

Haunt actor training – Allen Hopps

Introduce myself and share my experience

The meaning of amateur- I am an amateur

FEAR talk

- Frightening
- Energetic
- Aware
- Reliable

String theory

Circle exercise

Focuses on movement and character expression through movement

Ballerina hit by a school bus

Five min break

Talking points

Starting on time – so important to be ready for the first group

Show pacing busy night vs. slow night routine

Target selection- picking who to go for in a group and why

Promise breaking- show range and leave yourself options

Make up time- the earlier you get there, the cooler you will look

Safari game 4 groups

Five min break

Talking points

What to say

Paint a picture with words

Get into their heads

Phobia fishing

Freeze attack

Two lines of actors charge each other and get critiqued and kudos on their stances

SCAARE talk

Survey
Categorize
Aware
Action
Reaction
Escape

Character introductions

Great character introductions

1. Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003)

The music swells as the great Captain Jack Sparrow sails into Port Royal. It's a dramatic and heroic moment... until the shot reveals his sad, sinking boat. Jack jumps off the mast just before it becomes fully submerged underwater and swaggers past the dockhand.

2. The Dude in *The Big Lebowski* (1998)

We meet The Dude in a grocery store late at night as he checks the expiration dates on milk cartons. Everything about him embodies a comical laziness - from his appearance to the fact that he writes a check for \$0.69.

3. Sundance in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969)

It's a scene that shows the importance of character reactions. A mustached man, Sundance, plays blackjack with the saloon owner, Macon. Not aware of the identity of Sundance, Macon accuses him of cheating and puts his hands near his guns, relaxed and ready.

Butch enters the saloon, doing his best to lighten the mood, trying to get Sundance to forget it and leave, but Sundance won't budge: "I wasn't cheating". Sundance explains to Butch that "if he invites us to stay, then we'll go." Butch does his best to encourage Macon to "ask them to stick around", but Macon stands firm until Butch finally says, "I can't help you, Sundance."

The mere mention of his name changes Macon's mind quickly. He's terrified yet scared to show it. Eventually, with the help of encouragement from Butch, Macon becomes apologetic, and asks them to "stick around".

This scene not only establishes Butch and Sundance's relationship, but it shows the audience that Sundance is a man to be feared.

4. Darth Vader in *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (1977)

When Darth Vader made his film debut, he secured his place as one of the greatest villains of all time. His appearance is enough to secure such an honor, but it is his manner that seals his fate in film infamy.

The Rebel ship has just seen a laser-gun battle and dead bodies litter the corridor. From the passageway, Darth Vader appears all in black. He immediately commands respect as the Storm Troopers stand at attention. His helmet, cape, and voice make the moment even more dramatic.

5. Luke in *Cool Hand Luke* (1967)

Within the first images of the film, the audience understands the entire psychology of Luke. He is drunk and on the street, destroying parking meters. The last image of the introduction scene shows Luke's face illuminated by police headlights. He sees the officers coming towards him and smiles. He raises his beer to them in a "cheers" signal.

In this short time, the audience understands that although he is extremely charismatic and likable, Luke has a self-destructive nature and an inability to conform to authority. Not only does this character introduction explain a character, but it foreshadows Luke's tragic demise.

**Every moment you are visible you are introducing your character to someone.
Teach them about your character with every nuance.**

*One day it was 103 degrees outside, after a break Dan Carro and I were getting ready to go back out. As he was putting on black leather armor and attaching a black cape, I asked him why he was putting all of that on in the heat. He said
"It might be the only time they get to see me".*

"You never get a second chance at a first impression".

The moment a character is introduced carries the ability to invoke powerful emotions: joy, anger, fear, and envy. Not only can this moment inspire an intense audience reaction, but it can also offer a unique opportunity for insight and explanation.

We can learn about a character in many different ways. We can learn by what they do and what they say. We can also learn by what other characters say about them and how they react to those characters.

Think of the beginning of a movie- Think of what happens as characters are introduced

Look for Ice berg qualities

iceberg quality: only a little bit sticks above the surface, but it represents a huge mass of character information the reader can fill in.

Give each of your characters a specific way of speaking - do they use long words or short words? Do they curse a lot or not at all? Do they speak in complete sentences or just short, broken fragments?

Telling mannerisms

- leaning
- Finger tapping
- Lip biting or licking
- Toying with coins or jewelry
- Frowning
- Adjusting hair or clothing
- Head wagging

Obtain an accurate perception of your body's image. This should include:

- Posture
- Gestures
- Body movement
- Facial expressions
- Eye contact

Character appropriate facial expressions are an important part of Acting. In fact, facial expressions are often the key determinant of the meaning behind the message. When you speak, your face-more clearly than any other part of your body-communicates to others your attitudes, feelings, and emotions.

Walk, observe, and interact in order to show your character

Walk as a master, servant, fool

Observe as a master, servant, fool

Interact as a master, servant, fool

Don't waste a patrons glance- distill your characters essence into movement and even idleness.

Maltese falcon example

Character development

Every character should have a name and a story "nine toed Pete"

Character depth should equate to the length of time they spend with the patrons.

Every character should have these five things

A secret- helps make the character deeper and less one dimensional

An enemy- Someone the guests can remind them of to generate hatred-or another haunt character they can be competitive with.

A song- get you into character or reminds you of them

A favorite thing- to protect or regain (think of Golem's drive)

A psychosis- Having a psychosis will help the actors figure out what to do and how to act.

These things can really help to create characters and will help shape the movements and thoughts of the actors.

Set them up. Give them a place to come from, and a place to go, these are actor necessities. For you, give them more than one chance to scare.

Focus on the scare

Look- Act –Retreat- Look

How to be scary

Timing –like telling a good joke, timing is everything. Watching your prey and knowing when to strike. Look for guest distraction and position to tell you when to strike.

The unexpected- Coming out of complete hiding must be done swiftly or out of the view of the audience. The scare comes from the reveal- suddenly you are within threat range.

Distance -is the difference between comedy and horror. Imagine a Bear attack. From 75ft away, watching a bear crawl into a VW bugs window is hilarious. The camera in the car suddenly filled by a bear's head is terrifying.

Invasion of space- The sudden change of distance or the continuous creep into their space is a great way to instill fear

Dread of impending attack- Posing to give an iconic image to the guest. Man in a window, boots under a curtain, silhouette, Statue scare, blocking an exit.

Attack- Works best as a charge. Suddenly and loudly invading personal space, as soon as you reach the guest- back off and retreat or the effectiveness is ruined.

Vulnerability -of the guest (position, focus, size, prep). Look for a moment when the guest has been distracted, written off your hiding spot, looked back to see how far back her friend is, anything that shows their psyche is in a state of change. The transition periods of the brain in-between searching and evaluating are the best time to strike.

Adaptability -and knowledge of techniques (Scares list) Having a technique to pull out of the bag when nothing else worked, or to escalate the fear of a guest is priceless. The days of the haunt one trick pony are over.

Prop use – It is the skill of the actor to recognize the effectiveness of his props. Always focus on the audience. They will tell you if the clever hand is working or if another approach would be best. Try to use the same prop weapons all the time. Know their range and how they move.

Working with the scene

Be aware of the flow of the scene, and of the state of the guests as they travel through it

Were they blinded in the room before? Tell them all what you have in mind for the scene

Where do they hide, where do they retreat to?

Camo scares are great and are often one of the most talked about scenes in a haunt. Praise those actors but remember how much work the suit and environment are doing. Camo scares are a great place to help actors refine their timing.

Psychology

Everyone can get scared. It is a matter of how. For the really tough nuts to crack don't quit. Repeated good attempts to frighten them will wear them down and they will eventually run out of the show.

Try to make the leader jump and the rest of the group will follow. Don't bother too much with the ones that are scared to just be in the haunt, go for the ones that still look strong.

If all actors do that then everyone runs out at the end. Remember you are a team and someone is there to scare them behind you.

Humor vs. fear

If the focus is on the customer and they are not as scared as we would like them to be, then humor is a great option to give them their monies worth. Humor can also be used to break down the barriers they put up to keep from being frightened. A humorous actor can break the tension and allow other to get a great scare.

Humor does not ruin the purity of a haunt. Remember the difference between horror and comedy is often just distance it is viewed from. Humor will be in a haunt whether you want it to be or not, so you might as well plan on it in a few areas so it doesn't get out of hand and hurt the focus of the show.

Costume design

Create a costume culture

If you have a location and costumes then you can have a haunted house. That is not true with any other element- sound, sets, lights, animatronics. None of them have the impact or ability of an actor in a great costume.

Compile visual and movement references

Pinterest- pinterest is a website that helps you organize visual internet content (pictures). It is a great way to show your cast what is inspiring you and the direction you want to take new costumes and characters.

Dress to impress

Costumes are meant to get attention and be noticed. They are not clothes- they should be more than that. Find or make pieces that are character specific and will help the actor grasp a character. The better they feel equipped to be scary the scarier they will be.

Cool vs comfortable scale

What I call the cool comfortable scale is vary simple. The cooler you look, the less comfortable you will be.

If you explain it to actors in this way it will help them determine what is more important to them, and you can find a balance with what is important to you.

Contacts, prosthetics, silicone masks- all add to the look of a character or costume- but come at the cost of comfort. Dedicated actors will work through it but new actors may not be as ready.

It is more important to be able to work all evening in your costume than it is to look 100% awesome. Also the darkness inside of the haunt makes some of the uncomfortable extras unnecessary due to them not being seen.

Masks vs make up

My theory on this results in a mix of both. If the character they are portraying is human, then make-up is most likely the best bet. If they are trying to become inhuman-then a mask will be able to distort the features better. There are also many different styles and versions of masks. Is the mask supposed to be the characters head? Or is it supposed to be a character in a mask?

Masks are inherently scary because the person is choosing to be hidden. Make up can be a resource drain on a haunted house. It takes time and materials to be done correctly and those two things are often in short supply. Keep the resources your show has in mind when designing make ups.

Detail is in layers

Layers are as important to costumes as they are to set dressing.

Costumes should start with a base layer and be built up from there. Sometimes the base layer is make up, then a t-shirt, jumpsuit, then chains. The jump suit is ripped to have the stained T-shirt show through, the chains obviously allow you to see the jumpsuit so four layers are visible to the eye. That is a lot of depth and four chances for detail.

Aging everything so it looks like it went through the same trials is also important for costume cohesion.

Full costume as opposed to pieces

I find it is best to work on a full costume. If you are making a zombie costume then get an entire suit and age it all at once and in the same style and color palette, also get two pairs of shoes, and a wig, perhaps even a fake Rolex to zombify.

Imagine opening a box with your costume in it and having a Rolex watch in there that looks like it was worn by a zombie while feeding. Is it tarnished? Is there hair and gore

stuck between the links? That attention to detail will sell the actor on the costume and show them you care. If you care that much then they will care.

Costumes -Size matters!

When you are designing, you have a vision in mind for a character. You see them in your head; you see their silhouette and body type. Make the costumes for that vision. If you want skinny people in your asylum then only get smaller costumes. If you want to have a mammoth lunch lady then get a costume that is that size. The character will be better and closer to your vision.

Another point is that actors feel less important when they constantly wear “one size fits all” costumes. If they were chosen for a role and their costume fits them perfectly, they have that additional sense of pride that goes with that.

Have costumes for the masses, for nights when you are flooded with volunteers. Then they can see the difference in costuming and want the status of coming regularly and getting their own costume/character.

Sexual harassment –

I thought I would throw this out there since it happened and worked for me. In the Asylum at SCREAMS we had several nurse characters. Because the outfits are a touch on the sexy side we were worried about possible harassment (we sell alcohol).

Our solution was to put a male in one of the nurse costumes. He added a level of disturbing and kept the guests wondering if the nurse they were looking at was male or female since all of them wore masks.

Training your actors-Keys to success

Be a Leader- who ever is training them should be someone who they respect.

Know their name- I know you have a ton of actors, and many of them are not there all the time. If you cannot invest enough in them to learn their name then how much will they be willing to invest for you?

Focus their Training- We have a very short time to train them, and they have a short attention span.

Give them confidence- we are basically sending them into battle. No one touches, but the attacks and strategy occur in just the same way.

Continually aim them at the customer- actors enjoy scaring people so much that they start thinking that they are at the haunt for their pleasure. It is always healthy to remind them that the customer is the reason they are there.

Create a culture- a sense of belonging will keep them coming back each night. Feeling like they are part of something bigger than themselves will make them work to be more involved and better at scaring people.

Involve your cast

Have a place where you and your cast can work on costumes, your house, a space at the haunt, somewhere you can get dirty and get to the business of making costumes.

You don't have to sew- premade pieces can come together to make a great costume for your character

Think outside of the box- A nurses outfit can be a white house keeping uniform, Or a cafeteria uniform.

Design for durability- They have to stand up to abuse and be washable.

Design for a single concept- take an idea and use it throughout, color palette, iconic materials, persistence of vision are big factors in successful costumes.

Nothing is finished! - No mask or costume you buy was made for your show exclusively. It is up to you to take props and costume pieces and make them fit your character.

This is permission to cut bigger eye holes, to repaint, to distress, to stain any Item you get so it is custom for your characters. Never forget that you don't buy anything that is finished.

You can spend time or money- Spending time on your costumes with your cast breeds loyalty and helps them understand your visions. While working we discuss characters and goals for the show.

GAMES

One word game

Distill what you need to portray into one word and show it in your movement.

One actor walks by a line of performers and each one shouts what they think as soon as it pops into their head.

Zombie tunnel
emphasizes timing

Need a group of volunteers and the actors line up on both sides. The group needs to make it out (just like customers) so zombies must pace themselves.