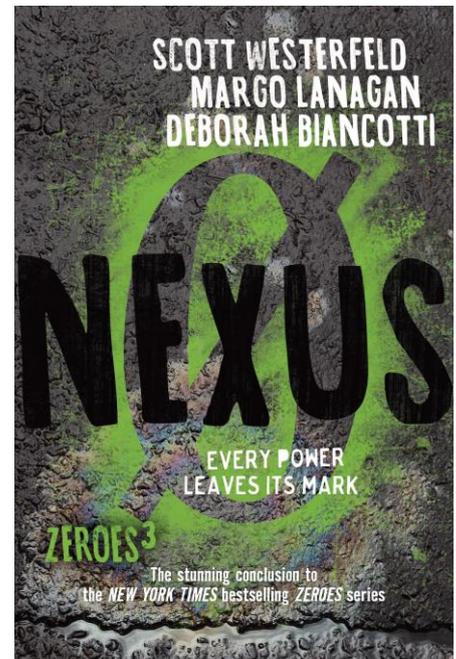


Nexus: Zeroes 3

By Scott Westerfeld, Margo Lanagan and Deborah Biancotti

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Recommended for readers aged 14 yrs and older



Summary

A brilliant, action-packed conclusion to the superb Zeroes series.

After defeating Swarm in a breathtaking stand-off, Nate has been arrested for his murder. In prison and isolated, he can't use his powers of influence at all. Flicker, Chizara, Kelsie and Ethan are on the run and in hiding from the FBI who believe the Cambria Five are domestic terrorists. And Agent Phan and the FBI have a secret weapon up their sleeve—a teenager with a superpower that the Zeroes haven't encountered yet.

Meanwhile, Sonia Sonic and her growing band of weird-hunters are tracking inexplicable events across the country—and their investigations lead them to New Orleans during Mardi Gras, where the celebrating crowds promise enormous power to anyone who can channel it. Time is running out for the Zeroes, but they must learn to trust each other again and combine their powers for good—to avert the looming disaster.

Not only does Nexus move at a cracking pace, with more chase scenes, power-play and general mayhem than the previous two books, it also nails the power-flipping phenomena of Swarm firmly into place and gives the Zeroes bigger crowds and yet grander-scale stakes to work with. It also introduces more intriguing types of powers, reprises some much-loved (and much-feared) characters from *Swarm*, and brings to a satisfying conclusion the personal story arcs of each of the six main characters.

The Zeroes series

The Zeroes series is about six Californian teenagers with powers that set them apart. Just don't call them heroes.

Zeroes, Swarm and Nexus are for teenaged readers who feel good about their potential in the world, as well as readers who are wondering what they can contribute. Superpowered teenagerhood is both more and less than it's cracked up to be for the Zeroes—anyone who's felt they must be a little odd or freaky, or who's wished they could be more magical or heroic, will find something to identify with in this culturally diverse group of characters.

The action is fast and furious and has high stakes, often life-or-death consequences. These stakes get raised throughout each book.

And the delivery is very funny!

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Themes of the series

Zeroes: Zeroes 1

- self-discovery; the sense of wonder when confronted by the magical-seeming nature of your own actions is an important element of the series;
- nurturing your own talents and gifts, or finding other people and situations that can nurture them with you;
- how you use your power, whether for good or evil, or for selfish or more altruistic purposes, is a major question throughout the series, as is how you deal with the way other people are affected by your actions;
- questions about belonging—belonging to society, belonging within your family, being part of (or not) a group of people with similar talents, the different ways you commit to or withdraw from the group, depending on your circumstances.

Swarm: Zeroes 2

Swarm continues to explore the themes of personal growth, the morally responsible use of an exciting power, and finding your place in the world. It adds into the mix:

- love, and the way it affects your judgment and can make self-control difficult. This is a significant thread running through this second book in the trilogy;
- the Zeroes must face the fact that, while they always knew their powers were a mixed blessing, there are some people who are using their special talents in truly malign ways. They all have to sort out their own attitudes and responsibilities in relation to those people;
- the destructiveness of self-doubt, the threat of failure, the danger of temptation;
- the place of family;
- the sacrifice of the self.

Nexus: Zeroes 3

The final book in the series, *Nexus* steps up the moral stress of being accountable for your super-powered actions. At least two of the characters must face the fact that some of their decisions are literally between life and death—of themselves and/or someone else in their immediate vicinity and at their mercy.

The main themes are:

- the importance of friends;
- the perils of power and the need to choose sides;
- how to form a collective, and make sure it's led responsibly and guided by well-thought-out aims that will ensure the best possible outcome for the greatest possible number of people, both within and beyond the group;
- how you band together to oppose what you perceive to be the wrong-headed machinations of other powerful groups.



Classroom discussion questions and activities

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of telling a story through six different points of view?
- Research the city of New Orleans and come up with some different ideas for why you think the authors chose this particular U.S. city as a backdrop for *Nexus*.
- Which Zero, in your opinion, has changed the most by the end of *Nexus*? Map out the key scenes throughout the novel that showed this change in progress.
 - *Extension question:* the series began with Crash, Nate and Flicker angry with Scam for hurtful things he/the voice said about each of them. How has Scam's superpower turned a full circle by the end of *Nexus*? Have any of the other Zeroes' powers turned full circle, too?
- Are Crash and Mob justified in killing Piper and Beau with their superpowers? Debate the concept, 'the end justifies the means' in relation to the final battle scene at the Mardi Gras festival.
- Watch this ABC News (U.S.) video about superheroes and answer the following questions: <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2013/06/why-are-we-obsessed-with-superheroes/>
 - Do you think the Zeroes 'superheroes' have morphed to fit the social needs of 2017? Use examples from the book to illustrate your answer.
 - If Superman was created to deal with the rise of Nazism, and Batman with the war in Vietnam, are there any contemporary political movements you can think of that might be linked to the superpowers on display in *Nexus*?
- Both *Swarm* and *Nexus* introduced characters with new and different superpowers to those possessed by the Zeroes.
 - Which of ALL the superpowers described in the three books would you most desire, and why?
- Each of the superpowers in the series have a negative side. For instance, Kelsie/Mob can control the mood of a crowd to keep it happy or turn it into a murderous pack.
 - What is the potential negative side to the superpower you chose? Try turning this question around and come up with the superpower you would least want, and explain your reason for choosing it.
- According to Margo Lanagan, one of the three authors of *Nexus*, the main theme of the novel is, 'how you form a collective, and make sure it's led responsibly... [to] ensure the best possible outcome for the greatest possible number of people, both within and beyond the group.'
 - Explain, in your own words what you think she meant by this statement.
 - How well do you think this theme is explored in the novel?
- '...nobody was going to lie for...three months, ten days, and sixteen hours...But those months of the unvarnished truth would make everyone think a little harder before they rained bull@#\$t on the world again.' (page 417)
 - Divide your class into two groups to argue for and against the notion that a dose of Verity's superpower would make the world a better place.

About the authors...



The authors

Scott Westerfeld is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the *Uglies* and *Leviathan* trilogies. His novel *So Yesterday* won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award. His latest solo work is the graphic novel *Spill Zone*. Margo Lanagan has won four World Fantasy Awards for her short stories and for her novels *Tender Morsels* and *Sea Hearts*. Her work has also been shortlisted in the Hugo and Nebula awards and longlisted in the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and for the Carnegie Medal. Deborah Biancotti has published two short story collections. Her Aurealis-shortlisted 'Bad Power' explored ordinary people discovering their superpowers. All three authors live in Sydney, where they are part of the overlapping communities of writers of genre and young adult fiction.



Margo and Deb on collaborative writing

Zeroes developed from an idea Scott had and from our mutual interest in TV writing. It is about six characters with social superpowers, so first we worked them out and then we determined which of the six characters we would each write.

For Book 1, we met weekly at a pub to talk things through: we'd plan a chapter or two at a time, bring those drafts back to the group and dissect them. Eventually we discovered the best thing to do was go away for a weekend or week, plan as much of the book as we could (including which character would be the point of view character for that event, what else would happen in that chapter, etc.) then draft an entire sequence of manuscript to share. It helped with continuity as well as character development.

For Books 2 and 3, we made a much more watertight plan—which is a whole lot easier, once you know who your characters are. (Who knew?) We also managed to get away a couple of times for major plotting meetings. We've been to a beach, the Blue Mountains and once to a swanky hotel in Phoenix, Arizona! Getting away from the usual distractions that way is great. And the intensity around the plotting table is all-consuming—when we're in the flow of it, keeping notes, throwing out ideas as quick as we think of them, building on each other's suggestions, talking what must seem like another language to anyone listening, the world could pretty much end around us and we wouldn't notice. Seriously, those plotting meetings are the funnest part of collaborating.

Sharing the writing of a single book with two other authors turned out to be (a) less riven with conflict and (b) more fun than we envisaged. We disagree on a lot of things, but not on the main purpose, thrust and nature of the series. We seem to work out our disagreements quite well.

Having Scott as our Showrunner means that we get all the benefits of writing by committee but without all the squabbling, and with an overriding vision keeping the whole thing from falling apart. And being accountable to two other writers, as well as being assisted/inspired by what they're producing, means you're much less likely to procrastinate or sit around stewing in self-doubt (a favourite occupation of writers).

Scott writes his chapters last and kind of slots them into the manuscript as he edits ours. Overall, *Zeroes* works because the planning works, and because we have one person doing the editing/leading. Margo and Deb get to pitch ideas, but ultimately Scott is in charge of the overall vision for the book. Scott, it must be said, has a little bit of a Glorious Leader complex. No, admit it, Scott, you do.