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Proposal:
Maniac Mansion™

Trespassers will be horribly mutilated

*From the deranged minds of
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Introduction (read this first)

If you were to follow Cemetery Lane all the way to where it dead ends on the outskirts of town, you would find the old Schwartz mansion. You can't miss it. It sits on top of a small hill, a rambling Victorian structure silouetted by a full moon. Its shutters bang in the wind -- even when there is none to be felt. Dead trees surround the yard, their branches reaching out like clawed fingers, poised to grab anyone foolish enough to pass the rusted and broken wrought iron gate. Yet despite its appearance, the house is far from abandoned. The Schwartz family still lives there, although nobody has seen them since Doctor Schwartz was fired from the hospital years ago after a bizarre series of events, surrounded in mystery and rumored cover-up. Following his dismissal, the doctor and his wife (who also worked at the hospital) pulled their son Ed out of school and went into seclusion here. In the years that followed they haven't been seen by a living soul. However, on a night when the moon is full -- a night like tonight -- flickering lights can be seen from the windows, and strange noises are heard... (fig. 1)



The Object of the Game

The object of the game is simple: a group of Kids must go into a haunted house to rescue a friend that went in alone (fig. 6). After they go in, they are trapped and must find their way out (fig. 2 & 3).

The Look and Feel

The appearance and feeling of the game will be like a zany comedy cartoon. Exaggerated behavior on the parts of both the Kids and the Schwartz family will allow us to show exciting and funny situations like hair standing on end and eyes bugging out.

The Screen

The player will see a 2-1/2-D screen. Looking at the room (fig. 5), the point of view will be as if a camera were mounted on one of the walls. The room will be in perspective to some degree. Since the rooms are not very deep, no vanishing point is visible. There will be objects in the rooms that characters can walk in front of, as well as behind -- with full clipping. When a room or other location is larger than the screen, it will scroll horizontally and vertically whenever the character gets close to an edge. There may be a large staircase that is two screens high (fig. 4). As the character moves up the stairs the screen will scroll down. At the top of the stairs, the balcony could be three screens wide. Whenever a character walks from room to room the screen will cut to another "camera" in the new room. The imaginary camera will follow the character as much as possible without cutting. This will give the player the illusion that he is looking in on the game.

Multiple Characters

There are four Kids in the game at the same time. The player, at any time, can choose which character he wants to control. He can also tell the Kids to follow one another and thereby control multiple characters at once. He will have to use all four characters in a co-operative way to get out of the house. Each Kid has individual characteristics. Some can run fast, others are strong and can carry heavy objects. The weight of a character might be important to the game as well. If there is a dumbwaiter in the house (all haunted houses have one), only the lightest would be able to use it. The Kids have personalities as well. The player is not really controlling the Kids directly; he is just telling them what to do. Using the mouse (Amiga, ST, Mac) or joystick the player will point on the screen to where he wants a Kid to move to. He can also point to objects that the Kids are supposed to pick up, touch or use.

User Interface

The user interface is how the player communicates to the Kids, how he gives them orders.

The top two thirds of the screen displays the room that the active Kid is in (fig. 9). Below this image is a text line. The text line is used to communicate any written message that comes up, like a note they find. It might also include anything that is said by any of the Schwartzs. Below the text line is a list of words. I will refer to these words as Buttons. Each Button performs a task, like "Drop", "Pick up" or "Lock". By first pointing to a word and then pointing to an object on the screen, the player can manipulate the world. If he first selects "Pick up", then points to a candle on the mantel, the Kid he is controlling will go over to the mantel and pick up the candle, which would then be added to his inventory. He could then select "Light" and point to the candle from the inventory list; if the Kid has a way of lighting the candle it would light. More complex actions can be performed as well. The player can select "Give" then "Sandy" (one of the Kids in the game) followed by "Baseball", Sandy would then have the baseball.

The player switches control from one Kid to another by selecting that Kid's name from the word list or "clicking" the Kid on the screen. If he selects "Greg", for example, the screen location and inventory lists will switch to Greg. He can now control "Greg" in the same way he was

controlling "Sandy". The player will always be able to see all the Buttons ever used in the game. No Buttons will appear or disappear as the game progresses. This will allow the player to know all the choices he has from the beginning.

Below the Buttons is the inventory list. For every object a Kid is carrying an icon depicting it will appear in the list. The player can select these icons and manipulate them in the same way as objects in the room.

There are three ways to push the Buttons and select inventory objects. The player will be able to use whatever method suits him best. The first way is to move the cursor over the word or icon and push the joystick or mouse button. The second way is to use the cursor keys. A separate cursor will jump from word to word and hitting the spacebar will select it. The third way is through keyboard equivalents. Every Button has a key that can be hit to select it. Any of the three methods can be used interchangeably throughout the game.

Some Buttons

Drop	Pick up	Open	Close
Go to	Go through	Exit	Turn on
Turn off	Flip	Catch	Hit
Unlock	Lock	Kill	Trip
Lift	Water (verb)	Fill	Map (verb)
Write	Pull	Roll	Touch
Clean	Fix	Look	Examine
Win	(screen clears and it says "you win, enter in your initials")		

Puzzle Solving

Playing Maniac Mansion involves solving a large complex puzzle made up of hundreds of small puzzles. Since its a graphics adventure game, the player will get all clues visually. Most of the puzzles will have to be solved in a certain order. There are always several way to get something done (of course there is always a best way).

An example of the kind of puzzles in the game would be to move an object that is in the attic to the ground floor. It is too big to move down the stairs. One solution would be to have left one Kid outside, then have the others go upstairs and push the object out the window. The Kid outside could then bring it in the front door. There will be many puzzles like this that all intertwine and interrelate with each other. Other possible elements:

1) Size and strength of a particular Kid will be important; some will be taller, faster, etc. It will be important to pick the right Kid for the right job. The dumbwaiter will be one possible way to get from floor to floor, but you will only be able to fit Bobby and possibly Sandy into it, as Joey is too heavy (but maybe the only Kid strong enough to pull the rope attached to the dumbwaiter) and Greg is too tall.

2) There will be something important in the Tentacle's bedroom, but it's pitch black up there. Candles go out, and so will a flashlight. What you need is a jar from the kitchen, and some fireflies from the greenhouse/pool area. If you can catch the fireflies in the jar, then the glow will light your way in that room.

3) Tickets are needed to gain access to Wierd Ed's Disco and you have to find them -- they are in the Tentacle's bedroom. Also you'll need the elevator key to get from the bar to the next floor down.

4) Greg might be a paperboy and have a newspaper in his back pocket, which will be chock full of useful information and clues, articles on the Schwartz mystery, etc.

5) The paintings on the walls may be removed to reveal secret panels and passageways around the house.

6) In a particular room there may be a painting hung over a bed too high to reach, but by jumping up and down on the bed like a trampoline, you can reach it.

7) If you feed the Tentacle with meat from the storage locker, and you can become it's friend.

8) There may be a transistor radio you find, and when you turn it on it plays the Schwartz's favorite disco beat. As long as the batteries hold out, the Schwartz family will like the Kid with the radio, but as soon as the batteries go dead, it's curtains.

9) It may be possible to tie Dead Cousin Ted's cloth bandages to the top of the laundry chute, drop him down, and climb down the bandage.

10) "The Schwartz family tree" will be an important book hidden somewhere in the library, possibly behind a secret panel.

11) If you drain the pool (you will need the key) while the Tentacle is in it, he will be sucked down the drain into the plumbing and will be stuck for a while. But when freed, he will chase the Kid responsible throughout the entire game.

12) Using the chimney maybe the only way to get from one floor to the next. When a Kid uses the chimney, he will become all sooty until he jumps into the pool. If the other Kids or a Schwartz sees him, they will get scared. This could be to your advantage as well as disadvantage.

13) It is necessary to cross the water-filled pit in the dungeon. The room where the pit is has a heater control. By turning it off, the water will ice up in a few minutes, then you can freely walk across.

14) Some of the rooms have phones in them and you call from room to room. To distract a Schwartz, call the phone that is in the same room. Each phone has a different number so you will have to know the correct number to place a call.

15) At the point in the game when the Schwartzs find out that "Disco is Back", the whole Mansion turns in to a giant Maniac Party and you are trapped in the basement with them and their personalities change. You will have to figure out how to deal with them so you can get out of the house.

16) If you find the hand mirror and show it to one of the Schwartz's, they will be frightened of their reflection. This will only work a few times before the mirror shatters.

17) Certain floors may have weak spots that creak when walked on. If you walk over these spots too often, they will give way, forcing you to find another path.

18) During the game, the doorbell will ring. If you are near enough to the front door, there will be a package for Edna. You can choose to get it, or escape from the house. (One Kid only) This package is what Edna wants.

19) There are three quarters in the game. If you play the "Disco Madness" game in the video arcade room, Edna will show up to watch. If you don't have the object she wants, after the video game is over, she will chain you up. (See personality puzzles drawing)

20) If Edna takes you to Doctor Fred, you'll need the newspaper that has the "Disco is Back" article. Earlier in the game, it will be very tempting to use the paper to start a fire.

No time limit, No Death

There is no time limit. The player is under no pressure to finish the game at a certain time. Some individual puzzles will have local time limits, but basically the player can take his sweet time. He should be able to think about the problems that need to be solved. If a decision is made hastily due to time pressure, it is likely to be based more on gut reaction rather than logic.

It is impossible for any of the Characters to get hurt or die. Anything bad that happens will be in the form of setbacks. For example if a Character walks down a flight of stairs that gives way, he will be trapped in the debris, but is unhurt once freed by the others.

The Audience is Watching

Maniac Mansion will appeal to text adventure players who enjoy solving puzzles, as well as those who like graphics strategy and adventure games. The characters will be very expressive and humorous. The depth of personalities and game play will make this game attractive to all age groups and can be played either as a solo game or in groups. The cartoon characters and situation will attract the young players; the sophisticated humor and puzzles will be attractive to the older players. The game environment has a broader appeal than strictly a science-fiction or fantasy game.