

HOMEFRONTING



1945. Germany. You're 12 years old. You and the remnants of your *Flakhelfer* unit are arguing over which is scarier: the war or the supposedly-haunted house you've taken shelter in. No adults anywhere, just you, the Führer's boy and girl soldiers.

Setup

- ❑ Round up 4+ players, preferably close friends. The more the merrier. Everyone should be OK with getting wet and having crude images drawn on them.
- ❑ Everyone gets a flashlight and a marker.
- ❑ You'll need to prepare several Pee Pods using water balloons. What are Pee Pods, you ask? Find out below!
- ❑ You'll need several pairs of white socks.
- ❑ One or two pieces of [kitchen steel wool](#) will be needed (and scissors to cut it). Used steel wool is better, just because it'll be more scuffed up and bristly, so grab some you've used to scrub pots if possible.
- ❑ Someone needs to bring a phone or another device that can play sound.
- ❑ Play somewhere that's dark (pitch-black darkness is preferred) and comfortable enough to fall asleep. A camping trip (especially one in your backyard) is a great time to play this game. The space where you play will get wet. Very wet.

PEE PODS!

To prepare each Pee Pod, place a small, bristly piece of kitchen steel wool (about 1 inch or so) into a white sock. Make sure the steel wool slides all the way to the bottom of the sock. Once this is done, fill a lemon-sized water balloon with warm water and slide it down into the sock so that it rests on top of the steel wool. (You should be able to use whatever brand of water balloons you want, **but make sure they're water balloons, as these have a thinner skin designed to break easily. The regular balloons you get in the Walmart party aisle won't work, unfortunately.** I tested [these](#), and they seem to do the job well.) Do this at least as many times as you have players. I'd recommend making twice as many Pee Pods as you have players, since some will inevitably break accidentally before the game starts.

Half of the Pee Pods should be prepared differently from the others. When making these, **wrap the steel wool in toilet paper and wet the toilet paper** before dropping it into the sock.

SOUND FX

Before playing, create a playlist of creepy sounds, war sounds and silent tracks of varying lengths using a music service that lets you download your playlist to a phone or similar device. [Spotify](#) has a 3 month free trial of premium for new accounts, and has all the features this game requires. **Make sure you enable the program's SHUFFLE feature so that you'll have silence interspersed with the sounds.** If you're using Spotify, you can use [this pre-made playlist](#). You can adjust the

ratio of silence to sound if you want to change the pace of the game.

Play Area & Safety

Prepare the play space so that all players have somewhere to sleep comfortably. Bring pillows, sleeping bags, blankets, cots, blow up mattresses, whatever. Make things as comfortable as possible.

Discuss safety stuff and clear the area of anything sharp or dangerous so that people can move freely. This game is played in the dark in close proximity to other people, so tread carefully. Place phones and other sensitive electronics in some central location where they won't get wet (ziplock plastic bags are a good thing to have on hand). No player should be carrying their phone on their person since, again, everyone will probably wind up soaked with water.

Ready?

When things are ready to go, all players should take up their sleeping positions. Have the Pee Pods in a central location, and have each player grab one (and only one) blindly as they enter the dark play area.

Each player must carefully clench their Pee Pods between their legs. Everyone should keep their Pee Pods in this position as long as they have them. Take pride in these. Guard them like a chicken guards its eggs.

Play

Begin playing late at night, or when everyone is pretty tired. This isn't a game that takes a lot of concentration, and play should take place within that kind of liminal state between consciousness and sleep where people are still lucid enough to respond to things, but sleepy enough to feel silly and irreverent.

When you're ready to commence the game-proper, start the playlist off on a silent track. Make sure the volume is pretty darn loud.

All players are child soldiers, around 11-14 years of age. You are most definitely somewhere in Germany during the waning days of the Nazi regime, but the exact location is up to you to imagine. Don't discuss it too much. Just know that you're part of the same conscripted military unit, and you're all gathered in a house that might be haunted taking refuge from the war. All of you know each other.

Think about these questions:

- Why did you decide to follow the other children into the house?
- Who or what is haunting the place (besides you and your companions)?
- Ghosts have supernatural powers. Everyone knows this. What special powers does this one possess?
- Friends? Family? What became of them?
- Ever seen someone dead? Fixate on a specific feature of the body.
- What are you most scared of right now?
- Imagine the war as a person/thing with a face. How does the face look?
- What war-related task gives you stomach butterflies the most?
- What do you think they'll do to you if they find you in here?

This game is an argument between you and the other children. To slip into character, you should first take a side. What frightens you more, in this moment? The war (in whatever way you've experienced it) or the haunted house you're staying in tonight? Make sure there are people on both sides (if you find that everyone chooses "the war," for example, be the odd one out and choose the haunted house yourself). You can do other things besides debating this—sing songs, play pranks, be goofy, be winsome, fall asleep—but this question should be the starting point from which all other play emerges.

Begin in the midst of the argument, and fiercely debate your position. Play off of the responses of others, but don't be afraid to throw in a few "Nuh-uh's" and only-vaguely-related creepy/scary anecdotes. Fall back to the questions above if you need more imagination-ammo. Don't be afraid to contradict what others have said, particularly relating to the haunting ("That's not the way *I* heard it...", "No, the story [about the haunted house] *is actually...*").

Kids are stubborn as heck. Don't change your position under any circumstances, unless ... well, ever!

Actually, I lied.

Not all kids are stubborn, but all kids are scared of things like ghosts and darkness and creaky floorboards and loud noises.

Whenever a sound plays from the playlist, **take turns HOMEFRONTING. When you engage in homefronting, you squeeze your knees together until they're touching while simultaneously blurting out a sentence-long vignette that touches on your wartime heroism.** Spit it proudly and boisterously, with enough bravado to hide your fear. Be brash. Be hyperbolic. Display your (pre)pubescent machismo by spinning a brief tale so bold and ridiculous as to show, *without a shadow of a doubt*, that you are a soldier and Totally Not Afraid. Everyone must do this.

After your tale, rotate your Pee Pod, then carefully reposition it between your legs. It doesn't matter how you rotate it, but you must reorient it some way.

BUT(t): If your balloon breaks, you've peed yourself. Oops! Quick! Hide it!

Your grandiose war stories are assumed true only until you're accused of being a pants-wetting coward. Any child can accuse another of this at any time after war vignettes are finished. If accused, you must illuminate the balloon inside your Pee Pod and verify your courage. Keep your flashlight off otherwise; you wouldn't want to alert any spooks (or rampaging Bolsheviks) of your presence in this house.

If your balloon is proven to be intact, **your accuser joins your side of the argument.** If not, your war record is forever rendered **questionable.** Ouch.

If you ever reach a point where everyone is in agreement, that won't do. Someone needs to be the contrarian and switch sides (why not have it be YOU?). "Well, maaaaybe the ghost is scarier after all."

Anyway, you should most definitely look down on people who pee themselves. Talk over them during the argument. Throw dirty socks in their general direction. Treat them as "lesser than," as untermenschen (whatever those are). Kids can be so cruel.

Someone will probably fall asleep eventually. (If not, play until the sun comes up. There aren't any adults around to stop you.)

If you're a member of that despised lot with pee-soaked pants and questionable war records, use their slumber as an opportunity to take out some of your frustrations. Reds be damned. Turn on your lights, and draw mean words and pictures on the sleeper's face with your marker. Steal any of the remaining Pee Pods and start a raucous water fight. Start making the argument personal, launching savage ad hominem attacks against your friends instead of debating shadowy, nebulous concepts like "war" or "the supernatural."

If you're one of the valiant with a big sack of precious bodily fluids still in your possession, chill and be mellow. You could try to stop the questionables, but why bother? They'll burn out eventually. Instead, spend your remaining time awake decorating your arms and hands with drawings of medals you'll never earn.