

Super

Book Club Discussion Guide



By Aaron Dietz

DISCUSSION

Examination of Documentation

BCL-01



Pike County Super Services Div.

The ten levels of the book each have themes that represent the most important skill or characteristic to master at each level of a Superhero's career. Did you agree with the order of these skills/characteristics, or would you have put them in a different order? (For example, is "Vigilance" important to master before "Virtue"?)

Praxis is the sole Level X Superhero mentioned in Super, though this Superhero demonstrates no definite super powers (unless you include uncanny accuracy with a rubber band, perhaps, or a remarkable ability to come up with a working strategy on the spot). Do you think Praxis has super powers? Is Praxis invulnerable, and if so, in what sense?

Praxis's gender is not specified in the book. Did you picture Praxis as a male or a female (or neither)? What led you to picture Praxis one way or the other / neither?

How did you interact with Super? Did you fill out the forms? Did you answer the quiz questions at the ends of the chapters or did you just read them, or skip them altogether? Did you find the online versions of the quizzes and fill them out, or look at other people's online answers?

In the Super universe, Superheroes are government-authorized entities. Superhero behavior is limited by legislation (referred to in Document W), and in general Superheroes are beholden to authority as is subtly noted throughout the book (and not so subtly noted in Document C). What does the book ultimately say about authority and its place? Is it necessary? Do you think it is portrayed as a positive thing, a necessary evil, or something else?

How does Lage's Civilized Foundation contribute to the authority theme? Was this villain deserving of having the final word in the book on authority?

Why do you think Jonesy, a civilian, got the final words of the novel (not counting the final psychological assessment)?

As the book progresses, the documents generally become more complex in structure and plot. The documents also generally begin as simple presentations of fiction and eventually develop a resemblance to actual documents from real life. What was the author's intention behind this arc in structure?

ACTIVITIES

Pop Quiz

Choose one of the psychological assessments from the book to discuss. Give everyone a chance to answer the quiz questions, and then discuss your answers.

Word Find

Open the book to Document O and engage in a timed contest to see who can find the most words on either page of Jerboa's word find puzzle. VARIATIONS: Don't give credit for words that read directly horizontally left-to-right. Allow bonus points for dirty words. TIP: For those that have already filled in the word find puzzle, print out a fresh copy of those pages from aarondietz.us (those pages will be posted on March 17 and 18).

Guessing Game

Select one member of your group to answer the multiple choice questions in one of the psychological assessments. Before that person reveals each answer, have everyone guess which answer they chose. Take turns being the one who answers. The one with the most correct guesses wins the title of "Super Powered Mind Reader."

"He was the butterfly that flapped its wings; no matter which way he flapped them, the world kept blowing up."

-Apostolos

VISUALIZATION

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Use the following chart to track the character and the documents they appear in.

	Jake Bonson	Irma Sabo / Protea	Robert Good / Alabaster Wight	Tamara	Sera Phares / Asana	Carver / Moonclaw
A	X					
B		X				
C		X		X		
D					X	
E	X	X	X	X		
F		X	X			X
G						X
H			X	X	X	
I					X	
J						
K					X	
L					X	
M			X			
N			X			
O						
P	X					
Q		X		X		
R		X		X		
S		X	X			X
T	X					
U	X	X				
V	X					
W	X	X	X	X	X	
X	X	X	X	X	X	X

THE CHARACTERS

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Discuss the story arcs of the following characters in the book.

Jake Bonson

Jake doesn't have super powers but he does have a calculating mind of action. He rejects help from Robert who wants to get him a Superhero tryout, and ends up going back to school to study statistics and philosophy. His gift for probability manipulation allows him to create the Great Monkey Project. Then, he operates Super Courier, Inc., and ultimately helps Lage create The Civilized Foundation.

"Perhaps I'll write a dissertation on tedium." -Jake Bonson

Irma Sabo / Protea

Losing conscious control of her powers leaves her an orphan child. Luckily, she's rescued by Pulmo and is eventually forced to sign up as a Superhero. However, within a short period of time she becomes an active recruiter to the cause and an apt trainer of new talent. Toward the end of the book, the stress of the job causes her to question why she does it, so she quits, and after a brief time working for Jake Bonson at the Great Monkey Project, she tries and fails to get a job far, far away (China), and eventually resigns herself to being a Superhero again (at least she is with friends, there).

"He wasn't trouble when I found him. Of course, he was sleeping at the time." -Protea

Robert Good / Alabaster Wight

Robert is recruited by Irma and learns the ropes quickly under Auslander. He is tormented by unrequited relationships and a tendency to do nothing about them. He wants very much to do good but his negative attitude (and maybe a bit of bad luck, too) prevents him from becoming the quick-acting Superhero he wishes to be. His sense of duty as well as his negative attitude also results in overlooking a potential love interest in Jerboa.

"I've become stupid from the drinking. And I'm the only one who can tell." -Alabaster Wight

Tamara

Tamara's friendship and ability to see the future helps provide Irma with a sense of stability. Tamara herself is much less inhibited, perhaps because her super power enables her to see the consequences of her actions before she does something risky. Her super power also is a source of bitterness, however, since she sees the negative actions people will take before they take them. Toward the end of the book, her power expands until she sees what she thinks is the end of the universe. This makes it hard for her to think anything really matters, so she retires and has an occasional lunch with Irma.

"On short notice, people must sometimes be thrown to the ground in order to save them (if you are a Superhero)."
-an EMT

Sera Phares / Asana

Sera falls in love with Nelson, who shrinks into oblivion. Then she falls in love with Edward, who is killed during a contract job near Diamond City. Her friendship with the fiercely loyal Garrote is perhaps the only grounding force in her life. Still, she continues to work hard and is perhaps the most skilled Superhero at Pike County. She is a master of acrobatics, marksmanship, and many other skills as a complement to her healing powers. Sera's hard work pays off in a promotion to an acting-Level X position in a very tough county.

"That beam collapsed on his head. Fortunately he has a thick skull." -Asana

Carver / Moonclaw

Carver begins the book with a secret identity and the Superhero name Moonclaw. Even though he's one of the most powerful Superheroes on staff, he is still unable to handle the double life and hates keeping secrets from his love interest, Jonesy. Hence, he discards the secret identity and Superhero name and becomes simply Carver. Toward the end of the book, he and Jonesy are firmly entrenched in a positive relationship.

"It's hard loving a Superhero. You have to be strong in ways that you don't even think are possible." -Jonesy

THE LEVELS

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Level I: Might

Documents A and B are meant to be origin stories for the characters Jake and Irma. Are there parallels between the supposed villains that they face? And who (or what) do you think their villains are?

Level II: Beauty

Nelson's super power is the ability to tell when people are lying. How do you think this ability affects his personal relationships with his Superhero friends, Irma, Tamara, and Pulmo? How do you think it affects his relationship with Asana, his love interest?

Level III: Athleticism

Irma (a.k.a. Protea) has transformed from a frightened child with out-of-control telekinesis (in Document B) to an active Superhero recruiter (in Document E) and trainer (in Document F). However, there are several clues in Level III that suggest she is still clinging to any form of stability she can get her hands on. Can you find some of them?

Level IV: Courage

In Level IV, newest Superhero trainees Carver (a.k.a. Moonclaw) and Robert (a.k.a. Alabaster Wight) both deal with matters of the heart. They both enter Level IV's chapter not being entirely honest about their passions. Which of them is better off at the end of Level IV?

Level V: Trustworthiness

The time-traveler Apostolos gives Auslander a warning not to go on the contract job to Diamond City. He goes anyway, and doesn't survive. If a time-traveler claiming to be your friend told you not to do something, would you listen?

Level VI: Vigilance

Garrote's style of vigilance takes the form of personally transporting Asana home after the botched contract job at Diamond City and telling her seemingly senseless jokes to keep her mind off the tragic loss of her boyfriend and co-workers. Maya's style of vigilance means secretly following Robert home and then waiting ten months to act. Which form of vigilance is the most flattering? The most desired?

Level VII: Virtue

Robert (a.k.a. Alabaster Wight) and Jerboa are Superheroes who cope with stress in different ways. Robert drinks and writes in his journal. Jerboa expresses her frustration, but only when it's cloaked in a secret code. Which of these Superheroes are most likely to crack under the stress?

Level VIII: Intelligence

How well do Documents P, Q, and R act as intelligence tests? And is it an appropriate correlation that the primary characters in these documents are expressing negativity?

Level IX: Leadership

Documents S, T, U, and V require a fair amount of reader-interpretation for them to make reasonable sense. Why were these structures chosen for this level, which has a theme of Leadership? What might you conclude about the author's perception of leadership based on these documents?

Level X: Invulnerability

This level is mostly comprised of pieces of the story told from the perspective of civilians or villains, instead of Superheroes. What was the author's intention in concluding the book by telling the final Superhero story from the eyes of "others"?

NOTES AND QUESTIONS

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What are the Superhero names of other members of your group?

What Level of Super caused the most discussion and why?

Who was your favorite character and why?

What did you dislike about Super?

What did you like about Super?

Other notes:

“Seriously? A rubber band? You’re going to fight me with a rubber band?” -Mike Barovich



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