

# Crafting Fear Beyond Gore

Subtle Horror Techniques with J.B. Kish

# My name is J.B. Kish

- Horror Author
  - *Novels & Short fiction*
- Co-Chair Oregon HWA
- Book Coach with [WritingMilestones.com](http://WritingMilestones.com)



**Let's talk  
about gore.**

# New Tools

- **Psychological Manipulation:**
  - Creating unreliable narration, sowing doubt, and unsettling the reader's perception.
- **Uncanny Imagery:**
  - Making the familiar strange to create discomfort and unease.
- **Suggestive Storytelling:**
  - Hinting rather than explaining to let readers' imaginations fill in the terrifying gaps.

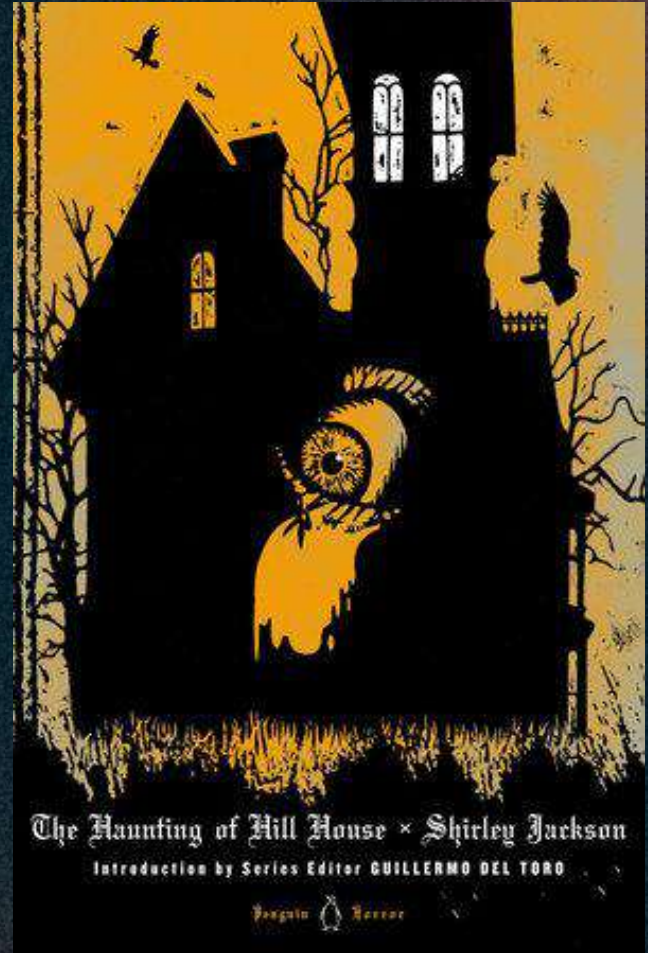


**“You’re going to die up there”**

# Psychological manipulation

Keeps readers on edge, creating a sense of suspense and unease as they, along with the characters, navigate a world where reality, emotions, or even memories may not be reliable.

1. **Unreliable Narrators**
2. **Blurring Reality and Fantasy**
3. **Sowing Doubt and Ambiguity**



# Uncanny imagery

Familiar things are presented in ways that make them seem eerie, unsettling, or "not quite right." The term "uncanny" means something that's both recognizable and strange at the same time, often creating a feeling of discomfort or even fear.

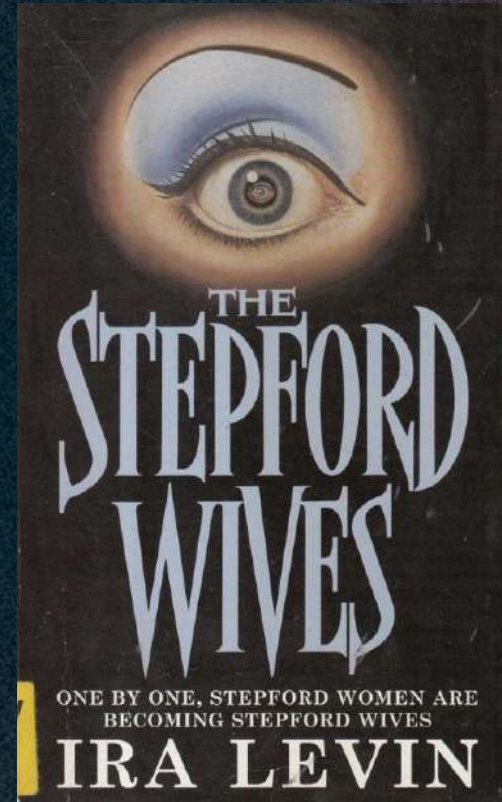
1. **Objects with Subtle, Inhuman Traits**
2. **Reflections and Doppelgängers**
3. **Settings that Resemble Home, but Aren't Quite Right**



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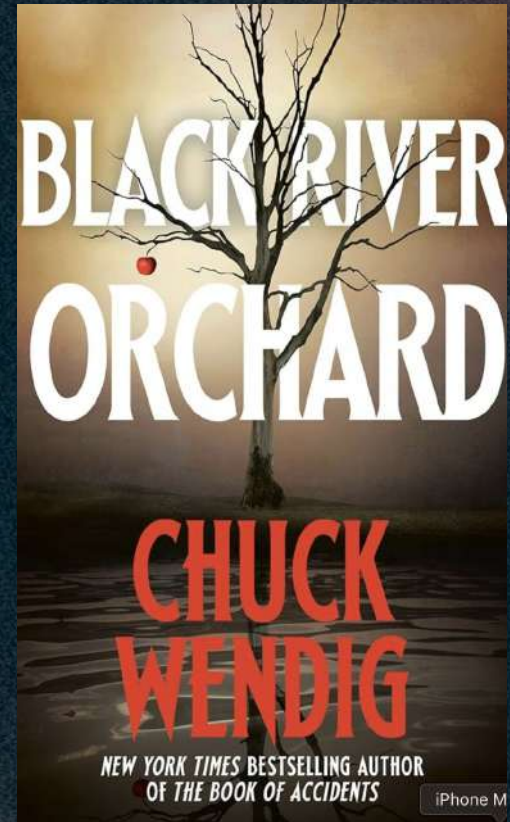


# Suggestive storytelling

Hinting at, implying, or subtly suggesting things rather than stating them outright. It relies on implication and subtext rather than explicit detail, encouraging readers to use their imagination to fill in the gaps

## Popular techniques:

1. Ambiguous details
2. Implied backstories
3. Unseen threats



**Let's Talk  
Atmosphere &  
Pacing**

# Atmosphere

- **Sensory Details:** Sensory descriptions (sights, sounds, smells) make scenes feel real and intensify dread by hinting at hidden dangers.
- **Quiet, Isolated Settings:** Isolated, silent spaces amplify suspense by making any sound feel threatening and emphasizing a lack of safety.
- **Specific Word Choices:** Carefully chosen words like “creak” or “shadow” create a dark tone, making even ordinary scenes feel ominous and alive with hidden menace.

# Pacing

- **Slow Build-Ups:** Slow build-ups stretch out scenes or moments, gradually increasing suspense and dread to make readers feel the weight of each reveal.
- **Sudden Shifts or Climaxes:** Sudden shifts disrupt a steady pace with abrupt events, intensifying horror by releasing built-up tension in unexpected ways.

**“One could, if necessary, hide between the studs in your wall. Shoulders, narrower than the gap. Back against the plywood of the exterior panel; chest, when fully inflated with breath, pressing against the lath and plaster. Room enough to disappear.”**

Home by Erik Grove  
Nightmare Magazine Feb 2023



**WHAT ABOUT THE  
GORE??**

# When Gore hits hardest:

- Climax of Psychological Horror
- Externalizing Inner States
- Contrasting the Ordinary and Horrific
- Emphasizing Real Stakes
- Highlighting Mortality Themes
- Building Anticipation





**Any Question So Far?**

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# Crafting Fear Beyond Gore

## New Tools

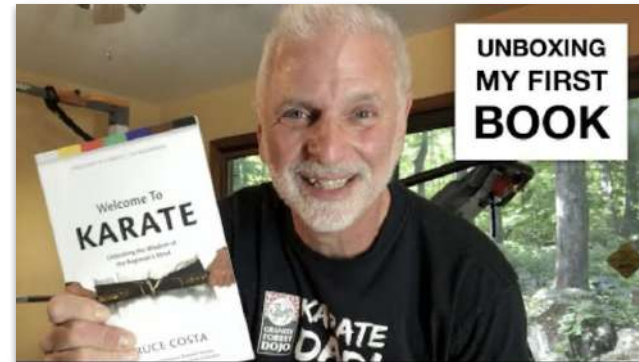
- Psychological Manipulation
- Uncanny Imagery
- Suggestive Storytelling

## Creating Atmosphere & Pacing

- Sensory Details & Quiet Settings
- Balancing Slow Builds & Sudden Shifts



# I help people do this



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Email me with the subject line: ***PWA Referral***

- [hello@jbkish.com](mailto:hello@jbkish.com)
- WritingMilestones.com

