

The Wood Ghost

To me it looked like a poorly carved, rather ridiculous attempt to manufacture a “scary”. Many of the other wood sculptures the natives had shown me were masterpieces of design and craft, but this was lacking in finish, artless in execution, and laughable in its realization. Were they having me on? Were they laughing at the foolish outsider, and his foolish concerns?

But they saw the skepticism in my eyes and swore it was real, swore that the spirit of a living man had been embedded in the trunk of a growing tree. I didn't bother to ask why this had happened. I didn't want to encourage them, and I turned away from it, working as hard as I could to maintain my dignity and my superiority.

But I had looked into the dead eyes of the thing, and I did not doubt, and only fear moved within me ...



The Wood Ghost

Written by Steven Dawes, based on an illustration by Kent Burles

Writer's Note: This is a GM's tool and prop. Anyone playing BTS as opposed to running it should read no further. Doing so will ruin what few things are known about this mysterious thing, or things, called the Wood Ghost.

This is also something of a living document. In time I may get questions or aspects I've not considered before, or it may appear in my home game from time to time and as more aspects and events come to light, I will add and periodically update this document on the houseofbts.net.

What little we do know about it...

The first thing you should understand is that "The Wood Ghost" is not (and was never) intended to be a sentient being as we understand it. It is not to be considered truly benign or antagonistic in any way. It has plenty of character in its own way, but is NOT to be considered to be a character, nor was it ever once a character.

If I was to use one word to describe what I've designed the Wood Ghost to be, it would be "unexplainable". It might be exactly what the natives said; that *it's the soul or spirit of a man embedded inside a growing tree*. It may not be that at all. It might simply be a tree that grew into the visage of a suffering man. It might have been cleverly carved that way by someone. There may even be more than one in the world; there could be dozens or even hundreds spread out across the globe!

Some claim it's sentient and responsive. Some say it watches us. Some say it listens to us. Some say it calls out to us at night. Some people claim it's never in the same place twice. A few people (usually those with a habit of embellishment) say they've seen it move in some small way out of the corner of their eye.

But does it really do any of these things? Does it do all of these things and more?

Whatever it is, the Wood Ghost appears every so often on BTS Earth. When it does appear, it offers a wealth of flavor text and possible opportunities, obstacles, warnings, ideas, or it might even subtly help or harm people. That's up the GM to decide.

It may show up nearby the scene of a murder in the woods. It might be inhabiting someone's back yard. It may show up in the middle of a scrapyard or an abandoned factory. Someone may have a dream that's its right outside their bedroom window, watching them sleep. However, in the morning when they wake up and check there's no sign of anything ever being there.

Another word to describe the Wood Ghost is “fearful”. For a reason that can’t be discerned, everyone who looks upon it feels a sense of fear about it (even if they won’t admit it). Everything about the Wood Ghost seems to say “be afraid”, but no one can truly say why.

Some speculate its fearfulness comes from its appearance of a tormented or haunted man. Some say it’s an instinctive fear of the unknown about it. Some say the Wood Ghost is psychically radiating fear as a way to keep animals and people away. Some say it’s trying to send a warning to us that it can’t convey any clearer. It could be one of these things. It could be none of them.

The idea behind using The Wood Ghost in your BTS game is to add some unexplainably mysteries or offer a possible clue or premonition in some way. Its appearance shouldn’t be used very often unless there’s a good reason for it. It should also never be fully explained under any circumstances.

It shares many of the same attributes of any given tree. It is alive, it has a trunk, it is rooted into the ground, and it can be cut down or set ablaze like any other tree. If someone performs any kind of DNA test, it would be similar to the trees common in the region (even though it looks nothing like them).

On the other hand, it never grows stems, branches or leaves, it never grows bark on its surface, it always has an off-white color and never seems to grow more than nine feet tall (the average being 6-7 feet). If one considers it to have a face, then it looks upward when its less than 5 feet tall, yet it looks downwards when it reaches 6 feet or more. Animals never nest in or on it, nor do they climb or land on it.

There are those who swear they’ve seen a Wood Ghost struck by lightning during a storm and absorbed it as opposed to being set on fire, splitting apart or exploding like other trees do. There are those who say they’ve carved their initials in the tree, but sometime later (days, months, years) their carving’s gone. It’s as if the tree healed the carving overnight.

Then there are others who say that carvings and etching have appeared on the tree. Sometimes they depict an image of something, sometimes they have words (known and/or foreign) or symbols that look to have eloquently been etched into them. But the next time you come back and look at it, the tree may be clear of any carvings or etchings.

Mystery is key with the Wood Ghost. Mysteries are what stay with the players after the adventures are finished. Attempting to fully explain what the Wood Ghost is in your game (whatever it may be as its your call) is antithetical to the poetry of both fear and mystery.

Skills concerning The Wood Ghost

Photography, Surveillance, T.V./Video and related skills: Any photographs or video footage taken of the Wood Ghost seem to “miss” the finer details and the more human-like aspects of the tree. It does not look anywhere near as “life-like” or “human” in photographs, videos, or even live video feeds. Some mystics say that you can’t capture record the “aura” of the Wood Ghost, “you can only see it for yourself”. It’s as if we can only see its eyes with our own eyes.

Psychology: The Wood Ghost is a great argument for psychologists and especially *Nega-Psychics* who label any phenomena with the Wood Ghost as **Pareidolia**; the mental process in which humans try to find recognizable patterns and meaning in everything we hear, see and experience. After all, what else could it be?

Whittling & Sculpting: Any lumber made from or items carved or whittled from a Wood Ghost will decay/rot and collapse/fall apart within 1D6 years (no matter how well treated). This is particularly puzzling as the tree itself seems incredibly resistant to decay, disease and even insect infestations.

Nevertheless, there are those who actively search for and cut down these trees as they swear that for the first year or two the items crafted from Wood Ghost are sturdier, stronger and more resilient than anything else out there, as well as having some mystical properties (see below). Bo staves, spears, fighting sticks, farming tools, canes, and the like have been carved from Wood Ghost. Some even carry carved totems or hunks of wood (ala “The Log Lady” from *Twin Peaks*) for various reasons.

Botany: Anyone who actively tries to care for or maintain a Wood Ghost will find it a baffling experience. If one digs up and transplants them, it immediately begins to look sick and withers, dying within 1D4 years, no matter how well its cared for.

It’s worth noting that there has been a rare exception to this rule as a Wood Ghost uprooted one night during a particularly bad storm. That particular tree has not decayed or crumbled yet and is current on display in a Native America heritage museum somewhere (hence the introduction story).

If one maintains the Wood Ghost where it’s found, they seem to thrive and grow taller than average. “Thrive” is a subjective word as it’s hard to truly tell how healthy they are, but some people swear they can “feel” its good health.

On the other and, one morning the caretaker may go to water it, only to find that its gone! They’ll be puzzled that it doesn’t leave a hole in the ground (as if dug up by the roots). It’s simply gone, vanished as if it were never there!

Lore: Any lore concerning The Wood Ghost are varied and seem to match the culture of the given lore. The only common denominator is that the Wood Ghost contains the soul of a person. How it got there and why are always different. Some say it's a punishment, some say it's a guardian spirit, some say it chose to be there. But no one knows the real story for sure; if there's even a story to tell.

Parapsychology: Even this skill has no real answers to offer beyond recounting the many lore's and stories about it. Those with this skill lucky enough to see one usually document and record all they can (photo's, descriptions, samples, etc.) More than a few Parapsychologists agree that its mystical or supernatural in some way, even if they do know or understand to what extent. There are also those who believe that it's not a soul in the tree, but an Entity, similar to a *Syphon*.

Psionic Abilities Concerning the Wood Ghost

Burnt Message: This ability works as normal, but inexplicably costs one less I.S.P. when writing upon one. Then again, sometime later the message disappears as if it was never there.

Fire Omen and Smoke Signal: Similar to the above, if the wood of a chopped-up Wood Ghost – one that's less than 2 years since being turned into firewood - is used in a campfire or bonfire, these abilities costs one less I.S.P. to cast.

Meditation and Mediation, Advanced: Perhaps not so surprising, meditation proves impossible when nearby (100 feet) or in line of sight of the Wood Ghost as its "fearful" aura will not allow them to get into a trance.

Detect Psionics: The psychic will detect nothing from the tree.

Suppress Fear, Death Trance or Deaden Senses: If these abilities are used within 100 feet or line of sight of the Wood Ghost, they cost an additional 2 I.S.P. and even then, the psychic has a 25% chance of failing to cast it properly.

Electrokinesis: Sometimes when a psychic is performing *Sense Electricity*, the source will lead them to a nearby Wood Ghost. Even stranger, if they place a hand upon the tree and try to cast *Electrical Discharge*, they can cast it at 0 I.S.P.! It's as if the tree provides the power to perform the ability. The tree may have 1D4-1 charges available on any given day.

Levitation or Telekinesis: One of the oddest aspects of the wood of a Wood Ghost is that it's somehow impervious to these abilities. Even the smallest fragments of Wood Ghost cannot be psychically moved. According to more than a few sensitive psychic types "it's almost like our psychic senses can't detect the wood to pick it up or even levitate it". This is why some mystics and psychics

carve them into wands, walking sticks, canes and the like as other psychics cannot telekinetically forcefully remove it from someone's grip.

Telekinetic Lift: Similar to some of the abilities above, but lifting a heavy portion of a Wood Ghost (or uprooting the entire tree) costs 2 extra I.S.P. and even then, it has a 25% chance to fail.

See Aura: Provides no details to the psychic beyond the notion of it being a tree WITH THE EXCEPTION of it having a low base P.P.E. Could be explained as the P.P.E. of the living tree itself as opposed to something more. But then again, maybe it's more than that.

Sense Evil: The Wood Ghost does not seem to radiate an evil aura. But then why is it so unnerving and scary to look at or be around?

Sense Magic: The psychic will not sense any magic energy or magic powers in the tree. But if that's the case, why does it have a detectable P.P.E. base? Even if low?

See the Invisible: While the psychic won't see anything extra when looking at the Wood Ghost, they may unintentionally spot entities and other invisible beings attracted to it for whatever reason.

If you have any questions or have experiences with the Wood Ghost that you'd like to share and have added to this document, you can send a message on the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/housebts/>) or send an e-mail to hostofthehouseofbts@gmail.com.

