http://www.spookyblue.com/halloween/scarecrow/grumble/

## Bruno has a son...

You can hear them down in the garage, muttering back and forth, plotting. If you listen closely, and they don't know you're there, you can hear them. Their voices grate in the darkness like screwdrivers on glass. One is a massive presence, towering over the other, smoldering eyes are twin points of fire in the darkness. The other is just a head sitting on a table. Hissing laughter rises and as quickly dies away. They plot and scheme, grinning at each other in the dark.

The head on the table was once a scarecrow named Bruno. His moldy choir robes and brittle grapevine body are no more. All that remains is his essence, stored in a pumpkin-head. He is a sinister soul, a demented wraith consumed with dark intent. In his madness he doesn't notice that he has no body, and he is strangely content. The twisted monster standing before him shares his madness. He is the son, a scarecrow. He is called The Grumble.

## Spookyblue's 2006 Scarecrow

Building on the success of our first scarecrow, Bruno, we combined different techniques to merge scarecrow with corpse for 2006. The result was a hideous hybrid named "The Grumble".

This guy turned out great. However, we did learn a hard lesson. Why I keep going back to the well of bad ideas I'll never know, but take my advice and do NOT use PVC pipe as a main post. The main post is the thing that you stick into the ground and to which your scarecrow is mounted. Use wood, or build a stand. Our scarecrow suffered the humiliation of doing a face plant when, trench coat weighed down with rain, the main post bent so far over that it finally snapped.

This was a fun project, but I could have used another month to add the details I wanted. Especially since I was building not only a giant pumpkin head from scratch, but also a skeletal torso. The paper mache work alone took a couple of weeks.

The Grumble is mostly poultry screen and newspaper, and it took about a month to build. I found the paper "vines" to be a neat detail that took on a life of their own. I chose all inorganic materials this year because I wanted The Grumble to last for more than one season as did Bruno. One scarecrow head sitting in the garage is enough.

## Materials list

- Poultry screen (chicken wire) - Get it at your favorite home improvement center.
- Duct tape, newspaper, heavy paper towels or "shop wipes" - You can find "shop wipes" at any auto parts store. Paper towels can be substituted, but they won't be as strong.
- 3/4" pvc pipe, 4-way junction, 45's & 90's - One 8' length should be enough. If you want longer arms, get two. Use this for armature support and for the arms, but not for the main post.
- Main post - Use wood. Dig a hole and drop a 2x4 into it or build a stand, in which case you'll need at least two 2x4s.
- Carpet adhesive or Elmer's Glue - You know the stuff I'm talking about. Call it carpet latex, call it adhesive. Get a gallon. It's cheaper than buying all those little cans, and if you have some left over you can use it to make groundbreakers. If you're having trouble finding the carpet stuff, plain old white Elmer's glue diluted with a little water makes great Grumble glue. Again, buy a gallon.
- Trench coat - Since you're probably on first name basis with the folks at the Salvation Army store, they might already have one of these set aside for you.
- An old lamp - I used two 25W red bulbs. Choose whatever color you like best.
- Paint - Use outdoor latex paint. Mismatches from your favorite paint-getting place are the best.



## Building a weird armature (Pumpkin head & corpse torso)

You would think that wadding a bunch of chicken wire into the shape of a pumpkin would be fairly simple, but no matter how I smooshed it, I kept ending up with a cylinder. The answer appeared in a recovered memory from Ms. Pitman's 7th grade

social studies class. Remember those maps of the world that looked like a bunch of elongated footballs glued together? If you cut them out, they can be taped together to form a globe. I unrolled my crappy cylinder so it was flat, then cut curved "V" shapes into the top and bottom at intervals. The cylinder could then be easily formed into a more pumpkiny shape.

Observe standard safety procedures for working with chicken wire. All those pointy ends will conspire to draw blood. Wear gloves, or when you're finished you're going to need a can of Neosporin and a tetanus shot.

This is a fine looking pumpkin, but it needs extra support so it doesn't collapse under the weight of its skin. I inserted a length of 3/4" PVC pipe through the center, leaving a good 4" at the bottom to serve as a mounting apparatus. On the top I left a couple of inches on which to mount the stalk.

I drilled holes near the top and bottom of the pipe and threaded wire through them, then wrapped the wire into the head so the pipe was firmly attached. When the head is mounted to the shoulders, the pipe will hold all the weight.

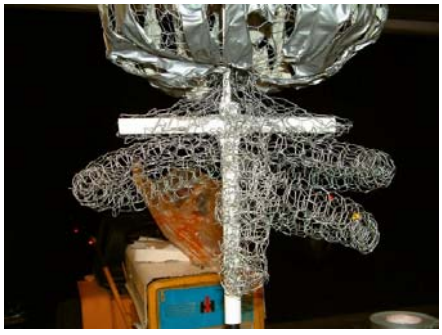
I added lengths of duct tape running from pole to pole, wrapping the tape edges around the wire wherever I could. This would give me more of a surface on which to apply the skin. I considered wrapping the whole thing, but that adds weight, and it wasn't really necessary since there was plenty area for the paper mache work. Besides, I wasn't entirely sure that the tape wouldn't be too slippery for the glue to stick.

"It sort of looks like how Frankenstein's monster might appear if the planet were populated by Slinkys."

* Aaack! If your chicken wire is reluctant to change form into a pumpkin, don't get discouraged. My first Grumble head didn't turn out perfectly on the first try either. I'm only showing you all the fun, happy, all-you-have-to-do-is-turn-this-metalic-porcupine-into-a-pumpkin kind of stuff. There aren't any pictures of me standing in the middle of my garage, bloodied arms folded, staring at a lump of chicken wire that won't do what I want no matter how much I cuss or threaten it. Take a walk. Come back. Try again.

The torso armature consists of about a 2' length of PVC with a 4-way junction on top. The shoulders are two (approximately) 1' lengths of pipe inserted into the sides of the 4-way. I cemented these pieces together, then added the head on top, also cemented. I had to adjust the length of the "neck" by cutting off an inch or so from the south pole of my head pipe. Better to have to cut a little off than to need more length, right?

I rolled about 2.5' of chicken wire to form the "breast bone" and secured the ends to the armature. I drilled holes through the pipe and threaded wire, then secured the breast bone firmly to the vertical pipe. Notice how it is curved. We're following the same procedure as a groundbreaker rib cage made from rolled newspaper. Refer to the link for more information. The ribs are also rolled chicken wire. I elected to use chicken wire instead of newspaper if for no other reason than it would have taken forever to roll that much newspaper. Besides, the wire is lighter.



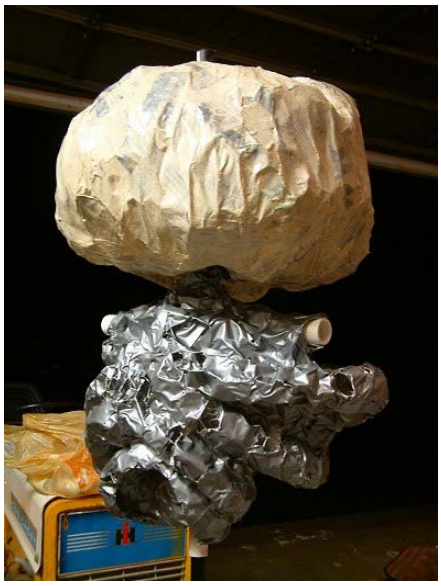
After the torso wiring was complete, I stuffed it with newspaper. This would make the paper mache work go much more easily by providing lots of surface area to stick to.



## Skinning the body (A different take on papier maché)

This part of the project will take a long time. I tore newspaper for about 30 minutes before I even opened my gallon of carpet glue. Starting with the head, I put down three layers of newspaper, making sure to give the previous layer plenty of time to dry. In between layers I added bits of duct tape to the torso. I "tied" some of the ribs together to make them more rigid. I also started adding paper to the torso. Same drill. Three layers. The "neck" area was built up with several layers of paper, then "skinned" like the

rest.  The shape of the head is still pretty crude at this point.  That's okay.  It's just a sketch right now.  The next step is to fill in the details.



I know what you're thinking.  What about the lights?  Well, it might have been easier to cut a hatch of some kind before I added skin, but I chose to wait.  It worked out fine, but I don't see why it wouldn't work to cut it out now.  For the hatch, I elected to make a sort of flap arrangement on the back of his head.  More on this in section 5, "Paint, wiring & light test".

Once the final paper layer was dry, I cut out the eyes and mouth, then began adding other features.  If your eye holes seem flimsy, try adding pieces of duct tape and folding them over the edges.  This will help firm them up, and will become especially important when you carve out the teeth.

I had originally planned on building features using paper mache pulp, but I was pressed for time so I just rolled up more newspaper and duct taped it down to form horns and ridges.

With the silver duct tape, he sort of reminds me of that robot (Box) from Logan's Run.  "Overwhelming, am I not?"

Over this went a layer of corpsing material for the skin.  That's where the shop wipes came into play.  If you find the right kind, you can tear them into strips, dip them in glue, and mash them over the paper mache (or duct taped ridges and things) just like you were corpsing a skeleton.

Turn any hard edges into smooth curves, bumps, boils, whatever.  The wipes are vastly stronger than normal paper towel.  If you get the wrong kind, it will take two bulldozers to tear them apart.  I have both.  I don't, however, have the wrappers anymore, so I don't have a clue what they're called.

I really overdid the stalk. I figure, to a scarecrow, a thick stalk is like a status symbol. Other, punier scarecrows that drive fast sports cars might be overcompensating.

Do feminist scarecrows have stalk envy? Anyway, I rolled more chicken wire (about 5'!), wrapped it in duct tape, and eventually skinned it.


The wire is securely fastened to the PVC pipe sticking out of the top of the head. I drilled holes and threaded wire through.

One stalk looked good, so why not lots of them?  This is Bruno's son, after all.  You know youngsters with their crazy hair styles.

The lesser stalks, or vines, are rolled up lengths of brown paper towel (on a roll, the same kind used in public restrooms) wrapped in duct tape.  They're of various sizes, sort of a Rastafarian thing.

Bruno's head glared approvingly the whole time.

**More on the torso...and a fundamental design flaw**

Since this scarecrow is a hybrid, we're navigating uncharted territory here.  Part undead monster, part vegetable.

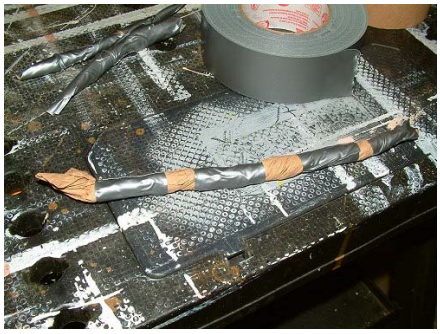
I added lots of extra vines that run all up and down the rib cage.  This kind of detail work will be lost on spectators who will be more than 5 or 6 feet away, but up close they are pretty gross.  He also has long vines extending out of his spine.  Yuck.  For the arms, each shoulder pipe got a 45 degree angle, a 2' pipe, a 90 degree angle, and another 2' pipe.  I tied a 5' long 1x2 to his shoulders to give the impression he was actually hanging from it.  Hands came next, but we'll get to that in a minute.

Here is where I screwed up.  Remember that he has a PVC pipe extending from the bottom of his torso.  I added a coupler, then cemented another length of 3/4" pipe, about 4'.  When it came time to set him out, I dug a three foot deep hole.  Into the hole went an 8' length of 1.5 " PVC pipe, tamped in nice and tight.  I inserted the scarecrow's pipe into the larger one.  The top of his head was nearly 10' high, and after I painted the pipe, he looked pretty good.  I was uneasy, though, because the pipe tended to bow and sway in the breeze.  Had I trusted my instincts, our scarecrow would have been spared the ignominy of ending up face-down in the mud after a hard rain.

## My, what big hands you have (fearsome claws made of paper)

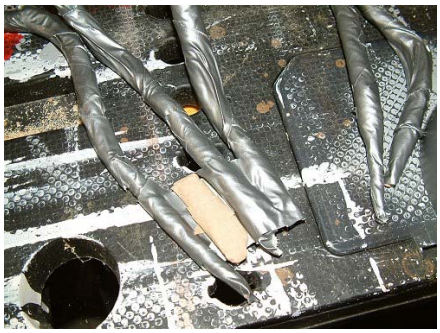
Need a hand?  How about hands with long, bony fingers that seem to grow out of a writhing mass of vines?

Start off with a roll of brown paper towel.  Tightly roll up a wad of towel, then wrap that in tight bands of duct tape until it's completely covered.



The tighter the better, as this will make them stronger.

You want your scarecrow to have a crushing handshake, not sloppy and wormy.  Although...hmm...



I made my fingers extra long.  They range anywhere from 12" to 16" long.  A good 4" of each finger will become the palm.

Most of the fingers are bent to form claws.  To keep a finger bent, I added extra tape to the bent part to hold it in place.

Hold the finger bent, apply a piece of tape over the joint to hold it in place, then wrap another strip of tape around the whole thing to make it permanent.

Shorter pieces of rolled towel go in between each finger to act as spacers.  Extra spacers were added in between the index finger and thumb.

To make the hand appear more natural, I rolled the palm as if the hand were holding a tennis ball (or a flaming Who - points to those who get the reference). Extra tape holds the hand in its proper shape.

More paper rolls form the "bones" that will extend out of the back of the hand and will eventually meet up with the mass of vines that will be his arm.

To the palm I taped a 45 degree PVC angle piece. Now the hand can be mounted to the forearm. I chose not to cement any of the PVC pieces that make up his arms because I thought it might be handy to be able to disassemble them for storage.

This ended up being a moot point after the vine mass was built around the forearm PVC, and the added weight tended to make the joints rotate toward the earth. Damn gravity. A scarecrow, hands on hips like he's waiting for a bus to take him to Olive Garden where he serves nights while he works on his interior design degree at the community college isn't scary.

I ended up drilling holes into the angle pieces and inserting short drywall screws to act as pins. The arms can still be removed from the shoulders simply by removing the pins, and they won't rotate. Make sure you get your angles right before you put in your pins or you'll have to drill your holes more than once. Use a variable speed drill and start slow or you'll walk your drill bit all over the surface of the pipe.

## Paint, wiring & light test (From pea-green to nuclear orange)

Scarecrow paint went pretty much the same for The Grumble as it has for our corpses except he's a lot more orange.  Or, he would become orange after the green "primer" coats were dry.

Here are two pictures of his electrics access hatch.  I cut a hole in the back of his head just big enough that I could replace a light bulb when needed.  I then covered the hole with overlapping skin "flaps".  They camouflage the hatch and provide protection from the elements.  Just lift them up to reach inside.

The lamp is fixed with wire to the PVC pipe running through the center of his head.  I happened to have several feet of split loom tubing (flexible plastic tubing slit down one side) that I used to protect the lamp power cord.  This I taped to his back and painted.  It looked like just another vine coming out of his spine.  If you wanted to do a better job of hiding the power cord, you could wire your scarecrow before the paper mache work begins.  Then just run the wire out his....um....from the bottom of his torso.

How you paint your scarecrow is a matter of personal preference. I start with dark colors, usually dabbed on with a sponge or paper towel, then work up to lighter colors. Highlights can be brought out by dry-brushing the tops of ridges and bumps.

Dry-brushing is a very useful painting technique. Load your brush, then wipe most of the paint off. Now, lightly drag the brush across the surface. High areas will pick up paint while lower areas won't. This is a great way to make ridges and wrinkles stand out. Make sure that the darker-colored coat beneath is dry before you try this highlighting technique.

After painting was complete, I sprayed several layers of sealant. It is imperative that you seal your scarecrow if he will be spending much time outdoors. Mine was outside for four weeks. I use an acrylic floor sealer that does a great job of keeping moisture from saturating the skin.

## A smoldering smile in the dark

After a successful light test, I dressed the scarecrow in a black trench coat.

It had been aged using scissors, sandpaper, and not a little effort.

Aging clothes manually is kind of fun, but you have to put some real elbow grease into it.

I don't remember it being this hard back when I was a kid.  All my jeans just seemed to sprout holes in the knees.

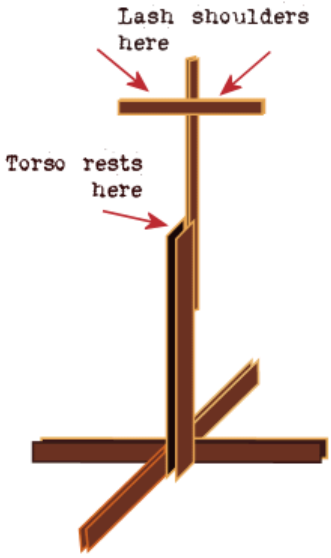


## Build a stand (How to prevent flattened TOTs) and a final word

I realize now that I don't have a good photo of the stand, so here's a picture of the old one that broke in two, and a drawing of the new one.

On the morning that a local newspaper photographer was scheduled to come take some pictures, I walked down the driveway to find the scarecrow lying face down in the mud.

We had had a heavy rain the night before. The coat was saturated. I suppose the added weight is what caused the pipe to bend. I wouldn't have imagined that it was enough to cause a total failure, but the evidence was lying right there in the mud. I'm glad there wasn't anyone smashed underneath. I gathered him up, washed him off, and made a few minor repairs. Bruno's head stayed by his side the entire time.




The second stand is a 5' 2x4 stood on end, supported by scrap 2x4 "feet" bolted to the base like so... **+** . A 5' (or so) length of 1x1 is screwed to the back of the 2x4. I untied the horizontal board from around his shoulders and screwed it to the 1x1 post. I set the torso on top of the 2x4 and lashed him to the horizontal beam. There you go. And it's portable, if not a little awkward.

The whole thing can be torn down, arms removed, and shoved into a closet or attic. However, it's kind of cool having him standing watch in the garage. Except on those nights when thick fog creeps up from the hollow, and there's a distinct feeling of watchfulness in and among the trees. On those nights, if you're quiet, and if they don't know you're there, you'll hear them, scarecrow and scarecrow head, muttering, giggling, plotting. Always plotting.

Have fun haunting!
~ Spooky