http://www.hauntedattraction.com/workshops/lighting.html

Fear In the Dark: Lighting Schemes for Haunted Attractions
by Joe Meils

Darkness, as the poet said, pulls in everything. It instantly creates fear in people, and an atmosphere of mystery. When they cannot see what is lurking beyond them, people's hearts begin to pump faster. Since they cannot see where they are going, they are made more vulnerable.

Darkness is cheap too!

Why is it then that so many venues tend to over light their scenes? Time after time I have entered a haunted house, or gone on a hayride, and found scenes brightly lit. You would think that the spooks were playing a night game of tennis, or sitting down to a novel! I believe that this is because many people just have not had the time to experiment with their lighting schemes. They were probably in such a rush to simply get their attraction open on time, that they did not work at finessing the light so it really works. Or, perhaps, they had a person in charge of the lighting who had never worked at creating such an atmosphere before, and ended up lighting the rooms as though they were a dance club, or worse, an office.

So, how do you avoid these mistakes?

You need to be able to convey your ideas to your construction/lighting crew more effectively. In order to do that, we need to cover a few terms. And then armed with these terms, we will see how you might apply them in a haunted house situation.

Your primary source of illumination is called a **key light**. Its purpose is to stand in for whatever the natural source would be. It replaces the sun, a full moon, or a torch on the wall.

A **fill light** does exactly what its name implies. It fills in the shadows, giving objects a full, three-dimensional quality. Normally, this light is mounted at an equal, but opposite angle to the key light.

Finally, there are **kickers**. These are also known as **hair lights** or sometimes **surface lights.** They are used to help bring attention to specific details in a scene. Sometimes you can use them to highlight eyes, or hair or fangs. They can also be used to draw attention to props like dead bodies, or axes, or to what a monster is eating.

All of these lights can be of varying degrees of focus. They can either be very sharp, in a tight beam, or diffused like the sun through an overcast sky with no shadows.

Generally speaking, we do not deal with the **color temperature** of the lights in haunted attractions. This means that various lights burn at different degrees of heat, which makes them appear to be different colors to more sensitive registers (film and video) even though they appear white to the human eye. This only becomes important if you plan on shooting a great many photos or video of your attraction. If you have ever gotten back greenish looking photos taken under fluorescent lights, or blue-white ones when taken outside when using indoor film, color temperature is why. In attractions, you need only deal with how it looks to the audience.

In order to change the color of your lights, it is best to **gel** or **filter** them. This means passing the light through colored sheets of plastic. This will not only change your light's color, but will also cut down the overall amount of light falling onto your subject, known as the **filter factor**.

Whenever you pass light through something, in order to cast shadows, it is called a **gobo,** or a **cookie**.

Let's say you have a large, ornate room in your house, which has a monster hanging out in it, just waiting for unsuspecting guests. How would you describe the way you want it lit to others, so that they all have the same vision? First, talk about your key light.

"I think this room should be lit by dim, candle-like sconces on the wall, with yellow orange gels on them."

Next, talk about where the fill light should be coming from.

"That huge window there, across from the wall with the sconces on it, I want some midnight blue light coming through it. That way, the cobwebs will be back-lit, and they will show up better. The window frames will act as our gobo, casting bar-like shadows on the wall."

And finally, talk about where you want specific lights for effect.

"The monster needs a focused spot right there, on the bookcase he comes through. Let's rig it so that it turns on as it opens."

Rather easy, isn't it?

Now, suppose you are trying to create something that looks like it is outside, as in a graveyard. How do you accomplish this? The secret to good simulated exteriors is **rim lighting**. This is when you light objects on a very thin edge, causing you to see them as little more than silhouettes. Additionally, most of these lights should all be aimed in one direction, the same way natural light would be if it were coming from a single source,

such as the full moon. If these lights can be placed in such a way as to hide them from direct view, so much the better. In this case, the directions to the lighting crew might go something like this:

"Let's set up a series of focused spots, filtered blue, up above the trees we have hauled in, and let them shine through the camouflage net we have got up there... That will give us a nice foliage effect. Let's cut the fill entirely, and put red LED lights on our shambling zombies for effect."

The next time you watch your favorite horror films, you can use these terms to take notes on how various scenes are lit. Studying how the professionals light a set can provide you with tips on how you should light yours. You might not be able to duplicate "Thriller" or "An American Werewolf in London", but I will bet you can come close! I would like to encourage everyone to spend more time thinking about your lighting schemes. By understanding the basic terms of lighting, we can better use the elements of darkness, and keep from over lighting our sets.

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