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# INTRODUCTION

*The little boy looked frail, his duvet tucked up under his nose and his sandbagged eyes darting to every dark corner of the room. Outside Dutch's window, the winds howled at the blistered farmhouse, the fields outside choked on a Dustbowl storm. A wisp of an old woman entered the room and sat at the edge of his bed, her veins mapping out the road of her years. Her eyes were almost white with cataracts but she steered by them just fine.*

*"Granma?" Dutch asked. "Are monsters comin' for me now?"*

*She smiled and ran her fingers through his silken hair to comfort him. "Of course they are, dear. You know that. They always gonna come for you."*

*"You gonna kill them?" he asked.*

*She shook her head and gently laid the nickel-plated revolver in his lap. "This here Colt belonged to my pappy. It killed many of them evil bastards and a few Union boys to boot. Every bullet, done baptised in blood. But Granma's done fightin' your fights. Time you became a man, Dutch. Time you killed them yerself. Or they ain't never gonna stop comin' for you."*

*Dutch nodded and propped himself up in his bed. He took the revolver in both hands, the nose dragged down by the weight of its long barrel. The old woman nodded and made her way to the bedroom door.*

*"Night, Granma," Dutch said. "Don't let the bed bugs bite."*

*She nodded and pointed to the closet door. It swung open a hitch. "Ain't the bed bugs you got to worry about," she called from the hallway. "Do us proud, Dutch. I'll pray I see you in the mornin'!" The closet door swung open another inch and Dutch could hear the monster breathing now....*

The *Supernatural Handbook* is a sourcebook for M&M dealing with the paranormal from the context of the "extraordinary" investigating and confronting the "otherworldly." In other words, it's about super-powered and fantastic men and women investigating horror. In these pages, imagination curdles as black as blood under a moonlit night, and the unseen, the unimaginable holds court with cackling delight.

These are games to be run by candlelight. These are heroes who face the unspeakable every dusk and struggle to usher in one more morning for a blissfully ignorant humanity. Let the spandex-clad jesters have the daylight and their paparazzi. Let them stop bank robbers and defeat four-color villains with their four-color dreams. Your glory is unspoken, your enemies legion, your daily struggles fought from the shadows.

In your worlds, your heroes speak in whispers, for words can stir the sleeping leviathans from their slumber.

In your worlds, the most inhuman of monsters can carry the most human of hearts, and the most mundane of humans can carry the most monstrous of intentions.

In your worlds, H.P. Lovecraft was a prophet and the Grimm Brothers crusaders. Their tales weren't just parables...they were omens, instructions and promises.

## THE CAVEAT OF HORROR

Before diving into the guts of this sourcebook, let's clarify something. This sourcebook may draw upon the supernatural and its role in superhero games, but at its tarhearted core, it's about horror. It's about the unknown

and all those dark and delicious things that lie beyond conventional understanding. Or perhaps horror is about understanding them all too well.

It's about unnerving the players and about characters playing scared. That last part is important, because without the players' cooperation, the game can go from *Alien* to *Evil Dead 2*, from *Night of the Dead* to *Shaun of the Dead*. If that's a deliberate choice, then let it be deliberate. Let it be unanimous from the series' conception and not some cruel happenstance that derails the game.

Of all game types, horror is easiest to highjack. The wrong joke here, a player unwilling to suspend disbelief there and all the tension evaporates. That's why, when running a horror or supernatural game, you need to line all your undead ducks in a row beforehand. The *Supernatural Handbook* is here to help you with that.

## CAVEAT PART II

The *Supernatural Handbook* deals with all types of horror, not just the supernatural kind. Slasher movies are about a type of terror that sometimes have little supernatural in them. Apocalypse films that use natural disasters to trigger "The End" have nothing mystical or mythological too them either. Giant sharks, killer ants, stalkers with murderous intent, diseases that ravage the body...all are equal to the task of scaring the player as any tentacle-waving fiend.

The fact is that horror can be anything from the ghost dragging poor souls into its web to the search for a girl



kidnapped by a torturing rapist. What matters here isn't the *cause* of the horror, which is only the vehicle, but the shock and terror it generates in the vehicle's passengers... the players. It may stem from the anticipation and fear of terrible things; it may come from witnessing brutal times and acts. Regardless, though, it covers a wide range of what people consider horror, and it tries to deal with many definitions by exploring what they evoke as opposed to what causes them.

Throughout this book is material on the effects of a disaster or the fear from loved ones jeopardized, etc., but what matters is that monsters are not scary on their own. Monsters and villains are only frightening in the context of their actions and impact. The "*Supernatural*" part of the *Handbook* (or "the *Supernaturals* series" when referring to a series) is just a vehicle for that impact.

## USING & ABUSING THIS BOOK

Imagine horror is a great beast, a construct of fetid minds and maligned intentions. And like all beasts, this too must be built from the skeleton up. Tendons, organs, muscles, veins... a symphony of foul creation to haunt the dreams of good folks.

Therein lies the purpose of this book. For Gamemasters, this book helps build the spirit and foundations of a good horror series, and it offers advice on continuing said series into the twilight. For players, this book is of equal importance. It details elements of building the right characters and the roles of said characters in the game.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

From heroes to monsters, archetypes to enemies, adventures to locations, and advice to examples, this book is a Gamemaster's one-stop to run a horror game and player's inspiration to play in one.

**Chapter 1: A World of Horror** deals with the basics of a game. Be it series styles or the genres that use the supernatural, this is the place to lay a solid foundation with the eras and types of horror out there.

**Chapter 2: The Player's Guide to the Supernatural** covers all the tools and tricks that players can use to help them survive a horror series, be it traits and modifications, rules on playing monsters, or both Heroic and Monstrous Archetypes.

**Chapter 3: Master Your Fear** arms Gamemasters with everything they need to know about running and maintaining series. Emphasis is placed here on running horror games with powered heroes in mind, though the advice is certainly open enough to run almost any style of horror game.

**Chapter 4: Misadventures in Horror** provides Gamemasters with monsters and adventure ideas, haunted house construction, and a monster randomizer to harrow the characters.

**Chapter 5: A.R.C.A.D.E.** presents The American Research Center for the Arcane Defense of Earth (A.R.C.A.D.E.), a Federal organization dedicated to fighting the supernatural. This organization is self-contained and can be dropped into any series with minimal fuss.



# CHAPTER 1: A WORLD OF HORROR

*The ground ruptured and spread a delta of cracks and fissures across the city. Entire blocks vanished into the hellfire glow of the crevices while swaying tentacles the size of skyscrapers emerged from the ground to shatter buildings.*

*"Tell me you've got a plan!" Morris said, looking at his companion, a wall of a man named Dutch.*

*"Plan?," Dutch said calmly; he smacked the baseball bat turned truncheon in his meaty palm. "We beat the ever-loving Christ out of that thing until we're up to our eyeballs in calamari."*

Stemming from a long-running debate in the horror community, the arguments as to whether horror is a genre or mood is a good place to start series discussions. The argument tries to define horror's place, because some people classify it as a genre and others as a mood, which adds flavor to other genres.

## GENRE VERSUS MOOD

Old horror stories sprung from the breast of Gothic novels, and were most certainly mood or emotive. They focused on nuance and the suggestion of something untoward, allowing the reader to fill in the gaps with their imagination. Mood is the horror in science-fiction films like *Alien* and *Pitch Black*. Mood is the horror in coming of age stories like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Ginger Snaps*, or in urban fantasy comics like *Hellboy*, *The Goon* or *BPRD*. Horror as mood is a spicing to change the nuance or theme of stories.

As a literary genre, however, horror follows a set of rules and principles. It becomes category, as defined and regimented as science fiction and fantasy. Horror as genre came about with writers like Stephen King and the booming sales of horror in the 1970s. Specifically, horror was at the prime of its popularity when bookstores categorized it on their bookshelves for easier shopping because fans came looking for more books by King or "like King."

Another way to think of it is if horror was a country, then genre would be its borders and mood would be its air.

A problem with defining horror as genre is that genre seeks to define a rules set, which some say defeats the

nature of horror. The problem some people have with mood is they might actually enjoy the rote and definitions of a genre. Slasher flicks, zombie stories, vampire tales and apocalypse yarns are all subsets of horror genre with their share of fans who prefer the visceral and known elements of their beloved medium.

Then, of course, you have those who say horror is neither or both, because if horror can't be defined for it to be effective, then it can be both genre and mood (or neither) as the story demands.

How does this all apply to the *Supernatural Handbook* and superheroes? Should the series be mood or genre? The answer is, it can be both. It just depends on what the Game-master wants to accomplish. If the series is ongoing and the universe pre-established, then horror as mood is a perfect way to introduce the occasional supernatural element into an otherwise normal supers game. If the series is dealing with specific horror-based events or enemies over the course of its life, then it can be genre. Otherwise, a trick to using both in an ongoing horror series is to say:

**Genre is the physical manifestation of horror (monster and location), while mood is the psychological ramifications of horror (its impact on the heroes and NPCs).**

## SERIES STYLES

When talking about a *Supernaturals* series, some of the threats and options have nothing to do with magic, but may be stories of science run-amok or ancient technology so beyond our kin it might as well be magic. In this sourcebook, "supernatural" is meant to mean anything that 1) provides an element of fear or terror to the series, and 2) is well outside the status quo of our everyday lives. The latter is sometimes hard to establish in a world where heroes routinely break the laws of physics, but so long as the setting establishes a baseline of normalcy, then the series or story arcs should be about matters deviating from that baseline.

## A TOUCH OF HORROR

This is best when the game is already ongoing or the group is only interested in occasional brushes with the supernatural. This style of series uses heroes of any power

level dealing with the normality of any supers game. Once in a while, however, the odd villain, monster, artifact or arc comes into play that exposes the heroes to horror. It is the best way to keep the team off-balanced and it throws a nice change of pace into a session.