

# Title: The Vitality Code

## Author: Michael Oehley

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### Synopsis

Daren Sáner lives on the Starship *Súperia*. Daren is half-human, half-clone and is special because he possesses four powers, while most people only have one. Daren is an adventurous young man. He and his friends Sela and Boron decide to steal the ship's space-pods and go to investigate the strange orbs that are hurtling towards them. It all seems like harmless fun until the three friends are infected with a deadly plague that puts them all into comas and threatens the survival of everyone on the *Súperia*. Daren alone wakes up from the coma. For some reason he is immune. The doctors on board the ship use Daren to experiment on in the hope of finding a cure.

However, Daren knows better than the doctors. Using the Jewel of *Súperia*, Daren travels back in time to his home planet Óshéanús and searches for answers. When Daren first time-travelled, three of the Unparalleled (wonders of the world) helped him, so he travels to the two closest to Fenidor – West Fort and the Stones of Time. At the Stones of Time he discovers a poem written in runes. The poem suggests that the answer to Daren's problem is The Code of Vitality.

In the past war threatens the medieval *Súperiae* coast and the fragile empire looks set to fall. Daren gathers a group around him to ensure that there are eight to stand at Western Wall. But being a leader is hard. He needs to earn the respect and trust of his companions. If Daren can't save his past then there is no hope for the future. Time is running out and he must unlock the Vitality Code.

### Text Type

The Vitality Code is the second book in the series of Science Fiction/Fantasy adventures involving Daren Sáner written by New Zealand author Michael Oehley. Suitable for readers of both genders aged 10+, the novel is fast-paced and action-packed enough to keep even the most reluctant readers engaged.

Set in outer space and on the planet Óshéanús, the author ingeniously plots a story that allows readers to make the leap of imagination required to become engrossed in a world where people travel the world in space ships, time travel is a reality and everyone is born with a special power.

The main protagonist Daren is a credible and likeable character because he possesses courage and humility. Through his adventures he learns what it means to be a leader and the effect that his decisions can have on others. Despite being the only one who can handle the Sword of *Súperia*, Daren can't achieve success without the other seven members of his group. All of the characters are well-developed and the females are shown to be strong, intelligent and innovative.

Themes include courage, friendship, good versus evil, time travel, the long lasting affect that decisions made can have on the future and the idea of the quest.

## Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 9–23), Chapters 2–8 (pp. 25–114), Chapters 9–16 (pp. 115–210) and Chapters 17–30 (pp. 211–390). Each of the Chapters is named and provides the reader with a brief overview of the content of that Chapter.

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Many ideas and concepts such as the social structure on board *Súperia* and the concept of time travel will require further explanation and discussion.

Have students describe the setting of the story. Make sure they understand the world on board *Súperia* and in ancient Óshéanús and the difficulties faced by the citizens of these worlds. Students should identify elements that help categorise the novel as Science Fiction/Fantasy. Encourage students to study the main characters and track their development throughout the story. Students should make predictions about the story and be able to identify important themes and conflicts.

## Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What kind of novel do you think this is? What do you expect from novels of this genre?
- What do you think the Vitality Code might be?
- Who is the main character in the story? How do you think he might be able to save his past and future?

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 9–23) aloud. Students follow along in their books.

## Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 9–23)

- Where is the story set?
- In what way is Daren different to the other children aboard *Súperia*?
- Who are Daren's two most loyal friends?
- Why is everyone so interested in the fight between Manix and Boron? Who is victorious?
- What does Alana reveal to Sela, Garey, Darren and Boron in the virtual-reality chamber? What decision is made about the orbs by the Starship council?
- What does Sela suggest that the group do before the orbs are destroyed? How does Daren convince Alana to help them with their plan?

## Discussion

- Describe life on board *Súperia*.
- What do we find out about Daren and his life in this Chapter? What do you think his four elemental powers might be? Why do you think he is forbidden to use them?

- What do you think the small stone lying in Daren's cupboard might be?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 2–8 (pp. 25–114) independently before the next shared sessions

## Comprehension Chapters 2–8 (pp. 25–114)

- What is special about the Jewel of Súperia? Why isn't the jewel working at the moment?
- How did Daren win the right to keep his powers?
- Why does Daren miss his past life on Óshéanús so much?
- Who does Sela suggest to Daren that he talks to about the jewel? Why is Daren reluctant to do this?
- Who is Daren's father? What does he do?
- Why does Daren decide not to tell his father the truth about the jewel? How does Sela react to this news?
- How does Alana get the others into the space-pod launching pad? How does the group plan to stay in contact with each other while they are flying in the space-pods? How does Daren feel when he flies into space?
- What do the orbs look like? Why does Daren find them unnerving?
- What comes out of the nearest orb? What happens to the three pods before they are retrieved by Súperia?
- What pact do Daren, Sela and Boron make before they are spoken to by the military officers?
- How does Daren feel when he realises that the jewel has evaded detection?
- How does the Military Leader know that the trio have been infected? Where are they taken to? Why is it important that they are kept in quarantine?
- What is an invirp?
- What does Doctor Ómen want to use on the sick children? How does he convince their parents to let him experiment on their children?
- What happens when Daren loses consciousness? Where and when does he wake up? What is his name? What does he know about his background? How does Daren feel when he realises that his powers still work?
- Who is Zúmenos? What is his power? Why are fights between Adarenas and Zúmenos common?

- Describe Lédok.
- Who is Axey? Why is it fitting that his power is Earth-Water?
- Who is Bub? What does he do?
- Why does Daren decide to explore the town of Fenidor? How does he feel when he realises that the caste system has been abolished?
- Who are the Ev-Énor? What are the Ev-Énor's base powers? Why have the Ev-Énor declared war on Fenidor? Why is Adarenas so surprised to hear Empress Kara's name?
- Why does Adarenas decide that he needs to talk to Aboroniad?
- How does Aboroniad react when Adarenas tells him he is from the future? Why does Adarenas think that Aboroniad has a lack of faith?
- What does Adarenas witness at the military camp? Why is Adarenas convinced that he is supposed to fight in the war? Where does he think he might find the answers to his questions?
- Why are the boys in the orphanage so convinced that Ev-Énor will be defeated? How do they react when Adarenas mentions Súperia the Magnificent?
- Why does Adarenas decide to consult the Stones of Time? What do we learn about the Stones of Time? Who does Adarenas meet there?
- How does Seladora react when Adarenas tells her that they share a life in the future? How does Adarenas form a connection with her?
- How does Seladora change when the Witch Mage appears? How does Adarenas convince the Witch Mage to help him? How does Seladora help Adarenas with the runes? What holds the answer within?
- Re-read the runes at the Stones of Time. What do you think the riddle means?
- Where does Daren wake up? Why does he feel guilty? How does Daren know that his cure has nothing to do with the serum?
- What decision is reached regarding the tests on Daren?
- Why does Daren get the impression that his parents know more about what's going on than they are saying? Who do they suggest that he talks to?
- How does Daren know that there is something he needs to do on the Starship before he returns to Adarenas' life?

## Discussion

- Describe the social structure on board *Súperia*. Why is Daren made fun of? In what way is Daren's father treated differently?

- If you had the ability to travel back in time where and when would you go to? Explain your answer.
- How does Fenidor differ from the Starship *Súperia*?
- Can you name another country that operates a caste system? Fenidor's caste system was based on what power you had. What are other caste systems based on?
- Use the internet to find out what runes are and why they were traditionally used.
- What do you think the poem means?

Students read Chapters 9–16 (pp. 115–210) independently before the next shared session.

### Comprehension Chapters 9–16 (pp. 115–210)

- How does Manix treat Daren at lessons? How does this make Daren feel? Why does he feel grateful to Alana and Garey?
- What new technology are Daren and his class mates introduced to during lessons? Why is Scientist Kúria so excited after she tests her invention on Daren, Alana and Garey? Why is Alana keen to have another go with the machine?
- What does Daren reveal to Alana and Daren before they go into the science laboratory to meet Scientist Kúria? Why does Daren admire Scientist Kúria?
- How does Alana propose to decode the runes? Why do you think that this plan fails?
- What does Daren figure out about the poem with Garey's help?
- Who are the eight people mentioned in the poem?
- How does Daren plan to take Alana and Garey back in time? How does Daren convince Alana to go along with the plan?
- How does Daren know that Alana and Garey have caught the plague? Where does he need to take them before they fall into comas?
- What powers do Alana and Garey have in Súperiae? What problem does their sudden appearance cause for Adarenas? What story does he concoct to tell Madam Mater?
- Who are the other five people that Adarenas need to convince to follow him?
- How does Adarenas know that war is imminent when he arrives back in Fenidor?
- Who does Garey make an instant connection with? What does Zúmenos threaten to tell Madam Mater? How does Adarenas convince Zúmenos not to speak to Madam Mater and to accompany him on his quest?
- What do the group plan to do to Aboroniad? Why does Adarenas change his mind at the last minute?

- What is the code that Súperiae soldiers fight under? What does Adarenas challenge Aboroniad to? How does he manage to succeed without using his powers?
- How does Aboroniad react after he is defeated in the dual? Who finally convinces him to join the quest?
- Describe the plan to kidnap Seladora. How does the group manage to avoid detection? What role does Alana play? How does Adarenas ensure that Seladora isn't frightened?
- Why is Seladora so grateful to Adarenas for saving her? What does she promise him?
- Describe what happens when the war begins.
- How does Seladora convince Zúmenos to follow Adarenas to West Fort?
- What terrible news does Vasa Valora give Daren about Alana and Garey when he wakes up in the medical research station?
- Why does the Council agree that Daren should remain in the research station?
- What does Daren see during his short tour of First Wing's science laboratories? What room does he find particularly disturbing? Why does Daren feel the need to try and escape? What goes wrong with his plan?
- What does Daren ask his father to send him while he is confined to the medical research station? How does Daren make use of it?
- Who does Daren decide to ask for help?
- How does he convince Sir Asútab to assist him? What does Sir Asútab identify as their first priority? How does he achieve this? How long does Daren have before the scientists become suspicious? How does Daren get back to his family quarters without being caught?
- How do Daren's parents react to his sudden appearance at home? How does having their support make Daren feel? What advice do they offer him?

## Discussion

- What would be the positives and negatives of being able to read someone else's mind?
- Describe the character of Doctor Ómen. Why does he irritate Daren so much? Do you believe that he has the best interests of the plague victims at heart? Why/why not?
- What potential problems could Zúmenos' lack of trust in Adarenas cause?
- What qualities make someone a good leader? Does Adarenas have these qualities? Why/why not?
- What do you think Daren's parents might be keeping secret from him? What do you think their motivation for doing this might be?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read 17–30 (pp. 211–390) independently before the next shared session.

## Comprehension Chapters 17–30 (pp. 211–390)

- What does Daren do in the weeks after he returns to Adarenas' life?
- What are Ah-yee'ks and Death Worms?
- Why does Adarenas' group begin complaining to him? Who comes to the rescue with a solution?
- What advice does Seladora offer Adarenas about the code of vitality?
- Who alerts the group to the danger ahead? What decision does Adarenas make about the Ev-Énor soldiers? Is his decision justified? Why/why not?
- Describe the fight between the Ev-Énor soldiers and Adarenas' group. What does Adarenas' guilt about the dead soldiers suggest about his personality?
- What creature attacks the group in the woods? Who is injured? How does Adarenas manage to kill the creature?
- What does Adarenas do that saves Axéy? In what way does this action help consolidate Adarenas' position as leader?
- What does Adarenas learn from Koriolan about the war and the Circle of Twelve? What causes Koriolan to leave so quickly?
- Who in the group of eight believes that Súperia the Magnificent is real? Do you agree with Seladora when she says "better to believe in something than nothing"? Why/why not?
- Describe West Fort. What plan does Adarenas formulate to get the group into West Fort? What goes wrong?
- Who is Aben Birú? Why does he agree to grant the group an audience with the Empress? What does Aben Birú reveal about the "code of vitality"? What sudden realisation does Daren have after he hears this information?
- What have some members of the Circle of Twelve lost faith in?
- How does Daren catch the attention of Kara after he is dismissed?
- How does Empress Kara die? How do the Ev-Énor Queen and her soldiers react to the death?
- What sign does Adarenas give the remaining eight members of the Circle of Twelve that convinces them to fight at Western Wall?
- Why does Daren go and see Hologram Tabis? What does Daren ask him that he instantly feels guilty about?

- How does Daren get into Commander Savagon's office undetected? What does Adarenas overhear Leron Tabel talking about to Commander Savagon that worries him? Why does Daren begin to admire Commander Savagon after listening to her deal with people in her office?
- Describe the Sword of Súperia. What is the code of vitality written in? What does Daren use to decipher the runes? How does Sir Asútab intervene to allow Daren to make his escape?
- What suggestion does Daren make to Doctor Ómen about the clones? How does Doctor Ómen react to this suggestion?
- Why is Daren convinced that he has to find the Sword of Súperia in the past?
- What does Adarenas decide is "the biggest part of growing up"?
- What roles do the group of eight play in the war? What happens late afternoon? Who invites Adarenas to the emergency meeting? How does Adarenas figure out where the Sword of Súperia is? What strategy does Adarenas come up with to give him a chance to reach the sword? Why does Adarenas decide that the other seven members of his group will accompany him?
- What difficulties do Adarenas and his friends face as they make their way across this beach?
- How does Adarenas know that he is getting close to the sword? What advice does Seladora give to him that allows him to find the sword? What is the code of vitality? How does Adarenas change after he finds the sword and discovers its power?
- How does Adarenas use the Sword of Súperia to save Aben Birú?
- How does Adarenas use the sword to end the war?
- How does Adarenas feel when Eloria Esú calls him "Master"? Why does he feel like this?
- Whose body does the Ev-Énor Queen possess? Describe Adarenas' encounter with the Queen. Why does Adarenas believe that the Ev-Énor Queen is "soulless, non-human"? Why is Adarenas determined to beat the Queen alone? Who helps when he can no longer resist the Queen with his own powers? How does Adarenas convince the Ev-Énor soldiers to turn against their Queen?
- What realisation does Adarenas come to about his identity after the Queen is defeated? What decisions does he make after the war?
- How does Adarenas cure Axey of the illnesses that plague him?
- Why does Adarenas decide to return the Sword of Súperia to where he found it?
- Who does Adarenas take back with him to the Starship *Súperia*? What does he decide that Lédok, Axey and Zúmenos will be trained for in his absence?

- What is Daren convinced has happened when he wakes up in the medical research station? How does he feel when he realises that this isn't the case?
- Why does Daren demand an audience with Commander Savagon? Who does he call for help when Doctor Ómen refuses to let him see her? What does Daren reveal to Commander Savagon during the meeting? What does she insist that he hand over to her? What realisation does Daren come to when his father mentions that no clones fell into comas?
- How does Daren propose to cure the plague? How does he identify the "switched-off" gene? Once the gene is discovered how is it used to treat the patients? How does Daren know that the gene is working?
- Why is Daren convinced that the Ev-Énor Queen is real? What does he think she has in store for the Starship *Súperia*?
- Why was *Súperia*'s decision not to name a new Empress a disaster? How does Daren feel about this mistake?
- What does Sela say to Daren that makes him feel better about this decision?

### Discussion

- How does Aboroniad's personality and attitude change as the story progresses? What is responsible for these changes? Why is his having his support so important for Adarenas?
- Identify the climax in the story. Why is this event important?
- How does the character of Daren develop and change during course of the story? What lessons do you think his experiences might have taught him?

### Activities

**Writing** – Rewrite a Chapter in the novel from another character's point of view.

**Writing** – Write an epilogue for the novel dated one year after the original story takes place.

**Plot** – Choose 15 important events from the story and create a flow diagram that shows the order in which they occur.

**Theme** – Identify an important theme in the novel. Write several paragraphs explaining how the theme is developed by the author. Back up your ideas with evidence and quotes from the text.

**Character** – Describe Daren Sáner’s character. What qualities and attributes does he possess? What is his role in the novel?

**Soundtrack** – Imagine that *The Vitality Code* is being made into a movie. Your job is to choose 5 songs for the soundtrack. List the songs that you choose along with where they will be played in the film and why they are appropriate.

**Radio Announcement** – Imagine that you are a radio announcer who is reporting on the battle between Ev- Enor and Fenidor and its outcomes. Record your news broadcast and play it to the rest of the class.

**Writing** – Write a letter to a friend explaining what you liked about the novel and why you would recommend them to read it.

**Static Image** – Design a poster advertising *The Vitality Code* that could be displayed in your school library.

**Writing** – Write an alternative ending for the novel.

**Monologue** – Create a monologue for Daren or Adarenas in an important part of the novel. What is he thinking and feeling in that moment? Why?

**Play** – Choose an exciting event that occurs in the story and write a script for it. Include a list of characters and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to the class.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd