

## READING GUIDE:

# Peter Counter's *Be Scared of Everything: Horror Essays*

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Dear readers,

Thank you for choosing to read *Be Scared of Everything*. I'm genuinely heartened that you want to spend your energy and time considering and discussing these 29 horror essays. The whole book is built on the premise that there is great personal value in the contemplation of entertainment and literature, especially the spooky stuff.

This collection was composed in the spirit of an album, with themes, motifs, and a deliberate sense of pacing. Each essay stands on its own as an individual and complete piece of writing, but when read in sequence, they all resonate with and inform one another. I won't ruin your fun by laying out all the byzantine machinations here, lest I accidentally summon a demon or bring the cat back from the dead or do something equally grim, but I will offer some guidance on the core ideas that unite the essays.

First, there is the idea of empathy as the engine of horror. There are some gruesome descriptions in this book of real and fictional pain. Don't close your eyes for these parts. You are safe. The pain described in the book happened in the past, and no matter what the future holds, the present moment is for cherishing your own vitality. Horror helps us do that by leading us to explore and experience corners of life we rarely acknowledge.

Second, there is a balance in this book between rational and mystical points of view. If you're an avid reader, you're likely open to many ideas and paradigms. That's an attitude that will help you engage with these essays. You don't have to believe in the occult, Satan, ghosts, or aliens to find value here, but if you can manage a state of half-belief, entertaining what Agent Mulder from *The X-Files* calls "alternative realities," then I think you'll be on track to really get your empathy engine roaring.

Finally, *Be Scared of Everything* is hybrid non-fiction, combining narrative memoir and criticism. My hope is that, in reading these horror essays, you will be able to engage with scary books, films, shows, and games with a new layer of appreciation. If you love horror already, I hope you find something new here to explore. If horror isn't your favourite genre, and your terrible book club is dragging you into the darkness with this selection, I hope you can come to find value in the macabre. This book, after all, is not a morbid rumination, but a celebration of life, and I'm overjoyed you'll be revelling with me.

Sincerely,  
Peter Counter

