

CODE. NAME. ZERO.

Detailed Summary

Zero is about to turn 14 when a **blackout** occurs in the gym where he is doing his daily workouts.

Zero is trained to become a drone pilot and he is living in the “**World**”, a place where everything is different from the outside reality: he has never attended school, he doesn't have any friend. Zero doesn't even have a family, but a **so-called Madar is in charge of him**: her metallic voice is his only relationship, and she talks to him since he was a very little child, saying him goodnight every evening and encouraging him at doing his best in his workouts. **Zero doesn't have a proper name, he is just a code number.**

When the power goes off, **he is ready to reach the next level** of his training, but Madar doesn't answer his call, and the lights doesn't reappear; he decides then to look at what it's happening outside the Gym and, door after door, **he finds himself outside.**

The world, the real one he has never experienced, is cold, snowy and huge. He still thinks to be in the “**World**”, just in a bigger space where to stand an harder test; he commands the computer to heat the place, but nothing happens: he doesn't know that outside its “**World**” there are no computers to respond his requests. In the world, the real one, **Madar doesn't hear and doesn't answer him.**

Cold and shocked, **Zero eventually faints**: until a woman who was driving by, stops her car and comes to the rescue. Stefania is a doctor and understands Zero is unwell, probably in shock: what is a young boy doing alone under the snow? She takes him to the hospital where also Luca, her husband, works; they both agree that the situation is very odd. **A strange couple arrives while they are visiting Zero**: they are looking for their son, an autistic child who escaped his home, they are mourning and weeping, although their movements look a bit too mechanical; they show the doctors a picture of him, and the kid in the photo is undoubtedly Zero. Their story doesn't convince Luca and Stefania, who take the sudden decision to dash off with Zero.

The doctors are now outlaw in the run, and they have an under aged kid with them. They drive outside the city to their family's mountain house, hoping that **nobody could find them there**; as a huge black car drives past them, though, they realize somebody is following them. **Zero starts saying some words**: he knows that Madar is looking for him, she has never left him alone, she has always been with him, even if unseen; he is still unsure whether the young couple can be trusted or not. Luca and Stefania threw their mobiles out the car window: they believe nobody will be able to trace them anymore.

Luca's father, **an ex-general, is called to the mountain lodge to help them** with the case. He finds a way to communicate with Zero, who understands the “soldier's language”; **he trusts the man** and tells him about the place where he has always lived, about his daily workouts, about his life-long training. The man understands that **he is part of an experiment** set up a decade before by a secret organization who kidnapped children to grow them into the World as drone warriors, with the aim to **control the entire mankind**. Little by little, Zero begins to trust the man and eventually decides to help the police to smite the organization; he will find out that **Madar is a woman**, a real one, and that she has always looked after him from the screen of a computer.

Zero will learn, day by day, to **relate with the physical, real world** that he has never experienced, and he will discover that life is not only made of tests and workouts, but of **emotions, faith and knowledge**. That the past is part of ourselves, although it can be difficult to accept. And he will also learn to love the two doctors who saved him as his real parents: because they love him and they take care of him. Not as a code number, but as their own child.

Luigi Ballerini is MD, Psychoanalyst living in Milan. He thinks he is very lucky because he works with teens and their families. He is also a journalist and a renowned author of YA fiction: he was awarded in 2014 with Italian Andersen Prize, the most prestigious award for children's literature in Italy.