor is perfect — Kit, of record)
- Chicken wire or a tomato cage (the mound form)
- Burlap or landscape fabric
- Soil, mulch, or dead leaves (the dress)
- A foam tombstone (Chapter 3)

Build it

1. Form the mound. Chicken wire over the motor, roughly the size of a shallow grave. The form is the grave's skeleton; size it to read at yard distance — a mound too small is a lump, a mound too big is a landscaping project.

2. Couple the motion. Attach a light arm or cam to the motor shaft so one spot on the mound lifts a few inches as it turns. The Kit's build is deliberately simple: no relays, no timers — a slow, continuous, imperfect motion that the form's flex makes irregular for free.

3. Dress it. Drape burlap over the frame, then dress with soil and leaves until no mechanics show. Soil directly on burlap reads as fresh-dug earth, which is exactly the story this grave tells.

4. Set the stone. The tombstone goes at the head (Chapter 3's aging, Chapter 8's anchoring). Test from the sidewalk: you want movement you almost can't see — two inches, slow, irregular. This sentence is the Kit's own test, and it survives every version of this build, including the Intermediate treatment.

5. The second-mound trick. If the motion is too regular, add a second, smaller mound on a timer. Two unsynchronized breathers read as a whole restless plot — the cheapest upgrade in the Guide, and the first taste of the layering doctrine the whole Intermediate book teaches.

> **Haunter's note:** Slow is scary. If a guest can count the rhythm, slow it down. (The Starter Kit's haunter's note, word for word in spirit — it is the build's whole law.)

Troubleshooting

- Mound visibly 'machines' → the arm lifts at one hard point. Spread the lift with a wider cam or a fabric sling under the crown so the rise blooms instead of poking.
- Burlap shows its weave in the light → another soil pass, thinner, worked into the weave. The fabric is a soil-holder, not a surface.

Condensed version: Starter Kit Build 2. Full treatment: Intermediate Chapter 1.

Chapter 14 — The Drop Spider & the Lair Light: Timing the One Scare

The Drop Spider appeared in Chapter 9.1's set-piece chapter as a build; this closing chapter is its performance doctrine — and the Spider Lair's light, the two pieces of Kit craft that are about *when* and *how lit* rather than how built.

What you need

- The Drop Spider rig (Chapter 9.2)
- One green or UV light source, low (the lair light)
- A hidden operator spot or a motion-sensor spotlight (trigger options of record)

Build it

1. The one-drop rule. One drop per group, after the bravest person passes the mark. Scare the confident one; the rest is laughter (Kit doctrine). A spider that drops for every guest becomes a ride; a spider that drops once, for the right person, becomes the story the whole group tells at the next house.

2. The reset discipline. Pull the line back up slowly *after* the group passes — never during. A spider visibly reeling itself up breaks the spell for the dropped group and spoils it for the next one. If two groups overlap, the second group gets no drop. Scarcity is the mechanism.

3. The lair light. One green or UV light from below. Spiders lit from above look like toys; lit from below they look alive (Kit rule). The light sits low, aimed up through the webbing, so the mother's shadow multiplies across the porch ceiling and the egg sacs glow at the foundation line. One source: a second color turns the lair into a display.

4. The web-free path. Keep one path web-free and clearly lit (Kit rule). Guests should choose the lair, never be trapped by it — the choice is what makes walking through it brave instead of rude.

Haunter's note: The performance chapters are why the Kit's builds are written with trigger discipline and light placement inside them: in this craft, *operating* a build is half of building it. A perfect prop run carelessly is a decoration.

Troubleshooting

- Drop gets gasps, then complaints → it fell too close or over the wrong heads. Re-check the 7-foot stop and the never-over-a-walkway rule; the scare must be escapable in one step backward.
- Lair looks flat → the light is at eye level or above. Drop it to the ground line and aim up; the under-light does the sculpting.

Condensed versions: Starter Kit Builds 6 and 7. Builds: Chapter 9 of this book.

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