

BOOK 1



THE PENULTIMATE DAWN CYCLE - BOOK 1

THE HUNGER

Book Club Kit

Discussion questions - themes - activities - facilitator guide

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CONTAINS FULL-BOOK SPOILERS AFTER THE SPOILER-LIGHT OPENING PAGES



START HERE

Welcome to the Discussion

A world that is literally hungry

In *The Hunger*, magic is not simply a gift. It is something people must consume, regulate, trade, hoard, and survive. That makes every spell part of a larger question: what happens when a society builds identity, religion, class, and power around a resource people cannot safely live without?



Spoiler boundary

Pages 2-3 are spoiler-light.

The character, theme, question, and activity pages that follow discuss major revelations from the full novel, including the final chapters and epilogue.



Suggested 75-minute meeting

- 10 min - first impressions
- 20 min - character choices
- 20 min - world, faith, and power
- 15 min - ending debate
- 10 min - activity or sequel predictions

One question to begin



If you could remove the Hunger from this world, but doing so would dismantle the society built around it, would you?

Do not solve the question immediately. Let it hang over the rest of the discussion.

Before the Spoilers

The setup

Kaval is an orphan nearing the age when his future will be decided for him. Azil is a fashionable court scholar with a dangerous curiosity and an old friend searching for lost truth. A mysterious invitation, a hidden cache of magical power, and a prophet named Evelet push their separate paths together as the rival Clans edge toward open conflict.

Survival

The magical Sustenance everyone depends on creates a literal Hunger. Scarcity is not abstract: bodies, identities, and social status can all change when people cannot obtain enough.

Belonging

Kaval wants family and a place in the world. Azil is caught between court identity and family guilt. The story repeatedly asks whether lineage, class, appearance, or choice makes someone who they are.

Truth

Jamith searches the Twilight Library for records that challenge accepted history. His discoveries turn the novel into a mystery about what institutions forget, suppress, or rewrite.

Before anyone opens the spoiler pages

1. Which character did you trust first, and what earned that trust?
2. What did the title *The Hunger* mean to you before the novel began to explain it?
3. Which part of the worldbuilding felt most immediately connected to a real-world human problem?
4. Did the humor make the darker parts easier to enter, or did it sharpen the contrast?

SPOILERS BEGIN HERE

Character & Relationship Guide



Azil

Scarlatt court scholar, historian, actor, and devoted follower of fashion. His search for truth becomes inseparable from his responsibility to Sarahah and his increasingly complicated trust in Evelet.

Kaval

An "extra" child raised in the Orphan's Quarter, desperate to find family and determine his own future. His unusual tolerance for magic gives him extraordinary power - and a fear that power makes him dangerous.

Sarahah

Azil's younger sister, an alchemist and skilled wilderness survivor who has hidden that she is a Mal. Her bond with mage creatures and her refusal to be treated as fragile make her central to the group.

Evelet

A prophetic guide whose connection to Rahim is far deeper than it first appears. She sees farther than the others, but her secrecy forces the group - and the reader - to decide how much foresight justifies withholding truth.

Jamith

Azil's oldest friend and the scholar whose Twilight Library journal reframes the history of Rahim, the Clans, and the Aspects.

Sven

An Azuran prince: charismatic, formidable, shaped by a culture that prizes strength, and drawn into the group's conflicts through Kaval and Sarahah.

Brehman

A marauder leader whose unnatural emerald power hints that the conflict is larger than rival Clans and ordinary magic.

USE THIS WHEN THE LORE GETS DENSE

World & Magic Primer

SUSTENANCE

ESSENCE

RESERVE

SPELL

Magical material is consumed, converted into Essence, held in the body's Reserve, then shaped into a spell.

Azure

Strength / skill.

Enhances the body, helps harness physical forces and elements, and supports feats of power.

Dorian

Motion.

Supports speed, movement, manipulation, and at advanced levels even teleportation.

Scarlet

Sight.

Reveals distant or hidden events and can extend, with difficulty, toward past or future.

The Hunger

The body requires regular magical nourishment. Prolonged deprivation can transform people into Mals. The same resource that enables power is therefore also a biological necessity and a mechanism of social control.

Limits matter

Spellcasting is not free. Repeated use increases recovery time. Pushing too hard can produce mage sickness and eventually mage madness. Kaval's unusual tolerance makes him both valuable and vulnerable.

The Clans

The ruling Clans grew from older religious groups linked to different Aspects and abilities. Jamith discovers that organizations once devoted to service have hardened into hereditary, pseudo-religious nobility.

Trifecta

A triangular strategy game built around three Keeps, specialized pieces, and surrounding an enemy to capture it. Late in the novel, Evelet says the game mirrors life - making it a useful lens for the entire plot.

Themes & Motifs

Hunger & dependency

The literal Hunger is also political and spiritual: people crave Sustenance, safety, status, family, truth, and divine certainty. Ask which hungers liberate and which make people easier to control.

Truth vs. inherited history

Jamith's journal repeatedly overturns accepted belief. Knowledge has been lost through purges, institutional decay, and self-interest, so "truth" becomes something characters must excavate.

Power as service or entitlement

The original Clans were organized around service; their descendants treat ability and lineage as claims to rule. The novel asks what power is for.

Identity & belonging

Kaval wants a family name. Sarhah hides being a Mal. Azil performs identity through dress and court manner. Again and again, the book contrasts assigned identity with chosen loyalty.

Prejudice & personhood

Mals are treated as lesser beings, servants, threats, or targets. Kaval's relationship with Sarhah forces him to confront a hatred he has carried since childhood.

Prophecy, faith & free will

Evelet sees more than the people around her, but foresight does not erase the moral cost of her choices. The tension is not simply faith versus doubt, but trust without complete information.

MOTIFS TO TRACK

triangles - color spectrum - hunger/feeding - clothing & appearance - journals/books - light/dark - blood - thresholds & hidden passages

Discussion Questions I

1. Azil uses humor, fashion, and theatricality even when he is frightened. When does performance protect him, and when does it keep him from confronting reality?
 2. Kaval begins by searching faces for a parent. How does his idea of “family” change as the novel progresses?
 3. Sarhah is capable, independent, and deeply connected to mage creatures, yet much of society would define her first as a Mal. Which scenes most effectively challenge that definition?
 4. Azil admits he benefited from the Sustenance his father withheld from Sarhah and their mother, even though he did not know it at the time. What responsibility, if any, does a person have for advantages received unknowingly?
 5. Kaval repeatedly worries that his power makes him a killer. How much of his identity should be based on what his power has done, and how much on what he chooses to do next?
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6. Evelet often asks others to trust what they cannot yet understand. At what point did your own trust in her rise or fall?
 7. Sven can be charming, brave, prejudiced, and shaped by his father’s culture all at once. How does the novel complicate the line between antagonist and ally?
 8. When Kaval learns Sarhah is a Mal, he admits his prejudice but says she is still herself. Is recognition enough, or what further change would genuine acceptance require?
 9. Which relationship changes the most over the course of the book: Azil/Sarhah, Kaval/Sarhah, Azil/Evelet, or Azil/Jamith? Defend your choice.
 10. If you had to choose one character as the moral center of the novel, who would it be – or is the point that no one character can fill that role?

Discussion Questions II

1. Sustenance is both food and power. How does tying survival to magical access change the ethics of wealth and class in this world?
 2. The Orphan's Quarter treats "extra" children as a population problem to be managed. What does Kaval's upbringing reveal about the society's definition of human worth?
 3. Jamith learns that the Clans began as groups devoted to service and became hereditary nobility. What mechanisms of institutional drift can you see in the novel?
 4. What is the effect of beginning many chapters with Jamith's journal rather than revealing the historical mysteries only through the main characters?
 5. The story contains faith, heresy, prophecy, religious ritual, and destroyed records. Which is portrayed as more dangerous: doubt, certainty, or the desire to control what others may believe?
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6. Mage creatures often behave with more loyalty and dignity than human institutions. What does the contrast suggest about civilization and "monstrosity"?
 7. Evelet says trifecta mirrors life. Which major events in the novel resemble sacrifices, feints, surrounding maneuvers, or delayed victories on a game board?
 8. Brehman can use power without the normal rules of Sustenance. Why is a "cheater" in a magic system especially threatening to characters whose society depends on those rules?
 9. The phrase "What now is bound must be undone" first appears as a riddle and later becomes a program for changing the world. What kinds of binding does the novel ask to be undone?
 10. Does the book ultimately argue that broken systems should be reformed, dismantled, or destroyed? Does the ending clarify that answer or make it harder?

The Ending Debate

The choice that changes everything

Using the three royal gems releases the Light Aspects into vast vessels. What follows is not a clean rescue: the great beings destroy the three Keeps and much of the surrounding land. Evelet argues that a terrible purification is necessary to preserve a remnant of humanity from even worse destruction.

Case for Evelet

She sees farther than the others, knows the Ether Aspects seek total destruction, and chooses what she believes is the only path that leaves humanity alive. Her metaphor is surgical: remove the diseased limb to save the body.

Case against Evelet

Her foresight gives her more information, not automatic moral authority. She withholds key facts, uses people as pieces in a plan, and permits mass death without meaningful consent from those who bear the cost.

1. Is Evelet making a tragic lesser-evil choice, or rationalizing an atrocity?
2. Azil witnesses the destruction through the Aspect and repeatedly begs for mercy. Why is it important that the book gives the catastrophe an internal witness rather than presenting it from a distance?
3. If the Aspects spare some people but destroy the Clans as institutions, does that change the moral calculation?
4. Who bears responsibility for the catastrophe: Evelet, the Aspects, Kaval, the rulers who built the system, or no single actor?
5. Kaval saves Sarhah after fearing his power can only destroy. How does that healing change the meaning of his earlier violence?
6. At the end, Azil cannot change the past but believes he may shape the future. Is that hope, duty, guilt, or all three?
7. Would you have consumed all three gems if you were Kaval and believed refusing might also kill thousands?
8. What emotion did the ending leave strongest: horror, hope, anger, relief, curiosity, or something else?

CHOOSE ONE - OR USE THEM ALL

Book Club Activities

1. The Trifecta Choice

Give each person three tokens.

Spend them on the values you think matter most for rebuilding the world: truth, mercy, order, freedom, survival, equality, faith, knowledge, loyalty, power.

Compare the group's "board." What had to be sacrificed?

2. Spectrum of Power

Assign yourself one of the three primary powers: Azure strength, Dorian motion, or Scarlet sight.

Then answer: what would you use it for first? What temptation would be hardest to resist? What limit would society need to place on it?

3. Rewrite the Clan Charter

Jamith discovers the Clans began as service organizations. Draft five rules for a restored Clan system that would prevent hereditary privilege, resource hoarding, and persecution from returning.

4. The Hunger Metaphor

On slips of paper, write non-magical "hungers" that drive people: status, belonging, certainty, comfort, recognition, control, knowledge, love, safety. Sort them into needs, desires, and dangerous dependencies. Debate the gray areas.

5. One line, four meanings

"What now is bound must be undone, and only then is victory won."

Interpret the riddle four ways: politically, spiritually, biologically, and personally for one character. Which interpretation best fits the ending?

Facilitator Guide



The facilitator's job

You do not need to explain the lore or settle every moral question. Your best role is to keep returning the conversation to the questions, explore the specific consequences, and the novel's own competing interpretations.

0-10

First impressions

Favorite character, strongest image, biggest surprise.

10-30

Character choices

Use Questions 1, 4, 6, 8, and 10 from page 7.

30-50

World & ideas

Use Questions 1, 3, 5, 7, and 10 from page 8.

50-65

Ending debate

Split the room: defend Evelet / challenge Evelet. Then switch sides.

65-75

Close

Choose one activity or make sequel predictions.



If the room goes quiet

Ask for a scene, not an opinion.

- "Which moment made you think that?"
- "Who would disagree with that reading?"
- "What did the character know at the time?"
- "What changed after that?"



If the room gets stuck on lore

Return to function.

Instead of "How exactly does this rule work?" ask "What does this rule force the character to risk?"
The magic system matters most when it changes power, dependence, and choice.



Closing question

What should the survivors preserve from the old world – and what should they deliberately refuse to rebuild?

Quick Discussion Sheet

1. Which character changed your opinion of them the most?

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2. What does the Hunger symbolize beyond magical need?

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3. Is Kaval defined more by his unknown past or by his choices in the present?

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4. What is Azil hiding behind humor and fashion?

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5. When does Evelet deserve trust, and when does she ask for too much?

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6. What does Sarhah reveal about the society's definition of "human"?

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7. Why does Jamith's historical research matter to the adventure plot?

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8. Which institution in the novel is most in need of reform?

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9. What does trifecta teach us about the story's view of strategy and sacrifice?

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10. Was the destruction at the end necessary?

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11. Who should be held responsible for the Penultimate Age?

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12. What unresolved question most makes you want the next book?

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ONE SENTENCE TO TAKE HOME:

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After the Last Page

The epilogue turns the mystery forward

Azil reaches the Twilight Library, finds Jamith's journal, and discovers writing in an unfamiliar purple script.

The Golden Aspect recognizes it as the work of an Ether Aspect. Azil concludes that Jamith may now be a vessel too – transforming the search for his friend into the next stage of the larger conflict.

Jamith

Where is he, and how much of him remains if an Ether Aspect is using him as a vessel?

Kaval's father

Evelet tells Kaval that Lord Azura is not his true father – but that he has already seen the man. Who fits the clues?

The Ether Aspects

What do the darker Aspects want, and why do they believe reunion or destruction is preferable?

The Mind of Rahim

Can the surviving look teach the group how to divide Earthmen and Ethermen – and end the cycle that creates Mals?

The new world

With the Keeps gone and Sustenance trade shattered, who gets to define law, faith, identity, and resource access now?

Azil's vow

He leaves the Library determined to find Jamith. How will his new swiftness change him – and what might it tempt him to become?

Final prediction: Write down one thing you think the next book will reveal about Rahim, one thing about Kaval, and one thing about Jamith. Seal the predictions and revisit them after the sequel.