The Horror Book Club Questions Pack

Discussion cards for the books you read with the lights on - dread, haunted houses, folk horror, cosmic horror, monsters & endings

Free sample - two real pages: The Host's Quick-Start, plus the complete Dread vs Gore set (four cards, sixteen questions). Print at 100% on US Letter or A4.

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The Host's Quick-Start - A Horror Discussion Night in Five Moves

The whole hosting system on one page (pack p.3) - the page a first-time host reads at 6 p.m. and hosts from at 7.

Before the night: pick two themed sets that match this book's breed of fear (a haunted-house book wants The Haunting + The Unreliable Everything; a folk horror wants Folk Horror + Monsters; a quiet literary ghost story wants Dread vs Gore + The Craft of the Scare). Print those two pages, one Anywhere Deck page, scorecards for everyone, and the Session Planner. That's the whole print job.

Move 1 - Set the spoiler line and check the lights (3 minutes).
Before any book talk, run the Finished-the-Book? check from the Spoiler Charter (p.4): who finished, who stopped partway and where, who's here on a reread. Then run the lights check from the Courage Charter (p.5): tonight's book got flagged chapters noted, any member's red lines confirmed without detail or debate. Three minutes now saves the whole night - and the member.

Move 2 - Open with a card anyone can answer (10 minutes).
Play one Anywhere Deck card or a gentle Lightning opener. First questions must be opinion-only - no memory tests, no plot recall - so the person who finished at 1 a.m. and the person who finished in October are equal at the table.

Move 3 - Spend the middle on the fear engine (30-40 minutes).
Work your two chosen sets, two or three cards each. Follow the heat: if the gore audit catches fire, stay in Dread vs Gore and let Cosmic wait for next month. You are hosting, not invigilating - an unfinished set is a success if the room is loud.

Move 4 - Hold the inquest (10 minutes).
Play one Monsters card - the Metaphor Audit (M1) is the classic - and let the room deliver its verdict on what the monster, the house, the thing meant. This is the ten minutes members describe to friends who then join the club.

Move 5 - Close with scores, the ballot, and lightning (10 minutes).
Scorecards out (p.25): sixty seconds of silent scoring - dread, atmosphere, monster, prose, and the honour column, Sleep Lost - then the averages go on the Scores & Vote page (p.26), where the club decides tonight, in writing, which breed of fear comes next month and takes the Courage Check before voting. Then end loud: a Lightning Round (p.23), first answer counts, nobody's dignity survives intact.

Timing plans: 60-minute night - Moves 1 and 2, one set in Move 3, skip the Inquest, keep Move 5. 90-minute night - as written. 2-hour finale night (October, or a series end) - add Subgenre Mode (p.7) and play the full Endings set behind the gate.

The host's kit: the printed card pages - scorecards + pens - the Session Planner - one copy of the book itself, for settling "page beats memory" disputes - a mug or hat for Lightning strips - a working torch if you're meeting in October. Atmosphere is a hosting duty.

You do not need to arrive brave. You need cards. The room will bring the courage - in different amounts, which the Charter (p.5) is for.

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Dread vs Gore - What Actually Scared Us

The pack's signature set (pack p.11): the fear mechanics - the questions generic packs cannot ask, because they don't know the difference between a scare and a splatter. Questions marked * are the strongest on each card: if the night is short, ask only those.

Card D1 - The Quiet Page

Best moment: the first fear card of any night.

1. Name the quietest page that scared you most. What exactly was on it - a sound, an absence, a sentence in the wrong tense?

2. * The loudest scene versus the quietest scene: which one is still with you a week later? What does that tell us about how this book builds fear?

3. Where did the book make you do the frightening yourself - leave the gap for your imagination to fill? Point to the withholding.

4. Hands round the table: who was more scared by what the book didn't show? Count it; the split is the book's review in miniature.

Card D2 - The Gore Audit

Best moment: core - the set's namesake argument.

1. Inventory the book's explicit violence in one breath. Now: how much of the book's fear actually lives inside those scenes?

2. * Judge every graphic scene: earned (the story needed to see it), decorative (there for flavour), or padding (there because the book stopped trusting its dread). Defend your harshest call.

3. Where did the book look away - cut, fade, aftermath only - and was the looking-away more or less frightening than showing would have been?

4. Does this book enjoy its gore? If so, is that a flaw, a flavour, or the whole point - and where does your own line sit on it?

Card D3 - The Slow Build

Best moment: core.

1. When did you first know this book was going to hurt - page, scene, or a single early detail that turned out to be a promise?

2. * Trace the dread curve: where does the book tighten, where does it let you breathe - and which release of pressure was a trick?

3. The ordinary-made-wrong: which everyday object, routine, or kindness does the book corrupt first? Why that one?

4. How long could this book have stayed in its first, almost-safe movement before you'd have put it down? Where is this room's patience limit, exactly?

Card D4 - Fear That Follows You Home

Best moment: closer.

1. * What did this book install in your actual life - a hallway checked, a mirror avoided, a sound reclassified? One

sentence each. Confessions are scored for honesty, not drama.

2. Which fear in this book was already yours - the height, the water, being believed by no one - and which one did the book hand you new?

3. Does the fear survive daylight and discussion? Is it still working on you at this table, or did naming it at this table shrink it?

4. Rank the book's fears by half-life: gone by morning / gone by next week / installed permanently. What separates the permanent ones?

Host notes (printed at the foot of the card page): The signature set - play at least one card from it on every night, whatever the subgenre; it is this pack's engine room. Arguments usually start at D2 Q2, the earned/decorative/padding audit, and can get gloriously heated. Quiet-room rescue: confess first - the host names their own quietest-scariest page, with specifics, and the room follows. Care note: this set talks about reactions, not scenes - safe territory for amber lights, because nobody is ever asked to describe a moment past their own line (Courage Charter, p.5).

This free sample holds two real pages of The Horror Book Club Questions Pack (28 pages: a 9-page host guide - Quick-Start, Spoiler Charter & the Finished-the-Book? Protocol, the Content & Courage Charter, How to Use the Cards with the Quiet-Room Ladder, Subgenre Mode, Session Planner, Reader's Running Sheet - then 52 cards in eleven themed sets plus the universal Anywhere Deck, two Lightning Rounds with 48 one-line questions, the Horror Scorecard with its Sleep Lost column, the Scores & Subgenre Ballot page and the club's Horror Shelf log - US Letter, A4 and tablet editions). Its shelf-mate is The Fantasy Book Club Questions Pack, which shares no questions with it. All live at pagelyra.vercel.app