

COMMON PITFALLS THAT MAKE HORROR FALL FLAT



How to Use This Guide: Whether you're writing a screenplay, short story, or novel, horror is a genre that demands precision. When it works, it's unforgettable. When it doesn't, readers disengage fast. Below are the most common mistakes when crafting horror, and how to avoid them. Pin this list above your writing desk. Every time your horror feels flat, run it through this checklist. The fix might be right here.

NO RULES FOR THE MONSTER

Whether your monster is literal or metaphorical, it needs clear rules. What can it do? What can't it do? What triggers it? If anything goes, nothing matters.

NO STAKES BEYOND SURVIVAL

Yes, survival is important. But what else is on the line? A relationship? A secret? A soul? Layer your stakes so survival isn't the only thing your protagonist cares about.

JUMP SCARES WITHOUT DREAD

Startling your audience is easy. Creating an atmosphere of dread takes craft. Don't rely solely on loud noises and sudden reveals. Build unease slowly and deliberately.

FLAT CHARACTERS

If we don't care about your characters, we won't care when they're in danger. Horror should reveal character under pressure; flaws, guilt, trauma, resilience. Make them real.

OVER-EXPLAINING THE SCARE

The more you explain, the less scary it gets. Leave room for the unknown. The best horror often leaves us with more questions than answers.

NO EMOTIONAL CORE

What's the emotional truth behind your horror? Grief? Rage? Isolation? Horror that resonates does so because it taps into real, raw emotion. Don't skip the heart.

A WEAK ENDING

A great horror ending lands like a gut punch. It might not be happy, but it should be earned. Don't let the tension fizzle or resolve everything too neatly. Go for impact.