

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 their 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. Something for everyone. 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 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. Lust; viewing a tasty morsel of the opposite sex. 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 there of...

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 possibly 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 to busy bragging of their success to notice that their bridge is burning behind them and the pylons ahead are set in quick sand.

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 near by 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 with in 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 burg 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 were 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 shining 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, ahhhhhh!!!!

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.