

Hazy Retina (a.k.a. Focus) is the leader of The OK Team, a group of Level D Third Grade heroes, who guard the streets of Melbourne from super villains and bad guys but something is going horribly wrong. The bad guys seem to be getting stronger and it's not because they're naturally improving! Word on the street is that they have a new secret weapon – STOMP: Serum That Overly Magnifies Powers – and they're not afraid to use it.

Can our hero and his not so experienced team of Superheroes; Logi-Gal, Cannonball, Switchy, Torch & The Gamer defeat these artificially enhanced Supervillains? Or will Bushranger and his gang have their wicked way, destroying the Hero community and taking over Melbourne for their own evil purposes. After falling for a Bushranger trick and agreeing to a Knighthood Pact, only Focus stands between good and evil. How will our Third Grade Hero get out of this scrape?

This was a great book, the second in a series, aimed at Grades 5-7. It's a fast moving, rollercoaster of a Superhero adventure and best of all, its set in Melbourne. Melbournian kids will recognise the locations and there are some great illustrations which combine street photography with comic book illustrations – very clever. There's also a fun website to accompany the series. I look forward to the next instalment.

Debbie Williams, Mountain District Christian School, VIC

Amazing adventures, exciting escapades and hilarious hi-jinks, that's *Better Than OK*. A sequel to *The OK Team*, Nick Place's latest creative, laugh-out-loud funny book can be enjoyed as a stand-alone title, suitable as a teacher read-aloud in upper primary classrooms, or borrowed by primary and secondary students alike from the school library collection. Readers will be entertained by the fantastic feats of the 'new look', now Level D Heroes: Hazy Retina (aka Focus), Cannonball, Torch and Logi-Gal, the newest member of The OK Team Superhero Squad. Switchy, upgraded to Level C Hero status, has been sent to the Advanced Hero Training Academy for extra tuition, and The G★rl-Stars, led by Cannonball's sister, Tomorrow Girl, are the 'newbie' twelve year old singing and dancing, 'wannabe' Heroes who have joined the scene. Golden Boy and Southern Cross also make a re-appearance as the OK Team battles with 'baddies' galore, initially in the guise of The Trolley King and The Hardware Gang, then challenging Bushranger and his Crew: SwoopSwoop, Morphul (a shape-shifter), Blink, Directo and Monkey 2.0.

That Bushranger is an active Category 2 Villain, he and his gang now powered to at least Category 6 status by a new secret weapon, the illegal magic potion STOMP (Serum That Overly Magnifies Powers), makes for fast and furious combat between our Heroes and the Villains. Moreover, Hazy's 'knuckle-headed', unwitting agreement to the Knight-Hood Pact puts the ill-fated OK Team under even more pressure, as Hazy has committed to a single-handed defeat of Bushranger.

Place's spoof-like writing is alive with up-to-the minute cultural references and clever humour, interwoven in a tale which can be read on several levels. Younger readers will delight in visualising the range of zany characters and in the insults bandied around as they bicker. Older readers will appreciate the more sophisticated satirical inclusion of many Hero-related concepts – Hero Anonymous meetings, the Hero TV Channel 78737, Hero Skype and Hero Ball – as part of Place's play on 'all things heroic'. They will also 'pick up on' the Prime Minister's Canberra residence, The Lodge, being used as the Super Secret Villain Holding Facility, Cannonball now having an agent, Kyle Smythe-Davies, to get him more press, and the possibility that Cannonball may be de-caped for a time, after a too-hard hit on a Hardware Gang member.

Beyond the team's heroic blunders, this clever intertwining of the fantastic and the real world is brilliant, the Melbourne central city and suburban setting, authentic. Issues of family dynamics are introduced, Hazy's parents fighting more, his father still 'hung up' on Hazy's 'freak factor'. Identity, acceptance and self esteem issues are explored through Place's premise that even 'freaks' possess something 'cape-worthy', to make them into a Hero, beyond the ordinary and everyday. Hazy can't possibly imagine life as a Non-Hero because his life has been changed so much with Superhero status. He can't be beaten, hence his resolve to 'stand firm' and honour his obligations with a 'genuine, undisputable win'. Another

'big issue' is addressed through Golden Boy's thoughts regarding being a hero with style and fighting fair, describing STOMP as a 'distasteful cheat's poison'. Akin to zero tolerance of performance-enhancing drugs in today's sporting world, this is indeed a timely parallel crafted within the story. A further extension of the Good versus Evil theme has Logi-Gal praised for her intelligent approach to tactics in the impending battle.

From the bright and colourful cover to the action-packed, engaging text, interspersed with Hero Swap Cards, photos, mock news reports and excerpts from *The Daily Cape*, this inventive, easy-to-read fantasy adventure will appeal to readers aged 11-13, for whom the theme of Superheroes is immensely popular, especially when presented in such a weird and wacky style, to fire the imagination in a flight of fancy.

Alison Cassell, QLD