

GAMERS' CHALLENGE

Sequel to GAMERS' QUEST

By George Ivanoff

Teachers' Notes

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Recommended for age 11+

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BLURB ON BACK COVER

For Tark and Zyra, life was literally just a game, controlled by the all-powerful Designers. But then they broke the rules and life got a whole lot more complicated ... and deadly. Pursued by a powerful computer virus they must locate the Ultimate Gamer with the help of some unexpected allies, and face their greatest challenge — finding a way out of the game ...

REVIEWS

"an enjoyably inventive tale that shakes the dust off fantasy clichés." *Aurealis Xpress, Sept 2011*

"This exciting story by Melbourne father of two George Ivanoff will appeal to kids aged 11 and over who love their computer games. Verdict: Game on" *Herald Sun Weekend, 24 Sept 2011*

SYNOPSIS

Tark and Zyra are teenage thieves living in a fantastical world filled with danger, in which magic and technology co-exist. Realising that their world is really just a constructed environment within an elaborate computer game, they break the rules. Although now excluded from playing the game, they are still trapped within its environments, pursued by what appears to be a computer virus.

Desperate to get out of the game, they team up with the Outers — a community of people who have also broken the rules and been excluded from the game. Tark and Zyra now discover that they are not even original — merely copies of constructed characters from the game — and that there are other versions of Tark and Zyra. To complicate matters even further, they also meet Hope, the teenage daughter of a previous version of themselves.

The Outers have a cheat code and knowledge of the Ultimate Gamer, the mythical character who supposedly possesses the secret to exiting the game. As Zyra and Hope start on a journey to find the Ultimate Gamer, Tark and the other Outers are left to deal with the computer virus, which turns out to be more than it first appears.

Key Points

- Fast-paced plot will keep the interest of its young teenage audience.
- Strong female lead as well as male lead, making it appealing for girls as well as boys.
- Issues of identity and reality are engaged.
- The concept of freedom is examined.
- Combines elements of fantasy and science fiction.
- Includes strong elements of gaming.

THE AUTHOR

George Ivanoff is an author and stay-at-home dad residing in Melbourne. He has written over 50 books for children and teenagers, including many titles for the education market. Three of his books (*Gamers' Quest*, *Life, Death and Detention* and *Real Sci-Fi*) are on the booklist for the Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge. *Gamers' Quest* is also on the booklist for the NSW Premier's Reading Challenge. George has also had stories published in numerous magazines and anthologies, including *Trust Me!* (Ford Street Publishing, 2008), *Doctor Who, Short Trips: Defining Patterns* (Big Finish, UK, 2008) and *Under the Weather: Stories about climate change* (Frances Lincoln, UK, 2009). More information about George is available on his website: georgeivanoff.com.au

THE WRITING OF GAMERS' CHALLENGE

Gamers' Challenge is a sequel to the popular teen, science fiction novel, *Gamers' Quest*. George says:

"My main goal with both the *Gamers* books was to write the sort of novels that I would have loved to read as a 13-year-old. My secondary goal was to entice computer game-playing teens, who might not normally pick up a novel, to give reading a go and to hopefully discover that reading can be just as much fun as playing a game.

"As a teenager I spent a lot of time wondering what sort of person I would be when I grew up. And I craved the perceived freedom I would have when I finally finished school. I also spent many hours pondering the bizarre notion that I, and everyone else in the world, might just be pawns in some game controlled by a higher power. So when I came to writing *Gamers' Challenge*, I wove the concepts of reality, identity and freedom into the narrative."

CHARACTERS

Tark

Tark is a 16-year-old thief. In fact, he has been a 16-year-old thief for as long as he can remember. With his partner in crime, Zyra, he is trapped within a game that he has been excluded from playing.



Questions:

- What are Tark's feelings towards Zyra? Find passages in the text to support your answer.
- What is Tark's relationship with Tee?

Zyra

Zyra is a 16-year-old thief with a red mohawk and numerous piercings. Like Tark, she has been a 16-year-old thief for as long as she can remember. Along with Tark, she is trapped within a game that she has been excluded from playing.



Questions:

- Is Zyra a leader or a follower? Find passages in the text to support your answer.
- What is Zyra's relationship with Hope?

Hope

Hope is an Outer and so is not involved with playing the game. She is the teenage daughter of a previous version of Tark and Zyra.



Questions:

- What is Hope's opinion of Zyra? Find passages in the text to support your answer.
- Why does Hope end up cooperating with Zyra?

Gal

Gal is an Outer and so is not involved with playing the game. Tark and Zyra knew him in the game as Princeling Galbrath — a character who was an adversary to them.



Questions:

- What is Gal's opinion of Tark? Find passages in the text to support your answer.
- What is Gal's reaction to Tark's revelation that he speaks the way he does by choice?

Tee

Tee is the leader of the Outers. He is, in fact, an earlier version of Tark, and the father of Hope.



Questions:

- What are Tee's motivations in wanting to find the Ultimate Gamer?
- In your opinion, is Tee a good leader? Find passages in the text to support your answer.

Bobby

Bobby is the mythical Ultimate Gamer that the Outers have been searching for. He has the power to manipulate the game and assume any avatar that he wishes.



Questions:

- What is the first avatar that the Ultimate Gamer uses to spy on Zyra and Hope?
- Is Bobby the Ultimate Gamer's avatar or is the Ultimate Gamer Bobby's avatar?

Other Characters

Gamers' Challenge is peopled with a variety of weird and wonderful characters — from the warrior monks in the Temple of Paths; to the Skinny Rich Dude who lives up the Hill.



Questions:

- Why is the Skinny Rich Dude now chubby?
- Why are the warrior monks essential?

LANGUAGE

Not everyone in *Gamers' Challenge* speaks in the same way. The speech of some characters (such as Tark and Zyra) is a devolved 'gutter-speak' in which many words are shortened or changed. Other characters (such as Bobby and Tee) speak in a more normal way.



Questions:

- Why does Zyra try to change the way she speaks?
- Why does Tark decide not to change the way he speaks?
- Each time the Ultimate Gamer uses a different avatar, the way he speaks also changes. What are his distinctive speech characteristics when he uses the Officer avatar?

THEMES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Genres

Gamers' Challenge is a science fiction story, even though it includes some fantasy elements. It is also a fast-paced action/adventure.



Questions:

- What is it that makes *Gamers' Challenge* science fiction?
- Can a story have more than one genre?

Identity

In *Gamers' Challenge* Tark and Zyra question their own identities. Meanwhile, the Ultimate Gamer is able to take on many different identities through the use of avatars.



Questions:

- What is it that makes Tark and Zyra individuals as opposed to merely copies of previous characters in the game? Find passages in the text to support your answer.
- Tee is actually an older version of Tark. In what ways do these characters differ and in what ways are they similar?

Reality

The world in which Tark and Zyra live is merely a computer-generated environment within an elaborate game. There are also many other environments within the game. But Tark and Zyra want to leave the game and enter the real world.



Questions:

- The characters who are playing the game, perceive their environment as the real world. Does that make it real?
- In our world, many people play computer games. It can be an escape from the pressures of school or work. Some of these people spend a great deal of their leisure time playing these games. Is it possible for people to spend too much time playing games like this?

Freedom

Trapped inside a game, Tark and Zyra crave the perceived freedom of the real world. But the Ultimate Gamer sees things differently. At one point he even asks Hope and Zyra: "What do you do with freedom when you get it?"



Questions:

- The Ultimate Gamer believes he has all the freedom he needs, inside the game. Do you think he is actually free?
- What does freedom mean to you?

TITLE



Questions:

- How does the title, *Gamers' Challenge*, relate to the story?
- Do you think it is an appropriate title?
- Make a list of possible alternative titles.

COVER

Look at the cover for *Gamers' Challenge*. The artwork was created on a computer and was designed to look like the cover of a computer game.



Questions:

- What does the cover tell you about the book?
- Do you think it is an appropriate cover?
- Describe or draw a possible alternative cover.

THE CRAFT OF WRITING

- The book's prologue provides some hints as to what is to come. Why do you think the author included this prologue?
- For most of the story the reader is led to believe that the balls of static and the entity in the cave are computer viruses. It is not until Chapter 24 that it is revealed that the balls of static are antibodies and the entity in the cave an anti-virus program. Why do you think the author chose to make the revelation at this point?
- *Gamers' Challenge* is written in the third person. Why do you think the author chose to write in the third person, instead of the first person from the point of view of one of the main characters?
- Chapter 8 includes more than a page of binary code. Why do you think the author chose to include it?

WRITING EXERCISES

- In Chapter 1 you find out that Zyra has previously tried other weapons against the balls of static. Write a scene describing one of these encounters.
- Re-write the final scene of Chapter 19 in the first person, from Gal's point of view.
- In Chapter 8 Tee and Hope tell Tark and Zyra about the cheat code. Write a story about how the Outers discovered the cheat code.
- At the end of *Gamers' Challenge*, Tark and Zyra finally exit the game. Write another chapter to continue their story.

SEQUEL

Gamers' Challenge is a sequel to *Gamers' Quest*. Although it can be read alone, a greater understanding of the characters and situations can be gained from reading the two books in sequence. If you have read both books consider the following questions:

- Does your perception of Tark and Zyra from *Gamers' Quest* change with the reading of *Gamers' Challenge*? Have the characters developed beyond what they were in the first book?
- In *Gamers' Challenge* is it revealed that the Fat Man from *Gamers' Quest* was actually the Ultimate Gamer using an avatar to play a game. How does this affect the story of *Gamers' Quest*?
- Did *Gamers' Challenge* meet your expectation of a sequel? Why?

OTHER STORIES ABOUT COMPUTER GAMES

Read some other novels or watch some films that involve computer games and compare them to *Gamers' Challenge*. What are the differences? What are the similarities? How do the different writers approach their subject matter?

Books:

Space Demons (and its sequels, *Skymaze* and *Shinkei*) by Gillian Rubinstein

Heir Apparent by Vivian Vande Velde

Films:

TRON (1982) – <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0084827/>

TRON Legacy (2010) – <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1104001/>

Television:

ReBoot (1994-2002) – <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108903/>

Harsh Realm (1999-2000) – <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0182587/>

WEBSITE

- Visit the website: <http://www.gamersquestbook.com>
- Watch the computer animated book trailer for *Gamers' Challenge*. How does the trailer affect your ideas of the book?
- The website contains further stories about the characters in *Gamers* books. How do these stories affect your ideas about *Gamers' Challenge*?