

The Devil's in the Details: Horror Worldbuilding Worksheet

A practical companion to building worlds that haunt

SECTION 1: THE REALITY ANCHOR

Grounding Fantasy in Believable Details

The 80/20 Foundation Check

For every supernatural element in your story, list 4 mundane details that support it:

Supernatural Element #1: _____

Supporting mundane details:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Supernatural Element #2: _____

Supporting mundane details:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Sensory Authenticity Builder

Making the impossible feel real through wrong details

Normal sensory experiences that feel slightly off:

Sight: *What looks almost right but isn't?* _____

Sound: What sounds familiar but wrong? _____

Smell: What smells recognizable but off? _____

Touch: What feels expected but disturbing? _____

Taste: What tastes normal but tainted? _____

Social and Economic Realism Check

Why do your characters stay in dangerous situations?

Economic constraints: _____

Family obligations: _____

Social expectations: _____

Practical limitations: _____

How would real institutions respond to supernatural events in your story?

Police response: _____ Medical

response: _____ Government response:

SECTION 2: CORRUPTION OF THE FAMILIAR

Making Home Horrifying

The Uncanny Valley of Settings

Your primary setting: _____

What makes this setting typically safe/comfortable for readers?

How will you subvert these comfort associations?

Domestic Horror Techniques

The corrupted home/sanctuary:

Original safe space: _____ ***How it becomes a prison:*** _____

Everyday objects turned sinister:

Object #1: _____ ***How it becomes threatening:*** _____

Object #2: _____ ***How it becomes threatening:*** _____

Object #3: _____ ***How it becomes threatening:*** _____

Routine disruption: What patterns of comfort will you break?

Community Corruption

Small town/community dynamics:

What makes the community seem close-knit/helpful initially?

How does this closeness become threatening?

Institutional corruption:

Institution that appears helpful: _____ *How it actually harms/controls:* _____

What facade does it maintain: _____

Geographic and Environmental Corruption

Natural settings that don't follow natural laws:

Urban decay/liminal spaces you'll use:

Weather/atmosphere effects:

SECTION 3: THE RULES OF YOUR DARK UNIVERSE

Establishing Supernatural Logic

Why Your Supernatural Rules Matter

How will consistent rules create believability in your story?

Establishing Your Horror's Boundaries

Power limitations - What your supernatural force CAN'T do:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Vulnerability rules - How it can be fought/avoided/defeated:

Transmission/spread patterns - How supernatural influence moves:

Detection methods - How characters recognize supernatural activity:

Internal Consistency Techniques

The iceberg principle - Supernatural rules you know but won't fully reveal:

Rule #1: _____ *How it's foreshadowed:* _____ *How it creates tension:*

Rule #2: _____ *How it's foreshadowed:* _____ *How it creates tension:*

Rules as Story Engine

How supernatural limitations create plot problems:

Potential loopholes characters might discover:

How rule violations could create climax/revelation:

Balancing Mystery and Explanation

Your approach to supernatural explanation (check one): ☐ Lovecraft approach: Rules exist but are incomprehensible to humans ☐ Jackson approach: Rules are felt rather than explained ☐ King approach: Rules partially explained through character discovery ☐ Custom approach:

What will you NOT explain to preserve mystery?

SECTION 4: PRACTICAL WORLDBUILDING TECHNIQUES

Tools for Horror Writers

The Worldbuilding Notebook

Details to track consistently: ☐ Supernatural rules and limitations ☐ Setting descriptions and layout ☐ Character backgrounds and knowledge levels ☐ Historical/cultural background elements ☐ Visual references for locations

Testing Your World's Logic

Stress test questions:

1. If your supernatural force has these powers, why doesn't it solve the plot immediately?

2. How would different characters (child, elderly, scientist, religious leader) experience your world?

3. What happens when you push supernatural rules to their limits?
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Common Worldbuilding Pitfalls Check

☐ **Over-explanation:** Am I killing mystery with too much detail? ☐ **Under-explanation:** Am I creating confusion with too little detail? ☐ **Rule inconsistency:** Do my supernatural rules contradict each other? ☐ **Research superficiality:** Do my real-world details feel authentic?

Revision Strategies

Detail layering plan for subsequent drafts: Draft 2:

Draft 3:

Final draft:

Character knowledge distribution:

Character: _____ What they know: _____ Character: _____

_____ What they know: _____ Character: _____ What they know: _____

WORLDBUILDING STRESS TEST & FINAL CHECK

Logic Challenge Questions

1. **Plot consistency:** Do supernatural rules create meaningful obstacles rather than easy solutions?

2. **Character behavior:** Do people react authentically given their backgrounds and the situation?

3. **Setting believability:** Could readers navigate your world's geography and social structure?

Beta Reader Questions

What to ask test readers

1. *"What confused you about how this world works?"*
2. *"Did any character reactions seem unrealistic?"*
3. *"Where did you stop believing in the story?"*
4. *"Which details made the setting feel most real?"*
5. *"What supernatural elements needed more or less explanation?"*

Final Horror World Assessment

Three-pillar check:

☐ ***Grounded in reality:*** 80% mundane details support 20% supernatural elements ☐ ***Familiar corruption:*** Safe/known places become threatening through subversion ☐ ***Consistent rules:*** Supernatural logic serves story without solving problems too easily

Does your world feel real enough that readers might worry it could be true? ☐ Yes, ready to terrify readers ☐ Needs more work on: _____

"The best horror worlds feel so real that readers worry they might be true. Build something solid, then make it terrifying."