

Page Fright by Strange Stage Studios

The storm waits until you step out of the car before turning savage, blinding you with cold rain and swallowing the road in mist. Your phone dies in your hand. Only one thing interrupts the night: a house, half buried in ivy, its windows like lidless eyes. From the attic window comes a faint flashing light. A basement grate hums with the whine of unseen machines. Through a study window, a lantern flickers over a road map left behind.

You are not meant to be here. But you came anyway. Now you must choose how you will enter the house.

The participant chooses the story, you choose the effect.

Strange Stage proudly presents **Page Fright**.?The game book is based on Steve Jackson's 1984 Fighting Fantasy classic House of Hell. Faithfully recreated with Haresign Press down to the exact cover lamination and true 1980s pulp paper. We even tracked down a member of the original 1984 print team to ensure the exact same stock was used. This is so much more than a book test; it can be the centrepiece of your whole show. And yes, the book is fully playable, but that's not why you're here.

Your participant first chooses how they'll enter the house, where they are greeted with a brief character reading depending on their choice. From there, four infamous "urban myths" branch into four performance pathways, each with a distinct, deceptive method.

THE FRONT DOOR?

In the 1980s, there was one particular playground rumour claiming a certain paragraph, should you be unlucky enough to choose it, would scare the player to death. This title differed from other game books. There are no weapons to find, or health potions to drink, only fear. Game over occurs when the player is scared to death.

You explain how the book works, and as you do, the participant opens to any page and silently reads a paragraph. You then reveal exactly what frightened them, naming a specific detail of the text they've just read. They then look at any full page illustration (they can even change their mind), and you name the image

precisely. I believe this to be a new method not just in book tests, but in magic, and I'm sure it's one you're going to love using. The very nature of this game book makes it all possible. The best part is there is nothing to find; even if the participant decides to play through the entire book, nothing will seem out of place.

THE BASEMENT?

In the late 1980s, rumours spread of a secret UK research facility that used House of Horrors in experiments on children. Hooked up to EEG machines, they were told to read the book late at night while scientists tracked their responses. Some reported seeing shadowy figures in the room as they turned the pages. Others swore they could predict 'correct' choices before even reading them, as if the book itself was guiding them. The program was allegedly shut down in 1991, its records destroyed, but rumours remain that the book's branching structure was more than just a game.

In performance, the participant makes their own series of choices as you recount this legend. The paragraph numbers they land on are openly noted. At the end, you prove that any other choice would have led to instant death, yet somehow they made all the right decisions. For the final kicker, the book's barcode is read aloud, and it matches the exact paragraph numbers they followed.

THE ATTIC?

Things get very dark if this route is chosen, literally and figuratively. The attic has long been considered the most psychologically disturbing of all the paths, not just for what happens in the story, but for what it can do to the reader. There are stories of people who entered the attic path and never finished it. Some said it affected them. Badly. One or two... fatally. The warning has always been the same: Read aloud. Stay grounded. Stop when you feel the need to stop. Don't push on to see how far you can go. That's when the book starts to get inside you. Better to leave a door unopened than to find out why it was locked.

In performance, the participant stops at any page of their choice when they get the feeling to stop. Light is introduced via a UV pen. When passed over the page, a hidden message appears exactly where they chose to stop: He finds you in the darkness. To dispel suspicion, you show there are no other secret writings, sweeping the torch across the other pages they could have stopped on, which

remain clean. The message was only ever waiting for them.

THE OPEN STUDY WINDOW?

In the original 1984 printing of House of Hell, an image depicting a cultist about to make a sacrificial offering of a bound woman was banned from subsequent issues. The eerie thing is, owners of the first edition claimed the image changed over time. Some said the victim's face became more agonised, others that the cultist's mask came away, revealing something more monstrous. A handful of readers claimed that the illustration was so bizarre that they were forced to rip it out after suffering waking nightmares. Later editions quietly replaced the picture with something generic. No explanation was ever given, but those who saw the original believed it was never just a drawing. It was an invocation.

In performance, an envelope is placed in the book as a marker. Several people are shown the page and see nothing too unusual, but one participant clearly sees the banned illustration. When the book is opened again, the page is gone, torn out. You then produce it from the envelope, your pocket, or anywhere you wish. The book can be freely handled, and there is nothing for them to find.

BONUS EFFECT

Inspired by how the original book was formatted, I have included a tossed out book effect. I have taken something from the original and added another principle to create an extra layer of deception.

PERFORMER'S EDITION?

Built for workers. It looks and feels like a real game book, because it is, yet it's robust enough for your gig bag or jacket pocket and is ready for miracles at a moment's notice. Each copy also includes a matte laminated bookmark.