**HORROR WORKSHOP SUPPLMENTARY MATERIALS**

These tips and tricks are useful not for just writing horror, but for writing *all* fiction.

1. DISSECTION

All writing is a struggle between the idea that you need to be new with your concepts and your storytelling and your language AND the knowledge that no matter what you do, you are still in conversation with the works that have gone before you.

**You have to ask yourself why these stories stick around, why they fascinate people, and why they fascinate you.**

Example: Why do we like haunted house movies?

1. They are relatable
2. They offer opportunities to come up with more ideas – the house, the history, the symptoms of horror
3. They tap into the primal fear of not being safe in your nest
4. They tap into modern fears – money, the economy, home ownershop and family

Nobody ever completely uses up an idea. Ideas don’t work like that. You can always do new takes, updates, subversions and twists. But you must understand the concept to reboot it.

**Exercise: Take a boring, cliched horror idea, and use the above steps to try and make it new.**

1. CHARACTER

This is writing 101 – characters need a reason to do things. If they don’t, their actions won’t ring true. Now, how does this connect to horror?

**The power of a good horror is making you think about what you would do in that situation.**

In a horror motivation is crucial, because the genre stress-tests the motivations. You have to put your characters in a situation that is so tense they feel the need to escape, flee or push back, but you also need to make sure they don’t just yeet themselves out of the window and away from the situation.

In Midsommar, there’s a pretty good reason for the terrible boyfriend to decide to take the girl along, and once they’re there, it’s very hard to get out.

In the original Wicker Man, there’s a combination of things drawing the main character forward and stopping them from heading back. He’s here to find a girl, but he’s also a die-hard Christian, and that makes him unwilling to back down in front of the pagans – even though the very fact of being a Christian means their pagan ways get to him more than most.

**Exercise: Invent a character for your haunted house story. Give them a reason to stay in the situation. Even though its horribly dangerous.**

1. SPECIFICITY

You must always strive to be specific. It is not enough to just say ‘there was a house. The house was spooky.’ Stephen King isn’t a multi-millionaire because of his ideas. *Spooky hotel. Spooky dog.* He is popular because he is achingly specific. Most of his stuff is set in in the same state. He writes blue-collar workers who talk about their jobs. His characters do not eat ‘candy bars’ - they eat Jolly Ranchers or Hershey Kisses.’ His worlds feel very real, because they are very real.

To stand out, you need to be specific in your characters, and your description.

1. Being specific in your detail means your work feels distinct and interesting
2. Being specific allows you to use your own experiences, which will feel more real to a reader
3. Specificity allows you to be vague elsewhere, because it makes it look like you are being vague on purpose (think of *It Follows* or *Get Out* – it doesn’t matter exactly ‘how’ the monster/villains do what they do, because the *why* and the rules are so specific
4. Specificity breeds confidence, and readers love confidence in storytelling. Not necessarily in your characters, but when you choose to say something *is* something, it’s more powerful.

Exercise: Describe your haunted house. Decide on weather. Decide on architecture. Decide on mood. Be achingly, powerfully specific. Choose really strong details – zero in on how the windows all turn red with reflections at sunset, or how the air inside smells so bad you can feel the taste of it caking your throat.