HauntMaven.com - Wolfstone's Haunted Halloween Site

http://wolfstone.halloweenhost.com/ThunderAndLightning/clsbuy_CommercialLightning.html

Commercial Thunder and Lightning

Some folks who are interested in thunder and lightning on demand, may be unwilling to experiment or build it themselves. For those, we have collected references to commercial lightning simulators.

These devices all work the same way: you play a sound track (thunder), and the lights (lightning) respond to the sound, as with a color organ.

Fake lightning machines come and go frequently. Many of the machines listed here are only of historical interest. Please read our disclaimers as to the timeliness and origin of this information.

Terror By Design

Denny at Terror By Design offers a "Thunder & Lightning Controller", complete with a CD full of instant lightning storm. Denny does a good job and has earned constant praise on the Halloween mailing lists. If you don't want to build it yourself, you can't go wrong with the Terror By Design setup.

As of May 2002, there are two models:

- The regular model runs $89.95 and works with up to 225 watts of incandescent lights, or a strobe up to 75 watts.
- The heavy-duty model costs $124.95 and goes up to 500 watts of incandescent light.

Both units use an internal microphone to pick up the sound from your speakers and require no special wiring. This certainly makes setup a breeze, but you need to make sure the unit is isolated from other noises, like patrons, partygoers, and traffic - or your lightning will flash with those sounds, too.

These appear to be single-channel units and have a single "sensitivity" control.

Spooky F/X

Jerry Chavez at Spooky F/X has offered numerous pre-built lightning boxes over the years.

I have not heard any reviews of these units, but given Jerry's long and helpful association with the haunt world, I would be stunned if there were any problems.

Most of the models are discontinued and are only listed here for historical purposes.

date	model number	name	power	price
October 2006	PSC5	Perfect Storm Category 5	3120 Watts	$185
November 2002	PS103102	The Perfect Storm	2400 Watts	$195
ended November 2002	LNCR-103102	The Basic Lightning Controller		$69
	LNCR-111-801	The Basic Lightning Controller	220 Watts	$59
	T10-13-01	The Tempest	1200 Watts	$160
ended July 2001	LC60	The Lightning Controller	220 Watts	$60

- In October 2006, Spooky F/X introduced "Perfect Storm Category 5", model #PSC5, $185 plus S&H.

This unit comes with a special CD that has nine tracks, each about 5 minutes long. The CD is piped into the storm box, and then into a boom box or stereo.

The web site states that the Perfect Storm is better than a standard color organ because it does not react to the sounds of wind or rain.

The unit drives 3120 Watts (26 Amps), and can be used with incandescent lights or strobes.

- In November 2002, Spooky F/X introduced "The Perfect Storm", model #PS103102, $195 plus S&H.

This unit requires a special CD (provided). The CD is piped into the storm box, and then into a boom box or stereo.

The unit drives 2400 Watts, and can be used with incandescent lights or strobes.

- In November 2002, the Spooky F/X web page offered a different "Basic Lightning Controller", model #LNCR-103102, $69 plus S&H.

The web site warned "Limited quantities, This item will be discontinued after we sell what we have in stock."

- Spooky F/X also offered "The Basic Lightning Controller", model #LNCR-111-801, $59 plus S&H.

As the name implies, this is a no-frills controller. Input is direct audio via a 1/8" audio jack. A sensitivity control is provided.

The unit drives 220 Watts of incandescent lights.

- Spooky F/X offered "The Tempest", model #T10-13-01, $160 plus S&H.

Unlike most other lightning controllers that take a thunderclap sound and turn it into light, this unit includes the thunderclap sound on a digital chip.

The unit drives 1200 Watts of incandescent lights, and can also power strobes. There is also an audio output

that goes to your amplifier and speakers. A cassette adapter is provided to feed the sound into your boom box.

- The original Spooky F/X lightning product was called simply "The Lightning Controller", model #LC60, $60 plus S&H.

  The controller does not have a microphone. Instead, it uses a 1/8-inch audio jack for direct sound input. This makes setup just a tiny bit more involved than the TBD unit, but prevents external noise from interfering with the effects.

  The unit includes: sensitivity control, grounded line cord, and can handle up to 220 Watts of incandescent lights.

  Spooky F/X also sells an endless loop tapes of thunder sound effects for $15 (Item #LTTS15).

  In July 2001, Spooky F/X announced that their lightning controller would be discontinued with a special sale price until they are all gone.

Haunt Master Products

- Jim Kadel at Haunt Master Products sells a "Thunder/Lightning & Flicker Control".

  It consists of a single-channel color organ, with a sensitivity control. It handles 600 watts. Input is via direct plug-in connection, isolating the effects from ambient noise. The box also features a sound power indicator, indicating excess volume into the unit.

  It comes with a CD that has two tracks: thunder sounds (with a two-second delay) and random noise for use in flickering lamps.

  As of May 2002, it sells for $59.95

  The product page is here: http://hauntmasterproducts.com/1.html

  I have not heard any reviews of this unit, but given Jim has a long history of innovative, quality electronic products for haunters.

- [Haunt Master Products](#) also sells TLRF - Thunder/Lightning with REVERSE effect and Flicker Controller

It consists of a single-channel color organ, with a sensitivity control. It handles 600 watts. Input is via direct plug-in connection, isolating the effects from ambient noise.

The unique feature of this unit is that it has a "reverse" mode that turns OFF the light when lightning strikes. This would be used inside a house, where you want to give the illusion that the lightning strike interrupted the power.

As of May 2003, it sells for $84.95

The product page is here: http://hauntmasterproducts.com/14.html

Thorz

In 1997, a lightning controller called "Thorz" was built by a company called "Cyber Image". It was distributed, perhaps exclusively, through TheatreFX. This unit is no longer available, and from some scattered notes in the Halloween-L archives, that might be a good thing.

From what little information I can assemble, it was designed to control up to four strobe lights, but turned out to be less compatible and more expensive than originally expected.

I'm still curious about the unit, and if you have one that you would like to get rid of, or lend to me for testing, I would appreciate hearing from you.

Automated Horrors

Other than this tantalizing bit of e-mail, I know nothing about this unit...

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From: CREEPSHOWS [CREEPSHOWS@aol.com]
Date: Wed, 15 Apr 1998 11:43:44 EDT
Subject: Re: HALL: Thunder & Lightning

An all new thunder and lighting box is coming out from Automated horrors. I
talked to my buddy up there and he said i believe it will be coming out early
summer.It works just like Denny's but instead of a strobe it's a flourescent
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light i believe. If you want more info give him a call. Take care buddies!

Erik (Creepmaster) Carlson
www.hauntworld.com/creep

Scream In The Dark

Scream In The Dark offers a "Storm Box". It consists of a single-channel color organ, with a sensitivity control. It handles 600 watts. Input is via direct connection, isolating the effects from ambient noise.

As of May 2002, it sells for $45.00

The product page is here: http://www.screaminthedark.net/stormbox.html

Also available is a Lightning Accessory Kit (500W photo flood bulb and clip on flood light receptacle with reflector) for $20.00

I have not heard any formal reviews of this unit, but one reader sent me e-mail saying that she had problems with it.

Tom Walker, of Scream In The Dark, sent me the schematic. The unit uses an optocoupler for the sound input. This is a common technique, but sometimes has problems. Please see our tips for optocoupler-based color organs.

American DJ

American DJ offers several different strobe controllers.

As of May 2002, models include:

- SS-DMX/19C - Designed to control up to 16 DMX-operated strobes. MSRP $99.99.
- SS-DMX/MATRIX - Designed to control up to 16 DMX-operated strobes in a 4x4 matrix. MSRP $199.99.
- S-4A/DMX - 4-channel analog/DMX strobe controller. MSRP $99.99.
- S-10 - A single-channel analog strobe controller that drives up to 6 strobes, daisy-chain fashion. MSRP $29.99.

Although these controllers are not marketed as lightning controllers, they all accept audio input, and can probably be used for some form of lightning effect.

Warning: Different vendors use different DMX arrangements to control their strobes. I do not suggest that you mix controllers from one company with strobes made by another.

Diversitronics

Diversitronics is a manufacturer of high-end strobes and strobe controllers.

These are high-end units, and cost like it. But you can probably achieve an effect *much* more impressive than with a $5 color organ.

Diversitronics makes a wide array of strobes, including this DMX "strobe cannon" that advertises "High output 30 Joules/flash, 600,000 candela, 4500 Watts peak flash." Wow!

Most of their strobes also offer "Hyperflash", a feature that allows long flashes. This should be very helpful to the lightning-lovers, because it provides the color and intensity of a strobe, but does not have the incredibly-short illumination of a standard strobe.

STROBE RUNNER controls 2-126 Strobes through DMX Lines, with sliders for intensity, speed, and audio gain. The unit can be triggered by DMX command or audio signal. It includes a "lightning" program.

Warning: Different vendors use different DMX arrangements to control their strobes. I suggest that you do not mix controllers from one company with strobes made by another.

We have a page dedicated to lightning with Diversitronics strobes.

Take One

Take One makes a variety of Halloween decorations, available through retail stores. In August of 2002, I noticed that they were getting into the thunderstorm business. These appear to be the first mass-market lightning machines.

- "Thunder Lightning FX Box"

  This product contains a sound chip with a single sampling of thunder, and a built-in xenon strobe. It can be triggered by a "motion sensor" that detects changes in ambient light. There is also a setting where it runs continuously.

  This unit is battery-operated and very portable.

  BEWARE: Quality control on these units seems to be poor! I tried three units in the store. Two flashed light, but no sound. One made sound, but no light. It could be weak batteries.

There is no perceptible connection between the light flashes and the sounds. When triggered, the sound is played, and the strobe fires at regular intervals.

I rate this one "good idea, but poor implementation."

Sources:

[Michaels](#)		$9.99 [August 2002]
Star Light & Magic (http://www.starmgc.com)	#128781	$18 [10/2004]
Johnson Smith Co. (http://www.johnsonsmith.com)	#25714	$14.98 [10/2004]

- "Wireless Thunder Lightning Machine"

This product contains a sound chip with a single sampling of thunder, and a built-in strobe with two xenon lamps.

This unit is battery-operated and very portable.

The unit is operated by a wireless remote control. The remote can be activated by push-button or "motion sensor" that detects changes in ambient light. There is also a setting where it runs continuously.

There is no perceptible connection between the light flashes and the sounds. When triggered, the sound is played, and the twin strobe lamps fire whenever they feel like it.

I like this one a lot more than the less expensive model from Take One. The remote control is a nice feature. The use of two strobe lamps increases the probability that you will actually get a flash during the loud parts of the thunder. But I would have like it better still if their lightning and thunder were synchronized.

Sources:

[Spencer Gifts](#)		$39.99 [October 2002]
http://www.frightcatalog.com	#57252	$39.99 [October 2004]

Can You Imagine

In February 2003, the web site shoplifestyle.com advertised "Special FX Movie Magic with CD" #CY101 - $29.95 [Buy 2, get 20% off the second. No risk 30-day trial.]

Since then it has appeared at several online stores.

One model has a green lightning bolt, another has a black bolt.

This was the first appearance of the Can You Imagine unit. The same unit is sold in a different package for Halloween use by 13 Transylvania Ave.

The unit itself is a single channel color organ, with sensitivity control, in a fancy box. The unit has a microphone and also has audio jack on back for direct audio input. It drives 500W of incandescent lights.

This unit comes with the "Greatest Storms Of The Century" CD that is different from the one in the 13 Transylvania Ave package. This CD contains various sound effects: creaking haunted house, howling winds, roaring tornado, pounding rainstorm, battlefield fighting, crackling electricity.

[Reader Ray Michael bought the unit and sent me mail about it on 9/10/2003. Ray is very pleased with it.]

Sources:

www.shoplifestyle.com	#CY101	$29.95 [2/2003]
Spencer Gifts		$25 [10/2003]
Spencer Gifts		$12.50 [11/2003, close-out]
Halloween Club		~$40 [10/2003]

13 Transylvania Ave

This is essentially the same as the Can You Imagine unit in a different package with slight cosmetic changes - the lightning bolt is orange and it has a spider molded on the control knob. It drives 500W of incandescent lights.

The one dressed up for Halloween is sold under the brand 13 Transylvania Ave. It is marked with "13 Transylvania Ave", "Paper Magic Group", and "Can You Imagine".

This unit comes with "The Sounds Of Horror" CD that is different from the one in the Can You Imagine package. This CD contains various sound effects: thunderstorm, spooky music, and other Halloween-themed material.

I have obtained one. In my opinion, this is the first *good* mass-market lightning box. I don't like the CD that comes with it, though.

Sources:

http://www.frightcatalog.com	#1408006	$24.99 [9/2006]
http://www.smarthome.com	#HW0511 Special F/X	$24.99 [9/2006]
http://www.hauntquarters.com	#PM2580	$29.80 [9/2005]
Target	(in ugly green box)	$19.99 [9/2005]
Albertson's supermarket		$19.99 [with club card, 9/2005]
Menard's (chain of hardware stores)		$19.99 [11/2004]
Johnson Smith Co.	#27304	$29.98 [10/2004]

(http://www.johnsonsmith.com)		
Wal-Mart	#6542580	$25 [Halloween 2003]

Haunted Creations

I first saw a reference to this machine at http://www.yardhaunter.com. It pointed to http://www.hauntedcreations.com. Searching the web found the same machine at http://www.hauntedvillage.com, but I don't know who is the actual manufacturer.

Haunted Creations describes the machine as follows:

Our Lightning Machine will synchronize your strobe lights (works only with VEI Pro Strobe) with the thunder sounds on CD. Just plug your stereo system and strobe lights into the Lightning Machine, adjust the sensitivity knob, and you're done. Unlike comparable units the Lightning Machine does not require a separate power adapter as it draws its power from the strobe light itself. Kit includes the Lightning Machine, custom CD and instruction sheet.

Options: [Circa September 2003]

- Basic kit - Price: $109.00

  Includes: Lightning Machine, custom thunder CD, and full instructions.

  You will need a stereo system or CD player with amplified speakers, VEI Pro-Strobe Light (model v701), and some cables.

- Deluxe kit - Price $269.00

Includes: Lightning Machine, 50W VEI Pro-Strobe Light model v701, amplified speakers, custom thunder CD, and full instructions.

Sources:

http://www.hauntedcreations.com			
http://www.hauntedvillage.com			
http://www.hauntquarters.com	#HE1140	$138.00 [September 2005]	lightning machine
http://www.hauntquarters.com	#HE1140	$435.10 [September 2005]	lightning machine kit
http://www.halloweenconnection.com		$269.00 [September 2005]	full kit
http://www.halloweenconnection.com		$109.00 [September 2005]	"Lightning machine only."

Perfect Storm

Here's another offering found on the web. But I don't know who is the actual manufacturer. Other than the markings on the case, the unit and technical specifications *look* like the Digital Sound and Lighting unit.
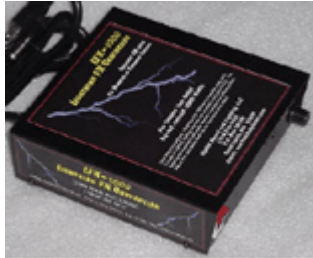

- Drives up to up to 1000 watts.
- Includes thunderstorm CD, over an hour in length.
- Can also be used as a disco lighting controller.
- "Place unit in front of cd player speakers" - suggests microphone input.

Sources:

http://www.hauntquarters.com	#VA621	$109.50 [9/2004]
Star Light & Magic (http://www.starmgc.com)	#VA621	$99 [10/2004]

Digital Sound and Lighting

I saw an ad for Digital Sound and Lighting in Haunted Attraction Magazine. Other than the markings on the case, the unit and technical specifications *look* like the Perfect Storm unit.

They advertise a lightning machine, "LFX-1000: Thunder & Lightning Controller (NEW Design!)" It is described on their web site as:

"Create realistic lightning effects!" The LFX-1000 is back and better than ever! We increased the load capacity from 500 Watts to 1000 Watts! Plus, We've provided BOTH a line level and a built-in mic for the audio inputs. You choose which input works best for you. Simply plug in an audio signal or set next to a speaker. Play the lightning sound track and the unit will respond to the audio to create a realistic lightning effect. Heavy duty, 15 Amp @125VAC, grounded plug and a 10 Amp removable fuse keeps this unit working safely. "Lightning Sound Track" CD Included.

Item #: LFX-1000 Price w/Soundtrack CD: $ 100.00

[Circa October 2003]

i-Zombie

i-Zombie (http://i-zombie.com) manufactures three different models of high-power lightning controllers:

SC-1201 Single Channel Lightning Controller
$119.95 [August 2006]

- o 1200 Watts

- o Can also function in "reverse" (dimming interior lights) mode.
- ST-2401 Stereo Lightning Controller

  - o $199.95 [August 2006]
  - o 2400 Watts (1200 Watts per channel)

  o Has one channel that can be switched to reverse mode, allowing lightning to flash in synch with interior lights dimming.

- MC-2401 Multichannel Lightning Controller

  - o $279.95 [August 2006]
  - o up to 2400 watts of lighting.
  - o "Timing circuits randomize power from one to four of the outlets for varying lengths of time. Using a centralized sound source, lightning will flash in one to four different areas before changing configurations. A very convincing effect with lightning flashing from all directions and every combination in between!"

Each unit comes with i-Zombie's "thunder tracks CD", which can also be ordered by itself for $9.95 [August 2006].

The i-Zombie folks loaned me a SC-1201 for testing. I was too busy to test it extensively before I had to return it, but I was impressed:

- The sensitivity control is excellent, making it very easy to make the lamp flash only with the thunderclap, and not glow along with other minor noises.
- Fit and finish was very good.
- Hookup instructions could have been clearer.
- The "thunder tracks CD" that came with it was surprisingly good!

I hope to write more about these when I get the chance!

Market Trends

It is clear that all of these products go through a commercial life cycle. This point was driven home during a discussion on the Halloween-L e-mailing list concerning a new and inexpensive lightning machine from 13 Transylvania Ave. offered at Wal-Mart.

On 9/4/2003, Jerry Chavez of Spooky F/X said:

Well...that is why Spooky F/X got out of the cheap low watt lighting controller market. (well we still have 3 in stock)

I knew the basic product would soon end up mass produced for spencers or Wal-Mart!

I sincerely feel sorry for the merchants that have dozens of 500 watt controllers at $45 per unit still in stock...

But remember that our PERFECT STORM lighting controller gives you the MOST watts for its price range!