

GAME QUEST

PLAYER VS. PLAYER

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 SCHOLASTIC



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CHAPTER 1

“The zombies are getting closer!” Tai shouted.

Kat, Alex, and Tai were in the woods, surrounded by a mob of hungry zombies. Just an average Friday morning.



Average, because the three friends were playing Otherworld, their favorite of the Game Quest video games.

“I’ve got this one!” Tai said, slashing a zombie with their sword. The zombie fell backward and faded away. But another zombie was approaching Tai from behind.

“Watch out, Tai!” Alex swooped down from the sky, on the back of an albatrossaur. The beast kicked its talons at the zombie, knocking it to the ground.

“AH! Get that thing away from me!” cried Tai.

“The zombie? I just did,” said Alex.

“Not that; I mean that thing you’re riding on! Keep it away from me. It’s creepy!” said Tai as another zombie

approached them. They quickly defeated it with a diagonal slash.

“His name is Barry,” said Alex, patting the



albatrossaur like a dog. “Don’t listen to them, Barry.”

“Hey, guys, check this out!” Kat called as the zombies wandered into her trap. When enough of them had gathered, Kat pulled the lever next to her. A giant spring hidden under the zombies catapulted them high into the air.

“Did you guys see that? I call it the KAT-apult! Get it?” Kat turned to her friends, but Alex and Tai were busy fighting off zombies of their own.



“You weren’t watching?” Kat asked with a frown.

“Sorry! Busy kicking zombie butt over here!” said Tai, hacking them left and right. “Well, kicking butt with a sword. Slashing butt?” Tai climbed into a tree to get some height, then jumped down in an aerial sword attack. The move took out four zombies at once.

“Oh yeah! Now THIS is how you play!” Tai did a victory dance. “You guys should be watching *me*. You could learn a few things . . . like why using weapons is the way to win this game!”

Kat and Alex rolled their eyes.

“Me and Barry have been defeating loads of zombies without ANY weapons,” said Alex.

Kat crossed her arms. “If you guys had bothered to watch, you would’ve seen my trap defeat more zombies than your sword attack OR Barry did,” she said.

“No way! I just took out like ten zombies at once!” said Tai.

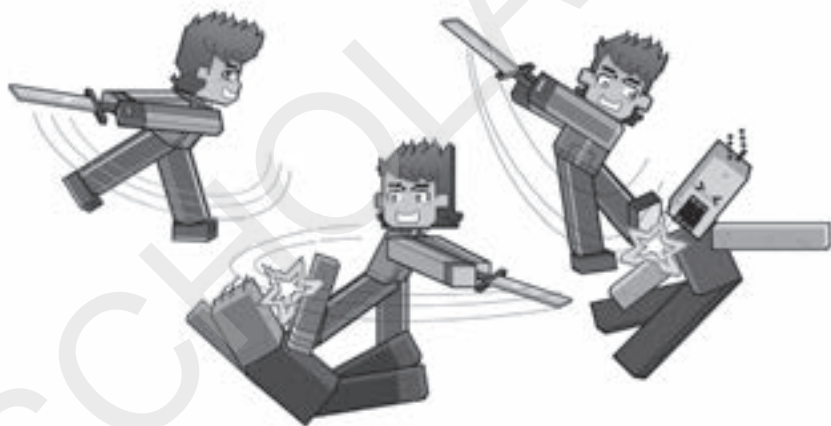
"It was four," Kat corrected them. Alex laughed at Tai's overconfidence.

"Four . . . ten . . . What does it matter? I'm unstoppable!" said Tai.

"And bad at counting," whispered Alex to Barry.

Tai smirked and crouched with their sword. "Here, watch this! I'll take out twenty with this move!"

Tai whirled their sword around like a tornado.



"Spinning attack!" shouted Tai, taking out one-two-three-four-five zombies. But then . . .

CLANG!

Tai's sword shattered into pieces . . . and disappeared.

"NO!" Tai yelled. "I've had this sword for ages, what gives?!"

"Did you forget about durability again?" Alex asked as Barry pecked at zombies. "All weapons break eventually . . . unless they're made of starstone."

Tai gulped. "Oh yeah. I sure could use some starstone right now . . ." The zombies surrounded Tai.

"Hold on!" called Alex, flying through the air toward Tai. "Barry, use your wings!"

Barry stretched out and began to flap with all his might. A huge gust of air pushed the zombie mob back. But soon Barry began to slow down. Moments later, the albatrossaur landed on the ground, panting.

"Barry, what's wrong?!" asked Alex, checking over the creature. "Oh no, his stamina ran out!"

Just as the zombies were closing in . . .

Meanwhile, Kat was busy setting her next zombie trap in a nearby stone tower she had built earlier in the day. “Hey, guys, you’ve got to see this!” she called from inside the tower. When there was no reply, she headed outside to look for her friends, but they had disappeared. All that was left were blocks of materials from their inventory. GAME OVER.

Kat gasped. The mob of zombies was now staggering toward her. She knew she had to act quickly, or she would meet the same fate as Alex and Tai.

Kat ran back through the tower’s entrance and pulled the wooden lever at the bottom of the stairs.

A large stone door slammed down, squashing a zombie underneath it. Then she ran up the spiral staircase as the zombies pounded at the door.

When she reached the top of the tower, Kat waited by the second lever with a smirk. The brainless bunch of zombies was walking right into her trap.

They kept pounding until the stone door fell with a bang, then piled inside the tower.

Kat's fingers hovered over the handle of the lever. "Come on, just a little farther . . ." she said, waiting for all the zombies to gather on the staircase.

But for a long moment, they stood deadly still.

Kat raised an eyebrow and waved down at the zombies. "Uh, hello? Don't you guys want to eat me?"

The zombies slowly raised their heads and looked at Kat with glowing orange eyes. Suddenly, their whole bodies burst into flames.

Kat gasped. "Emberdead?!"

The zombies had evolved into emberdead—flaming creatures who were much faster than ordinary zombies. So fast that they were already halfway up the tower before Kat remembered her trap.

"Oh no you don't!" Kat quickly pulled on the wooden lever. A door within the tower opened, releasing a giant steel boulder that rolled down the stairs.

Kat watched with anticipation as the boulder went down the spiral staircase, rolling faster and faster. It reached the zombies, knocking down the first few like a giant bowling ball.

“Take that!” Kat cheered. But then her smile dropped.

The fire of the zombies rapidly began to melt the steel boulder, shrinking it down until it disappeared completely.

Kat was all out of traps. She looked over the edge of the tower. It was far too high to jump down. Desperately, she pulled at some loose stone blocks to throw at the emberdead.

It was no use. Though she knocked a few over, there were too many of them, and she quickly ran out of blocks. There was nowhere to escape to.

**One final, desperate idea crossed Kat's
mind . . . but could she pull it off?**





CHAPTER 2

In Ada Lovelace Elementary's computer lab, Alex and Tai watched as the emberdead surrounded Kat on-screen.

"Bad luck," said Tai.



Alex nodded. “Yeah, I heard the chances of zombies evolving into emberdead are rare.”

Kat watched them attack and drain the hit points of her avatar. If she didn’t do something quick, the tower she’d spent so much time on was toast. She just needed to wait for the right moment . . .

Tai spun on their swivel chair. “Well, at least we’re all in the same boat. I lost my awesome sword and Alex’s big goofy bird is gone—”

“His name was Barry,” Alex sighed, hanging his head. “It took me so long to tame him.”

Kat’s hit points continued to drain. Her eyes darted between the screen and her friends.

“Big bird, Barry, same thing. Hey, at least it’ll respawn somewhere. Why did you name it anyway?” asked Tai.

Alex frowned. “What’s wrong with that? You name your silly attacks.”

Tai crossed their arms. "Hey, my attacks are cool! Way cooler than any bird!"

"They are not!" said Alex.

Kat glanced at Alex and Tai. They weren't watching her. This was her chance.

Just before her health bar reached zero, Kat quickly pressed the computer's power button.

"Oh no!" Kat cried, jumping up from her chair. "What just happened? My screen went blank!"

"HUH?" Alex and Tai hurried over to Kat and stood around her computer.

Kat put her hands on her hips. "It must've been some kind of . . . power cut! I think there's a storm outside. Maybe that caused it?"

"Oh yeah. Maybe," said Tai, raising their eyebrows. "But if your game turned off, does that mean you got to keep all your stuff?"

Kat gathered up her notebook and pencils and

shoved them into her bag. “I’m not sure! I guess so! Hey, we’d better head to class. Don’t want to miss our weekly performance!” Kat said, nudging Alex and Tai with her elbow.

“Oh no,” Alex groaned. “I almost forgot.”

“Same rules as last week?” said Tai with a grin. “Whoever laughs loses?”

The school bell rang. The three friends headed out of the computer lab and down the corridor. Alex paused to look out the window. Gray skies loomed over the ball field, but it wasn’t raining. *No storm yet*, he thought to himself, then hurried after his friends.

In class, they stowed their backpacks and got ready to rock as Mr. Garcia waved them to the front of the room. Each of them held a different instrument: a drum, a recorder, and an accordion. Their band began to play, and all the other kids winced and covered their ears.



They sounded awful.

Why in the world Mr. Garcia let them perform every Friday morning was hard to understand, but Kat guessed it had to do with how passionately they played. That or Mr. Garcia just had terrible taste in music.

Kat wanted to cover her mouth to contain her giggles. She looked across at Alex and Tai. Tai's face was red from holding back laughter. Alex's mouth was a straight line. But it kept twitching—he was struggling not to grin.

Once the song was over, the trio high-fived one another and sat down.

“Thank you for that beautiful performance,” said Mr. Garcia. “And now for a special announcement: Ada Lovelace Elementary will be hosting a charity fundraiser this year. It’s going to be . . .” Mr. Garcia lowered his glasses and squinted at the piece of paper. “A Game Quest tournament.”

The whole class erupted into enthusiastic chatter.



“Settle down, class.” Mr. Garcia walked around the room, handing out the tournament rules and sign-up sheets. “The game we’ll use is Otherworld. You can register as a single player or as a team. And you’ll be allowed to use the computer labs to practice during breaks.” He glanced at Tai sternly. “So long as you sit in your seats properly and keep the noise down.”

Kat looked over the tournament rules.

She couldn’t wait to get started! Kat glanced at Tai, whose grin stretched from ear to ear. They gave her a thumbs-up. But Alex wouldn’t look at her.

Lucy, who sat next to Kat, leaned over to ask, “Are you going to team up with Tai and Alex?”

Kat smiled. “Of course!”

Only she couldn’t help thinking something was off with Alex. He was staring out the window at the rain that had just started to come down.



GAME QUEST TOURNAMENT



Whoever collects the most points wins!
Entry fee \$\$\$ Charity Donation!



RULES:

NO CHEAT CODES.

NO STEALING FROM OTHER PLAYERS.

CHARITY SERVER ONLY (CODE #HIR3AD3R)



Points:

Defeating an Enemy	100
Defeating a World Boss	10,000

Crafting:

Small Item	25
Medium Item	100
Large Item	500

Befriending a Creature	200
Evolving a Creature	3,000



Inventory:

Starstone	10,000
Starstone Piece	5,000



But the rest of the school day was so busy, she didn't have a chance to ask him what was wrong. When the last bell rang, Kat, Alex, and Tai all returned to the computer lab. They loaded up Otherworld and joined the special competition server. This meant none of them had anything in their inventory.

Kat showed them her sign-up sheet. "I put us down as a team, so you don't need to bother filling in the form."

Tai grinned. "Oh, neat, thanks!"

"We could even think of a cool team name for ourselves!" Kat joked.

Alex stayed silent for a few moments, eyebrows furrowed. Then he asked quietly, "Kat, why did you lie earlier?"

"Wh-what?" stammered Kat.

"You said the storm turned your game off, but it only just started to rain a little while ago," said Alex,

pointing at the skylights. The clouds were dark, and the heavy rainfall was loud on the glass.

Tai gasped. “HEY . . . Alex is right! That’s not fair!”

Kat’s face heated with embarrassment. “It . . . it happened on its own! And even if I was lying, you said it yourself: It was bad luck the emberdead showed up. I wanted to save everything I worked hard to make . . .”

“But Alex and I lost stuff and we didn’t reset the game!” said Tai.

A flash of lightning lit up the computer lab.

Kat avoided eye contact.

“Just admit you made a mistake, Kat,” said Alex.

“/ made a mistake? You guys are the ones who forgot about durability and stamina!” Kat argued.

“Besides, it’s not my fault that my way of playing is the best,” she blurted out, then cringed. “I mean . . .”

“WHAT?!” cried Alex and Tai.

“If my sword hadn’t broken, I could’ve saved you both!” Tai said.

Alex groaned. “You guys only care about yourselves. I don’t want to enter the competition with *either* of you!”

Lightning flashed outside, followed by another rumble of thunder.

Tai and Kat stared at Alex in shock.

“W-well, I don’t want to enter with you guys



either!” Tai declared. Another rumble of thunder shook the room.

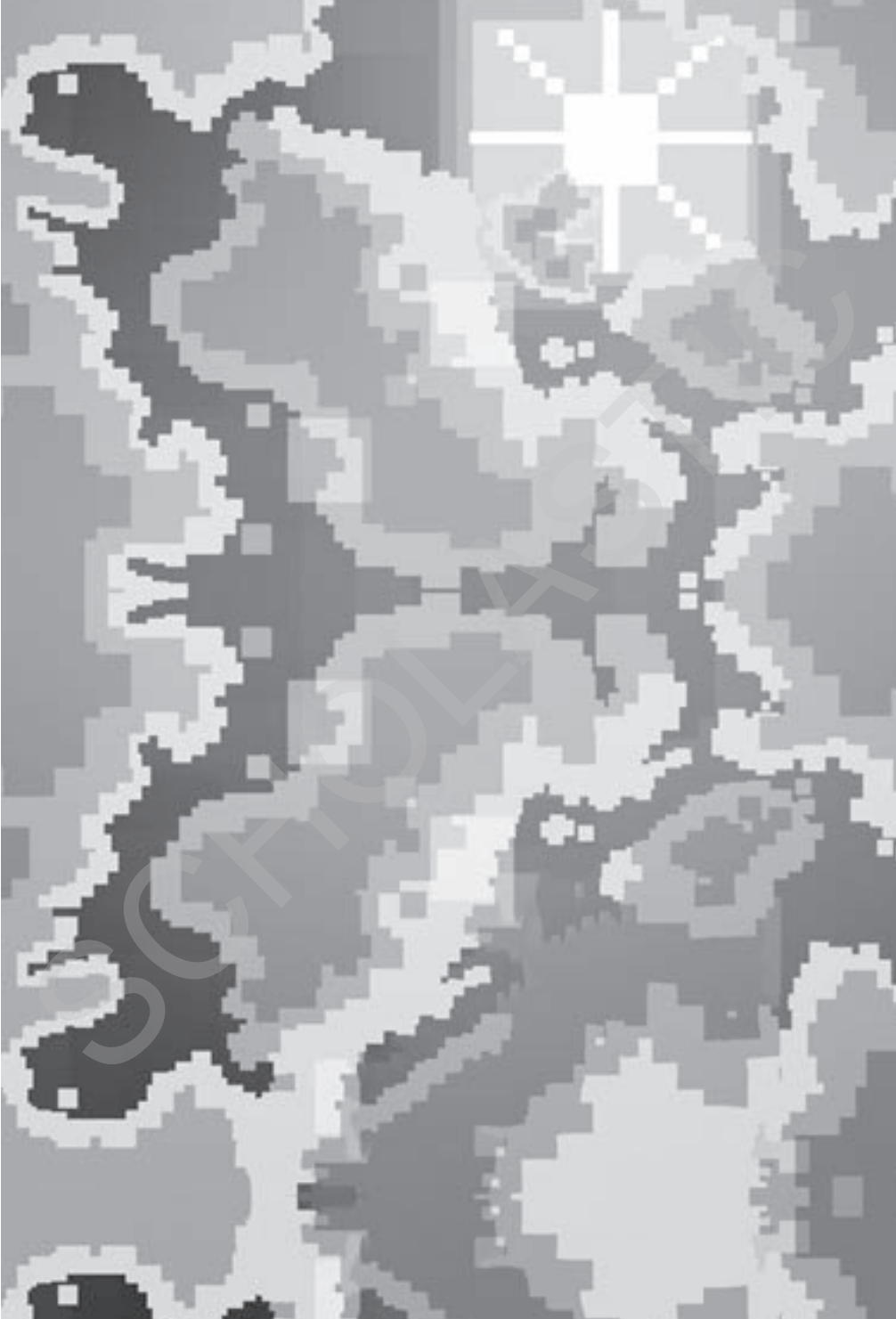
Teary-eyed, Kat grabbed the sign-up sheet.

“FINE, that settles it, then! I’m winning that tournament *alone!*” she said, then tore the sign-up sheet into pieces.

The moment that the paper split, a massive bolt of lightning struck the ground outside, accompanied by a deafening boom of thunder.

Everything went dark . . .

Kat felt herself falling. When she opened her eyes, she saw a bright blue sky filled with pixelated clouds.



Pixelated clouds . . . like in . . . Otherworld?
Then suddenly . . . **SPLASH!**
Everything fell dark once again.



CHAPTER 3

Kat woke up on a golden beach. She coughed, then looked down at her hands.





“No way . . .” she gasped. They looked just like her Otherworld character’s did!

She stood up and looked around. Farther along the beach, she spotted two blocky figures getting up from the ground. Kat recognized the avatars immediately.



“Tai! Alex!” Kat ran over to them.

“Kat!” said Tai and Alex.

For a few moments, they just stared at one another with shocked pixelated faces.

Then they burst into laughter.

“Your faces are too funny!” Tai laughed.

“So is yours, Tail!” said Kat.

“I can’t believe this. We’re in Otherworld . . .” said Alex breathlessly.

“But how did we get here?” Kat asked. “And how do we get out?”

She turned around and spotted a mountain range in the distance. A castle sat on the tallest peak, with dark clouds swirling around it. And high above that castle was a giant, glowing portal.



“That’s gotta be where we came from.”

“So, if this is anything like the game, I guess we just need to go on a quest and get through that portal?” said Tai. “As much as I love Otherworld, I already miss having fingers.” Tai held out their block hands.

“It’s pretty far away . . .” said Alex quietly.

“I’m sure we can get there if we all work together!” said Kat. Then she paused and added, “We should work together, right?”

A silence fell as they all remembered their argument.

“Yeah,” Alex mumbled.

Tai folded their arms. “Sure.”

Kat nodded awkwardly. “Cool, cool, cool. So we should probably—”

A loud squawk interrupted Kat. Alex’s head spun around at the familiar sound.

“Barry?!” cried Alex. Farther up the beach, a giant albatrossaur perched on a log. But unlike Barry, whose feathers were all white, this bird had wings with gray tips.

Alex ran toward it.

“Wait!” cried Kat, hurrying after him.

“That big bird looks even *bigger* than the original big bird,” said Tai as they reluctantly followed.

The albatrossaur was at least one and a half times the size of Barry. She stared down at Alex with piercing yellow eyes. Alex reached out to pet her, but the bird snapped her beak at him.

“I knew that was a bad idea,” said Tai.

“It’s not a problem. We just need to find some food to tame her with,” said Alex.

Kat stared at the albatrossaur. While Barry had friendly eyes, this one glared constantly.

“I don’t know, Alex. It looks like it might take *a lot* of food to tame this one,” said Kat. She squinted at

the faraway portal. “We should focus on making something to launch us up there.” Kat picked up a stick and began to draw in the sand. “I’ll design something. You guys should look for materials to craft with.”

Tai nodded and headed down the beach. But after finding a single stick, they got distracted thinking of all the monsters they might come across.

With another squawk, the albatrossaur flew off into the distance. Alex stared after her with a frown. Then he headed for some nearby trees. Maybe they’d have some fruit he could use to get her back.

A few minutes later, Kat finished her catapult design. “Hey, guys! Feel free to bring over whatever you’ve found!” She glanced over her shoulder. Alex was currently halfway up a mango tree and Tai was swinging their stick around like a sword.

Kat groaned and slapped her forehead. “Guess I’m the only one doing something useful around here.”



She stood up and went to search the beach for materials herself. Moments later, she came across a flint block, four wooden blocks, two iron blocks, and three stone blocks, all hidden under the shadow of a palm tree. Kat gathered all the pieces. Though it wouldn't be enough to craft her catapult, it was a good start.

But then a sparkle under the sand caught Kat's eye. She began to dig. Her eyebrows shot up when she realized what she'd found: a *starstone*.

"Wow . . . I could make anything with this!" Kat



ARE YOU GAME?

**Kat, Tai, and Alex
are entering a video game tournament!**

They thought they were going to crush it . . . except they can't seem to work together. They each think they know the best way to win, and it's pushing them apart.

Then the friends get zapped into the game!

With zombies to outrun and defenses to build, there isn't much time to argue. They'll have to work as a team to figure out how to get back to the real world . . . or it's game over for good.

Player vs Player (Game Quest #1)

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