

## **ATTENTION**

This manual is not intended to be a stand-alone document. It is a guide. Cut and paste information for your operation. The CD-ROM contains the entire manual in Word 2000. It is a better guide when used with Books one through three of the series. Additional material is found in videos one through three. Amusement Park management information can also be found on the web at IAHAweb.com.

## **WHY**

The purpose of promoting an event is to attract customers. The customers arrive expecting to have a good safe time. 'Good' is a matter of personal taste. "Safe" has a direct meaning. It is easy to underestimate customer safety because we refuse to think like our customers. Another aspect is insurance fraud, when a customer or group of customers come to have an 'accident' at your expense.

Being prepared is your only defense; during the emergency and later in court.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Safety is a word that would seem to be easy to define. Yet, it is not easy. Its definition is more elusive than a pot of gold. Safety begins and ends with people. A safe operation presents itself to the public in the same fashion as an unsafe operation. The difference is that an unsafe operation causes many more injuries than a safe one. Can a safe operation be injury free? No. But it can have fewer incidents and respond properly to the incidents it does have.

My Definition of Safety is an operation that: has properly trained its employees to perform their task in a manner as safe as possible; makes broad allowances for the interaction of guests with actors, staff and equipment; and has developed response plans for major *variances* from 'normal operation'.

A *variance* would be; an injury to a guest or employee, guest assaulting an employee, guest assaulting another guest, employee assaulting a guest, guest or employee having a medical emergency, claim of fraud, items lost or stolen, quick change artist, pick pocket, harassment (sexual and otherwise), food poisoning, equipment failure, storm, fire, power failure and or any combination of the above, as well as many more situations to numerous to list here. Another type of *variance* would be guest difficulties with their vehicle; car does not start, flat tire or vehicle theft. Preparing for disaster is the job of middle and upper level management. Key staff members will be required to make quick decisions in difficult times. Preparing key staff for these decisions is the job of upper level management. Training in the form of indoctrination, seminars, videos and written materials is required. Follow up training; review of situations handled and modifications to plans will keep all employees prepared for the unplanned.

Operational manuals present the same plan to all employees. Handouts for select employees reinforce orientation and prepare the employee for different assignments. This manual is not intended to replace common sense, nor can it address every possible situation. It is to be used as a guide. A template to be placed over your operation, trimmed to your needs. Added to where needed and deleted from where it does not apply or work.

## **QUESTIONS**

Examining your operation is time consuming and dangerous. The danger is that you will not take the process seriously. It is not easy to see the forest for the trees. Your relationship with your operation prejudices you and makes self-examination near worthless. An attractions creator is more likely to overlook potential problems than a person from operations. After 'you' have examined the operation, call in a friend (first) to play 'Devils Advocate'. Take every comment seriously; write them down, no matter how stupid or obvious. Next find an individual that knows you and thinks your chosen path is a handful of pixels short of a full screen. Repeat the process. If possible include the two people that played 'Devils Advocate' in the walk through and roundtable discussions with other staff members.

The self-examination of the operation for potential problems or risks to guests is important enough to include staff from all venues of the operation. Contributing areas would include, but are not limited to; Executive Management, Creative Staff, Operation Staff, Mid-Level Managers, Security, Crowd Control and Emergency Services. Inviting outside services from a municipalities Building and/or Fire Department 'prior' to final inspection builds a strong working relationship with those that will be regulating your operation.

### **The Walk Through**

Have your notes prepared in outline fashion with plenty of space between lines. The notes must be prepared in a professional manner. No side comments; about how you think a comment is not accurate. If an individual makes a comment, you must consider it. You are looking for physical plant problems. Because an effect or scene has worked for ten years, does not mean it is safe. It may mean that you have been very lucky. This process may find hidden problems. An effect that has worked, continues to work, may soon fail because of a weak weld or frayed part discovered during the investigation/inspection.

All participants should make notes during the walk through. Inspect the customer path scene by scene, effect by effect and decorations. Any thing a guest can touch must be examined and determined reasonable safe. Guests/customers are anything but reasonable; however: only so much can be done to prevent stupidity or vandalism. Repeat the process for the non-guest areas. This will include: tech areas; actor positions; service and access areas; storage; costume; make-up and break areas. Now that all members of the discussion are equally familiar with each item listed, begin the roundtable discussion.

### **Roundtable Discussion**

Each member of the discussion may comment on each item listed. Allow a full day for your first roundtable discussion. Examine and tare apart each item, line by line. Items to complex or for which not enough information exists may be passed and resolved at the next meeting. All participants' comments will be included in new notes for the next meeting. Once a consensus on a problem has been reached the members will agree on a course of action, who is responsible for execution and determine a deadline for completion.

Any special operational manual information will be decided. This would include special information for actors/staff working in this area and/or additional things that they should be looking for. Should the item be listed on the pre-opening list walk through? Should the item be inspected hourly during operation?

### **Inspection during operation**

As difficult as inspecting your operation before the season begins is, it is more difficult to inspect during operation. There are too many areas to examine and observe. The individual managers must work together and observe the physical plant with guests. This will include guest's interactions with decorations, animations, effects and actors. It will also include detailed observations of guests moving through the attraction. Where do they: slow down; stop; speed up; get crazy; trip; bump or push? What objects are the guests attracted to, touch or try to grab? Which actors may be at risk from guests?

Experience is the best teacher. First time operators purchasing a package unit are placing themselves at the mercy of the builders. Not that this is bad, but it can be. Purchasing an effect, scene or entire attraction does nothing but add another name to any legal action. Visiting other attractions during the season is one of the best ways to improve your own. Learn from what they do right and what they do (in your opinion) wrong.

### **Seasonal Employment**

We all fight a high employee turnover rate. Hiring and having the new hire skip indoctrination/orientation is a mistake that we all make at one time or another. Guests walk up to us on site during operation and ask for a job. We are always short handed and sometimes hire them on the spot and put them to work. Bottom line, this is bad. Sometimes after the quick new hire we still fail to train the new employee. "He looks reliable". OK, and how many serial killers looked normal the day before they were caught?

One way to train on the run is to have single sheet handouts for all positions. This is not meant to replace orientation, but to allow for error during the hiring process.

### **Staff Sheet**

Guest Relations, Crowd Control, Security, Ticket Booth and management positions. Prepare a single sheet describing in brief the responsibilities of the position. Some of these positions will require more than one sheet. Many basic explanations will be covered in the employee handbook. The operations manual for managers and assistant managers will be more detailed. But positions that can be filled on the fly may be covered with the one sheet. The sheet should include a site plan. Indicate emergency services and the location/area the employee is to work. Also, include basic responsibilities during an emergency situation or evacuation.

### **Character Sheet**

One of the single most important documents I have ever devised. We all experience high

actor turnover. Some less than others, but the point is, we seldom (if ever) complete a season with all the actors with which we started. We replace actors along the way, some quit others are fired. The ones we hire during the season may not have received all the training of those that were hired at the beginning of the season. The “Character Sheet” can help to fill this gap. It contains basic actor information: character name; costume; make-up/mask; dialogue suggestions or script; character photo; duties; who is in charge of the scene; a floor plan of the complete attraction showing exits, fire extinguishers and where the actor works; the actors duties in the event of an emergency and the actors exit path. I have a sheet for every position in my haunt. This includes tech positions.

The actor arrives, is given a quick tour of the haunt and then allowed to explore (sometimes I ask another actor to help out) with his character sheet in hand. The manager is freed from actor hand holding, can proceed with preparing to open and when the new hire returns for final directions, makes it easier for both the manager and actor to communicate.

### **Training Haunt**

No, not haunt training; Yes training haunt, a dedicated haunt or scene in a haunt for training new hires. Multiple haunt attractions need to dedicate a specific haunt for training new actors during the season. The haunt should have the lowest skull rating and two assistant managers. One assistant dedicates his time to training the new hires.

In a single haunt attraction dedicate a large scene with several actors as the training area. The scene should be easy to get to for staff. Your best lead actor should be in this scene. The haunt director will stop by frequently offering support and suggestions.

The training haunt concept is simple. The new hire has the character sheet. He is placed in a scene and his duties are explained. Make sure he understands he knows where he is in relationship to the rest of the haunt. Show him the preferred emergency exit path and any emergency equipment in his area. The assistant manager, or lead actor in charge, observes the performance. Reinforce the rules, provide positive feedback and encourage the individual.

### **Employee Handbook**

The one size fits all may not apply here. The employee handbooks that I prepare are specific to the type of work that the employee is performing. Actors have many rules specific to them alone. This begs the question why separate handbooks? I do it because I have the resources and because crowd control does not care about the actors’ rules. Or maybe they should have all the same information. The process of orientation for employees is difficult as it is without providing information for all positions in a manual to be reviewed during orientation. It would be possible to include specific position information within the employee handbook in sections. During the orientation you would direct ticket booth employees to their section, ignoring all other specific position sections. The decision to do this has to be made on your needs. How proprietary is your training/employee information? With anyone position having possession of all employee training information, are you safe with this? Another approach is a basic employee

handbook and a supplemental handbook for each position. That will be the approach I use in this manual.

### **Emergency Situations**

Emergencies are even more so when not prepared for. While it is not possible to be prepared for every emergency (or think of everyone), it is possible to have flexible procedures in place that can take responsibility and make decisions.

Decision. The scariest word in any language will give ulcers, turn a bushy head of hair into a desert and those with any left will find them all gray. Chain of Command. Think military. I have been in the midst of emergencies where the chain of command (if it existed) disintegrated. Then came lack of or failure to make any decision. Situations like this can lead to injury, loss of life and loss of revenue. They can lead to criminal prosecution and prison.

Chain of command and making decisions can be decided well in advance of any emergency. Making the best decision under the circumstances takes experience. No decision may be right or wrong, but it can be the best one of the moment. This is where being flexible comes into play. Make the decision, observe the results (or progress of the decision) and be prepared to revise, modify or cancel the decision with an improved one as the situation changes. Limitations of experience impact the emergency situation.

Preparing the decision maker. Books, seminars and training with other operations pay off in an emergency. Executive management overlooks the importance of handling the emergency situation during the hiring process. ‘Joe’ my bud is a bouncer, he will be in charge of security. ‘Sam’, a great guy, will take charge of crowd control. I’m the boss, so I will make all emergency decisions. This is great, if your luck holds out. Year one comes and goes with no emergencies; you and your staff have gained experience and knowledge. Year two passes. Year three comes and goes. Your staff is now trained in the realities of your operation. Even without any outside input your staff could handle most anything by now. The exception would be a major fire or evacuation. Luck, that’s all you need to survive. Because with ‘luck’ you will gain experience; ‘OJT’. We had an Amusement Park here in the DFW area that tried the luck route. The site has been scraped clean for a business park. The “Boardwalk” lasted one season.

A good management team is constantly in training. Purchasing books and videos, sending staff to training sessions/seminars with other professionals so that they can learn from one another.

## **Rating System**

Any event with more than one attraction encouraging guests of differing: age groups; religious or ethnic backgrounds; social environments or physical capabilities should have an easy to understand rating system in place. A large sign near the entrance will explain the system. Example using skulls (or pumpkins, ghosts, skeletons, etc): one anything should be tame for the biggest chicken on the planet; a two rating would startle a small child, not scare them; three skulls will scare a small child; four will startle an adult and five skulls will scare an adult. Include with this your policy on: physical contact; use of fog machines; use of strobe lights; etc.

## **Handicapped Actors**

In any season, actors are hard to find and keep. I have been using the handicapped off and on since 1981. They make great, loyal, employees. Since 1992 all my haunts have been handicapable. A wheel chair will easily travel the entire customer path. Handicapped actor access is not as accessible from the central corridor. In my haunts the handicapped actor must use the customer path. Special consideration for these actors includes; an attendant (usually a personal friend or relative and also an actor), personal food and drink items within the scene at an easy reach and a standby actor to relieve them. This may sound a bit much, but it is not. In my experience they are reliable hard workers; they also do a great job of scaring the bee-gee-gees out of guests. I hired a double amputee in 1993, during the rack torture sequence; the torturer would hack off his leg and wave it at the guests. 1988 we had a students' grandmother do the cauldron ritual as a witch. She was a great distraction for the scare that came. Emergency evacuation plans require that my handicapped actors have an exit to the outside from within the room that they work or no less than 20 feet. This distance/exit door requirement depends on the physical fitness of the individual.

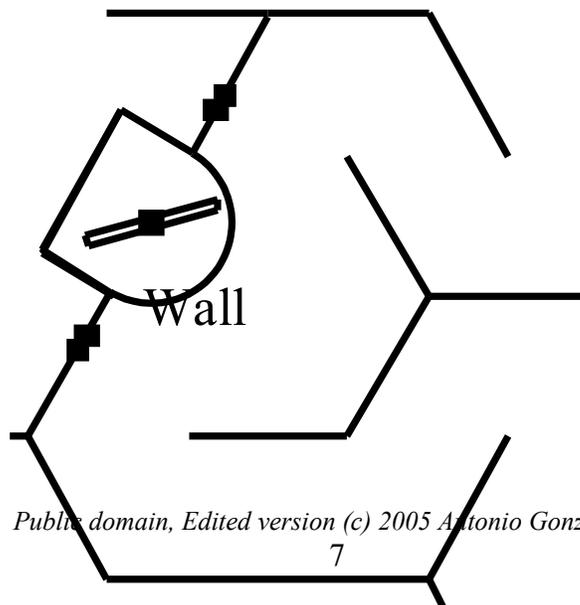
The evacuation plan for handicapped actors must be included on their character sheet, the attendants and securities. No additional duties will be given to this pair, other than exiting the haunt safely and meeting at the designated location for emergency situations.

**Scene Check List** (example)

Scene Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Scene Inspected By: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Is there a clear customer path through the scene?
2. What objects could the customer touch?
3. What objects could an assertive customer remove from the scene?
4. Any sharp pointy objects that could injure the customer?
5. All wood surfaces painted and splinter free?
6. Objects that may entangle a customer or actor?
  - a. Drapes
  - b. Masking
  - c. Decorations
7. Floor surface secure, even, clean and dry?
8. Walls secured to floor and anchored above?
9. Props secured and inspected?
10. Moving objects in the scene
  - a. Pneumatic or Hydraulic effects inspected?
  - b. Electric motors inspected?
  - c. Hinged objects moving into the customer path?
  - d. Tethered/swinging props?
  - e. Elastic propelled objects?
11. Barriers (slope or lip) customers must move over that retain material through which they walk.
  - a. Noodle room (packing Noodles)
  - b. Sponges
  - c. Plastic or rubber balls



Inspection forms should include a floor plan of the scene being inspected. Notes can be made on the floor plan where problems exist.

**Effect Inspection Form (example)**

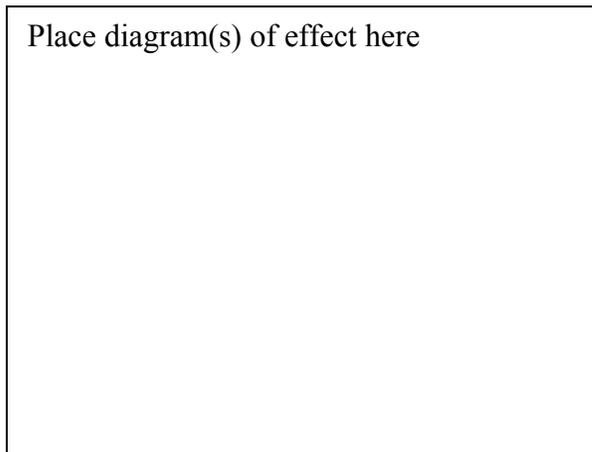
Effect Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Effect Location(s): \_\_\_\_\_

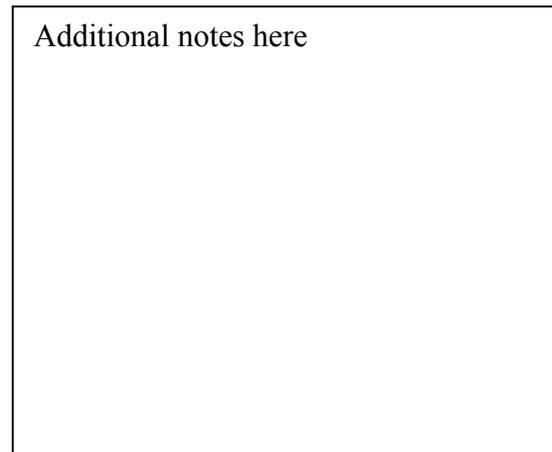
Inspected by: \_\_\_\_\_ Condition: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Air, Electric, Hydraulic, Manual What controls the effect?
2. Cam, wheel, rod, lever, direct How is motion applied?
3. Sensor (motion, heat, light beam), manual, floor switch How is effect activated?
4. Can customer touch object?
5. Does object move into customer path?
6. Loose bolts or nuts?
7. Welds solid?
8. Object firmly attached?
9. Sensors secured? Manual switch in good condition?
10. Mechanical assembly operates smoothly?
11. Does this unit need lubrication?
12. Any signs of rust or other corrosion?
13. Is the unit rubbing against anything when activated?
14. The unit and area around unit clean?
15. Power wiring secured and in good condition?
16. Relays or other electronics operating correctly?
17. Additional wiring includes:
  - a. Control wires
  - b. Remote sensor wires
  - c. Wires in the moving object for sound or lights
  - d. External speaker or lighting wires
18. Is this effect a critical effect
  - a. Could it cause a fire?
  - b. Does it impact the customer path?
  - c. Does its not working impact the show?
  - d. If it operates improperly, will it impact the show?

Place diagram(s) of effect here



Additional notes here



### **Electrical Motor Inspection**

Electrical motors are found everywhere. Fans, pumps, animations, clockwork movements, rotating tunnels and service equipment are but a few of the items to contain electric motors. The area around the motor must be clean and free of any combustible materials. The motor must be clean, free of grease, dirt and dust. Check the power cable providing the motors electricity after the motor has been operating for several hours during haunt conditions. If it is warm to hot to touch it needs to be upgraded to a larger service of wire. Most circuits are installed with number 12 solid. Replacing this with number 12 stranded may help but number 10 stranded would be better. Stranded wire conducts a higher current more efficiently than solid wire does. Repeat the procedure at the electrical breaker box. Touch the breaker for the circuit that the motor is on. If it is warm to hot, isolate the circuit, making sure that the motor is the only item on the circuit. If the motor is alone replace the breaker, increasing its capacity and increase wire size.

Good air circulation and clean motor vents will reduce fire hazard and prolong the operational life of the motor. Check to make sure that electrical ground is solid and that no difference in potential exists between the motor and the concrete floor or surrounding metal structure. Faulty ground will reduce motor life and create a shock hazard.

### **Light fixture inspection**

1. Has the fixture been damaged externally?
2. Cracked lens or damaged gel?
3. Frayed wiring?
4. Loose wiring entering the unit?
5. Plug bent or broken?
6. AC outlet, cover plate secure or broken?
7. Conduit secure in fitting to outlet?
8. Mounting frame secure to unit and wall or pipe?
9. How easy is it to position the unit within the scene and re-secure it?
10. How much AC cord hangs below the unit?
11. Is the AC cord slack secured?
12. Ventilation, does air flow easily around unit? Poor air circulation
  - a. Reduces bulb life
  - b. Creates a fire hazard
13. Is unit clean? Dust and debris on the unit create a fire hazard.
14. Open unit
  - a. Is unit clean inside?
  - b. Reflector shiny?
  - c. Any signs of heat damage to wiring or case?
  - d. What does the bulb look like?
  - e. Is this bulb type included in your inventory of replacement bulbs?
15. Heat rises
  - a. Any speaker or control wires above unit?
  - b. How close is any masking or fabric to unit?

- c. A dirty overheating unit could set off a smoke detector.

## **ADDITIONAL INSPECTIONS**

Follow the light fixture and electrical motor inspection suggestions to create inspection forms for pneumatic and hydraulic systems. Remember to include a diagram of the item and an area for notes. A standard maintenance report form can be used for all maintenance performed on sets and effects. A filing system breaking your attraction down into scenes and effects will be needed to maintain the documents. Keep all documents for at least seven years.

Props (items used or held by actors) need to be inspected.

## **Special Considerations**

The operation manual for each event has standard portions, its inspection procedures, maintenance reports, special scene and actor considerations.

### **Three D Glasses**

There are two types of “Three D Glasses”, disposable and reusable. The care and maintenance of the reusable glasses is important. Some of these glasses do not fold-up, they are fixed in the open position. Guests must be advised at time of receiving their pair that to be careful not to try and fold them when returning them at the exit. A sign on the wall should reinforce this. Enough glasses should be purchased for a busy evening run of guests. The glasses should be cleaned between each use with a mild soapy water and rinsed with a mild disinfectant then dried. A dishwasher can be modified to do this. Modify top and bottom trays. Regulate the water temperature if needed so as not to damage the glasses and decrease the amount of time of the wash cycle. The newer dishwashers have an automatic rinse chemical dispenser; use this to dispense the disinfectant. It may be possible to use the machine's drying cycle; experiment with a pair of glasses first.

### **Animals**

Reality brings real live animals into the haunt. Lizards and snakes are more common. Again, their care must be outlined within the manual and a sheet provided for those that work with the animals. In some cases actors react to or are in contact with these animals. An example would be “Spooky Worlds” ‘Mouse Girl’. She shares an exhibit case with a hundred or so live mice. The operational manual must contain information for the manager on how to maintain the mice and a separate sheet for the actress. The following is an example of information a haunt manager would need.

## **MOUSE GIRL**

The Manager needs to be aware of customer flow. The six-hour shift will be a strain on

the Mouse Girl Actress. As soon as it is possible to give her a break by stopping a sparse trickling crowd the better. The manager must directly notify the Mouse Girl the break is coming and monitor her progress to reopen the line and let customers back in. The notification could be by radio, but a radio inside the display will probably be eaten. A two-way light bulb system controlled at the entrance could signal when it is safe to take a break and controlled from within the cage to let the front know that she is ready for guests or needs a break. The line can be opened before the Mouse Girl is fully back in place, because it will take them several minutes to reach her display.

### **Motivation**

The Mouse Girl is trapped in a display case by the demented clowns. Inside the case are 200 live mice. She pleads, with the customers in a weak voice, asking them to help free her. She is playing a part, she is an actress, some customers will go beyond this and direct to her humanity. The level of sickness displayed by some customers will be educational; However the Mouse Girl must stay in character, ignore the comments and entertain the other customers.

### **Necessary Actor Amenities**

Provide a place on site for the actor to shower at the end of shift.

Provide a camper style port-a-potty for use in a space adjoining entrance to cage.

### **Mouse behavior**

1. Mice are naturally jumpy, DO NOT USE white mice, use brown mice.
2. They nibble on anything and everything, nesting material, they will nibble on you, and do not let them draw blood. If one begins to nibble on you, flick him off
3. They relieve themselves anywhere and yes on the mouse girl  
The amount of liquid excrement is small and the solid matter is like rabbit pellets
4. Improper mouse sorting will have mature males and females  
Males are naturally aggressive and will mate with eligible females
5. As the season proceeds the mice will get older and some will reach maturity
6. Because the mice crawl everywhere it is possible that you may injure or kill one  
Remove dead mice as soon as possible, they will eat their dead.
7. No food in cage, mice will be attracted, distracted and will become hyper, if the food gets on you, you become food

### **Customer notes**

This event stops customers' cold; they stare in total disbelief. Some will be very rude, make sexual comments, and crass gestures. A customer tapping on the glass will cause mice in the area to jump and make them momentarily hyper. An actor/monitor should be stationed in front of the display case. The actors duties include: moving the crowd on to the next scene; discouraging guests from making rude comments and keeping guests off the glass.

### **Manager Notes**

In addition to the above, the manager would need to know how to care for the mice, food, water, habitat material and temperature. He would need to be trained in how to recognize

gender and age of the mice. When dealing with animals of any type you must deal with a reputable supplier. This way you will know the birth date of the mice when they arrive and be confident that they are disease free.

# Haunted House

## Operational Manual

Version 00-00-0000(date)

### **Introduction**

The Haunt Manager is responsible for:

1. The safe operation of the house
2. The attitude of the actors in relationship to the guests, (i.e. courtesy)
3. The quality of the show presented to the public.

Arrive early, inspect the house and take time to have a brief meeting with all your staff before the show. Be present during the wardrobe/makeup process for questions and answers. Present a positive role model. The Haunt is a (one to five) skull rated attraction.

Take roll and determine who is new. Assign a veteran actor to give the newbie a tour of the house. Invest time to review: the new actors character sheet; wardrobe and makeup; time clock location and procedures; house floor plan; emergency procedures; evacuation plan and any special duties the position may include. It is important to make a new person feel welcomed and a part of the team.

### **Your chain of command**

CEO

Vice President

Director of Attractions

Director of Actors

Managers of:

Haunts, Hayride, Swing Crew, Guides and Costumed Walk Arounds.

Actors

### **Manager / employee relationship**

The Managers are the positive force in the relationship. Discipline, when necessary, should be constructive and non-aggressive. Be sure to go over the procedures regarding disciplinary action later in this manual.

Get to know your actors, get involved, and use feedback from the actors where appropriate. They are the ones going through the motions and their input can be invaluable. Written suggestions are best. Forward all suggestions to the Director of Acting. Encourage actors to seek out additional friends to become actors.

The manager is to use the warning of review or interview with the Director of Acting as part of the disciplinary process. It is the tried and true "Good Cop vs. Bad Cop". This method keeps the individual managers as the good guy in the eyes of the actors.

Corrective action of any serious nature comes from the Director of Acting. There are extreme exceptions to this general rule, but let us try and avoid them.

## **SAFETY – COURTESY - SHOW**

### **SAFETY** (Inspection of the houses)

1. Walk through inspection for cleanliness
  - a. Trash is removed and work areas clean
  - b. Floor swept and mopped if needed
  - c. Mirrors and glass should be cleaned with glass cleaner.
  - d. **WARNING:** Plexiglas should not be cleaned with glass cleaner, (chemicals will destroy the Plexi). Use water only!
2. Emergency Preparedness
  - a. Fire extinguishers are in proper location
    - (1) Nothing hanging on or concealing them
    - (2) Flashlight with every fire extinguisher
  - b. All new employees are briefed on emergency evacuation plan
  - c. Review plans with key designated employees
  - d. Test actor panic buttons
  - e. Follow procedure for radio check
  - f. Radios properly and fully charged
  - g. Check that emergency exits are clear and unlocked
  - h. Open main entrance and exit doors
3. Inspect/Test all moving objects:
  - a. Manually operated by actor/tech
  - b. Mechanically operated by motor or air
  - c. Turn air compressor on and check air pressure
4. Inspect all decorations in guest path
  - a. Make sure to re-secure anything a guest might have loosened
  - b. Look for items guest might have removed and placed elsewhere
  - c. Make a note of any items that have disappeared
5. Inspect illusions
  - a. Clean glass and inspect concealment lines
  - b. Check actor area for debris and concealment
  - c. Placement, has illusion been moved?
6. Special Effects
  - a. High Voltage electrical effects
  - b. Animatronics, electronic or air driven
  - c. Electronic talking heads and mic batteries
  - d. Proper fog fluid filled nightly

7. Electrical inspection
  - a. Exit lights all operational
  - b. Work lights, replace burned out bulbs
  - c. Effects operated by 110vac
    - (1) Power cord and on/off switch
    - (2) Mat switches and sensors
  - d. Emergency house shut down, manual check
  - e. Emergency lighting, replace burned out bulbs
  - f. Theatrical lighting, replace burned out bulbs
  - g. Theatrical lighting accessories, gels, snoots, gobos, etc.
  
8. Sound System Inspection
  - a. Amplifier has power
  - b. Sound source has recorded media
  - c. Speakers are clear; no crackle or distortion
  - d. Start sound sources
  - e. Check batteries on wireless mics

## **COURTESY, “ACT”**

### **Attitude**

1. Spend time with each actor, observe their attitude
2. Check the actors time cards, who is early, who is late
3. Observe the actors hygiene, clean clothes, odor
4. How do they interact with one another?
5. Establish any conflicts and move actors if necessary
6. Pre open trip through house, pep talk to each actor
7. During operation multiple trips through house
  - a. Look for potential problems
  - b. Observe actors performing their tasks
  - c. Confirm actor/guest relationship with any problem actors

### **Character**

1. Actively help each actor develop their character
2. Provide motivation
3. Encourage them to improve
4. Site examples from your experience and relate fun or interesting stories
5. Look for the actor that changes dramatically when becoming the character
  - a. Some introverts could become dangerous to themselves and/or to our guests
  - b. Increased verbalization and near violent use of props and/or effects
  - c. Use of profanity
6. A character should never verbally abuse a guest or another actor

### **Timing**

1. The art of timing the scare is that “an Art”

Explain how to anticipate a guests position

- a. See to it that the actor has a view of the guest
- b. And the actor has a safe place from which to operate

## **SHOW**

The “Show” is everything. The actors are (Theme Park name). Without them we are nothing more than a pile of nails and cleverly arranged lumber. The actors present the show, operate effects, present their character to the guests and create the excitement that is (Theme Park name).

### **All aspects of the show must be examined before operations begin**

1. Inspect all props handled by actors
2. Check costumes, before opening and during operation
3. Makeup inspection, before and during operation
4. Condition of props and visuals in your house
5. Examine your actors, inspect them as if for a military dress parade
  - a. Give constructive criticism, i.e. *Do Not* say “Your makeup looks terrible”  
*Do* say, “You will have to arrive earlier to complete your makeup”.
  - b. Take an interest in their character, offer tips and encouragement
  - c. Mention good scares that you have observed
  - d. Do not talk down to the actors, treat them as equals

## **FACILITY**

Each attraction has a meeting place for its staff. This includes a place for all to sit down and go over new information. Wardrobe and make-up will be in this area as well. The actors should not have to walk very far (and Yes I know a trail is different) to their respective haunts. Provide a break area with: lockable lockers, refrigerator, microwave, tables, chairs, coffee and hot water for tea or chocolate. Snacks to include would be: cough drops, fresh fruit, water, fruit drinks and a soda machine.

# **Haunted Trail**

## **Operational Manual**

(A guide) Version 00-00-0000(date)

A trail would be an area through which guests walk to be entertained. A Hay Ride would be a wagon pulled through an entertainment area. Both present similar problems. Security is the biggest. Guests will leave the trail, jump off of the wagon or sneak into the area from outside the park or from inside the park. They will want to cause mischief. A secure trail area is difficult at best. The very nature of a trail is to cover a large area, move in and out of trees, shrubs and other obstructions. Sets and props provide additional cover. A fence through such an area will have many weaknesses. It will come close to trees that will make it easy to cross over. The ground will erode in places making it easy to slide under. And it will weaken; a post will come loose from the ground. Maintenance will be constant and necessary.

Your final line of defense is your actors and technicians. Once security and the fence have failed to stop the determined guest, it is up to your trail staff to detect the guest/intruder and notify security. This can be difficult on a trail where everybody is wearing a costume and employee turnover is a problem.

### **Walk the Trail**

Treat it like a haunt (use haunt manual as guide to produce this document). You have three types of inspections. First is the major examination inspection. Second is the daily pre-opening inspection and third walking through (or riding the wagon) during operations.

Mother nature plays a major role in outdoor operations. Tractors and wagons will get stuck, make poor choices in making a turn and create ruts in poorly conditioned roadways. Rain and wind will reshape the landscape, sets and props. Items placed outdoors in the elements need special attention, during construction and later during the season. The more seasons that pass, the more special attention is needed.

Actors using outdoor sets are rougher, more aggressive and larger than life during their performance. Props will be used against sets and larger prop/set pieces. Hinges will fail. Doors and windows will be opened instead of closed and closed instead of opened. Rule of thumb for actors, sets and wagons is the path for these areas should be three times the wagon width. If a turn of 30 degrees is to be placed in these areas the path width should

be at least four times the wagon width.

Path width presents additional problems, vast expanses of empty space that actors must fill. Path width protects the actors, too. A narrow path through an actor area leaves the actor no place to retreat to.

Inspection will include the environment. Trees, shrubs, plants, ground, erosion areas, streams, branches and rocks in the path. Overhead power lines in the path area should be avoided at all costs. They present a high voltage danger, as well as a high wind danger that may cause the line to fall. Transformers on poles in the path area are asking for trouble.

## **Break Areas**

The nature of a trail spreads actors out over a large area. Management of breaks is a problem. Portable restroom facilities should be placed near major scenes and these become break areas. An actor in a nearby minor scene will be minutes from his assigned position, easily observed by actors of the major scene and should he or she need assistance, it is close at hand. Actors should be allowed to bring coolers, snacks and other appropriate items into their scene. These items must be behind the scenes.

## **Management**

Large trails need communication. It costs little more to lay communication lines during the construction process. A two-way communication system at every scene will enhance security. Patching this system into the wireless communications the trail manager and his assistants use will increase operating efficiency and give the actors a greater feeling of security. Each scene should have one actor as head scene actor. This position has no real power, but it establishes a chain of command and delegates responsibility. This actor would be the one to use the communication system in event of an emergency. He could relay suggestions that he or other actors have about the scene to the trail manager. This actor would receive additional training and be paid more.

## **ORIENTATION**

Orientation is the first new employee meeting after the interview from which they were hired. A polished presenter welcomes and encourages the new employees and reviews the employee handbook, introduces company staff and leads a tour of the facility. The employees receive their photo ID badges at this time and during this process the presenter calls for questions. The presenter explains to the employees how important they are and that without them there would be no attraction. Make sure that they all understand the chain of command.

## **TRAINING**

All staff members need to be trained. This is more than saying, “Stand here and go Boo”. Explain to each employee how important he or she is (this will be repeating the message delivered at orientation). Build up the employees self-esteem, verbally reward good work and encourage improvement when they fall short. Offer opportunities for advancement to the entire group and explain the positions that are available.

## **CHARACTER SHEET**

The Character Sheet provides a direct way to communicate with all actors. This is necessary for several reasons. Actors tend to be late; handing an actor a character sheet provides all the information for the position. This will likely be a new position, because the actor is late. Actors tend not to show up and quit without notice. This will place a strain on resources.

Example: Your operation requires 100 actors and technicians to operate at peak show efficiency. The Director of Actors has everyone check in at his office when they arrive for work. They sign in on a sheet for the event they will be working. Some managers are better than others at instilling a positive working relationship with their actors. This is great; however, you may have to borrow a few actors from this attraction to fill vacancies at another. Most operations do this after they open. With the sign in sheets you can fill haunts evenly with talent. After opening and meeting immediate needs managers may shuffle actors to preferred positions. Example: James arrives at a time when his services are needed in a different attraction (normally he is the executioner); Bill arrives late and is assigned as the executioner. The two actors may exchange places if they and their managers agree and it does not affect the show for the guests.

Actors arriving early get their first choice. Actors arriving late are assigned where they are needed. The individual event managers assign the actors via the character sheet. The

Director of acting makes sure that the event has a base number of actors with which to work.

## **CHARACTER SHEET**

The manager provides each of his actors with a character sheet. The character sheet contains information necessary for the actor to do his primary job. It, also, contains emergency evacuation information and duties.

1. The actor's area of responsibility is marked at the bottom of the character sheet on a floor plan of the attraction in which he or she is working.
2. The actor's emergency exit path is noted.
3. Additional duties for the actor may include:
  - a. Following behind guests encouraging them to take the first exit.
  - b. Moving quickly to the first exit and holding the door open while encouraging guests to exit.
  - c. Using a fire extinguisher.
  - d. Assisting another actor, wearing a difficult costume, to exit.
  - e. Assisting a handicapped actor/guest to exit.
4. In the event of a power failure;
  - a. The show will go on with emergency lighting. Emergency lights operate on battery power that is good for at least 20 minutes.
  - b. It will take the last guest 'within the guest path' no more than 10 minutes to complete the tour through the attraction.
  - c. No more guests will be allowed to enter the attraction until power is restored.
  - d. The guests already inside the attraction and out of reach of the greeter will be allowed to continue through the attraction.
  - e. The actors will continue to perform their show till they run out of guests to entertain.
  - f. The attractions manager will decide if the actors may exit the attraction.
  - g. In some instances the safest place for guests during a power failure may be the attraction(s).
    - 1) The attraction is now the safest place during a total power failure
    - 2) It is illuminated
    - 3) It keeps the guests occupied/entertained
    - 4) Refer to "manual"
5. Managers conduct training meetings before opening each evening.
  - a. They use a 4'x8' floor plan of the attraction for orientation and review.
  - b. New actors are shown their position and can see the positions of other actors working around them.

- c. The visual reinforcement of the large floor plan and the small personal plan for each character (Character Sheet), will improve each actor's memory of the attraction's layout and its exits.

**CHARACTER SHEET**, position #12

Pendulum Scene

Diana, Victim on table

Costume, Nude Body suit, tight fitting white dress,

Red choker to mask neckline of body suit

Make up, natural

Props, none

Character is attractive

Dialogue, adlib asking for help

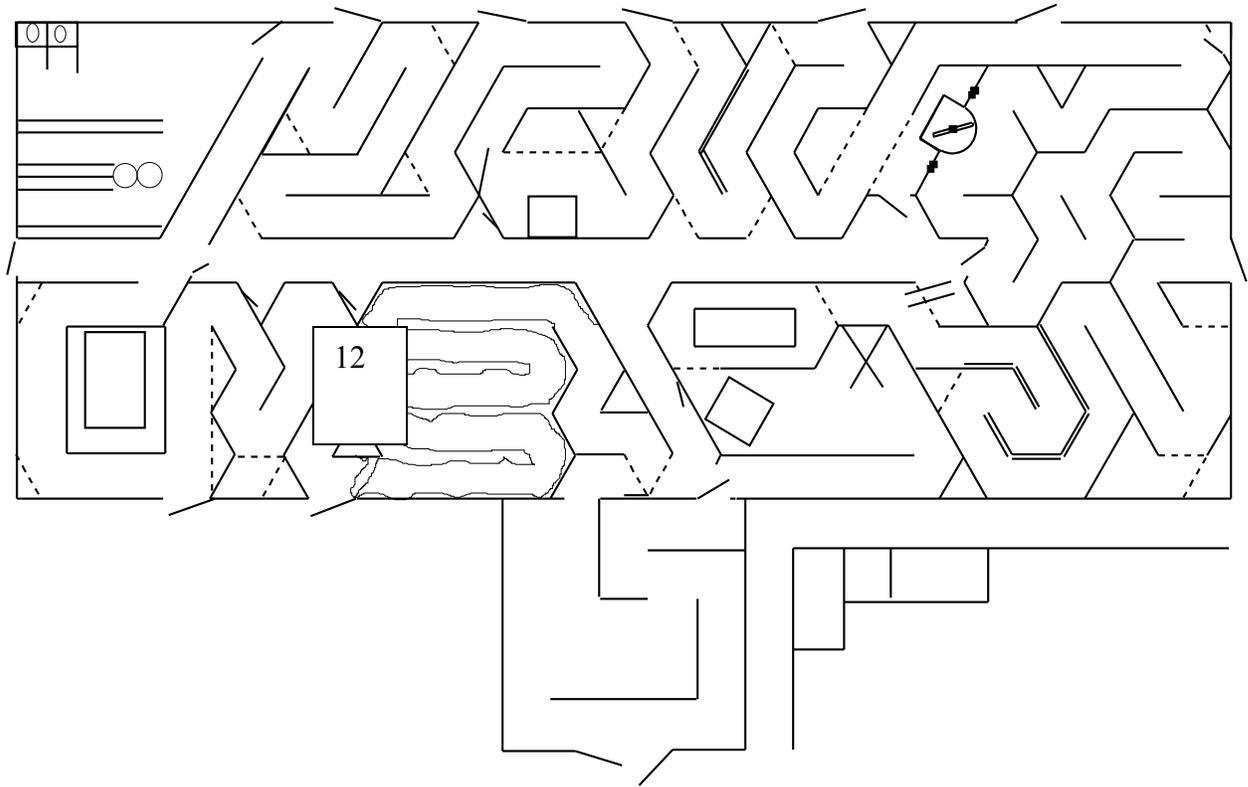
Emergency procedure,

Actor is to assist guests exiting room and report to

Grand Entry

Additional Notes:

Paste Polaroid of actor here. If you do not use photo ID badges, place one picture without make-up and one with make-up. If character has special make up, note it At left, style, appliances, wig, etc.



§

## OPERATIONAL POSITIONS & DUTIES

### THE MANAGER

During operation, the manager will continually make trips through the attraction.

1. He will encourage the actors and monitor their performance.
  - a. Direct their scene including blocking and dialogue
  - b. Monitor their makeup, costume and prop(s)
  - c. Make suggestions
2. He will ask them basic questions:
  - a. Where is your emergency exit?
  - b. What are your responsibilities during an emergency?
  - c. Where do you go after the emergency evacuation?
3. Each actor has heard the pre-alarm sound. IE: the sound made when the fire pull cover has been removed. (Some attractions have fire pulls within the customer path. A plexi cover can be placed over these exposed stations. It will emit a shrill sound if someone tampers with it. One drawback to this system is that a guest witnessing a real emergency may think that this pre-alarm is the actual alarm.)
  - a. A designated actor (per the character sheet) close to a fire alarm pull will investigate when the pre-alarm sound is heard. (Sound must be balanced in the attraction so as not to drown out the alarm)
  - b. The manager and guest relations will monitor other fire alarm pulls.

- c. The cover will be replaced if there is no visible reason for it being loosened or removed.
- d. If there is a visible reason for the cover being removed the fire alarm will be activated.

## **THE ASSISTANT MANAGER**

During operation the assistant manager will support the manager. In the event the manager is called away, the assistant will step in and act as manager. The assistant will assume duties and responsibilities as listed above. A large attraction may have several assistant managers. Their areas of responsibility must be clearly determined. Example: assistant manager “A” has the front half of the attraction and “B” has the back half. Failure to do this will create confusion among the actors

Additional duties include:

1. Positioning, training and monitoring last minute replacements until the manager is available.
2. Overseeing handicapped actors
  - a. Ensuring each handicapped actor has a buddy that knows that the handicapped actor is their responsibility (this should be noted on the character sheet)
  - b. Seeing to it that their special needs are met
  - c. Haunt placement appropriate to their disability
3. Encourages actors in their jobs
  - a. Does not direct actors
  - b. Does not make suggestions (even if the manager is called away)
  - c. Informs the manager of problems with actors
4. Monitors special effects
  - a. Checks fog juice levels
  - b. Air pressure
  - c. Pumps
  - d. Etc.
5. Add to all of this the fact that the assistant is also an actor.

## **GREETER**

...another word for crowd control. The “Greeter” controls/regulates the rate of guest entry into the attraction. The greeter is the first Attraction actor that the guests will encounter. His level of professionalism will set the tone for the haunt. An excellent presentation by the greeter will enhance the guests experience, introduce the rules and prepare them for things to come.

1. Show control
  - a. Groups of guests enter the attraction
  - b. The time between groups directly effects show quality
  - c. Length of line/guest waiting time directly effects show quality
2. The fine line between rowdy and happy guests can be broadened with exciting Attraction background information (example in index)

- a. Delivered in character to each group as they wait
- b. Used to treat/torture the guests

## **LEAD/KEY ACTOR**

This position brings some control down to the scene level. This is an important position for the scene, actors and guests. Good presentation/acting skills will encourage other actors in the scene to do better and may create a competitive atmosphere for who can do/scare the best.

## **ACTOR**

Good actors in quantity are hard to find and sometimes harder to keep. Sprinkle your good actors about. This will improve scene quality and help to bring the quality of not so good actors up.

## **ACTOR/TECH**

This position operates an effect or equipment necessary for a good show from behind the scenes. He should be familiar with all technical aspects of his position and a working knowledge of all technical aspects of the haunt.

## **TECHNICAL**

This position has no acting responsibilities. He is the one to fill fog and bubble machines; repair broken effects or items; replace light bulbs and in general, maintains the operation before, during and after.

## **Actor Disciplinary Procedures**

The Director of Actors is directly responsible for all Managers and actors.

Managers included are: (list attractions); Hay Ride Trail Manager; Guide Manager; Line Entertainment Manager and Costumed Walk Around Character Manager.

Assistants to Managers are actors with additional duties.

### **Proper Disciplinary Sequence of Events**

1. The Manager provides a verbal warning and so notes in the actors' file
2. The Manager requests a written warning from the Director of Actors. Copies to:
  - a. Human Resources Director
  - b. Director of Actors
  - c. Attraction Manager
3. Probation
  - a. The actor has received a written warning
  - b. Director of Actors may place the actor on probation
  - c. Part of probation may be sending the actor to the (lowest skull rating)
  - d. Period of probation commensurate with offense

- e. Actor on probation may be dismissed for additional offenses
- 4. A Manager has the authority to dismiss any actor in his/her charge. But, if at all possible, The Director of Actors should do this. The actors conduct must have been:
  - a. A serious safety violation
  - b. Gross negligence in performing job duties
  - c. Displaying insubordination to:
    - (1) Other actors
    - (2) Guests
    - (3) Managers
- 5. The actor has right of appeal to the Director of Actors. The Manager must remind the dismissed actor of this right and prepare the appeal if so asked.
  - a. All actors know this; it is in their handbook.
  - b. The Manager must stop what he is doing and prepare the actors appeal.
  - c. He will immediately deliver the appeal to the Director of Actors for a hearing at the end of the workday.
  - d. The Director of Actors, Manager that dismissed the actor, any witnesses and the dismissed actor must be present at the hearing.
  - e. The Director of Actors will prepare a report for The Human Resources Manager.
  - f. There is no further appeal, unless the charges involve sexual harassment
- 6. Sexual Harassment
  - a. The Director of Actors will hear a charge, or defense of being dismissed, involving sexual harassment, first.
  - b. The Director of Actors will prepare a report.
  - c. The Director of Operations, Human Resources Manager and the CEO will review the report and schedule a formal hearing.

### **Special Circumstances**

- 1. Actor becomes ill or needs to leave early
  - a. Make a note in actor's file
  - b. Determine if this is a regular occurrence
  - c. Provide verbal warning if actor not sick
  - d. Actor leaving without permission from manager is docked 50% of pay for that days work, per the handbook.
- 2. Transfer
  - a. The actor requests a transfer
  - b. The manager requests a transfer
  - c. Refer all requests to Director of Acting
- 3. An actor must revise his schedule through the office of Director of Actors

# Castle Dragon

## The Background

Officially known as “Castle of the White Dragon” it is located in the Penny Mountains of England. Founded during the Roman occupation as a point of refuge by citizens of the realm: a band of Scots joined forces with Picts of Ireland and the Nordic Saxons attacking the Romans along the Hadrian wall in 409 AD.

The Romans hastily constructed a wooden fortification using locals as slave labor, many died. Unknown to all a nearby cave contained the den of the Dragon Ayanna. She was protecting a clutch of three eggs when the Romans began to kill all the villagers. The horror angered her and she leapt to the defense of the villagers. The Romans were utterly flamed. But Ayanna did not escape, in her death throes, she pleaded with a little girl, Mary, to watch out for her eggs.

The eggs hatched and the dragons flew, all but the last. Her name was Dew, a white dragon. She made Mary feed her and care for her. Finally Mary had had enough and told the dragon to grow up. They became life friends. The castle was built on the ruins of the fort. It contains hidden treasures, a secret entrance to the caves and many horrors.

“Create a strong story line for your attractions”

# Castle Dragon

## The Walk Through

Entrance has a themed greeter welcoming the guests and acting as crowd control

### GRAND ENTRY

1. Greeter welcomes and taunts guests
2. Mirror tech/actor can see guests, when they look in mirror, cross fade light

### TORTURE “X”

3. Male victim's clothes are shredded
4. Female torturer taunts guests, whips victim

### ROOTS

5. Actor low on left works dummy low on right
6. Actor overhead waits for right moment to pound on ceiling

### WINDOW #1

7. Corridor actor pops out at guests

### WALL

8. Actor works Wall and Bars

### BARS

9. Right actor works Bars

### SPIDER WEB

10. Corridor actors work left and right scares

### HALL of KNIVES

11. Left actor works left knives
12. Right actor works right knives

### CANNON

13. Corridor actor operates controls

### PENDULUM

14. Female victim chained to table
15. Actor taunts her and guests

### GUARD ROOM

16. Female actress prisoner behind bars
17. Large male actor sits at table, smiling

### SKULL CAVERN

18. Corridor actor works Skull scare
19. Corridor actor works Window #2 scare

### FINAL EVENT

20. Actor works Window #3

## Castle Dragon

### Character List, 1999

1. Reaper, greeter
2. Bones
3. Steven, the victim
4. Tasha
5. Grunge
6. Tech
7. Corridor Actor
8. Mr. Fun
9. Gorgeous Ghoul
10. Corridor Actor
11. Skull
12. Terror
13. Corridor Actor
14. Miss Pure
15. Dr. Edger
16. Mouse
17. Mr. Happy

18. Corridor Actor
19. Corridor Actor
20. Little One

These numbers match the number on the character sheet and positioning numbers on the floor plan. Draw the floor plan of the haunt or trail on a 4'x8' sheet of marlite. Indicate each actor's position, exits and emergency equipment.

# **THEME PARK**

## **Emergency Procedures**

### **OVERVIEW**

What is an emergency? ...anything that is not part of the show. An emergency may be small, or seem minor. If it is not handled properly it will become your worst nightmare.

Guests shouting obscenities at one another can escalate to pushing and shoving; to hitting: then friends of either participant can get involved; this will create reactions from guests that do not know either participant; the reactions will vary from; "Let's get out of here", "I must protect my girl friend", to "Think I'll join in on the fun". Guests must not be allowed to get out of hand. Unruly guests must be attended to.

A guest is injured by an actor, another guest or falls. A report must be generated for your safety and to document events, witness testimony and prepare for any insurance or legal claims. A bad impression will be made on guests, if they witness an injured guest not receiving immediate attention.

### **DARK ATTRACTION**

Each of the Dark Attractions (list here) has a manager, assistant manager (an actor with additional responsibilities) and actors. The (lowest skull rating) Dark Attraction has an extra assistant manager, because it has the greatest number of new actors. In the event of an emergency evacuation of one or more attractions, evacuated actors are instructed to meet in front of their attraction. As soon as the manager of the attraction can reach the attractions guest entrance; (if possible) the manager will quickly walk through the attraction to ensure that all guests and actors have evacuated.

Evacuated guests will be instructed to also meet in front of the attraction. From the front of the attraction guests and employees may be relocated by security. Should the emergency be of the type that closes the park, refund procedures or guest passes must be ready. Guests will be directed to the ticket booth to receive refunds or passes.

## **HAY RIDE**

The nature of a hayride makes any emergency policy difficult. The trail is the problem, how to move wagons and people during a crisis. A tractor breaking down is not a crisis, financially maybe. The need to evacuate an entire trail that is a crisis. The major problem arises when the tractor/wagon are in a position that allows no escape. Cannot turn left/right or go forward and backing up is all but impossible. Depending on the circumstances during this type of event the Narrator takes charge of the guests and the tractor driver stays with the tractor/wagon as long as practical. The Narrators character sheet needs to note two areas to return guests to. One should be the loading area and the other about half way through the trail or the next nearest access point to the trail not part of the trail itself. No matter where the Narrator takes the guests a means of communicating with management is necessary. The Narrator must use all means possible to keep the guests with him or her. This requires additional training.

## **MIDWAY**

That part of the park where guests play games, purchase food, find restrooms, see shows and wait in line to enter attractions.

## **ADDITIONAL ENTERTAINMENT VENUES**

This is the catch all, in case I missed something, I can always say “Yeah, that’s what I meant by ‘additional entertainment venues’. Some attractions offer pony or bounce rides in the parking lot. Personally I think this is a bad idea, but it’s your operation.

## **POWER FAILURE**

Castle Dragon began as a parking lot haunt. I used generators to provide all my electrical needs. This arrangement was less than perfect. It seems that I would run out of gas at least one time per night or a generator would fail. My emergency lighting system was tied to the AC line. The emergency lights would come on till I could switch on another generator or fix the one not operating.

Castle Dragon actors are instructed to continue to perform and scare guests. Which is a good thing, seeing as how the guests would ignore even the fire alarm when it was accidentally tripped.

A closer examination finds that the safest place for guests to be during a total power outage is in the haunt(s) or on the trail. The tractor has lights, turn them on and continue to scare. The powered down haunt is now the safest that it has ever been. The fire alarm is operational, sprinklers standing by and there is no high voltage operating. The actors need to turn up the intensity and the guests need to be reassured that everything is all right.

One of the reasons I was able to continue to operate was that my sound system would also switch to battery backup during power outages. The emergency lights may have been on, but the show continued.

Tractors and other vehicles can be used as a source of illumination during a power failure. Position them so that their lights illuminate easily controlled areas for the guests to mingle in. Use crowd control and security to move the guests to these areas.

## **FIRE**

Fire is the one word in the English language that can bring terror faster than any other. For this topic I refer you to page# 84. Other than be prepared, what can I say?

# Attractions Name

Year

TRAIL or HAY RIDE name

SCRIPT

CONCEPT

BY

Author

**EDITED**

BY  
name

Plot plan of trail path. Emergency equipment locations.  
Include additional Narrator notes regarding emergency equipment location.

Attendant assists in loading wagon from their vantage point.

Greet guests in a character tone of voice.

Once the wagon is loaded or the trip begins, present the rules to the guests in a comic, but serious fashion. Rules vary but should include, no food, drink, do not stand up (or a trail walk, do not run), no flash photography, no smoking or open flame, stay on the wagon (or in the group) and “Do not touch the actors, they will not touch you” type of statement.

Attendant or guides lines in bold text

**Greetings I am character name.**

**Story line explaining his/her existence**

*(pause)*

**Any Volunteers?**

*The conclusion should include attempt at audience participation, gesture toward guests*

## **Perhaps it will be you... or you...or even YOU**

*Wagon approaches first scene*

### **Prepare yourselves, we approach the...**

**Wait for wagon to stop, or other appropriate cue to be determined**

### **Master, more mortals for your choosing**

**Pretaped (or live adlib) speech main character, Attendant must pay attention and react**

Scene character interacts with attendant, examines guests and sets stage for things to come. Good improv actor is important for this position. An evil comic assistant provides more entertainment value, acts as a further distraction and gives the main character someone to work off of incase none of guests have a sense of humor. The main character should have complete control of the scene, other actors and triggering of effects.

First Set

### **Attendant speaks as guests move to the next scene**

Present each scene or not as the style dictates. Mention accidents from trips previous and how a guest may resemble another guest not so fortunate.

Scares should come from different directions. Each scene should exploit different approaches to interacting with the guests. The actors must never touch the wagon, guests or approach close enough to be touched by the guests.

Example: If the scare in the scene previous came from the left side, then the next scene could scare from any direction except the left side. Distraction right, scare left; distraction left, scare right or from above or below... you gets the idea.

Additional dialogue between designated actors and the attendant act as additional distraction and can provide dramatic pause as well as comic relief.

As the scenes advance

*Wagon approaches unload*

### **You have done well mortals. You have survived the name. To ensure your safety, do not exit the**

**wagon till it has come to a complete stop. Good Luck Charms and talismans are available in a place called “The Gift Shop”. Special Guests appearing tonight are...**

Mention guests appearing, stage performances, other events and any other information before arriving at trails end.

**Remember me well and send me mortals to please my master. Until then join me in moaning my plight, at the count of three scream so that others might know the terror of the trail. 1 – 2 – 3  
SCREAM**

The guide or wagon reaches the end of the trail. The guests exit back into the park. A walking guide should carry a small pack with a water bottle and snack bars or fruit. A guide on a wagon should have similar items easy to reach. Most people are not used to using their voice in a character manner for long periods of time. The refreshments will help to save their voice and make the job more enjoyable. During the presentation of the event material, there will be many opportunities for the attendant to access his refreshments without impacting the performance.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Tele: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

School you attend: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

operational dates, please check the ones you can work. Pay varies with the number of days you work, the more you work, the more you get paid.

Friday,	oct 2 _____	6-12pm
Saturday,	oct 3 _____	2-12pm
Sunday,	oct 4 _____	2-10pm

Friday, oct 9 \_\_\_\_ 6-12pm  
Saturday, oct 10 \_\_\_\_ 2-12pm  
Sunday, oct 11 \_\_\_\_ 2-10pm

Friday, oct 16 \_\_\_\_ 6-12pm  
Saturday, oct 17 \_\_\_\_ 2-12pm  
Sunday, oct 18 \_\_\_\_ 2-10pm

Friday, oct 23 \_\_\_\_ 6-12pm  
Saturday, oct 24 \_\_\_\_ 2-12pm  
Sunday, oct 25 \_\_\_\_ 2-10pm

Friday, oct 30 \_\_\_\_ 6-12pm  
Saturday, oct 31 \_\_\_\_ 2-12pm  
Sunday, Nov 1, CLOSED

Comments:

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**WELCOME TO “attraction name”**  
**Promotional tag**  
**(year) Employee Handbook**

This employee handbook is intended to provide employees with a general understanding of the company’s personnel policies. The information in this handbook should be helpful in familiarizing employees with our company. It is designed to acquaint you with the company’s policies as quickly as possible. Although it is not a contract or a legal document you will find it to your advantage to read the entire handbook so you may have a complete understanding of the material covered.

The company is constantly striving to improve its policies, the services and products that it provides its guests, and positive relations with its employees. By working together, the company hopes that it will share with its employees a sincere pride in the work place and the products and services that we are all here to provide.

**EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER**

The Company is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer and will not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment in an unlawful manner.

### **YOU ARE A TEMPORARY EMPLOYEE (SEASONAL)**

Temporary employees are defined as those employees holding jobs of limited duration. Temporary employees are completely ineligible for employer-sponsored benefits. (Including Unemployment Benefits)

### **EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION FORMS**

Employees must complete, sign and submit an application before beginning. The application includes a theatrical performance release form, W4, INS employment eligibility verification form, certificate of seasonal employment form and employee availability form.

### **WAGE AND TAX STATEMENT**

At the end of each calendar year you will be supplied with your Wage and Tax Statement (W-2) form. Forms will be mailed First Class Mail to the address you listed on your application.

### **FORM I-9**

This form must be filled out and the appropriate information photocopied to be kept on file.

### **FORM W-4**

Employees must submit a completed W-4 form before a paycheck will be processed.

### **PAYROLL DEDUCTIONS**

Payroll service will deduct appropriate amounts for payroll taxes, including State and Federal income taxes, and FICA taxes.

### **DISCLAIMER OF IMPLIED CONTRACTUAL LIABILITY**

This handbook is available to employees only for informational purposes. It is not intended to constitute an employment contract of any kind and does not create any express or implied contractual obligations.

### **EMPLOYEE AT WILL POLICY**

Your employment with the employer is at will and, accordingly, may be terminated by you or the employer at any time, with or without cause and without prior notice.

### **SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY**

It is the goal of The Company to promote a workplace that is free of sexual harassment. In "State" (business is located), the legal definition for sexual harassment is this; "sexual harassment" means sexual advances, request for sexual favors, and verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- (a) Submission to or rejection of such advances, requests or conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment or as a basis for employment decisions; OR
- (b) Such advances, requests or conduct have the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or sexually offensive work environment.

The Director of Human Resources is responsible for receiving and investigating all sexual harassment charges.

### **IDENTIFICATION BADGES**

When you are hired you will be given a company badge, which you must have with you at all times. This badge identifies you as a company employee. There is a replacement charge of \$10.00 for all lost ID badges, which will be deducted from your paycheck. You are required to present your ID badge to receive your paycheck and turn in your badge for your final check.

### **MINIMUM AGE REQUIREMENTS**

All employees of the company must be at least 18 years of age. Employees may be asked to provide proof that they are at least 18 years of age at any time.

### **PERMISSION TO LEAVE DURING WORK HOURS**

If it becomes necessary for an employee to leave his assigned post or the company's premises during working hours, permission to leave must be obtained from the employee's Manager before the employee leaves. Employees who leave the premises for personal business or business that is not part of their job, must punch out when they leave.

### **WORKING HOURS**

Various factors, such as operational efficiency and staffing needs may require variations in an employee's starting and quitting times and total hours worked each day or each week. The employer reserves the right to assign employees to jobs other than their usual assignments when required. As part of our responsibility to our clients, the public and the other employees, we expect our employees to be at work as scheduled and to notify us as early as possible if they expect to be absent or tardy. Employees are expected to be at their workstation, ready to begin work, at the beginning of their assigned shift.

### **OVERTIME HOURS**

Overtime hours are not permitted unless an employee has received advance written approval by his supervisor.

### **EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS**

The Company is (promotional tag). Our goal is to present the best entertainment possible.

1. "Safety" is first and foremost.
2. "Courtesy" towards guests and staff is as important.

3. “Show” is our presentation to/for the customer.

All three of the above goals suffer when employees take time away from their duties to socialize. Employees found socializing during working hours may be dismissed.

Employees found socializing with patrons during working hours may be dismissed.

Working hours are those hours the employee is punched in and include time taken by the employee as breaks. Therefore: from the time you punch in to the time you punch out there will be no socializing.

### **THE PROHIBITION OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

The company is committed to providing a safe, efficient, and productive work place. The use of drugs or alcohol is prohibited and strictly enforced. Employees who violate this policy are subject to disciplinary action up to and including immediate discharge.

### **TIME CARDS**

Time cards are used as a means of accurately recording hours worked and calculating pay. Time clocks are provided for recording work time by all employees who are not specifically exempt from doing so. It is important that the time card not be lost, falsified or mutilated. If there is a mistake on the time card or it is missing, an employee should inform their supervisor.

**IT IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN TO PUNCH OR TAMPER WITH ANOTHER EMPLOYEES TIME CARD. This time card is a legal document and disciplinary action will be taken against anyone who violates this rule.**

Employees should not punch “IN” more than seven minutes prior to their scheduled starting time. Punch “OUT” shall be promptly at the end of the shift and no more than seven minutes after their scheduled quitting time.

Time cards are the property of the employer and are not to be removed from the rack or time clock area. Removal may result in termination.

### **EXCHANGING SHIFTS**

An employee is not permitted to exchange with another employee without the prior authorization of both employees’ supervisors. No authorization for exchanging shifts will be granted unless the exchange can be accomplished without interference with the company’s operations and without either employee working overtime.

### **PAYDAY-PAY PERIOD**

Payday will be on Friday. You may pick your check up after closing (12pm) or between 4 & 5pm on Friday. Paychecks may not be picked up or distributed while the park is in operation. Pay period runs Monday through Sunday.

### **PAY ADVANCES**

The employer does not provide any payroll advances or extend credit to employees.

### **GARNISHMENT OF WAGES**

The company is required by law to recognize certain court orders, liens and wage assignments. When the company receives a notice pending garnishment or wage assignment the amount will be deducted from their paycheck.

### **UNIFORMS**

When an employee's employment terminates voluntarily or involuntarily, the employee must return all uniforms, costumes, props or masks he has received before he picks up his final check.

### **CHANGE OF NAME AND/OR ADDRESS**

It is the responsibility of each employee to immediately advise their Manager of any change in name, address, telephone number, social security number or number of dependents.

### **DRESS STANDARDS**

Employees are expected to present a professional image. Employees must dress in a manner that is consistent with their responsibilities. Attention should be paid to safety, company image, and customer interaction. Your Manager will explain the proper dress requirements for your position.

### **PROPER USE OF THE TELEPHONE**

The use of the company telephones is limited to official company business. Incoming calls for employees will be relayed when possible as a message. Extreme emergency calls will be relayed as soon as possible. Pay telephones are provided for personal use.

### **SAFETY**

Every employee is responsible for safety. Please report any unsafe or hazardous conditions directly to your Manager immediately. In case of an accident involving an injury to yourself or a guest please notify your Manager immediately. Failure to report accidents can result in a violation of legal requirements and can lead to difficulties in processing insurance and benefit claims. Injuries requiring immediate medical assistance during operational hours call Guest Relations on radio channel 3

### **SMOKING**

For health and safety considerations, the company discourages smoking. Smoking is prohibited in all locations on company property except those specifically designated as smoking areas. This policy is strictly enforced.

### **INCLEMENT WEATHER**

You must either call in to receive instructions or report for work; do not assume that the weather has closed the park. Failure to check in either by phone or person may result in dismissal.

**LOITERING**

Presence on company property when not on duty is prohibited.

**EMPLOYEE PARKING**

Employees will be assigned a parking area to be used while on company time.

**NO SOLICITATION RULES**

Solicitation or distribution of literature on the company property is prohibited during working hours.

**EMPLOYEE PARKING**

(Designate the employee parking area)

**The Company  
ADDITIONAL RULES FOR ACTORS**

**SAFETY, COURTESY, SHOW**

1. Do not touch the guests - ever!  
You know where you are; the customer does not. A frightened customer may lash out and unintentionally hit you.
2. Stay at least an arms length away from guests  
Moving into the customer's natural defense zone may cause the customer to lash out or retreat into harms way.
3. Scare guests forward (not chase) out of the house  
Performing your duties as described by your Manager is important. Do not follow behind guests in a manner that would require the customer to run over or push past guests ahead.

4. Do not block a guests forward progress  
A frightened customer will try to escape; blocking their avenue of escape may cause them to lash out, striking you or someone else.
5. Do not over scare! Little ones especially  
Once you have frightened a customer go on to the next. Do not pick on a customer because they are easy to frighten.
6. Report dangerous guests to your Manager immediately  
Crowd control and security do the best that they can in identifying dangerous guests. They are not perfect. Sometimes a customer's true intent does not materialize until he is in a haunt or on a wagon.
7. Scare all members of a group, not front only  
The group leader is usually the bravest. Change up your scare timing and go for the ones in the middle or end.
8. Do Not Take Scares Away From Other Actors  
Do your job; do not interfere with another actors scare.
9. Memorize house floor plan and exits  
As an actor and The Company employee you are charged with the safety of the guests in your haunt. You must know the quickest exit from your location in case of a major emergency or in the event a customer needs help.
10. Learn emergency plans & fire extinguisher locations  
In the event of a major emergency, it is your job to follow the evacuation procedure for your event.
11. Do Not Touch or rearrange set pieces, props or dressing  
Many artists have labored long and hard to create your event. If wardrobe did not give you the prop, then you may not use it. Your artistic skills are needed to bring life to the scene, not redesign it.
12. Report damaged or broken items to your Manager  
Damaged or broken items are dangerous to you and to our guests. Take it upon yourself to be aware of all that is around you and look for potential problems.
13. Punch your time card in and out to get paid  
Actors work for a flat rate. It is based on your doing your job. Part of that job is to be on time and not to leave early. Failure to punch in/out may result in no pay for your days work.
14. Arrive early for makeup/wardrobe; keep work areas clean  
Makeup/wardrobe time will vary based upon your character. You may have to arrive more than an hour ahead of show time or you may be able to arrive later. Your event Manager will determine your final schedule. You will clean up after yourself.
15. No smoking, food, drinks or personal items in the house

The only items allowed in the house are you and your props.

16. No backpacks, big bags, controlled substances or weapons  
You may bring in a small makeup bag, 12"x6"x4". All other items will fit in this bag.
17. You will not be seen out of the house in costume  
Arrive wearing all black clothing, punch in, report to makeup and wardrobe, after the transition to The Company actor check in with your Manager ready to work, breaks are to the Green Room only, you may not venture into the park for any reason, at the end of your shift report to makeup/wardrobe, check in your props (if any) and costume, punch out and leave the grounds.
18. Wardrobe assigns costumes and props to your responsibility  
You will sign for all items in your care. Any not returned will be deducted from your pay.
19. Stay in character, look for guests that may need help  
Once you make the transition to The Company actor you may not break character. Exceptions include; helping a customer exit the building, helping a handicapped customer, presenting your human side to a customer that has become terrified and calming them down, and additional situations as may occur. Also, look for guests breaking the rules; smoking, striking matches/lighter, etc. Report violations to your Manager.
20. Return to position immediately after helping a customer  
Your assistance in helping a customer is important. As soon as you have completed the task return to your assigned job.
21. Work with the other actors in your room/event  
Teamwork is important in any successful operation. You are part of a team. Ideas and variation (within limits established by your event Manager) are good for you and the customer.
22. Do Not leave your assigned position without permission  
Actors are placed according to house design under the direction of the Manager. Your position is important and staying as placed assures show quality.
23. Treat guests, staff and other actors with respect  
Do not bad mouth or use foul language in front of or to the customer. Treat guests and actors, as you would wish to be treated yourself.
24. Be Entertaining, Not Insulting  
Do not make fun of the customer in an attempt to be entertaining. Entertain the customer with your talent, props or effects at your disposal.
25. Actor Schedule  
Actor wanting to revise schedule must do so at the office of Director of Actors.
26. Be Reliable

An actor leaving before being dismissed by the Manager will be fined one half of their day wages.

27. Valuables

Do not wear watches, rings, bracelets, earrings, exposed body piercing, or other objects. Leave items of this type in the car or at home.

28. Manager prerogative

Event Managers may impose additional rules pertaining to their event or the character you will be playing. These rules will be noted on your character sheet or a separate handout for your event.

**SAFETY – COURTESY - SHOW**

**Attraction name**  
**STANDARDS OF CONDUCT**

It is not possible to provide employees with a complete list of every possible type of disciplinary offense. However, in order to provide some guidance concerning unacceptable behavior, the following are examples of conduct considered impermissible. Employees who engage in any misconduct or whose performance is unsatisfactory may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and possibly including immediate termination.

1. Altering or falsifying any time-keeping record, intentionally punching or recording time on another employee's time card, or requesting another individual to punch or record your time card. Removing any time-keeping record from the designated area without proper authorization.
2. Actual or threatened physical violence towards another employee, or fighting on company property.
3. Insubordination, refusing to follow a supervisor's directions, or other disrespectful conduct to

- a supervisor.
4. Possession, distribution, sale, use or being under the influence of alcoholic beverages or controlled substances while on company property, while on duty, or while operating a vehicle or potentially dangerous equipment leased or owned by the company.
  5. Unacceptable or unsatisfactory job performance.
  6. Abuse or misuse of the employer's property or equipment.
  7. Smoking in restricted or non-smoking areas.
  8. Abusive or vulgar language.
  9. Behavior that is offensive to other employees.
  10. Recurring excessive absenteeism or patterned absences.
  11. Excessive tardiness.
  12. Displaying behavior that could endanger you or a fellow employee.
  13. Release of confidential information about the company.
  14. Bringing on company property dangerous or unauthorized materials, such as explosives, firearms or other similar items.
  15. Sexual harassment or other unlawful harassment of another employee.
  16. Violating safety or health rules or practices or engaging in conduct that creates a safety or health hazard.
  17. Unauthorized possession or removal of company or employee property, record or other materials.
  18. Working unauthorized overtime.
  19. Engaging in rude or discourteous conduct towards others.
  20. Failure to follow additional rules covered under "Rules for Actors" or special rules/instructions from Event Managers pertaining to your position.

## **Days/Hours of Operation, (year)**

*Every Friday, Saturday & Sunday and Columbus Day Monday Oct 11 6pm to 12pm*

*Actors on call 5pm to 1am*

A bonus for actors working all dates is a \$\$\$\$ gift certificate in The Company Gift Shop

## **Rehearsal dates, all begin 7pm sharp**

### **Terror Walk Guides; Sept. 19**

Terror Walk Actors & Guides; Sept. 20

Castle Dragon; Sept. 21

House of Illusions; Sept. 22

Stage Shows; Sept. 23

Hay Ride, Narrators; Sept. 24

Hay Ride, Actors & Narrators; Sept. 25

Compensation is two The Company Tickets per rehearsal

## **HANDBOOK ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM**

I have received and read The Company employee handbook. I understand and agree that nothing in this handbook alters my employment status as an at-will employee of The Company.

I further understand and agree that this handbook is merely a guide to the general personnel and/or practices of the Company, and that The Company may change any of the terms of this handbook at any time, with or without notice to employees.

**Signature**

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**Date**

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Print Name

This manual is on the disc saved as EmpMan.doc in a different presentation.

### **The History of JB Corn in the haunt business**

As a child I made the candy rounds like everyone else. We would attend the Halloween Carnival at school; take a trip through the haunted house and bob for apples. 1961 was a fun year for me. I was twelve, almost thirteen, we had moved into a new house, far away from our old digs, and Halloween was fast approaching. I was into many different things and Halloween was about to become one of them. Out of the clear blue I decided to entertain the local Trick-or-Treaters. Our front porch was enclosed with ironwork. The only way in was up a slight step and onto the porch. I placed an 8' plywood ramp, decorated it with ropes to look like a drawbridge and created my first horror scene in my living room. I would play music and, using a PA system, talk to my victims. Distracted as they were, they did not notice, at first, the drawbridge being raised, and when they did, it was too late. The porch light went out as the front door opened and I greeted them. I was very busy that night. Word went far and wide and for the next couple of years I created more fun for my neighbors. It was not 'cool' to continue this in High School and the urge to scare died away.

## **How Not To Build Your First Haunt, 1979**

1979 found me newly married. I operated my own acting schools in \*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\*\*. The month is October, one of my favorites, and something new was happening in the area, Haunted Houses. We had several, some good some bad but all in fun. My wife suggested that we build one in the school, something for the students to do and a fundraiser for the school. She created a monster.

\*\*\*\*\* (the school) was located near downtown \*\*\*\*, right on the freeway at a major intersection; a perfect location. We decided to open for the last week plus, Thursday the 22nd through Saturday the 31<sup>st</sup>. Please remember the title to this article as I describe my first haunt.

I wanted my customers to experience something different. So I went all out not to look like any other haunt. Customers had to remove their shoes and socks and stow all their belongings in a numbered box we provided. Their first adventure was to cross Worm Swamp. A 2x6 framed pool created with black plastic, filled with water and plastic worms with a black light. Fishing line was hanging in the path and a fan blew air into their faces. For added terror we would pull a garden hose through the water. It worked to well. Imagine your bare feet with worms squishing beneath and then suddenly something slides along your leg, in the dark...

Customers traveled a brief path through hanging carpet tubes. The space was big enough to get turned around in, the forerunner of my tube room turn around. A puppet monster would come down from above in the tubes at random places to nibble on any available heads, yes, we touched the customers.

The school stage became the cemetery, covered with leaves, nearly eighteen inches deep, tree limbs, tombstones, flying bats and a singing corpse rising out of the grave. This was the distraction, the real scare came from the corpse rising behind them, and he would grab an ankle. Many customers fell, some off the stage but mostly into the leaves. By Halloween night our eighteen-inch high pile of leaves was about two inches and we brought in twenty more bags to fill the cemetery again.

They would exit and crawl into a 2'x2' tunnel. We preferred couples and with word of mouth we had many couples. We would get on top of the tunnel, bang on the wood and squirt them with water guns. As they crawled they moved up. They would crawl over an actor padded with a quilt; he would wiggle as they crawled over him. This made for some unusual reactions. Because they were forced to crawl one behind the other, it was easy to separate them. A wall would suddenly appear in the space between them. They were told to continue to crawl. They each made a right hand turn and were told to lie face down. The bottom would drop out and they would land face up together on a large mattress 24" below.

Lady Luck was kind to me. Not one injury, no fire, no emergency of any kind. The haunt had one entrance and exit and was on a second floor. Flame Proofing? Not a clue, What Me Worry? My only fire extinguisher was of the kitchen type. A variety of lighting fixtures powered by an array of extension cords in various conditions were tacked and hanging everywhere, even around the swamp. Cassette players with tapes that had to be turned over or rewound were placed in several locations.

We charged \$2 per person and made a little over \$600. The haunt was small, but because of the individual attention each group received and the fact that running was not

an option, customers felt they got their moneys worth.

The students enjoyed the work and this event became the annual fundraiser of first \*\*\*\*\* then \*\*\* through 1996. I would continue producing the event and would eventually make a few mistakes. I had much to learn, but we were off to a good start.

## **Working In Tight Places, 1980**

The building my school was in was sold. The new owners had other plans, so off I was to an office warehouse space. The 1980 haunt was about 1,500 sq. ft. I had to come up with ways to deliver a longer haunt. Our location faced a major roadway. We had the opportunity to make good money, if we could deliver a good show.

The building had a front entrance and a back rolling door. The concept of emergency exits was not to present itself to me till 1986. Passageways in the haunt were two feet wide. And then there was the crawling maze. On your hands and knees, down two foot square tunnels, with us on top banging, yelling and squirting you with water. The tunnel path was 64 feet long. Built of sheet rock, 2x2s and nails (I had yet to discover the wonders of screws) it almost lasted the season. It did require major repairs before the last weekend. Carpet tubes returned, puppets popping out of all sorts of places, a witch's cauldron and witches, too. The grand finale was a large box. Customers walked up a ramp, ducked down and entered a four-foot square box, eight feet long. It had 100-watt sound system and two woofers. The sound track was the classic "buried alive", being sold everywhere back then. We closed the door behind them, turned out the lights, turned on the music, then released the lock and the entire box pivoted back and forth like a see saw. We would bang them around several times (more if the line was short) then let them out the backside. As they exited the box, they could see the exit to outside. As they stepped forward (thinking they were through) a very large spider dropped on top of them at the doorway of the exit. Very effective.

Well, actually this was another good year, almost. We covered the expense of building the haunt, purchasing some new props, had a cast party and still had a pocket full of money to play with. However, I learned the first of many lessons this year.

We masked everything with black plastic (yes, the kind we have all learned not to use). Stapled it in place, OOPS, stapes? Yes staples. Customers would bump into, fall all over and pull down the plastic. When it would come down, it brought with it staples. Some staples remained partially in the wood, leaving a sharp pointy thing armed to attack an unsuspecting customer. As fate would have it the injury was to a little girl being carried by her dad. The staple cut across her right hand and confused us. We were not ready for customer injuries. They could not receive any help till they made it all the way to the box. At this time we realized the reason for their shouts of 'help'.

It was clearly our fault and I agreed to pay the emergency room fee. He took her down the road and was back in less than an hour with a receipt for \$98. Ouch. After the accident I closed the haunt down for about ten minutes and found several more staples poised for attack. I removed them. This was the last time I would ever use staples exposed in any of my haunts. That is not to say that I do not use staples, I do. After creating a curtain with taffeta, I cover the stapled side with another board using screws.

This was the first of three customer injuries 1980, 1982 and 1988.

This event brought to my attention emergency situations. I had never prepared for them. It also focused attention on access to haunt areas. We had no access except through the customer path. It would be several years before I could remedy this problem. But we did prepare emergency response plans. The adults and students that worked the haunt were advised to listen to the customers as they made it down the customer path. Any unusual shouting was to be investigated immediately. This action paid off several days later when a family got stuck in the tube room. It seems that one of the tubes had come untied and the dangling cord was caught up in a unique hair do. They were caught for only a brief time and they themselves were not in a panic, yet. I was notified and was able to untangle her hair from the cord. It was nothing that they could not have done themselves, except that each was carrying a child that was not willing to be put down. We were able to help them before the problem became serious and they continued through the haunt laughing and screaming.

The staple lesson was clear. Second year of operation and it suddenly dawned on me that I was responsible for the safety of my customers. It was my job to create a safe haunt. Somewhere during this revelation the word fire 'snuck' up on me. I noticed the pathetic kitchen fire extinguisher and almost died laughing. Before we opened the next evening I bought two giant chemical extinguishers and more flashlights. We had talks about evacuation and selected a location outside of the building where everyone was to meet in the event of an emergency. People were assigned emergency duties. One to walk through the haunt and make sure that all customers were out, two to standby the fire extinguishers and one to count heads at the meeting place.

There was no regulations, guidelines, inspections or anyone to talk to. I learned by visiting other haunts, watching my customers and making mistakes. These lessons I pass on to you.

## **Stay Focused, 1981**

During the day I was a TV Producer. We had three half hour television shows to produce each week. 1980 had but one show and we were able to pre shoot studio segments and avoid using the studio where the haunt was. This year the studio had to be used during the day and converted back to a haunt at night. This was a drag.

The haunt was almost the same as the year before. No exposed staples. The customer path was rearranged and sets from the TV programs were used. Most of the haunt was hinged and my portable designs were being born. 4x8' and 8x8' panels were all around. I was still using mostly ninety-degree walls in the design, but the mazes used a variety of angles. Oh, and I stopped using sheet rock. I had not discovered wafer board, so I used plywood. I did not use the sixty-degree system till 1989.

A variety of problems were created. The first was the night we opened and no customers were coming out of the haunt, they were going in, but nobody was exiting. At first we joked about this, told customers waiting in line that no one ever escaped our haunt alive. After about thirty customers had entered it was obvious that something was wrong. As it turned out a wall was in the wrong place, it was hinged and got closed off

the wrong way creating a loop effect. The customers were going in circles. The reason we heard no complaints was that they loved it. This error was incorporated into other designs.

Then there was the night I became brain dead. I had no idea where anything went. Nothing seemed to fit and we were twenty minutes late in opening. Add to this the Saturday we ran over in shooting. Normally we would open at 6pm for lights on tours then 7pm for real haunting. We had a crowd at 6pm, unusual, for the lights on, but we were still shooting in the studio. In between takes we were setting up the haunt, but we still did not open till 7pm for lights on and 7:30pm for lights off. We stumbled through the month exhausted and in a semi coma. Bottom line was that the haunt did not really suffer and our TV shows seemed better. I work well under pressure, but this was absurd. The final straw came when I actually loaded into the VCR and cued that days show seconds before airtime. We were all basket cases and losing focus, then the month was over, could not have lasted another day.

The plus to this madness was that I was learning short cuts. Quicker ways to put up/take down, run wire, set lights and general preparation for opening. This experience became valuable beginning in 1989 and 1990 with the advent of more than one haunt and setting up in a parking lot. We were really on our own with no municipal guidance. No one was injured, no customer emergencies went unhandled (like we are really scared, please let us out) and nothing broke. We did have fewer parents helping out, but we had more than enough students and some of them were already planning for 1982.

So, so what? You say. Well, I am into year three, still using the haunt as a fundraiser for the acting school and I love it. OK, so I enjoy self-abuse. I have learned a great deal, and I start keeping notes. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending upon your point of view) I have lost my early floor plans. They were little more than a joke, anyway. Basically I would walk into the room, pick a spot and begin to build. When it failed to fit, I modified whatever I was working on to fit, or changed to something else entirely. I did not make a real floor plan till 1986. And it was 1987 before anybody in city government noticed us or anyone else I believe.

The reality was/is that I did not even begin to work on the haunt till October. My life was so busy that I could not focus on the haunt till it was up and in my face. We usually opened for the last two or three weeks and that gave me the first week of October to prepare. This to would change in time. My haunts were becoming more complex and requiring more time to build. I had not yet developed the technique for modular construction. We re-used everything from the haunts in our TV productions. The inventory of show sets was increasing and it began to make sense to me that I might begin an inventory of haunt related sets, but that is another story. And if there is any message here (focus) it is that time must be dedicated and a true focus achieved. Unless you wish to become a candidate for the funny farm and a pretty padded cell with a limited view.

## **Splinter, 1982**

Summer of 1982 I stumbled across a deal. An old mall was being renovated into a high-class flea market. They were spending big bucks to reopen Lochwood Mall and to

make it look modern. I knew one of the organizers and talked him into letting me place a puppet theater in the basement. It was a huge success. Not that we made big bucks, but along with the puppets we used our students as actors on stage for some great entertainment. And my students enjoyed live audiences. The admission was free and the mall promoted our weekend and holiday shows. I made out by attracting more students. Our TV show \*\*\*\*\* was in \*\*\*\*\* Mall and we filmed some sequences at Lochwood.

Halloween became a thought and I asked the mall for use of additional basement space for a haunt. They said yes. We provided four free passes per vendor in the market and opened Thursday the 14<sup>th</sup> through Sunday the 31<sup>st</sup>. We had special shows during the day Saturday and Sunday. As before I wandered into the space and started building in one corner and worked my way around till I ran out of space. Most of the haunt was of plywood, but we had more space than we had money, so sheet rock made a return. Lumber was cheap, but there was an even cheaper grade of 2x4 available and I bought it.

The haunt was not remarkable. It contained several of my standbys, the carpet tubes, crawling maze and several rooms. It would take an average of 15 minutes to get through and we now had as a permanent feature the ability to swing a wall and send you around through most of the haunt as many times as we wanted or as time would allow.

We operated the puppet theater, the haunt and performed additional skits in the open area on a stage between the two. \$3 per person and you got your moneys worth. It was easy to spend an hour in the basement, and little of that time standing in line.

The haunt was a technical nightmare. Wires, extension cords and pull cords running everywhere. No one came to inspect and no permits were required. This was the first year where the exit and entrance were one in the same. Not because I wanted it that way, the space had only one-way in and out. The new customer base was rough on the haunt. I had been building one style of haunt, but this year it became obvious that not all customers are alike. It would take an hour or so before opening to repair damage. And during operation I had to shut down once or twice per night to fix something. The worst was the pulling down of extension cords and clamp lights. It seemed that some of the customers only came to destroy.

The stage was set. Halloween night 8pm another little girl being carried by another dad got a big splinter in her hand. And another emergency room bill this one \$129. It was one of those bargain 2x4s. I figured out latter that had I bought the better grade of lumber I would have had money left over from the \$129 I spent. Hindsight is always 20/20. At the end, I also discovered that I could have almost paid for plywood instead of sheet rock, I was replacing it on a regular basis. Well, not actually replacing, more like nailing another sheet of ½ inch over a damaged one. It took hours to clean up the sheet rock mess and haul it off. And I trashed the crummy 2x4s as well; they were doing a wiggle and enough nails in them for a nice sized anchor. The sheet rock maze had many lessons.

But on the brighter side the event was a tremendous success. The students and their parents had a blast. Our audience was entertained and we had money to play with. Our costumed characters roamed the mall during market hours. The merchants were pleased and so was the mall management. After all, the entertainment was free and effective. Merchants recalled this season as being the best yet for a new flea market.

We continued right through the holidays, converting the haunt into Santa's

Workshop and presenting holiday shows. We made a killing selling photos with Santa.

I was learning the value of entertainment. We entertained and the crowd loved it. Next year I would learn another lesson, crowd mentality. But for now it was clear that superior building materials had to be used and that all raw lumber should be painted. This would add considerable cost to the final event, but then it would be worth it. We now had a nice collection of props, set pieces and building materials.

## **The Line, 1983**

Year two at Lochwood Flea Market was upon us. I saw no reason to change my ways too much, so I began in a corner and started building the haunt. The Mall had given us more space. We had over 4,000 sq. ft. I was nearly lost in a space so large. Then I was hit with a surprise. We were scheduled to open Thursday the 13<sup>th</sup>. Because our location was in the basement and the closest entrance was in the back I seldom visited the front main entrance of the mall. I was coming back from the lumber yard (before Home Depot) and noticed a large sign for a haunted house over the main entrance. I was surprised that the mall would do such a thing for us (serious ego problem here), but I surmised that they were very happy with the show we put on. HA!

I drove around back and delivered the lumber. Worked into the night till about 8pm. Staggered up stairs and drove around to the mall front to see the sign again. OOPS. It was the Friday before we were to open and there was a line out the front doors. I parked and entered the mall to see what was going on. In a space of over 10,000 sq. ft., a prime entry location, another Haunted House was open. I was in shock. The management explained it to me this way, 'If one Haunted House is good, then two must be twice as good.'

This haunt was a completely different style. Inside they built elaborate sets, placed distance between them and presented a theatrical production. They would take groups of about twenty at a time and the cast produced a vampire wedding. I never saw it all, but it took us some time to recover from the surprise. You see, the production was about twenty minutes, only one group at a time was allowed inside and a very very long line formed. They could have held the line inside the mall. Instead they forced it out the doors onto the front sidewalk. At the time I thought this was stupid.

The crowd mentality was; see a line get in it. We did our best to have no more than a fifteen-minute wait. On Friday & Saturday nights you could stand in line for two hours upstairs. Their success was great enough to add a second cast so that they could do two groups at a time. I am no mathematician but they could only handle 120 people per hour. But, they were charging \$8 per person (this is 1983, we were charging a whopping \$3 per person). The down side was that our initial attendance was down. Our only advantage was that they allowed no children at all.

We did more for the mall. We provided daytime entertainment (costumed characters), opened our haunt during weekend business hours and provided discounts to vendors. Our competition did none of this. Latter I found out that they did pay rent, which we did not. Out of desperation we finally began to work their line, this paid off and our second season at Lochwood was better than our first.

Our style changed this year. We had larger scenes and the crawling maze was gone, it was now a walking maze. This would be our first year for a fog machine and strobe lights. We also added some black light puppets. Our stereo sound system was supplemented with portable cassette players and loop cassettes playing random sounds along the customer path.

And, sorry to say, we created a line out the front and up the stairs. We never got it outside the mall entry door, but not for lack of trying. When people from the other haunt came to check us out they would get into a long line, but would leave if we had no line. That mentality exists till this day. They enjoyed our show as much as the one upstairs and would not have gone through had we not had a line.

I find this curious. A long line indicates a superior show, one worth waiting for. No line indicates a lousy show and that one should leave. Its part of the haunted thing for Halloween, I guess. But I have seen this for other amusements as well; Six Flags and Disney Land come to mind. There is a science to crowd mentality, I do not understand it; I accept it.

The bottom line is (if there is one) charge what the public is willing to pay. I know of no magic formula for this. I am sure that the upstairs haunt had a higher overhead than us and equally certain that they made money. Our goals were not the same. They operated strictly for the money; fun for us, student training and some change left over. Till this day I note that a line out the front door of my haunt is the best sales tool for those driving by, because if I do not have a line, they do just that... drive by.

## **All Good Things..., 1984**

Our last year at Lochwood was to be strange, not that the haunt business was in and of itself normal. It seems that the mall was not doing well. Money seemed to be disappearing, not going to advertising as it was supposed to. Many vendors had left, but the upstairs haunt returned and so did we. We cut back on entertainment during the day and opened the haunt for lights on tours, no actors till 7pm. The folks upstairs were using the stuff from the year before and apparently producing the same show for the first two weeks. I know, because the word got out and our business was booming and they never fully recovered. They blamed us. We added our sign to the front of the mall and placed direction banners across the mall hall leading to our haunt.

We tied our two shows together. First the customers were seated in the puppet theater for a ten-minute show. They were then escorted to the exit, which was the haunt entrance. We kept them entertained for an average of thirty minutes and could move 120 people per show or 240 per hour. Our price went up to \$4 and we had a good-sized stack of dollar bills to play with when it was all said and done.

The haunt changed into more of a path connecting scenes. It was not all 90

degree, but we were still using two-foot wide passages. This year we had two swinging walls and tried something new (and I promise never to do it again). We actually could turn the customers around and back onto themselves. This was fun for a while, but it proved to be dangerous, as customers began to confuse themselves with actors and some customers became actors. This was done as part of the maze and the scenes before and after the maze. The maze is where one of the problems developed.

This was the first time I had seen people pay to get in and set up shop as an actor in the haunt, usually in the maze. It didn't seem bad at first, but then it became apparent that these people could/would and did get carried away and created problems. The situation could have been worse had we not nipped it in the bud. It is one thing for a member of a group to move quickly ahead of the group in order to scare one of his friends, it is quit another for an individual to join the cast. Cast implies that you know who they are, have information on how to get in touch with them and require them to be accountable for their actions. 1992 would present a similar but different problem.

October would be it for the mall. None of us knew that, but the management was not paying the rent. When the hammer fell our stuff was caught in the web. It took us nearly a month to get most of our stuff out. It was not a pretty sight. We had no true lease; a verbal agreement was it. But the mess extended to flea market vendors as well. Tuesday November 1<sup>st</sup> was a deadline. When vendors returned for the next weekend they discovered that they were locked out. An interim solution was found and the mall owners accepted weekend rent from vendors for what would turn out to be the last weekend.

This was only one of many times that my lack of management skill would become obvious. Our attraction was outgrowing my ability to manage it. Not the creative/show side, but the detail side. Advertising, marketing, contracts and other types of agreements were foreign to me. I mention this because a haunt is a blend of creative talents and business skills. Although my haunt continues to survive, it should be doing better.

We were growing and changing as well. I was the creative part of a group trying to establish one of the early satellite networks. We built some nice studios, sets and shot a stack of videotape. The haunt would relocate to our film/video production studios, which contained classrooms for the acting school.

## **Plastic Miracle, 1985**

Halloween almost slipped by us this year. Everything we had and were doing was tied up in the attempt to launch a satellite network. My students would not let it pass. Space, we had plenty of space. Money, well, that was in short supply. We had props and sets, lights and effects, but no way to build the connecting walls. The building materials from years past had been used in other ways. Then it hit me, walls of black plastic (hey, get over it, this was '85 and I knew no better). The sets were placed and ropes formed the tops of the walls, black plastic was draped over the ropes and walls were formed.

This year marked the first time we were inspected. The Farmers Branch Fire Department came out the week before Halloween. Made sure we had at least two 10-pound fire extinguishers and flashlights. That was it. We were opened the 17<sup>th</sup> through the 31<sup>st</sup> and charged \$3.

This haunt was remarkable in that I used more blood and gore than ever before. The teens loved it. One scene was an actual telephone booth with a teen girl being hacked to death from the shadows. The customer path covered three sides of the booth. It

was remarkable because the amount of blood that was squirting and splashing everywhere. She would wipe the glass with her bloody face as customers hurried by. This was before plastic knives and things, so we used a real machete. Her back was protected by plywood covered with a pillowcase filled with cotton and straw. The hacking sound added to the illusion and as customers came close the machete would slip and hack a piece of wood near her face. Not to worry, her mom wielded the weapon. Friday and Saturday nights we would destroy several pillow cases.

This was the year to learn the value of scene placement. The telephone booth was placed in the middle of the haunt; it should have been at the end. Customers commented about it as they exited and the remainder of the haunt was as in passing. In the business of theatrical revues an actor knows his performance was miserable when he reads his name and the word adequate. It indicates that the reviewer did not remember his performance, but noted his name in the credits. The last half of our haunt was like that, it was there, but nothing came close to the intensity of the telephone booth. There was a natural fear of whatever was hacking at the girl would come after them, but they did not notice our closing scenes. This is not to say that we did not scare them, we did. But there was a difference.

It hit me like a ton of bricks. I should have known better, but who would have thought that a simple scene could have such impact. At once I realized I should have moved it. But my designs were not that flexible and I had other duties. The haunt did OK, nothing fantastic, but we had the same amount of money left over as the year before, only because we spent nearly nothing building the haunt. This was also the year for developing pace as a haunt concept.

A simple effect occurred by accident. As the customers moved along the curtained path, the curtains (black plastic) moved with them. The flow scared a majority, who thought they were being followed. Their imagination filled in the blanks and after the telephone booth some wanted to exit. Another problem was no internal exits. The haunt had an entrance and an exit, nothing more. We began to add more illusion to the flowing curtain. At selected locations an actor would rush the curtain, pushing it in towards the customers. The reactions were extreme and we had to be careful as to not scare the customers into anything that would hurt them.

This wanting to get out of the haunt because they were scared and being able to move scenes was having a cumulative effect on me. The satellite network thing folded up around my ears and my concentration returned to the acting school.

## **900 Sq. Ft. & Pickets, 1986**

Halloween suddenly appeared. The kids were ready. I was not. Again funds were scarce but student anticipation was high. A haunt for Halloween had taken a life of its own. The students expected it. Our acting school was in a new smaller space. We would add more next year, but this year our haunt was cramped. This would be the first time that we built an entry area. It was a giant cave facade.

Also unique to this design was a central corridor. It provided actor access to all scenes and customer exit from any scene. The entrance and exit to the haunt were one in the same. There was no real haunt design. The space was divided into square

rooms/scenes. The customer path followed the wall of the space with switchbacks dividing the rooms. Black plastic was used for the walls of the central corridor and wafer board was used to build the switchbacks. This was my first year to use wafer board.

The haunt was packed with actors. The space may have been small but we had eight scenes, four to a side, three to four actors per scene and several scare points in the switch backs between scenes. The down side is that it took about eight or nine minutes to make it through, but we only charged \$3, so our customers were pleased. The fog machine and strobe lighting everywhere added to the show. The students were intense. Farmer's Branch Fire Department paid a visit-opening day, looked for fire extinguishers and flashlights. They announced that next year we would have to notify them in advance and request an inspection before we opened.

However, a season cannot go by without some lesson. October 31<sup>st</sup> was on Friday night. We had a line before opening. We also had something else. At our front door was a TV news reporter, and at the entrance to the haunt (back in the alley) was a religious cult, wearing robes, carrying large wooden crosses, singing and chanting. It seems that we were all going to 'Hell.' Halloween night is also the night for the students Halloween Party. The lobby was full of parents and kids ranging in age from 6 to 17. Refreshments were being served and games were being played.

The camera crew was in back and the reporter entered the lobby asking questions. We opened on time, our customers thought it was part of the show and I let the students answer the reporters' questions. Our cult left right after the camera entered the lobby and our kids looked great on TV for the Ten PM. News. I missed the story. The tape machine failed to record a useable picture and the phone rang off the wall... asking how to get to our haunt. We were opened till 2am, which is not normal for us.

I never knew who the cult was, some people accused us of orchestrating the event and the cult left a mess in the alley, their signs, crosses and other trash. Bottom line is that the event did not hurt us, as was intended, but we made more money that night than all other nights combined. We lucked out. The cult picked on a kid acting school and it backfired. The greatest stroke of luck was that none of the staff appeared on camera. A seven-year-old girl explaining Halloween and how fun it was to scare big people was very diffusing.

It could have easily gone against us. Had the cult been more organized and had a game plan besides marching around chanting, we could have been toasted. The reporter decided to play the cute side of the event instead of going along with the cult. She interviewed several students and parents, but only the seven year old made it on camera and the whole story ran at the end of the newscast as a ninety second filler. Our student had more time on camera than the cult and they showed our best scene of the haunt.

The cult was so serious that they became comical. Customers in line decided that they were our actors and joined in the fun. This intensified the cults chant, which intern intensified the customers' reactions. The cult was so humiliated that they could not wait to get out of Dodge (so to speak). I have no idea what it is that I am saying or what the point is (if any), except to say that the haunt business is a lightning rod. I did not realize that this was a prelude of stranger things to come.

## **Great Discovery, *SCREWS*, 1987**

Back in the 50s I built my first tree house. I built a clubhouse, train layouts, Christmas tree forts and sets for school productions. My friend was the hammer and his close associate the nail. I loved nails. I could build almost anything with them and various sizes and shapes of lumber. Summer of '87 I began to build yet another set. It was our sitcom stage. It had a kitchen, front door, living room and the obligatory staircase to nowhere. I had completed the staircase and landing when it was decided to add more space. The new studio was over 1,500 sq. ft. So like a good little trooper I began to disassemble the set to move it. I wanted things to stay together, so I used large nails. Removing them proved to be a challenge. One particular nail was very stubborn. I was on the steps, had a lever under it; it would not move... then it flew out of the hole. I mean it took wings, sailed into the upper atmosphere and went into orbit. I (the launcher) was going the other way. I fell about two feet... and shattered my left arm. Note I did not say break.

I was alone at the studio. I lay on the floor for a couple of minutes trying to figure out why I was in such pain. It became obvious every time I tried to move my left arm, but the pain was coming from my entire arm. I could not stand, so I crawled to the soda machine and purchased a Coke. I sat on the floor before the Coke Machine Idol and sucked down the pop. This gave me enough energy to make it to my car and then the hospital. Exciting stuff, eh? Well, there is a moral to the story.

I had experimented with screws off and on, what I did not like was the cord on the screw gun. I really did not like any screw gun that I purchased. I had to continue to work and it was proving difficult with one arm strapped to my body. Then by accident I discovered The Makita 9vdc cordless drill. I now own several. The sitcom stage was a combination of nails and screws as I slowly and painfully made the transition from the love of my life (nails) to screws. What I have learned is that I was a fool. True screws cost more and may take a little more time to set in place, but I could build anything now. I did not have to build walls on the floor and tilt them. I could build them in place because I no longer needed a firm surface against which to pound.

The real beauty of screws is flexibility. The entire haunt was assembled with screws. We changed it twice after we opened and once at the request of the fire department. The inspector had a concern, I agreed and while he stood there and watched I went zip, zip and zip. It was done. He was appreciative, as he did not have to come out again, and I was amazed. I have used screws exclusively since then. Except for hidden nails that hold wire mesh in place for cement or plaster.

The 4x8' wall panel goes together quickly. Not as quick as a nail gun, but the wondrous thing is that that same panel comes apart again to become something else as quickly as I screwed it together. I have over 400 panels. Most of them were built in 1990. Some of them have gone on to their final resting place, but most have remained. They are easy to repair, convert and modify. There were no nails working their way out to attack customers or to fight with me when storing the panels. And when a screw does get loose in its hole, you have two choices. Replace it with a longer screw or move it a little one-way or the other.

Other than the discovery of screws our year was rather uneventful. Another version of the central corridor made its debut. We used nearly all-available space and had fun building the haunt. This was the first year for major help during construction

from students and parents. The arrival of the screw would make a greater impact next year, as I would simply go crazy.

## **Bridge of Doom, 1988**

The haunt included both classrooms. The largest was the sitcom studio and it contained the first planned central corridor. The last two years the central corridor happened as a result of other developments. This year the haunt was planned around the central corridor. The transition was made easier with the use of screws. I had yet to find three-inch screws, so the 2x4s were nailed, but the wafer board was screwed to the frames to form single sided panels.

The 900 sq. ft. classroom contained my first bridge type effect. The trap door bridge was 16' long and 4' wide. Its ascent and descent ramps were 8' long. The bridge was 3' off the ground with a trap door centered in front of the descent ramp. The door was hinged facing the open side towards the customer, had a creature attached to its underneath and was chained to keep it from flopping open more than 30 degrees while being operated.

The bridge was enclosed in white fire proof plastic, had a protected entrance and exit. Fog filled the enclosure. The creature had Red LEDs for eyes. As the customer approached the trap door it would pop up, the creature would bounce around and they could see its glowing eyes. A slow pulsing strobe was set at 90 degrees to the bridge and illuminated one side from the outside. The entire fog filled bridge would glow briefly. Walking through the enclosed bridge was a terror filled treat. The fog limited vision, the strobe would blind you, a sound track of rushing water filled your ears and a trap door rattled ahead with something horrible trying to get out, who could ask for anything more?

This was my first and last trap door. It failed. I had a 12-year-old girl and her friend operating the effect. I had no idea how strong two little girls could be. One night they broke the chain loose, the trap door flopped up and over and became a hole in the floor. The girls did not know what to do, they could not pull the door back over from below, so they decided to wait for the customer to pass by. The customer fell through the hole, hurt her leg and I had \$145 bill to pay for emergency room x-rays.

I have seen trap doors in other haunts and they solved the problem by placing several very large chains over the trap door(s) as well as a path that did not require the customers to walk over it. We repaired the effect and it did not fail again. Because I was using children someone got hurt. They were not mature enough to do there job correctly. And yes they were told not to let anyone cross over the bridge if the door did not close properly. This was in reference to the creature's limbs getting caught in the door as it closed and was the reason for two people. One to fix the door while the other stopped the customers till it could be fixed.

This incident, and several other minor ones yet to come, planted the seeds for doing away with volunteers. Paid actors brought a different set of problems, but they did improve the safety and quality of the show. Age also became a factor. Maturity and responsibility are attributes necessary for producing a better show. I will never do away with young people. I have a couple of events where a child as young as six can take a six

six male to his knees. The big change to come was how to use children and what to expect. And much to my surprise, this information would apply to adults as well. Actor placement is a science. You must understand your show, what it is that you expect each scene/event to accomplish and the mentality needed to reach this goal.

My greatest achievement is a core group of actors capable of executing all scenes/events as well as performing security and maintenance duties. From this core it is easier to train new actors. Dedication in an actor is difficult to find. It is the number one attribute to look for. No matter shape, size or sex; dedication is what matters in a haunt. Dedication brings with it two other important attributes. Dedicated actors (no matter the age) tend to be more mature and responsible for their age.

## **Maze Craze One and Two, 1989**

As Lady Luck would have it, we added another location this year. A failing mall became our second location. We were afraid to move our haunt completely to the mall, so we opened two haunts. The school haunt was typical, no bridge, instead we built a large maze with two foot wide passageways. The maze had a four-foot wide exit corridor completely around it and many chicken exits to this corridor. But only one true way in and out. The maze contained three cubicles for actors to pop out. The advantage to two locations was that we could refer customers.

The mall location offered many advantages. First was 10,000 sq. ft. of space. It was so large that we could not use it all the first year. It provided us with shop, construction and much needed storage space. This was the first year that we painted all our panels. The color of choice was black (or is that lack of color?). The haunt was similar to the school haunt, in that the first half had actors and scenes and the second half was a maze. It did not have a central corridor. This would prove to be an error on my part. The choice for lighting was, little to no light. The sound system was your regular stereo speakers and turn up the volume. The new panels were all double sided.

This new location provided several new problems. All previous haunts had been built on carpet. The floor at the mall was concrete. The panels would slip and slide as customers bounced off the walls. We had to constantly walk the passage and realign the walls. The ceiling was white and made light control difficult, the solution was less light. This was bad for several reasons. Without areas of brightness, the dark areas were less effective. The sound was very uneven and because of the volume not much more than noise. Which was OK except for the fact that as you walked the path the sound would go from soft to deafeningly loud. It would be a couple of years before I solved this problem.

The year would be known as a learning experience. The facade on the mall exterior was black and white. The mall haunt was black and white (with droplets of red). We operated the mall haunt for the month of October, but the school haunt operated Friday and Saturdays only, except for the last weekend, then we were opened through Tuesday night, Halloween. The school haunt made as much money with its limited run as the mall haunt. The addition of the new haunt stretched our resources to the breaking point and created more stress than it was worth. The school haunt used all volunteers and the mall haunt had the first few paid actors.

No central corridor in the mall haunt made life miserable for us all. It was difficult to move from scene to scene. We could not easily leap frog ahead of customers on slow nights when we had few actors and we could not monitor what the customers were doing. Several couples managed to slip out of the haunt area into the empty space and find happy hiding places. This is one of the reasons a guy brings a gal to a haunt, get her all worked up, frightened, then comfort her (LOL).

'89 found new uses for haunt materials. The mall location became "Winter Wonderland" for Christmas. The panels were arranged to form walkways (they were covered with red and green convention taffeta), wafer board was painted to resemble cobblestone for the path, 100 illuminated Christmas trees were arranged along the path, white cotton bunting filled in the space between the walls and the cobblestone path to complete the illusion. The entrance was a magical ride in Santa's sleigh, which brought you to the Winter Wonderland trail. Customers would follow the trail to the first of three stages. The guide would ask the customers to be seated. Students would perform a comical seasonal production. When the performance was completed the customers would move on to the next stage and finally the exit. School literature was handed out along with mistletoe.

Winter Wonderland was not a financial success, but it was a school success. Out of this event a permanent theater was built in the mall and regular shows produced on Saturday and Sunday. This gave the students training in front of live audiences. The seasonal nature of the haunt business limits our income. Yes there are exceptions, but as a rule we make money one month out of the year. Finding alternative sources of income for our investment will help us all make a little more money.

## **First Parking Lot Haunt, 1990**

It was decided to move both haunts to the mall. The haunt inside would mirror the classic school haunt and be opened weekends only. Customers entered a replica of the bridge of the Starship Enterprise (Next Generation). It was a display, no scares here. The customers would pass through the operating turbo lift doors into the Tardis (from Doctor Who). A lightening display hung overhead and the theme music prepared them for being transported through time and space to the living room from Hell and the first series of scares. On the couch was the dysfunctional family, the distraction. Flying through the air came one of their children and as you tried to escape another child came at you from the fireplace. The path was a twisting one.

The dark path began to glow red, a large blood red shower, running water, shadow of girl being hacked to death and her parting the curtain. She would lean out, pleading for help. She was the distraction, another hacker was positioned on a platform above the shower, and he was already leaning out over the customers, waiting for his cue.

No one ever bothered to look up, till it was too late. The girl in the shower was wearing a nude body suit, the blood painted on and soap bubbles strategically located. The customers looked at her, the shadow of hacking and were totally destroyed by the scare from above.

Pace came into play here. After the shower, things slowed down. The wedding scene was mild and the passage scares almost comical. This all lead up to the dentist. This scene was played for laughs; the scare came from the opposite direction of the dentist. Our seven-foot creation slipped up behind the customers as they enjoyed the dental antics. The scare was nothing more than a startle, OOPS, something big is behind us, they would scream and run or was it run and scream. It was difficult to tell.

They were not able to run far. The path led directly into a room of massive fallen beams. No clear path, strobe lights and many blind spots for actors to pop out of, which they did. Once the customers exited, they found themselves in the largest haunt room I ever constructed. One scene, 1,000 square feet, 50 white trees in a landscape of white snow covered earth. A cobble stone path wound through the eerie strobe light landscape. A wooden fence outlined the path, which split in two at a fenced enclosure. Screams came from the fenced area. Customers could go to the right or left, but something very large seemed to be before them. It was a giant spider. More than eight feet in length, it would rise seven feet above the ground, its ten-foot long legs bowing beneath it. Suddenly it would drop back down onto the girl it was tearing apart. Customers would pause, the exit was clearly visible, they would chose a path to the left (or right, it made no difference) once the choice was made the spider would raise and lean over the path. Some would back up and take the other path; the spider would lean over it, too. Eventually, they would escape.

The indoor haunt was built around a central actor break room. Emergency customer exits emptied into this room and it had two exits to the outside. It allowed our actors to move from scene to scene and was a learning experience for central corridor development.

The outdoor haunt was larger, more than 6,000 square feet. It was one big black blob with some white trim. The press loved the indoor haunt and stated that the outdoor one was a waste of money. This haunt had two central corridors, as I had not figured out how to have only one central corridor. It was nothing more than a twisting path in darkness. Scene illumination was at a minimum because we were operating from a generator.

The building and fire department inspected both haunts. They had a one-page handout that I received when I applied for my temporary CO. I have not a clue as to what they were doing, looking for or expecting. The handout was common sense to me (at this stage in my development as a haunter). My personal observation was that they were on an information gathering expedition. We passed both inspections. The indoor haunt made more money, got better reviews and was more fun. The outdoor haunt had more customers exiting early. My conclusion was that more detail was needed. Customers appreciated set design and props. Several customers revisited the indoor haunt; to the best of my knowledge no customer visited the outdoor haunt twice.

## **Yo! Can You Swim?, 1991**

This year was memorable for many reasons, none of them good. I was talked into using a tent (something I will never do again). This 40x100 foot fabric disaster was a nightmare from the time it went up. I ordered a tent with eight-foot sides (my haunt panels were 4x8) and they put it up with seven-foot sides (standard tent configuration). So here I am raising the tent sides with my panels and creating another problem. When it rains the tent collects water. The interior tent poles are not in the customer path, but the outside perimeter ropes make emergency exiting a challenge. Are we having fun yet?

This year I was in collaboration with another person. He provided the haunt design (no central corridor), location, prop suppliers and we shared advertising for both haunts. Another mistake I will never make.

The location was an old amusement park parking lot. The city had some concerns about the fact that I was in the 100-year flood plane. Other than that it went smooth with the city. The fire inspection lasted less than five minutes and I would have missed it all together had I not noticed their car leaving. My helper let them in and then they were gone. The other person used the same basic location the year before and he gave me volunteer contacts. Another mistake I will never make, using someone else's volunteers.

This is going well. I have not even opened and I have learned so much. Oh, well, the props are delivered opening night after we have opened (a little late). The volunteers are less than reliable, but the customers come. The show is not its best, but Saturday night most of the props are in place and the show is getting better.

The show is making money and we are all set for Halloween week. Then comes the 100-year flood. It rains and rains and the haunt is under four feet of water the four days before Halloween. We are closed Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Thursday morning I arrive (I inspected the site midnight Wednesday and the water had gone up!) and all the water is gone. I sit in my car for a moment trying to figure out where it all went, then I begin not to care... a few moments go by and I realize that if I get my tail in gear, I can open tonight.

So much for good news. Everyone has written the haunt off. I can find no one to help. Then I remember a news story about the homeless. I drive to downtown Dallas to the area of the report under a bridge and hire twelve homeless people. I drive straight to a food place and feed them all. These folks worked their tails off. Cleaned the haunt, which was full of mud and other debris, and we opened on time.

Now all during the day the weather is great, an hour before opening a blizzard arrives, driving rain, sleet and hail. It is so cold that wet things inside are cracking. After all of this we still did a little more than 1,000 people. My actors were the homeless people. They did an excellent job and I have sense used other homeless people as actors with great success.

This haunt was the first time that I used the 70-volt sound system. It was great. I installed battery back up emergency lighting and created the final event (last scare in the haunt) that I still use in my current haunt. I built electronic effects, a cross fader, simple fader and audio effects generator. Loop audiotapes were used for the first time and I began to have reservations about masks for actors.

The flood damage did not come to full light until the haunt was taken down. Many items had to be thrown away. Some items were washed away. The port-a-pot floated about a block away. The month contained one more exciting event. The police

chased a car into our parking lot. The occupant jumped out and disappeared. They shut us down for about twenty minutes, till they caught the guy. We had more police cars, ambulances and fire trucks than I could count. One saving grace is that we had a police officer for security. With him on our side the transition from haunt to search area to haunt went smoothly. What we go through for the sake of our craft.

## **Mutual Beneficial Affiliation, 1992**

Last year is still in my memory, engraved. Another problem '92 had been that the haunt was too far from the school for volunteer support. I approached an amusement facility. They had go-carts, two arcades, paddleboats and more. They were very interested, but could not say yes or no because they were in the middle of a management change. About this time, an indoor go cart track opened a mile from the school. They welcomed us and saw an opportunity for joint promotion. The city threw us a new curve with a parking restriction, which we blew out of the park with permission for parking from our neighbors.

This haunt was a new design. No tent, a central corridor that ran from one end of the haunt to the other and outdoor elements mixed with the indoor ones. I developed my core group of actors from this haunt season and began to experiment with room designs, effects and scare concepts. The first week was devoted to trying this, then that and then rearranging entire scenes, walls and all. It was fun this year, we had a blast.

The first event was a walk through ghost. The customers walked through an air-powered fog that a live image was projected onto. Customers entered the room and were held in a jail cell. On the other side of the bars was the ghost. She would talk briefly and then reach out opening the jail door; the customers would exit the cell walking through her image. It was a great effect, except that Castle Dragon (the Haunt was named this year) was portable and air currents ran through it like water through a sieve. After its success on opening weekend I had to remove it, because the air currents competed with the closed air system and destroyed the illusion.

It was replaced with a 20Kcps tone generator. Customers entered the darkened cell, were left in the dark for a brief moment, the sound was activated and nearly every group had at least one person react to the unheard sound. The cell door would open and the sound was discontinued. This effect remained for the season. It was briefly visited by its sister effect the 100 watt 20cps tone generator. This caused some extreme reactions. One person got sick and threw up, others would not travel down the hall and still another looked to faint. This experiment lasted about an hour one evening and has not been repeated.

The wall made its debut this year. It was one of those brainstorms that created problems a plenty. Customers would enter a room with a platform. On the wall behind the platform was a sign that said "Creature on Break". As soon as a customer reacted to the sign the wall the sign was on would spin around and reveal the monster. The original platform was square. Customers went out of their way to stumble over it. White posts added to the front stopped this and in latter years I cut the platform into a half circle and removed the posts. It remains to this day as one of the best effects I ever designed.

Edgar Allen Poes' story of the Pit and the Pendulum inspired my next creation. The pendulum was twelve feet high. It was the first outdoor event. The blade was an

eight-foot arc swinging over the body of a lovely young lady. The room contained a rack where additional tortures were being conducted. Customers had to walk between the two events, but the scare came from above.

I had fun the summer before the haunt opened. But I was not able to complete all my creations. One item not installed but nearly completed was the Lava Floor. It contained cracks of Plexi glass looking like red lava illuminated from below. Skull Cavern was only partially installed. I had visited a haunt the year before that had great caves and caverns. The creator told me there was no way to make something like it portable. My portable Skull Cavern has grown each year and even now in its state of disrepair awaits its rebirth for 1999. It was not used in 97 or 98 due to budget constraints.

The raceway and the haunt worked together promoting the event. We created package entertainment deals for customers that wanted to go through the haunt and race. The volunteers from the school kept costs down and the giant quad searchlight brought in the crowd.

## **Rowdy Guests, 1993**

The raceway was attracting rowdy guests. Year two at the same location. The city had a major cow over the parking. I have yet to understand the reasoning behind it. We never caused any crowd problems, traffic difficulties or emergencies. We had more parking than we could eat, but because the parking lot was not part of the property for the permit it could not be included. This technical problem would make this our last year with the raceway. Which was not all bad, because as I mentioned, the crowd they attracted was becoming rowdy.

The lava floor went in this year along with a 90% completed Skull Cavern. A metal roof was added to the castle and two scenes with twelve-foot ceilings. The pendulum was now inside (the actors would be dry this year) and the Lava Floor filled the other twelve-foot ceiling space. An under ground fog system in the cemetery used fog juice of my own formulation.

A scene that is now a castle staple was created this year. It is known as the guardroom. It was so intense that customers trying to retreat from it hit the exit door hard enough to take it off of its hinges. It is simple. But complex. In a nut shell customers must pass between a little girl in a jail cell and a large man (no mask) sitting at a table. The reality is that the event is much too complex to describe here and may become a topic for another column.

The spider web from last year is moved and improved. It is lowered to the point of forcing most people to crawl near its end. Its path has changed and many nasty things are caught in its web. Customers have to bump into the objects trapped by the web. They are of many different textures, shapes and sizes. The coffins in the cemetery use an oil based fog system. The air driven device is placed inside the coffin; fog builds up and seeps out of the cracked lid. A red light in the coffin adds color to the fog. The oil foggers cost pennies to operate and the compressed air is used to blast customers and operate other air driven effects.

The fire department requires a smoke detection system this year. It includes horns and strobes at the exits and two fire pulls. The fire department wanted the fire pulls in the customer path. I explained to them that this was not wise, as customers might pull

them for fun. I held my ground and eventually got my way. The fire pulls were installed in the central corridor, one at each end. Low-level exit signs that would illuminate if the alarm sounded were required, also.

New exit doors were built for this year. Last year a curious thing happened. The building inspector thought that the doors marked exit were only directional signs and he asked me to pop out the arrows. He did not realize that they were exits because the doors were painted like the walls. This year marked a new design. Exit doors were painted to look like doors. The exit signs were clearer and the low-level exit lights were added.

Another growing concern of the fire department was extension cords. I solved that problem by constructing a low voltage lighting system. The castle no longer had any 110vac inside and we did not have to worry about being fried every time it rained. The central corridor was refined and was proving its value. On the slow nights five actors can run the whole show and the customer has no idea that the same people are scaring him over and over, because we have time to change clothes between scenes. And yes, on these nights we use masks (oh what a terrible admission, help!).

One event stands out for this season. It brings to the forefront ones customer base. On a busy Friday night a customer pulled a gun on one of my actresses. Scared the hell out of her. We cut him off within seconds and sensing that he was trapped he exited and ran like a bat out of hell. Our security is good, but there was no way we could prevent a customer from doing something stupid. We responded incredibly fast. The girl was rattled, but because we were there by her side in seconds she settled down and finished the season. The incident played out like this. The girl spins the wall around and tries to scare the customer. The customer pulls his gun and approaches the girl who is on a raised platform. She yells (not the haunted house type of yell) and has another actor by her side before her mouth closes. The customer backs up and looks around. Emergency lighting comes on; all sound and effects stop while the customer is still in the room where the event began. Security is blocking his progress forward and a police officer can be heard talking on the radio and asking for back up (love those police radios, don't care how much they cost per hour, one officer is worth twenty security guards). The customer turns around the way he came and takes the first exit. My staff, because of the gun, does not pursue him but he runs like we are hot on his trail.

## **Fall Festival, 1994**

I had a friend in tight with a city government. His club was one of the groups that rented the castle for a dinner party. They all had a grand time and he had an idea. Produce a joint production between the city parks and recreation department (which used to produce a Halloween haunt and hay ride till their own fire department made it too expensive for them to continue) and the school. We were looking for a home and a better crowd, a match made in heaven (ha!).

This would be my first Fall Festival Production. I convinced over 100 vendors to rent space, a carnival to set up rides and provided continuous entertainment on Halloween weekend. The event was a success in that it lost no money. We would have made money if not for the \$8,000 fire sprinkler system we had to install. It should have cost us about \$4,500, but the fire chief changed his mind on what he wanted installed. I now own a

sprinkler valve system for a ten-story building. This could be funny, if not for the fact that the system he designed was not adequate and I had to modify it. He wanted a bell on the valve. If a sprinkler head were activated, the water traveling through the pipe would mechanically ring the bell. This was great, except who could hear the bell? As I suspected, the bell could not be heard over the screams and sounds of the haunt. I added a pressure switch, which was directly connected to the fire alarm system. This covered me if a sprinkler head went off and if something happened to the systems water pressure.

Castle Dragon has changed very little. Experiments continue during the first week of operation. Most of them are failures and are removed. We added a hayride and it did very well. It was designed for family entertainment and not too scary. It became very important as early in the season before the Fall Festival I discovered that the drainage in the park where we had set up was not very good and the park flooded. It did not flood where the castle was, but the road to the castle flooded. We used the hayride wagons to bring customers to the Castle and the hayride.

Political affiliations with public officials are, at best, fickle. I will have to relate the story in a blind way to protect the guilty. Income from the hayride and the castle went to three charities, the acting school and two service organizations. One provided actors for the hayride and the other actors for the haunt. Members of these organizations were prominent citizens in city government, like the mayor. These people became, er, difficult. And they were prone to pitching unique fits. An example: the castle was open and customers were making their way through it. The cemetery fog machine ran out of fog juice, the ranking volunteer came screaming down the central corridor that he could not work under these conditions, without the fog. He was very vocal and not alone. I could present more examples, but suffice it to say, volunteers (these were adults) bring with them a unique set of problems.

The weekend before Halloween I was witness to a potential crime. The reality is that we will never know the what and/or the why. This was the weekend that customers were riding wagons to get to the haunt. Three teenage boys entered the haunt. One was celebrating his sixteenth birthday with his older brother and a friend. The birthday boy was to have his day celebrated by being bashed into walls, doors and props by his brother and friend. Security was tailing them by the second scene, but several guests were between security and the three boys. It seemed all in fun, but security followed the boys out of the castle. Once outside, the birthday boy passed out. Because the guests were being ferried back and forth via wagons, all the guests in the group were trapped waiting for the next wagon. As the incident developed it appeared (at first) that the boys were claiming that he was injured inside. Again my hat is off to the police. My officer called for back up. In a matter of minutes flashing lights and sirens enveloped the haunt. The sirens ceased, but the flashing lights continued for over thirty minutes. The officer was busy. He was taking statements from all the customers that witnessed the boy's antics. The family of the boy *happened* to be on site, and they were delivered by wagon ASAP. At first it seemed that they were about to claim injury via the haunt. This was shot down by the officer. They were surprised (?) to learn that their son was injured by his brother and friend. They became very quiet when the officer mentioned witnesses, not haunt employees. The boy regained some awareness before he was transported to the hospital.

I am sure that had I not had a police officer as security that we would have been sued. I did not think to interview customers, I was too busy controlling the crowd and

arranging for transportation. The radio police officers carry proved to be valuable and save time. Yes, we had a cell phone and two-way radios for communication. But, when a police officer makes a call on his radio, the reaction time is quicker. A potential disaster was avoided because we were in control and there was a police presence before and during the incident.

Another fun thing happened this year. For those of you that have purchased my books, this will help you to rest a little easier about my designs. Hail and a twister preceded the storm that flooded the park. It ran along the power lines about two hundred feet from the castle and took out several transformers. I was in the castle during the storm. The castle came through without much more than a few hail dents. What makes this funny is that as soon as the storm passed the cities building department truck (one of those four door diesels) pulled up to the castle. There were six employees inside. They rolled down the window and looked at me and the castle with disbelief. Money exchanged hands and they drove off. I recognized one of them as being the one giving me grief over the design and telling me that the building was not safe. He, who laughs last, laughs best.

## **Fall Festival Flop, 1995**

As usual, I screwed up. The '94 fall festival production went off so smoothly that the city decided they could run it. Little did I know? Anyway, I proceeded under the assumption (we all know what the word assume means) that they produce an event at least equal to my own.

On this I based my plans. I built a brand new haunt for little kids, expanded the castle and purchased \$8k in props. Part of the castle improvement was a new grand entry and pier and beam floor. Castle Dragon was closer to its finished form. The fire department that cause me so much grief the year before barely looked at the castle and did not bother to test the fire alarm or sprinkler systems. The building department, however, produced a parade through the castle.

Unknown to me something else was happening. Powers at be within the city had decided that haunts were bad. These are the same people that produced an annual event for ten years. The staff necessary to produce the fall festival was never assigned. The event was not produced. The driving force behind my demise was the Soccer Association. It seems that they decided that they did not want to share the use of the facility with a haunt. This park was huge. The entire soccer facility was in the rear of the park. Had its own parking and could not be seen from the front of the park, where I was. One week before October I was informed that the city was canceling the event. Even with this four vendors and the carnival showed up. The city did all in its power to make my life miserable. No Parking signs were erected everywhere. Orange temporary fencing surrounded the haunt and the parking lot. And they locked the park gates at 10pm.

They went through a stack of locks. It seems that they kept disappearing. But not even that helped. The season was a disaster. The haunt for kids had one paying customer. The castle itself made less than it made the year before. But on the bright side I had many cool props, ahhhh!

The Pumpkin Patch Kidz (kids haunt) was great. The building had a 24' wide by 24' tall pumpkin for its front. Once inside you watched a special effects video, had monster make up demo and met the Pumpkin Patch Kidz. They were kids with pumpkins for heads in Halloween costumes. Admission included a photo with your choice of Kidz. We had only one paying customer, but we had many birthday parties. Over all it was a success. Considering that the event was canceled.

The carnival operator was not a happy camper. No one had told him anything. He arrived, set up and opened before he realized that something was wrong. He pulled out early and sent his big rides to other events.

No season goes by with out some fun little thing happening. Because of the haunts exposed position to the public, I spent the nights inside its haunted confines. I notified the police that I was doing this, but... Sunday night someone knocking on the front door of the castle awakened me. I looked up and saw flashing red lights everywhere. The castle appeared to be surrounded. I got up, dressed and opened the front door. OK, I never said I was bright, basically kinda dim, for the most part. Anyway, spotlights converged on my location as well as long pointy things. I was told to get on my knees, put my hands on my head and lace my fingers. I hesitated and began to speak, but I'm not that dumb, and did as I was told. In the distance I heard a voice shout, "He's the wrong color". It seems that they were chasing someone and they thought he was hiding in or under the castle. They apologized and I wobbled back into the castle, where I tried to sleep. Of all the things that went wrong in '95 I could not imagine things getting worse, gee, all I had to do was wait till '96.

## **Majestic Ranch, 1996**

This was the best deal yet, a horse ranch of about 60 acres. The castle was situated deep within and held a commanding view from its hill. Castle Dragon has reached its final form. The raised steel roof was sloped for drainage. The sprinkler system hung from it, instead of being positioned on the walls. The ranch would set up the hayride and I would direct the actors. A good advertising budget was split between radio and newspaper. The guy seemed sharp, we agreed on what to do and we did it. And if you believe that that is the way it went down...

The fire department arrives for its inspection and discovers that they made a mistake. The fire hydrant is too far away and they will not let me open. I said, "Excuse me, you guys approved these plans". They said sorry. Well, I had spent a small fortune on installing a fire alarm and sprinkler system, only to be forced to remove the roof of the haunt so that I could open. It seems that there was some confusion as how to classify the haunt once I removed the roof. By the time they make a decision, October was over and I was gone. Removing the roof got me open, but I had no working safety systems in place, other than fire extinguishers.

The advertising did not seem to be working. Then I discovered that we were on a country station, too late. I walked up to the main entry area and noticed a DJ set up with a station van. We were doing a radio remote and not one person was responding.

But my problems were only beginning. The ranch folks did not like the way the hayride was set up. They took over, added real guns firing blanks and dangerous horse

stunts in the dark. They became careless in the loading - unloading procedure. A horse drawn wagon rolled over a log, displacing the driver and the wagon rolled over him. There were more than 1,000 people on site at the time. We gave out refunds to more than 900. During the incident no new customers that arrived stayed to purchase tickets. Not till all the customers on site during the accident were gone did we begin to make money again. Our business was zero on the Saturday before Halloween for an hour and a half.

The ranch tried to make off with all the money. Although I made not a dime, all the actors were paid. The ranch did manage to make a little extra; they stole my steel roof.

The wall was especially effective this year. The guy that did it the year before was back and he wanted to do nothing but the wall. He was awesome. He was too awesome. One Thursday night he comes to me and says that he has a problem. I walk back with him and he shows me that a particular wall will not stay attached to the floor. I examine the wall and discover that the floor is more like a trampoline, it moves up and down. I close the castle, crawl under the deck and see one floor joist broken completely in two and another split nearly the same. I repaired the damage. My actor tells me that a group of four teenagers fell hard to the floor above the spot of the break. I had heard everything. Customers were now going through my floor.

The castle had another visit by a twister; this is Texas. Castle Dragon was built on the site during spring. After it was completed a major storm system crossed its path. Ranch hands witnessed the event. But the damage told the story. The castle was positioned among trees. The southern end of the castle had trees all around it. The twister hit the southwest end of the castle, picked up the building and set it back down. The large trees on either side of this path were ripped to shreds. These trees were huge, 30-40 feet in height. I know the building was lifted because several of the legs holding the deck up fell off. It seems that I forgot to screw them to the frame, OOPS. The back wall for a distance of 40 feet was pushed in two to three feet.

It took about one hour to reposition the back wall and secure it. Another twenty minutes to jack the deck and replace the legs. The greatest amount of time was spent on cutting the broken limbs and moving them from the exits that they blocked. The twister moved on, picking up an old car and flipping it around. One branch took out the phone cable, but that was a minor repair. I am exhausted and ready to quit the haunt biz.

## **Hawkwood, 1997**

Actually, there was a bright side to 1996. A friend told me of a new renaissance faire, Hawkwood. It was early July and I visited their site. They were not ready, but I saw tremendous potential. I had been trying to hook up with a medieval seasonal type operation for some time. My castle would fit nicely into a renfaire setting. At this same time I was noticing little things with my Majestic ranch guy that began to bother me. I seriously considered moving the castle for the '96 season, but the faire owners could not make a decision in time.

After the '96 season was over I contacted Hawkwood again. Could not get anyone to respond. Well, I was at the bottom of my barrel and scraping the bottom to dig

deeper. My personal life was a mess (divorce) and the haunt biz was looking none to good. I decided to sell Castle Dragon and look for a less painful career, er, hobby. October '96 through March '97 Castle Dragon was on the market. I talked with many potential buyers and was positioning for a sale when...

I got this email. It was from the *NEW* General Manager of Hawkwood. It seems that they were in a form of management turmoil. He never heard of the deal, with earlier management, to move Castle Dragon to Hawkwood. He accidentally received an email from my bulk mail server and responded. Within a few days we had a deal and Castle Dragon had a new home, a permanent location. My potential buyer snoozed and lost the deal. He really thought I was trying to jack up the price, because he was trying to get the price down by playing me. Oh well, the castle was a heck of a deal at \$100k.

The Hawkwood location was perfect. The 4,000 sq. ft. part of the building was to be in the parking lot. Only the Grand Entry portion would be in the forest. Of course I was broke, actually I was beyond broke, should have sold, but I think I have pointed out that I am not very good at business. And in reality had the bozo with the bucks ever ponied up the dough I would have sold it to him and built a new castle. With barely enough money to keep gas in my truck (it gets 7 miles to the gallon) I take my ball of string and lay the lines for the castles foundation.

Anything I can do that costs no money I do first. A few small trees and brush must be cleared, markers placed for postholes and the path in the forest connecting me to the faire grounds cleared. As soon as I get a few bucks I rent a posthole machine and sink 75 holes in one day. I cut scarp wood into posts and treat it with sealer. Whenever I find a buck in my pocket I purchase another bag of concrete mix and set another post. The construction process is painfully slow. Not because I am not busy, I am working 12 hour days on the site, but because it is only me. I am taking the castle down and putting it back up at the same time. Hawkwoods season is August through September and I am beginning to think that I will not make it.

In my haste I break one of my Lava floor panels. It will take several hours to repair it, so I decide not to install the Lava floor. Skull Cavern was to have a five-year life and it did. As if on cue it disintegrated while being moved, something else not to be part of the new location till 1999. I did not have the materials to complete the new floor plan. Because this was to be permanent location, I made many structural changes. The castle was still portable and could be easily removed, but it now had more structural members and a sturdier design. The writing was on the wall, it was in red and the blood was mine. I would not complete the castle in time for Hawkwood and I may not complete it in time for Halloween. The task I have chosen is suicidal. Then a miracle...

Out of nowhere I get an email from the local chapter of NERO (a live action role playing group LARP). They are willing to provide volunteers to help with construction in exchange for game time in the castle. Duh, this is a no brainer. They helped with the last of the posts and stayed with me till...

## **Out of the Mouths of Babes, 1997**

Nearly every weekend NERO had volunteers baking in the sun. Well, actually I started work each morning around 5am and stopped by 2pm. I would then move into the

forest and work on other projects till my body screamed. The deck came together rapidly. I could not complete the deck, but I had a plan. Once the deck reached the end of materials I began to erect the walls. Weather added to my problems. An incredible storm swept twenty temporarily braced walls from the deck. It took one day to repair the damage and another day to catch up.

The 4x12' panels were neatly stacked on the ground on top of scrap lumber to keep them off the ground. As I removed the next to last panel I heard a unique sound under the last panel. When I lifted the last panel and eight foot rat snake and I locked eyes. I gasped and dropped the panel, the snake did the quickest 180 I have ever seen and disappeared under the castle. I placed the last 4x12' on the deck and took a break.

The castle had 75% of its perimeter in place (no floor for the remainder). I began central corridor construction and completed the Grand Entry. My original idea for Hawkwood was to provide a walk through dungeon. Faire vendors were on site preparing their shops. Two little girls were playing in the forest and asked my permission to look around. I being the kind hearted fool that I am, said yes. While they were playing one of them said to the other "...this would make a cool labyrinth". Now there is an idea.

The castle was perfect for constructing a Labyrinth. I had many secret doors, panels and traps for my actors to use. It was somewhere during this time frame that I realized I was missing two thirds of my metal roof (\$1,200 I did not have). The good folks at Majestic Ranch helped themselves. Two weeks before opening I hired four workers to pour concrete for the fountain and walkways. This completed the area leading to Castle Dragons' Grand Entry. From the forest approach the castle looked complete, from the parking lot it looked like hell. Strange thing about customers, they thought it was two different buildings.

The central corridor reached 60% of the distance of the castle, the Labyrinth was near complete, roof rafters were positioned to receive what roof I did have and the roof was on the Grand Entry. The faire was laying the underground power lines and my electrical boxes were in place. I began installing the forest walk low voltage lighting system and built the archway entrance to the forest walk that led to Castle Dragon.

In order to raise money to complete the castle I sold the storage trailer that has been my lifesaver. I picked up the materials to complete the deck, central corridor and roof rafters. The castle would only have one third of its roof for Hawkwood.

It was the Friday before opening for Hawkwood. I see the light at the end of the tunnel and it is not the train. I will have one half of the castle opened as a labyrinth, the deck will be completed and the entire perimeter wall will be in place. OK, so I made a mistake, what's new? I was using a box knife to clean a tool. Like a good cub scout, I was cutting away from my self. Now here is something new. My left hand slipped off of the object and attacked the backside of the box knife, my arm lost. I sliced a six-inch long gash deep into my arm. How deep? I saw my bone! I jumped up, stood for a moment, planted my left foot as if nailed and did several circles (no lie, just like Curly). I was looking for something but I could not figure out what, then it dawned on me that I needed to protect my arm. I grabbed my clean after work T-shirt and wrapped the wound. Wandered up to the office, they called for an ambulance, which arrived as I was passing out.

The hospital staff was great. I was chattering like a magpie (one of those things

you do when things look real bad). The emergency room doctor was a lady and she had several of her interns on hand. My arm became show and tell. The bright side to this is that she had deadened the arm and I had turned my head away. I did hear the wonderfully detailed description of my arms anatomy as she invited the interns to look deep into *MY* flesh (where are ear plugs when you really need them?).

Not all the red on the deck is paint.

## **Open and Busted, 1997**

I am back from the hospital. More or less. My left arm is in a sling tied tight to my body. I am told to do nothing for two weeks. Oh well, I do take Saturday off. I putter around and work on my to do list. Sunday I pick up steam and Monday I am rockin'. I complete the perimeter and begin to extend the central corridor. Tuesday a freak storm takes down the perimeter I have put up. I get half of it back up and leave the rest. The castle is not ready to open. I work at a break neck pace and open Saturday, three hours after the park opens. The NERO volunteers arrive Sunday and the castle perimeter is in place to stay.

It is here that I create my persona as The Mad Hatter. I trade one of my books for my large red and white polka doted hat and become the character I am destined to be (or already am). The hat, a pair of wrap pants and my dragon shirt makes me difficult to miss. I bark at the entrance to my castle, enticing patrons to challenge the labyrinth. Each week I change the degree of difficulty, create new panels and unique ways for them to move. I provide a clue to those willing to listen. And as it turns out, the clue points the way out. Some customers, in their desperation to escape, scale the walls. Others give up and exit the way they entered. The labyrinth confounds over half of the customers. Those that do not give up ask for more clues and some are able to crawl into my mind (scary thought) and solve the mystery.

My customers love the Labyrinth and I think that I am really on to something. I make enough money to cover expenses, pay rent and purchase materials to complete the castle in time to be opened for Halloween the last two weeks of October.

The first task was to complete the roof. This done the castle interior was completed. Speakers, effects, lighting and props had to be installed before opening. Another deadline I missed. The castle was not ready opening weekend, but it did open. Arriving customers saw fog oozing out of the cracks in the walls of the castle, after purchasing tickets they entered the grounds and walked three hundred feet through an eerily illuminated forest to the Grand Entry of Castle Dragon. The first week I had a small cast of actors. We kept the customers guessing with quick changes. The second week the cast increased, business picked up and Halloween night the line was four hundred feet long.

Castle Dragon was missing Skull Cavern (a mini version was installed) and the Lava Pit (floor panels illuminated from below). New elements were added, but they were weak in presentation due to lack of time, help and money. The hall of knives was to be a backlight scene. Customers walked down a 16' hallway with various sharp objects on the wall illuminated with backlight. An actor (in a black set of clothes with hood) on each side would hold one or two knives against the wall. As the customers moved through the

scene the knives would seem to float towards the customers. Sounds great, no money for the backlight tubes. The storeroom was a series of crates the customers had to walk through. Air rams would rattle, move or pop the crates tops. Not enough time to install the air rams.

The scenes were modified in unique ways. The hall of knives became the suddenly appear scene. The actor in black would turn around holding a glow in the dark head. The crates grew legs and walked at the customers. This got laughs and caused some major scares.

My ad budget for 1997 was \$41. The good news is that I paid all my bills, made money and had a good time. I was back in the Halloween Spirit of Scare again. The castle had its good nights and its bad nights (not many of those). Halloween night was my money night. Till then I was not seeing black. The bottom line was that I no longer had to worry about where the castle was going to be or spend money on erecting it each year.

## **Three Big Mistakes, 1998**

Somewhere between sanity and insanity I jumped the tracks and landed in 'la la' land. This is to say that what I attempted to do this year was beyond nuts. For whatever reason, I felt secure and confident. I decided to cater to families on a scale larger than before. We built carnival games, scheduled dance and acting schools to perform, added food. Poe readings, fun costumed characters, monster make-up and magic. And this was during the day Saturday and Sunday. Saturday night I added a Rocky Horror Review and gross magic. The castle was the main event, but I added a terror walk.

My print advertising focused on the family events. This decision was made because I had no competition. Mistake ONE. Opening week I discover a major competitor fifteen minutes away. They are out spending me in advertising and the cast for their hayride exceeds my entire staff. The sad part is that it was all glitz and no show. The \$15 admission price included two haunts, a maze and the hayride. But the show was terrible. If I am lucky they will not be back for '99.

Mistake TWO. Opening Saturday night a customer openly solicits three teenage girls to work in a "Modeling Studio" (for those claiming to be naïve, this is another name for the prostitution business). He tells them that he works for me. This creates a disaster from which I do not recover. I cancel the Saturday evening entertainment.

Mistake THREE. I am not sure when I woke up, but at some point in time I realize that I had made another mistake. When I originally set the price for admission to the evening events, it was based on a castle only event. I added the terror walk and never changed my admissions price. So, I essentially doubled my overhead and retained the lower ticket price, ahhh!

The first two articles of my series detail more about this year. But they do not mention the falling out with Hawkwood management. They were under the impression that all the daytime customers were paying customers. That the children performing on stage were customers. When I turned in my report, they called me a liar. A cube of dry ice has better relations than I now have with Hawkwood. My relationship is deeper than I have let on, so now I will elaborate.

The first season of Hawkwood I was at Majestic Ranch, yet I found time to shoot a promotional video and give it to Hawkwood for free. While I was building the castle at Hawkwood I also undertook completing construction of one of their stages, even after I cut myself I finished work on their stage before I completed the castle. They were short on cash for some road improvements; I paid for eleven truck loads of tailings (\$495) and told them that I would deduct it from '98 proceeds. They were having problems with a dragon effect for their '98 stunt show. I worked with the staff to repair the effect and when it failed again, I took it upon myself to make the dragon work for each of the shows that weekend. This is the short list of help I have provided. Since my November meeting I have said less than a handful of words to the Hawkwood management. And now the search is on again. This time I am saving up to purchase my own land. Plans call for dual site operation while I install the infrastructure.

Is there a moral? Yes. I have worked with others 'off and on' in the haunt business. If I have learned anything it is that I will not be working with anyone in the future. It appears that the others that I have had relationships with were only interested in short-term gains. Get what you can get out of Corn and move on. The bright side to this is that I am still here and moving forward, that cannot be said for most of the rest.

## **Hell Hath No Fury Like A Woman Scorned, 1998**

Mad Hatter here, and welcome. I will be presenting a new column each week. Topic for the first few articles, The Customer.

Since 1979 I have seen many customers, all shapes, sizes, colors and reactions. To borrow from history "...you can scare all of the customers some of the time, and some of the customers all of the time, but you cannot scare all of the customers all of the time." As a tried and true fall back position my primary goal is to entertain the customer and whenever possible, give 'em a good scare. I would like to say that my efforts have been 100% effective, but alas it isn't so.

What to do? I hate the scene where the customer pitches a fit, demands his money back and rants about what a lousy show we presented. I have played this both ways. Early on I actually gave refunds. To my dismay the customer still badmouthed me all over, up and down the line. Therefore an unhappy customer is something to avoid, because no matter what you do after he is unhappy, you will accomplish nothing positive. And I no longer give refunds.

I have no magic answer on 100% customer satisfaction. In reality I do not believe it is possible. I have, over the years, reduced the number of complaints. As a matter of fact they have declined every year, 1998 we had two serious demands for money back and several people in departing groups that appeared to be disappointed. The true measure of my haunt is in those that take one of the twelve chicken exits before the final exit. 1998 was not my best early exit year, but it did come in number three.

1998 was a year for firsts. I actively promoted a daytime event for small children, and I lost my shirt. Both money back complaints came from daytime customers (families). It seems costumed fun characters, magic shows, free carnival games, make-up demonstrations, ghost stories and... .. it made no difference how hard I tried... I was paddling up stream in the face of Niagara Falls. True we pleased 99% of the daytime customers, but the two families we did not please stood out beyond belief. One woman

continued to call and leave messages into November. The other woman stood around the ticket booth for fifteen minutes (her husband waited in the car) with her children who began to cry. What a scene for newly arrived customers to view, one car pulled up and left. A Roanoke Police car (on routine patrol) pulled up and she left. This family of four paid \$20, they went to every show, toured the castle and stayed for over an hour. From what I was told this family had a good time. Both kids got free monster make-up and bags of candy.

So, why the fit? I have no idea. But from the beginnings of my passage in the haunt biz this had never happened to me before.

This begs the question (of course in hind sight) all things considered, knowing what you now know Mr. Hatter, would you now refund the ladies money? NO, I would not, maybe dig a big hole for her to fall into or arrange a kidnapping by an unfriendly UFO, but no money back. What has happened is that I am now in unfamiliar territory, dealing with different types of customers and I know not what has escaped from Pandora's Box. To say that I understand my customer base is not entirely true, but I thought I had a better Understanding than I apparently did, or do?

Do I have a lesson that I have learned? Not sure. 1999 was supposed to be an expansion of my family theme for Halloween. At the moment those plans have been scraped and the back up plans are slipping into place. I have invested heavily in costumes for little ones, decorations and props. I could build an entire haunt for children, but... Two major concerns: One, I lost money. Two, the happy ladies. Losing money is normal for me, being the biz wiz that I am, but a parent's rampage is a bit much for me. To see a grown woman, children in hand, making gutter trash look classy is more than I bargained for. The bottom line is that I was not prepared for this, and had no way to deal with it. It began small and slowly escalated out of control and beyond any and all reason.

Customers are income. We must please the majority. My operation is based heavily on word of mouth. These two ladies (early in the season) may have contributed to my poor attendance during the day.

## **Guilty Till Proven Innocent, 1998**

1998 was a year of firsts. During the day I was catering to families with small children. Ahh, but at night it was a different story. 9pm would bring out the new live shows. First a Rocky Horror Musical Review, then a gross magic show to entertain the crowd. We reached for a PG13 rating and may have stepped over a little. Opening weekend, Saturday night, in our open air theater the fun began. To me that evening appeared to go smoothly.

I was not able to watch all the shows, but caught bits and pieces. My job was to

circulate from event to event, watch the front gate and provide customer service. I noted the crowd reactions as they left that night. I noticed nothing unusual. No unhappy customers, the normal fun poking by friends of the group member most frightened and the comments about how it was better than last year and how much fun they had. No idea that all hell was about to break loose.

Sunday came and went, then Monday morning arrived, and with it a force five hurricane. I was under investigation for child pornography. I could get no straight answers, till a mom called me. It appears that a man solicited her two daughters and a friend to work in modeling studio, gave them forms and literature and stated that he was one of the sponsors of the event and had my permission.

Lets recap. I was producing a mature show featuring songs glorifying homosexuality, a magic show going where none has gone before and of course I had to be guilty. The Denton County Sheriffs and Lewisville Police Depts. were all after my neck. Unknown to me I had one defender. The local Constable knew better. He defended me and kept them from arresting me. By Tuesday I felt like crawling under a rock, canceled all evening live shows and did my best to discover who was responsible for my situation. Wednesday arrived and I was vindicated, in writing from the police. I felt a little better, happy endings in these things are rare.

The down side is that I invested heavily in the shows. The upside is that it never made the press, whew! I never was allowed to see the documents, nor did I ever discover who was responsible. The problem was resolved.

Or was it? The fact is that this occurred opening weekend, I had the rest of October to worry about whom? And again? None of my cast or crew had any idea as to who it could have been. This could happen to you.

The advantage that I had in this situation was my work with the local officials. The town of Roanoke Fire, Police, Paramedics and Constable Depts. My contributions and civic participation proved to be more valuable than I had ever imagined. The event was forgotten by all (except me) before Friday opening. My staff and crew never knew how serious it almost became and we cruised the rest of October unscathed.

If, indeed, there is a moral to this story it is...

- 1) If you ever believed things cannot possible get worse, think again.
- 2) Erase any doubt in your minds about how important community relations are.
- 3) And share your horror stories, so that we may all learn and be better prepared.

## **Hind Sight is 20/20**

Well, sometimes. As a child, just a mere 15, I found it amusing to scare the bee gee gees out of trick or treaters. My grand finale before going on to college was the porch with the working drawbridge. The little ones would walk up the bridge, ring the doorbell, the bridge would quickly rise, trapping them on my porch, the porch light would go out, scary music would fill the air and then the door to my living room would slowly open...

Halloween was not for me for the next few years. I went on to have some type of life.

Met my third wife in 1979 and she had the idea for a Halloween Haunt fundraiser for my acting school. The lunatic JB Corn was born. No need to mention that the haunt biz beginning my marriage also ended it, so I won't mention that.

For those that wish extreme pain I will describe my first haunt. It was fantastic, it was dangerous, it was deadly, it was insane, but I survived, and so did my customers, oh, well, most of 'em anyway. We had about 1,000 square feet. I wanted to charge \$2 per person, so I had to think of a way to give 'em their moneys worth. First, the customers came in two at a time and had to take off their shoes and socks. Next they walked through the swamp, a 2x6 framed pond with squishy worms and cooked spaghetti, and this was gross. A few turns then up on stage and into the cemetery, thirty bags of dried leaves, branches and of course tombstones, one of the graves had an actor, actually two did, the first actor drove the customers into the second, very effective. Now down on to their hands and knees, they crawled, then they became separated. Each was forced to crawl alone till a dead end, they were told to lie down, then the floor fell out from under them and they landed together on a bed. I may have missed a few points, but they got their moneys worth, had many repeat couples, wonder why?

In 1986 I went to the 4x8' reusable panel. I was still using 90-degree walls, but the path was less than 24" wide. It was not till 1988 that I began to use the 60-degree method. It was being used by area March of Dimes haunts. It was difficult to use. In 1990 I began to refine this design and develop the central corridor, which I have now refined and is a major key in safety and keeping actor costs way down. I can operate Castle Dragon with 4 people at a customer rate of 24 people per hour. True it does not sound like much, but when things are slow, and they do get slow, it is a nice feature.

The haunt was originally for fund raising purposes by my acting school, then \*\*\*\*\*. It was a fun way for the students to get involved, raise funds for projects and have fun. Now renamed, Castle Dragon, it is a commercial haunt.

My first attempt at a partner was a disaster, followed by two more attempts that became bigger disasters. It began to look like the smooth talkers wanted to steal all they could from me the creator. Creative people are cursed, we tend to believe in the pot o' gold at the end of the rainbow. The real stupid people are the ones that take advantage of us. A real quick example is Michael Flaherty. His production of River Dance set the stage for a musical revolution; he was fired on opening night in London by the investors who wanted control of the production. These idiots must be kicking themselves all over the place; Lord of the Dance has blown the entire world of dance light years into the future and grossed more money than a show dog can jump over.

Now I have no partners. And should you have money and think you can get my attention, think again. I wear the multiple knife wounds in the back well, my wardrobe conceals most of the damage, and the one thing I do not need is someone that thinks they are smarter than I am.

My word of advice for those insane enough to venture this way: stay away from the idiots

with the money; they are, for the most part, fools. Have no clue and cannot see the forest for the trees. They do not deserve any part of this business and have all earned my eternal disrespect. Harsh words, not near what my Marine Corp. training can evoke. Start small; look for partnerships that involve location. The best deal I have ever found is Hawkwood, many such opportunities exist. This is a deal where both need each other. You the haunt operator need a permanent location. The amusement park needs additional attractions to deliver to its patrons.

The show is the thing. Disney creed: Safety, Courtesy and the Show. Nothing else to be said. The customer must be safe, the employees must be courteous and the show must be fantastic. If you fail to deliver 100% in any category then you will fail, maybe not at first, but eventually. To make all this happen you have to have a good management team. Ahhh, there's the rub. Sounds easy, it is not. I have finally put in place all the elements for a Halloween Family Theme Park, and I have been doing this since 1979. Management is not something you go and buy, others have tried. Another quick example: For a brief moment we had an amusement park here called The Boardwalk. It came into being at an old abandoned park. I had an inside track and wanted to be a part of the creative side. I was told that my talent was not needed and my inside track came to a dead end. About a year later the park opened, my kids and I visited it opening day. I was not there ten minutes when I told my kids this place would not last the season, well, I was close, and it did not open for a second season. I would pass along what tipped me off, but that's another article. Suffice it to say, the Disney creed was not to be found, strike one, strike two, strike three and you're out.

A haunt is even more so. We are in the business of scaring the bee gee gees out of people. If a person feels no threat, he cannot be scared. Kinda conflicts with the Safety-first creed. Yes, No. The goal is to create a moment where reality is suspended and fantasy takes over. In that moment the customer can be scared. Sounds easy, he he he, it is not. Again I have been to many a haunt and wondered what they were thinking.

The pay off is eventually making it. It is not easy. It has been fun. No matter how bad the season or deep the knife wounds. I would trade none of it; the experience has been enlightening to say the least. As my business grows I have to give up more of the things I really love, like scaring people. Early on any given day when it is slow I can be found doing what I really do best, the timed scare. As things get busy I have to promote myself and turn the scares over to my staff. No one does it like me, and that is to be the case, you train them the best you can and when they make unauthorized changes you fire them. *I have fired an entire cast in one night.*

*I am not one to fool with on the Three Golden Rules.*

The creator of the haunt is the master. There can be none other. True you will have management in place, but the entire operation will run as the creator has set it or it will fail as the creator has set it. This is a cruel business. I suggest working for a haunt in the trenches for a season or two before taking the plunge. After all, it is a blood bath and we must watch our table manners.

## **Animation**

Into the fray I say, what me controversial, never after all would I bite the hand that feeds me, You betchum Red Rider, and the one that feeds you too. This animation thing has gotten way out of hand. The sad thing is that everyone thinks there so cool, they suck. I saw two good animations at the show. A talking shrouded skeleton at the Universal Studios booth and another talking seated skeleton at Boneyard Productions booth. Note I said good, I have actually seen better at Chuckie Cheese or Show biz Pizza.

OK, now to seriously backpedal a bit. Animations are cool, and they do have a place, but the cost AHHH. Now I do not count pop ups as animation's (and are they ever overpriced) I use several pop ups or pop downs or pop outs, you get the idea, a thing that goes pop and its there. That is not animation that replaces an actor doing the same thing over and over to the point where they begin to do it wrong. A pop up does it the same way every time (unless it poops). The animation's (and I use this word in protest) I saw were more for large area entertainment. You have a waiting area for "x" number of people, this group of people changes every half hour, you entertain them with a show featuring an animation or surround your waiting guests with simple animation's like the mummies (actually pop outs) at the Halloween Productions booth.

**KISS Keep It Simple Stupid**

I say this often. I have not said it near enough, loud enough or **LOUD ENOUGH**.

I am a distant voice blowing hot air in the distance, enough to launch a fleet of balloons. Yet, the industry has decided that what we need is another expensive, poorly done (my opinion) animation (more like one cell animation). As for simple pop ups no one should ever have to purchase one of these from a vendor. And yes their were some very cool pop ups. The Morris Evil Jack in the Box was one awesome looking prop, er, but did you notice the price. Lets see, one big box, painted, with hinged lid, mask and air cylinder, POP he's up and then he slowly goes away. No, not for that kinda money, nope, no frickin' way.

Of course then you have the elaborate pop up 55-gallon drum, LOL. So you say, but what if I need these. Then do it yourself. Once you have made your first pop up you will know exactly how overpriced they are. So you say, I do not know how. Then I say **WAKE UP**. Search the web, everything you could possible want to know is on the net, computer illiterate? I'll bet you have a friend who is literate on the net.

Animations are cool and fun, they offer production value for your customers. They are not the answer to making a haunt a success. Purchasing an animation is only the beginning, the scene it is in must be of a quality equal to or greater than the animation itself. With this in mind how is your budget going?

## **Creative Moods**

Creativity has different ways it affects people. Some become great artists, sculptors, carpenters, computer wizards, etc. It is difficult for one person to become proficient in all of the areas necessary to produce today's competitive haunt. Enter the haunt supplier. He creates that which you cannot and he charges you dearly for the

privilege of doing business.

I have seen many of these marvels of construction in haunts all over the \*\*\*\* area. They have one thing in common, over priced. Now it is true, charge what the market will pay. But, lets be serious, how many repeat customers are you going to have? Some of these suppliers are flakier than Quaker Oats, and others claim superior product as they deliver junk, if they deliver at all.

What to do? I get creative block. That is, I run head long into a brick wall and flop around trying to get past it. When I write, writers block; paint, painters block; er you get the idea. Most haunters have limited skills and/or specialize in one area. They have to rely on others (that they must pay) to fill in the gaps. Why?

Why indeed. What is happening is simple or maybe complex. When I became a haunter I relied on myself for everything. That has not changed for me. But, the average haunter sees what else is out there and he/she wants this and that ooh and one of those, too. This is not bad, but it becomes an obsession and the haunter loses sight of the goal. What goal? The one where I get to scare the bee gees out of folks. Two things happen when the haunter takes the path. One he begins to look like everyone else and two he must make more money to cover the investment in manufactured props.

Creative Moods are those that creative people get when they become creative. How can you expand your creative mood, extend your talents and create new haunt items to amaze your guests? Simple, do it yourself. You do not need to purchase fancy animations, wham bam super sonic lighting gizmos or custom music. You do need to expose yourself to opportunity.

Opportunity for creative moods and original ideas are all around us. But where around us? Everywhere! Places to look for creative inspiration are: Home Depot (lumber yard), Salvation Army (props and clothes), salvage yard (large weird looking items), Exhibit builders (set pieces and lumber), Performing stages, (theatrical productions save very few sets) and the trash can (there are more, but this will get you moving). I travel the alleys several times a year and pull treasure from the jaws of ferocious machines that would squish and mangle my find.

These trips provide my mind with roads to travel. I may start down one and end up somewhere else completely. So, who cares? An idea is an idea. It makes no difference what inspired you to create, it does matter that you create. You will discover that the money spent on one animation will buy more in your imagination than the animation will ever deliver for your customers. Skills limited? Unless you plan on standing in front of your haunt explaining to your customers how limited your skills are, no one will ever know. The customer only knows what you tell him or show him.

What skills are needed to become a good haunter? Passion is the main skill, a passion for the business. Because financial rewards (if any) will be fleeting. A true haunter is an artist that enjoys his craft. Carpentry skills are helpful and very basic. You are not building furniture. I have kids that can slap two sheets of OSB onto 2x4s and screw them together. Basic painting skills, like covering the panels with black paint. Want more detail? Purchase an opaque projector. Find something you like, project it onto a board and paint. Next level up is an overhead projector with transparencies made from your photo copier (my favorite). I am not an artist with paints. I need some guidance with lines, then its paint by the numbers. My creations are combinations of several photos. Once completed the finished product is my creation that does not

resemble any of the originals. Basic knowledge and respect for electricity. Do not use damaged wires and keep all wiring off the floor. Other skills may be added, but with the basic ones you can do a bang up job of scaring folks. The key is to find ways to extend/expand your natural talents.

Failure is what all-creative people fear. This is what keeps us from trying to accomplish something new and propels us in search of that something special from the haunt supplier that will make our haunt the best. Once we have the item we proudly point it out as if to point away from all that is ours/us. I have purchased items. I do not point them out, I do not say look at this, I do not count on them to save my haunt and I certainly do not have more pride for the purchased item than I have for my own creations. It is not wrong to purchase items. It is wrong to do so at the expense of your own creativity.

There is no shame in asking for help. Many haunters are willing to share ideas and answer questions. I purchase skeleton kits. It would be insane for me to sit down and sculpt the human skeleton, then create all the molds and cast each part. It is easier to purchase a raw unfinished skeleton. To this I add my imagination. Once complete it is my creation. It is those that feel they must purchase a skeleton that has been painted, clothed and artistically completed, that need to realize that they are placing unfair limits on themselves.

## **CrEaTiViTy ?**

Having survived another season is one of life's little miracles. I have been doing this professionally since 1979 and a yard haunter beginning in 1961. So What? Hmmm Let us examine the creative process, at least my creative process. I have to be in the mood, the right mood, whichever mood that may be for whatever it is that I am working on. I may need to work on displays, but the mood I am in keeps from them and maybe towards lighting or sound.

### *Side Bar*

Now I realize that there are people in business as haunters. These people are not necessarily creative, they hire the creative ones, pay them and semi-control them. For them the bottom line is everything. Not that they may not have a good time or enjoy what they are doing, they are not creative.

### *Back on track*

Me, I live to create. I have created scenes; events, effects and more that have never been seen by anyone but me. Oh, some of my close friends have seen parts of them or all of some, but the point is that the public, my haunt customers, has not enjoyed these creations.

For the most part the fault has been mine, no permanent location, lack of funds to increase haunt space to include the new creations and lack of time. 1993/4 were to be good creative years I had funds I had time I had space I... I had to purchase a sprinkler system.

My mood went to hell in a hand basket. Couple this with bad deals and business decisions and, well its 1998 and I am still trying to create.

I am what one would call a one-man show. Not by choice, just am. So I make all the

decisions, advertising, marketing, promotions, hiring, firing, ticket booth, and security... I have no idea how things got so far out of hand. All I wanted to do was to scare the hell out of folks. Actually "Entertain" them. That is not to say that I/We do not accomplish our creative goal, it's that it never pays for itself.

The problem with the one-man show is, duh, one man.

Or is it?

Education is a great part of my haunt adventure. And some of this I have shared with others through my books and videos. And with all that I know (or think I know) I know very little. I am always learning and more than willing to learn. The price for this is the many names others use when referring to me. A reward I accept. But there is more that I can learn, except for time and distractions.

Distractions. DISTRACTIONS.

Of all the distractions the greatest are the building inspector and fire marshal. These people have not a clue. Their education stopped as soon as paranoia set in. The words haunted house turn them into jelly fright-feared idiots worrying first about their job and second about the municipality they serve. Whenever a haunt receives bad press, it spreads like wildfire. The original information is so twisted; that by the time it makes the loop the originator recognizes it not and thinks it is a new event to be resounded.

Fear. FEAR. Or is it Paranoia? PARANOIA?

To say that nothing has happened is foolish, but to what extent happened and how much truth in the telling of the happening? Truth has a strange new definition, thanks to our Prez of hide and seek with the cigar. This new meaning of the word truth is what the person claiming to be true believes to be the truth, is indeed the new truth. That is to say, there was a haunt fire, 20 people died; I will not have a haunt in my jurisdiction, because of this.

My creative process has suffered greatly. I am unable to deal with these fools. For fools they are, if for no other reason than that they are uneducated, misled and lied to. My solution was to leave the jurisdictions of all municipalities, is that the right decision?

What part can education play in the decision making process? How to go about this?

One small step is IAHA. An organization that is trying to bridge this gap. If you do not believe there is a problem then consult your relative the Ostrich. Or better yet your distant cousin the Dinosaur. IAHA is not out to wreck the industry. And as in all politics I am sure some members have agendas, so what? Especially if the greater agenda is a stronger industry that becomes a respectable industry.

I have gone from being the city showplace for how a haunt should be done, to being told to get out of town by the same person. One year the building department and fire companies gave praise, the next not even a kind word sideways. Don't think this can happen to you, cool.

## **Process Of Creativity**

The creative process is different for each of us creative types. I have been in haunts where it was obvious to me that a single mind ruled and only it had input. This inhibited the haunt from becoming as good as it could. Then on the other side of the coin is the haunt where there is no apparent theme and complete lack of control. Now that I have a permanent location I can invest more time in improving my haunt, the intensity of its scenes and increasing the quality of my actors.

One haunt I visited in '98 had such poor control that it was dangerous and the actors were completely out of hand. Four times in this haunt actors that were determined to get a reaction out of me touched me. This jump up in your face, block my path and demand I react is Stupid and Dangerous.

One of the things I like about my haunt (Hey, its my article) is the individuality of its progressive creativity. I have a core group of actors. They return each year and (for what ever reason) prefer to do the same event over and over. Early on in the season they get to play and do other things, but at crunch time they go to their favorite scenes and work them.

My haunt flourishes on improvisation and before you say yours does too, pay attention. Improvisation is much more than making it up as you go along. It is the ability to work within certain parameters and to excel. It is teamwork. As the creative director of my haunt I set the parameters, provide the props, sets, music, lighting and create the customer path through the scene. I, also, use the natural talents of my actors. And unlike many haunts I have visited, I do use real actors.

What follows is a radical example of my creative style. I present this example to suggest to others ways to achieve depth in their attractions. In March of '98 I began training a new batch of younger performers. A few of these had worked with me before and knew that I was up to something. The training came in the guise of The Midnight Movie "The Rocky Horror Picture Show". I provided all the props, effects lighting, soundboard and other misc. items. The troupe grew and the show became a major success and is still running. The troupe changes as do we all. These performers played a major role in the Halloween production, but they were not done.

I was preparing them for much more, Murder Mystery Dinner Theater, Corn style. Saturday December 12 is the most interesting and challenging event to date. We were hired to do a Company Christmas Murder Dinner Party. I use a scale of one to ten in levels of intensity for designing the event. I explained the scale to the Bankers that hired us. At first they ordered a safe five, conservative, but the next day they changed it to a NINE. I explained that the only thing that does not happen in a Nine is the 'F' word and nudity, that all else is fair game. They said OK. (As to what it is that I do, I will not reveal, but suffice it to say that one couple left the room during the murder sequence and did not return)

The creative process moves into full gear. I needed a cast of eight. I created stereotypical characters and cast accordingly. Each actor was given an extreme to play, which other characters it could interact with, relationships to these characters and props.

The scene. Actually this event began two weeks before the dinner. Rumors were started via telephone calls, memos and special delivery packages that their company was to merge with another company. The new owner would be at the Christmas Party. Employees had to complete a survey (important to our development as this information was used to select which of the employees were to have evidence planted on them). By

the party the buzz was considerable. In a post show interview I learned that only two employees thought something screwy was going on, several others refused to believe it, but more than half fell for it hook, line and sinker.

The guy taking over the company and his wife attended along with his secretary and bodyguard. The guy was murdered at the end of dinner, in front of everyone. Santa happened to be a cop making some extra money and eventually solved the crime. Along the way the cast of eight worked singularly and as a team. Each was responsible for furthering the plot line and being their character, however, each was also responsible for creative initiative. This vehicle materialized as interruptions of the investigation. We had five musical numbers during the show that paralleled the plot, shed light on who might have done it and thoroughly embarrassed many of the guests.

When the event was over the guests had cheered, jeered, applauded, laughed and turned several shades of red. The original spontaneous creative bits inserted by the cast made the show. You see, this entire event was unscripted, rehearsed once as a walk through and then executed. The detective kept the show on track and provided cue lines for planned events, but the inter-reactions were as real and natural as could be. None of us had any idea what any one of the others was going to do, so when it was done we were really reacting as if we had never seen it before, because we had never seen it before.

So what you say? I enjoy a live audience. It is the most fantastic thing to work with. It is one of the reasons I look forward to October each year. But most haunts abuse this honor, they treat customers as dollar bills only, deliver a by the book show and move on. Creating situations where the customers are treated individually and given a show scene by scene for them is more fun for my cast and me. True during crank through this is not always possible, but it is a goal. Using an individuals name in a group is tried and true, but how many actors change what they are doing in a scene as they see that it does not work to something that does? Or, they see that it is working and modify it to make it more intense? Haunts that I have visited are not fine-tuned; they are (for the most part) coarse and cater to the uneducated customer. Competition is increasing and an improved show presented by the actors is now required, if you wish to survive.

I heard more negative comments about my competition this year than ever before. True some of these people may have been trying to be nice, but I worked the gate, I watched them enter and exit and I talked to more than 70% of my crowd. The in your face, yell and scream, blood and guts, chain saw and chains are fine for the screamers. What about the rest of your audience, don't they deserve more bang for their buck?

## ***HAUNT BIZ, NOT!***

Entertainment, what? Yes, I am in the entertainment business. WHAT? JB Corn is in the entertainment business; I thought he was in the haunt business. NO, you may be in the haunt biz, I am in show biz, I aim to entertain. Of course we may go about this differently in a haunt. One of the few places where the goal is to make the customer feel unsafe, in one of the safest over regulated buildings on the planet, in order to scare the bee gee gees out of them. And no, I have no explanation for this.

My actors often remind me that we are in the business of scaring people. One will come up to me and relate an exciting experience he had when scaring a customer. Seldom do I have an actor tell me about the many customers that he does not scare. And even more seldom do they tell me about ‘entertaining’ a customer. My core actor team is different, they tell me about the ‘entertaining’ of customers, they pride themselves on their ability to quickly size up a group and cater to their wants/desires/fears. They act as the ultimate distraction and set the group up for ‘future scares’.

*“Flash Back”* In my early haunt days I would visit as many of the area haunts as I could each October. As my haunt became more of a task I had to visit haunts before they opened for lights on tours. In the late 70s and early 80s safety was of very little concern. But we did have fun. The problem was we stood in line for an hour or more, and then walked through the haunt in fifteen or less minuets... and that was it, nothing else to do, except to trek to the car, load up and blindly do it all over again, which we did... over and over and ... well.

More haunts are entertaining. And making their haunt more than a haunt by making it a destination. A haunt destination has entertainment value to offer the customer. It may have a carnival, musical artists, stage shows, etc. I produced a Fall Festival for a city in '95 & '96. It included a full size carnival (big rides), craft booths, two stages, tents, talent show, costume contest, ghost stories, grand illusions, petting zoo, face painting, two haunts, hay ride, food, games and more. Entertaining with the stand-alone haunt may be a bit more challenging. Then again it may not...

When I first started in the haunt biz, it was not a biz, it was, er, uh, well, it was on a lark. Spur of the moment kind of a thingie. OOOhhh lets do this as a fundraiser, it is easy. HA!!! Little did I know what I was getting into? My background is TV/Film producer/director. Eventually the two merged and created the very mild mannered, easy going, unopinionated person you have all come to love (lol).

The reality is that I have developed opinions. I have made all the mistakes that there are to make and even some that you cannot even begin to imagine. A book the size of War and Peace could not contain my mistakes. This knowledge I offer you. I AM IN THE ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS and if you pay close attention you will/are too.

Halloween and horror in general fascinate us all. Different cultures approach life/death in different ways. A funeral can contain tears and black; celebration and music; burial under the family house or consumption of the deceased's ashes or flesh. Many cultures have celebrations in the fall around our traditional Halloween time. I am not here to investigate this but to exploit it. It is the fears of man that make the haunt biz possible.

In 1990 I built two Haunted Houses. Haunt one inside a mall, many scenes with elaborate sets. Haunt two in a parking lot, black as pitch, little detail, and lots of fog.

1990 was a season of learning for me. Both haunts did well, but the indoor haunt, opened Friday and Saturdays, made more money than the parking lot haunt did for the entire month. The Indoor Haunt customers appreciated the detail, sets, costumes and the way the scenes played. Also, Newspaper reviews panned the parking lot haunt and praised the indoor haunt.

I worried at first. It seems that a good number of customers exiting the indoor haunt were laughing as they exited. True, most were terrified and glad to get out alive, but... It appears I had much to learn, you see I thought I was in the business of 'scaring people'. The final scene of the indoor haunt was over 400 square feet. A path wove its way through a forest of white leafless trees (flame proofed), bathed with opposing strobes, then the path divided around a giant eight feet long spider with six foot legs and red glowing eyes. It was devouring a lovely young lady covered in blood. We play the melodramatic scene to the max. As customers approached, the spider would rise up on its legs and lean forward toward them. The Customers would select the left or right path around the spider to the exit clearly in their view. Once their path was chosen the spider would lean into their path in a threatening way. The customers would stop, panic, back up, scream, take the other path, etc. The spider operator had a blast. Yet, some of the customers were laughing. What was I doing wrong?

I began to observe customers as they moved through each event of both haunted houses. The parking lot haunt had more early exiting customers. The two haunts were equally terrifying (I thought). However, the indoor haunt retained (fewer early exits) terrified customers better, maybe because the light levels inside were higher. I did have a few customers laughing as they exited the parking lot haunt, but the indoor haunt had many more. I was getting no closer till I decided to follow groups that had purchased tickets to both haunts.

It was then that I learned the truth. In no way possible can you scare all the people all the time. You can scare some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time. (Poetic license please) However, you can entertain all the people all (ok, most) of the time. Starting in 1992 I designed scenes with entertainment value. First we entertained the customers and second, if possible, we scared them. Yes, there are customers that scream from the time they enter the building till the time they get home, but these scene designs are to entertain. The real scares came in the corridors and from above and behind.

BUT, how do you scare someone? Or is it entertain? Or rather, is it both? The Roller Coaster Ride article presents path and pace. Now what shall we offer, beyond the obvious scare. Castle Dragon is now on a different path, but its checkered past has provided the ultimate R&D facility for developing and sharpening my skills, and yes at the expenses of many a poor unsuspecting customer. I found that I could really scare someone to the point of soaking their undies, barfing and into hyperventilating. Before all the safety BS, I added more exits to my haunt to get the chickens out of the way. The loneliest job in my haunt used to be the exit scare. During adult operation (scariest version) the exit scare person sees 60% to 70% of the castle customers. The twelve exits along the customer path see considerable activity. Some of these chickens are enticed into returning, most are not.

Here is two of my favorite entertaining scenes. 1992 we introduced the "Pendulum" inspired by Edgar Allen Poe's book "The Pit and the Pendulum". (Or

“Beauty and the Beast” as we lovingly call it) A giant four foot blade swings slowly barely touching the stomach of a lovely innocent young girl, dressed in a full length white dress, long sleeves, high collar, completely covered, tightly. Her arms and legs are spread across an “X” table, clothes draped/hanging showing shape and form. She The Beauty. The Beast is a tall strange looking creature hovering greedily over her. A character actor with no mask, good eye contact and facial control. The scene as played out scares over half the customers and entertains the rest. A room richly decorated with instruments of death and pain covering the walls, cells containing the remains of previous victims and victims yet to be. We create a false sense of security by illuminating all the rooms' visuals. The tall beast lumbers around slowly as the customers ease their way through the scene. Then the beast suddenly moves towards the customers or leaps up on the table roaring, long hair flying, laughing, mild scare, but for some this scene is one to many. The first year we produced this scene we placed an exit door in the room, it was the most used chicken exit. But being the good sports that we are, we would retrieve our victims and set them back on the path.

1996 The Pendulum was joined by the ”Torture X” for entertainment value, or by way of entertaining, set up the scare in the following scene. . No scare, strange conversation and much left to the imagination. In both scenes the customers must walk between two actors, the one on the “X” and the one moving about.

1996 had a ghostly visitor. The Grand Entry was added to Castle Dragon the year before. It contained a trap door over the entrance doors. Customers waiting to enter the haunt could scare customers entering the Grand Entry. The attendant would select one person from a group to operate the effect. When operated a ghost would propel itself through the trap door and into the faces of the entering customers. The ghost was made of fluff, the effect was too much. I ran it for two nights, and then I pulled it. Customers operating the effect loved it; those receiving the ghost in the face were embarrassed at how easily they were scared, some out the door and to ask for a refund. The big problem was that after this scare, for some, the rest of the castle was a let down. I had out done myself. The effect will be re-introduced in 1999 as part of the exit sequence. However, the crowd entertainment value was incredible, everyone in the Grand Entry knew what was about to happen, they all watched with great anticipation and reacted accordingly to the results. I had succeeded in entertaining, but could not continue to deliver a show that matched the entry ghost. My Roller Coaster was all down hill from here. Care must be exercised when creating the items/scenes to be presented to the customers. From this experiment I developed the Fright Control Unit (FCU). This item will not be covered in an article anytime soon.

Working the emotions of the customer is important. The more emotions a scene involves the more the customer is entertained. Emotions are manipulated to create the customers trip through your haunt. Entertainment takes on many forms. One of my displays of a skeleton with a white-gloved bony hand has a sign that says “The Gloved One”. Simple humor. Another display is of a gorgeous female mannequin, her shirt is opened to the edge of her chest, and her face is covered with a werewolf mask. Male customers will pause and gawk, caption “Where Wolf?”

It is possible for the stand-alone haunt to entertain. To survive competition it may be necessary to become a destination. How does one become a destination with more than a haunt to offer customers? Possibilities include: teaming up with other haunts to

create a haunted house type destination; permanent (or seasonal) location in an amusement facility and utilizing existing facilities; co-production with a municipality; part of an existing carnival or fair; and the list goes on. The complexity of this type operation is barely within my grasp and better left to others here at Haunted America. And although it is true that 1998 will be my first true year on my own with a destination Halloween Production, it is also true that I am still learning this concept and as soon as I think I know what I am doing, will gladly pass along my hard earned lessons.

## **FIRE FIRE or The sky is falling, The Sky Is FALLING**

OK Troops load them flamethrowers with Napalm and stand by. I have selected a position, which is not going to be very popular. But first a little background.

The current building and fire codes (which we all love) have roots. The reality is I know nothing about these roots, but I am going to spin a parallel tale, that is I am making this all up. This is the story of a Powerful Amusement Park, a weak local municipality And a Dark Attraction. This attraction was a walk through made from trailers. The internal switch back design added to the problem of exits and safe customer egress in case of an emergency. The customers would walk through, looking at the displays and set decorations, no actors. From the outside it looked grand, great facade and entry area, even looked safe. Actually there are two identical attractions with one entry, during peak periods both sides would be opened. Between the two attractions was the entry and control room. One dark day there was a fire and a bunch of people died. End of story. NYET.

First lets examine the attraction. It meet no building codes of the modern world, unless there is a part of this planet that specializes in coffins built to look like Dark Attractions. Exits were not to code, no smoke detection equipment, no emergency lighting, no emergency controls (OOPS I forgot the telephone) of any kind. In case of a fire no provision was made for the ventilation system to be shut down. The attraction was installed and leveled and its tires left on the wheels. The interior and exhibits met no flame proofing standards, as they were not flame proofed. The walls were coated with foam rubber to give a cave look. And even with all this said no one should have ever died. This hypothetical case was settled out of court, records sealed and witnesses advised against speaking out. But because I am making this up I will continue the story.

Less than two weeks before this make believe fire the local Fire Marshal paid his annual visit. He wrote a report. In it he said any fire here would be very difficult to fight. He failed to mention that the building met no safety standards, oh well its the Powerful Amusement Park, they rule. Gee, I forgot, the staff. The highly trained Amusement Park teenage staff.

And now, the two bones I have to pick. Bone one; the unique construction of this

attraction could very well have been the first case of anyone dying in a fully sprinkled building, except the building was not sprinkled. The victims of the fire died from smoke inhalation not the fire. And the smoke was extremely deadly. The burning foam rubber created a gas that once inhaled caused disorientation before killing you. Now I am disorientated in a smoke filled maze, gee. The smoldering foam fire was well in advance of the heat wave that would set off the sprinklers (the fire would be put out behind the advancing low heat yield burning foam), couple this with a ventilation system feeding oxygen to the fire and you have dead customers, period. And now we have sprinkled buildings. And if we are not very very careful people will die in them. Bone two is staff. The customers died because of the staff, no other reason. A customer actually informed the staff in the control room that there was a fire. Now I do not know what planet you're from, but we detain such a customer with one hand while we pull the fire alarm with the other. (OOPS, sorry, no fire alarm to pull, oh well) There is no thinking here, there is no option, it is get the customers the HELL out and then check the fire. Well not today, the control room staff sent an observer (with out a fire extinguisher) who indeed came back to the control room and said yep there's a fire. This is a maze; all that time wasted walking around. The case is sealed, the lawsuits settled and paid and we the public are left in the dark. A funky fire report was made and is on file, but hey, its The Powerful Amusement Park.

So here we are. I am now ready for the flames. Because I will do my best to see to it that there is some type of certification process for haunt operators and staff, a license maybe. People are injured in haunts all the time, people have died in them. And like air crashes the responsibility falls mostly on pilot's, pilot error. That is, the final responsibility is management's. I have walked through haunts in broad daylight that scared the Hell out of me for all the wrong reasons. I look at the teenage staff (nothing against teens, my son and daughter are) and know that they have not been trained to any standard, have not a clue and think it is neat to scare the bee gee gees out of people. (Well, hell, so do I)

So I propose a national standard of some type. A book of knowledge that we can come to some type of an agreement on, and a method of testing staff, actors and management. Accreditation of a type, where cards are issued and levels of training are indicated. A haunt employees pay could be tied to his certification type and level. Displaying an ID card with your photo and achievement levels might give a better impression than "Yeah babe, I work in a Haunted House". In case of an accident or emergency a haunt would look better before a jury when presenting trained staff. And not everyone would be required to have a certification, it is an option. It would also provide legitimacy to our craft. This is one of the reasons I favor an association, it is a formal way to get organized and prepare materials of this nature. And once it is formed I will push this till I turn purple (Barney notwithstanding). Knowledge is power, the more you know, as an operator, the more you can and will be prepared for the most unlikely emergency. This knowledge can be obtained via reality, or you can learn it from others that have been there. The difference being learned as you go Vs I know what to do. AND YES I am aware that some of this knowledge is available on the net via Haunt World and Haunted America, but there is no way to know who is/is not reading this information and no way to determine how much has been retained. I would like to see a sign or emblem in front

of a haunt that indicates the level of professionalism contained inside, I, the customer, deserve it. And 'Katy Bar the Door' for those that come between my goal and me. Because I see only good, that's all my blinders will let me see. Others will see what others want to see. I can use some guidance that is all. Of course you could (and probably will) try to dissuade me, and for that I promise to stay out of your haunt.

*Some suggested areas of training*

Evacuation and crowd control

Evacuation and emergency plan design

Fire fighting techniques

CPR and other life saving

Customer management in the haunt

Crowd management

Scare tactics that protect the customer and actor

Haunt communication for safety/security

Haunt design parameters in regards to safety and ease of egress

Natural disaster management

## **ACTORS**

I have been producing haunted houses since 1979. No matter how creative I think I am; I am never prepared for what my actors will do with my creation. Sometimes they improve upon my work and make me look good. More likely than not they make me look foolish and trash carefully prepared scenes.

No matter the actors age, they must be treated like children. In reality, they are children. The power an individual obtains when they become someone else is nothing less than absolute. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. As a haunt's creator, it is easy to be wrapped up in your favorite room and enjoy plying your annual trade upon hapless victims (customers). I am no different. However, may I offer a change? I do my thing on the slow nights and for a short time on the busy ones. Then I step back and become the creative director. I monitor all scenes, travel through the attraction as a customer, constantly give direction and make DAMN sure all my talent know that I am watching them.

OK, as the creative director I have already trained all my actors and technicians. I have explained each individual's duties and any variations that are allowed. I have explained what to do in the event of an emergency, how to handle customers that really should have gone to Boo at the Zoo (not only children) and how to notify internal security about rowdy customers. I have left no stone unturned.

HA!!! Well, all of you that believe that, I have some invisible paint for sale, just \$99 per pint. I have identified the problem. After all these years one would think I might have learned something. It is the power of the mask and even elaborate make-up can have a similar effect. Once a persons true identity is concealed, they can and often do become God like, "I can do no wrong" "...and if by chance I do, no one will know its me, he he he " I had a friend relate an incident to me.

All his actors wear masks in his attraction. A select few decided to grope attractive females. The first time a female complained he shut the attraction down,

brought all his actors out and the female easily selected her attacker, who was fired. An actor in the select group learned from this. The next time he traded masks with another actor, who promptly turned him in when the victim pointed his way. Again the select actor group learned. This time the culprit brings a mask to wear for groping and a mask to wear when in review. Eventually this actor was caught and fired.

I am an x-Marine and in fairly good shape. I explain to my actors that if I ever see them touch a customer, the least of their problems is going to jail, because a trip to the hospital will take precedence. I do not count reflex response. That is when a customer is so scared that they lash out and accidentally make contact with one or more of my actors: or when an actor gets carried away, loses balance or missteps and bumps into a customer.

It is important to note that masks do more than give actors' power, they also give certain customers' power. Because an actor will do things he/she never thought possible, a customer may do the same. An actor in a mask is no longer human, has no identity and as such will become a target. Certain customer types will hit masked actors. Especially those that stand still like dummies. The customer will say "Hey, I thought it was a dummy, I didn't know it was a person" Which of course is a lie, the customer was looking for an out. His goal was to hit an actor and get away with it.

Increased security has no effect on this problem. The solution is simple. Starting in 1992 I began to limit the use of masks and for the most part masks were used on dummies. I did not go to elaborate make-up. Instead I created scenes for people. My technique is more complicated than can be explained here, but I am playing with your mind and senses (Excited Senses Article) from the time you enter to the time you exit. Alfred Hitchcock is my style. I use limited make-up to enhance a face, like a touch of red, for blood, a light base of white, black and even appliances. The actors' face is visible and the person recognizable.

What I have added more than makes up for any perceived loss. The most important addition is eye contact and next facial expressions. Actor training is more intense and not anyone can perform in my haunt. Customers comment on how my actors make eye contact, look at them. I train my actors to look at the customers, to use their eyes and facial muscles to convey meaning. I Entertain, previous article. You are safest in rooms with my actors, not that they don't nail more than half the customers, the real scares come in the corridors between rooms.

More planning is necessary. Your room/scene scripts become complicated to the point of simplicity. What? Yes, the scenes are so simple that it is now possible for your actors to become bored even quicker than before. After all, they have to do the same thing over and over and over and... I offer several variations for the actors to work with and I have a reward system for actors to work their way up the privileged scene ladder. The actors that have been with me the longest get first choice. Once you have proven your worth I design a scene for you.

## **USING MASKS**

Jason, Freddy Kruger, Darth Vader and Hannibal the Cannibal all evoke emotions and for some, emotions of fear. Jason was a young man in a Hockey mask. The mask did not reveal an entire face, leaving the viewer to guess at the identity. Freddy's face

was the result of a fire. The damage concealed his original identity. Darth Vader wears a mask to stay alive. It hides the fact that he is human. Hannibal earned his mask with his teeth and of all the images; I find this one the more terrifying.

Hannibal Lecter is a human that crossed over to realms of horror. The other characters are inhuman, or act that way. Not any actor could play the part of Hannibal Lecter. It requires more acting skill to be a villain of such horror with no mask and add to the mix the partial mask he did wear, but only after establishing his character without one. Haunted attractions do not attract Academy Award winning talent like Anthony Hopkins, nor do they contain award-winning scripts. Ideas are rampant, execution faulty, scenes incomplete and technical flaws abound. Yet we survive.

Motion Pictures continue to provide a wealth of horror material from which we all draw some of our inspirations. Sometimes we select a mask to use because of these emotions. We, as creators, rely on the images created in movies and television to help us produce some of our scenes. The movie "The Pit and The Pendulum" with Vincent Price inspired my pendulum room. Freddy has been a staple in haunts for years and Jason rules. Leatherface is still chasing customers out many a haunt with a chainsaw. I do not question the use of masks, just how, where, when and why.

**HOW** A mask is used to hide a poor actor. The power this can provide to the actor has already been discussed. The real problem, is the actor any better? The answer is no. If your actor cannot do a great job without the mask, he will do no better with it. The haunts creator will often mistake improvement in a scene with the emotions he has tied to the mask. The creator will read into the mask (not the actor) things he wants to see. The mask has now impaired the actor and the creator. "I spent one hundred dollars on that mask and it will make the scene work". The scene will scare people because the mask is great. Yeah, right...

**WHERE** Creators tend to use masks in scenes with little floor space. The idea is that the closer the mask is to a customer the more horrific it will be for the customer. The customer must pass close to my creature and will fear the closeness. The reality is that the closeness reveals that it is a mask for which the actor must now compensate and either scream louder or become more physical. The mask is no longer scaring the customer; the action of the actor, as he goes over the edge, is scaring the customer. The customers are not afraid because of the creators' design; instead they are in fear for their safety in the real world, and rightly so.

**WHEN** I try to visit haunts whenever possible. I go to garage haunts, Halloween parties, yard haunts and, yes, the commercial ones. At times the only faces I ever see are those of other guests, customers or the ticket taker. Masks cover all the faces. One haunt I visited had Freddy popping out everywhere. Masks, masks, nothing but masks, every scene all over the place, AHHHHHHH!

**WHY** The mask is an easy out. A scene based on a mask is easier to produce. The creator can rely on images/fears that the mask evokes. He will create actions based on these images, direct the scene as the mask directs him and allow the mask to limit his creativity.

OK, I have trashed masks. I use masks and not only on dummies.

**HOW** Carefully. Masks are powerful. They can and do create fear in customers. The mask must not be close to the customer, at first. The mask must completely cover the head, fit snugly and give the actor freedom of movement. The costume cannot expose anything that is not the character being portrayed. The eyes must be visible. Open the eyehole in the mask, add color correct make-up to the actors' eyes and make sure that the snugness of the mask pulls it back flush with the flesh of the eye socket. The transition between mask and body must be flawless and look natural.

**WHERE** Scenes with masks must be big. Use space to build the tension. Create the scene around the space needed for the scene to develop. The masked actor moves towards the customers. By varying the rate and direction of movement, the actor controls what the customers see and how safe the customer feels. A small scenic area gives the actor no room to develop his character or to move in relation to the customer.

**WHEN** a scene with a mask is a high point on the roller coaster (another article). Use these scenes as accents of terror. Masks become more effective when used sparingly.

**WHY** Now the mask becomes a challenge. You are no longer using it as a crutch to show how great you are. You are using them as a true horror artist, painting scenes with variety, and keeping your customers guessing as to what they will see next. A scene produced with a mask will now create fear because it is different and the customers know that masks mean something different and unexpected.

The Hannibal Lecter style mask worn in haunts today evokes emotions. A person may see a monster, a murderer or a cannibal. Which image scares you the most and why? The answer will guide you to create horrific scenes.

## **BRIGHT ROOMS WITH STROBES**

### ALUMINUM FOIL ROOM

A tried and true effect is to cover the walls with shiny aluminum foil and add one or more strobes. To keep the customers from removing the foil it is in turn covered with a wire mesh. The rooms of this type that I have seen are done with flat walls and no more than two strobes. Actors may be placed in this room, but basically it is used for entertainment and to partially blind customers in preparation for a scare.

I offer this variation. Add some dimension to the room with two and three-dimensional geometric shapes covered in foil applied to the walls. Also, change the angle of the walls by tilting them in or out and use wall angles other than 90 degrees. Create a path through the room with additional objects, like boxes, covered with foil. Yes, I know this will complicate assembly; however, it will improve the effect. Do not forget the ceiling. Foil shapes and even a rotating mirror ball adds light reflecting

surfaces to tease the viewers' eyes. Use more than two strobes and try different rates of flash for point ... counter point. A light fog creates beams of light off the mirror ball. Use too much and the foil effect is lost. The boxes can have an air ram added to one or more to pop the lids or have something pop out of a box. The effect can be random, actor controlled or sensor triggered.

### SKULL CAVERN

A more elaborate variation is my event called "Skull Cavern." The room is a cavern created from hydra cal, burlap, wire mesh and 4x8 frames. Skull Cavern has four 20' long corridors that switch back and forth. Stalactites and stalagmites divide the corridors. Passage between corridors is through arches. Customers can see from one corridor to the next, but not clearly. The room is portable. Bolt the sections together and fill the cracks between units with burlap strips soaked in hydra cal. Paint the room bright white. Position three slow pulsing strobes equally and staggered in the corridors for a total of twelve strobes.

Skull Cavern appears to be alive. The stalactites and stalagmites appear to move. The continual changes in sources of illumination create an animation effect. Customers walking through the room become disoriented, have trouble walking a straight line and some turn around and exit. We place no actors in the room. Instead we blast customers from above with jets of air or CO2 as they pass beneath the arches between the corridors.

The room is basically entertainment. The bright strobe lights cause the customers' iris to close down and set them up for a scare at the rooms exit. We have an air ram effect operated by the same operator working the arch air jets. An ugly head is thrust up and out towards the customer group from the left as they exit right. This either stops them in their tracks or helps them out of the room.

It is easy to change the room's color, because Skull Cavern is painted white. Add floral wrap to the strobe bulbs and the cavern becomes an Icy Blue or Hot Red. Experiment with two to three colors simultaneously flashing. The animation of the stalactites and stalagmites becomes even more surreal. Use additional layers of floral wrap to increase the color saturation making the color deeper. I recommend floral wrap because it is cheaper than traditional gel and easier to wrap around strobe bulbs. Hold the floral wrap in place with a rubber band.

### CHECKERBOARD ROOM

The Checkerboard room uses similar principles. The room is made up of black and white squares. Sometimes the squares are painted in perspective to give the illusion of greater distance. A strobe illuminates the room, usually pointed into the customers' eyes. One or more black squares are removed. An actor can thrust some soft scary object out a hole towards the customers. An error often made is painting the floor with the same design. The ceiling, Yes, the floor, No. Customers will wear a path through the design. You may be able to repaint it nightly, but during crank through it will wear. It then reveals the rooms true nature and a path out. The room is interesting. It is highly over-rated and best reserved for a haunt catering to a younger audience.

### ADDENDA

I know that some of this sounds strange. I build my own 5vdc strobe lights and use a 12vac theatrical lighting system. This provides many advantages. My light fixtures cost less than \$5 each, use 7 watt or 11 watt bulbs (this translates into lower power usage, the 4,000 sq. ft. Castle Dragon is illuminated with 20 amps), the low light levels cause the customer's iris to open wide and wide iris' are easily blinded. I will cover low voltage theatrical lighting in another article.

## THE ULTIMATE CEMETERY

The cemetery has a place in everyone's mind, all of us are frail in our mortality and The Cemetery is a reminder of how mortal we really are. Because of this relationship, I try to use my cemetery as a lighter side of death and always place it outside.

First I establish that, no matter how good it looks, it is not a real cemetery. I do this with artwork, silly signs, absurd tombstone captions and even a tombstone for the Disney Mouse with a cartoon hand reaching out of the grave. Some of the tombstones have coffins bursting out of the ground and their occupants bursting out of the coffins. I use arms, legs and an occasional head. Complete coffins are cut in half at an angle. This way I get two coffin scenes for the price of one coffin. Air rams made from tire pumps or door closers are used to pop body parts out of coffins close to the customer path area. A technician manually operates these. The cemetery is a set. I do not believe that it should try to a part of reality; instead it is a major distraction for the customers.

After the customer has been "entertained" I set out to scare the bee gee gees out of him. The distraction is the absurd cemetery. The prelude to fright is the specters that roam the grounds. I use lovely young ladies in white gowns, some with basic white face and others with horror faces. The cemetery spirits take turns between harmlessly roaming and providing startles for the customers.

Fog pours into the area. I paint the fog with colored lights; control its direction and density. Mixing my own fog juice from the base chemicals gives me control over its hang time in varying weather conditions. Yes, wind sucks my fog out like it would for anyone else, but when the cemetery is right the effect is awesome and this happens most of the time.

Hanging from trees are dummies in assorted states of decomposition. As they travel the path around one corner a dummy swings very close to the customers, passing over their heads. Another corner and a dummy swings low, in front of them, briefly blocking the path, providing a fair scare. Half way through the cemetery customers view a crude autopsy. A specter may be playing with body parts or continuing the butchery with an appropriate instrument.

The finale to the 300-foot trek through the cemetery is a visit by a Leatherface type creature. Leatherface needs a chainsaw, a real chainsaw with a blade. Too dangerous you say, of course it is, anyone using a real blade is a fool. You will be amazed at how many customers do not know that. I gave my chainsaw a blade with illusion. Near the exit we have a very large tombstone, about four feet high. Concealed in the tombstone is a motorized grinding wheel. The chainsaw starts as our creature walks towards the customers. You always have a customer that says, "There is no blade,

it can't hurt you." Well, well, my actor approaches the tombstone with the hidden grinder, he steps on a platform switch and the grinder spins up to speed (you don't want it making noise till the chainsaw sound can drown it). He then takes the chainsaw blade and grinds it. From the customers point of view it appears that the chainsaw is cutting stone. The sparks fly, the customers react, the creature chases the customers as they run for their lives. When the actor leaves the platform switch, the grinder spins down and stops. The chainsaw blade is not the original. I have a sheet metal shop make several blanks and while I am at it, I make them longer.

The cemetery requires three actors for normal operation. The central corridor design allows me to dedicate only one actor during slow operational hours because I can rotate additional actors according to customer flow. During peak operation I use up to six actors and two chainsaws. The chainsaws take turns, each working a different group of customers. The second group feels safe as the creature chases the first, turns off his chainsaw and wanders away. Until they hear the second chainsaw start-up... The tombstone with the grinder has a limited viewing area, customers can hear the chainsaw as they enter the cemetery, but they cannot see it or the tombstone with grinder.

My cemetery designs take advantage of the site. I include any spooky looking trees, mild variations in elevation and shrubs. The ground is covered with mulch, because October is a rainy month. I enclose the area with 4x8' wall units and the internal path with a combination of 4x8' panels and 4x3' picket fence sections. The internal 4x8' units shield areas of the cemetery and provide hiding spots for actors. The fence sections reveal areas of the cemetery for customer viewing. The path must have many changes in direction. This helps to disorientate customers and provides many opportunities for scaring them. The largest opened area will be the finale.

A cemetery of this type could be constructed in a fenced in backyard. Sheets (muslin) stretched over 4x8' 1x2" frames would work. Panels made this way provide an additional scare potential. The translucent quality of sheets works with misdirection. Place several 4x8' muslin panels together, leading to a fence. An actor's shadow is projected onto the muslin. The actor's shadow moves as if it is about to scare the customers. The customers see the shadow and believe they know where the actor is, they come to the end of the muslin wall section, expecting a scare and find nothing. The actual scare should come from above and the opposite side. The shadow can be created by a cut out or shadow puppet with movable limbs and operated by the air ram technician. Other images can be projected onto the muslin. The main advantage to a projected image, and even sound, is that each customer uses his imagination to fill in the blanks. The customer draws from his own nightmares to scare himself.

## **ROLLERCOASTER**

I enjoy roller coasters. "A good ride, a drop, a rush, the up and the down." Movies do much the same, except emotionally. I write scripts as well as books. A key element is pace. It is one of the things I strive for in my haunt. PACE is a word simple yet complicated. It is easy to say, difficult to execute, not because it is difficult, but because you will not believe me. I have yet to go through a haunt that utilizes this simple word, other than my own attempts. I classify most haunts as scream and run. Most

guided haunts I classify as talk and scream.

One of the best-decorated haunts I ever visited had creatures to chase us through the whole haunt; I imagine increasing customer flow. Verdun Manor is a richly decorated haunt. I know this because I have been through it before it opens. I have been through it during peak operation and the crush of people flowing through keeps me from making the same observations. One advantage to a customer not seeing all that there is to see is that they may want to come back and see what they missed.

When I help with a haunt, all I hear is how scary, scare this, scare there, scare here, everywhere a scare, "E I E I O." Refer to entertainment article. People ask my opinion on how to scare. Somewhere I have made a mistake. How do you scare someone? A simple question that has more than one million answers or solutions.

You must prepare your customer. Do this with visuals before they even enter. The facade, waiting area and actors observed by customers before they enter. How many scenes does your haunt have; scare sequences does your haunt have? What emotions are you trying to evoke from your customers. Well, besides the obvious one. A good haunt goes for as many different emotions as it can. It is this play between emotions that provides the ups and downs. It is also the play of the senses, another article.

For which emotions are we going? Startle; a nervous reaction. Fright; a more serious reaction. Laughter; at the scene and at one's self. Anticipation; believing that something is about to happen. Comic relief; a scene designed to evoke laughter. Gore; gross out the customer, not necessarily blood, maybe vomit (he he he). Disbelief; viewing the impossible. Terror; the ultimate emotion and the one we all strive to give our customers. And other emotions to varying degrees. Emotions make the peaks and valleys of your haunt; the more emotions you stimulate, the more successful the haunt.

List all your scenes, rooms, events and scares. Organize them first in sequence through the haunt. Next, rate each on a scale of one to ten. You must be honest and realistic. *True we all produce only fantastic scares.* Last rate them according to the emotion you believe they will evoke. If the only emotion you have is fright/terror then you need to rethink your haunt, because you are not being honest with yourself. I discovered many years ago that my scenes have different results with different people, ages, sex and ethnic group. Another ingredient is mindset. I, the creator, have no control over my audience. No one does.

It is not possible to scare the bee gee gees out of your customers every time. Some scenes work better than others. Use this to your advantage. Place weak scenes between good scenes. This becomes part of setting the pace. I have organized my haunt to gradually build to a climax. I even have an anti climax that only a few brave souls get to enjoy.

A scene that evokes more than one emotion is high on my list. One of my favorite scenes is "The Wall." The room has a small half circle stage with a rotating wall. The customers enter the well-illuminated room. They see a sign on the wall "Creature on Break." Negative comments and words of verbal let down follow, then one or more of the customers quote the sign out loud. The customer group fills the room and then the revolving wall begins to rotate. At the moment of rotation the bright theatrical lighting becomes medium flash strobe lighting. The actor, in a robe with no mask, makes a loud sound as the wall rotates. Their vision is seriously impaired, the customers only see the wall rotating, opening to them, they hear the loud sound and their imaginations

fill in the blanks. The customers scream and fall all over themselves. In his left hand is a very large hammer, he is shaking his right hand, as if the hammer had hit it, and he says “Yeow, that hurt.” The customers relax and laugh at themselves and the scene.

This one scene has evoked three emotions; Disappointment, Fright and Laughter. The more emotions you evoke by your scenes, the better. Immediately after this scene we nail them to the wall from both sides causing them to run for their lives. It might not appear to be PACE, but it is. I took them down, I propelled them up, I gently lowered them and then I shot them higher. Next, I do nothing for a while, they are treated to ghost illusions, displays and more. Do not get the wrong impression, there must be calm before the storm, my haunt gets progressively more intense. It only works because I let the customers relax (relatively speaking) between sequences. Each period of rest is more intense than the last, but the customer does not know this. I am slowly elevating emotional levels in the customer. The distance between scenes decreases, the intensity of each new scene intensifies and the mind games played vary with an assault on the senses. They are walking through my movie, experiencing a roller coaster ride of emotions and if I am successful they exit with a smile or on the run.

Once you have digested this information it will be possible for you to apply it to your haunt. Examine your customer path and consider establishing a pace for your victims, er, customers. Another key element is proper use and exploitation of the human senses. I will cover that next.

## THE FIVE SENSES

The design of the typical haunt includes two senses, sight and sound. Seldom do I see an attempt to reach more senses. Taste is the one sense that I am unable to use in a commercial haunt. My LARP games use taste and my early home haunt during junior high used taste. I would bring the little costumed monsters into my living room and among sorted other goodies, in the dark, I would give them a peeled grape to eat, as they chewed I would say “...and that is Uncle Fred’s good eye.” The response more often than not required me to turn the lights on and show the shocked child a peeled grape. I could easily write many pages on each of the remaining four senses.

**SIGHT** The human eye has a contrast ratio of one million to one. Motion picture film has a contrast ratio of two hundred to one and television is twenty to one. Contrast ratio is the relationship of the brightest spot to the darkest spot. The human iris can adjust from the darkness of a closet to the brightness of the sun in a relative short period of time. It is during this transition time that you have complete control over your customer. The lack of proper sight increases the sensitivity of the other senses, especially sound. When a customer is semi blind and he detects a soft voice in very close proximity, prepare for a severe reaction.

The mechanics are simple. Most haunts are so dark all the way through that they can never take advantage of this most basic principle. The usual way to compensate is with strobe lighting or the flashlight in the face. Instead paint your scenes with color. Red, blue, green and amber are my favorites. My lighting system is 12vac with bulbs of four, seven and eleven watts. The intensity of the light is controlled by the wattage of the bulb. Low cost floral wrap is used for colored gel and adjust color saturation by adding

more layers of gel. Traditionally I use red and green together; amber and blue as stand-alone. Create more color variations by mixing different colored gels.

In my haunt I use Red and Green to crisscross a subject. Blue is used on some dummies and amber is used to brightly illuminate some scenes. I try not to use white light, except in some instances with strobes. I do use more colors than listed. The key to color is the spectrum and color saturation. Darker colors force the iris to open. Lighter colors force the iris to close. When using light to set up a scare, it is important to have objects to reflect the light. A black room will not reflect any light. A room with some white, chrome or other highly reflective item(s) will reflect light into the customers' eyes and help to close the iris.

A slow pulsing strobe is more effective at blinding than a fast pulsing strobe. Whenever possible, aim the strobe into the customers' face. Aim strobes 180 degrees apart if more than one strobe is used. Do not use dark colors on strobes, you defeat their purpose.

**TOUCH** This area is constantly overlooked. Your customers want to touch things. Most of the time they are touching things that you do not want them to touch. Fill their craving for physical contact, give them things to touch. My tombstones are made with hydra cal and burlap. I place two or more near the customer pathway for customers to touch. Hydra cal is cold, smooth and hard. It has the feel of death. The lava pit uses burlap soaked in a mix of paint and Elmer's glue. The burlap is then applied to the wall, while the wall is still flat on the ground. Once dried the wall is set in place. This has a rough texture, coarse and unfriendly. In the dark these walls evoke feelings of being in a strange unfriendly place.

We do not touch any of our customers. That does not mean that they are not touched. At every opportunity something will touch my customers. The Tube room is 4" diameter flexible black drainpipe hanging from the walls and ceiling. Customers must touch, bump and bounce through the mess. The fun house effect is better for all behind the lead person as all the tubes he bumps become alive and bounce into those that follow. Roots uses sisal rope dipped in black latex. Customers must duck down to enter roots. The roots are dangling in the path. The latex rubber has a clinging quality that grabs at the customers. The roots feel gross. My spider web uses latex covered fabric with a wire center. I shape these with bends, twists and turns. Customers crawling through the web have these things bumping their face. When they move them aside with their hands they are disgusted and cannot wait to get out. The web is full of other items as well; dangling string, soft body parts and wet fabric.

Verdun Manor has a tunnel of flesh. Customers must maneuver through the sixteen-foot tunnel. All manners of gross fleshy items are visible; Lance calls it the "Meat Locker." A living wall of flesh was part of a short-lived Dallas Haunt. Actual arms, legs and heads were thrust into the wall from the back and used to animate the constructs of the wall. To keep customers from touching or grabbing the flesh items, the wall was covered with glycerin and green slime. Customers exited with glycerin and green slime on their clothes anyway.

I have coated items with glycerin, too. But, prefer to encourage customers to feel the natural item. Lighting, or lack of, plays an important part in touch. That is, what you feel and cannot see lets the imagination fill in the blanks. The guardroom

offers a unique opportunity. Once in a while the actor will have a macho type challenge him in one way or the other. This actor may not talk. He can offer this customer a bite of the arm he is carving. Occasionally the macho customer will touch the arm, to take it, the arm is sprayed with glycerin. The macho customers' reaction is immediate, but amplified by his friends. The guardroom creature laughs, and then pretends to eat the arm. The customer group is totally grossed out and exits quickly. This is the least used variation of this scene, but it does use touch.

**SOUND** The haunts that I have visited treat sound as, Oh yeah by the way, we need music. Sound is a stepchild to the haunt business. Sound in motion pictures is the second sense. Without it, many motion pictures would fail to entertain the audience. Even with it many fail. Sound is so important that some movies do market tests with different musical scores. What is it that we are missing? The usual haunt uses a stereo system and four large speakers. The system is turned up to a deafening roar. Customers walking the path move closer to the source of the sound (deafening roar) and away from it (less deafening). It serves as a distraction, not an addition to the overall effect. Volume is the least of our worries.

Sound Effects They are used to give a creation or scene depth/life. Background sounds of a lab create the atmosphere where the (mad) scientist works. Pieces of equipment come alive. A scene with creatures gnawing on the remains of previous customers gains depth with sounds of slurping and the gnashing of teeth.

Sound Frequencies A single sound system does not allow us to play with frequencies. Sound waves. There are two types of sound waves, those we can hear and those we cannot hear, but can barely perceive. The sound that we hear I divide into three basic groups, High, Medium and Low. I use speakers designed to take advantage of these three groups; tweeters, mid-range and base. I create scene sound tracks to match the scene then select the speakers to match the sound. House Sound uses a mid-range speaker and the 70-volt distribution system. Scene sound uses 4-16 ohm speakers and stereo sound track with matching speakers. By changing the frequency from scene to scene I add another element to pace and distraction. I paint part of my visual image with sound. The sound must not distract from the scene, but add aural color to it.

Sound frequencies below our general range of hearing 20cps or less and those above 20,000cps can be used to evoke many emotions. 20,000cps and up sound is frequently used by crystal ball readers and such. It comes on at the moment of *spiritual contact*. The sound cannot be heard, but it can be perceived. I have used this effect in a totally dark room where customers waited before entering my haunt. The effect on one or more customers in a group was so startling that I had to discontinue use. 20cps or lower can be used with a sub-woofer to project sound waves down a hall into on coming customers. Again, the effect was so powerful that I discontinued use after one hour. These effects can be used in a controlled way. They should never be used in excess and experimentation on customers is not recommended. I discontinued their use not because they did not work, nor that the effect was so terrible, but because I trusted only myself to operate them and I had other things to do. As tempting as it may be, these two effects should never be automated. The power these two effects have must be controlled and not

abused. Try it on your friends.

House Sound Greatly overlooked and abused, the main sound system is for general mood setting and sound masking. A 4,000 square foot haunt can be filled evenly with sound from a 100-watt amplifier. I use a mixture of 5 and 10-watt speakers and a 70 volt distribution system. The 10-watt speakers are used to mask sound. A ten-watt speaker is placed above the entrance and exit doors to mask all house sounds. Two more are used in the haunt to mask selected areas. The 12 remaining speakers are all 5 watts and are placed to evenly distribute sound through out the haunt. The 70-volt system uses smaller wire to carry signal a greater distance and requires no impedance matching.

Scene Sound Matching a scene to music for effect is not easy. Frequency, speaker placement and pace must all be considered. Try each scene with different sound tracks. Watch the play of the scene and concentrate on the scene, not the music. If the music stands out, then you have the wrong music. Sound frequency and the beat are key things to be considered. Changing your sound track may also mean changing the frequency range of your speakers. Scene sound speakers are 20 watts. Note also, that not all scenes need special sound tracks. Most of my scenes use house sound, but I do adjust the frequency.

Speaker Placement Book one shows my speaker cabinet design. They have two advantages, they focus sound into the customer path and they look so bad that no one would want to steal them. I label the back of each speaker for its type, wattage, frequency range and ohms or voltage. Sound effects must come from the area/item making the sound. Background music should fill the scene evenly and remain in the background. A scene could have three sound systems. A speaker outside of the entrance of the scene for house sound that masks the sounds from the scene. The second system would provide background music and the third would provide sound effects. I often combine the background music with the sound effects, placing one on channel "A" and one on channel "B" of a stereo amplifier. Some scenes require stereo background music and stereo sound effects. I use endless loop message cassettes; if you take care of them they last forever. I still use two tapes from 1990. House sound uses a three-minute tape. Tapes for scenes vary in length from 20 to 30 seconds.

Sounds In The Dark Back when I first started in the haunt business, I used cassette tape players for sounds. We placed them between scenes in dark hallways. 1994 & 95 I used an 8 track Teac running at 15ips to distribute small quiet sounds to the darkest passages in my haunt. Digital storage chips have replaced this. Small 20-watt amplifiers and 20-watt speakers play the random sounds. Some of the speakers are placed between 5' and 6' high from the floor. This way the sounds are near ear level. Other speakers were aimed at the roof, so the sound would be blasted in all directions. For many years' customers would exit, saying, "I never saw the chainsaw." All I had was the sound and many others.

SMELL And no I don't. OK. Haunts traditionally use fog machines. Every manufacturer I know says not to add things to their fog juice. Well, I'm hard of hearing and can barely read. Odor is a great distraction and offers additional depth to scenes. An autopsy room that reeks of death is more effective than one that

smells like popcorn.

My outdoor mineral oil based fog machines work great at providing a light mist for lights and a fantastic odor source. 20 to 30 lbs. of compressed air into a copper tube with 3 or 4 1/64" holes is all that you need. Sources of aroma are found in the food flavoring section of your grocery store. Read the label for oil-based flavors. Experiment with mixing flavors with the mineral oil to come up with something very disgusting.

Glycol fogger's are water based. Look for water-based flavors. I use Vanilla in the cemetery; it gives the cemetery a cotton candy smell, a great distraction. Anise gives a nasty odor, great for coffins. Smell is as close as I can get to taste. An aroma will evoke those pesky taste buds.

Of course you use all this at your own risk. I mix my own fog juice. I purchase in bulk the chemicals and for about \$1,000 I make more than 500 gallons of fog juice. Any mathematicians out there? I prefer Roscoe fog machines (and no I am not getting a kick back, hmmm); my methods require me to replace heat exchangers and other parts. However, the complete cost in my operation is less than twenty five percent of purchasing off the shelf fog juice.

A new fog technology uses only water. The system of which I am most familiar is the Mee Fog System. Zoos and amusement parks use it. The system atomizes water and creates true fog. I have seen this used in indoor haunts (dumb) but recommend outdoor use only. Water based flavors may be added to this system, but the addition of flavor to the water is tricky.

**SUMMARY** The creative mind is always looking for unique ways to entertain (next article) your creative mind must not only think in three dimensions (yep, another article), but in the five senses of your customer. Sensory deprivation is just as important as sensory excitation. Our world of illusion includes even the sixth sense, or the illusion thereof...

## **K.I.S.S.**

...And no not what you think. I have been producing Haunted Houses since 1979. But I started in junior high as a yard haunter. I have completed my annual tour of local haunts and have been amazed at how much money everyone has, except me.

So I come to you (those of you poor as a church mouse as I) with offers of simplicity and a reminder that big scares do not require big bucks.

1. A time old favorite is varying lengths of black fishing line hanging from above in a concentrated area of hall width by 4 to 8 feet.
2. Water guns do a real good number on victims. Best place to use one is in a scene where one actor is hacking another with a butcher knife or ax, have the spray in a line with the hacking.
3. Flashlight in the face, blind 'em then toy with 'em, gently LOL
4. Basic distraction, an actor, in plain view, sets in a chair. He looks harmless; with his up stagehand he is pulling a string, moving an object out of view, a chain or something, that is opposite him. The victims are pulled into the scene knowing where the scare is going to come from. But another actor is overtaking them from behind.
5. Lower things onto victims heads, stuffed animals are my favorite. No reason to make

- it elaborate, keep it dark and let them use their imagination as to what it is that is bouncing off their heads.
6. Variation to above, in a long hallway swing a stuffed animal into the face of the first victim, the effect is awesome.
  7. The haunts entry ghoul can offer to shake the hands of victims as a show of support, his hand is fake, of course.
  8. The ghoul behind the curtain is nothing new, so how about two new wrinkles? We nail a pair of shoes to the floor and have the curtain set in a way that barely exposes the tips, while the victims are busy checking out the curtain we scare them from behind. And for the very devious build a shelf 5 feet from the ground above the shoes, the victims check out the shoes, see nothing below, but are scared in the face from above.
  9. A hall way of dummies, except one of them is not, no not looking like a dummy, he is above, working a string that makes one of the dummies appear to be alive, then the scare comes from above and behind.
  10. The duck and scare from behind and above is tried and true. Have the victims duck under an object 5 feet from the ground. The actor hides in the opened side of the object. **Ten little low cost scares. Have a fantastic season and be safe.**

## **DIMENSIONAL HAUNTING**

Many of the haunts I visit think in only two dimensions, even when they believe the set/staging is more than two dimensions it is not. One would think that a cube of wood was three dimensional (and yes I know that it is, but bare with me for a moment, I may actually have a point to make). Star Trek “Wrath Of Kahn” ending battle sequence was in a Nebula. At one point in the battle Kirk asks Spock for an evaluation of Kahns’ battle tactics, Spock replies that Kahn appears to be fighting in two dimensions. Yet all around them is three-dimensional space. Is it possible to live in three dimensions, build in three dimensions, and yet think in only two? YES.

OK OK, OK... Confused? The space we create within is more than walls, sets and decorations. And three dimensions are more than Height Width and Depth. Well if it is more then it would be four dimensions or five dimensions or... Seldom do I see a Haunt using three dimensions, four even less and no one to my knowledge has traveled to the fifth dimension, except little ol’ me. But then you guys think I live there. *(I make many references to safety and the lack of, the August article will get me flamed, it is on haunt safety from the creative point of view. Those of you waiting to torch me stock up on Napalm.)*

A one-dimensional haunt is one where the money factor out weighs all other considerations. Line through put is maxed out and whatever show may have been cannot be. Actors and their training is, if anything, an after thought. Cheap masks, costumes and props add to the flavor and are one of the many reasons for pushing the customers through as fast as possible. Set design could be elaborate, if the customers were not being pushed through they might even notice it, but usually this style of haunt has little or no set design. Safety is usually sacrificed and the customer path is dangerous, not scary, life threatening dangerous. I have been through some of these in the daylight for lights on tours and was scared for all the wrong reasons. Like, can I get my kids and me out of

here alive and uninjured? This type of haunt lives on hype (which it never lives up to) and on crowd interaction, not customer reaction.

The more typical two-dimensional haunt is an attempt, usually, by well meaning folks. Production value, of a sort, abounds. Set detail is there and the actors actually, well almost, know what they are doing. The staff has some training and, who knows, may even be able to handle an emergency. Greater attention to types of scares and a variety there of is attended to. Money is still a factor and safety compromised. The customer through put is slower but only because they have not figured out how to attract more customers. Daytime tours are almost safe and I usually do not fear for my life, sometimes my safety. My son (age 10 at the time) mentioned things like uneven floor, carpet pulled up and loose boards in one haunt. Attention to safety detail is usually the first thing to go.

Three-dimensional haunts are hard to find and not always appreciated for what they are. Verdon Manor is a three going on four-dimensional haunt. Rich in detail inside and out, elaborate sets, characters and special effects. Even before Verdon became a Theme Park and a true haunt style destination it was three-dimensional. It all seems so real. A real Haunted Verdon Manor, cemetery, flames and more. Entertainment is everywhere and you never know when something is about to get you, even out in the open walking around. Once inside there is more to see than you can possible take in, so you must return. The through put is high, yet the line moves painfully slow, especially when it is you the monsters are after and you would really like to get out of this room, only to find that you were better off where you were.

#### AND NOW HE DIGRESSES

Imagine a point in space. Add another point and connect, one dimension. Now imagine a haunt with all the excitement of this singular line, boring. Extend this line into a plane, our two dimensional haunt fares only little better. Not till we create a cube with all three dimensions do we see anything of interest. I am not going to give negative examples; you are more than capable of filling in the blanks. Customers are not near as clever. Some haunts of one and two dimensions stay in business for several years, but the public eventually catches on and the haunt goes belly up. Is it wrong to be a one-dimensional haunt? No, not as long as you grow. As long as you learn and make the effort to expand and develop your talent and the way you present your creation to the public. Take it in steps and learn.

#### MEANWHILE BACK AT THE CASTLE

Earlier articles deal with pace and the senses. These elements take you beyond the third dimension. They are near impossible to incorporate into a temporary haunt. The trip into new dimensions requires a permanent home. An example is my ghost illusion that you can walk through. Yes a real ghost that you see and walk through, the ghost reacts to this and comments on your rudeness. The effect took four days to install, many hours of maintenance and was hard to keep working because of the portable nature of the building. If you have 10 such high quality effects, well, it would take many man-days for these very special effects. Time portable haunters do not have. Another effect was the customer seeing himself as a ghost face on. A video freeze frame of customers passing a point in the castle is delayed and fed to a video ghost projector.

The dimensions beyond three require more attention to all the senses (except taste). The human perception of sounds below 20cps and above 20k cps is used to create

unique atmospheres and self-illusions of danger or enhance fear. Lighting or lack of stretches the visual range, creates fear from shadows real and imaginary. Textures coarse to cold and smooth and dry to moist activate images in the mind. The very air the customers breathe can deliver distractions and create fear from unseen images.

Haunt depth is more than walls, masks and loud music. Anticipation is the most over looked aspect of a haunt. The creators are too busy being in your face, pushing your dumb ass out the door to make room for more fools too eager to part with their hard earned money, to really care about more than surface show. Am I perfect, HA, far from it? However, I notice that I do attempt to improve and learn from my mistakes. Others are too busy bragging of their success to notice that their bridge is burning behind them and the pylons ahead are set in quicksand.

## **Fog**

Fog (smoke) is an effective way to create atmosphere and aide in the customer's disorientation. I used enhanced smoke, i.e.: fog that carries an aroma. My favorite aroma is cotton candy (vanilla). This aroma is most often used in the cemetery. Customers entering the cemetery comment on the smell, turn to talk to one another (they are thoroughly distracted) and loosen up or laugh about the smell. They are primed for the first scare in the cemetery. It could be anything: a swinging puppet, vibrating floor, actor startle or loud noise close to one of the customers.

Anise is another favorite aroma. Your local grocer has a variety of water based food flavors. These added to water based fog juice can create a grand variety of aromas. I have experimented and created the musty smell of a damp swamp as well as a close approximation of formaldehyde. I no longer have these formulas, but experimentation is half the fun of being a haunter.

My raised deck allows me to back light small holes in the floor, through which I pump streams of fog. A fan nearby pulls the air fog mixture along a predetermined path, this adds to the effect and keeps the path way clear enough to appreciate the floor effect. Walls can be forced filled with fog and holes or cracks will stream fog into the customer path. Fog filled coffins; cauldrons and other haunt items add depth and atmosphere to scenes. Regulate the flow so that only a small amount of fog escapes the container. Always have illumination from within the container to color the fog.

Fog distribution via forced air is accomplished with a four-inch pipe from the fog machine to a "Y" adapter. The bottom of the "Y" is the exit point for the fog. One of the "Y" tops is the fog machine input with the other "Y" top being the air input. I have used shop vacs, squirrel cage fans and leave blowers to provide constant airflow. For fine control of the amount of air to propel your fog, place another "Y" on the air supply side in front of the first "Y", add an adjustable damper and manually fine tune the flow of air to carry the fog. This same damper method can be used to control the exit of fog into the haunt from the system. The first damper would be opened a small amount, the next a little more and so on.

The 60-degree system will sometimes create long hallways. A little fog and a laser light pointed at the on coming customers create a vortex type effect. Other patterns can be used. The key is to add another dimension/distraction and create another

opportunity for a good scare.

Low lying fog is neat to walk through. Cooling fog need not be complicated or expensive. Depending upon where your haunt is located and if you are an indoor or outdoors haunt, cooling fog is its relationship with the mean air temperature. In other words, the colder the air your customers travel through, the colder (more difficult) the fog must be to hug the ground. If it is cold outside your haunt, but warm inside, use air management to bring the cold air into a heat exchanger.

The heat exchanger is the key element of the system. I have used a large igloo cooler, a small window air conditioner unit, a leave blower and small fog machine to build my system. The AC unit is vented into the effect area (sometimes this air must be redirected); the chilled air travels through multiple flexible plastic pipes packed into the igloo. The fog travels through copper coils. The igloo is filled with water to improve heat transfer. The water inside gets very cold; the fog travels through the coils, loses its heat and exits as low-level fog. Instead of an AC unit, ice or dry ice can be used, however, they must be replenished.

A unique way to create cold water for the heat exchanger would be to add a waterfall to your haunt. It could be indoors or outdoors. The water is cooled as it travels through the air. The greater the distance the water falls, the cooler the water. Now that I think about it, a small ice rink for ghouls would be nice, too.

A popular outdoor fog system is the water misters. These are used by Zoos to create tropical conditions for the animals. I have seen these water systems used indoors, which is where they should never be used. They can create a grand fog effect around a haunt. They are expensive, but the fog juice (water) they use is cheap and this will pay for the system in one or two seasons.

## **More Than Hot Air**

A select few (maybe more) believe that I am full of hot air. Be that as it may (I tend to hover above ground, and my subjects) air effects in haunts have a place. Motion sensors, on the other hand, are of questionable benefit. I tie these two together because most haunts do. Air effect here, er, motion sensor there, hmmm, customer walks here... wham, effect scares customer. HA!

Actors and technicians are expensive. They cost in actual wages, damage they cause and items they borrow for long periods of time. They can make mistakes, injure a customer or themselves. The appeal of pneumatics/hydraulics (big brother to pneumatics, move mass quantities) is obvious, but the appeal of motion sensors is laziness. I have seen the best and the worst of the pneumatic effects. And they can all scare customers equally. But, only if the customer *happens* to be in the right place, at the right time and looking in the right place at the right time when detected by the motion sensor. A great many variables. Before the advent of motion sensors an actor/technician would activate the effect at the correct moment. He might even assist by creating a distraction that would cause the customer to be in the right place at the right time creating maximum scare/startle.

The distraction is one of the main elements missing with air effects. Customer walks in, the jack pops out of the box and we all get a good startle. The traditional way

to make the customer look at the object is with it being the only thing to look at in the room. This works, yes/no, because they will look, but this is a haunt and what may be lurking in the shadows. The customer looks at the Jack in the Box, then around the room, the box goes pop, but was anybody looking? One of many ways to get the customer to look in the right/correct direction is the distraction. Maybe the front of the Jack in the Box has a color wheel that begins to spin. Customer reaction, “Wow, big deal”, and then the Jack pops out of the box.

So what is a haunt owner to do? Hire more actors/technicians? NO. Technology has come to your rescue. Build and install the effect. Determine exactly where the customer must be and where he must be looking. Install a video camera (oh, its dark, duh... FYI we have low cost cameras, \$200 or less, that see in total darkness) so that the customer is looking into the camera at the time the effect is triggered. Do this for four effects. The camera view should show no detail of the scene. The picture should be nearly black except when a customer comes to view. The object doing the scare/startle must not be seen by the camera. The cameras area of view should only reveal the customer and his reaction. SAMs has a low cost b&w quad security system, but for the deep pocket guys, low light color systems with 16 cameras per monitor are available. Create a tech space for the monitor and remote air effect and distraction controls. Depending on customer flow, a single tech can easily control four effects, slow nights he can control eight or more.

An obvious advantage to a camera effects system is in the area of security. Cameras are more effective than metal detectors, add a video recorder and watch problems drop to near nothing.

This is a major investment. The system can be added to each year. Year one; four cameras, monitor, four air effects and a large bottle of aspirin. Year two; add sound effects, live mic and tech sound. Year three; add multiple air effects in same room/scene. Year four; add a monitor in the lobby where customers are waiting. If yours is a b&w system colorize the video with a red or blue piece of Plexiglas. If you use the mic in the scene audio can be added to the video. The tech can select which video signal to feed to the waiting area with a simple a/v router.

Add sound with tech-controlled sound effects in the scenes, monitor the customer's reactions via a microphone and the tech may use information obtained at a latter effect or respond live to the customers in the scene. An air horn directly over the customer's head that triggers the same time the main effect does will require a mop and bucket close by. I but scratch the surface here; your imagination should be fanned to flames by now. And as much as this may seem, it is but the tip of my berg on the subject, but alas, I cannot give everything away.

### **Theme or Not to Theme**

This sounds like an easy question (and is it the correct question?), but it is not. A haunt with a theme is similar to military intelligence (can you say oxymoron). A theme locks (?) you into doing things a certain way. Example: A haunt based on Horror Movies (original idea). Each scene presented represents a scene from a notable movie. Ahh here/there is the rub. If the scene is not presented in the fashion of the movie from

which, er, it was borrowed, then you are not true to your theme (which was notable horror movies). An example of what you could not do would be to give Freddy a chain saw! Is a theme a millstone about our neck? And unless we are going swimming does it make any difference?

Enough of the preamble. A theme has advantages. Your potential customers have an idea of what to expect, the venue from which it is presented and will develop anticipation. A theme greater than the sum of its parts may lend itself to operational hours beyond October. “Haunted House” is programming customers for October. “Castle of Terror” could be extended beyond October.

What are your goals? Because that is what it comes down to, are you seasonal or do you want the potential to do more with your haunt? When I first came up with the name “Castle Dragon” (complete name is “Castle of the White Dragon”, but that’s another story) for my haunt, I was under no illusion that I was anything more than an October event... but I had hopes. From day one I was looking for an alliance/permanent location type arrangement. Now in a fixed location and up year round I can plan other events. Some include: paint ball, Live Action Role Play, Murder Mystery, Renaissance Faire and parties. Castle Dragon opens in August as part of Hawkwood Renaissance Faire and operates through October. My theme has given me additional sources of revenue. I do not make big bucks during Hawkwood, but I do pay for all additions/improvements.

Look out! A theme can become a crutch. We creative types can lose sight of distant goals, because something easy is within reach. A theme can limit your growth. Do the gains outweigh the losses? For me the answer is Yes, I have gained more than I have lost, because I create outside of Castle Dragon. Build goodies for others and create events that challenge my talents. The castle theme has been good to me, even though I stray a bit. I have this great prop, it’s a dentist chair and equipment tower, true it has nothing to do with castles, but it was free and looks so good. I toss it in with no explanation.

The main advantage to a theme is that it is easier to advertise/promote. It gives potential customers a point of reference to compare you to other haunts via the media. A theme makes it easier orientating your actors to their parts and place within the haunt. It gives them a point of reference from which to spring in character creation. A third advantage to a theme (for those of us that are poor) is financial sponsorship. Talking with a potential investor or sponsor is easier when you say “... Like the movie Alien...” instead of, “... here’s a sketch of my idea...”

A haunt with a theme is the way to go for beginners. It would have made my beginnings in the haunt biz easier. The theme becomes your foundation. This foundation brings with it, confidence. Creative types need all the confidence that we can get. Now the question changes from “Theme or not to Theme” to “Theme October or Theme Year Around?”

Is the haunt biz a hobby destined to become a career? Or is the haunt biz a hobby destined to fade away as you grow up? Two very important questions. I have been trying to answer one or the other since 1964, when the haunt bug bit me.

## **Masks**

Now comes da touchie subject. Till now I have been on my best (and yes I know it does not look like it) behavior. My background is that of a frustrated actor turned producer/director (easier to get an acting job, hire myself). Masks are something to hide behind, a cover of sorts. The idea is to create a scare with the minimum investment of time and creativity. OOPS, did I say masks were not creative, hmmm, why yes I did. It is not that they are not good for something, like dummies/displays, it is that they are not for actors. But there is the problem. Most haunts do not hire/train actors. Any body that will show up and go BOO will do. And it is not to say that masks are all that bad for actors. The Phantom of the Opera did rather well, leather face and Michael Myers. Ooh, double OOPS, those are masks ALA the Lone Ranger and Zorro. They conceal identity. They become symbols of good or evil, or even good trapped within evil, but ...

Is there a point? Why Yes, I believe there may be, soon, I hope. Traditional Halloween horror masks (and Leather Face, Michael Myers etc are not traditional, they are cinema developed props that have history connected to them) look great and they stop dead as a doornail right there. *Next month I will talk about customers and reactions.* Bottom line is that masks are a cheap (\$\$) way to create scary actors for a haunt. Masks accomplish two things before the doors even open. One: they empower the actor, he/she becomes something/one else; the mask is their crutch, without it most of these sorry performers can do nothing, with it they release uncontrolled energy and can become demigods, a danger to themselves and to customers. Two: they dehumanize the actor and empower the customer; I (the customer) can do what I like to you (the masked non-person actor) because you are not real, you could be a dummy and it does no harm to kick a dummy.

Hmmm, I wonder how JB feels about masks? You now know. But, there is more. I use masks (did I say that? quick someone slap me). I do not use them often. I like the Hockey Mask and have a scene where I use it often. Other than that I use masks on the displays, except for slow time. During the week (M-W) Castle Dragon has a small staff, sometimes as few as four actors. My design allows me to operate 50 to 75 customers per hour with four hard workers. We leap frog ahead of the customers and on these slow nights we use more masks, as many as three.

What I like are true character faces, little if any make-up and basic wardrobe: nothing to take away from timing and “eye contact”. Next on the ladder would be more basic make-up, white/pale face, black lips and a touch of blood. Appliances are great for enhancing another wise ordinary face. But I try not to distract from the eyes.

Masks have many faults, the lack of good eye contact is number one, next is the poor fit, popping out of the costume around the neck, or slit up the back and when the actor turns around you see his/her head. The lack of mouth motion as they scream at me almost makes me laugh. But, complete costumed characters done well do command my attention. The best that comes to mind are the werewolves of Verdon Manor. No mouth movement, but good eye contact.

What is he talking about with this eye contact stuff? The deep subtle scare comes from the eyes. Track the customers as they enter the scene, search out the eyes, look for the weakest link and lock eyes, continue all else, but one or more customers should have deep eye contact with the actor. Some will look away, most will be afraid to look away. I have seen customers walk straight to the exit, or was that run? Nothing is better than a

good character face, facial expression and eye contact. It is real, latex is not real, nothing is scarier than real... nothing!

### **Illumination**

...or the lack there of... Vision is one of the five senses, duh. And no I do not believe in any more than five. Haunts can be broken down into three types. Right, wrong and wronger (wrongest?). Seldom do I see right, so let us investigate the other two and from this you may glean right.

Dark hallways have their place, black hallways maybe, but a haunt using a single flashlight for lighting is a sure sign of lack of forethought. Proper illumination is part of scene design, which is based on overall haunt design. Light, its color, placement, intensity and space it fills are a major part of scene design. When should a customer see? What should he see? Where should he see it? How should it affect him? What happens when he can no longer see it? How long should he be in the dark? How dark? How intense should the illumination be? From where?

Many questions. The answers will come from your own unique style. First things first, design a scene. This includes all aspects: customer entrance and exit; the set and props; number of actors (if any); theme (part of a themed haunts story line or not); lighting and sound.

The room I have chosen for purpose is a collapsed mine shaft. Large beams fill a vast space (20'x20'). The path is obvious, requires some ducking and the exit is unknown, due to the winding path. The beams are made from 1x4s and 1x6s boxed to form a larger beam. Some are full boxed others two or three sides, depending upon their orientation to the customer path. Black convention taffeta is draped to form a tighter space and can be draped around sprinkler heads. One of the scares is the infamous customer duck down; actor is now above and behind customer. This actor may control an air ram for moving one or more beams... in the wrong direction, an air horn, air jets, big board for banging, bean cans, etc. This scare should be near the end of the scene and have clear running room for the exit. Do nothing special to mask the actor, continue with the taffeta draping and make this duck down look like one or two before. What were we talking about? Oh, lighting!

A thin mist of fog will add to the collapsed feeling and enhance lighting. I have set lighting several different ways for this scene. The first was pure theatrical. Little spots creating pools of light, chasing down the sides of beams, bleeding through cracks, looked great, but... Strobes played cool, too. The most effective and dramatic was pure white light. Two sources. The entrance to the beam room was illuminated from behind and at floor level shinning up. The customer's entrance blocked light, created shadows and concern for things that were not there. The exit provided blinding light directed into the customers' face. This distraction accomplished three things; additional cross lighting of the beam room (complete with shadows created by the customers exiting for those now entering), clear view of the exit and set the stage for the next scare in near darkness with the customers iris near closed down. A side benefit was for those customers brave enough to turn around and look back after the duck down scare. When ever possible I used a little girl as the actor. This had the added effect of customer amusement at the thought of a child scaring them.

The entrance light was on the floor in a Boo unit. These are special units I have

designed that make use of lost triangular spaces common to the 60-degree method. Boo units have openings top, middle and bottom. I have several of each style and place them as needed. The exit is illuminated from another Boo unit. The beams are painted in dark tones, but added to this are streaks of bright white paint. They help shape the beams and provide reflective surfaces for the white light. The customer shadows playing across the white streaks provide a unique and ever changing distraction. Colored light looks cool and very theatrical. It does not accomplish the scare effect. That is not to say the beam room does not work with colored light, it does. It is to say that the room is more effective with bright white light and provides the set up for the next scare.

Lighting is more than bee bopping down to the hardware store and scooping up some clamp lights. Lighting is customer manipulation at its best. How about a grain of wheat bulb that suddenly appears near your face, in the dark?

## **Sound**

Pain hits me in flashes whenever I here that some poor haunter has solved his sound problem with a boom box, ahhhhh!!!!

OK, I feel better. True I started with boom boxes and little cassette players. I even had an eight track reel to reel. Gosh, I even used eight-ohm stereo speakers and drove them with mighty amps to blast sound through my haunt. But I have grown up now, I am no longer in my parent's living room and the customers are paying me for something a little more than a sheet and peeled grape.

The next most unamusing thing I have found is the banter over the constant search for the best sound track (similar response as noted in opening paragraph). The reality is that unless you are using a motion picture soundtrack theme from a successful movie, customers do not notice, nor do they care. But wait you say, customers tell you how great the sound track was/is, it must matter. I dare say that the number who say anything about sound are few and far between.

I have taken several approaches to "house sound". House sound is the major sound track that is heard throughout the haunt. This sound would act as masking for scene sound and effects as well as actor dialogue and customer reaction within the scene. This is not to be confused with entry area sound. A mistake most haunts make is that the same track used as house sound is used in the entry, bad idea. House sound is that, used in the house only. Do not prepare your customers by giving away one of your best distractions before they enter the actual haunt. Distraction?

Yes, Distraction. 1993 was a fun year for me. I attacked haunting with a passion and left common sense behind. I realized customers were not only to be scared; they were also to be entertained. Sound was my weakest area. I examined the customer and experimented on them in '93. Walls were moved, effects added, removed, modified and some customers swore off haunts. But I learned. '93 through '98 I used a house sound track designed by me and produced by my son. The track contained driving base and

piercing treble. But, its main attribute was an every changing beat. Its tempo was not sacred; it would gradually change then dramatically change. Did customers notice the sound track? No, since day one in this biz no one ever (other than employees, who hated the new track) mentioned the track. And for this I am grateful. The point is that customers do not notice sound, other than effects used to enhance a visual effect. Well, OK that is not entirely true. '93 did have a unique sound effect, that of a chain saw. I was poor that year and could not afford a chain saw, so I recorded one. Customers did notice it.

The offbeat sound track was one more distraction. It was not a conscious one, but a background variation. Distractions create the atmosphere necessary to provide a great customer scare. A distraction need not be obvious to work. Scene sounds were masked by house sound. Proper placement of house sound speakers before and after each scene kept customers from learning what was ahead. The actors did not worry about their scene being revealed and the customer received a better show.

Sound design did not stop there. Each scene with its own track (not all my scenes have their own track) was carefully designed. Skull cavern was four tracks, cemetery two tracks and the pendulum scene a unique variation of recorded and sequenced live sounds.

Speaker placement is as important as what the speaker is spitting out. Another consideration is frequency response and to tweet or not to tweet (er). And lets not forget the power that drives our sound, the amplifier.

The scare is what drives most of us. And it is difficult to stop building cool props and think about sound design. It is more difficult to purchase proper sound equipment instead of another five-gallon bucket of latex. However, you will be pleased to discover that properly designed sound will enhance your creative latex creations and may even require an additional investment in a professional mop and bucket.

## **Colour**

Being a rather old fossil, I remember when there was no TV. I listened to radio. Well, actually I am not that old; TV was around, but barely. Local stations were coming on the air, the magic box was in the papers, but I had radio. Grand serials, my favorite were "The Shadow". I would listen to the brown box and visualize the events. This was fast paced stuff, the dialogue riveting and sounds (called sound effects today) all descriptive. I could see the events painted out before me; I could see them in colour.

'Tis a shame that that is not the case in most haunts of today. Some of you folks are in serious need of a radio. And maybe a seeing eye dog (yes I know they see in black and white) to guide you around your haunt. Ever sit in your haunt, in the dark, closing your eyes and taking in the sounds during operation? I have, then I am stranger than most. Do it, this season, on a busy night, park your butt for an hour or two and listen, listen to the colour. Yes, sound is colour. You paint with it as well as with the colour of light. Your customers provide some of the finest colour, but only if you provide colours for them to see and hear.

Hundreds of man-hours are spent on building a haunt. How many did you spend on colouring it? No, not paint and I do not care how great your airbrush artist is. Because all of his work is for naught should you fail to properly present it to the

customer. The sound of dripping or rushing water brings to mind which colour? An ice cavern, we are chilled to the bone; the blinding whiteness penetrates our bones, what sound comes to mind? A fireplace crackles, the cat lies before it, a table set with milk and cookies, a book opened face down, all covered with dust and the propped up legs belong to a corpse; what comes to mind? What do we want to see, hear, what message do you wish to convey?

“Hey guys I need a sound effect here, oh and get me a red gel!” RED! what colour red, shade, intensity, aimed where? Why? To what end? Sound effect, of what? From where? And, oh, by the way how loud? A little planning, please.

STOP. Lets not get too carried away. All of the above is a lost cause, unless you can execute it every night you are open, for every customer that enters. Each scene must play out the same over and over and... Automation you say. HA, I don't think so. Unless of course your customers are patrons in a Dark Ride and not a walk through. (see article “More Than Hot Air) A true haunt is a theatrical experience. A customer walks through a continuous play, some interaction may or may not take place, and actors may modify their presentation to meet the customer's needs. Actors do not need to be hamstrung by automation. Instead it should enhance. Lighting/sound effects should be triggered by the actors in the scene or by a technician working the scene. These effects should enhance the presentation and be flexible enough to take in to account the many variations of customer reactions.

Shades of coloured light amplify sound effects. Each must be properly placed in relationship to the customer path with in the scene. Decisions as to what or who is to be coloured must be made. The placement of the speaker is not any more or less important than the placement and colour of the light source. The two work together in presenting the actors and scene to the customer. Low frequency sounds need more power and amplitude to carry as well as high frequency sounds, which need less. Colour has variations of intensity called saturation. The deeper the colour the more light amplitude needed to present the colour. Focusing of the lighting instrument changes the suggested intensity of the colour. Sharp defined edges (focused spot) versus soft bleeding to nothingness edges (flood) shape the scene and suggest an intensity level. A sound effect that cannot be seen is lost and worthless. If the creature suddenly lurches for me, is properly illuminated and sounds as if from another world, then and only then will the customer be looking for another pair of Depends.

## **The Customer**

Finally, a subject that we all live for, the customer. In his grabby little hands he holds our money, well, almost our money. It must make it to our paint stained hands with latex clogged fingernails covering the splinters and bruises. So much for glamour. The customer, who and what is it? Customers come in a variety of distortions. The ones that scream at high noon when they discover their shadow is gone and those that are so macho that a near miss with a chain saw hardly makes 'em blink (or so they would like us to think).

Part of the customer's baggage is the all knowing and seeing building department; they are followed by the powerful fire department. I was in several haunts last year that scared the poop out of me, not because they were doing a good job (HA), but because the

haunt was as dangerous as dangerous could get. I have no idea how this place got approved and what ninny thought it had enough exits, but...

To set the record straight, our job is to scare the bee gee gees out of people. We do this by getting them lost in a maze (oxymoron?), presenting them with impossible situations, jumping into their face and bouncing off the walls. Some customer's keep their eyes closed, others ignite a match for guidance and others boldly exclaim that they are invincible.

'93 was a year of serious tests. We set up to do a fire drill with real customers. A sign in the lobby (as well as our ticket sales person) warned every customer of the impending test. It never happened, we got so darn busy we had no time. A fluke, Thursdays early in the month are slow. I forgot about it, was not going to do it over the weekend and took down the sign. Well as Murphy would have it, the fire alarm got tripped. The cast thought it was the fire drill and proceeded to their individual tasks. The customers were unimpressed, did not exit the building and generally ignored the actors and security. Now, the drill was to be presented to the customers as the real thing, they were told that there was an emergency and could you please take the nearest exit. A few did manage to finally leave, I think. But in general it was a flop. Oh my staff found the fake fire (a large cut out of flames, it was hidden in wardrobe), but our evacuation of real customers was less than successful. Why?

Because of all the aforementioned items, our job was to scare them and we were doing a terrible job of it. The saving grace was that this occurred early Friday evening before the rush. We gave all the customers free haunt tickets to return and Raceway Passes. One of the contributing factors was (discovered accidentally before opening during the building department inspection) all the exit doors were painted exactly like the haunt walls: they did not stand out as different or as exits. This was changed for '94. The main factor is that customers are "idiots". We added 12 flashing strobes and horns. emergency lighting, no sound track and no theatrical lighting. "Hey this must be part of the show". "Not very good if you ask me". "Yeah, it really sucks".

What to do about the customer. Short of an orientation film and professional presenter, I have no suggestions. If the customer is not screaming, running into the walls and each other; they are attacking props and actors. We have had two more emergency drills, with similar results. The third drill included four deafening sirens placed about the building. I waited to see if anything that we were doing new this drill would have an effect, it did not, till I threw the switch on the new sirens. This was most effective and drove people out of the building and kept moving them. I sincerely hope that I never have to hear that sound again. To enhance the sirens I have been developing an air ram system that will automatically open all doors when an alarm is tripped. And even with all the problems we still evacuate a customer filled haunt in less than ninety seconds. It's just that I would like for the customers to participate more.

We do not use metal detectors. I have a real live police officer in the lobby and a sign "For your Safety and the Safety of Others, You are being Video Taped". Since 1979 I can count all physical incidents on one hand (knock on wood). My actors have done more to injure themselves than the customer have come close to and potentially rowdy customers have learned a whole new meaning to dejavu as they pass the same security person over and over again.

Catering to the customer is a must. However, we must take into account that the

very nature of our production can cause confusion during an emergency and that our customers are apt to become blithering idiots.

If you made it this far, congratulations and good haunting, jbcorn