

Introduction

On the face of it, horror roleplaying is not that different to roleplaying in any other genre or era. The characters face similar challenges – enemies to defeat or outwit, mysteries to unravel, dangers to overcome. The difference is one of attitude, mood and meaning. The familiar surfaces of the world are not a mere backdrop for the characters' heroic escapades; there are gibbering things in the shadows. Certainty falls away – nothing can be trusted or relied upon. In most games, the Players know that the challenges they face will be balanced with their abilities, that their characters are who they believe themselves to be, and that the Games Master is ultimately on their side.

In a horror game, none of that is true. By playing, you are *asking* the Games Master to put your character – and you – through the wringer. Your character might face creatures utterly invulnerable to his attacks, have friends and allies torn away by alien claws or incomprehensible magic or

terrible madness, and may even lose his own identity. Every action you make could be the misstep that sends you plummeting through the fragile walls of reality into the endless nightmare of horror.

That is not to say that the Games Master is out to get the characters no matter what, or that everything is utterly, utterly hopeless. There is always a path through the labyrinth. It is always worth lighting a candle against the darkness. Just remember that the fear-filled thrill of being lost, alone, desperate and scared is the point of the game, not a sign of defeat.

Most of this book assumes that the game is taking place in the modern day, in the familiar present. This is often the most effective setting for horror. Both Players and Games Master are (one presumes) wholly familiar with the world around them, keeping the need for dull exposition or scene-setting to a minimum. More importantly, horror is often best when it perverts the familiar. We know what is possible or impossible in the modern world, so when something casually and hideously violates the 'rules' of our world, it is horrific. Horror that strikes close to home is very effective. The thing that crawls out of a witch's cauldron in the tenth century is not half as scary as the thing that is crawling out of your television right now.

That said, the paradigm of horror can be used with any setting. While the focus of this book is on the modern day, with the occasional diversion to the roots of the modern horror genre in the Victorian era and the 1920s, this book can also be used to add horror to games set in any time or place. Hateful shadows and terrible things can happen anywhere – and while these settings may lack the patina of familiarity that gives modern day horror its special bite, they have their own unique charms, whether it is the fear of having to face the monsters armed not with guns, but with bronze swords and flint arrows, or the terror of being all alone in the interstellar night...



'We've got to clean out this car.' Irene reached back and dragged a camera out from beneath a pile of polystyrene cups and fast food wrappers. The car was rank with the smell of cigarettes and stale burgers. She trained the camera on the house across the street.

'What is it?' asked Rookman.

'A light just came on inside. Second floor.' She peered through the camera's eyepiece. 'There's someone in there.'

'Let me see.' He grabbed the camera off her. 'It's him. I'm going in. Stay here, start the engine, and be ready to move.'

'What happened to staking the place out until-'

'Fuck that.' He popped open the glove compartment and took out a gun. 'I want him dead.'

* * *

The back door was unlocked. Rookman pushed it open with the nose of his pistol. He crept forwards, wincing as his shoes squeaked once on the tiled floor. The kitchen inside was practically sterile, every surface wiped clean – except one.

On a chopping board next to the sink was a single human finger, a woman's finger, elegant with a long painted nail. The wedding ring was covered in blood, but he still recognised it. He'd given it to her five years ago, seen it every day for three years, seen it in his dreams every night for the other two.

Now it was here, waiting for him.

Fighting back the impulse to throw up into the sink, he reached out, took the ring (crusted with dried blood), kissed it and slipped it into a pocket. He held the severed finger helplessly for a moment, unsure of what to do with it, then it thrust it into the same pocket. Then he took the safety off the gun, and walked further into the dark house.

* * *

'...and leave a message. Beep.'

'It's Irene. It's now, shit, 3.27 on Sunday morning. We're outside Lichfield's house. Rookman's gone in. We, we found an old letter belonging to his wife, she'd been involved in some sort of business deal with Lichfield. We got Lichfield's address off it. It's –'

'Oh hell, that was a gunshot. Look, I'll ring you back.'

* * *

'Mr. Rookman.' Lichfield smiled widely, and gestured to a couch. 'I was expecting you. Can I get you something?'

Rookman pointed the gun and fired directly into Lichfield's grinning face. For a moment it felt like the finger in his pocket was the one pulling the trigger.

One, two, three, and the grin just got wider. Lichfield's cheeks split down invisible seams, revealing row after row of unnaturally sharp teeth. The bullets just left tiny pucker-marks in his face.

'Roourkmaannnn'. The voice was unrecognisable. First Lichfield's head, then his whole body unfolded along lines of teeth, like a fractal made of dripping meat, a chain of star-fish covered in sharks' teeth.

The finger convulsed again, sending four, five, six bullets into the centre of Lichfield's writhing chest. One appendage licked out lazily, and the gun became a mess of twisted gunmetal mixed with a mess of hot red wetness and shattered white chips.

That's my hand thought Rookman. His other hand closed around the twitching finger in his pocket.

Then another dozen appendages flickered out from Lichfield.

* * *

Irene held the flashlight in her teeth as she tried to pick the lock on the front door. She almost had it when the door opened from the other side.

'You!'

'It's OK,' said Rookman, smiling widely. 'I got him.'

Something twisted in her stomach.

FBI Statistics

HP: 30,000
Force: 25 (+7)
Response: 14 (+2)
Resources: 25 (+7)
Information: 33 (+12)
Occult: 15 (+2)
Influence: 24 (+7)

Skills: Computer Use +17, Craft +17, Decipher Script +17, Demolitions +17, Disguise +17, Forgery +17, Gather Information +18, Intimidate +12, Investigate +19, Knowledge (art) +17, Knowledge (behavioural sciences) +19, Knowledge (civics) +19, Knowledge (current events) +19, Knowledge (earth & life sciences) +19, Knowledge (history) +19, Knowledge (occult lore) +19, Knowledge (physical sciences) +19, Knowledge (pop. culture) +19, Knowledge (streetwise) +19, Knowledge (tactics) +17, Knowledge (technology) +19, Knowledge (theology & philosophy) +19, Repair +17, Research +19, Search +12, Treat Injury +15.

Feats: Arsenal, Emergency Response, Forensics Laboratory, Library (all), Private Hospital, Psychological Treatment, Research Lab, Secure Base (x 10).

Group 23

Group 23's brief is to investigate inexplicable and bizarre events worldwide – and report back to the group's mysterious patrons. A consortium of multinational corporations and financiers control the Group and use it to deal with any unusual phenomena or strange situations encountered by any of their numerous subsidiaries and business. The Group is often ordered to contain and then cover up a problem – Group members might find themselves in Germany one day, dealing with zombies animated by toxic waste, and fighting nature

elementals in the Yucatan the next, so the corporations can start exploiting a mine in the jungle.

The Group's staff and equipment are a mix of the best and the broken. Some of the research scientists and ex-military field operatives are brilliant and skilled professionals, but others are eccentrics too useful to just fire, but too strange to function in a normal corporation. The Group is given cutting-edge gear to field test, but the majority of its equipment is made up of cast-offs from the parent corporations. Keeping the Group's budget under control is a major problems; sometimes the Group can pass back biological samples to a pharmaceutical or genetic engineering corporation and pay for itself for a while, but often Group missions end with a very large explosion and an even larger bill.

Group 23's headquarters is an anonymous building in an industrial estate on the outskirts of Houston, Texas, but its missions can take place anywhere. Its current head is Albert Duchon, who has used the Group as his own private research lab for years. Now, Duchon is retiring back to France, and the two front-runners for his job are J. Mortimer Clyde III, the entirely useless second son of one of the Group's patrons, and Alison Smith, who has vowed to drag the Group back to efficiency and constant profitability.

The Group currently has a half-dozen five-man field teams and a support staff of sixty.

Group 23 Statistics

HP: 135
Force: 5 (–3)
Response: 14 (+2)
Resources: 5 (–3)
Information: 14 (+2)
Occult: 5 (–3)
Influence: 10 (+0)

Group 23 Troubleshooter

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Defence Bonus	Reputation Bonus
1st	+0	+1	+0	+1	Oh S**t	+0	+0
2nd	+1	+2	+0	+2	Spin Control	+1	+0
3rd	+1	+2	+1	+2	Bonus feat	+1	+0
4th	+2	+2	+1	+2	Really Dirty Secrets	+1	+0
5th	+2	+3	+1	+3	Dealing With Demons	+2	+1

Skills: Computer Use +7, Investigate +7, Knowledge (civics) +7, Knowledge (current events) +7, Knowledge (physical sciences) +8, Knowledge (technology) +12, Repair +12, Research +12, Treat Injury +4.

Feats: Arsenal, Covert, Forensics Laboratory, Library (civics, current events, technology), Psychological Treatment, Research Lab.

Group 23 Troubleshooter

The best agents of Group 23 advance in this prestige class. They are experienced not only in investigating the weird events that the group is faced with, but also in dealing with the group's corporate patrons. Knowing how to work the system is as important as knowing one end of a stake from the other.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Group 23 Troubleshooter, a character must fulfil the following criteria.

- ~ **Skills:** Gather Information 6 ranks, Investigate 6 ranks.
- ~ **Feats:** Alertness, Iron Will.
- ~ **Ties:** One or more ties to Group 23.

Class Information

The following information applies to the Group 23 Troubleshooter prestige class.

Hit Die: d8

Class Skills

The Group 23 Troubleshooter's class skills are as follows:

Bluff (Cha), Computer Use (Int), Craft (chemical, electronic, mechanical, pharmaceutical)(Int), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Investigate (Int), Listen (Wis), Knowledge (any) (Int), Navigate (Int), Pilot (Dex), Profession (Wis), Read/Write Language (none), Research (Int), Search (Int), Spot (Wis), Speak Language (None).

Skill Points at Each Level

4 + Int modifier

Class Features

Oh St (Ex):** The troubleshooter learns to anticipate trouble before it arises. If ever attacked while flatfooted, he may make a Reflex save at a DC equal to the attack roll to dodge the attack completely. He may only use this ability once per combat.

Spin Control (Ex): The troubleshooter becomes more and more experienced at covering things up. He has a +4 insight bonus to Bluff and Forgery checks, but only when deflecting suspicion and unwanted attention. For example, he could use this ability to block a police investigation, but not to Bluff his way into an ongoing police investigation.

Bonus Feat: Ongoing training within the Group gives the agent a bonus feat from the Investigator's class feats.

Really Dirty Secrets (Ex): The troubleshooter's job takes him into the underbelly of industrial espionage and black science. An unscrupulous agent could use what he has learned to damage the Group's patron corporations. The character may use a secret to get a +4 bonus to a single Bluff, Diplomacy or Intimidate roll against another character with a tie to one of the patron corporations, or else to gain a +5 bonus to one Wealth roll. However, every time the character uses a secret, the Group's Response score drops by one for any action involving that character – if the character dies in the field, what he knows dies with him...

Dealing with Demons (Ex): A lifetime of cutting deals and facing down horrors leaves the character tough and jaded. He has a +2 resistance bonus to all Will and Horror saves.

Cult of Unity

The Cult of Unity is a fringe cult that believes fervently in reincarnation. According to their doctrine, human souls should be reborn again and again in human bodies. However, with the vast increase in population in recent centuries, souls have become fragmented. A single soul is now divided among hundreds or thousands of bodies. The only solution? Mass murder.

Some members of the cult are serial killers. They target those people who they believe share a fragment of their soul. These killers are protected and sheltered by the cult, making them very difficult to catch. Many of these cultists study magic, both to divine who holds a soul fragment and to aid in their ritual killings. Others are lunatics, who murder anyone who reminds them of themselves or their idealised self-image.

Other, more sinister cultists believe that just cutting bloody chunks out of the mass of humanity is not enough – there must be a total solution. They sit and plot the utter destruction of whole cities or communities. They are architects of mass destruction and total warfare.

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +1

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2

Skills: Listen +7, Spot +7, Swim +9

Feats: Weapon Finesse

Horror: Panic 10

Sharks can scent blood in the water over great distances and have mouths overspilling with razor-sharp teeth.

Tiger

Large animal

Hit Dice: 6d8+18 (45 hp)

Massive Damage: 17

Initiative: +2 (Dex)

Speed: 40 ft.

Defence: 14 (+2 Dex, -1 size, +3 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 12

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +4/+14

Attack: Claw +9 melee (1d8+6)

Full Attack: Two claws +9 melee (1d8+6), bite +4 melee (2d6+3)

Space/Reach: 10 ft. x 10 ft /5 ft.

Special Qualities: Pounce, improved grab, rake

Saves: Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +3

Abilities: Str 23, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6

Skills: Balance +6, Hide +5, Listen +3, Move Silently +9, Spot +3, Swim +11

Horror: Panic 10

These predatory beasts are rarely man-eaters – rarely.

Wolf

Medium Animal

Hit Dice: 2d8+4 (13 hp)

Massive Damage: 15

Initiative: +2 (Dex)

Speed: 50 ft.

Defence: 14 (+2 Dex, +2 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 12

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +1/+2

Attack: Bite +3 melee (1d6+1)

Full Attack: Bite +3 melee (1d6+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. x 5 ft /5 ft

Special Qualities: Scent, Trip

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +1

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6

Skills: Hide +3, Listen +6, Move Silently +4, Spot +4, Survival +1 (+5 when tracking by scent)

Feats: None

Horror: Panic 5

The children of the night, what music they make...

Trip (Ex): If the wolf hits with a bite attack, it may attempt to trip an opponent as a free action without having to make a touch attack or drawing an attack of opportunity. If the trip attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the wolf.

Constructs

Nightmare Engine

Large Construct

Hit Dice: 5d10+20 (50 hp)

Massive Damage: -

Initiative: -3 (Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

Defence: 11 (-1 size, -3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 6, flat-footed 11

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +2/+13

Attack: Chainsaw +8 melee (3d6+7)

Full Attack: Chainsaw +8 melee (3d6+7), three Slams +3 melee (1d8+4 each)

Space/Reach: 10 ft. x 10 ft /10 ft.

Special Qualities: Damage Reduction 10, Process Horror, Cannibalise, Control Machinery

Saves: Fort +1, Ref -2, Will +1

Abilities: Str 24, Dex 4, Con -, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11

Skills: Hide +10*, Repair +20*

Feats: None

Evidence:

~ **Investigate (DC 10):** All the victims were killed by a chainsaw. No such weapon was found at the scene, nor did security cameras detect anything.

~ **Repair (DC 20):** There do seem to be numerous anomalies – automatic doors that opened without a key, glitches in the security system...and for that matter, so does your computer.

Research:

~ **Research (DC 30):** The suggestion of a self-organising system was present in some of the earliest computer programs written by Ada Lovelace.

~ **Research (DC 20):** A junkyard night watchman died in suspicious circumstances two months ago.

Horror: Fear 20

Even describing its outline is difficult. The Nightmare Engine is a ramshackle horror built of junk and rusty metal. It hides amid the discarded carcasses of its kin and it is hard to tell if a given engine block or ancient lawnmower is just scrap or is actually a quiescent limb of the Engine. Its shape changes, as it sloughs off old parts and welds on new ones. It favours sharp things, and cutting things, and things that burn.

The Nightmare Engine is fuelled by fear. It drinks in the terrified psychic emanations of its prey, picking up fear on television aerials twisted into reverse dream-catchers and sucking it down, to be downstepped in blood-soaked transformers into physical form and mixed with engine oil and blood. Its hunger is instinctive – while the creature can sense fear, it understands nothing of the human mind. Its attempts to provoke fear tend to be clumsy at first, but

the Nightmare Engine quickly and efficiently learns how to adjust its murders to be as terrifying as possible.

Where does the Nightmare Engine come from? No-one knows. The Engine can control other machines and perhaps it seeds them with a spark of its own consciousness. A car animated to drive over its owner might slowly become more and more aware until it begins to grow limbs, and teeth, and evil...

Combat: A Nightmare Engine begins by trapping its prey. In modern cities, a building can easily be isolated – automatic doors can be compelled to lock, dump trucks driven to block exits, phones disabled – and then it begins to stalk. Grinding, lumbering footstep after footstep, its blades whirring, the Nightmare Engine goes about processing its victims. Fear is changed to fuel and living flesh is turned into dead meat.

Process Horror (Su): If anyone fails a Fear check within 30 feet of the Nightmare Engine, the Engine instantly recovers a number of hit points equal to the margin of failure.

Cannibalise (Ex): The Nightmare Engine can absorb other machines into its own body. It can either add new capabilities (such as ranged attacks from firearms, or faster movement), or repair itself. It has a +20 insight bonus to Repair checks. Furthermore, as the Engine looks like a walking heap of scrap metal, it gains a +10 circumstance bonus to Hide checks when concealed amid machinery.

Control Machines (Su): The Nightmare Engine can psychically control other machines within 120 feet. It can control one machine as a free action, two machines as a standard action, or four machines as a full-round action. It suffers a –2 penalty to all attack rolls and skill checks for every machine it controls and the machines use the Engine's Base Attack Bonus for any attacks.

Game Ideas: Nightmare Engines are horrific because of the modern world – machines and appliances are everywhere, so the characters should never feel safe or secure.

Animated Corpse

Medium Construct

Hit Dice: 6d10+10 (46 hp)

Massive Damage: -

Initiative: +0 (Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

Defence: 14 (+4 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 14

Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +3/+8

Attack: Punch +8 melee (1d6+5)

Full Attack: Punch +8 melee (1d6+5)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. x 5 ft / 5 ft.

Special Qualities: Damage Resistance 5, Fame

Weaknesses: Vulnerability: Exceedingly Bright Lights (10)

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +0

Abilities: Str 20, Dex 11, Con -, Int 7, Wis 5, Cha 15

Skills: None

Feats: Renown

Evidence:

~ **Investigate (DC 10):** There are traces of what appears to be sunscreen at the crime scene.

~ **Knowledge (physical sciences) (DC 25):** It is not sunscreen – it is some sort of chemical compound that absorbs ultra-violet radiation, certainly, but it is quite poisonous.

Research:

~ **Gather Information (DC 15):** Rumours of drug abuse and medical problems have dogged this celebrity for years. It is also said that the celebrity's demands are getting more and more eccentric.

~ **Research (DC 30):** The celebrity did attend a 'private clinic' for a 'minor operation' several years ago.

Horror: Fear 10

Medicine has come a long way since a mad scientist jolted a corpse back to life with bubbling vital fluids and bolts of lightning. There are no more unsightly bolts in the neck, no more scars, no more sutures of thick, ugly

