

The Gamers

Shauna Sare Little

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The Gamers presents a dystopian world for more mature audiences eager to explore issues of technological control.

In this science fiction thriller, thirteen-year-olds Libby and Kem “untether” from their virtual reality lives and venture outside their sheltered compound. The world that Shauna Sare Little creates in *The Gamers* is both comprehensive and chilling, though her characters—perhaps as a function of their isolated backgrounds—at times behave strangely and in ways incongruous with their age.

Libby and Kem decide to disconnect together from the virtual reality program that has thus far sustained and educated them. After going through a few more educational simulations in their class and switching to talking in code in order to communicate without detection, the two of them finally take the plunge and awaken in their actual bodies, inside the Trinity BioDome. From there, they must decide whom to trust and just how much they can rely on each other.

The Gamers begins with an esoteric description of the lives of the Gamers, including a discussion of the issues they face, like “psychic conflict” and “optimal survival.” The chapter’s narrator, Libby Hansdotter Singh, then explains that she will detail her escape from the Trinity BioDome and subsequent life among the Clann of the Sol, dating her entry in the year 2400, a year after the events of the novel. The beginning is riddled with lingo that, at times, can be overwhelming; in the first few pages, the book lists acronyms such as GPA [*sic*] (Game Avatar Program), CHIP (Cognitive Hypothalamus Intelligence Processor), and PGER (Post Game Experience Report).

Soon after, though, the story settles into more of a flow, including descriptions of the education simulations that Libby and Kem’s class go through. Some of the material is mature and even disturbing, including descriptions of experiments on children in Auschwitz, as well as a character’s suggestion to boil the flesh off of bodies to get rid of soft tissue more quickly for autopsies.

Though the setup is intriguing, some of the characters feel stilted, perhaps due to lives that thus far have only been lived in a virtual reality. Libby, for instance, is a somewhat reactive character—it is Kem who does most of the work looking up information on their situation and researching its history, reporting back to Libby after taking the initiative. Libby also accepts Kem’s speculations with a minimal amount of resistance, quickly concluding that she has been “manipulated, lied to, and given information that was produced to control [her] mind and [her] heart.”

There are also a few inconsistencies in the text, including dropped quotes and spacing issues. These are, on the whole, minor, and do not detract much from the overall narrative.

The Gamers presents a dystopian world with a layered setting, and will appeal to readers interested in the types of questions posed through its story line. The book would be most appropriate for more mature audiences eager to explore issues of virtual reality, moral obligations, and technological control.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (September 11, 2015)

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