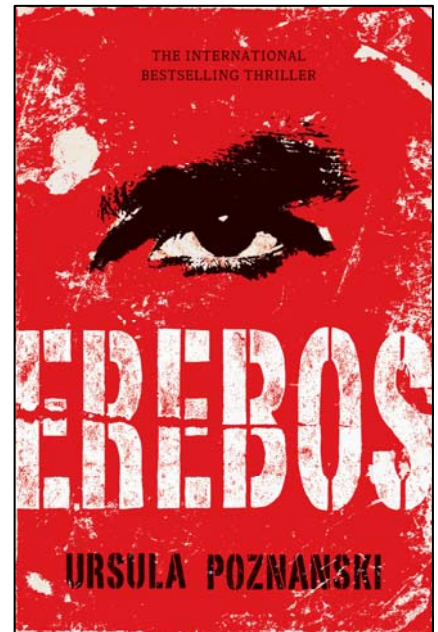


Erebos

By Ursula Poznanski
Translated by Judith Pattinson

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Summary

Erebos is a thought-provoking, enthralling and engrossing story set in present-day London where a computer game blurs the lines between virtual reality and real life. *Erebos* is written by Austrian author Ursula Poznanski and has been translated by Judith Pattinson.

Nick is secretly given the computer game *Erebos*. It instantly proves addictive, requiring players to carry out increasingly questionable and risky behaviours both within the game and in the real world. As *Erebos* players form part of a secret society, finding the truth behind the motivation of the game is as difficult as it is dangerous.

Suitable for students aged 14+ (particularly years 8-11)

Australian Curriculum (Draft version 1.1.0) years 8-10, VELS levels 5 and 6 and year 11 VCE (Victoria), Stages 4 to 6 (N.S.W.), Standard 4 – stages 9 to 13 and Standard 5 - stages 13 to 15 and year 11 (Tasmania), Years 8 to 11 (Queensland), Early and late adolescence (Western Australia), and SACS Standards 4 and 5 and SACE Stage 1 (year 11) (South Australia), Bands 4 to 5 and NTCE (year 11) (Northern Territory) and Early and Late adolescence (years 8 to 11) (A.C.T.)

Erebos is a piece of speculative fiction that is sure to spark classroom discussions about the use and impact of videogames on the individual and society.

Potential in the curriculum

Using *Erebos* as a class text in English, Philosophy or Psychology could lead to in-depth discussions relating to the role videogames play in our society, the perceived effects of violent games on players, the value of games as learning tools, the blurring between reality and virtual reality, the need for humans to escape reality, the power of cults over individuals and groups and historical examples of one person controlling a group for a questionable purpose. It is suggested that *Erebos* be studied:

As an English text:

- as an example of speculative fiction set in 'the real world'
- as an example of the use of language to construct an entire videogame world
- as an example of the use of language to construct real and game characters
- as an example of the way an author can convey a sense of urgency and danger
- as an example of the way readers can identify with characters
- as a study of the craft of writing

As a Philosophy resource:

- to debate the nature of right and wrong
- to debate how power over others is used for good and evil
- to discuss the nature of forgiveness and the nature of guilt
- to discuss the human desire for revenge
- to debate the effects that videogames have on the individual and society
- to discuss the videogame as a place of safety to expend normal violent impulses

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In the classroom...

Erebos by Ursula Poznanski

As a Psychology resource:

- to discuss the way power over others is developed and used and the techniques used to manipulate others
- to discuss the addictive nature of videogames
- to discuss the reported effects of videogames on players
- to research cults, how they control people and how people deal with the loss of the group when they leave
- to discuss and research historical examples of how one person can control a large group
- to discuss whether carrying out an order absolves one of guilt
- to research the sub-culture of videogaming
- to debate where acceptable behaviour ends and unacceptable behaviour begins
- to debate the nature of how being anonymous online changes accepted behaviours
- to discuss how people gain power over others
- to debate the need for people to escape from reality

Teaching tools to support the study of *Erebos* include the *Hunger games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins, *Avatar chronicles* by Conor Kostick, *For the win* by Cory Doctorow, *Gamers* series by George Ivanoff, *Dangerously placed* by Nansi Kunze, *Ready player one* by Ernest Cline, *Luka and the fire of life* by Salman Rushdie, *Percy Jackson and the lightning thief* by Rick Riordan, *Tron* (DVD), *The Matrix* trilogy (DVDs), *Virtuosity* (DVD), *Tomb raider* (DVD and videogame), Sid Meyer's *Civilization* (videogames) and *World of Warcraft* (videogame).

Discussion questions

1. Is playing Erebos like being in a cult? Why do you think only high school students were chosen to play Erebos? Find examples to justify your point of view. Can you think of historical events where one person has so much control over so many people?
2. The 'dead man' says to Nick, '...acquaint yourself with the rules. If you don't like them, you can end the game at any time.' (p. 37) Is this true? What prevents Nick from ending the game at any time? Thinking about what happened at the end, was the 'dead man's warning enough?
3. " 'You should leave Erebos. Go, and never come back. Pretend you've never been here. Forget this world. Will you do that?' Of course not, Sarius thinks." (p. 47) and 'Can't you leave me in peace for just one minute, for God's sake?' (p. 59). What is the allure of the Erebos game? How do video games do this to us? How can they help someone like Helen?
4. In late 2011, there were media reports that the Red Cross wanted gamers who play violent war games charged with war crimes. How do you think gameplay affects real world events?
5. T.S. Eliot said, 'Humankind cannot bear very much reality.' Does Erebos provide an escape from reality for the gamers or is it all too real for them? Explain using examples from the book.
6. "...before Sarius can feel suitably surprised..." and "...Sarius thinks..." (both p. 208). How does Nick think and feel as Sarius? Are they separate beings when playing Erebos? Does this allow Nick to get away with behaviour that would be otherwise unacceptable?
7. How does the author use references to Greek mythology and Christian symbolism to make parallels within *Erebos*? Why does the author employ these techniques?
8. "Create. Sustain. Destroy...I created what no-one before me has created...but destruction can also be of some interest." (p. 250) Does the person who creates something have the right to destroy it? List instances where it is acceptable and instances where it is unacceptable.
9. Do you think Nick would have reacted differently to Jamie's 'accident' had he still been playing Erebos? Explain your thoughts.
10. Andrew Ortolan was a liar and a thief. Did that give Mr McVay the right to try to punish him the way he did? "Those who had scruples were saved. Those who were left I used." (p. 414) Were the players willing accomplices or simply McVay's puppets? Should the players take responsibility for the results of the 'orders' they carried out? Why or why not?

Judith Way is a teacher librarian with a Graduate Diploma in Children's Literature and a Master of Arts. She was the recipient of the IASL/Softlink International Excellence Award for 2010, the School Library Association of Victoria's Innovators Grant in 2009, and the SLAV John Ward Award for outstanding contribution to teacher librarianship in 2007. She was awarded the CBCA's Eleanor E. Robertson prize in 2003. She has presented at conferences locally, nationally and internationally. Judith blogs at [<http://jway.global2.vic.edu.au>]
