

Shmanners 428: Haunted Houses

Published October 11th, 2024

[Listen here on mcelroy.family](https://mcelroy.family)

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello internet, I'm your husband host, Travis McElrooy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElrooy.

Travis: And you're listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette.

Travis: For ordinary occasions. Listen, I don't always know how it's comin' out. How are you, my dove?

Teresa: Fine. How are you, dear?

Travis: Good. Listen, sometimes you're just doin' it, and what happens is I was putting down the track pad.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: To pull back the wizard's curtain for a moment, as I like to call it. I was putting down the trackpad while talking, and my brain suddenly went, "Oh no, I'm too aware of everything!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And so my name came out differently.

Teresa: I wasn't sure that you were ready to start because you still had the trackpad in your hands—

Travis: Listen.

Teresa: — and then you just started.

Travis: You're never ready. Just like parenting, you're never ready to start podcasting.

Teresa: [chuckles] Oh boy. Ohhh boy.

Travis: You just have to start. It's fall, y'all.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: That's it.

Teresa: Yip.

Travis: Bye everybodyyyy. Just we wanted to pop in, make a quick announcement about what season.

Teresa: It might actually be fall in Ohio.

Travis: Yeah, it does— It was cold this morning, below 50 degrees.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And so we wanted to get into... Do people still say "spooky?" Is that a thing?

Teresa: I don't know.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: I feel like Gen Z was like, "Spooky!" and now they don't say it anymore because everybody says it, right?

Travis: See, I thought it was— That actually does track 'cause I was going to say they were the ones who were like, "Please don't say spooky anymore." And I think that that habit, I think Gen Z more than any generation, has had to deal with the speed at which their own... their own like lingo is turned against them.

Teresa: Yeah. [chuckles]

Travis: And they're like, "Oh no, we actually hate it now. Please stop saying that. Please— No, please don't say it anymore." And for that, I apologize, skibidi, and—

Teresa: [cackles]

Travis: So today, we're talking about something that's very close to my heart.

Teresa: Oh yeah?

Travis: Haunted Houses.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: And I'm sure I've talked about this before on this show, but I've definitely talked about it before on *My Brother, My Brother And Me* and maybe *Adventure Zone* as well, I've worked many a haunted houses in my life.

Teresa: Yes, yes. I also worked a few in LA.

Travis: That's true, those were weird.

Teresa: We needed money.

Travis: Okay, don't say it like that.

Teresa: Well, I mean—

Travis: Whenever someone gets job, we needed money.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So you could just say it like, "We needed to work to pay for things"—

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: — 'cause that's what it was.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: But it wasn't like we were assassins, right? Like, "Listen, we went against our code and morals, but we needed the money."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: We had a job performing. And it was this business where most of the year, the rest of the year, it was like a party planning thing.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: You know, of like, "You wanna throw a birthday party for you kid," whatever.

Teresa: So at this point, they do like, "You wanna throw a Halloween party, we'll set up a haunted house for you."

Travis: Yeah, and so—

Teresa: "In your garage or whatever."

Travis: They had like all these like flats and, you know, tarps and things. [sighs] Lot of issues that... The biggest issue, here's what I'll say folks at home. If you're gonna set up a haunted house at like a party, right? Having the same haunted house set up for like three hours for like the same 12 kids.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Is madness.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Because eventually the kids just start going through it and screaming at the performers. I got smacked in the face.

Teresa: Ugh, it was bad.

Travis: By somebody when I was being a scarecrow, I was in a chair and I would lean forward and do an "Ahhh," and then a whap! Just side of the face, I was like, "Come on." [chuckles] "I'm a person."

Teresa: And it was like a what, 12-year-old girl?

Travis: Something like that, yeah man.

Teresa: Something like that, yeah.

Travis: It was— And I was like, “I think I’m done.” But I’ve worked— Let’s see, I worked a haunted house in college that was set up inside a big kind of circus tent kinda thing, in the parking lot of a mall.

I worked haunted houses in Huntington, at the Museum of Art and like the outdoor kind of pavilion there, I worked all those haunted houses there, and I think there was another one I can’t remember. But I’ve worked a lot of haunted houses.

Teresa: This will surprise no-one, I don’t like being scared. So I don’t— I did not work haunted houses until we were hired by this company in LA. And I haven’t since, and I don’t like it and I don’t wanna go.

Travis: I also don’t like being scared. I like getting paid. So. What are we talking about? Let’s talk about them.

Teresa: So let’s talk about a brief history of hijinks hauntings.

Travis: Mm-hmm. Now we’re not talking about, to clarify, how to behave if you go to a hou—

Teresa: Oh we will.

Travis: When you go like—

Teresa: At the end.

Travis: But I mean like if you go to a ghost for real.

Teresa: Oh no no no.

Travis: And were going on a ghost hunt.

Teresa: Like recreational haunted houses, not like paranormal haunted houses.

Travis: Yeah, these are fake haunted houses, not the real haunted houses.

Teresa: Ooookay.

Travis: What?

Teresa: Anyway. So they've been around for about 200 years.

Travis: Whoa, really?

Teresa: I know, right.

Travis: Okay. Actually, that tracks. I don't know why I was like mah, but like there's been superstition and mythology forever, so of course.

Teresa: Well the iteration that we see most often today has not been around, but the seedlings of which have been around.

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: And I wanna start with—

Travis: Baby haunted houses.

Teresa: Madame—

Travis: Haunted shacks.

Teresa: Madame Tussaud's.

Travis: Oh yeah, okay.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: 'Cause that started— Oh, I know too much about Madame Tussaud's, I think.

Teresa: Well talk about it.

Travis: If I remember correctly, it started... about— Well, I know that for a while it wasn't like celebrities and stuff, it was like scary figures or like murderers and everything, right?

Teresa: It is possible that murderers and criminals and stuff were displayed, but it was mostly because of the French Revolution.

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: The people whose— who were beheaded at the guillotine. Those are the people who are— is really like Madame Tussaud's like claim to fame, right?

Travis: I believe it's pronounced "gillintine."

Teresa: Mm. So we've got—

Travis: Gilly suit?

Teresa: Marie Antoinette and Robes Pierre, and people like that, right?

Travis: Robes Pierre, can I be honest?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: There's always a little part of me, and I know very little about Robes Pierre, but I smile a little bit every time because it makes me think of like, "attorneys general." Where like one is a Robe Pierre.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: And you would think it would be Robe Pierres.

Teresa: No.

Travis: But that's not it, it's actually Robes Pierre.

Teresa: And—

Travis: My brain is a weird place to be in.

Teresa: Yes, yes it is. So she had created her wax figures from the actually like faces of these victims.

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: By death mask, right? And so... England especially, not at this point up to the level of macabre. [chuckles] That France was, right? Was particularly scandalized by Madame Tussaud's and she set up a permanent exhibition in London, what she called "The Chamber of Horrors."

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right, yeah? And so the latter half of the 19th century, another Parisian art form contributes to the haunted house kind of like genre, and we've got the Grand Guignol Theatre, which was—

Travis: Okay, I don't recognize the name.

Teresa: It's a puppet theatre, right?

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: "Guignol" is puppet. So 1897, it was originally called Le Théâtre du Grand-Guignol, which maybe it doesn't have the "l" at the "o."

Travis: I— Listen.

Teresa: Grand-Guignol?

Travis: I still loved it.

Teresa: Oh? Hm. The Theatre of the Great Puppet. And the founder didn't really set out to make something so terrifying. His father was a policeman, so this guy Oscar Méténier, his father as a policeman, everyone assumed that his— that he would also be a policeman, right?

But in Paris, right, there was a lot of crime, because a big city. And so Méténier was inspired by the literary movement of the time, which is naturalism. So okay. I see you raise your eyebrows.

Travis: I'm trying to remember. Yeah, I'm trying to pretend like I'm smart.

Teresa: We've got romanticism, right? Which is like Keats, right?

Travis: Sure, yes.

Teresa: The idea— Like the flowery nature of like the dreamy idyllic countryside, things like that, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That's romanticism, and so the pendulum swings the other way, we've got naturalism, which is about how we want to see the world how it actually is, the pretty and the terrible. And we're not gonna romanticize the— like the way that, you know nature preys upon each other.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And we prey upon things.

Travis: It's grimdark.

Teresa: Grimdark, right.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So with this new literary movement. [sniffs] Sorry, I'm a little stuffy.

Travis: Yeah. Hey, as the weather changes, so must we.

Teresa: [chuckles] [sniffs] He started to write some short stories and plays about the gruesome things that he saw in Paris.

Travis: Is this where we get— I mean, what time period is this?

Teresa: This is 1890s.

Travis: Okay, so this is also like Edgar Allen Poe, and yeah like—

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Absolutely part of that movement as well. And so he wanted to use the idea of the theatre mirroring everyday life, right? Which was kind of gross and gruesome.

Travis: But using puppets.

Teresa: Using puppets.

Travis: This is— There— I think that in life, there are certain like phobias and fears and stuff where it just— like I can see why if you're on this end of the like— If you can just be one degree further left and be like, "I'm actually terrified of this thing."

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Right? Because puppets doing like realism— too realistic moving.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And you start to like project onto them like humanity as well. It's kind of like a— Oh, what's it called? The valley. That uncanny valley.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Right? Where it starts to be like, "Okay, I'm now seeing this projection of that being a real person, but moving slightly..."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: "Unnaturally."

Teresa: And you can do a lot of things on stage to puppets that you obviously can't do to humans.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? Which is very scary.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so the theatre's director famously boasted that he judged the success of every performance by the number of audience members who fainted.

Travis: At puppets.

Teresa: At puppets.

Travis: There you go.

Teresa: Yeah, really gross, right. It was—

Travis: Jim Henson said the same thing.

Teresa: There were— [chuckles] I mean, there are some pretty grotesque looking puppets early on.

Travis: Yeah, but I don't think Jim Henson was trying to make people faint. He was trying to offend people.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: That's why they blew up I believe the Ten Commandments in the first... episode of *The Muppet Show*. You can't find that anymore.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: But I think that's a thing. Hey, that might be apocryphal.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Sorry.

Teresa: That you—

Travis: I'm not the smart one, Teresa's the smart one, I'm the cute one.

Teresa: One of the shows was even—

Travis: I'm the bad boy.

Teresa: [chuckles] Temporarily banned by the police.

Travis: Oh wow.

Teresa: They were like, "This is too much for people, it's dangerous," right? So. So one of the places that we point to as something that is... like the haunted houses that we know today, right?

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Is on an English fairground in 1915.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: It was called "The Ghost House."

Travis: See this is where I would've guessed like a hundred years for haunted house as we think of it.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Starting to be in like the fairgrounds and like, you know, that kind of thing, and I— This is— I don't have it in front of me, but this like something in my brain, right?

Is like there is a— there's like psychological theories or something about why horror began to develop as this thing of like when we spent so long having to worry about like wolves and, you know, these kinds of things happening, and then we as a society got safer and we started to develop like electric lights, and you know sturdier doors and everything. We were still kind of programmed to—

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: That our brains were like, "But we worry about things and we wanna be afraid of things," and like there's a part of us that's like, "There's gotta be scary things out there." And we—

Teresa: Like the imagination just filling in the gaps.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And like I said, I might be making that up. But doesn't that sound right?

Teresa: It does.

Travis: It sounds right, doesn't it?

Teresa: It sounds good, it's a good theory. So this was known as The Orton and Spooner Haunted Cottage, it was commissioned by the—

Travis: Not a lot of cottages these days, not the scariest of haunted structures.

Teresa: Well, let me tell you about this structure. Okay, so it was commissioned by a man named Patrick Collins for his wife Flora, and Collins owned this fairgrounds, right? And his wife loved all things spooky and paranormal. So he approached Orton and Spooner, who were a team who specialized in creating carnival attractions, right?

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: To produce a cottage that was painted with things like skeletons and spiders and ghoulish faces, so it's the architecture of the cottage that is kind of like creepy, right? It's not like, you know, there's not like skele— like people in it, right, doing jumpscare or whatever.

It's not gruesome especially, other than like the depictions. And so like... they've made it so like the floor is uneven, so you might— it's— it feels discombobulating to be inside. And like—

Travis: Mmm, so what would be like a mystery shack kind of thing these days.

Teresa: Yeah, kind of like a mystery shack. You can actually still see it today. The Ghost House can still be found in Hampshire today, and you know. It's not— It's not a haunted house.

Travis: No.

Teresa: It's a mystery shack, like you said.

Travis: It's a— And listen. If you're going there to get scared, it's historic, it's a history place, have fun.

Teresa: So, now this— for specifically Halloween haunted house in America has a different kind of goal, right? So you see like Halloween attractions popping up during the Great Depression.

Travis: Distraction.

Teresa: Not only that.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: But also this is the same time that we talk about trick or treat happening, right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And so not only is it a distraction from how terrible the Great Depression is and how awful people have it.

Travis: Hey, babe stance babe. Are you sure you wanna go out on a limb and say that the—

Teresa: I do.

Travis: — the Great Depression was bad? Okay.

Teresa: I do.

Travis: Whoa. Hot takes.

Teresa: But also, if you'll recall from our trick or treat episode, they were very concerned that "trick or treat"—

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: — would be taken very literally.

Travis: Yeah, with hooligans.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And ne'er-do-wells and rascallions and whatnot.

Teresa: Ne'er-do-wells.

Travis: Kids going out and creating chaos.

Teresa: And if you are a very poor person and you don't have candy to give to kids, they might break your windows or whatever, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That's the idea. So you offer something else to give them, and the haunted house is something for them to do. And it's kind of a treat? But maybe so you won't get tricked.

Travis: There you go.

Teresa: That's the idea, right? So we have this like, "Walk through our home and you'll be able to see all of the ghoulish delights," right? Lisa Borten, sorry Morten, author of *Trick or Treat: A History of Halloween*, said that cities were looking to buy the children off.

Travis: Well sure.

Teresa: Essentially.

Travis: Hasn't that always been the case?

Teresa: It sure has. It would be kind of underwhelming to people today, right? It's not like the Halloween horror nights, or— We have the Dent Schoolhouse—

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: — around here. So like here is a party pamphlet from 1937, which actually describes how a person could design a quote "trail of terror."

"An outside entrance leads to a rendezvous with ghosts and witches in the cellar or attic. Hang old fur or strips of raw liver on walls."

Travis: What?!

Teresa: "Where one can feel their way through dark steps, weird moans and howls come from dark corners. Damp sponges and hairnets hung from the ceiling to touch his face. Doorways are blockaded so that guests must crawl through a long, dark tunnel. At the end, he hears a plaintive 'Meow', and sees a black cardboard cat outlined in luminous paint."

Travis: Now listen. I think you've undersold this.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Because... if I went into a random neighbor's house, and they were like, "Come up to my attic with me," and I was like, "Okay," and then I get up there and there's just like animal fur and liver on the walls, I'm like, "Oh no."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "What have I done?" And then he's like, "Now crawl through this."

Teresa: [chuckles] "No."

Travis: I'm like, "No, I've gotta go." I'd run out of there screaming.

Teresa: Well.

Travis: That's terrifying. Maybe not for the intended reasons.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: But it's terrifying to me, frankly.

Teresa: Still worked.

Travis: Yeah man.

Teresa: Still worked.

Travis: I'm— I would be plenty scared. So scared in fact, I need to take a break.

Teresa: Ha haaaaa.

Travis: For a word from another MaxFun Show.

[transition theme music plays]

Christian: Hi, it's Christian from MaximumFun. Have you listened to the bonus content for *Shmanners* yet? Bonus content is where *Shmanners* gets to dig into some weirder and wilder topics, like time travel or the history of memes, with meme librarian Amanda Brennan.

Any time of year is a good time to join MaximumFun and support. For just five bucks a month, you get access to all the *Shmanners* bonus content, and the bonus content to every show on MaximumFun. That's what I like to call a deal.

So go on over to maximumfun.org/join and become a member today. Thank you so much for your support.

Travis: Okay. Now. That's not still the— Well haunted houses today don't often contain raw liver.

Teresa: It's true. But we would be remiss if we didn't talk about... the one who... seems to put haunted houses into the mainstream. Walt Disney.

Travis: Oh, that guy.

Teresa: Yeah. So a Disney legend, Imagineer Harper Goff, designed a black and white sketch of a crooked street, leading away from the beautiful Main Street, by a peaceful church and graveyard, with a rundown manor perched high on a hill that towered over the Main Street. An eerie detour from the happy imagery of the rest of the Disney park, right?

Travis: The Haunted Mansion.

Teresa: The Haunted Mansion.

Travis: One of the two best rides in Disneyland or Disney World.

Teresa: I mean it's great. I really like it.

Travis: It's that and Pirates.

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: Those are the two best in my opinion.

Teresa: Those are the two best ones?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Disney then assigned Imagineer Ken Anderson to create a story using Goff's idea, and he used kind of like New Orleans—

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: — architecture and like gothic themes to realize this manor house. And initially, Disney wasn't into it. He was like, "I mean, you guys can keep doin' your thing, but like I don't think this is what I want," right?

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: But then Disney visited the Winchester Mystery House.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yeah. So—

Travis: Which should be entirely considered to be a fictional entertainment house.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Because I think we've talked about it before that a lot of it was just unfortunate judgment of a rich woman, and people being like, "So she must be evil!"

Teresa: Yes. But he was into the idea, right? Of creating something that you could walk through.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: And marvel at.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Maybe even be kinda spooked by.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And so, this mansion... Like the concept was started and they started to do like a kinda story around it, with an unfortunate family who lived there, and like all this kind of like— You know, if you've been to it, it's got a bunch of different themes inside it.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: The idea of like the paranormal and the séance, and then there's like the kind of like spooky, more like animalistic stuff with like werewolves and things like that, right? So there's a lot of ideas going on in this gothic New Orleans style mansion.

And so people really loved it, once it debuted. It opened in 1969, and that was nearly two decades after Disney officially approved the project. So they put a lot into this, right?

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: From conception to opening, and it was a hit. 82,000 people passed through it in a single day.

Travis: Wow.

Teresa: And they loved the sound effects and the details, and the centerpiece of the ride was the 90-foot ballroom of dancing ghouls at a birthday party. Which is— it's really a great special effect.

I mean there's tons of stuff on YouTube detailing exactly how they do it, and you can look at that and see it. But I mean if we're talking about haunted houses, right, this really raises the bar.

Travis: Yeah. Also interesting fact, just 'cause I had also mentioned it. So Pirates of the Caribbean and Haunted Mansion were developed at the same time.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: And Ken Anderson and Mark Davis was the one who sketched it. And so anyways, when they were developing it, they were like, "Oh, and we'll connect them," right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: That'll be this idea. So originally Tom Sawyer Island was supposed to be redone all about like John Lafite, the real-life pirate, and it was gonna be like a connecting idea of the three of these were all— Like so, you know, some of the ghosts in there are like victims or pirates from over here.

And so like in Disneyland it never ended up happening, but there are still some like remnants connecting them, and one of the ones I think is most interesting is there is a bricked-up archway in New Orleans Square in Disneyland with... 1764 on it. And it was supposed to be like a connecting thing between pirates and the Haunted Mansion.

Teresa: Neat! Lisa Morten tells in her book again, *Trick or Treat: a history of Halloween*, "What made the Haunted Mansion so successful and

so influential however was not it's similarity to haunted houses and quote 'dark rides'. That is tawdry carnival haunted houses of the past.

But its use of startling new technologies and effects. Ghosts were no longer simply sheets hung in a tree, they were instead actual shimmering translucent figures that moved, spoke, and sang. A witch wasn't just a rubber masked figure bent over a fake cauldron, but a completely realistic bodiless head floating in a crystal ball, conducting a complex séance."

Travis: And I'll say man, I wasn't jokin' when I said it's one of my two favorite rides at Disney. Because it still works. Like I'm not saying it's scary.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Right, but as far as enjoyable goes? It holds up. Both that and Pir— Holds up as far as the technology and stuff goes. And of course they've been updating some stuff throughout there and everything.

Teresa: Right. Yeah. Totally.

Travis: But there hasn't been like a full gutting and redoing of it, and it still holds up.

Teresa: And it's even pretty good for kids because it's like— you— It's a feast for the eyes.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And if you don't have a concept of what death is yet.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It's not too scary.

Travis: Yeah. Also it's not real.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: So that helps.

Teresa: Yes, that helps.

Travis: It not be scary.

Teresa: So then, not only do we have the Haunted Mansion at Disney's to thank, we also have the horror movie boom of the 1970s.

Travis: Well it's also important to note. So after Disneyland, right? Which was in California. At that point, air travel wasn't like cost effective really for a lot of people, it was still like a luxury thing. But cars had become a lot more like— What's the word, like reasonably for people to buy.

Teresa: Affordable.

Travis: A lot— Affordable, thank you. So a lot more people owned cars, so you started to get a lot of much more localized amusement parks pop up.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: And we— Like there was a huge boom of them in like the Adirondacks area, and like throughout kind of like the north, you know, the East Coast and everything. And so people would vacation to there. And a haunted house is a pretty easy setup to do, right? Not like a roller-coaster or something like that.

Teresa: Yeah, totally.

Travis: So we saw—

Teresa: Especially one that you walk through instead of ride through.

Travis: Right. And with the success of Haunted Mansion and everything, you had a lot of people trying to recreate. So it became... Even if people hadn't gone to the Haunted Mansion in Disneyland, they had gone to something that was trying to be a haunted house.

'Cause like we had a haunted house in Camden Park in Huntington that I think is like one of the few if not the only remaining like gravity rides. Where it's like you're on a slope and it just rolls down, kinda like a marble going down and then it's like carried up to the top.

Teresa: Oh wow.

Travis: And go through. And it's like open to the front, it's really weird looking and cool. But.

Teresa: Okay. So then in 1970s, we've got slasher movies.

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: Being into the mainstream, so we've got like *Halloween*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Friday the 13th*, and you know, a ton more, right? That people really flocked to and really loved.

Travis: And the important thing to note about those, budget-wise? Very cheap. Right, where a lot of scary stuff—

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: — up until then had been like the grand scale of like, "Oh, you got— Oh, it's scary 'cause there's like demons and scary stuff." And then it was like, "It's a guy with a knife," right?

You can shoot it on a city street, in a house, and it started to make independent like horror movies, and it's the reason like horror movies still to this day are one of the most common like independent films made.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Because like as far as budget goes, it doesn't take like a lot of special effects, it doesn't take a lot— You don't really even need like star power to do one because the power is in if the horror is effective.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: If the killer is effective.

Teresa: So we get a lot of cross-promotion, right? So Halloween houses and spooky celebrations love the scary movie stuff 'cause you can take all of those characters from that and put it in your haunted house.

Travis: Every haunted house has like a chainsaw guy now.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: After *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*? Yeah.

Teresa: Exactly, and then people love like the idea of the haunted house so they'll go and they'll watch the movie and you can see all the tropes.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: In the movies, right?

Travis: And then you'll like live it, but a little bit safer.

Teresa: Exactly. So then we get Knott's Berry Farm hosting Halloween attractions. Then we get Universal Orlando in 1991 started Fright Night, and then 4 years later, 1994, we've got Mickey's Not So Scary Halloween Party.

And so like it keeps... Keep on keepin' on here. We've got bigger and better every year, right? Different places opening things up, and now we have things like haunted trails that the Girl Scouts put out, or even like neighborhoods, right? If you have adjoining backyards, you can build a haunted house. And these are actually like a great community builder.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Like you were talking about in Huntington. Because usually they're free, but if they aren't free, the money usually gets put back into the community, right, because it's a shared experience.

Travis: So, I wanna know about the etiquette of attending a haunted house. First of all, if you're working a haunted house, don't touch people. Okay.

Teresa: Yes. Yes. So let's start as a patron first.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: If somebody doesn't want to go with your group, don't pressure them, right? We want everybody to enjoy themselves, and if you don't like being scared then don't— you don't have to go.

Travis: And this is where... We haven't touched on this for a while, but don't hhm and haw if you don't want to go, because sometimes, especially with something like this.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: It's unclear to your friends and family and loved ones if you wanna go and you're nervous and you want to be convinced, versus if you're like, "I absolutely don't wanna go," right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: So if you're like, "Oh, I don't know. Oh, it might be a little too much. What if it's scary in there?" sounds like you want to be comforted.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: Versus if you say, "I am not going to go in there with you, but you have a good time."

Teresa: Right. And it would help to do your research, right? A lot of these places come up year after year, like we mentioned like Fright Nights, or King's Island has one.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And we've got Dent Schoolhouse here in Cincinnati. You know, make sure that you know what you're getting into. Some of these places are like 18 and over.

Travis: But also some of the places will do special like timings and schedules and events where it's like, "This is— If you just wanna come and see what that haunted house looks like, but without all the jumpscares—"

Teresa: Right.

Travis: “— and without people chasing you around or whatever,” they will have scheduled times for those.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Which is—

Teresa: Like a lights on tour.

Travis: Yes, right.

Teresa: Or something like that, right?

Travis: So if you wanna go, or like you have a kid of an appropriate age who is interested in it, but maybe you don't think they're be able to handle the like, “This guy jump out and chases you through the thing,” but they wanna see what it's about.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: You can check and see if that's the case.

Teresa: Don't smoke or bring a lighter to a haunted house.

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: Because you never know what kind of like effects they're using, and it's usually quite close quarters and things like that, right? Don't touch actors, like you said, or props unless specifically instructed.

Not only, you know, you don't know like what they're made of or if they're safe for you, but also if you break something, you could be held responsible for that.

Travis: I will also say as someone who used to work it, and it sounds like I'm making a joke or something, but please remember that these are people who are doing a job and working and everything.

Teresa: Totally.

Travis: The number of people I had who were trying to prove like how brave and strong they were by like yelling at me and mocking me when I was like a 19-year-old working at a haunted house, and it's like, "Okay man. You're like making fun of me and yelling at me, and I'm like I'm just doing my job here."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: "And I hope that the person you're on a date with or whatever is impressed or whatever." But if you're gonna come in, have some fun with it, right? Buy into the thing, or don't come.

Teresa: Yeah, totally. Watch your language, this may be a family event, and you know, you do the best you can if you're scared and you yell something out. But like try not to, right?

Attend these events sober, because you never know how like the floor is gonna be, or like if maybe if marijuana is legal in your area, like you don't want to be— You don't wanna get lost, you don't wanna get separated.

Travis: You don't want your judgment to be compromised.

Teresa: Exactly. Be respectful waiting in line. There are usually rules posted outside, right? Figure out what the rules are. And make sure that you communicate if something is wrong, right? If you're having an adverse reaction to a fog machine, or to spinning lights, or something like that.

This is for fun, right? So you are allowed to let somebody know that you need help, especially if you have a medical limit that you've reached, right? Certain disorders can be triggered by flashing lights, or chemicals, or whatever it is, right?

So hopefully the people in the haunted house have some kind of plan if something happens like that, but there's almost always ways to like go to the exit, or tell someone that you need help.

Travis: Can we talk about if you're working it?

Teresa: Just a second.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Make sure that if you're going to wear a costume that it is allowed.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Right? I know that the one at King's Island they encourage costumes, but they don't have— like if it's super big or if it's like a full face mask or things like that, you're not allowed to wear them in certain areas and stuff like that.

Travis: The same I would say with like flashlights.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: I'm willing to bet you're not allowed to bring your own flashlight in.

Teresa: Flashlights or phone lights.

Travis: Yeah, people's eyes adjust to the darkness, and like you could really cause problems by like shining it in someone's eyes, or whatever when they're not ready for it. Don't do that.

Teresa: And also supervise your children, right. Children should be accompanied by adults, and teenagers should be supervised if they are not committed to behaving properly.

Travis: That is— Hey, that was very well said.

Teresa: Thank you. So now we can go into some purveyors of haunted house etiquette.

Travis: I— So like I said, don't touch people, that's number one.

Teresa: Obviously.

Travis: But also I recommend— So whenever we worked those ones in LA, I— there were like kids who wanted to go through but didn't wanna be scared, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And I... I think that it is important to respect that.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: And appreciate that. Because like you don't want a kid to feel excluded, right? And sometimes the best way for a kid to start to adjust to things is to see like what it's all about, without it being like, "I'm gonna scare this kid as much as possible."

So like if I was working the front of the haunted house, I would always ask them like, "Do you wanna be scared or do you wanna explore?" right? And I think it's important to have like some kind of code or something that you use with the performers when it's like, "Hey, we got a kid comin' through who wants to explore," right? Or code word or whatever.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: To let them know like no jumpscares, right?

Teresa: And as an actor, I think you should commit to that.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: And be truthful.

Travis: Because we did have— Man, sometimes the guy that we worked for, I would call it out and he would still scare, and I'm like, "What are you doing, man?" and he'd be like, "Well they wouldn't got through a haunted house if they didn't wanna be scared, right?"

Teresa: Yeah, but...

Travis: Nope. Don't do that.

Teresa: Don't do that.

Travis: And be respectful of like if you see someone who's like legitimately having a rough time and freaking out, or says like, "No thank you, please leave me alone," do that.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Right? Like do that, be cool.

Teresa: It's a great idea to give your house or your trail like a rating, right? Like you would for a movie, right.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: If you're gonna be like general audiences, you've got like the spaghetti for brains and grape eyeballs and things like that, right? But if someone's gonna chase you around with a chainsaw, I would consider that closer to a rated R.

Travis: Yeah. So just— And also it's a business, man.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: You want people to come back.

Teresa: If possible, provide a map or a route through your haunted house, right? It will help people to know where they're supposed to go, especially for like a trail, right?

Travis: Mm, yeah.

Teresa: And like you said, a safe word or even like a non-verbal safety signal.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: I think that there's like— I've seen productions where there's like if people need to leave, they do like an arms crossed over their chest or something.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And so like an actor will know “We have to get them to the exit.”

Travis: I think it’s important when you’re thinking about planning and executing a haunted house, right, divide— separate the kinds of fears.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Right? Real life fear, I might trip. I might get lost. It might be too dark. I might, whatever, have an asthma attack, right? Real life fear isn’t fun, right? Separate that out, figure out ways to like prevent that. So that way the fun kind of fear that you’re actually trying to create is allowed—

Teresa: Like what’s behind this corner?

Travis: Yeah, “Ah they’re chasing me. Oh, what’s that sound? Oh no,” right. That is fun for people to feel, that is what you’re trying to create.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And the more you can separate out the stuff they shouldn’t be afraid of, the more fun they can have with the fun kind of fear, you know what I mean?

Teresa: Right, so you should make sure that it’s illuminated enough so that people don’t fall over.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: And that like you, you now, if there’s uneven floor or whatever, there’s lighting on it, it’s marked.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And if you’re like, “But the lighting breaks up the immersion.” If it’s— If somebody trips and busts their nose on the floor.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: That’s not immersive, bud.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: That's bad. And [chuckles] you're gonna get sued.

Teresa: [chuckles] In the same way, you need to post effects that might compromise people, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: We talked already about like fog and strobe lighting and things like that, those need to be posted.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And have your staff trained in event of someone needing help. I'm not talking about like CPR or EMTs or whatever, but they need to know what to do if someone needs to leave.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? And so like you said, make sure that nobody doubles down on someone who is genuinely terrified, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And if someone is literally having a panic attack, you are okay to break character, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So just be like, "Hey, let's calm down for a second here," take your mask off, get lower down to the ground, things like that, right?

Travis: And if you're doing that, also make sure that if you're running one that you are also respectful of your performers.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: You know, if they're like, "Hey, this person was really rude to me," or "This person got physical with me," or whatever, that that is as important as a customer having a bad time, you know what I mean?

Teresa: Right. So for everybody, wear sensible shoes, right? We are going to be walking through this attraction, you wanna make sure that you are safe, the actors are safe, everybody should wear closed-toed, sensible shoes.

And then I would say that if you are asked to sign a waiver, something that's more than "You acknowledge that we use strobe lights," maybe not. Maybe not enter that.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It's probably not worth it.

Travis: Yeah, I mean read the waiver first— Because here's the thing, sometimes if they have like insurance or whatever, that's required.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: That they have the waiver. But yeah, use your best judgment I would say, because if you are looking at it and you're like, "But thi— Hold on."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: "There is a level to which there is an unreasonable amount of danger that I could face in real life."

Teresa: Yes. I agree.

Travis: "That is not okay."

Teresa: And have fun! Enjoy the scare.

Travis: And let's see, before we let you go, we wanna say thank you to our researcher Alex, without whom we could not make this show. Thank you to our editor Rachel, without whom we could not make this show.

Thank you to you for listening. Without you, we'd be performing for ghooooosts!

Teresa: Woooooo.

Travis: Let's see, coming up on October 18th, 19th, and 20th, if my memory serves, we're going to be in Denver doing *My Brother, My Brother And Me*, and then Phoenix on the 19th and 20th doing *My Brother, My Brother And Me* and *The Adventure Zone*, and you should come to those shows.

And then... the next weekend, my father Clint and I will be in London doing MCM London, so you should come to that. And then we have some shows coming up I wanna say the 5th, 6th, and 7th of November, in Milwaukee and Indianapolis. So head to bit.ly/mcelroytours for tickets and all the information and everything there. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "Brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also thank you to Bruja Betty Pin Up Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

As always, we are taking your topic submissions, your questions, your idioms. Send all of those to shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alex, because she reads every single one.

Travis: And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required!

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[outro theme music plays]

Maximum Fun.
A work-owned network...
Of artists-owned shows...
Supported directly by you.