

When the director told us we'd be filming inside one of the most haunted locations in Republic City, I almost laughed at him.

I still would, in fact, even while I'm standing just outside its front gate. Fate is often fickle, but I refuse to consider that a house might attack me.

Now, we haven't gotten the cameras rolling yet, but the recording is running. So you'll get to hear me break out the *scary* voice in a moment.

Anyway, you're only getting the behind the scenes talk if you cough up a few extra Yuans, so I assume that you want to hear me rambling before we head on set.

I hear Varrick purchased this old wreck a few months ago. Don't ask me about the price; it's so far above me on the totem pole that the only thing I *do* see is some shady shareholder shaking with anticipation. Fat cats, am I right?

Muffled conversation

Turns out we're cutting that part. Best get on with this.

Camera check.

One.

Two.

And three.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Behind The Curtain. I'm Chin, and this is Qin – our resident Spiritbender. Yes, we're twins, and yes, they thought they were being funny.

But you're not paying for that. You want to see the paranormal, and thanks to our sponsors, today we're going to give you it.

The camera turns around slowly, giving you a panorama shot of the house. It looks as if nobody has lived here for decades.

Welcome, one and all, to the House of Silence.

Now, we know that name doesn't inspire hope in what we want to show you tonight. It certainly threw us off at first, but watch closely.

The camera pans around again. No wind blows against the house's dilapidated window shutters. No animals race across the barren ground. Nothing stirs.

Not a thing. You can't actually see it from here, but not even the leaves are moving on that tree over there.

Creepy, right? What if I told you that this is just the beginning?

Qin, it's time. Let's move on in and take a peek behind the curtain.

The camera shakes, but only slightly, as Chin moves up. The courtyard is oppressively dark, and the image flickers for a moment.

By the tree, if you look close enough at the abyss, the abyss stares back at you.

Alright, we're in. Thanks to a special someone, we have the key to this place. It's one of those big old ones, you know the drill.

This place was built before they installed the city power grid. You know what that means, boys and girls. No lights for our intrepid explorers.

Aren't you lucky that I brought matches?

With practised confidence, Chin strikes the match. Light suffocates the entryway like too much water after a long drought. He lights a few candles, and then blows it out.

There, that should do it. Qin, take one of these candles.

First, we're going to head up to the master bedroom. Spirits, those stairs are creaky.

The air in here is warm. A little too warm, really. Stale, too. Suppose that comes with the territory. Candles are holding up well, at least.

Okay, we're going to head into the room now. Qin, do your thing.

Qin heads into the room, taking the cap off of his water pouch. He takes a deep breath, then begins asking questions. "Are you there?" "Who are you?" "Will you show us a sign?"

"Do you want to play?"

Uh, Qin? That last one wasn't on our list. No, I didn't say it.

Wait. Shh, be quiet.

A faint humming noise can be heard, cutting through the silence. Downstairs, the door slams shut. As quickly as it began, the humming ends, and in its place comes a tenser quiet. One that they were not expecting.

Okay, whispers only, Qin. Until we find out what's going on here, we should stick together. Do not lose sight of me, or the candle – got it?

The camera image flickers again. A figure appears behind Qin that his twin does not appear to see.

It looks directly at the camera, and raises a finger to the place where its mouth should have been. The camera flickers violently, then dies.

That, uh. That isn't good. Camera's dead, Qin.

Of course I brought batteries. They should be in my pockets. Hold the camera for a second, would you?

Muffled movement ensues, alongside a brief period of cursing.

Great. I left them back at the Satomobile. Let's go back and get them so we can actually film this.

What do you mean, the key doesn't work? It *un*locked the door, didn't it?

Spirits, there goes the candles.

Was that a piano?

No. Absolutely do not go and see who made that noise, Qin.

You aren't going to listen, are you?

Of course you aren't.

Fine, meet me back here. I'm going to try to figure out why we can't open this door.

Chin sets the camera down. You hear keys jingling around.

This one?

No. This one, maybe?

Hmm, not that one, either.

This one *has* to be the one.

Listeners, it's getting very cold in here all of a sudden. Something is making my hair stand on end, and I'm not sure I want to turn around and find out what it is.

In a previous life, I was a locksmith. Or, depending on how you viewed my advertising methods, a burglar. Never leave home without a set of lockpicks, kids.

His voice projects confidence, but wavers in places. You hear him fumbling around. By the way he's cursing, the clicks aren't coming nearly fast enough. The humming picks up again, high in pitch with an underlying tone of malevolence.

It sounds like it is getting closer.

Chin drops the lockpick on the ground, and you hear a curse that you should definitely cut out. He picks them back up quickly.

This is not the time to have slippery fingers, Chin. Come on, focus.

One last click, and the door opens outwards. You hear Chin's footsteps getting further and further away.

Silence. You begin to see why the house was named for it. It is the heavy kind of quiet, and it is all you hear for a while.

The audio crackles to life, and you hear breathing. Calm, slow, breathing.

The kind a hunter makes while waiting for its prey.

Suddenly, the camera springs back to life, and the first thing you see is Chin's face. It glistens with sweat, a nervous expression painted upon it.

Right, that should be enough juice. Best go find Qin and get out of here. If this mover ever makes it past our editors, you should know that they don't pay us enough for this.

Ghosts have never been real. Not before. The paranormal was just a niche illusion meant for easy entertainment.

Maybe we should have listened to the locals on this one, you know? Anyway, let's go search for my brother.

Even if we aren't releasing this, they'll murder me if we don't get enough footage.

As Chin picks up the camera, you spot a face immediately behind his. It grins, far too wide to be a human smile.

Now that you have a close-up, you notice it has no eyes.

But it looks around as if it does.

Okay, folks. I think this was some kind of studio. I see the piano. Obviously, it's not making any noise now, but it shouldn't have been making any in the first place.

Chin brings the camera closer.

As you can see, there's no keys left. I'd like to know how – wait, what just fell on my face?

*Chin tilts the camera up. You see nothing, but what **he** sees is enough to make him scream. He falls to the floor, then gets up without you.*

You start to wonder if they even remotely care for their equipment. With the camera still very much pointed at the ceiling, you even wonder what he could have seen in the damp, dark room.

With little fanfare, the camera is picked up again. Their breathing is slow and laboured, but otherwise fine.

Hi, folks. This is Qin. Chin left the camera here. He does that sometimes.

As I'm sure he told you, the piano has no keys (and must scream). Heh, sorry. Had to go there. I don't really know if it was this one in particular, but I explored a little bit.

This is the only piano in the house. Let's not ask the question you're all itching for me to answer.

Anyway, I think Chin managed to get out, so let's go ahead and check the door.

Ah. This isn't good. Either my brother is a rat and he locked the door behind him, or whatever has been toying with us threw him out on his behind.

Alright. I'm going to place this camera facing the hallway while I try to get this door open.

You hear him faintly mutter "The things we do for footage..."

Just going to freeze the lock and smash it. No time for theatrics, here. Remember, boys and girls. It's not breaking and entering if you're breaking out of a place you had the key for.

The lock breaking shatters the fragile silence.

There we go, all done.

He picks up the camera, then opens the door inwards to reveal a solid brick wall.

That definitely wasn't there the last time.

I'll just go find something heavy and -

As he spins around, the camera flickers. You briefly see the figure again.

It winks at you as the lens goes dark.

“Do you want to play?”

Qin screams.

The camera moves around in silence, for a time. The calm breathing has returned, content to show each room without comment. Sometimes, you could swear that the camera goes through a wall or two.

It lingers in the master bedroom, and, almost playfully, flicks the camera up to the ceiling. It only shows you for a few seconds, but you see two shadows there.

And room for a third.