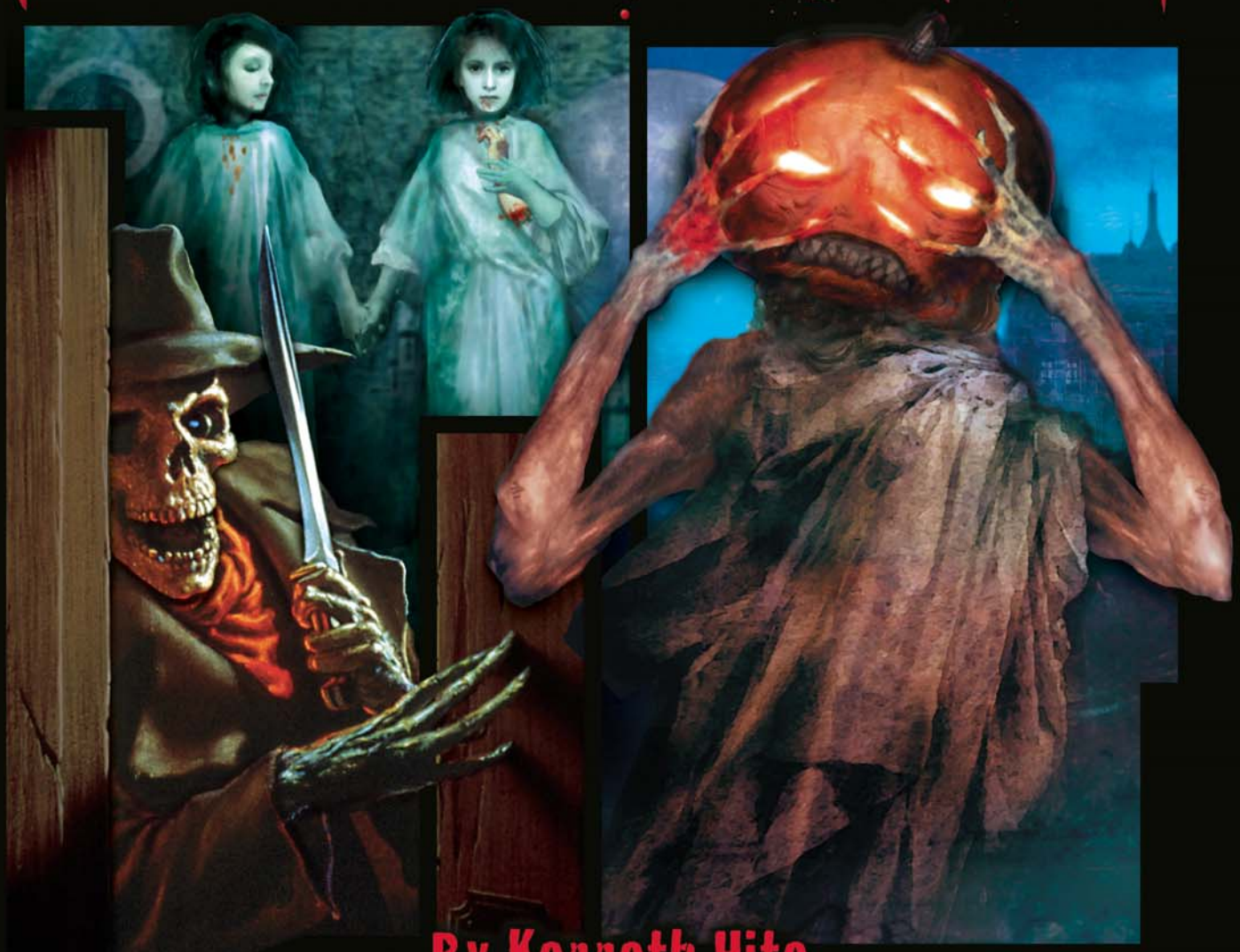
GURPS Fourth Edition

HORROR



By Kenneth Hite

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

GURPS® Fourth Edition

HORROR

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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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About *GURPS*

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Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all ***GURPS*** releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition.* Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

Introduction

So what is horror?

Horror is a matter of intent, and a matter of content. Anything written to frighten the audience is horror. Horror is usually a goal, not a genre; horror can appear in Westerns, romances, science fiction, fantasy, and mysteries. Wherever the writer wants to make your flesh creep, there's horror. Horror can be a genre, though, and in one sense it's the oldest genre of all. The first stories we have, from the Sumerian epics, are full of evil gods, the birth of monsters, and malevolent scorpion-men. And we have only added to that supply of scares over the next five millennia. Vampires, werewolves, psycho killers, haunted houses, and hundreds of other time-tested elements now jam-pack the horror toolbox.

These are, however, diverse elements. Horror doesn't have to be supernatural – the Black Death was completely natural, and completely horrific. Horror doesn't have to be human – the slow, inevitable death of the universe scared H.P. Lovecraft more than any personal narrative ever did. But horror doesn't stay in its box – the Black Death helped inspire the legend of the vampire, and the inevitable laws of physics gave the 20th century both the mighty Godzilla and Great Cthulhu. Horror is as sloppy as a Jack the Ripper killing, and as neat as Josef Mengele's fingernails.

With something so slippery, it can take some work to get it right. That's true of writers, film directors, and artists – and roleplayers. The GM has to want to scare you, work to scare you, try to scare you. You, the players, have to want to be scared, work to be scared, try to be scared. Horror is the most collaborative of styles, which makes it perfect for roleplaying games. The GM and players must contract to play a horror game, and agree to build the atmosphere of fear together. Otherwise, it just plain won't work.

But when it does work – well, then, you have roleplaying at its finest pitch. Fear is the strongest, oldest emotion of all, buried deep in all our psyches from the caveman days, when we were one campfire away from the saber-tooth tigers. But as deep as it's buried, you can bring it to the surface with some dim lighting, a hushed tone, and a good story. It's a bottomless well of power, catharsis, and bloody farm implements, and it's waiting for you.

So enter freely and of your own will, both GM and player, ready to scare and to be scared, to join hands around the metaphorical campfire, listen to the snarl of the saber-tooth tiger, and to share the oldest and strongest emotion . . . and to make it brand new again.

Pleasant screams.

Publication History

This is the fourth edition of ***GURPS Horror.*** It expands upon, mutates, and replaces ***GURPS Horror,*** *Third Edition* (2002), which Kenneth Hite sewed together and reanimated from his own horror roleplaying guide ***Nightmares of Mine,*** along with the gigantic and wonderful limbs and organs previously assembled by J.M. Caparula in ***GURPS Horror,*** *Second Edition* (1990). That madman attached such things to the hellish torso of ***GURPS Horror,*** *First Edition* (1987), given eldritch unlife by Scott Haring. Its heart still beats within the unholy amalgamation you hold now.

About the Author

Kenneth Hite fervently believes that he was the first person to buy ***Call of Cthulhu*** in the state of Oklahoma, and has been running and playing horror RPGs nigh-constantly since then. Also since then, he has (among other things) developed and co-authored ***GURPS Infinite Worlds*** and ***GURPS WWII: Weird War II,*** written ***GURPS Cabal,*** and created over 300 "Suppressed Transmission" columns for *Pyramid* magazine. Additionally, he has written for ***Nephilim, Vampire: The Masquerade, Deadlands, Vampire: The Dark Ages, Unknown Armies, Call of Cthulhu d20, Vampire: The Requiem, Delta Green,*** and a smattering of games less obviously horrific.

His most recent works include the ENnie Award-winning RPG ***Trail of Cthulhu,*** a ***Savage Worlds*** setting describing ***The Day After Ragnarok,*** the blasphemous children's books *Where the Deep Ones Are* and *The Antarctic Express,* the critical essay collection *Tour de Lovecraft: The Tales,* and the ongoing "Lost in Lovecraft" column for *Weird Tales* magazine.

He lives in Chicago with many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore, his wife Sheila, the mandatory Lovecraftian cats, and a tell-tale heart.

There is no delight the equal of dread.

– Clive Barker

Necrophone (TL6)

In the October 1920 issue of *Scientific American,* Thomas Edison announced that he was working on the design of a machine to contact the spirits of the dead. No plans or prototypes were discovered in his laboratory after his death in 1931. In a séance 10 years later, Edison directed two electrical engineers to a blueprint of the device.

Edison's necrophone is a sensitive electrical valve, powered by a chemical electrolyte solution, which amplifies spirit voices captured by a large, trumpet-shaped aluminum dish-aerial apparatus. The ghosts speak through a microphone hooked up to the valve. Tuning the necrophone to a specific spirit requires something connected to that spirit or a summoning ritual – and the ghost isn't *required* to answer. To use the device, roll against Electronics Operation/TL6 (Parapsychology). $800, 22 lbs., external power. LC4.

Spiricom (TL7)

In 1980, electrical engineer George Meek and medium Bill O'Neil built Spiricom, a machine for communication with the dead. They used it to communicate with deceased NASA scientist George Mueller, who helped them perfect the Spiricom Mark IV by 1982. This system uses multiple-frequency tone generators to isolate ghostly voices from a room's "white noise," and creates a spiritual "carrier wave" to speak with or summon a specific spirit. Ascended and evolved spirits come in on the 29.5 MHz band or higher; tuning the Spiricom to lower frequencies contacts baser, even inhuman, spirits.

Operating the Spiricom requires 1d×10 minutes of tuning and a successful Electronics Operation/TL7 (Parapsychology) roll. The technology functions far more reliably with a medium; without one, attempts to contact a specific spirit are at -6. Mark IV: $3,200, 80 lbs., external power. LC4.

Combat Gear

This equipment is just a start. For even more fearsome paraphernalia, see ***GURPS Loadouts: Monster Hunters.***

Armor and Protection

Holy Water (TL0): Holy water may burn some monsters like acid (see *Acid,* p. B428). If so, then holy water from holy wells, lakes, or rivers (e.g., Glastonbury, Lake Nemi, the Jordan, or the Ganges) might do extra damage. Of course, it's hard to test in advance. Holy water is free from the font at the front of any Catholic or Orthodox church; water from a specific source costs more. Anyone with Clerical Investment can bless water with one minute and a Religious Ritual roll. See *Holy Water Heresies* (below) for some further options. Water, holy or impious, weighs 1 lb./pint. LC4.

Crucifix (TL1): A crucifix or other holy symbol may provide protection or just comfort. Small *silver* model: $25, neg. LC4.

Electric Pentacle (TL6^): Invented by Thomas Carnacki in 1907, this device consists of mercury-vapor tubes set in a pentagram shape, wired in parallel to an induction coil, powered by two lead-acid batteries. The tubes emit specific wavelengths of blue light that repel spirits; ghosts or demons that wish to cross the light barrier must *win* a Quick Contest of Will vs. the barrier's DR.

Holy Water Heresies

In the modern world, only Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians doctrinally believe in holy water as a method of resisting or repelling evil forces. Some High Church Anglicans, Sikhs, Jews, and Buddhists use water ritually, if not explicitly to zorch demons. A hard-core Evangelical Protestant (or 17th-century Puritan) would consider holy water frivolous at best, idolatrous at worst – using it might *expose* the wielder to evil! Fantasy religions could have their own intricacies: perhaps the Fire God condemns holy water. The GM will have to adjudicate the theological implications for his campaign, or just let the Pope (and Hammer Films) do it.

The GM might be understandably nervous about allowing monster-hunters potential access to sprayer trucks full of vampire-killing solvent, or feel that toting "Holy Super-Soakers" cheapens the campaign's Gothic tone. The rules as given essentially track Catholic teachings on holy water. For GMs feeling their inner Martin Luther, here are some heretical variants:

Donatist Variant: Anyone without at least one of Blessed, Power Investiture, or True Faith has -4 on his Religious Ritual roll to create "vampire-proof" holy water. Alternatively, any vampire, demon, etc. vulnerable to holy symbols has the 0-point feature "Affected Only by True Faith," and the fearless vampire-slayers had better hope that the priest who blessed the font at St. Patrick's was truly faithful!

Jansenist Variant: The wielder has to maintain suitable reverence for the holy water for it to retain its sacramental status. He must roll vs. Will *each minute* that the water is contained in an inappropriate vessel (squirt gun, Big Gulp cup, etc.), and whenever he blasphemes, pollutes, or otherwise acts irreverently toward it. Failure means the holy water reverts to mundane water. Part of Armoury (Esoteric) (p. 28) might be the secret of inscribing a water gun with angelic glyphs, or building it from chased silver and crystal. The charitable GM may allow the wielder who sings a hymn or chants a prayer while toting the "sacred fire hose" to make a Religious Ritual roll and add his margin of success to these Will rolls while the prayer or hymn continues.

Valentinian Variant: Blessing water takes 10 seconds per gallon, as the "sacredness" must propagate through the pipes or across the swimming pool. During this time, the celebrant must take constant Concentrate maneuvers. This at least somewhat constrains the old "bless the sink and hit the fire alarm" plan.

In the above example, the GM should ask himself *why* vampires don't cast reflections. Some legends assert that it's because the vampire has no soul, which is what the mirror reflects. If so, then all reflective or image-capturing devices become useless; vampires certainly won't show up on video surveillance cameras, and a telephone might not even pick up a vampire's voice! Conceivably, vampires' names might not be recordable on computer databases – that would certainly explain why they wind up hanging around derelict warehouses. Others traditions specify that the mirror in question is silver-coated and point out that silver is harmful to vampires. In that case, only silver-coated or -backed reflective surfaces are ineffective; while some cameras use silvered film and mirrors, digital cameras and X-ray machines don't.

Incorporeal beings such as ghosts pose different problems. Sometimes, ghosts are manifest – but can they be photographed? Generally, yes, since a photograph (or video image) is a recording of rays of light, and it could be said that a ghostly manifestation is one of light. The GM may wish to redefine the concept of ghosts to prevent photographic recordings, however; perhaps their manifestations are merely *psychic* illusions that only the mind can perceive. Some ghosts might even use magic to render cameras useless. Of course, modern-day PCs who hope to use photographs of ghosts as proof face another challenge: convincing the authorities that such photos aren't hoaxes in this age of Photoshop.

If you're moving a monster out of its "native" habitat, then a little thought about what you're moving, and why, can pay big dividends of game realism – and hence, of horror.

Monsters as Fears

With the above in mind, the remainder of this chapter is organized into sections that address some basic human fears. Each fear has a "signature" monster, some variations, and game notes attached to it. The monster given for a particular fear is a starting point; this organization is descriptive, *not* prescriptive. If you decide that vampires are fundamentally not about the fear of taint and disease, but rather the fear of the unloved dead, then revamp (ahem) your bloodsucker accordingly. Some creatures – and fears – have pointers and advice for such adjustments. Add new monsters for specific fears, and recombine monster templates with Frankensteinian abandon. The goal here is to help the GM think about monsters in terms of their role as thematic elements first and foremost, as portents of the uncanny, rather than as opponents.

Bullets Can't Stop It!

"God made man. Sam Colt made men equal." By the numbers, Sam Colt (or perhaps Richard Gatling) may even have made man equal to monsters. Daikaiju and Ancient Ones aside, few critters can withstand a hail of well-directed lead for long. So how can the GM un-level the playing field again?

No Guns: Set the story in a place, time, or situation where there would be no guns; e.g., medieval France, a remote island after a plane crash, or an insane asylum.

No Gunmen: The PCs don't carry guns; e.g., kids at summer camp, Buddhist monks, or maximum-security prisoners.

Lousy Gunmen: The PCs have guns but can't hit the broad side of the barn; e.g., most people in a zombie apocalypse, CIA "desk jockeys," or overconfident street thugs.

No Reloads: The PCs are trained but must conserve ammo; e.g., soldiers behind enemy lines, a police sniper during that zombie apocalypse, or hunters backpacking in the Canadian wilds.

An Inconvenient Shoot: The monsters lurk where guns' effectiveness is diminished; e.g., total darkness, underwater, twisty tunnels, or dreams. Consider Morlocks, Deep Ones, or Freddy Krueger.

Smart Monsters: The monsters are intelligent or cunning enough to take away guns or ammo; e.g., a werewolf who dislikes taking a silver risk, a ripper who lives to terrorize his prey, or Roy Batty in *Blade Runner.*

Sneaky Monsters: The monsters are too stealthy and/or fast to engage effectively before they enter close combat to attack; e.g., man-eating lions, invisible madmen, or the xenomorphs in *Aliens.*

Charming Monsters: The monsters use mind control (or pure terror!) to make victims pause when they should shoot; e.g., a vampire who can mesmerize you to drop the gun, impossibly beautiful faeries, or little kid zombies you don't *want* to shoot.

No Safe Target: The monsters lurk where one shouldn't discharge a firearm; e.g., any monster hiding in plain sight in a crowd, a monster on a pressurized jet or submarine, or the xenomorph nest under the heat exchanger in *Aliens.*

No Good Target: The monster's organs aren't where they should be, requiring a roll against an obscure Physiology specialty to target its vitals, or the creature has No Vitals (p. B61); e.g., alien invaders, golems, or revenants.

No Target At All: The monster can't be dealt with by shooting; e.g., Hill House, the Colour Out of Space, or a tiny grub that parasitizes people and makes them act erratically.

Won't Stay Shot: The monster gets back up shortly after being shot (although shooting buys the victims some time, because the monster must recover before striking again); e.g., vampires, Michael Myers in *Halloween,* or tulpas.

Ghosts aside, relatively few monsters are simply bulletproof. In fact, most go down just fine against a skilled shooter with a good gun and ammo, set up where he can't be flanked, covering an evacuated kill zone, and warded against dirty tricks. The trick is setting that up . . . and the GM's trick is to make it impossible.

Concept

A *player* who deduces the disease's vector, etiology, cause, and true nature (demonic imp-virus, mummy cooties, mad-science serums in the water, germs from planet Zelkor, or whatever) should get a bonus on the Concept roll.

Prototype

Make a Prototype roll once per month – or once a *year*, in a high-realism campaign. Even at TL7-8, disease research requirements are grim: a cure for polio required millions of dollars and decades of research. In the case of AIDS, *billions* of dollars and over 20 years of study have developed only a few (expensive and bulky) suppressants. If the germ is a variation on a known bug, or if there has been a long, ongoing research effort on the disease, the GM might realistically cut research time from years to months or weeks. Such time scales, as abbreviated as they are, may still prove too long for many campaigns. Fortunately, PCs often have magic, high technology, secret alien formulae, and other advantages that the Mayo Clinic doesn't – and when all else fails, the GM can adjust things cinematically.

Cinematic Cures

Larger-than-life germ-stomping uses *Gadgeteering* (pp. B475-477). The Gadgeteer advantage (p. B56) is *mandatory*. Relevant skills are as discussed above (typically Physician), but the GM may also wish to require Science!, Weird Science, or something similarly cinematic and arcane. Cinematic horror cures use the standard gadgeteering modifiers, times, costs, etc. with these Complexity levels:

Average: A *suppressant* that stops the development or progress of symptoms.

Complex: A *vaccine* that prevents an uninfected person from contracting the disease.

Amazing: An *antidote* that completely cures the disease in an infected patient.

Complications

Remember that the "bugs" in an alien invader vaccine may be big bugs indeed! While the PCs are working with – and, dare we hope, fighting monsters around – all their dangerous, fragile, virus-covered equipment, the GM can work with *Contagion* (p. B443) and *Infection* (p. B444), especially if an afflicted PC could turn into a horror himself. Even if all goes well, the GM should feel free to vary the cure's effectiveness, onset time, and other parameters as dramatic tension requires.

Nosferatu: The Plague Vampire

There's a type of vampire – the *nosferatu* – that bears no resemblance to Dracula. It's dead white, with long fingernails and rat-like teeth. It looks and smells awful; can turn to mist but not assume animal form; and summons rats, not wolves. When it sucks blood, there's nothing sexual or romantic about it; the victim wastes away and dies in agony. Like many vampires, the nosferatu symbolizes disease – a starkly medieval image, disgusting and evil. Where Dracula's aristocratic bearing and sexual charisma hint at syphilis, the nosferatu is the plague, tuberculosis, or perhaps typhus. Such creatures are the "walking pestilence," sapping strength and life, and then spreading through the land by transforming their victims into their likeness.

This older image can suggest more scenario ideas: A plague has struck the town, and a mysterious figure has been seen at night – coming up from the sewers, some say. A reward has been offered to anyone who can stop the Bringer of the Black Death. Investigators who work to find the meaning behind the monster can find ways of dealing with it. For example, a vampire's aversion to garlic is due to the bulb's nourishing, healing qualities; his fear of running water stems from the fact that it is generally considered clean and cleans that which enters it. Perhaps salt, sunlight, and other traditional purifiers can also stop the fiend!

The GM can use a monster's meaning to rework its appearance into a more appropriate and interesting form. In an American Civil War setting, the nosferatu might be accompanied not by rats, but by the pigs that fed on the bodies of dead soldiers. In a post-nuclear war setting, such a vampire may bring an army of cockroaches, glowing green at night.

> *Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;*
> *Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.*
>
> *– Medieval talisman, from Psalm 91:5-6*

Nosferatu

43 points

Advantages: Allies (Rat swarm; Built on 25%; 12 or less; Summonable, +100%) [24]; Claws (Talons) [8]; Pestilent (p. 22) [1]; Speak With Animals (Specialized, Rats, -80%) [5]; Vampire (p. B262) [150].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous) [-20]; Bad Smell [-10]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Dread (Salt) [-10]; Frightens Animals [-10]; Infectious Attack [-5]; Lifebane [-10]; No Alternate Forms [-30]; No Dominance [-20]; No Speak With Animals (Specialized, Wolves and Bats, -60%) [-10]; Vulnerability (Impaling Wood to Heart ×2) [-10].

Features: Achilles' Heel includes fire as well as wood.

Variations

For a nosferatu embodying a plague spirit, add Plague (p. 16).

Survival Horror

The polar opposite of *High-Powered Horror* (pp. 104-105), "survival horror" channels powerlessness as a wellspring of terror. This style privileges resource management, tactics, and stealth while foreshadowing a fundamentally bleak endgame: sooner or later, the horrors will swallow up the heroes. Exceptions exist, such as the theatrical version of *28 Days Later,* but are almost always driven by nervous producers rather than by narrative logic. While its literary origins go back to Lovecraftian tales like "Herbert West – Reanimator" and "The Lurking Fear," survival horror only blossomed with George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and the subsequent zombie boom. In video games, it arguably began with *Alone in the Dark* (1992), although *Resident Evil* (1996) was the first game to market itself as "survival horror." The label is now applied to *any* game or movie that features zombies or similar shambling hordes.

Other common (though not universal) traits of survival horror include:

Brutes vs. brains. The nearly always mindless horrors appear in swarms or hordes of identical monsters. Surviving heroes are smart, not just tough.

Disunity. Particularly in films, there's tension, arguments, or even outright betrayal within the human survivor community or protagonist group. Rather than join against the common threat, the pressures turn people bitter, selfish, panicky, and cruel. If the GM wants to emulate such intraparty conflicts, then it's probably best to make survival-horror games one-offs unless everyone involved truly likes that kind of roleplaying.

Dwindling resources. Guns run out of bullets or get lost. Armor is torn off. Food grows scarce. The heroes slowly lose their technological and cultural crutches, bringing them down to the level of the monsters outside – often despite having whole cities' worth of abandoned gear nearby. Some gamers find this *incredibly* frustrating, so the GM should clear it going in.

Invaded Houses (p. 130). Nowhere is safe for long; the heroes must keep moving or die. If there's a window, something *will* crash through it.

Labyrinths. Especially in video games, the heroes must navigate maze-like paths to avoid the hordes. This trope also shows up in films like *The Descent* and *This Is Not a Love Song,* featuring protagonists lost in unfamiliar terrain, and *Cloverfield,* where a familiar city becomes an obstacle course.

Promised Land. The heroes are seeking a safe haven: the evacuation zone in *Cloverfield,* "the island" in *Dawn of the Dead,* etc. The GM decides whether it's a lie, a mirage, full of zombies, or a genuine refuge. Survival-horror purists regard having a real "Promised Land" as cheating!

Themes

Presenting a theme isn't a matter of distributing handouts that state, "This campaign is about corruption." Nor is it a matter of an NPC nodding sagely and offering a few thoughts on the topic of doom. Themes are *hidden* notes, best kept under the story itself. Think of a game's theme as its skeleton, its bones: they give it structure and let it stand up – and as with your own skeleton, it's seldom a good sign if the bones show up too clearly. You don't have to decide on a theme at the beginning; if you're telling a good story, then your theme will emerge in due time. Themes show up in little bits of offhand character development or evocative symbolism; eventually, these tiny pebbles add up into an avalanche that sweeps your story to its climax.

Betrayal

The theme of betrayal plays a key role in horror. "Trust no one" is the code, but that's easier said than done. Players and characters alike tend to lower their guard around the obviously harmless or actively useful NPCs. The GM should occasionally remind them that this is a mistake. Especially in conspiratorial horror – but to an extent in any game – any NPC can be a villain. The friendly clown could be a madman, the nice old lady at the sweetshop might be a cannibal, and the heroes' mentor may be using them for his own fiendish purposes. Little marks of betrayal can show up in a symbolic fashion (30 pieces of silver, to melt down for bullets) or as the tragic flaw in a truly beloved and otherwise noble NPC.

Be warned that betrayal is easy to overuse. In all but the most conspiratorial games, it can actively prevent the players from investing any emotional energy in the game world if it becomes too common. However, it works at the heart of isolation in the horrific world: We're all separate from each other, alone against the dark.

Corruption

Closely related to betrayal, corruption is the slow change of something good into something evil. Decaying flesh, rotting meat, disintegrating cities, eroding morality . . . all of these things tell the story of horror loose in the world. In dark, gritty campaigns, the corruption is omnipresent; the party may have to choose to defend a corrupt world against an even worse alternative. In brighter, more heroic games, the corruption comes from outside: invaders from Mars, skeleton ships from the Dry Tortugas, or vampires from far-off Transylvania. Corruption might have a face, making it a mirror and/or a target for the heroes. Images of corruption include not only rot, mold, and decay, but also such horror elements as the ruined castle and the abandoned factory.

The GM should know that expanding the corruption's visible scope while limiting the game's scale increases the players' sense of confinement. Make sure they fight back and don't withdraw! See *Power Corrupts* (pp. 146-148) for some rules that model such growing corruption.

Forgotten Lore and Horrible Secrets

Especially in games of psychological and cosmic horror, the horror might come not only from monsters and corpses, but also from the heroes' discovery of horrifying truths about the world, themselves, or their place in the universe. These discoveries can require Fright Checks. Since much horror magic forces the caster to confront directly, accept, and indeed invite such knowledge, even casting a spell might demand a Fright Check! For rules, see *Fearsome Magic* in ***GURPS Thaumatology.***

Whether a Fright Check is required in a given case depends on the campaign. In a traditional Gothic horror game, discovering that one's grandfather went mad might demand such a Fright Check; in a gritty, alien-hunting black-ops game, only the realization that an alien race is pulling the ops' strings is likely to shake them to the core. In general, the more clearly and completely the new discovery reveals an Awful Truth threatening the heroes' sanity or worldview (or even the worldview that they still desperately wish to believe in), the greater the Fright Check penalty. Some examples:

This information demonstrates the Awful Truth, but might be explained away (e.g., the graphically realistic graffiti art in the subways shows ghouls killing people): no modifier

This information clearly demonstrates the Awful Truth; rejecting it takes willful denial (e.g., this transit police report clearly indicates the presence of a ghoul colony in the New York subways): -1

This information shows the Awful Truth goes deeper, or has wider meaning, than previously thought (e.g., these diaries prove that a group of madmen have spread ghoul colonies to Oregon): -3

The Awful Truth strikes directly at your life or beliefs (e.g., your grandfather somehow became a ghoul and faked his death): -3

Knowing this information, or casting this spell, assuredly opens you or your loved ones up to evil, madness, or Things Man Was Not Meant To Know (e.g., your grandfather infected your children with the ghoul virus when he last visited you): -5

The Awful Truth has global scope (e.g., the ghoul cult has existed for centuries, and controls major healthcare institutions): -7

The Awful Truth strikes at the core of your identity (e.g., your grandfather initiated you into the ghoul cult as a child and erased your memory of it until now): -7

This knowledge, or spell, could destroy the world – perhaps it's doing so right now (e.g., the ghoul cult has laced this year's flu vaccine with the ghoul virus): -10

Stress and Derangement

In some horror, especially horror dealing with Things Man Was Not Meant To Know, certain frights can blast the sanity from those who behold (or discover) them. The Thing simply *cannot* exist – the mortal mind cannot perceive it and remain sane. Without going the full Lovecraft, a horror campaign might still posit a difference between simple terror and adrenaline shock, and madness-inducing visions and experiences. One way to draw this distinction is to separate Fright Checks into two categories: ordinary Fright Checks, which cause *Stress,* and *Sanity-Blasting Fright Checks,* which cause *Derangement*.

In this model, failing an ordinary Fright Check causes the effects on the *Fright Check Table* and adds -1 to Stress – or -3 on a critical failure. Sanity-Blasting Fright Checks work similarly, but worsen Derangement instead of Stress. The victim has a cumulative penalty to *all* Fright Checks equal to current (Stress + Derangement)/2, rounded *against* him. Unforgiving cosmic horror games with truly sanity-blasting stimuli may halve only the Stress penalty!

Not Just Stunned

The *Fright Check Table* (pp. B360-361) depends a lot on "stunned" results. In short (one- or two-second) bursts, there's little wrong with that – but when stun lingers on, players can find themselves spending an entire combat with nothing to do but defend at -4. (Fainting is even worse, but it's *intended* to turn the victim into monster bait.) While the GM should try to make combats terrifying enough to capture everyone's attention, even those playing inactive characters, there are several alternatives to stun:

Down the List: The player can always suggest a *worse* (but perhaps more fun to roleplay!) result from further down the *Fright Check Table.* The GM should make sure that this choice is at least as inconvenient – if not as tiresome – as being stunned.

Flight or Frenzy: The alliterative alternatives to "freeze." After one second of stun, the character must either flee the scene at his highest Move or attack the frightening stimulus as if Berserk. If he already has a similar disadvantage (Cowardice or Berserk), he must roll vs. the *lower* of Will or that disadvantage's self-control number to snap out of it.

Stun is Fun: Provided that the character isn't doing anything useful, and only defends at -4, he need not just stand there. He might run around in little circles having hysterics (roll his direction randomly each turn, as for *Scatter,* p. B414), or collapse and moan, or scream at the top of his lungs, or rant and gibber, or anything along those lines. If the GM agrees that the move is tactically useless, he may even let the victim try to take pictures, frantically text his location, or pull out his gun only to drop it from nerveless fingers and chase it along the floor. The GM should allow any free action during "horror stun" that wasn't caused by a creature deliberately attempting to freeze its victims in place.

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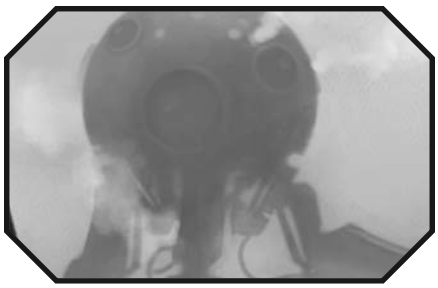

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