

Séance Manor

By David Kempf

I've always wanted to be scared to death. That's why I love haunted houses so much. I've been to most of the good ones. I've been to every haunted house from the big theme parks to Vegas to the home of witches in Salem. I just love haunted houses just like I love Halloween. I love to be scared. Many of my friends love to be scared, too. I found that in the last few years since I graduated from college, it's more fun to go into haunted houses alone. Everyone must face death alone so I figured out that the best way to be scared is to go by alone. They said on a television documentary that haunted house attractions are a metaphor for confronting your own mortality. I like that.

There is only one haunted house that really, really scared me. Only one that I guess you could say changed my life forever. That haunted house was Séance Manor. I've seen good haunted houses where actors jump out at you. They're usually just high school kids dressed up for their summer job. I've seen state of the art animatronics, too. That's good for the eye but typically doesn't invoke real terror. I can't remember exactly when I visited Séance Manor but I knew it was going to be the ultimate haunted experience.

The first sign of the upcoming terror was the look of the attraction itself. It was at an amusement park called Hill's Park. It was unusually far from all the other rides. It was a big, black building with a giant white skull painted on the front door. There was no one else in line. I walked up to the ticket booth and a man dressed like the grim reaper approached me.

"That's ten dollars even, William Price."

That really took me off guard. How did this actor know my name?

"How do you know my name?"

"We know everyone who comes through these doors, Mr. Price. Since introductions seem to be in order my name is Ignatius. I will be your guide through Séance Manor."

I was really annoyed. How did this guy know my name? Then my annoyance turned into sheer delight. Any haunted house that goes to this much trouble must be very good. I decided to just go with it and accept the fantasy. Ignatius left the ticket booth and then opened up the front door.

"Please come this way, sir. There is much to see."

I must confess I was somewhat disappointed after such a dramatic introduction to this intriguing haunted house with what came next. There really wasn't too much to see. There was nothing very original anyway.

I walked through a dark hallway. There were eerie paintings with eyes that followed me. Perhaps I'm somewhat hard to please but I've seen this too many times to appreciate it anymore. There was also a lady dressed like a witch in the next room. She cackled and then continued to stir her kettle. Then there was a dungeon master. He tortured what was obviously a plastic mannequin. Finally there was a room filled with coffins. Oh...let me guess...vampires? It won't be too long before some stupid kid dressed like the undead jumps out at me. I was wrong. The coffin slowly opened but it wasn't some kid pretending to be Dracula. It was.....Ignatius.

"What's wrong sir? Are you surprised to see me?"

I told him I was very surprised to see him. I thought that he was behind me. It was odd to see him come out of the coffin like that. I was wondering if this guy moonlighted as some sort of magician.

“You’re finding the first part of Séance Manor to be too typical and ordinary. Aren’t you sir?”

I told Ignatius that I was disappointed because I’m a harsh critic when it comes to haunted attractions. I’ve basically seen it all before. I wanted to see something that I’ve never seen. I wanted to see something I would never forget.

“Please follow me. I promise that what you’re going to see next will be something you’ve never seen before. I guarantee that it’s something that you will never forget. It’s all in the last room.”

Ignatius led and I followed. We walked down a long, dark hallway with two windows. There was one on each side. I heard thunder outside. Then I saw lightening flash twice through the windows. It didn’t seem like special effects. I think the lightening was real. Ignatius smiled at me. Then he opened the door that was in front of us.

“This way, please. You can sit down now.”

It was a séance room. I sat down at the table and looked at, of all things, a crystal ball. The room was dimly lit. Ignatius closed the door where we walked in.

“Goodbye.”

The crystal ball lit up. Everything was black except the bright ball. Then it started to spin. I heard voices in the room. I tried to listen to what they were trying to say. I couldn’t do it. There were too many speaking at once. The crystal ball was spinning very fast. Then it began to levitate off the table. I couldn’t take my eyes off of it. I started to recognize a face inside of it. It looked like my grandfather.

“It won’t be long. You’ll be with me again soon,” he said.

Then I saw a young boy. It was George. He died when he was eleven. George and I went to school. He died in an auto accident.

“You’ve lived a much longer life than I did. No one lives forever, Billy.”

The ball kept spinning faster and faster. Then I saw glimpses of my aunt, my uncle, my cousin. The faces kept making appearances. There was the secretary where I used to work. There was my old neighbor. The faces kept appearing. The faces of the dead were everywhere. Then they all seemed to speak to me at once.

“Be with us....come to us....it won’t be long now.....”

The ball floated right in front of me. It had one more thing to show me. The most important thing it saved for last. Then it showed me the last face that would appear. It was my face. Only it wasn’t my face. I was older. My hair was grey. I felt a sigh of relief. I have a few grey hairs but the image of the man in the ball was completely grey. Then I disappeared from inside the ball. The ball quickly stopped spinning and landed gently back on the table. The lights came back on and Ignatius showed me the exit. In the light, he didn’t look much like grim death. He looked like a high school kid dressed up. He smiled at me.

“I hope you had fun tonight. The park doesn’t close for another hour or so. You should try the upside down rollercoaster.”

I told him that I would and said goodnight. I was too tired to ride the coaster. I went home and went straight to bed.

The next day I got up and wondered how they did the séance effects in that haunted house. Do they get pictures from your friends and family? Did one of my friends play some sort of trick on me? That was the scariest haunted house I’ve ever walked inside in my life.

I was starting to realize that I was obsessed with this haunted house. I thought about it all the next morning. I thought about it when I ate breakfast, I thought about it when I was in the shower. I didn’t think about when I was shaving. I could only think about my reflection in the

mirror then. I looked and saw the reflection of a man whose hair had suddenly become completely grey.