

# Haunted

(Alpha Draft 2.0 February, 2011)

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## Introduction

This game was written for the February, 2011 Ronnies project. This is the revised alpha draft composed after placing as a “Runner Up” and receiving extensive feedback from Ron Edwards and an extremely useful conversation with Paul Czege. The challenge of the Ronnies is to design an RPG in a 24 hour period inspired by two of four words provided. The words chosen for this game are Murder and Whisper. The game attempts to incorporate those words by focusing on a character who has committed a desperate murder and is followed by the ghost of his victim who constantly whispers in his ear. The game requires a minimum of three people and is probably best played with four, five or six people. The group will also need pencils, paper and a bunch of six-sided dice. Index cards may also be useful.

## Setup

Two players should be selected to play the murderer and his victim's ghost. These will be the only two characters with dedicated owners. Everyone else will be playing a rotating cast of characters. While everyone should share in the creative process of the setup phase these two players have final say and should take on leadership roles in the discussion.

Once these two players are chosen the player of the murderer should sketch out the base concept of his character. In particular he should focus on a crisis in the character's life that has driven him to murder. This act should not actually resolve the crisis. It can delay some critical aspect of the crisis, offer a momentary relief from the crisis, or be an early step toward resolving the crisis but it can not actually be a stable viable solution for the crisis.

Once the crisis and how it leads to murder is determined the group should flesh out a few details about the actual act of murder. This is not about generating clues so much as cementing the details of the act for later creative inspiration. In particular the group should understand why the murder was committed, how it was committed and to some extent how the murderer has initially eluded the police.

Next the group should draw two overlapping circles on a piece of paper in Venn diagram fashion. One circle represents the social circle of the murderer. The other circle represents the social circle of the victim. The overlapping space, of course, represents mutual relationships. The players should now take the details of the crisis and the murder and brain storm some additional characters placing them in the appropriate sections of the diagram. Three to six secondary characters is probably a good starting number.

**Note:** When constructing scenes characters **MUST** be chosen from this diagram. Characters may **ONLY** be added to the diagram during police scenes (described in detail later).

The murderer player should now roll a single d6. This number represents the amount of Influence the character has. This value subtracted from seven represents the player's Reserves. Example: If the player rolls a 4 then the character has Influence of 4 and a Reserve of 3. This process should be repeated for each character on the Venn diagram. It may be useful to record each character's Influence and Reserves on separate index cards. Finally, the ghost has an Influence of three and no reserves.

## **Play**

Play proceeds as a series of scenes as the murderer attempts to resolve his crisis. The players who are not the murderer or the ghost are responsible for establishing the start and end of scenes. Secondary characters are taken on and played by this same group of players on an as needed basis. The murderer player may request scenes by declaring where his character is going and what he intends to do but the non-murderer, non-ghost players have final say. The ghost player has very little (permanent) say over starting and ending scenes except in how he successfully influences the murderer's behavior.

## **Scene Ground Rules**

The murderer and the ghost are present in every scene. Only the murderer can see and hear the ghost. The ghost can not normally physically interact with the scene in anyway (there is one exception explained later). Only police scenes (described later) can involve the authorities investigating the murder. No player may play more than one character at a time but different players may play a given character in different scenes. Characters participating in the scene must come from those currently listed on the Venn diagram. In each scene the murderer is attempting to make progress towards resolving his crisis and the ghost is attempting to persuade the murderer into take actions that will make his crisis worse by whispering advice to him.

## **Conflict**

Once a scene is established players play out the scene providing descriptions for their characters and providing dialog as needed. A conflict occurs when two or more characters take actions whose outcomes are incompatible with one another. When this happens the dice are used to resolve the conflict.

## **Basic Resolution**

Each character engaged in the conflict rolls a number of six-sided dice equal to their Influence. The character who rolls the single highest die wins and his action achieves its intent. Ties are resolved by simply comparing the next highest die between the tied players.

## **Reserves**

Before rolling a player may choose to gamble dice from his current character's Reserves. This is done by taking any number of dice from the character's Reserves and rolling them along with his Influence. If the character succeeds in the conflict the Reserve dice are considered spent and removed. If the character fails then the dice are returned to the Reserve. It is important to note the player's original Reserve value for purposes of refreshing the Reserves (explained later).

## **The Victim's Ghost**

Over the course of the scene the ghost has been whispering to the murderer pushing him to take actions the ghost believes will make the murderer's crisis worse. The ghost will always roll into a conflict one of two ways.

If the murderer willingly takes the ghost's advice then he simply adds the ghost's Influence dice directly into his own roll. In this case, regardless of the outcome the ghost gains an additional die of Influence after the conflict is resolved.

If the murderer attempts to ignore the ghost's advice and carry on with his own agenda then the ghost must attempt to force the murderer to comply. The ghost player rolls his Influence dice independently like any other character in the scene. If he wins the conflict then the murderer is forced to take the ghost's whispered course of action.

However, this forcing is accompanied by dramatic and obvious supernatural effects. The rule

about the ghost being unable to physically interact with the world is lifted. Other characters may momentarily catch a glimpse of or hear the ghost. In some way, the ghost's agenda is forcibly fulfilled.

## **Helping**

If two or more characters are helping each other (i.e. share the same intent behind their actions) then rather than rolling separately the player simply gives the other player a single die from his Reserves. If their collective efforts are successful this die is lost, if not it is returned to the player. If the player has no reserves then he may help with his actions narratively but provides no mechanical benefit. The ghost can not help, nor be helped.

## **Confronting The Ghost Directly**

The murderer can request a scene where he confronts the ghost directly. The murderer decides where this confrontation takes place. The murderer does not have to be absolutely alone with the ghost but none of the important secondary characters may be present. This scene represents a direct attempt to reduce the ghost's Influence.

The ghost and the murderer roll against each other in the usual manner, however, the murderer may NOT use any of his Reserve dice. If the murderer succeeds the ghost loses a die of Influence. Regardless of the outcome all characters, including the murderer, refresh their Reserves up to their original values.

## **Influence Zero**

If the ghost ever runs out of Influence he is banished. Poof. Gone. The ghost's player simply reverts to playing the secondary cast just as all the other players have been doing.

## **Ending Scenes**

It is important to note that scenes may come to a natural conclusion with no conflict. This is perfectly fine. Nor is it necessary to forcibly end a scene after a single conflict. Normal scenes may contain as many conflicts as the play group wishes. Police scenes and ghost confrontation scenes, however, contain only a single conflict there must be at least one other scene before another such scene can occur.

However, once a normal scene or a ghost confrontation scene concludes the group rolls a single d6. On a three or greater the group simply proceeds into another scene. On a result less than three the group goes into a police scene.

## **Police Scenes**

The police are actively trying to solve the murder. In a police scene the police arrive to interrogate the murderer or confront him with evidence. This scene may take place anywhere the group wishes and may even involve the presence of secondary characters if they wish.

During the first police scene of the game the group should decide if there is one or two detectives investigating the murder. If there are two they always show up together and never appear separately. It is also recommended that the detectives are always played by the same players in police scenes.

For the most part police scenes work just like normal scenes. The murderer, the ghost, and any secondary characters are free to pursue their usual agendas which may very well lead into a conflict. However, the police character's agenda for the scene is set. It is worth noting that the police characters are pretty convinced of the murderer's guilt, they are simply trying to establish enough leverage over the murderer to justify making an arrest.

The police do not have Influence. Instead they have a score called Evidence. This begins at one. Each time the police show up their Evidence score is increased by one. Even if there are two detectives there is only one Evidence score. Evidence is rolled and compared exactly as Influence is rolled in other scenes.

If the police win then they have caught the murderer in a lie or piled up enough evidence to make an arrest. The scene concludes with the murderer being taken into custody and the game is over.

This may seem dire given the police's ever increasing pile of Evidence. Fortunately, for the murderer the ghost has no interest in seeing the murderer arrested. That's the easy way out. The ghost would much rather watch the murderer self-destruct among his crisis. The ghost is perfectly willing to help the murderer evade the police.

### **Introducing New Characters**

This is where the Venn diagram becomes important. Over the course the scene the murderer and the police players are allowed to introduce new characters onto the Venn diagram by revealing new information through their dialogue. There are some restrictions

The police player(s) may only add new characters to the victim's circle (including the area that overlap's with the murderer. This represents the deepening of victim's personal life or showing how the murderer's life was more deeply enmeshed with the victim than previously thought.

The murderer play may only add new characters to his own circle (including the area that overlap's with the victim). This represents a deepening the murderer's back story (and perhaps a development of his crisis).

### **Ending The Game**

Given the above rules there are a few possible outcomes.

- 1) The murderer is free at any time to simply turn himself into the police. He may or may not serve out a ghost free sentence.
- 2) The murderer can himself be killed as the outcome of a conflict.
- 3) If the detectives ever win a police scene with their Evidence dice then the murderer is arrested and sent to prison. He may or may not be ghost free at this time.
- 4) The murderer successfully evades the police until his crisis is resolved. There is no mechanical measure of this event. The group is simply charged with identifying the climactic moment when it arises. There are two sub-conditions.
  - 2a) If the murderer is ghost free at the time his crisis resolves the he also gets away scott-free, the murder remains officially unsolved and his story is concluded.
  - 2b) If the murderer is not ghost free at the time his crisis is resolved then this story is concluded but his on going saga is not. The group should develop a new crisis and reconfigure the social circles diagram in anyway they like. No new murder is invented. The murderer simply continues to be haunted into his next crisis. The police lose half of their accumulated Evidence dice as the case has gone cold.