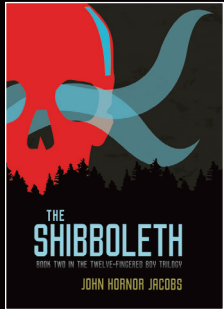




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### *The Shibboleth*

John Hornor Jacobs

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# THE SHIBBOLETH

BOOK TWO IN THE TWELVE-FINGERED BOY TRILOGY

**JOHN HORNOR JACOBS**

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**




“There are certain shibboleths to our condition.”

At the end of the first book of *The Twelve-Fingered Boy Trilogy*, Jack and Shreve are incarcerated—physically locked up. Shreve’s back in the custody of the state of Arkansas, and Jack’s somewhere in the clutches of Mr. Quincruux—both problems Shreve aims to rectify.

Cages might hold Shreve’s body, but the power that’s been growing since his encounter with Quincruux has reached a pinnacle. Nothing can prevent his mind from scaling the etheric heights. Freed from his body, Shreve discovers the magnitude of the evil that’s stirring in the east. The wave of insomnia that’s paralyzed the nation is only the beginning.

To save Jack—and maybe all of the humanity he no longer feels part of—Shreve has no choice but to join Quincruux and the Society of Extranaturals.



## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Shreve realizes that his new powers can be used in immoral ways, and he vows that he will not become like Quincruux. Can you think of a time when Shreve uses his powers differently than Quincruux would? Overall, how is Shreve doing on his goal?
2. How would it feel to “have lived whole lives in other people’s heads,” as Shreve has through his powers? How does it make Shreve feel? How do your feelings compare to Shreve’s?
3. Why is Shreve transferred to the psychiatric hospital? Why are the other children there? How did the chapters set in the psych ward make you feel?
4. Rollie claims that along with her anorexia, depression, and self-harm, she is in psychiatric treatment for being able to read minds. Do you think she truly has psychic powers, or was her mind-reading a delusion and another sign that she was in need of help? How did you come to your conclusion?
5. Describe Jerry and Shreve’s relationship. What kind of role does Jerry most closely fill for Shreve? Do you think it’s possible for different generations to form real friendships?
6. How is Shreve able to defeat the Witch? What happens to him when he does?
7. Describe Jack and Shreve’s reunion. How do you think each felt seeing the other again, and how can you tell?
8. What is different about Jack and Shreve’s relationship now? What is the same?
9. Imagine you were in Shreve’s position during his confrontation with the Red Team in the cafeteria. What would you have done? Why does Shreve say he feels horrible even though he successfully stands up for himself?
10. Shreve finds out he has the ability not only to infiltrate people’s minds, but also to help people fall asleep and to give others the ability to communicate with him telepathically. What compels him to share these parts of his gift?
11. Shreve goes through two horrific and transformative ordeals: one on the roof of Tulaville and one in the bunker, where the Society keeps him locked in the dark. How did these events change Shreve? In what ways is he the same as at the beginning of *The Twelve-Fingered Boy*? What has he gained or lost?
12. From Rollie’s flirting to the painful power of Sarah Montgomery, aka “The Bomb,” sexuality comes up in strange places in the novel. How does Shreve talk about sexuality and sexual relationships?
13. Since Shreve’s ex-girlfriend Coco is only mentioned in the previous book, Rollie, and then Casey and Danielle, are the first female “friends” we see Shreve make. Do you think Shreve acts differently when getting to know girls than he does with boys? Why or why not?
14. The plague of sleeplessness across the country causes mass violence, suicides, and even acts of war. Why did the author choose to connect these tragic events with insomnia?
15. The chapter where Shreve witnesses what happened between Quincruux and the elder in Maryland is told from Quincruux’s perspective. How did the author make it clear that Shreve was not the narrator in this chapter? What was different about Quincruux’s voice?
16. Booth, Hollis, and Rollie were all close to Shreve, and Shreve feels somewhat responsible for their deaths. How did each death affect him?
17. How or why is Shreve able to get the mysterious Mr. Negata to talk? Who do you think Negata is, and why do you think Shreve says they might need him in the fight against the elder?
18. Leaving out any extranatural powers, what strengths or powers does Shreve have? Choose one and point to an instance where it has already helped him, and then explain how this strength will help him in the battle to come. Why is the strength you chose important?