

Welcome Home

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From set *Duskmourn: House of Horror*
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Welcome, harrowed—I mean, honored—guests. I heard the commotion you were making in the parlor and had hoped you’d make it all the way to me before you fell afoul of some of our less ... civilized residents. We’ve been in here ever so long, you see, and it’s only recently that we’ve been able to find doors to anywhere else. Manners do erode after too much time in isolation, don’t you think?

Mine as well, it seems. Please, have a seat. You’re safe here, for the moment. I can’t promise how long that condition will last—safety is a temporary thing here in Duskmourn—but I can promise you the time you need to catch your breath. That’s better than anyone else is offering right now, you’ll find. Please, rest.

This is my dining room. I’ve claimed it, and I defend it from the other residents, and they’ve learned to leave me be, if they know what’s good for them. This part of the house is called the Boilerbilge. I do apologize for the heat. Turning it down is quite impossible, but, as few linger here long enough to feel any ill effects, it’s a small complication in a world that’s made of them.



Art by: Ralph Horsley

A world? Yes. Duskmourn. Oh, you thought that name referred to the House? It does. The House is the world, the world is the House, and the word for both is Duskmourn, the grief of the sun slipping out of your hands, the coming of the cold and sorrow.

Oh, it wasn't always like this. Once, this was a plane like any other, safe and dangerous and welcoming and hostile. It had mountains and seas, cities and coasts. There are pictures in some of the books, if you can find a library. I believe that it was beautiful.

But the people were discontent. Magic was a scarce resource, controlled by very few, and others yearned for the ease that it could bring, the way it could smooth the ridges in the plaster of life. They sought to find ways to harness power for themselves, and, to their great eventual regret, they found it.

The people of what became Duskmourn learned the art of summoning creatures from the lifeless void, beings of hunger and raw strength. They weren't evil, necessarily, but they were ravenous. They fed on contracts and consent. They yearned for invitation and could do nothing without its offer. It was small at first: creatures to enable strange machines to function, to ease lives, to power lights and preserve food. Maybe, if they had stopped there, Duskmourn could have been a paradise. A paradise built on the starvation of the void, but a paradise all the same.

But alas, greed is a fact of intelligent life, and people began to summon greater and greater beings, never thinking ahead to what would happen if those beings ever broke free. And then one day, something too great to be controlled was bound here into a perfectly ordinary house on the outskirts of a perfectly ordinary city. Even then, things could have gone very differently. But someone came across the creature—the demon, if you will—and when it offered them a contract, they accepted. They paid its price, and it was finally free to feed.

Duskmourn was born in a summoning, a binding, and a contract, a slaughter, a betrayal, and a consequence. This place became inevitable when the first person called for something they didn't understand. The creature did what it was made to do. It consumed, and it kept its bargain. The House was safe. The House was preserved.

The House was a bloated corpse swallowing the rest of the world, until there was nothing left to eat, and all that remained was Duskmourn itself and the survivors in its walls, like rats.

Then, something changed. We didn't know what, only that all at once, the House could open new doors, in new places. Could reach out for companionship where there had been none before. Could feast on flesh that wasn't ours.

Oh, yes, it *is* difficult to stand up after you've been sitting for too long. The chairs tend to hold what's given to them, you see, and you sat willingly. Contracts and consequences. But you caught your breath some time ago, and that was all the safety I promised you.

The House is hungry, you see. And if I can convince people not to fight it long enough for it to take the first few bites, it lets me keep my little space and my little pretense of freedom. I don't want to die. I suppose no one does, but I was clever enough to learn how to survive in here, while you seem to have missed that lesson in whatever world you came from. It must have been far kinder there.

It must have been less hungry.

But I wasn't quite finished, was I? What's left to say? Duskmourn woke, and Duskmourn hungered, and it grew to swallow all those other pieces of the void, keeping them safe within its walls, all those little appetites, eating and eating and never fed. They serve the House. After this long, they *are* the House. Just like you'll be, very shortly.

Oh, don't scream. It's so tiresome, and we were having such a *pleasant* conversation before this all began. But if you must, you must, and I suppose that's your prerogative.

Duskmourn likes the sound of screams.

Now, then. It's so nice of you to stay for dinner. But I'm delighted to say that I won't be joining you just yet. As long as I can keep feeding my dining hall, it won't feel the need to feed on me. So, this is where we say farewell, I suppose, unless your ghost comes back for a second helping.

I'll be waiting, if it does.