GURPS®

HORROR

Third Edition



by Kenneth Hite

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

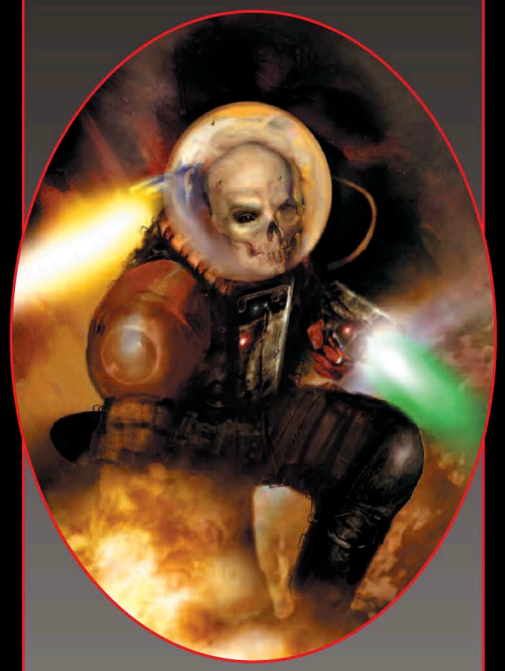
What's That Behind You?

Do you fear the Bad Things that stalk us all? Or is it the things you cannot grasp that scare you the most – that make you realize just how irrelevant you really are? Or is the true horror the things that simply *cannot* be grasped? Then get ready to scream, because your fears are about to come to life . . .

Within the pages of ***GURPS Horror*** you will find everything you need to run a horror campaign, including:

- A systematic dissection of horror as a genre and as a genre treatment – everything from the most brutal splatter to the most subtle psychological horror.
- Plenty of advice on horror gaming, for players and GMs.
- Character templates, including the troubled Artist, the innocent Child, the dabbling Occultist, and the stalwart Policeman.
- New and thoroughly unnatural advantages, and some disturbing new takes on old disadvantages.
- Evil clowns, werewolves, undead, and even Things Man Was Not Meant To Know – with full game statistics and guidance on using them in a horror campaign.
- Three original campaign frames: Seas of Dread, Sails of Daring; Blood in the Craters; and the Madness Dossier.





GURPS Basic Set, *Third Edition Revised* and ***Compendium I*** are *required* to use this supplement in a ***GURPS*** campaign. The material on horror adventures, campaigns, and characters can be used with *any* game system.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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CONTENTS

*About **GURPS*** 3

Introduction: Enter Freely and of Your Own Will . . . 4

1. The Rag and Bone Shop 5

Personalizing Characters 6
Typical Character and Backgrounds 6
Character Templates 6
Monsters as Characters 13
Advantages, Disadvantages, and Skills 17
Advantages 17
Secret Advantages and Disadvantages 18
New Advantages 18
Disadvantages 21
Skills 22
Disadvantages From Fright Checks 22

2. Alone Against the Dark 23

Embrace Your Fear 24
Motivation, or "Why Are We in This Graveyard at Night?" . . 24
Character Design 25
Character Concept 25
Brief Biography 25
Character Hooks 25
Character Development 26
Party Design 27
Working With the Other Players 27
The Challenge 28
Investigation 28
Monster-Hunting 28
The Monster-Hunter's Toolbox 29

3. Things That Go Bump in the Night 31

Choosing Your Monster 32
Thoroughly Modern Monstrosity 32
Race or Monster? 32
Stereotypes and Archetypes . . 33
Monsters as Fears 33
Fear of Taint 33
The Vampire 33
Vlad the Impaler 34
The Ghoul 35
Fear of Nature 36
The Werewolf 36
Fear of Sex 37
The Wolf-Man 39
Becoming a Werewolf 39
Quick-and-Dirty Shapeshifting 40
Stopping a Werewolf 40
Fear of Madness 40
The Serial Killer 40
The Psycho Killer 41
Psycho Killer Weapons 41
The Evil Clown 42
Fear of Mutilation 42
Mutilation Panics 43
Jack the Ripper 43
The Ripper 43
The Ultimate Mutilation: The Disembodied Brain . . . 44
The Creeping Hand 44

Fear of the Universe 45
Things Man Was Not Meant To Know 45
Fear of the Foreign 45
Fear of Natives: The Manitou . . 45
Cosmic Deities 46
Ancient Ones 46
Describing the Indescribable . . 46
Minions 47
Poisoning Phobias 48
Fear of the Unnatural 48
The Ghost 48
Ghosts in the Game 48
Some Specialized Ghosts 50
Malevolent Objects 53
Alien Invaders 54
Fear of Others 55
The Unseelie 55
Other Hidden Races 55
Faerie Fear Filters 56
Fear of Disease 56
The Killer Virus 56
Stopping the Plague 57
Nosferatu: The Plague Vampire 58
Fear of Death 58
The Zombie 58
Variant Zombies 59
The Mummy 60
The Mummy's Curse 60
More Monsters 61
The Natural Unnatural 61
Hell and Horror 62

4. Dark Theatres . . . 63

Campaign Length 64
One-Shots 64
Extended Campaigns 64
Narrative Structures 64
Escape 65
Gauntlet 65
Extended Campaigns and Plausibility 65
Nemesis 66
GURPS Cabal 66
Picaresque 66
Quest 66
Mix and Match 66
Protagonists and Antagonists 67
Against the Darkness: Heroes 67
Let the Players Play 68
Pre-Generated PCs? 68
The Nature of the Beast: Enemies 68
Design Parameters 69
High-Powered Horror 70
Scale 71
Scope 71
Precisely Calibrated Evil 72
Austerity 72
Boundaries 73
Across the Planes 73
Uncanny Powers 74
Magic 74
Rural or Urban? 74
Psionics 75
Magic Items 76
Black Technology 76
Super Abilities 77
Horrifying Genres 77
Fantasy Horror 77
Dreamworlds 78
Historical Horror 78
Victorian England 79
The Roaring '20s 80
Modern-Day Horror 80
Science-Fiction Horror 82
Horror Across Time 84

5. Ominous Feelings, Gathering Shadows 85

Elements of Horror 86
Uncertainty 86
Isolation 86
Surrealism 86
The Unnatural 87
Styles and Themes 87
Modes and Approaches 88
Styles 88
Thrills vs. Gore 89
Themes 91
Gothic Horror 91
Symbolic Settings 92
Running Horror 94
Timing 94
Changes of Pace 94
Props and Atmosphere 94
Adding Horror In 95
Who Can You Trust? 95
Fright Checks 95
Cumulative Effects of Fear . . . 96
Multiple Fright Checks 97
Ad Hoc Fright Checks 97
Sanity-Blasting Fright Checks 98
Scenario Design 98
The Story Hook 98
First Blood 98
Building in the Twists 99
The Teaser 99
Making it Different 100
The Payoff 100
A Good Bad Man Is Hard to Find 100
Villains and Beasts 101
Villainous Motives 101
Victims: Their Creation and Abuse 102
Opportunity 103
Cowards Die a Thousand Deaths 104

6. Tales to Terrify 105

Seas of Dread, Sails of Daring 106
Variations 106
The Campaign 106
Design Parameters 106
Other Settings 107
Characters 107
Uncanny Powers 108
Cinematic Pirate Template . . 108
Here Be Monsters 108
More Monsters 109
Possible Narrative Structures 110
Inspirational Material 110
Blood in the Craters 111
The Campaign 111
Design Parameters 112
Characters 112
Uncanny Powers 112
Martian Monsters 112
Variations 112
Red Technology 113
Possible Narrative Structures 115
Inspirational Material 115
The Secret History of History 116
The Madness Dossier 117
The Campaign 117
Variations 117
Design Parameters 117
Campaign Crossovers 118
Characters 118
Uncanny Powers 118
Reality Quake Table 119
Irruptors 120
Reality Subduction Zones . . . 120
Irruptors as PCs 121
Possible Narrative Structures 122
Inspirational Material 122

Blasphemous Lore . . 123

Index 127

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the ***GURPS*** system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources include:

Pyramid (**www.sjgames.com/pyramid/**). Our online magazine includes new ***GURPS*** rules and articles. It also covers ***Dungeons and Dragons, Traveller, World of Darkness, Call of Cthulhu***, and many more top games – and other Steve Jackson Games releases like ***In Nomine, INWO, Car Wars, Toon, Ogre Miniatures***, and more. *Pyramid* subscribers also have access to playtest files online!

New supplements and adventures. ***GURPS*** continues to grow, and we'll be happy to let you know what's new. A current catalog is available for an SASE. Or check out our website (below).

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all ***GURPS*** releases, including this book, are available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE. Or download them from the Web – see below.

Gamer input. We value your comments, for new products as well as updated printings of existing titles!

Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at **www.sjgames.com** for an online catalog, errata, updates, Q&A, and much more. ***GURPS*** has its own Usenet group, too: rec.games.frp.gurps.

GURPSnet. This e-mail list hosts much of the online discussion of ***GURPS***. To join, e-mail majordomo@io.com with "subscribe GURPSnet-L" in the body, or point your web browser to **gurpsnet.sjgames.com**.

The ***GURPS Horror*** web page can be found at **www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/horror/**.

Page References

See **www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html** or ***GURPS Compendium I,*** p. 181, for a list of abbreviations for ***GURPS*** titles. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Third Edition Revised*; e.g., p. B144 refers to page 144 of ***Basic Set.*** AE refers to ***Alternate Earths,*** AET to ***Alternate Earths 2,*** BE to ***Bestiary,*** BO to ***Black Ops,*** CB to ***Cabal,*** CI to ***Compendium I,*** CII to ***Compendium II,*** CM to ***Celtic Myth,*** FB to ***Fantasy Bestiary,*** G to ***Grimoire,*** M to ***Magic,*** *Second Edition,* P to ***Psionics,*** SPI to ***Spirits,*** STM to ***Steampunk,*** UN to ***Undead,*** VO to ***Voodoo,*** WWi to ***Who's Who 1,*** and WT to ***Warehouse 23.***

ENTER FREELY AND OF YOUR OWN WILL

"There is no delight the equal of dread."
– Clive Barker, "Dread"

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 is 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.



They 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 Joseph Mengele's fingernails.

With something so slippery, it can take some work to get it right. That's true of writers, and 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. 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.

– Kenneth Hite

About the Authors

J.M. ("Joe") Caparula is a freelance game writer and assistant manager of a game store in Madison, Wisconsin, where he lives with his wife Ann. His first project for Steve Jackson Games was ***GURPS Riverworld.*** He harbors a lifelong fascination with vampires, and Halloween is his favorite holiday. He wrote the second edition of ***GURPS Horror*** in 1990.

Scott Haring has made too many contributions to ***GURPS*** and to Steve Jackson Games to fit in a tiny blurb like this; most recently, he edited *Pyramid* magazine, authored a chapter of ***GURPS Y2K,*** and co-wrote ***GURPS Traveller: Planetary Survey 5 – Tobibak.*** He currently lives in Luba, Texas, with his wife Louise and two children, and is working on reanimating dead games. He wrote the first edition of ***GURPS Horror*** in 1987.

Kenneth Hite fervently believes that he was the first person to buy ***Call of Cthulhu*** in the state of Oklahoma, and has been playing horror RPGs almost continuously since then. In addition to his long-running "Suppressed Transmission" column in *Pyramid* magazine (currently collected in two books), he has written ***The Cainite Heresy*** for ***Vampire: the Dark Ages,*** part of ***Back East: The South*** for ***Deadlands,*** a chapter of ***GURPS Y2K,*** and ***GURPS Cabal.*** He also wrote the horror roleplaying guide ***Nightmares of Mine*** for Iron Crown Enterprises, from which some of this book's text is adapted. He lives in Chicago with many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore, his wife Sheila, and a tell-tale heart.

The Monster-Hunter's Toolbox

Useful Gear

Famed ghost-hunter Harry Price (1881-1948) recommended colored chalk, candles, thread, matches, flashlights, a notebook and pencil, a camera, sandwiches, and brandy as the standard kit for investigators of haunted houses. Upgrade the camera to a digital video camera, and add an MP3 or DAT recorder, and his list still works today. Some other useful modern-day equipment includes:



Cellular Phone: Handy for inter-party communications (but unwise if you suspect monitoring or tracing). As well, a cell phone with police, fire, and other emergency numbers on speed dial can provide anything from a distraction to a quick medevac in an emergency. $70, 0.25 lb.

Duct Tape: Holds thermocouples on walls, repairs broken equipment, and serves as makeshift handcuffs (Escape-3 or Quick Contest of ST vs. ST 18 to escape), rope (a 60-yd. roll can be braided into a 20-yd. rope that can support 200 lbs.), or direction marker, among other things. 60-yd. roll is $8, 1 lb. Matte-black, weather-resistant tape costs twice as much.

EMF Detector: Senses electric and magnetic fields, and radio emissions. Can come in handy in settings where ghosts or spirits are composed of electromagnetic energy. Commercial EMF detectors work at relatively short (1-5 foot) ranges. $200, 0.5 lb.

Fiberscope: Optical fiber within a steerable steel-mesh tube, with lenses at both ends. It can be snaked around corners, under doors, through heating ducts, etc. to provide a view of a hidden space. The tiny lens gives -3 to Vision rolls. A 1-yard-long version with an eyepiece is $2,250, 2 lbs. A special video camera and 4" LCD monitor add $1,400, 1 lb., but let an entire group see, and record, anything being examined.

Glow Stick: A plastic tube containing chemicals that create light when mixed by shaking or bending the tube. Lasts 6 hours, and illuminates (dimly) a 5-foot radius. Comes in a variety of colors; some monster-hunter teams assign each man a color for easy ID. $1, 0.25 lb.

GPS Receiver: Receives signals from the NAVSTAR (NAVigation Satellite Timing And Ranging) satellite network, giving your precise location anywhere in the world. This effectively grants Absolute Direction. (Roll vs. Orienteering to determine where you *should* be, the direction you're facing, etc.) Useful for pinpointing your location in haunted woods, underground tunnels, and other places that aren't on the map. By setting waypoints, you can use it to retrace your steps if you've gotten turned around. GPS signals may not penetrate thick rock – be careful while caving. $200, 0.5 lb.

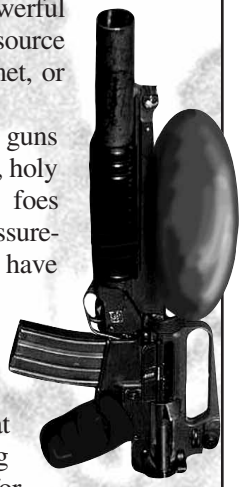
Headset Radio: Compact, voice-activated mike-and-earplug combo allows whispered communications between dispersed party members at up to 150 yards. A nice compromise between "don't split the party" and "sneak ahead to see what's going on." $50, neg. wt. Standard *tactical* models have a range of 1 mile, and are $700, 1 lb.; state-of-the art *encrypted* tactical headsets are $5,000, 0.5 lb.

Infrared Flashlight: Shines a beam of infrared light, useful for scanning a dark room without giving away your own position (assuming you have IR goggles or similar). $30, 1 lb.

Kryptonite™ Lock and Chain: Useful for tying up stronger beasts, securing doors and gates behind you, and keeping your bike safe. Price depends on ST rating: $100 for the lock and $10/yd. for the chain at ST 15, up to $300 for the lock and $50/yd. for the chain at ST 30. Weight is 2 lbs. per yd. per point of ST over 14.

Light-Intensifier Goggles: Concentrate and amplify existing visible light, granting Night Vision (p. B22) at the cost of peripheral vision. They are of no use in total darkness. Battery life is 12 hours. $6,000, 1.5 lbs. Bulkier (5 lbs.), less effective (-2 to Vision rolls) goggles, usually old Soviet models, can be had for as little as $800.

Shoulder Light: Useful when you need both hands free, the shoulder light is a powerful (30,000 candlepower), compact light source easily mounted on a shoulder strap, helmet, or gun barrel. $50, 1 lb.



Squirt Gun: Powerful plastic water guns use pump action to spray liquid (garlic oil, holy water, silver nitrate solution, etc.) onto foes with liquid susceptibilities. Quality pressure-loading squirt guns hold one gallon and have Malf 16, SS 12, Acc 2, 1/2D –, Max 12, RoF 2~, Shots 8, Rcl 0. Use Guns (Flamethrower) to hit. $30, 6 lbs. empty.

Thermal Detection Device: A hand-held IR sensor with a built-in computer that can distinguish the heat signatures of living beings from other heat sources; useful for finding "cold spots" or "warm spots" at a distance, and thus for detecting ghosts or invisible creatures. $600, 1 lb.

Thermographic ("Infrared") Film: Produces pictures even in complete darkness, as long as heat sources are present. A Photography roll is necessary to take and develop IR photos. Costs $1 per exposure.

Ultraviolet Flashlight: Some vampires that react to "sunlight" are specifically sensitive to ultraviolet (UV) light. The beam of a UV flashlight may harm them as sunlight – or even as "concentrated sunlight," doing double damage. A flashlight has SS 12, Acc 3, 1/2D 5, Max 15. Use Beam Weapons (Laser) or Guns (Pistol)-4 to hit. Effective RoF is 6; use the laser autofire rules (p. B120) to simulate a continuous beam. An adjustable longwave/shortwave UV flashlight is $70, 5 lbs. A high-intensity handheld UV lamp must be plugged into the wall, but does *quadruple* sunlight damage. $225, 8 lbs.



Zippo™ Lighter: The lighter that won WWII. Rugged construction, a reliable flint mechanism, and near-perfect ergonomics give you a failsafe instant source of fire. Requires butane fuel for every 100 lights. $20, neg. wt.

Continued on next page . . .

Variant Zombies

B-Movie Zombies

In the B-movie world, certain contaminants – from chemical spills, to cometary radiation, to strange diseases – can animate corpses and turn them into the walking dead, or even transform living humans into zombies. Many of these creatures are characterized by a ravenous appetite for human flesh, and may be extremely difficult to dispose of without dispersing the chemicals over an even wider range. Since these zombies have a powerful hunger for human flesh (especially brains) and quite often emerge from graveyards, they can be seen as yet another type of ghoul (p. 35), this one melding fear of taint with fear of death and mutilation.

B-Movie Zombie *-131 points*

Attribute Modifiers: ST +1 [10]; DX -1 [-10]; IQ -2 [-15]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Immunity to Poison [15]; Independent Body Parts (No reattachment, -60%) [14]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood) [5]; Single-Minded [5]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: Bad Smell [-10]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Dead Broke [-25]; Dependency (Human flesh or brains; occasional, daily) [-30]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Dread (Daylight) [-30]; Dread (Fire) [-20]; Gluttony [-5]; Hidebound [-5]; Infectious Attack [-5]; Low Empathy [-15]; Monstrous Appearance [-25]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Obdurate [-10]; Reduced Move (Running) -2 [-10]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Unhealing [-30]; Vulnerability (4d from head blows) [-20].

Voodoo Zombies

Zombies created by Voudun sorcerers, or *bokors,* are made from living people via administration of a ritual preparation compounded from puffer fish (which contain the contact poison tetrodotoxin), some amphibians, and a variety of plants found in Haiti. They can traditionally be laid to rest by tasting salt or (sometimes) by the sight of the sea; as well, a powerful magician or priest can return a zombie to normal life. These zombies are a monster of a culture born in forced labor; the horror is not of being attacked by one, but of *becoming* one – a senseless, mindless, unfeeling slave for eternity.

In historical horror campaigns, evil landowners may have zombie workers and servants, and local people guard the graves of relatives at night in case a "death" was not natural, but caused by zombie poison. In more modern times, becoming a zombie is the ultimate punishment for social transgressions. It could happen to anyone, from a violent criminal to an overly inquisitive anthropologist.

Voodoo Zombie *-185 points*

Attribute Modifiers: ST +1 [10]; IQ -2 [-15].

Advantages: Doesn't Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision [10]; Single-Minded [5]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: Bad Smell [-10]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Dead Broke [-25]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Hidebound [-5]; Low Empathy [-15]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Obdurate [-10]; Reduced Move (Running) -1 [-5]; Reprogrammable Duty [-25]; Slave Mentality [-40]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Vulnerability (4d from salt) [-40].



Often, splatter is combined with a subversive political message implying that the "normal" world is built upon a foundation of horrors, and that nothing is truly safe or innocent.

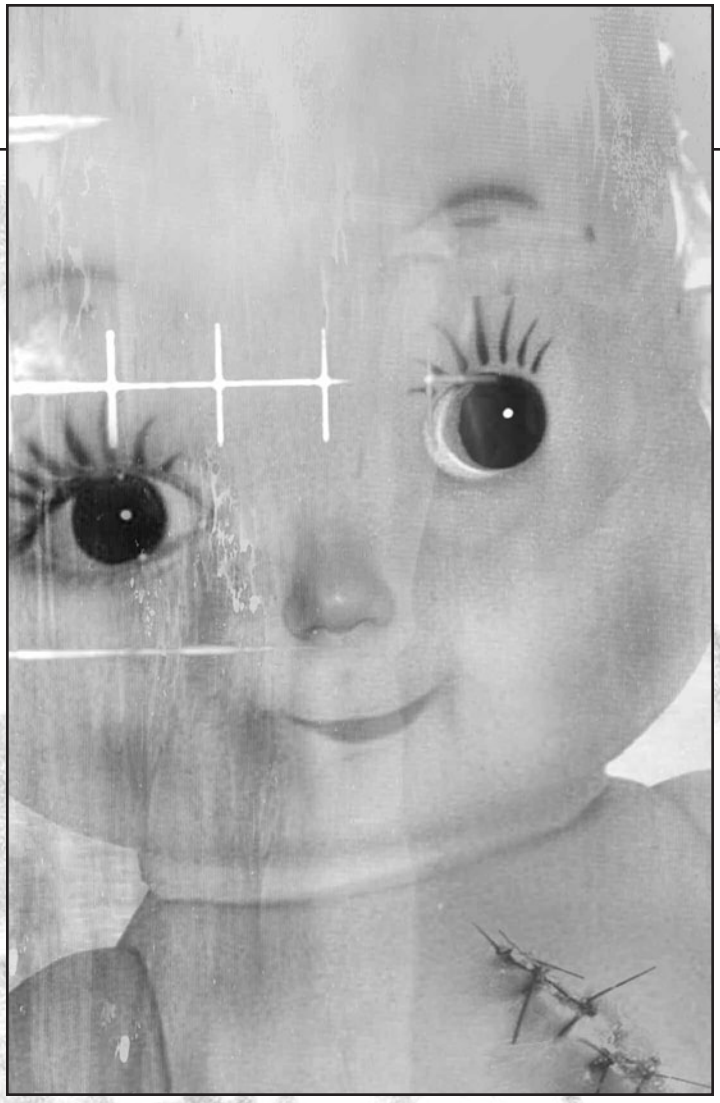
are getting worse" (or "things are not as they seem"). Indirect uses of splatter as information can turn into the use of splatter as metaphor; this specific use of splatter mixes well with other horror styles, especially cosmic horror and psychological horror.

It is certainly possible to build an entire campaign around splatter-style horror, where the escalation of grue is the theme of the campaign, but the GM should make sure that his players want to engage in a welter of blood over the long haul. If so, splatter can be used as the horrific element in a near-conventional "hack-and-slash" game, or as the dominant image in a subtle exploration of social and personal disintegration; it is capable of supporting either of these goals, or anything in between.

Cosmic Horror

Cosmic horror derives its power from its immensity: the horrors are bigger than the world, older than the world, and, in some sense, create and underlie the world. They can't be escaped, evaded, or defeated; the only thing that keeps the tiny pockets of innocence that feeble humans call "normality" in existence is that the horrors have no reason to act directly against them. The horrors will win in millennia; to them, millennia are as seconds to us. In cosmic horror, all knowledge is dangerous (much as all knowledge is doubtful in psychological horror). Everything that seems to explain the world simply reveals more of its innate horror and madness, which makes cosmic horror oddly suited to florid surrealistic excesses, as well as to slow, academic exploration of the Awful Truth.

Once the players stop thinking about "winning" and start thinking about sharing the feeling of fear, cosmic horror becomes one of the richest and most rewarding styles for role-playing adventure. Even a short-ranged, minor victory becomes a triumph; one person saved from the madness and corruption of the Things Man Was Not Meant To Know is a success made infinite by its very triviality. Cosmic horror can function in any genre, although it does tend to require a more "intellectual" culture than many fantasy worlds possess. Cosmic horror works well in the present day; like conspiracy gaming (with which it shares many thematic similarities), cosmic horror is more fun if the players recognize the world being horrifically revealed to their characters' eyes.



Thrills vs. Gore

When running a cinematic horror campaign, it is all too easy to rely on gory situations to create Fright Checks. But remember that not all horror films use special effects to excite their audiences. Instead of grossing us out with steaming entrails and rotting corpses, they *thrill* us with their roller-coaster pacing and nerve-wracking suspense. Producing a good thriller without a lot of gore is the mark of a skilled director. Similarly, running a hair-raising adventure without blood and guts is a sign of a talented GM.

To make a thriller work, the GM *must* keep the players from figuring out exactly what they're up against until the very end. Reveal things a little at a time. Don't show the monster right off – let the party arrive just after it leaves, or have it attack them in near darkness. They shouldn't really see it until (or after!) the final confrontation.

The majority of the adventure should take place at night. Emphasize darkness in the scene descriptions. When the players make Vision rolls to see things – which they should have to do often – impose heavy penalties for darkness. When a Fright Check is called for, apply the darkness penalty to that, too; poor visibility can be disorienting and disconcerting.

Include lots of unexplainable occurrences. The monster's victims don't turn up in bloody chunks – they just disappear. The house keys a PC leaves in his jacket pocket are lost, only to turn up later in his mailbox. The monster ducks into an alley that the heroes *know* is a dead end, but by the time they get there, it's gone.

The Madness Dossier

"If that there King was to wake," added Tweedledum, "you'd go out–bang!–just like a candle!"

"I shouldn't!" Alice exclaimed indignantly. "Besides, if ***I'm*** *only a sort of thing in his dream, what are* ***you,*** *I should like to know?"*

"Ditto," said Tweedledum.

"Ditto, ditto!" cried Tweedledee.

He shouted this so loud that Alice couldn't help saying, "Hush! You'll be waking him, I'm afraid, if you make so much noise."

"Well, it's no use ***your*** *talking about waking him," said Tweedledum, "when you're only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you're not real."*

– Lewis Carroll, ***Through the Looking-Glass***

For 15 centuries, the Red King has been asleep, knocked out by a cataclysm so massive that it threw all of history – past and future – into a new pattern. The Red King's servants, the ones who survived the reality quake, slowly shook themselves out of the rubble of their superseded history and began trying to wake him up. For over a century, only the archaeologists, neurolinguists, and commandos of Project Sandman have stopped them. Every day the Red King stays asleep is a day that history remains familiar, that human beings remain free, that the madness dossier remains closed. And all it costs is the life, the morals, and the sanity of everyone who works for Project Sandman.

The "Red King" is a Sandman slang term for the entities that once ruled the world, known to archaeologists as the Anunnakku (a species of Sumerian god or demon). Nobody knows for sure if the Anunnakku were aliens, supermen somehow mutated (or evolved) from *Homo sapiens,* or just the ruling caste of an unguessably ancient civilization that somehow mastered the art of control. Because before the reality quake, the Red King was in control. Humanity was linguistically programmed to obey his orders, and the orders of his servants. It still is. The Red King's servants use the ancient post-hypnotic blocks and memetic programs in the human subconscious to control us, to hide in plain sight, and to bring about their victory. Project Sandman has hacked the human source code, fighting fire with fire . . . using the minds of the innocent as the burning ground.

The Campaign

Genre: Modern-day espionage and micro-conspiracy. Project Sandman operates super-covertly, through a special-ops strike force and a deeply theoretical analysis section. The irruptors don't control world governments, but they do move through the population unseen, thanks to their powers over human perception.

Style: Psychological horror, as the agents must continually use horrific methods (mind control, along with the other less-savory aspects of espionage work) to defeat horrors using the same methods. If the GM wishes to emphasize this style, the agents' *own* actions might spark Fright Checks.

Mode: A quintessential wainscot game, making the question of boundaries between universes (as well as between defenders and irruptors) its major concern. Much of the horror of the irruptors comes from their ability to "hide in plain sight." With only moderate tweaks, this can also be an action technothriller – in which case the GM may wish to add more, and more horrific, irruptors.

Variations



This setting is not cosmic horror, but it can take on much of cosmic horror's mood and style if the GM emphasizes the irruptors as aliens and if he establishes that History A is truly doomed regardless of Project Sandman's sacrifices. In a cosmic horror game, learning the truth about our universe, or seeing an irruptor, causes a Sanity-Blasting Fright Check (see p. 98). A cosmic horror variation would also support a more investigative mode, including a campaign in which the heroes were outsiders (other government investigators, independent archaeologists, or tenacious reporters) chasing down the mysterious Project Sandman and stumbling into the nature of reality. Outside the cosmic horror style, the open-ended nature of reality quakes can justify any amount of the Fortean mode for a GM interested in questioning reality and perception by presenting streams of ever-more-bizarre events.

Theme: Betrayal and corruption meet in this game; the heroes must betray their own morality and become corrupt to defeat amoral slavers from another reality. However, that reality *was* the real one; History A is artificial, and it is breaking down under the irruptor onslaught. Insanity, mirrors, social disintegration, and "the curious madness of crowds" can all highlight these themes, along with the inevitable question: if you know memories and perceptions can't be trusted, how can you trust yours?

Design Parameters

Scale: Epic, from day one. In theory, if Project Sandman fails at any mission, it could flick out our existence like a light bulb. In practice, some mission failures "merely" cause a reality temblor that retrocreates another batch of irruptors (see *Reality Quake Table,* p. 119).

Scope: In theory, agents are restricted by orders from their superiors, and by their own personal morality. Much of the psychological horror in this campaign comes from the actions they must take to widen their scope.

Visible Scope: The same as the scope; Project Sandman agents are fully aware of the potential consequences of their actions. For an investigative game with different protagonists, the visible scope will expand with a jerk when the investigators learn the truth about the irruptors.

INDEX

Academic, *template*, 7.
Actual scope, 71.
Addiction disadvantage, 21.
Advantages, 17-20; *new*, 8-9; *secret*, 18; *see also advantage name*.
Alien Invaders, *template*, 54.
Altering templates, 7.
Alternate-historical horror, 84.
Ancient ones, 45-47; *template*, 46; *variations*, 47.
Anunnakku, 116-117.
Ape-Man, *template*, 108.
Aristocrat, *template*, 7-8.
Artist, *template*, 8.
Attorney, *template*, 8-9.
Austerity, 72.
Bad place, 92-93.
Basmu, *template*, 120.
Betrayal, 91.
Bibliography, 123.
Black technology, 76.
Blessed advantage, 17.
Body of Swarm advantage, 19.
Boundaries, 73; *globetrotting*, 73-74; *localized*, 73.



Burton, Sir Richard, 38.
Byle, *template*, 108-109.
Campaign, 64-65, 67-69, 71-74, 76-78, 86, 88-91, 95; *elements*, 86-87; *extended*, 65; *full-magic*, 74-75; *length*, 64; *modes and approaches*, 88; *no-magic*, 74-75; *secret-magic*, 74-75; *styles*, 87-91; *themes*, 91; *samples*, 106-121.
Channeling advantage, 17.
Character, 6; *biography*, 25; *concept*, 25; *design*, 25; *development*, 26-27; *hooks*, 25-26; *templates*, 6-17; *see also template name*.
Chemosit, *template*, 109.
Child, *template*, 9.
Childhood curse, 25.
Cinematic pirate, *template*, 108.
Clergyman template, 10.
Clerical Investments advantage, 17.
Conspiracy, 81.
Contacts advantage, 17.
Corruption, 91.
Cosmic deities, 45-46.
Cosmic horror, 89-90.
Creeping hand, 44.
Criminal, *template*, 10-11.
Crucifixes, 30.
Customizing templates, 7.
Cyberpunk, 82-83.
Delusions disadvantage, 21.
Demon, *template*, 62.
Design parameters, 69.
Detective, *template*, 11.
Disadvantages, 21-22; *secret*, 18; *see also disadvantage name*.
Doctor, *template*, 11.
Doppelganger, 50.
Dream Travel advantage, 19.
Dreamworlds, 78.
Enemies, 68-69; *anything goes*, 69; *desperate struggle*, 68-69; *one*, 68.
Epic scale, 71.
Escape, 65.
Evil ancestor, 26.
Evil clown, *template*, 42.
Evil faerie, *template*, 56.
Explorer, *template*, 11-12.
Fantasy ghoul, *template*, 36.
Fantasy horror, 77; *high*, 78; *low*, 79.
Farmer, *template*, 12.
Fearlessness advantage, 18.
Fears, *of death*, 58; *of disease*, 56; *of hell*, 62; *of madness*, 40; *of mutilation*, 42; *of natives*, 45; *of no hell*, 62; *of nature*, 36; *of others*, 55; *of sex*, 37; *of taint*, 33; *of the foreign*, 45; *of the unnatural*, 48; *of the universe*, 45.
Forbidden knowledge, 103.
Frankenstein's monster, *template*, 62.
Fright Checks, 95-98; *ad hoc*, 97; *bizarre and supernatural*, 97; *cumulative*, 6; *dead bodies*, 97; *disadvantages*, 22; *forgotten lore and horrible secrets*, 97-98; *monsters*, 96; *multiple*, 97; *sanity*, 98.
Funerary ghoul, *template*, 36.
Gauntlet, 65.
Genres, 77.
Ghost Form advantage, 19.
Ghost, 48, 50-53; *abilities*, 49, 51-52; *attributes*, 48-49; *point cost*, 52-53; *poltergeist*, 50; *template*, 53.
Ghoul, 35-36.
Ghul, *template*, 35.
Gill-Man, *template*, 109.
Girtablullu, *template*, 120.
Gothic Horror, 91.
GURPS Alternate Earths, 84; ***Alternate Earths 2***, 84; ***Arabian Nights***, 22, 79; ***Atomic Horror***, 54, 61, 79, 112, 114; ***Autoduel***, 83; ***Bestiary***, 32, 61; ***Bio-Tech***, 112-113; ***Black Ops***, 61, 76, 118; ***Blood Types***, 34; ***Cabal***, 17, 61, 66, 73, 75, 81, 88, 118; ***Cliffhangers***, 79; ***Creatures of the Night***, 61; ***CthulhuPunk***, 61, 82; ***Cyberworld***, 82; ***Deadlands***, 80; ***Dinosaurs***, 109; ***Discworld***, 90; ***Egypt***, 61, 79; ***FantasyBestiary***, 61, 109; ***Fantasy Folk***, 61; ***Greece***, 79; ***Grimoire***, 75; ***Illuminati***, 54, 81; ***Imperial Rome***, 79; ***In Nomine***, 62; ***Magic***, 75; ***Monsters***, 61; ***Myth***, 61; ***Old West***, 79-80; ***Psionics***, 76, 118-119; ***Reign of Steel***, 83; ***Russia***, 61; ***Screampunk***, 91; ***Shapshifters***, 40; ***Space***, 83; ***Spirits***, 20, 48, 61, 73; ***Steampunk***, 76, 112-113; ***Steam-Tech***, 76; ***Swashbucklers***, 22, 79, 1107; ***Technomancer***, 75-76; ***Time Travel***, 84; ***Undead***, 48, 61, 88, 102; ***Vehicles***, 50; ***Voodoo***, 17, 48, 75, 79; ***Warehouse 23***, 118; ***WWII***, 80; ***Y2K***, 83.
Haunted item, 26.
Headless horseman, 50.
Herbs, 30.
Hidden races, 55.
High-powered horror, 70.
Historical horror, 78-80.
Independent Body Parts advantage, 19-20.

Insanity, 26.
Introduction, 4.
Invaded house, 93.
Investigation, 28.
Isolation, 86-87.
Jack the Ripper, 43.
Journalist template, 12-13.
Kusarikku, *template,* 120-121.
Lovecraft, H.P., 45.
Lycanthropy, *see Werewolves*.
Machen, Arthur, 55.
Magic, 74-76; *items*, 76.
Man-eaters, 38.
Man-eating lion, *stats*, 38.
Manitou, 45.
Marauds, *template*, 113-114.
Martian ghouls, *template*, 113.
Martians, *template*, 112-113.
Minions, 45, 47; *template*, 47; *variations*, 47.



Missing relative, 26.
Missing time, 26.
Mix and match, 66-67.
Modern-day horror, 80-81.
Monsters, 32; *as characters*, 13; *as fears,* 33; *archetypes*, 32; *choosing*, 32; *hunters of,* 28-29, 67, 70, 104; *modern*, 32.
Motivation, 24, 103.
Mummy, 60-61; *curse*, 60; *template*, 61.
Mutilation, 42-44; *disembodied brain*, 44; *panic*, 43.
Myrmidons, *template*, 114.
Mystic, *template*, 13-14.
Narrative structures, 64-67.
Natural unnatural, 61.
Nemesis, 66.
Ngojama, *template*, 109.
Nosferatu, *template*, 58.
Occultism skill, 22.
Occultist, *template*, 14.
Party design, 27.
Patron advantage, 18.
Patterson, John Henry, 38.



Personalizing characters, 6.
Pestilence advantage, 20.
Pestilence, *see Plague*.
Phantom ship, 50.
Phobias, 21-22, 48; *disadvantage*, 21; *poisoning*, 48.
Photography skill, 22.
Piasa bird, 61.
Picaresque, 66.
Plague, 56-58; *stopping*, 57.
Policeman, *template*, 14-15.
Post-holocaust, 83.
Pre-generated PCs, 68.
Project Sandman, 116-118; *template*, 118.
Props, 94-95.
Prosaic scale, 71.
Protagonists and antagonists, *plain folks*, 67.
Psionics, 75-76.
Psychic silhouettes, *template*, 114.
Psycho killer, 41; *template*, 41; *weapons,* 41.
Psychological horror, 90.
Pulp horror, 90.
Quest, 66.
Racial templates, 7.
Reality subduction zones, 120.
Reality quake table, 119.
Retired military template, 15-16.
Ripper, 43-44; *template*, 43; *variations*, 44.
Roaring ’20s, 80.
Scale, 71.
Scenarios, 98-100; *first blood*, 98-99; *hoaxes*, 100; *inversions*, 100; *payoff*, 100; *story hook*, 98; *twists*, 99.
Science-fiction horror, 82.
Scientist, *template*, 16.
Scope, 71.
Sedu, *template*, 121.
Self-defense, 101.
Serial killer, 40-41; *template*, 41.
Shaggy ones, *template*, 38.
Shapeshifting, 40.
Shelley, Mary, 62.
Silly horror, 90.
Silver weapons, 30; *damage*, 30; *making*, 30.
Siren, *template*, 110.
Skeleton, *template*, 110.
Skills, 7, 22; *see also skill name*.
Space, 83.
Spirit Advisor advantage, 20.
Spirit Invulnerability advantage, 20.
Splatter, 88-89.
Strong Will advantage, 18.
Struggle, 92.
Succubi, *template*, 37.
Super abilities, 77.
Supers, 81-82.
Surrealism, 86.
Survival, 101.
Symbolic settings, 92.
Teaser, 99.
Terror advantage, 20.
Things Man Was Not Meant To Know, 45-47; *description table,* 46.
Thrills vs. gore, 89.
Time travel, 84.
Transhuman Space, 119.
True Faith advantage, 18.
Twisted honor, 103.
Ugallu, *template*, 121.
Uncanny powers, 74.
Uncertainty, 86.
Unfazeable advantage, 18.
Unseelie, *template*, 55.
Vampire, 33-35, 37, 58; *template*, 34, 37; *variations*, 34.
Victim, 102; *tricks*, 102; *types*, 102.
Victorian England, 79.
Villains, 100-101, 103; *motives*, 101; *opportunity*, 103-104.
Visible scope, 71.
Vlad the Impaler, 34.
Werewolves, 36, 39-40; *becoming*, 39; *stopping*, 40; *template*, 39.
Wolf-man, *template*, 39.
World Sight advantage, 18.
Working with other players, 27.
Writer template, 16-17.
Zombie, 58-59; *template*, 32, 58; *variants*, 59.



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