Host's Quick-Start: The Year-End Night in Six Moves

The night in six moves

1. **Settle & the Year in Numbers (20-25 min).** Drinks, seats, and the year's books visible - a stack on the table, covers along the shelf, or the list read aloud from p.9. The host opens with the words below, then the table completes the Year in Numbers sheet (p.8) together, aloud, from the Reading Record (p.5). Laughter is expected and load-bearing: the numbers are the year's first story about itself. Finish with the Memory Lane Grid (p.9) read down the year, one line per month, so every book is named once before any is judged.

2. **Ballots cast in silence (15 min).** The host re-reads the Voting & Fairness Charter (p.6) aloud - all of it, every year, even to a table that knows it. Ballots A, B and C (pp.13-15) are dealt face-down. Members write their choices in silence: no campaigning, no "you have to pick - " across the table, no showing a neighbour. One ballot per member per sheet. Abstaining on any single category is allowed and unremarkable; write ABSTAIN rather than guessing. Ballots fold once and go into the bowl in the middle of the table. The host counts later, on p.16 - not yet.

3. **The Bracket, head-to-head (30-40 min).** Post the Bracket Chart (p.20), seeded as p.19 directs from the p.9 grid. Run each match by the procedure on p.21: one speaker for each book, two minutes each, only the year's own evidence, then a show of hands or a slip vote, majority carries the book forward. Quarter-finals first, a breath, semi-finals, a longer breath, then the final. Write each winner straight onto the chart in marker. The Bracket Champion is recorded on the chart and, later, on p.27 - separately from the ballot's Book of the Year, because the two may differ and both stand.

4. **Awards announced (15-20 min).** Once the bracket is decided, the host (or a drafted co-counter) tallies Ballots A, B and C on the Counting Sheet (p.16), resolving any tie by the Charter's procedure - head-to-head re-vote, then a shared award, never the host's casting vote. Then announce in the order printed on p.16, certificates (pp.17-18) filled in and presented as each winner is called. Applause, photographs if the club takes them, and the Press-on-a-Stranger card (p.18) filled in by whoever wants to actually give that book away.

5. **Wooden Spoons, kindly (10-15 min).** Now - and only now, after the main awards - the DNF ballots (p.22) come out. The host re-reads the DNF Honesty Rule from p.6 before a single spoon is cast: a spoon judges the fit between a book and this club in that month, never the member who chose it and never the members who stopped. Cast, count (totals join p.16), present the spoon certificates (p.22), then run the DNF Amnesty on p.23: every unfinished book is released or - one book only, by vote - carried into next year as unfinished business.

6. **The First-Pick Ceremony & close (20 min).** Pitch slips (p.24) should already be written - in the quiet after balloting (Move 2) or during Move 4's counting, as the chosen timing plan (p.4) directs - if they have not, write them now, in silence, before anyone speaks. Run the ceremony exactly as p.25 sets out: pitches read aloud by another member, questions of fact only, then the club's chosen method - secret ballot, or the bowl draw from the top-three shortlist. Announce the First Pick of Next Year, record it on p.25 and p.26, fix January's date, and close with the Annual Record (p.27): read the night's results back to the room from the one page that will keep them, the host signs and dates it, and the year is closed.

The host's opening words (printed - say them exactly as written if that steadies you)

"Welcome to the night we judge ourselves. Tonight there is no new book and nobody is behind - the year is the book. We're going to count it, award it, argue it down to one bracket champion, forgive the books that beat us, and choose January's book before anyone leaves. Everything tonight is by the Charter, which I'll read before we vote, and everything we decide goes onto one page that we keep. First: the year, in numbers - starting with the only statistic that matters. We are still here."

Printed host rules

- Read the Charter (p.6) aloud before balloting, every year. Fairness that is assumed decays; fairness that is spoken holds.

- Silence during balloting is the product. Protect it cheerfully and absolutely.

- Never cut Move 2's silence or Move 6's ceremony to save time. Compress retrospective talk or bracket speeches first (see p.4).

- Fill in p.27 before the room empties. A record written next week from memory is a lesser document - p.5 exists precisely to mark reconstructed memory as reconstructed.

The Year in Numbers - Club Retrospective Sheet

How to complete this sheet (host reads)

I call each line; the table answers from p.5, from the books on the table, and - where the record runs out - from memory, marked as memory. No line is skipped because the record is thin: a line the club cannot fill is filled with the words NOT KEPT, which is itself a true sentence about the year, and often the funniest one of the night.

The count

- Books finished together this year: _____ (from p.5 Part 1: meetings where the club completed its shared book - if "finished together" was never tracked, the table decides tonight, book by book down the p.9 grid, and the method is noted here: _____)

- Books started together this year (including every book in the count above AND every DNF on p.5 Part 3): _____ - Of those, books not finished together (the DNF count): _____

- Meetings held: _____ - Meetings planned but cancelled and never held: _____ (from p.5 Part 4 - a cancelled meeting is remembered here, not counted there)

- Distinct authors read together: _____ (count from p.5 Part 1; a returning author counts once) - Authors new to every member at the table ("none of us had read them before"): _____ (table's judgement, by show of memory - mark M)

- Genres / kinds read (in the club's own words for its shelves - no fixed list is printed, because the club's words are the record): 1. _____ (count of books: _____) 2. _____ (_____) 3. _____ (_____) 4. _____ (_____) 5. _____ (_____)

- Total pages read together: _____ - COMPLETE THIS LINE ONLY IF the club's record supports it (editions differ; a page count summed across mixed editions is a cheerful fiction). Route if unsupported (circle one): NOT KEPT / ESTIMATED FROM EDITIONS TO HAND (mark ESTIMATE) / LINE LEFT BLANK BY CHOICE

- Longest book finished together: _____ (title) at _____ pages in the edition read - Shortest book finished together: _____ at _____ pages - Longest single meeting's book, by discussion minutes if anyone remembers them: _____ (mark M)

- Members at the year's start: _____ - At its end: _____ - Meetings attended by every current member (the perfect-attendance count, if the club kept it - otherwise NOT KEPT, never reconstructed by pressure): _____

The three one-line verdicts (the sheet's heart - allow real time here)

Verdict 1 - The year in one word, per member. *Go round the table. Each member gives ONE word for the club's reading year - not a review, a word - and the host writes each word against the member's first name. No word may be challenged, only received. (A table of eight produces eight words; the set of them, read back, is the most accurate review the year will ever get.)*

1. _____ (name: _____) 2. _____ (_____) 3. _____ (_____) 4. _____ (_____) 5. _____ (_____) 6. _____ (_____) 7. _____ (_____) 8. _____ (_____) (continue on the back for larger clubs)

Verdict 2 - The year's sentence. *Together, by negotiation aloud, the table completes ONE sentence, written here exactly as agreed: "This was the year our club _____." (If the table cannot agree, two rival sentences are written and both stand - disagreement, recorded honestly, is this kit's house style.)* ***Verdict 3 - The number the table will quote.*** *Of every figure on this sheet, the table picks the ONE it expects to still be quoting next year, and circles it above. Host writes why this one, in the table's words: _____*

Closing instruction

When this sheet is complete, turn to p.9 and read the year down, month by month, before any judging begins. The numbers say how much year there was. The grid says what it was.

Ballot A: The Headline Awards (4-up)

The night's headline ballot - one slip per member, cast in silence under the Charter (p.6), counted on p.16. This page prints FOUR identical ballot slips (2 columns × 2 rows) with cut lines between them; the host prints one sheet per four members (see p.7) and cuts before the night.

BALLOT A - THE HEADLINE AWARDS

The Book Club Year-End Kit - Club: _____ - Year: _____

Write ONE book per line - title as it appears in the year's grid (p.9). Only shared picks are eligible (Charter clause 3). Write ABSTAIN on any line rather than guessing. Fold once when finished. Do not sign this ballot.

A1 - Book of the Year: _____

A2 - Best Discussion: _____

A3 - Most Divided: _____

A4 - Discovery of the Year: _____

Definitions live on p.12 - ask the host to read one aloud if you need it. Silence while balloting (Charter clause 5).

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Host's strip - cut off and kept by the host, not dealt:

Deal Ballot A with B and C together in Move 2 (Quick-Start, p.3). All three ballots are always cast before the bracket, so no bracket argument can campaign for a ballot not yet written (Charter clauses 5 and 9). Collect folded, unread, into the bowl. Count on p.16 only - except the provisional A1 tally for seeding alone, exactly as p.19 directs. Typeset note (for the typeset pass, recorded here so the design intent survives): category names appear on the slip WITHOUT their p.12 definitions - by design (see p.12). The four slips are identical; any slip found differing from the others at typeset is a misprint to be corrected, not an edition.