Hidden Goblin Hunt

By Morgan Davie. Version 1.0, May 2019

Warning! This game is untested and incomplete!

This is a game for several players and a GM. The players take on the roles of treasure hunters who enter otherwordly mansions in search of goblin gold. But goblins don't take kindly to treasure hunters.

Why are you an explorer?
You need money, and you have more courage than sense. You and your team will use machinery to locate and enter goblin mansions and seek out treasure.

What is a goblin?
The goblin is created from a living person's fears and resentments. It is not part of the person, but something separate that has its own existence in the goblin realm. Its mansion is the dreamlike space that forms around it, its horrid and upsetting nest.

What is goblin treasure?
It is a substance that can be brought out of the mansions into the real world, but its real appearance is as a kind of glistening crystalline sludge. People who don't use their real names will pay large sums of money to get their hands on it. Treasure hunting is dangerous work, but you can earn enough to retire off a few big scores.

Creating characters

Name your explorer.

Every character has four abilities: (assign +3/+2/+1/+0)
- **Search**: Inspecting, analysing, identifying, uncovering.
- **Scout**: Listening, noticing, sneaking.
- **Fight**: Hitting, breaking, forcing.
- **Focus**: Convincing, resisting, committing.

Every character has a pool of four six-sided dice, representing effort.

Every character begins **clean**. If they are harmed by the goblin or other dangers, they become **scratched**. If they are further harmed, they become **blurred**. If they are further harmed, they are **claimed by the goblin** and become part of the mansion forever.

GM setup

Creating the mansion

The GM needs an area out of view of the players, for example behind a screen.
The GM takes a normal deck of cards, shuffles it, and lays out cards face down in a five-by-five arrangement in this area.
The GM then chooses three cards to remove from the grid, without the players seeing what they are. The GM can choose at random (drop three dice on the array and remove the cards landed on, or generate co-ordinates by rolling two d10s and halving each result giving two numbers from 1 to 5) or purposefully to create an interesting map.

Now each mansion needs a theme. Goblin mansions always resonate through the dreams of those exploring them. Ask the players to secretly write down three words and give them to you.

The words relate to the explorer's most recent unsettling dreams. They are:
1. An environment that unsettled you.
2. A physical object that seemed important to you.
3. A sound that you couldn't escape.

Gather these words, and use them to improvise the contents of the mansion and the secrets of its goblin master.

Creating the goblin

The three cards that you took from the grid tell you about the capabilities of the goblin that lurks there. Each card gives you a goblin power (indicated by suit) and the strength of that power (the score). The cards represent different states that the goblin mutates through during the game.

Arrange these cards in order from lowest to highest (Aces high). The lowest card is the goblin's initial state. Certain events can make the goblin evolve from its weakest state, to its intermediate state (the second card), and then to its final state (the highest card).

At any time the goblin only has one power.

- **Clubs:** The clubs power is *violence*. The goblin is physically dangerous and seeks to harm and kill intruders. It can manifest weapons on its body or use objects lying around its mansion. Either way it is deadly.
- **Hearts:** The hearts power is *enchantment*. The goblin can seize control of those within its mansion and cause them to do its bidding. This only lasts a moment, but that is long enough to cause significant problems!

- **Spades:** The spades power is *movement*. The goblin can use its power to separate characters, pushing and pulling them into traps and dangers, even yanking them across its mansion or moving parts of the mansion around.
- **Diamonds:** The diamonds power is *animation*. The goblin can use its power to move objects around from a distance, harming or trapping characters.

All goblins, once active, can feel the movement of characters through their mansions. A goblin can only focus on one character at a time, but it always knows where that character is.

All goblins are always good at hiding. They hide at the difficulty of the card they are on.

GM procedures

Exploring the mansion

When play begins, characters will enter the mansion in the location of the lowest card that is not of the clubs suit, with a preference for hearts, then diamonds, then spades.

Characters can move to any adjacent card space. For each new space entered one character should make a scouting check. If successful, all the other characters can follow their lead and move silently into the space.

Each space has an inherent difficulty, represented by its numeric value. The higher the number, the more strange and crowded and full of shadows and dark corners the space is. Face cards count as 10, and Aces count as 11.

As the characters move through the mansion, the GM improvises the appearance and contents of different spaces according to the dreamwords they have been given by the players.

- **Heart** spaces are rest opportunities. The room might be strange or sinister, but it contains no dangers. When a goblin uses its powers on characters here, use the lower of the two card values, not the higher. When in these spaces, characters can make a focus check to recover a one spent effort die, but on a failure the goblin evolves.
- **Diamond** spaces have knowledge, where the characters can learn secret hints about about the nature of the goblin, including its current location in the mansion, its current and future forms, and the location of its lair. Uncovering secrets requires either a searching or a focus check, at the GM's discretion based on the nature of the room. Only one secret can be uncovered in a given space.
- **Spade** spaces have hidden traps. These spaces can be entered freely, but when searched without full success or when an attempt to leave is made, the trap will spring. Avoiding harm from a trap requires a check, which can be of any type the GM deems appropriate.

- **Club** spaces have obvious dangers threatening any attempt to enter or pass through. Explorers must make a check (fighting or scouting, typically) to do so without suffering harm.
- **Face cards** have treasure hidden somewhere in their environments. The treasure, when found, may look like anything but it always glows brightly. Jack treasures are worth 5 gold, Queen treasures are worth 8 gold, and King treasures are worth 10 gold.
- **Aces** are goblin lairs. This is a special space the goblin has made to rest and hide. All Aces allow crawl-through access to any other Aces in the mansion. (Some goblins do not have special lairs!)

Making rolls

Any character can roll 1d6 at any time they act, at no cost. If they choose, they can make an effort, taking an extra 1d6 from their energy pile to add to their roll. They can make an effort after the initial roll, but it must be before the GM reveals whether they succeed or fail with their result. Add the relevant ability bonus to the roll, and compare the result to the target.

- 1d6 + effort + ability vs. target

The target value of any check is set by either the room they are currently in (as indicated by the room's card, face cards count as 10, ace cards count as 11) or the goblin's relevant ability (as set by its current card), whichever is higher.

- If the total equals the target value, the character succeeds.
- If the total misses the target value by 1 or 2, the character partially succeeds or succeeds at cost.
- If the total misses the target value by more than 2, the character fails.

Playing the goblin

The goblin begins in its lair, or in the highest value card in the array. It is resting.
The goblin discovers the characters are about in its mansion when any of the following happen:
- They enter the goblin's space.
- They enter a space adjacent to the goblin and fail a Scouting check.
- They take damage of any kind within two spaces of the goblin.
- Any Queen or King treasure is taken.

As soon as the goblin wakes, choose the character the goblin senses first. It will begin hunting that character, using its powers to harry them and drive them off. Track its movement on your GM map. It takes two moves whenever the target character moves.

The goblin can switch to track a different explorer whenever it shares a space with that explorer, or whenever that explorer takes any treasure. If the explorer it is tracking leaves the mansion, it automatically switches to track the nearest explorer remaining in the mansion.

Leaving the mansion

To leave the mansion, characters must return to the space they entered and make a successful focus check. They take with them any treasure they have found.

Defeating a goblin

Goblins can be injured and driven away, but they can never be destroyed. If a goblin is defeated in a fighting check, it immediately retreats to its starting space and spends a turn evolving. Then it begins the hunt again. If it has already evolved to its third form, then it reverts back to its initial, weakest form.

A goblin can be resolved. The players must confront the goblin and dispel it by naming the trauma that created it and offering it specific forgiveness. The trauma is hinted at by everything encountered in the mansion and particularly by the contents of diamond rooms.

If a goblin is resolved, all treasures in the mansion are claimed by the explorers and the mansion dissipates, leaving the explorers to return safely to the normal world.