

## *For Danielle, Ruby and Léo*

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Scholastic Children's Books  
Euston House, 24 Eversholt Street, London NW1 1DB, UK

[www.scholastic.ca](http://www.scholastic.ca)

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Horror house / Jeff Szpirglas.

Names: Szpirglas, Jeff, author.

Description: Series statement: Countdown to danger: choose your ending!

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 2021037618X | Canadiana (ebook) 20210376198 |

ISBN 9781443189613 (softcover) | ISBN 9781443189620 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Plot-your-own stories. | LCGFT: Choose-your-own stories.

Classification: LCC PS8637.L65 H67 2022 | DDC jC813/.6—dc23

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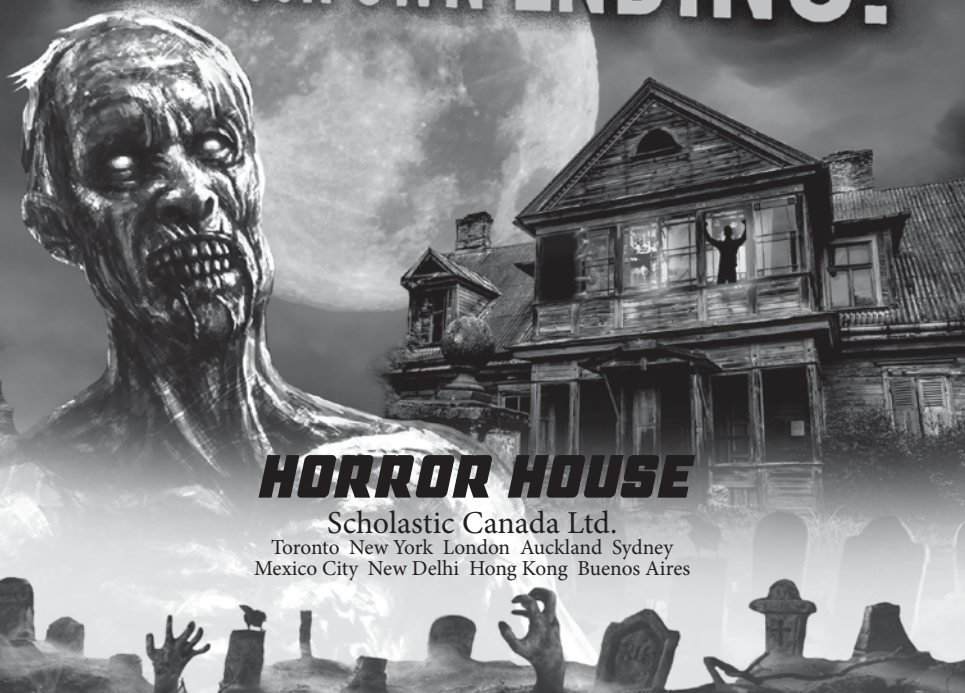
7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Printed in Canada 114 22 23 24 25 26



**JEFF SZPIRGLAS**

# COUNTDOWN TO DANGER

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ENDING!



## **HORROR HOUSE**

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30:00

The door slams behind you. You turn around and grasp the handle. It should open, but it doesn't. "Kanisha?" you say nervously, and turn back to face the inside of the old, abandoned house you entered only moments ago.

Your cousin is here on a mission, already holding her video camera in one hand. In her pocket is a device she claims can detect the "essence" of "spectral entities." You're not entirely sure you buy that, but this place definitely gives you the creeps.

"The door won't open," you tell her. "What if this place is, like, *really* haunted?"

"Good," Kanisha says. "That's why we came here—to prove it once and for all."

You shake your head. While Kanisha has been busy posting videos about ghosts on her YouTube channel, you've been digging for information at the library.

What was in that old local history book you found there? That this is the house of Avonlea and Abraham Smithson—and it's rumoured to be a gateway to supernatural realms.

You look back at the front door, hoping maybe it was just the wind that snapped it shut, and then you see it.



BLOOD RED LETTERS BEING SCRATCHED INTO THE WOOD.

*AT MIDNIGHT YOU ARE OURS.*

You let out a yell. Kanisha turns around. “What are you screaming at?”

“Don’t you see it?” You point to the door, and sure enough, the writing has vanished. But it was *there*. You pull out your phone to check the time, noticing you have no signal. It’s only thirty minutes, you realize, until midnight.

Kanisha steps farther into the house, close to a towering, dusty bookcase. Past it there’s a stairwell going up, and one going down. “I’m getting a strong reading from the basement,” she says. “Let’s try there.”

“Don’t do it,” you plead. “We’re in danger.” But off she goes. You turn back to try the door again.

*YOU CAN’T SAVE HER. WE WILL POSSESS YOU. WE WILL BE FREE!*

Yikes! You should get Kanisha and get out of here. But then a flutter of movement down the hall catches your attention. Maybe it’s just the wind. Maybe it’s . . . you gulp . . . a ghost?

***If you go down to the basement to look for Kanisha, turn to page 39.***

***If you explore the main-floor hallway, turn to page 55.***



12:53

**Y**ou look at the fireplace and hold your breath. The intense heat sizzles your skin, but you step forward anyway, ducking to keep from bonking your head on the stone mantel. You are engulfed by the searing flames, and you open your mouth to scream in agony when—

Darkness.

The flames vanish. The pain immediately ceases.

You rub your arms and legs just to make sure they're still there.

You take a tentative step forward. Your foot touches something cold and wet. Something that definitely hasn't been roasted.

Another step, and this time there's a squelch as your foot sinks into muck. White smoke wafts into view, and you try to wave it off. The smoke swirls with the movement of your hand. You get a whiff of it, and—it's not smoke. It has the earthy smell of a fog, or a mist.

You take a few more steps, and the world around you opens up. Through the thick fog, you spot several dark shapes that are waist high and still as the dead.

They're still as the dead because they're tombstones.

You're standing in the middle of the graveyard. It's



dark, but the full moon above casts a useful glow over the place.

You whip around to look for any sign of the fireplace, but it has either a) completely vanished, or b) been obscured by the thick fog. Regardless, you can worry about how you are going to get back into Smithson House later.

You don't have much time, and if Smithson is right, you have to retrieve the page by digging up her grave. You hope there's a shovel or something around here. Plus, you still need to find her grave.

On the other hand, now you're outside. You could just run out of here and find someone to help rescue Kanisha.

***If you look for the grave, turn to page 76.***

***If you leave, turn to page 59.***



19:05

**Y**ou hurl the knife at the painting. At the very least, it makes a cool *SHHH-DOINK!* noise as the blade slams into the canvas.

It's lodged right in the middle of the woman. You can't believe it—she's still just a painting, but now she's standing there inside the canvas, writhing back and forth.

She looks down at the knife and laughs. "Nice try!"

Breathing heavily, you watch the woman push at the knife.

A second later, the metal blade clatters to the floor.

With one hand clutching her belly, the woman slowly looks up at you. "That was a mistake."

The entire painting, even the frame, begins to vibrate. A low noise fills the basement, making your ears tremble, and you watch as the woman reaches out, her hand passing beyond the canvas and into the real world. Her arm takes on three-dimensional form, but her skin still looks like it's been finished with brush strokes. She grabs hold of the frame and pulls hard. Her knee juts out of the canvas.

"Don't think you can escape," she says.

You stare, dumbfounded, as the woman pulls





herself further and further out of the painting. Who knows what she's capable of in the real world?

You look around. The knife is useless. Clearly you can't stop a painting with a knife.

But you realize there's paint leaking out of her "wound." Not blood. Paint.

You back up, searching the room for anything you can use to slow her down, and see a shelf full of paint cans on the far wall. That's it! You can "erase" her by painting over her.

"No!" she screams.

You rush over to the shelf, throwing down several cans. They land with hollow thuds. Empty!

Now it's your turn to scream, "No!"

You whip your head around. The woman is nearly out of the painting. Her feverish, furious eyes are locked on you.

You fumble through the shelf, picking up can after can, shaking them. Some have liquid inside, but not enough.

She's out of the painting now and walking towards you. She's not fast but she's closing in, and she's put herself between you and the stairway to the main floor.

As you search, you hear a metallic sound behind you, and you turn to see her standing there—**HOLDING THE KNIFE!**

Without thinking, you pick up one of the empty



cans and hurl it at her. The can smacks against her face with a loud clang. She winces and shakes her head. “That won’t work,” she says.

You eye the knife in her hand and throw another can, this time right at her arm.

You turn, looking for more cans, and now you see a jar with liquid in it and *PAINT THINNER* written on its side. You take a running dive at it and start to loosen the lid.

The woman’s right on your tail. Her icy hands sink into your back. Searing pain flares from where she’s gripping you.

“I’ve got you now,” she hisses.

THE PAIN! You drop to your knees. You can feel her breath on your back. It smells of paint. Her wound is dripping more paint onto you. You grit your teeth, turn around, and fling the jar right at her.

***Turn to page 61.***

