

SECTION IV

SAFETY

OVERVIEW

HOW TO BUILD A PORTABLE MODULAR DARK ATTRACTION

A dark attraction is dangerous. Call it a haunted house, haunted castle, caverns of terror, haunted manor, haunted anything, it is dangerous.

Why is it dangerous? The nature of the event is to entertain/scare customers. I do this by having scary music, sounds, monsters, low lighting and surprises. The average customer will become disoriented very easily. The macho customer will never admit he/she is disoriented or scared. The frightened totally out of his/her wits customer is afraid of his/her own shadow when just thinking about a haunted house, much less a professionally produced dark attraction.

All of these types and more are in the house at any one time. In the event of a true emergency (fire, berserk customer, falling props, walls, or ceilings, panicked crowd, injured customer, passed out customer, etc.), customers need to be evacuated quickly and/or help must get to where the problem is within seconds.

Customers do other strange things. Some will grab or attack actors. Others will join the cast and may even find a location in the house to scare their friends or other customers. Sometimes they move in and out the exits and employee areas like they belong there. These customers can create many problems and are a danger to themselves. A tight, easily monitored and controlled design is first priority.

CENTRAL CORRIDOR AND EXIT DESIGN

The first concern of design is safety. Notice the floor plan on page 59. This is a typical 40x100' dark attraction. It has 9 emergency exits plus the main entrance and main exit for a total of 11 exits; more than code, more than you will ever need except for that one emergency when even these exits are not enough. In addition to standard exits, there are two doors for the cemetery, one into the cemetery and one returning from the cemetery into the Castle. This floor plan also has an exit dedicated to the central corridor.

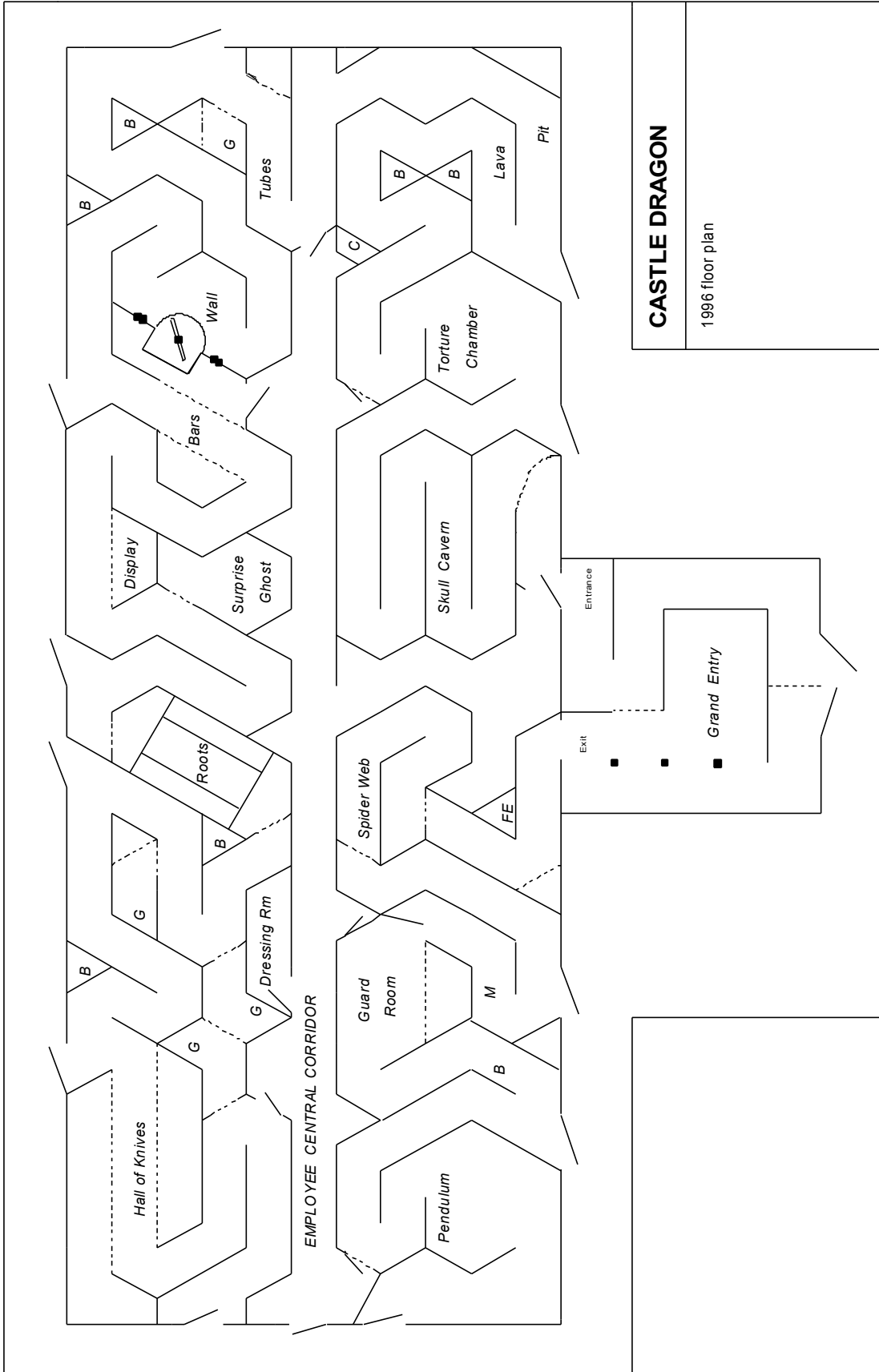
The next main feature is the central (employee) corridor. It starts with the Grand Entry/Ticket Booth area and connects both ends of the Castle. The central corridor should be clear of any objects. The Castle Dragon corridor is 5 feet wide. Remember, it is dark in the attraction. A wide corridor makes it easier for actors to move from scene to scene. In the event of an emergency, the wide corridor will become even more valuable.

Note that the Grand Entry is centrally located and contains both the entrance and exit. This allows customers to purchase their tickets, stand in the entry line and, when they exit, report any problems or lost items to staff. The control offered by this design is unequalled. The main problem is with exiting customers. If you are not entertaining the customers as they exit, the waiting customers will get the wrong idea.

All the rooms/events are immediately accessible from the central corridor. Actors can easily move from one part of the house to another without walking through the customer path. This allows operation of the house with a reduced staff during slow customer traffic periods and lets actors exit into the central corridor or ticket booth with valuable information in case of any emergency. The staff inside the central corridor can act upon the actors' information in seconds, quickly move to where they are needed, and begin the proper response. Note the customer path is a straight path with fire exits - no maze.

Exits must have no steps, only ramps. The exits in Castle Dragon are all 4' feet wide with no hardware. The exit doors are held shut with gate springs, no latches.

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CASTLE DRAGON
1996 floor plan

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FLAME PROOFING

Fire proofing of all flammable decorator items is a must. Any fabric or fake hair used in prop or creature design, rope or curtain type material, fabric used to line a coffin and cotton spider web effects must be submerged or liberally doused with an approved flame proofing agent. Portions of trees, branches, leaves, or bark must be flame proofed as these items become very dry and offer perfect materials to start or fuel a fire. Follow instructions carefully. I even flame proof large wardrobe pieces such as capes and coats. When in doubt, I flame proof it.

Prepare a pan big enough to receive the largest item to be flame proofed. Submerge the item in the pan and let it soak for about five minutes. Hang the item to drip dry over the pan. There is a flame proof paint available from Sherwin-Williams. It is expensive and comes in both latex (#20-20) and oil base (#111). The oil base has a better fire rating. The paint foams up when exposed to high heat to create a flame barrier. It is an intumescent fire retardant paint, fire hazard classification, class "A".

CONVENTION TAFFETA

Never use plastic in the house. It is always tempting to use rolls of plastic for masking, curtains and to cover rooms to seal out light. Conventional plastic releases poison gas when burned and the plastic forms flaming globules that will spread the flames further. A plastic-like fabric called convention taffeta emits no fumes, will not support a flame and creates no flaming globules. It costs more but, if plastic-like product is required, it will work. Most fire departments will not allow use of plastic but permit use of convention taffeta. Include a sample for the fire department with the plans. They will want to test it. See SRI lab test results for convention taffeta on page 72 of appendix.

FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

Fire code requires only 2a10BC (10 lb) fire extinguishers. This is absurd. I use 4a15BC (15 lb) fire extinguishers. In my 5,000 square foot house I have 8 of them. The main reason is response time. The central corridor is dark and, in a fire emergency situation, some customers may be following actors or led by actors into the central corridor. This will further confuse the situation and delay time needed to find a fire extinguisher. Once I have the extinguisher, I don't want to have to go find another one because the one I have is too small and runs out of chemical before the fire runs out of flame.

FIRST AID

It is good to have a well stocked first aid box and emergency aid location for actors in the central corridor. This same equipment can also treat customers with minor cuts, abrasions or splinters. It is best for more than one actor or staff member to have first aid training and basic CPR. In case of a major accident, have a first aid plan not only for customers, but for actors and staff as well.

Many things could go wrong over which there is no control: sudden storm or wind collapses part of the house, a vehicle crashes into a portion of the house, lightning strikes a pole or tree and it falls on the house. Use your imagination on this and prepare ... Murphy's law ... **Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong and at the worst possible time.**

EVACUATION

Plan and practice emergency evacuation of the house. Assure that all actors and staff members know exactly what their job is in the event of an emergency. Designate a rallying point/location for all actors and staff so that they may be easily accounted for. Make plans for: fire, storm, loss of power, panicked customers, rowdy customers, dangerous customers and drunk or under the influence of ??? customers. Post evacuation/emergency plans in ticket booth and break area. Quiz staff and actors on their knowledge.

CUSTOMERS

Do not let customers enter the house with: their vision obscured by costume pieces or masks, strange wardrobe accessories that may impede their progress through the house, props like swords or knives, baseball caps, packages, purses, high heels or open footwear. Let experience and common sense be the guide to admitting customers. I have a lost and found for items (pierced and regular earrings, bracelets, watches, car/house keys, articles of clothing, etc.) found when sweeping up.

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Post a sign at the house entrance advising customers of the rules: Secure loose objects, No running, pushing or shoving, No open flame or smoking, Do not touch the actors or props, Report any problems to the ticket booth, Warning - strobe lights in use, Enter at your own risk, The floor may be slippery, Not responsible for lost items. Consult an attorney for additional information on this.

FLASHLIGHTS

Locate a flashlight with each fire extinguisher, in the ticket booth, with the first aid box, in the exterior equipment room with the air compressor, close to the concealed interior equipment room, and with each actor or staff member. These are not toys and are to be used only in event of emergency. Flashlights used by actors to temporarily blind or lead customers are not emergency flashlights

**ADJUST AND ADAPT THESE SUGGESTED RULES. STAY IN CHARGE.
RIGHT OR WRONG, MAKE A DECISION AND STICK TO IT. DISCUSS THE DECISION
LATER, NOT IN FRONT OF CUSTOMERS.**

RULES FOR ACTORS

DO NOT TOUCH THE CUSTOMERS - EVER !
STAY AT LEAST AN ARMS LENGTH AWAY FROM
CUSTOMERS

DO NOT CHASE CUSTOMERS DOWN A HALL
DO NOT BLOCK A CUSTOMERS FORWARD PROGRESS

DO NOT OVER SCARE ! LITTLE ONES ESPECIALLY
MEMORIZE HOUSE FLOOR PLAN AND EXITS

**DO NOT BE SEEN OUTSIDE OF THE HOUSE IN
COSTUME**
DO NOT SMOKE, DRINK OR FOOL AROUND IN THE
HOUSE

**STAY IN CHARACTER EXCEPT WHEN HELPING A
CUSTOMER**
WORK WITH THE OTHER ACTORS IN YOUR ROOM/EVENT

**TREAT CUSTOMERS, STAFF AND OTHER ACTORS
WITH RESPECT**
LOOK FOR CUSTOMERS THAT MAY NEED HELP

REPORT DANGEROUS CUSTOMERS IMMEDIATELY
GET PERMISSION TO CHANGE ROOM ASSIGNMENTS

ARRIVE EARLY FOR MAKEUP & WARDROBE

SAFETY

LEARN EMERGENCY PLANS & FIRE EXTINGUISHER LOCATIONS

BE PROFESSIONAL !!!!

ATTRACTION INSPECTION / MAINTENANCE

PART OF OVERALL SAFETY IS HOUSE INSPECTION PRIOR TO OPENING TO THE PUBLIC EACH DAY.

- 1) REMOVE ALL TRASH FROM THE CENTRAL CORRIDOR, CUSTOMER PATH, AND EXTERIOR OF THE BUILDING. MAKE SURE THAT ALL BRUSH IS TRIMMED BACK AT LEAST 10 FEET FROM THE BUILDING.
- 2) LOOK FOR SLIPPERY PLACES ON THE FLOOR. IF CAUSED BY A FOG BOX, SPRINKLE DIRT OR SAW DUST TO ABSORB THE OIL AND SWEEP IT UP. IF THE HOUSE IS OUTSIDE, RAIN WILL MAKE THE FLOOR OF THE HOUSE WET. POST A SIGN AT THE ENTRANCE ADVISING CUSTOMERS OF THE WET/SLIPPERY CONDITIONS AND TO PROCEED WITH CAUTION.
- 3) LOOK FOR TAMPERING, BREAK-INS AND OTHER DAMAGE.
- 4) REMOVE ALL UNUSED BUILDING MATERIALS FROM THE SITE.
- 5) IF IN A PERMANENT STRUCTURE SUCH AS A WAREHOUSE, ALL FLOOR AREAS AROUND THE HOUSE SHOULD BE CLEAN AND ALL PAINTS, BUILDING MATERIALS AND TOOLS MUST BE REMOVED.
- 6) WARDROBE/PROP AREA SHOULD BE EXTREMELY NEAT AND CLEAN. INSPECT ALL COSTUMES, MAKEUP APPLIANCES AND PROPS. DO NOT USE STRAIGHT PINS IN WARDROBE/COSTUMES.
- 7) DO NOT ALLOW STAFF/ACTORS TO BRING ANY FLAMMABLE ITEMS SUCH AS HAIR SPRAY AND RUBBING ALCOHOL INTO THE HOUSE.
- 8) DO NOT STORE ANY PAINT, THINNERS, ACETONE, ADHESIVES OR OTHER FLAMMABLE MATERIALS IN OR NEAR THE HOUSE.
- 9) VERIFY THAT EACH EXIT DOOR IS UNLOCKED AND WORKING PROPERLY, THE EXIT LIGHT WORKS, AND THE LOW LEVEL EXIT LIGHT WORKS.
- 10) TEST THE EMERGENCY LIGHTING AND FIRE ALARM SYSTEMS.
- 11) ALLOW NO ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IN THE HOUSE. DO NOT ALLOW ACTORS OR STAFF MEMBERS TO WORK UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL OR DRUGS OR TO TAKE BREAKS AND CONSUME MIND ALTERING SUBSTANCES LIKE ALCOHOL AND/OR DRUGS BEFORE RETURNING TO THEIR JOBS.
- 12) ALL ACTORS AND STAFF MEMBERS SHOULD BE FULLY RESTED. SCHEDULE REGULAR BREAKS AND MAKE SURE PLENTY OF CUPS, ICE AND COLD WATER TO DRINK ARE AVAILABLE. DO NOT LEAVE ANY ACTOR AREA UNSTAFFED.
- 13) INSPECT FOG BOXES FOR FLUID LEVELS AND LEAKS. START FOG SYSTEM AT LEAST THIRTY MINUTES BEFORE OPENING.
- 14) DO NOT ALLOW ANY GLASS CONTAINERS IN THE HOUSE.
- 15) NO SMOKING, NO MATCHES, NO LIGHTERS AND NO SOURCE OF OPEN OR ENCLOSED FLAME OF ANY KIND. NO SPACE HEATERS - ELECTRIC, KEROSENE OR GAS.
- 16) DO NOT USE ABUSIVE OR FOUL LANGUAGE. TREAT ACTORS, STAFF MEMBERS AND ESPECIALLY CUSTOMERS WITH RESPECT.
- 17) INSPECT ALL WALLS, RAMPS, BRIDGES, RAISED/LOWERED AREAS, SUPPORTS, BRACES, EFFECTS LIGHTING, SOUND EQUIPMENT, WIRING, MANUAL, ELECTRO-MECHANICAL EFFECTS AND DISPLAYS.
- 18) CHECK ILLUMINATION AND PADDING IN ANY AREA WHERE A CUSTOMER MUST LOWER THEIR HEAD.

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- 19) CHECK FOR SPLINTERS, LOOSE PIECES OF WOOD AND PROJECTING OBJECTS LIKE SCREWS OR POORLY ATTACHED JOINING PLATES.
- 20) INSPECT EVERYTHING, EVEN DURING OPERATION

OPERATION

One staff member must be dedicated to emergency response. This includes reacting to a customer or actor crisis as well as repairing wardrobe, props, makeup and fallen structural members.

A complete structural repair kit must be available complete with battery powered screw gun, screws, wood or metal plates, large flashlight and duct tape.

No matter how strong the house, a customer or group of customers will find some way to knock down a wall, display or even pull down part of the roof. I actually had a group of drunk customers completely collapse two sections of hallway and roof onto themselves. They thought it was part of the show. That's how far gone they were. Fortunately, none of them were hurt.

Training actors and staff members is very important. Dark attractions usually rely on young people for talent and some staff positions. Maintain tight management and quality control on all staff and actors.

Relief actors are very important, especially on the busy nights. If possible, have two complete crews on big nights. Use only reliable, responsible people in key staff positions. Continually monitor the operation of the house from the central corridor and from the customers point of view. Allow changes in a room/event procedure only with the talent director's approval. Do not let actors change rooms whenever they want too. They must get permission.

SECURITY

Most dark attractions use parent/adult help as security. In this day and age, I use local police officers. They cost more but my customers feel safer going into my house. Rowdy/dangerous customers behave better and my staff and actors feel safer. This is not to say customers will not misbehave, just that they will behave better.

The house should be bringing in large amounts of cash and criminals are not real big on direct confrontations with the police. In case of major problems, a police officer can summon back-up faster than a 911 call.

Small two-way wireless headsets can be used by staff in the house for communications. Remember, the house is noisy and this may reduce the effectiveness of the headsets. A staff member should walk the house (go through the house as a customer, look for damage and make sure the actors are doing their job) 2 or 3 times per hour when busy.

TICKET BOOTH

The ticket booth should be directly accessible only from the employee corridor and have a door of its own. There should be room for at least two people, a fire extinguisher, a flashlight, an out of sight cash drawer, literature about the attraction and the sponsoring charity, a trash can, attraction tickets, and the fire alarm pull (should be visible to customers). If sales warrant, construct a double window ticket booth.

A customer presents cash, discount coupon or admission pass to the ticket booth and receives a numbered ticket. Use a different color/type of ticket for each type sale or keep a written record of all sales considered not normal. Upon opening, record the beginning ticket number for each type of ticket and at close, record the final number. Keep all large bills out of sight.

The customer presents his/her ticket to the admissions person who will tare the ticket in half save one half for the nightly audit and give the other half to the customer. Cross check the ticket stubs with the total ticket sales in the booth.

This check and balance system will keep track of the sales and flag any improper tickets being presented for admission.

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ADMISSIONS PERSON

Because of the design of the house, it can be operated at a slow rate of admissions to a high rate of say 600 to 800 people per hour. The admissions person has control of this rate. He/she notes the length of the entrance line and the average waiting time per group of customers. When in doubt about waiting time, the admissions person should ask the customers if they thought they waited too long. A wait of greater than 30 minutes should be avoided if at all possible.

Early on a potentially busy night and on slow nights, allow the groups of customers to come in at a slow rate. This accomplishes two things. First, the customers in the house have a longer time to enjoy the house and the work you have put into it because they are not being pushed from behind by other customers to move faster. Second, it helps to build a line out front which telegraphs the message to passer-bys that this is an event worth waiting for.

Many potential customers have come by my house early on what should be a busy evening and not entered the house because the line was too short or non-existent, giving the impression that the house was not very good. I have actually used some of my actors and staff members as customers in line to encourage people to stop and go through the house.

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