

# Moving Shadows

[http://www.hauntedattraction.com/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE\\_user\\_op=view\\_page&PAGE\\_id=38&MMN\\_position=62:14](http://www.hauntedattraction.com/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE_user_op=view_page&PAGE_id=38&MMN_position=62:14)

## A Scene From Nightmare on Grayson, San Antonio, Texas by Gordon Wise

As you walk from a dark hallway into an open area you see gray walls with long shadows cast from an arrangement of scrap lumber and odd-shaped objects resting on the grid overhead. Some of these objects look like bodies, drawing your attention upward. The area is lit by a single small light source high above the room that is responsible for the long eerie shadows. Just then something sweeps quickly past you. It isn't really that you saw something, but more like you felt a presence. Then it happens again—as if the shadows on the walls are coming alive, moving across your path and disappearing back into the wall. Dark forms dart around quickly and silently as you struggle to escape, not knowing where they are coming from or when they will appear again.

## How it Works

With the patron's eyes adjusted to the dark environment, the mind thinks that it can see in this room with high contrasting black shadows on light gray walls. In fact, the overhead light is so dim that it casts no light into the room and is used only to backlight the overhead grid. This fools the eye into believing that the shadows are real and the room is well lit. In what is actually darkness, an actor dressed fully in black, can vanish and reappear within this room by moving through openings hidden in the black-painted shadows. There is no need for the actor to make any sound. Quick movement is noticeable and unsettling. An actor need only work the perimeter circling around and between the patrons for a great scare.

## The Set Up

## Lighting

For this example I used two “ping-pong ball” sized, 15W clear medium-based bulbs in normal clamp lights. Since the provided plugs are too short to reach the height I needed, I re-wired the lamps with 12/2 industrial coated wire to a length suitable for my calculated needs, plus a little extra. Extension cords are not safe. Avoid them whenever possible. Each lamp is plugged into its own standard dimmer switch and is raised by cable through a pulley to its working height, about 7-8 feet above the wall height. I used pulleys so that if I needed to change the bulb I just lowered the fixture. Check your local codes for legal and safe cabling, strain-relief, and weighting your fixtures, so that they can be moved

safely. You could also permanently attach the fixtures and use a ladder for adjustment—I'm just too lazy.

## **Walls and Overhead Grid**

I like to have at least one blind turn in this scene, just to break up the space. The number of hideaways is not as critical as a configuration that allows for movement of the actors. See figure 1.

After your walls are up and braced, add the overhead grid pattern. Break up the overhead space but be sure to use parallel lines in your layout to help the audience recognize the shape of the room. See figure 2.

Now add recognizable shapes to the overhead grid. Placement of these is critical. The shadows of these objects must either: 1) cover an actor passage; 2) cast on the wall for effect; or 3) loom overhead in a way that is immediately recognizable as a familiar object. See figure 3.

## **Painting**

Always use water-based paints. Safety first! I basecoat the walls in a medium gray (about halfway between black and white). Shadows are painted in flat black, and the entire floor is painted with a premium quality black epoxy floor enamel. While it is still wet I add a light sprinkle of sand to the surface to reduce slipping. The overhead gridwork and overhead objects do not have to be painted except for flame treatment.

To establish overhead layout, turn one of the clip lamps all the way up and move objects around until you get the desired effects. After securely fastening the lumber and items on top of the walls and grid, outline the shadows cast on the walls with a Sharpie pen. Then turn down the dimmer on the first lamp and turn up the dimmer on the other lamp. Repeat the item placement and once secured make these shadows with the Sharpie and paint in the shadows from both of the lamps. See figure 4.

## **Actor Passageways**

Cut openings into the shadow areas large enough for the actor to slip out of but no bigger than necessary. See figure 5. Black canvas fire retardant curtains can be attached from the rear in the shape of the shadow to help hide the opening and the actor behind it. I added white stripes to the top edge of the passage access to help the actors find the openings in the darkness.

Stand in the room and adjust the dimmers on the clip lamps until you cannot tell where the openings in the walls are. There should still be enough light to see the shapes on the overhead grid.

## **Action**

Dress one or two actors in black robes with “Invisible Mask” by FunWorld (a black hood with black see-through material over the wearer’s face, available at most Halloween Shops), black gloves and black shoes. As the group of patrons enter the room, the actor peers out through the wall opening waiting for the group. Quickly, the actor moves out of the wall, crosses in front of the group, or even through a gap in the group to the opposite wall opening and out of the room. This action can be repeated for larger groups or slower nights. Even if the patrons’ eyes do not see the actor, they sense that their space is being encroached on and feel the wind of the actor’s robe. The effect is quite remarkable even when you know it is coming.

*Gordon Wise is the director of Nightmare on Grayson in San Antonio, Texas, now in its 18th year of operation. You can contact Gordon at [ultrafright@hotmail.com](mailto:ultrafright@hotmail.com).*

Created on 05/31/2006 11:45 PM by savage  
Updated on 05/31/2006 11:49 PM by savage

Obtained from  
Omarshauntedtrail.com