

PHANTOM OF THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

by Lara Paige Turner

Complexity: 6

Tone: PG-13



PRESENTING THE MYSTERY

The Northlake Theater has been haunted for the last ten years by a mischievous spirit the actors call “Backstage Brian.” He’s largely harmless, hiding scripts, moaning in the rafters, or causing other low-effort haunting phenomena. However, disaster has marred every opening night for the past decade with events like a falling chandelier, a sudden blackout, or a possessed extra.

Thankfully, these opening night issues haven’t caused any injuries, but theater management hasn’t done anything to end the haunting. Instead, they loudly deny Brian’s existence, claiming that the opening night disasters are just standard technical issues. But something’s up. Regular theater walls don’t bleed during Lady Macbeth’s “Out, damned spot!” scene.

One day, the theater’s owner visits the Paranormal Inc. office. He’s a man with a perpetual sneer and an affected posh accent named Preston Burke. He reluctantly confesses the following:

“No, Backstage Brian truly doesn’t exist. Or, rather, I’m Backstage Brian. It’s all marketing; people have come to expect an opening night disaster, so I engineer one. And on opening night, the house is always full!”

“Actors are superstitious; if I hide someone’s script during a rehearsal, they assume Brian did it. So they see Brian in every shadow, and because actors love to talk, I get free publicity. But for the last month, props have disappeared, people have seen shadowy figures lurking and heard strange music, but I’m not doing it! Something has moved in for real. The actors are frightened more than I want them to be.

“I need it gone. And I’m coming to you lot instead of a larger, better ghost-hunting group because I need absolute discretion. I’ll double your normal rate if none of the actors realize that anything is out of the ordinary.”

It seems like it’s time for Paranormal Inc. to spend a night at the theater.



Establishing Question: What play is the Northlake Theater putting on this year? One of you is extremely familiar with it; why?

Goal: Discover who's haunting the theater and either convince them to leave or remove them by force. Ideally, do this without letting the actors know why you're there.

Setup: After you accept the job, Preston Burke hurries out of your office, leaving behind a key. "This is for spare costume storage," he says. "Find something inconspicuous to wear."

The nondescript door at the back of the theater leads to a dim storage room filled with rack upon rack of clothing. Go around the group and have every Investigator describe the outfit they throw together.

There's nobody and nothing to speak of in this old storage room. Play begins when you draw a Location card and head into the theater.



LOCATION PROMPTS (HEARTS)

A WINGS

The wings are at the very edge of the stage, where the sets that aren't in use on stage wait. Getting through the wings means carefully navigating over and around walls, curtains, and furniture.

Paint the Scene: *One of the sets for this show is badly damaged. What's wrong with it?*

2 DRESSING ROOMS

There are two adjacent dressing rooms, both large and stuffed with racks of clothing. Each has a mirrored wall and a table with makeup strewn untidily across it.

Paint the Scene: *A bulletin board of announcements dominates the wall between the two rooms. What notices have the crew left for the actors?*

3 BOX SEATS

This hallway leads to the private viewing boxes, all of which are closed and presumably empty. Everything here is considerably lusher than it is for the rest of the audience.

Paint the Scene: *The door to Box 5 has a handwritten label: "Brian's Box, Do Not Disturb." What sound do you hear which inspires you to investigate?*



4 PROP CLOSET

The prop closet is an enormous room filled with just about anything you could imagine, from swords to sofas. It is so unbelievably cluttered you can barely make it past the door.

Paint the Scene: *There's a table for props used in this show, but one carefully labeled space is empty. What's missing?*

5 ACTOR'S LOUNGE

The actor's lounge is a big room full of mismatched chairs where actors can relax, read, or chat while they're waiting for their scene.

Paint the Scene: *The actors have a "good luck" ritual that involves leaving certain objects at a small, makeshift shrine in one corner of the lounge. What do they leave there?*

6 CATWALKS

Narrow stairs lead to the catwalks above the audience, where lights are attached. The house's massive chandelier is just barely reachable from the catwalks. A few actors rehearse a scene on stage.

Paint the Scene: *From here, you can see that someone observes the rehearsal on stage from the far back. Who?*

7 THE LOBBY

The lobby is where the audience mills about as they wait for the show to start. It's big and glamorous but eerie with no crowd.

Paint the Scene: *Paraphernalia from old shows decorate the walls. What performance has the most posters and photos?*



8 CONTROL BOOTH

The control booth overlooks the stage. Control panels for lights and music are within.

Paint the Scene: *The equipment here has been shoddily repaired. What seems the most dangerous?*

9 TRAP ROOM

The trap room is a cramped, dusty space running beneath the stage. Trap doors and lifts allow actors to rise or sink dramatically.

Paint the Scene: *Items littered in the corners indicate someone has been spending their spare time down here. What do you find?*

10 PRESTON BURKE'S OFFICE

The office is large, but messy; books, ledgers, and loose paper cover every surface.

Paint the Scene: *What information do you glean about the theater's management and financial situation from glancing at the documents?*



PARANORMAL EVENT PROMPTS (DIAMONDS)

- A**
- A sandbag crashes to the ground inches away from someone.
 - For a minute, without knowing how or why, everyone speaks in a Shakespearian-era English dialect.
 - A pallid man in a crown appears, demanding that you avenge his death before vanishing into the darkness.
- 2**
- You hear the sound of thunderous applause, as if the house were full.
 - For a minute, without knowing how or why, everyone sings their words operatically.
 - A hazy, indistinct figure offers critical notes on your performance before disappearing into mist.
- 3**
- The building echoes with a dramatic musical sting played on a far-away organ.
 - A whispering voice in your ear mocks your outfit.
 - A phantom curtain drops between you and an NPC; when it goes back up, they're gone!



- 4**
- You hear clunking from within the walls.
 - The room is filled with ghostly flames that don't generate heat.
 - A dagger floats invitingly in mid-air.

- 5**
- Ghostly laughter echoes through the room.
 - For a minute, without knowing how or why, everyone loses the ability to speak and can only communicate in mime.
 - One of you briefly has your head replaced with a donkey's.

- 6**
- An NPC falls abruptly through the floor as a trapdoor appears out of nowhere.
 - Every exit somehow leads right back to where you are.
 - A hulking, headless figure quickly ducks behind a curtain. You hear the distant, echoing sound of hoofbeats.

- 7**
- A haunting voice can be heard through the walls, singing Irving Berlin's "Always."
 - A dusty, taxidermied deer head, discarded in a corner with other miscellaneous set pieces, shouts "GET OUT!"
 - As you enter the room, you see someone who looks exactly like you leaving the room.



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- The stage's speakers suddenly turn on, playing the sound of cold wind and a distant, threatening howl.
- Out of nowhere, a phantom tempest fills the room, tossing everyone around.
- A ghostly, wailing human figure bound in chains briefly appears before sinking beneath the floor.

9

- Lights suddenly explode, showering you in sparks and shards of glass.
- You are drawn, against your will, to marks painted on the floor.
- There is a momentary blackout. When the lights come back, a bloody corpse is in the middle of the floor! (Closer inspection reveals it's a mannequin coated in stage blood.)

10

- There's a distant sound of whistling. (Superstition dictates actors never whistle backstage!)
- There's a momentary blackout, after which you discover you've all switched outfits with one another.
- You spot a pale figure who paints vermillion blood splatters on the wall and floor. They hastily flee through the wall when spotted.



NPC PROMPTS (SPADES)

A JASON HEART, THE DIRECTOR

Thin and pale. Black turtleneck and an aesthetic that screams “ARTIST!” He appears as though he hasn’t slept in a week.

Quote: *“Who are you? Actually, never mind. I’m hemorrhaging actors; my show is imploding; I’m too busy for you right now.”*

2 COURTNEY VAN NUYS, THE STAGE MANAGER

Burly and cheerful. Never without her headset and a copy of the script. Unlike the rest of the cast and crew, she knows about Backstage Brian and helps Preston Burke maintain the fake haunting.

Quote: *“Hey y’all, you must be the, uh, ‘exterminators’ that Mr. Burke sent. I have, uh, three minutes and twelve seconds to talk, so what can I do for you?”*

3 ELIZABETH PALMER, THE STAR!

Bold, brash, brilliantly dressed. Elizabeth always acts as though the spotlight is pointed firmly at her, and she expects the world to react accordingly. She isn’t acting today as the uptick in supernatural occurrences has left her “too fatigued to perform.”

Quote: *“Oh! You haven’t heard about my ghostly encounter? It’s too, too horrible to recount! But let me try anyway because it’s also too, too good a story to pass up.”*



4 “DAPPER” DANNY RUFF, THE OLD HAT

A chipper old man who takes a nip from his hip flask whenever he thinks nobody is looking. He's a pretty bad actor, but he's got a gruff charm and mostly knows his lines. He's been here long enough that it feels cruel to get rid of him.

Quote: *“I remember when Brian first started coming around; those were the days. Not like now. Don't know what's changed but Brian's gotten meaner... starting 'round about the time that Davis girl started here.”*

5 PETER KING, THE BIT PLAYER

Buff, handsome, and extremely quiet. He's a stagehand who would prefer building sets to acting on them, but he's taken about a dozen minor roles to make up for actors who have quit because he's very bad at saying “no.”

Quote: *“... hey. You look like you need something. Are you new actors? Because I have four quick changes in act four, and if someone were to step in and... no? Oh, okay. Um, so who are you then?”*

6 ALICE, TAWNEY, CLAIRE, AND MO, THE CHORUS

A gaggle of young women who seem attached at the hip. On stage, they have clockwork choreography; off stage, they are perpetually talking over one another, bumping into one another, and generally bouncing about like a tornado in ballet flats.

Quote: *“Oh. My, Gosh. Have you heard what Brian did in the wings-” “Of course I heard, I was there-” “Not you, Tawney!” “Wait, are you talking to me?” “Are you Tawney?” “No, I'm Claire, how do you not know-” “Wait, have you heard what Claire saw Brian do in the wings?”*



7 **MATT CAPELLI, THE UP-AND-COMER**

A self-absorbed twenty-something desperately seeking superstardom. He temporarily stopped improvising during performances after being physically threatened by the director, but he's absolutely planning to start again when there's an audience.

Quote: *"I feel like Brian is sort of a... partner for me. Some actors are just here to have a good time, but I'm here to perform, and Brian gets that. Sometimes I think I can hear him... and he agrees that act two needs a big musical moment."*

8 **ALFRED AND HORTENSE DELACOURT, THE PATRONS**

Northlake Theater's largest donors, the Delacorts are an elderly couple who technically shouldn't be allowed backstage. Hortense is perpetually on the hunt for fresh gossip; Alfred tends to bob along behind her, completely uninterested in his surroundings.

Quote: *"Goodness, fresh faces! Charmed, I'm sure, though surprised that the ghastly rumours haven't driven you away. What, ghosts? No, that's nonsense—I mean the ongoing dalliance between the director and Miss Palmer, it's all anybody can talk about, you know, isn't that right, Alfred?"*

9 **PRESTON BURKE, THE OWNER**

Your client, although he pretends not to know who you are, just in case there are actors around to overhear.

Quote: *"Quite busy here, quite busy, and I'm quite sure you must be too, so if you need something, be quick."*



10 ANNIE DAVIS, THE USHER

Preston Burke's awkward teenage niece acts as a general gopher for the cast and crew but would rather read awful sci-fi novels in a quiet corner.

Quote: *"Yeah, Uncle Pres- I mean Mr. Burke says there's a ghost here, but I think, um, some of the weird stuff could be, like, better explained as, like, a trans-dimensional incursion from a parallel plane, um, or like a different timeline of reality. Um."*



CLUE PROMPTS (CLUBS)

- A**
- An old, yellowed playbill for the theater's first performance of King Lear 50 years ago
 - A photo of the cast and crew with everyone's eyes crossed out
 - A radio earpiece that isn't the same model that Courtney and the other stagehands wear
- 2**
- A playbill for the cast's most recent production of Macbeth
 - An expensive-looking diamond ring in a wadded-up newspaper
 - A shoddily-repaired hole in the wall
- 3**
- A small bottle of arsenic
 - A notebook full of critical reviews clipped from the paper
 - A few loose pages of an extremely gory horror movie script
- 4**
- A human skull in a box labeled "for Yorick"
 - A totally abysmal love sonnet, unsigned
 - An envelope containing several hundred dollars in small bills



- 5**
- A cheap book called The Country's Most Haunted Playhouses tossed in a corner
 - A wilted and discarded bouquet of roses
 - A performance contract torn to bits
- 6**
- A newspaper article from decades ago that describes "last year's tragedy backstage at Northlake"
 - An envelope filled with photos of Jason Heart and Elizabeth Palmer
 - Insurance documents for the theater
- 7**
- A hidden dagger with a sharp blade
 - A jacket with lines from the play scrawled all over the sleeves
 - A small, concealed video recorder
- 8**
- A fresh-out-the-box Specter Detector 3000 (consumer-grade but more user-friendly than the equipment you use)
 - A book of matches from a nearby bar
 - A broken frame containing the photo of a younger Preston Burke, shaking hands with an unknown person
- 9**
- Blueprints of the theater, with areas of supernatural influence highlighted
 - A crumpled up note, reading only "I KNOW"
 - A notebook containing a hand-written script for a terrible farce called "The Haunting at Northlake Theater"



10

- The torn-up remains of a safety harness
- -A lovely, well-made folding fan
- -A canister of gasoline hidden behind some paint cans

