

DAVE ALLSOP
ADRIAN BOTT

THE BOOK OF UNREMITTING HORROR

GUMSHOE VERSION



Sample file

The Book of Unremitting Horror

Foreword

Players in horror campaigns are a little too accustomed to the nightmares their characters face; even the most eldritch of tentacular horrors is less intimidating when you know exactly what it is, because your PC has faced it before on some other evening. New times demand new nightmares. Our horrors are nightmarishly intimate, often created from human vice, or let loose by human greed. They show us the ugliness that underlies reality. They are the crawling things under the rock of the everyday, sane world.

This book follows on from the first two releases for the new GUMSHOE system, Fear Itself and The Esoterrorists. It requires one or both of these books. Most of the material can be used with either book. The book is based on creatures and material first published in The Book of Unremitting Horror, created by Dave Allsop and Adrian Bott, and Adrian has rewritten and updated the material for GUMSHOE. It includes a completely new adventure for Fear Itself and a whole chapter for the Esoterrorists background.

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12 July, 2003

Dear Mr Cosgrove,

I have some information I think might interest you. I hope you think that's a good opening line, because I've thought about it a lot. How to write a letter asking someone I've never met to read something they won't believe. That last bit's not so good, is it? I used to read a lot of fiction, horror and stuff like that, and in those books the protagonist often says "I can't remember when I first realized..." but this one won't. Because it's not fiction. I can remember. I often wish I couldn't, but I can. And now I need to tell someone else who can remember, or at least make sure that the information isn't lost. I suppose I'd better begin at the beginning, because it's a strange story. I'm almost certain you won't believe it - I wouldn't have, if I hadn't seen it - but if I tell you the way it started you might believe it enough to keep reading.

I'm an artist, you see. I really can't remember learning to draw, to see things with my eyes and to put them on paper so others could see them too. I never wondered what I would do for a living, just honed my skills in college, and walked straight into a job as a technical illustrator for a publisher producing academic textbooks. I spent my days in a small office drawing whatever was put in front of me: bones, fossils. Dissections, even, for medical texts. I suppose the students never think about where the drawings come from, and other people would be horrified if they thought about it, the nice, clean black and white as red and blue and purple, and the smell - but I liked it. I was comfortable in my office, or other people's labs, observing, translating color, texture, light and shadow into shades of black on white. Most people don't often see what's really there, you know, or rather they see it, but their brains edit the information, filling in any gaps with what experience has shown them in the past. I think that if they see something truly strange, completely beyond their experience, their brains edit that, too, substituting something that makes more sense in the world they know. I'm an artist, a trained illustrator. My brain doesn't do that. I see what's really there.

It started as a lovely day. I'd been working flat out all week to make a deadline, drawing fish, all staring eyes and spines and flabby grey flesh. I had to go in on Saturday to ink the last drawing. By the time I'd finished all I could smell was fish and formalin, so I decided to walk home the long way, through the park to get some fresh air, or I'd have to skip dinner. The sun was sinking into the lake and families were packing up their picnics to go home when I reached the park, parents closing the coolers and kids dragging their baseball bats back to the cars. It was wonderful. The grass was green, the poplars were every shade of yellow, gold and bronze in the low sun, and the sharp smell of their leaves flushed the formalin out of my sinuses. I slowed my pace as I came to the edge of the park, admiring the colors. A young couple was walking along the edge of the trees, holding hands. He said something, she turned and kissed him, laughing. As I watched, two dogs bounded up, looked like those black ones, labs? that seem to laugh at people. The dogs just stood, tails wagging, looking expectant, and after a moment the guy shrugged, picked up a stick and threw it. It flew through the air behind me and the dogs barked happily and took off after it. They ran past me, grinning mouths full of teeth. Lots of teeth, gleaming white against floppy pink tongues. The couple turned and walked off, her head on his shoulder. The dogs ran past the stick, around it and back towards the couple disappearing into the trees. One of them ran a little closer this time, its head swivelling up to look at me as it went past. I, too, walked away. My legs kept moving as my brain wrestled with what my eyes had seen, teeth, too many teeth? I carried on walking, listening to the high distant screams of the gulls over the lake, watching memory rather than the cracks in the sidewalk. Their laughing mouths were too big, the sharply serrated teeth too big, and the claws on their hind feet had left gashes in the green turf. That couldn't be right, I didn't see them, I must have imagined it. Do you understand what I'm telling you? Do you? I didn't believe my eyes.

I. Did. Not. Believe. My. Eyes. I kept walking, all the way home.

On the news that evening they reported a horrific murder. A young woman had been ripped to pieces by a frenzied attacker in the lakeside trees. There were shots of blue flashing lights and blood, red against gold leaves, but it was alright, they'd caught the murderer. Her boyfriend hadn't left the scene, was found semicomatose, drugged out of his mind. They showed him being bundled away and the reporters talked wisely about the effects of illegal substances. Except he - they'd - been fine when I saw them, about 15 minutes before she died, red and gold in the setting sun.

The police called for witnesses. I told them about the dogs, but they didn't believe me. They knew I'd been drinking, they could smell it on my breath.

I took Wednesday off, when the park opened again, walked there all day and saw nothing but trees and leaves and grass, and silent gulls. It was colder when I went the next Saturday. I sat on a bench, feeding the gulls and watching the shadows under the trees. I caught a glimpse of movement, something black, but it was only a jogger running the paths. Did something move under the trees? I couldn't be certain. I didn't trust my eyes, you see.

That night I went into town and tried to get drunk, but I drank too much and was sick, and spent the night walking instead. And while I was walking, trying not to think, I saw something else, and this time I believed my eyes, and that is how it started.

Did you see Blade? I often see him in my dreams, all black and silver, striding through the night, killing them. But I've never seen it. I've never seen one die. Do you believe me? Are you interested? I hope so. I'm tired. I'm afraid. And I'm so very tired of being afraid, of wondering when I'll make the mistake that kills me. They're cunning, they're very good at what they do, and I might have missed one, not seen it. Read the files I've sent. There are other copies, I've sent them to other people I thought, I hoped might be interested, but YOU might be the only person who sees reality instead of something your brain thinks makes more sense. There must be someone else who will believe their eyes.

Yours most sincerely

THOMAS PERPER.

PS. It's interested me for years, the difference between the pen and ink on paper and the bone on the table, the words on the pages and the ideas the words convey. Reality and what we perceive it to be. There's a finely honed distinction between perception and madness; it's a razor's edge I've been walking for years, and I'm bleeding.

For a while I wondered if I was going mad, so I watched the mad and the drunks. They cringe and weep at things drawn from their past that exist only in their minds: Harvey left no piles of dung, no footprints in the grass. The things I see leave bloody corpses ripped limb from limb, the stench of dead meat seeping out beneath a locked door, fragments of lives like pieces of a jigsaw to be assembled from reports in the press. They are real, far more real now than the people they've destroyed. Please believe me.

introduction

How To Use This Book

The GUMSHOE edition of the *Book of Unremitting Horror* presents the creatures from the initial OGL edition, specially revised and detailed for use with *Fear Itself* and *The Esoterrorists*, along with completely new material in the form of five new entities Bleeder, Skitch, Empty One, Motherlode and Soliloquy.

We've also provided ten summarized Sinister Plots for the GM's use in an Esoterrorists game, along with information on how the creatures of Unremitting Horror are used in the Esoterrorist campaign for global reality breakdown. This section includes important distinctions between the World of Unremitting Horror and the Esoterrorists campaign setting.

Finally, we close with an expanded version of the scenario *The Final Case* and the new scenario *Crook's End*, both designed for use with *Fear Itself*.

New Abilities

The Book of Unremitting Horror: GUMSHOE Edition introduces two new abilities, one for PCs and one for their ghastly antagonists.

Aberrance (General, Creatures of Unremitting Horror only)

Some creatures in this book (typically the ones that hail from the Outer Black) have **Aberrance** pools. A creature's **Aberrance** ability represents the degree of intrinsic power it has to shred the Membrane protecting our world and impose subjectivity upon objectivity. **Aberrance** is similar to the human faculty of 'willpower', but is more alien and often malevolent.

Aberrance is a catch-all ability that each of the horrors uses in its own way. For example, a creature might draw upon **Aberrance** to create a supernatural effect, to alter a person's perceptions, or to travel between realities, depending upon what that creature's special abilities are.

The higher an entity's **Aberrance** rating, the more potential it has to disrupt conventional reality. A being such as the Mystery Man is a vortex of pure **Aberrance**.

It follows that the higher a creature's **Aberrance** rating is, the keener the Esoterrorists are to bring it into the world. Psychics can sense strong sources of **Aberrance**, which (in the case of Unremitting Horrors) appear as black clots of nightmare howling with a thousand voices.

Aberrance may be refreshed by the usual rules regarding creature pools (see below). Some creatures have other ways to refresh **Aberrance** during an encounter, which involve defiling or deforming the mundane world in some way. These methods are explained in the rules text for the creature.

A creature with an **Aberrance** rating is usually actively inimical to humanity; the Outsiders are the only known exception. Creatures with no **Aberrance** rating, such as Blood Corpses, simply follow their own limited agenda and only contribute to the Esoterrorists' grand campaign by increasing the level of chaos, unpredictability and fear in the world.

The Ordo Veritatis has not yet established exactly how **Aberrance** works, but its observations have led it to conclude that the supernatural horrors summoned by the Esoterrorists do have a limit to their power. This information has tactical value: it means that they can be exhausted. Bitter experience has shown that when one of the horrors retreats, it is not usually because it has suffered harm. These entities only withdraw so that they can return again, replenished.

Pathology (Investigative, Academic)

You are trained in carrying out medical examinations of living human subjects and forming diagnoses based on your findings. You can

- diagnose probable causes of sickness or injury
- identify the extent and cause of an unconscious person's trauma
- detect when a person is suffering from a physically debilitating condition such as drug addiction, pregnancy or malnutrition
- establish a person's general level of health

- identify
medical
abnormalities

If you have eight or more points in **Medic** you get **Pathology** 1 for free.

New GUMSHOE Rules

Ability Pool Refreshing (Creatures)

In accordance with GUMSHOE's narrative-based style, creatures refresh ability pool points according to how often they appear. A creature that is not encountered for 24 hours or more may replenish all of its ability pools, with the exception of **Health**, which is recovered at the rate of 1d6 points per day.

If the PCs encounter a creature later on in the same day, such as by tracking it to its lair, it can refresh all of its ability pools to a maximum of *half* their total Rating, again with the exception of **Health**, which it cannot refresh at all.

Creatures that have special rules for recovering **Health**, such as regenerating creatures, follow their own rules rather than those given above.

Alcohol, Drugs and Stability Loss

It is possible to achieve some measure of insulation against horrible events by getting drunk on alcohol or high on drugs. This isn't a sensible choice in the regular course of an investigation, but characters pushed to the very limit of endurance will frequently turn to 'Dutch courage' to help get them through.

Becoming moderately drunk (or high) increases the target Difficulty of all tests by +1, but grants the character four points of temporary **Stability**. These can be expended on **Stability** tests as usual, thus possibly allowing characters to make successful **Stability** tests when confronted with horror. However, any unused points are lost again when the character sobers up. Temporary **Stability** pool points gained through alcohol or drugs do *not* cancel the effects of being shaken or having a mental illness.

Becoming roaring drunk (or sky-high) increases the target Difficulty of all tests by +2 and grants a character six points of temporary **Stability**, which function as above.

Note that only *depressant* narcotics have this effect. Stimulants and hallucinogens such as LSD are more likely to increase the Difficulty of **Stability** tests.

Alertness Modifier

Some creatures have keener senses than others. They may have heightened senses of smell, or psychic abilities that tell them who is nearby. Alternatively, they may be dense, brutish or even lacking in primary senses.

This variation is represented by the creature's Alertness Modifier. It is added to (or subtracted from) the target difficulty of **Infiltration** tests made when the creature's sensory awareness would be a factor, such as when the players are trying to sneak up on a creature, or are moving around near its lair.

Note that creatures do not have the **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance** abilities. Players make rolls to evade creatures; creatures do not make rolls to detect players.

Bowel Rake

Some creatures can use their natural weaponry (or objects such as butchers' hooks) to rip their victims open. A creature with this ability can spend two points of **Scuffling** before an attack is made to deal two additional points of **Health** damage in the event of a successful hit.

Chill Grasp

Creatures with this ability can induce exhaustion with a touch, draining the body heat and vital energy from the target. The creature can spend three points of **Scuffling** to make a Chill Grasp attack as its attack for the round. (These points are *not* added to the attack roll.) If it hits, it drains an additional 1d6 points from the victim's

introduction

Athletics pool, as well as dealing **Health** damage as usual. If the victim's **Athletics** pool is empty, any further points are taken from his **Scuffling** pool; if this too is empty, then the additional points are taken from his **Health**.

Drowning

Characters plunged into water (or other unbreathable environments such as smoke or poisonous gas) are at risk of drowning.

If a character has advance warning before being immersed, he can hold his breath. A character holding his breath underwater may make an **Athletics** test each round to avoid inhaling water, in addition to anything else he may be doing (such as trying frantically to escape from a creature's grasp). The Difficulty of this test begins at 3 and increases by 1 with every passing round. As soon as the character fails the test, he has inhaled water and begins to drown.

Drowning characters automatically lose 1d6+1 points of **Health** per round, but these lost points can be restored if the victim is rescued and resuscitated before he or she dies.

Grappling

A creature within scuffling range may use its action to make an **Scuffling** contest (opposed by the victim's **Athletics**, **Fleeing** or **Scuffling**, target's choice) and grasp hold of its target. If the creature wins the contest, it deals no damage but has caught the victim and is holding him fast, and continues to do so for as long as its grip lasts. The effects of this grip vary depending on what is doing it. Typically, the effects of a grip (such as Strap Throat's strangulation) do not begin until the creature's next action, so the victim has a chance to break free.

If a character begins his action grappling a target, he may attack that target with **Scuffling**; the target's hit threshold is lowered by 1 in that event. However, the grappler's hit threshold is also lowered by 1 if the person he is grappling attempts to attack him.

The grappled victim may use his action to attempt to free himself from the assailant's grasp by beating the assailant in an **Athletics**, **Fleeing** or **Scuffling** contest (victim's choice).

Health Loss and Death for NPCs

Unlike PCs, monsters and other NPCs cannot continue to function when below zero Health. If their Health is reduced to zero or below, they simply die. Exceptions to this rule are given in the creature's game text.

The GM is, however, at liberty to use the rules for PC injury and death for certain important human NPCs, if this would add to the drama of a given scene.

Investigative Ability Ratings As Difficulty Modifiers

The GM will occasionally encounter situations in which a character needs to use a General Ability to accomplish a difficult task, in such a way that one of her Investigative Abilities is obviously relevant to it. The question to ask is 'Would this character's rating in the Investigative Ability give her an advantage in tackling this challenge that another person would not have?'

In these cases, the *rating* (not the current pool) of the Investigative Ability should be deducted from the target Difficulty of the test in question.

For example, a character who is trying desperately to crack the encrypted security code on a locked bulkhead door (so as to escape before the room floods) might roll **Infiltration** against a target Difficulty of 7 minus her **Cryptography** rating, because her knowledge of **Cryptography** is directly relevant to the dramatic attempt to crack the code. Similarly, a character who is racing against time to clear a jammed rifle before the blood corpses grab her might roll **Mechanics** against a target Difficulty of 6 minus her **Ballistics** rating.