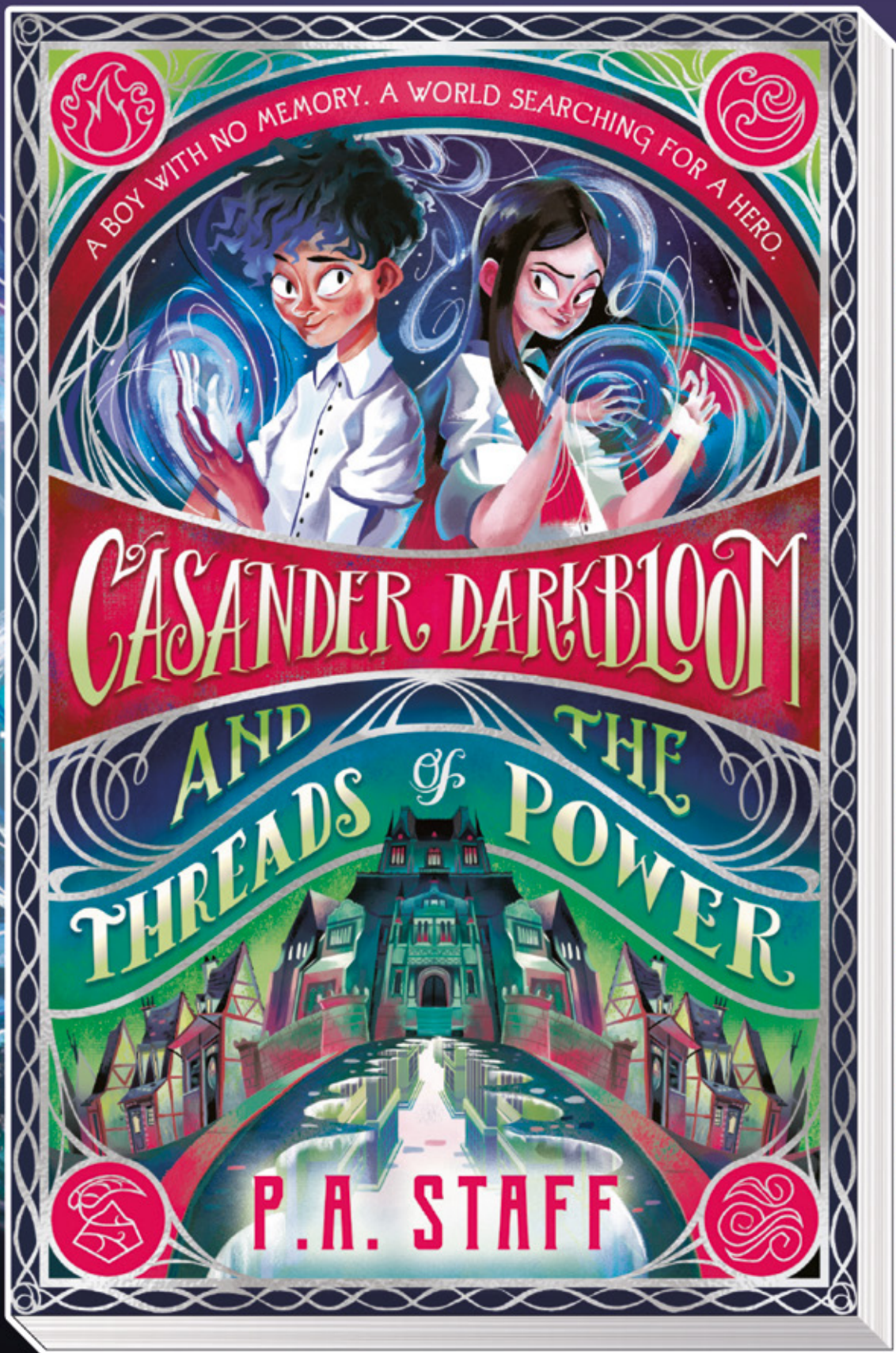


DISCUSSION GUIDE



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BOOKS

CASANDER DARKBLOOM

AND THE THREADS OF POWER

P.A. STAFF

ABOUT THE BOOK

A classic middle-grade fantasy, *Casander Darkbloom and the Threads of Power* will leave readers itching to return to the wonders of the Balance Lands and a world full of magic and intrigue. Twelve-year-old Casander wakes each morning outside a curiosity shop, with no memory of the day before. But when he inexplicably brings a stuffed raven to life, and a shop assistant rescues him from some mysterious cloaked figures, his life takes an extraordinary turn. He discovers whole worlds and powers that he could never have imagined, as well as a prophecy that might just be about him. Chock-full of fantastical ideas and wild imaginings, the first book in the Casander Darkbloom series is a sure-fire hit for readers looking for a spark of magic and a dark tale full of twists and turns.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

P.A. Staff is a science communicator and vet by day, writer by night. Born in Norfolk, where she still lives, she spent her childhood growing up with an unknown and unexplainable movement condition known as Paroxysmal Kinesigenic Choreoathetosis. She now writes stories featuring heroes with similar differences for the next generation, as an ode to her twelve-year-old self. *Casander Darkbloom and the Threads of Power* was created to tackle the universal themes of embracing your differences, conquering people's perceptions of them, and learning to be your own hero who is neither held back nor defined by them.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

There's plenty to discuss in *Casander Darkbloom and the Threads of Power*, and much of the discussion will naturally focus on the magical and fantasy elements of the book. Nonetheless, there are themes within the book around parental relationships, identity, orphanhood and abuse of power that may echo lived experiences of some people – be aware of anyone within your group who may be affected, and ensure appropriate support is in place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

What did members like about the book? What was anyone's favourite part? Why? Was anyone reminded of any other stories they know? How so?

1. The Balance Lands

“The Balance Lands is a perfect mirror image of the Normie world,” Warrior explained.” – p.39

What does the name “Balance Lands” suggest to the reader? Why are they called that? Why does the author create a mirror of the “Normie” world, and not a whole new world? What might a walk through the Balance Lands be like?

2. Casander

“For there slept a young boy with the most extraordinary story, though he had no memory of anything at all.” – p.17

What did anyone in the group think of Casander? Who liked him? Why? What did the group think of his “funny leg”? How does Casander feel about it? Read the author’s note at the back, about her Paroxysmal Kinesigenic Choreoathetosis. Why might the author have created a character with the same condition?

3. Warrior

“A smudgy birthmark. Dr Bane thought that if you squinted hard enough it looked like an ancient symbol meaning soldier or warrior.” – p.117

What did anyone think of Warrior? Why is this her name? Does it suit her? Why, or why not? Look again at the description of her “gleaning” on page 117. What effect did this have on Warrior? What might being “gleaned” be like? Can anyone compare being “gleaned” to something children might experience in the real world?

4. Abnormies

“People might call us Abnormies, but it’s just because they don’t understand our powers. We’re not like most Others.” – p.106

Why does the author create “Others” – those with magic – but also “Abnormies” – those who don’t quite fit with the other magical people in the Balance Lands? What does this create in Wayward School? What is the author suggesting? Why does Lucille hide her “abnormal” powers?

5. Dr Bane

“This Dr Bane? Your wonderful, perfect Deathmaker teacher? My, oh my, you really are naïve.” – p.342

Is Dr Bane a good character or a bad character? Is it that simple? Why does he do what he does? What causes things to go so wrong for him? Why might he have kept his powers when other Lifemakers and Deathmakers lost theirs?

6. Wayward School

“Wayward School, 1,203 steps, 3 skips and a jump” – p.33

Who would like to attend Wayward School? Why? Look at the name together – why does the author use the name Wayward? (Check understanding of puns and double meanings.) What does each part of the word suggest? Does “wayward” have another meaning? Is the school a safe place? Compare Wayward School to other magical schools or settings the group know of. How is it similar? How is it different?

7. Orders & Elementies

“Just like us, Elementies belong to Orders too.” – p.156

What would it be like to discover that you had an elemental power? Which Order would anyone like to belong to? Why? What about Elementies – how do these increase power? What sort of Elementie would anyone like? Can anyone think of other stories, or myths, or books that use elemental magic, or divide people into different powers? Why is this a common idea?

EXTENSION: Create a profile for yourself in your chosen Order. Create an Elementie to enhance your power.

8. Mrs Crane

“Cas had to stifle his laughter each time as Mrs Crane was a particularly unusual-looking lady.” – p.102

What would it be like to have powers that were then forcibly taken away? How does Mrs Crane deal with what happened to her? What makes Mrs Crane different from the other teachers at Wayward School? Why? Why does she protect Dr Bane? Is she right to do so?

9. Nothing boy

“He has no aura. No existence. He is a nothing boy.” – p.80

Did anyone predict the twist in the book, that Cas was a creation of Warrior? Were there any clues earlier in the book? What does this mean for Cas? Who is he? Is he a real person? Is he so different from other people?

10. Prophecy

“That’s why people steer clear of me. They’re either terrified I’ll predict something horrible about them or they think I’m useless.” – p.141

What is a prophecy? What does it mean to be “the Foretold”? What might it be like to have a prophecy told about you?

EXTENSION: As a group, research prophecy in our world. Start with the character from this book – an oracle – or assign smaller groups research tasks to present back to the wider group: oracles, the Norns, seers and seeresses, divination, tarot, etc. NB: Supervise groups closely if using internet-based research, particularly around interpretations of magical practice.

