Uninvited

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an online freeform larp by Lorenzo Trenti [mrvalis.itch.io]
for Golden Cobra Challenge 2022

English is not my mother language: please be charitable if you find errors or inaccuracies.
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Premise

You've followed the psychic lead up to the house. It's midnight and you're sure there's no living being inside at the moment, so you got in. Your fellow investigators will assist you, following your exploration through your video device. Will you find the answer? Will you understand the question? And, most important, will you get out alive?

Requirements

This game needs 2-4 participants and is played online. Everyone needs a connection and a device for a video call.

One of the players will be the Guest; the other participants will be Operators.

You are all investigators of paranormal events, strange occurrences and unsolved mysteries.

The Guest will play in his/her house, pretending it's the home of a mysterious character: the Landlord/Landlady. To do so, the house must be in the dark and no other human being must be around: play when you're alone or your family is out and, depending on the context of the building, you absolutely don't risk alarming other people with your behaviour.

The Operators play from wherever they want. It's easier if they connect to the video call through a wider device (e.g. a pc), while the Guest should have a compact one, like a mobile phone or a tablet, for ease of moving it around the house.

The Guest should also have a functioning flashlight (hopefully a headlight, so to have free hands).

Define together the channels you will use to communicate (e.g. a message chat).

Everyone picks a name (default setting is your actual place and time) and enters it as the nickname in the software you are using for the video call.

Estimated game time is 60 minutes max, plus 15 of initial setup.

Setup for the Operators

Divide among yourselves 6 Events (so: 3 Operators will each write 2 Events, 2 Operators will each write 3 Events, 1 Operator will write 6 Events).

Every Operator, in secret and without telling the others, creates his/her Events.

An Event is any strange thing that can happen in the house and that will be secretly telegraphed to the Guest before the game starts. Each Operator won't be aware of the Events submitted by the other Operators until they are shown in the game.

An useless Event suggestion is something that needs uncommon requirements, or that puts the Guest player in danger. Things that you don't want to write are, e.g.: "you find a bag of 13 golden coins", "suddenly you feel the urge to scream loudly", and so on.

A good Event is something strange or scary that smartly uses the constraints of the game; that adds a clue to your collective story raising questions rather than giving plain answers; that the Guest can adapt to more or less any situation.

Some examples:

- You see blood somewhere. We don't, but you are sure it's here. How does it look?
- You hear a voice whispering in another room. It says…
- You show us a reflection of your persona (e.g. in a mirror) and we see before you that you have a strange marking on you. Which one?
- You hear music coming from somewhere inside the house. Which music?
- You suddenly speak a phrase in a very different voice. It says… Do you remember it?
- You touch something and feel like it's incandescent.
- You unawarely put a name in your talk. The name is…
- You feel the urge to do something strange. What?
- You touch an object or part of the house and you instantly experience telemetry. You see a vision of…

Feel free to pick from this list or create your own Events.

Telemetry - the last one in the list - is always a good suggestion. You can tell the Guest a very detailed vision, leave the full content to the Guest, or any shade in the middle.

The Guest can also add their own telemetry events. Just touch something, fall in a trance and give the Operators a glimpse of what you're seeing.

Setup for the Guest

The Guest chooses from their house a Last object, one that will be the final answer to understand the identity of the mysterious Landlord. It doesn't need to be something too unusual or with a definite occult bouquet; a pen, a bow tie, a little tin toy are perfect.

Now, starting from the place where this object would reasonably be in your house, you will set up a

backwards treasure hunt with 6 more objects. Let's say, for example, that you chose an old aftershave lotion as a Last object. You put it in an unusual place - e.g. the fridge - and then you take something from the fridge, maybe an egg. Now you put the egg into another unusual place, like the sock drawer. You take the sock and put it into an unusual place, and so on. Repeat until you have displaced the 6 objects (7 in total counting the Last object). Try and mix objects from different rooms. In the end you will have a First object. Keep it at hand without hiding it.

While you are setting up the backwards treasure hunt, the Operators will submit to you a total of 6 Events. Put them in any order you want (you can also change it later); memorize them, or write them down on a piece of paper that you will hide in your pocket, or tape it to the back of your device so you won't risk framing it during the video call.

Finally, if you don't want something from your home to be shown in the game (e.g. the photograph of your beloved granny), just lock it somewhere.

Fine tuning before playing

Last requirements before the game starts: define a safe word (default is "tapioca tapioca tapioca") in case a player, especially the Guest, needs to signal a stop from the game for whatever real world reason (e.g. family has got home sooner than planned).

Playing the game

The game starts when the Guest activates their video call and says the ritual phrase *"Ok, I'm in"*. The Guest tells the Operators of the psychic trail that led to this house; there's this object in particular that is somewhat very meaningful. The Guest shows the operators the First object. From now on, the players follow these principles:

- The Operators will explore the mysterious house sending the Guest where they want, trying to follow the lead of the displaced objects. Have opinions, make connections, share your guessings with the other players. Try to understand the identity of the Landlord.
- The Guest will do their best to show the house through the mobile device and the flashlight, and pacing the game so that the hunt is not too simple nor too hard. The Guest is the director, photography director and actor of this interactive movie and can play with the game constraints at their wish (e.g. moving the device around, putting it on a table, temporarily disabling the audio or video, etc.).

Everyone: keep it scary. A reckless explorator, one of you, has entered the house of a mysterious character without being invited. It could be a serial killer, a warlock, an unaware jinx, a supernatural

avatar of some kind… It's a risk. And you know what curiosity did to the cat.

The Guest manifests an Event when a new object is found (starting from the second), or when ten minutes have passed since the last Event (or the start of the game). The Guest can manifest the Event at their taste, instantly or some minutes after the trigger, depending on the situation.

Ending the game

The game enters its final stage when the 6th Event is revealed (either because you have found the Last object, or because a maximum of 60 minutes has passed). The Guest declares this stage using the ritual phrase *"We're almost done. I need to get out very fast. Help me understand the Question that led me here"*.

The Guest makes it clear that something is happening. The Landlord is coming home, or supernatural energies are gathering, or whatever.

You have collectively explored the house, found objects and witnessed the Events. Now you can try to understand the real nature of the Landlord.

Everyone (the Guest and every Operator) writes a Question concerning the Landlord/Landlady, a question where the Last object is the Answer. Obviously, if you haven't found the Last object this task is much harder.

For example, if the Last object is an aftershave lotion, the Question could be…

- The Landlord decided to become a serial killer because he couldn't stand his father's scent. What was it like?
- The Landlord's only love gave him a Christmas present that made him the earthly incarnation of luxury. What was it?
- The Landlord always disinfects his hands before evoking demons. With what?

Write the question on your channel and press "enter" when everyone is ready.

The Guest reads all the suggested Questions.

- If two or more questions are at least similar (at Guest's discretion), the Guest can safely flee from the house. If not, something will happen that abruptly interrupts the video call and the Guest is probably dead, or gone mad, or sucked in an interdimensional portal.
- Before quitting the video call for good or bad, the Guest selects one of the Questions (the similar ones, if any, or any other) and repeats it in front of the camera as the official truth behind the Landlord. Then with few words the Guest describes what will be their immediate future before quitting the video call.

The End.

Debriefing
Have a last out-of-character video call to comment the game.

Designer notes
I tried to use all the four ingredients from 2022's competition: *reflection*, *midnight*, *guest*, *drawer*. I wanted to have a game where you could have a little less conversation, a little more action (sorry, Elvis).
This scenario is dedicated to *Unknown Armies*, the tabletop roleplaying game by John Scott Tynes and Greg Stolze, published by Atlas Games. I always loved the weird setting of the game, where there are no external menaces and all the dangers, even supernatural ones, come from us: human beings and their believings. If you know the setting of the game you can explicitly play *Uninvited* in it.