

AUTHOR'S VOICE
Studying Gamers' Quest

An article about the potential use of Gamers' Quest in classroom discussions

George Ivanoff, Melbourne, March 2010

Author Jenny Mounfield had this to say of *Gamers' Quest* in issue 70 of *Buzz Words*: "Highly recommended for its enjoyment value alone, this book would be a powerful tool in a classroom environment, sparking all manner of thought-provoking debates."

I wrote *Gamers' Quest* primarily as a fun, action/adventure, science fiction romp — the sort of book that I would have liked to have read when I was a young teenager. But within that framework, I saw no reason why I couldn't include some more thoughtful (and thought-provoking) elements.

Gamers' Quest aims straight for the computer game fascination held by many of today's young people. Its basis is a very simple question: If ordinary people, who live ordinary lives, play computer games full of danger and excitement and fantasy, what sort of games would be played by people who lived in a fantastical world full of exotic dangers?

Set within a computer game environment, *Gamers' Quest* follows the adventures of Tark and Zyra, two teenage thieves, as they attempt to reach Designers Paradise, a virtual reality games hub. Of course, things don't go to plan and they are pursued into Designers Paradise by the novel's villains. The use of computer games as a basis for the story is an ideal way to hook the attention and interest of a generation to whom sophisticated games are second nature. Studying a book that students are actually interested in reading and are excited about is a great starting point, and half the battle won.

There are a number of classroom discussions that can be sparked by the text. Most obviously there is the discussion of genre. At its heart, *Gamers' Quest* is a science fiction story as there is, ultimately, a scientific basis behind the environments and actions of the novel. But there are a number of fantasy tropes that are used within the story — from the concept of 'the quest' through to stalwart fantasy creations such as dragons, magic swords and mages. Discussions can cover the elements of the two genres and whether they can co-exist in the one text.

Perhaps the key discussion point is the concept of computer games and reality. We live in a world that is becoming more and more computer connected. People can play games together, construct imaginary lives and socialise with friends, without ever physically interacting. Twitter, FaceBook, MySpace, Second Life, online games and a plethora of other computer-enhanced 'realities' enable people to stay glued to their computers and yet stay 'in touch'. In *Gamers' Quest*, things are taken several steps further, as characters live and interact with each other within created, computer environments. As the story progresses, the main characters begin to question not only the reality of their world, but their own reality. Students can be asked to relate this to their own experiences on the Internet.

Which leads on to the next major discussion point — identity. How is a person's identity affected by the perception of others? What if you could affect how others see you through an assumed identity — an avatar? People are already doing this in today's world. A person's online identity often bears little resemblance to his/her real-world self. So, what is it that makes us who we are?

Other discussion points include the use of language to distinguish class and status, and the concept of heroes and villains. The various characters in *Gamers' Quest* speak in different ways depending on their position within the established hierarchy. The novel has two clear-cut villains in the characters of the Fat Man and the Cracker. The heroes are the two main characters, Tark and Zyra. But despite being the 'heroes', they are also thieves, stealing the belongings of others in order to finance their entry into Designers Paradise. Can thieves be heroic? A further shade of grey is provided by the character of Princeling Galbrath. Galbrath's hero/villain status wavers throughout the book. In the end, he needs to choose sides, and it is that choice which determines the outcome of the climax.

Teachers' Notes for the novel are available from the Ford Street Publishing website: <http://www.fordstreetpublishing.com>

The Official *Gamers' Quest* website can also be used as a teaching tool. The site contains character breakdowns, additional short stories with characters from the novel, music and a computer animated book trailer: <http://www.gamersquestbook.com>

George Ivanoff is a Melbourne-based author with over 40 books for children and teenagers, many for the education market. He often speaks to school groups and conducts writing workshops.

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