

Book Club Discussion Questions

The Weight of Command

A Jane Doe Program Novel, Book 2

- **The novel’s title names its central preoccupation: The Weight of Command.**

How does Jane’s evolution from operator to commander change her? What does the book suggest leadership costs that mere participation does not?

- **Book 2 opens with Jane haunted—by Simone’s capture, by the men she watched fall at the fence.**

How did beginning with survivor’s guilt rather than action shape your reading? In what ways does that guilt drive—or distort—Jane’s decisions across the rest of the novel?

- **The team debates whether to attempt Simone’s rescue, knowing it may be a trap.**

Were you persuaded by Jane’s reasoning, or by Denise’s and Pascal’s objections? Did the rescue feel like a mission, or—as Denise asks—like sentiment?

- **When Jane learns Simone gave Steiner the safe house, she chooses extraction over execution.**

Is this mercy, punishment, or something harder to name? How does this decision echo, or differ from, the mercy Jane showed Mercier in Book 1?

- **Jane works under, beside, and eventually around several different commanders—Denise, Maurice, Beaufort.**

How did each model of leadership land for you? Which approach do you think Jane ultimately makes her own, and at what cost?

- **The Maquis du Limousin and the Auvergne networks resist being trained—and resist being trained by a woman.**

How did the depiction of gender friction within the Resistance affect your reading? Did Raoul, Édouard, and “Didier” feel like obstacles, allies, or something more complicated?

- **Jane recommends bombing the Gnome-et-Rhône and Michelin factories, knowing French civilians will die.**

How did the contrast between the two raids—same tactics, very different civilian outcomes—sit with you? Where does responsibility lie when a strategic decision is made by London but recommended by Jane?

- **Lefebvre describes three Michelin engineers quietly altering the rubber compound so German tires will fail on the Russian front.**

What does this kind of invisible sabotage say about resistance compared with bombs and ambushes? Does the novel argue that quiet work matters more, less, or simply differently than the spectacular kind?

- **Maurice breaks the original team apart, scattering them across regions.**
 How did the fragmentation of Jane’s found family affect the emotional texture of the second half? What does the book suggest growth costs in the kinds of relationships built under occupation?
- **Major Steiner never appears on the page in Book 2 the way he did in Book 1, yet his shadow shapes nearly every decision.**
 How did the offstage antagonist affect your sense of threat? Did Steiner feel more frightening as a presence Jane and her network had to anticipate, or less?
- **The Lyon restaurant Simone dreamed of opening after the war becomes a quiet refrain across the book.**
 What do small futures—a restaurant, a meal, a wedding—mean in a novel filled with operations and losses? How did Simone’s wine memory shape your reading of her final conversation with Jane?
- **The Jane Doe Program continues to suppress her memory, even as she commands hundreds of fighters.**
 How do you understand Jane’s identity in this book—Marguerite, Jane Doe, Agent 6732, the American Steiner is hunting? Does the program still feel necessary, or has it become a wound she carries into command?
- **The novel’s climax is not a battle but a list of BBC messages—“Quasimodo est une fête,” and others—read aloud over a wireless.**
 How did the build toward D-Day, rendered through waiting and listening rather than action, work for you as a reader? What did the choice to end on the eve of invasion, rather than after it, suggest about what the war has been?
- **Jane stands before Beaufort’s men on the eve of the invasion and does not sing along with Le Chant des Partisans because she has not learned the words.**
 What did that small detail say about Jane’s place in this fight—and in France? How does the novel ask us to think about who belongs to a resistance, and who serves it?
- **The story continues to draw on the real women of SOE Section F—Pearl Witherington, Violette Szabo, Vera Atkins, Andrée Borrel—and on the real Maquis du Limousin under Georges Guingouin.**
 How did knowing the historical scaffolding influence your reading of Book 2? Does fiction owe these women something different from history, and if so, what?