

Title: Saving Thanehaven
Author: Catherine Jinks
Publisher: Allen & Unwin
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Audience: 10–14

Synopsis:

Noble is a knight who's brave and true, but he's tired of fighting, fighting, fighting – always fighting. Then a scruffy teenage boy named Rufus tells him that he can do exactly what he wants and set himself free from the endless task of attacking a fortress and saving a princess. But as soon as Noble takes control of his life, his whole world comes crashing down. Can it be true what people are saying: that Noble actually lives inside a computer (whatever that is), and that Rufus is a computer virus? To find out Noble must set out on the most dangerous quest ever – one that will take him away from his medieval/fantasy homeland to a spaceship where humans are hunted down by mutant machines, a change room where Barbie and Ken-type characters talk endlessly about fashion and accessories, a zombie apocalypse and, possibly the most perilous scenario of them all, a rock concert where adoring fans will do anything to get near their 'guitar hero'.

This story has it all: rich humour, fast-paced action and an extremely clever plot that keeps the reader on the edge of the seat all the way to the end.

Style:

Saving Thanehaven is written largely in the present tense, capturing the immediacy and unpredictability of a computer game. And like a computer game, the plot races along from one level (or game scenario) to the next, with ever-increasing challenges thrown at our intrepid hero.

Jinks uses a third-person voice and rich, descriptive language for each exotic scenario and the creatures inhabiting it. And while there is plenty of cartoon violence to capture the attention of readers, teachers and librarians can recommend this book without fear as it does not contain anything controversial.

Author Motivation:

Of her motivation to write *Saving Thanehaven*, Catherine Jinks says, 'I wanted to write a book about a computer-game character (long before *Wreck-it Ralph* was released) and the idea of a virus "freeing" the character was at the root of the book; I was haunted by the image of a dishevelled young kid telling a computer-game hero, "You don't have to do this, you know." Everything else stemmed from that.

'Needless to say, I had to consult my computer-genius friend Richard Buckland...and he had a lot of helpful suggestions for me. He was the one, for example, who advised me that the

best place for a virus to hide would be inside an anti-virus program, because the AVs don't actually monitor *themselves*.'

The end-result for Jinks is a story she believes is an action adventure that will appeal to gamers and non-gamers. 'I'm quite honestly prouder of this book than of most of the others I've written because it's such a mind-bending journey and was such a challenge to write.'

Author Background:

Catherine Jinks was born in Brisbane in 1963 and grew up in Sydney and Papua New Guinea. She studied medieval history at university and her love of reading led her to become a writer. Her books for children, teenagers and adults have been published to wide acclaim all over the world, and have won numerous awards. Catherine's most recent books include the bestselling *Evil Genius* series and her paranormal spoofs, *The Reformed Vampire Support Group* and *The Abused Werewolf Rescue Group*.

Catherine lives in the Blue Mountains in NSW with her husband, journalist Peter Dockrill, and their daughter Hannah.

Visit her online at <http://catherinejinks.com/>

Suggestions for classroom discussion and application:

- Before reading the novel, look at the cover of *Saving Thanehaven*. Consider the title and cover design. Discuss the mood set by the cover. Talk about how mood can be influenced by visual cues such as font, framing, subject matter and perspective. How do some or all of these elements work on this cover? What impact does the caption '*Saving the world isn't always a game*' have on your expectations? After reading the novel ask students to devise an alternate title and to design a new cover based on another gaming world depicted in the novel.
- i) Read out loud to your class the opening chapter of the book until page 4 and 'Her hunger must be satisfied.' Look at the language used in this extract. Find as many adjectives, adverbs, metaphors and similes within the extract and discuss how their use 'intensifies' the mood of the scene. An interesting exercise is to allow students to choose a few paragraphs and then remove all of the language devices to see what effect this has on the language that remains. Next, have them find words they don't immediately recognise, for instance, the use of *purchase* on page 4. What effect does the use of this vocabulary have?
ii) Ask students to look at how the mood of the scene suddenly changes with the entry of Rufus. What devices has the author used to change mood suddenly?
- Humour plays an important part in *Saving Thanehaven*. One of the funniest aspects of the novel is when one clichéd character meets another from an entirely different scenario. In a whole-class discussion, talk about clichés and their role in defining characters and what we expect of them. Ask students to describe the clichés that surround the characters of Noble, Lorellina, Yestin and Brandi.

i) Now look at an example of when one clichéd character meets another, for instance when Brandi meets Princess Lorellina. Discuss if this scene is funny and why.

ii) Is Rufus a cliché? Why is it funny when he meets and talks to all the computer-game characters?

iii) Jinks also creates humour when Noble, the cliché of a medieval knight, is confronted by modern technology and has no idea how to deal with it. One example of this is when he comes to a lift and doesn't understand what it does (p183). Find other examples of this humorous technique in the novel.

- *Saving Thanehaven* is told from Noble's perspective in the third person. Allow students to choose any scene from the story and re-tell it from another character's perspective.
- ““*You told me to put down my weapon, Rufus, and I did. You changed me. I used to think that made you clever and powerful. But if I can change and you can't, then maybe I'm the clever one. Maybe I'm the powerful one. Not you.*”” (p280) Map how Noble and Rufus's characters change over the course of the story. Who has changed the most?
Extension question: Is Rufus a 'good' character or an 'evil' character? Explain your reasons using elements from the novel as evidence.
- Discuss the role of an epilogue in bringing a story to a close. What purpose is served by the epilogue in *Saving Thanehaven*? Does the epilogue change how the reader feels about Rufus? How would you feel about Rufus if the epilogue didn't exist?
- Extension essay question: If *Saving Thanehaven* has one overarching theme, it is that people can follow rules AND be free to think and do as they want. Discuss how this is shown in the novel.