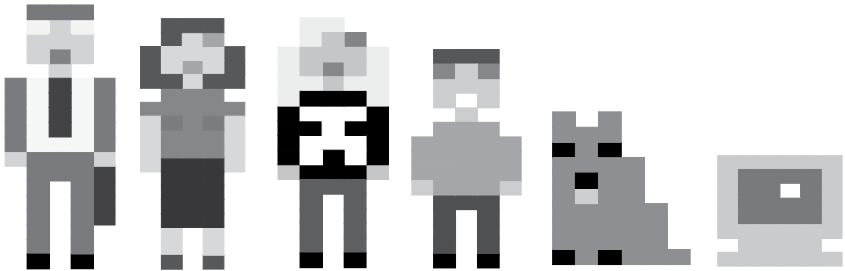


Game Quest

by Leopold McGinnis



**Read the novel in its entirety at
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Chapter 39; virtual celebrity

April 20th, 1995

<RepoWoman> Hey

<Pizzazz> Still using the new name, huh?

<RepoWoman> Yeah. I'm still getting messages.

<Pizzazz> That's crazy. When will people give it up?

<RepoWoman> I don't know, but until they do, I'm sticking with RepoWoman.

<Pizzazz> Ha ha. You're like a minor celebrity now. Haunted by fans and paparazzi.

<RepoWoman> God. It's annoying. And embarrassing, really. It was just a stupid game.

<Pizzazz> like a sub-celebrity...or e-celebrity.

<RepoWoman> I wish I'd never played Adam at that their booth.

<Pizzazz> Oh come on. You like him. And it was fun, right? And you're getting a job out of it, right?

<RepoWoman> Yeah. I guess. I just wish it wasn't made into such a big deal...

RepoWoman rolls her eyes.

<Pizzazz> Mrs. Aphrodite's Bow. The WOMAN who beat Adam Clayburn at his own game, ladies and gentlemen!

Heather rolled her eyes. She was sick and tired of hearing phrases like this; sick of the subject in general. Of course Carol was being facetious but Heather was still tired of it. Everyone made her win out to be, like, this giant achievement. But it just seemed lame to Heather. Exploring Vegas on their own, dying their hair, getting kicked out of casinos and experimenting with underage drinking – that was an achievement. That was great, conquering the world. Beating games was...tiresome...and the big fanfare over it even more so. If a boy had won, it wouldn't have been such a big thing. But it was almost as if they couldn't believe that a woman could do it. Well, Heather had proved it and now she just wanted people to accept it so she could move on.

<RepoWoman> Shut up, please. If I hear that phrase one more time I'm going to spew. I would never have agreed to compete if I knew this was going to happen. Its embarrassing. I just wish it would go away. I hate feeling 'special.'

<Pizzazz> ha ha. It's kind of funny though. You have to admit.

<RepoWoman> i'm surprised the news spread so fast. I remember when we first got on-line when my dad started up SupraNet. There was like, maybe a 1000 people in the country on-line. 2000 max. Now it's like a million. There's so many sites and people you can't keep track of it all. And a vast majority of them are computer gamers who now all want to talk to *me*. I'm just glad I didn't give out my real name.

<Pizzazz> It's too funny. The two days I was on the bus on the way back was like...media blackout...I didn't know that all this was going on. Kind of nice actually. Then I logged in and I was like – Whuh!???? That picture of you playing Adam was EVERYWHERE. And all everyone was talking about was you, you, you and how you beat the creator or Gloom (one of them, anyway). It was nuts. Ha ha. I as jealous until I saw how crazy it had got. Then when I tried to find you online and you were just getting swamped with questions and stuff. LOL.

<RepoWoman> Ug. We couldn't even talk. It was frustrating.

<RepoWoman> I wonder if this is what Adam's online experience is like.

<Pizzazz> Maybe.

<RepoWoman> I dunno. It was kind of cool at first. When I first got back from e2c2 the news was already on a few sites... and a lot of other e2c2 stuff too. A bunch of newsgroups were talking about the match. But it wasn't like, this BIG story.

<Pizzazz> I didn't think it was that big a deal really. Our win at Death-0-Rama was, really, more important...in terms of girl gaming. It's just like nobody realized it until e2c2.

<RepoWoman> Yeah.

<RepoWoman> It was cool talking to the people in the newsgroups that first night back. They were curious and nice and we talked about the Ego booth and not being allowed into e2c2 and vegas and stuff. It was casual and fun. But then, somehow, it turned into this HUGE story and I couldn't get away from it. People knew my handle and one of my emails got out so that's been swamped. And then, like a week after e2c2, as its finally starting to die down and Ego puts up the 'official web page' on the event - like it was something they planned all along and I was the lucky winner that won the first

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place prize of a job at Ego... Now it's totally nuts again.

<Pizzazz> Was that Adams idea?

<RepoWoman> The 'official' site? No. He told them not to do it. But they put it up anyway. Partly because they thought it would be excellent publicity for Ego, which it has been, really, but I think they did it more to chide him for losing to a girl.

<Pizzazz> too funny.

<RepoWoman> Well, I'm glad you're enjoying it.

<Pizzazz> It's got to die down eventually, though, right? I mean, it's been a month since e2c2 now.

<RepoWoman> Yeah. It's been getting better...but I'm tired of it. It actually died down a lot last week. But there are still trickles. And I don't want to restart anything by showing up now. I'll hide out as RepoWoman for a few more weeks.

<Pizzazz> Do you talk to Adam at all?

<RepoWoman> Yeah. I've been talking to him a lot.

<Pizzazz> So are you two officially 'going out'?

<RepoWoman> What? On e-dates?

<Pizzazz> Ha ha. I get your point.

<RepoWoman> I don't know. I like him.

<Pizzazz> That's good. I'm happy for you.

<Pizzazz> So I guess since Ego made such a big deal about this contest they are going to have to give you the job, heh?

<RepoWoman> Yeah. I'm going to be a level designer probably.

<Pizzazz> Whoa! Really? That'd be cool. I thought for sure it would be coffee boy or something.

<RepoWoman> Yeah, but that wasn't part of the deal. Besides, we're top gamers. We should know a good level when we see one.

<Pizzazz> Yeah. But if you take the job, aren't you going to have to move down to Lodi or something? Will your parents let you?

<RepoWoman> I dunno. It's practically a sure thing by now. I'll start after I finish school in the summer. There's some six month probationary term or something, but then it's a real job. But I've been putting off telling mom and dad. I don't know. They'll have to let me...probably. I mean, I'll be graduated. And all parents want their kids to get jobs...and don't want to stand in the way of that, right?

<RepoWoman> And it's a good paying job in the same industry they are in so I don't see how they can say no. But they'll probably be all worried about it. I don't know why I'm procrastinating. I haven't even hinted about it to them. They don't even know I'm, like, this big star.

Well, my dad heard from some friends are work...but he thinks it's just like a little thing. I don't know. Maybe I'm not 100% sure I want this job. I mean...I do...but I don't know.

<Pizzazz> You don't know!?! Whatever. Of course you want this job.

Heather thought about this for a moment. She thought about life outside of Redwood. Her *own* life. Her *own* apartment. Finally breaking out of this slump of existence, trapped in the social isolation of her parent's dream and held back from her own Heather Hütergun adventures. She thought of being like Carol. Going to parties. Sleeping recklessly with men. Dating. She thought of Adam. Drinking. She thought of working and making friends with people who she liked, who were intelligent and not like all the morons at school.

<RepoWoman> Yeah. I do.

<Pizzazz> Will your dad be disappointed that you're going to work for the competitors and not him?

<RepoWoman> I doubt it. I don't even know if there's going to be a Madre to work for in two years.

<Pizzazz> WHAT?!?!?! I didn't think it was that serious! I thought they were just bought out but nothing was happening. What happened?

<RepoWoman> Ok...I exaggerated. It's just my dad has been having troubles with Melfina guys for the last month.

<Pizzazz> Phew! Madre can't go away! That would be so wrong.

<Pizzazz> What kind of troubles?

<RepoWoman> I don't know. They want him to make all these changes. Or at least Newman keeps saying that they do...but my dad thinks its crazy and refuses to do them. But Melfina can't really do anything until the next shareholder's meeting anyway.

<Pizzazz> Why not?

<RepoWoman> Cause thats the only time they can fire him, I guess. But until then Madre's safe...for a year, at least.

<Pizzazz> Geeze. Scare me already. Who's Newman?

"Fuck!!!"

Heather heard the muffled shout waft up through the floorboards of her bedroom floor. It sounded like her father. But she couldn't recall ever having heard her father swear before. Especially loud enough to hear it through rooms. There had been a crash before the yell, but it hadn't been big - like the coat hanger falling over again, as it always did.

Would you buy a second-hand
camel from this man?

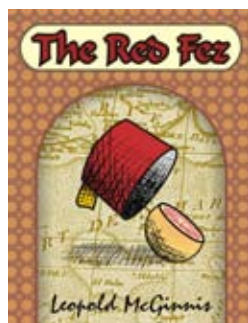


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**not intended as a complete list!*

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<RepoWoman> I don't know. The head of the San Fran headquarters or something. He does all the business stuff.

<Pizzazz> Oh.

<RepoWoman> Hey, I gotta go here. I'll call you tomorrow.

<Pizzazz> o k

Kendra came into the dining room to see what was the matter. She'd heard the crash and Will swear in a way she hadn't heard since, well, before the kids were born. She was worried when she saw Will so upset with the coat hanger that had fallen over, as it had a thousand times before. He rather crudely stabilized it and threw his coat on it, almost daring it to fall over again so he could punch its lights out. He slapped his suitcase on the table and then looked up and saw Kendra.

Kendra didn't say anything. Will took off his shoes and deflated. Kendra snuck in a little closer and Will drew up to her. They embraced. After a moment of this comfort Will spoke up.

"Melfina called a shareholder's meeting."

"What do you mean?" asked Kendra. Heather had come downstairs to see what was going on and was peering around the corner at them. Mark, who Kendra had just brought back from baseball practice, was at her side.

Will dug through the papers in his suitcase and handed them to Kendra.

"The highlighted bit. It basically states that anyone with more than 50% of the shares can call a shareholder's meeting at will. We had that clause in there when we first went public. It was supposed to benefit us so we could change things around if we had to, instead of having to wait a year."

Kendra looked up. "What does that mean?"

"It means that in two weeks we have a shareholder's meeting with nothing on the agenda other than the Board of Director positions. No shareholder other than Melfina is going to come to vote at a secondary meeting barely two months after the last one. And even if they did, it wouldn't matter. Melfina has 56% of the shares."

"Well, do you think they'll...?"

Will huffed, "Of course they will! That's the only reason to have this meeting! To toss me out!" Everyone was silent in the tense aftermath of his thundering voice.

"Well, maybe they'll just change some of the other seats," Kendra suggested kindly.

“Without discussing it with me first?” Will shook his head, his voice soft now. “No. This is about me.” Kendra could see Will’s face was red. His eyes were a little watery, like he was struggling to hold back something...sadness? Anger? She didn’t know.

“But you won’t lose your job will you?”

Will laughed suddenly, exasperated. “No. I don’t think so. I’ll still be in charge of our office...of the games...I think.”

“Well that’s good.”

A short, pregnant pause followed.

“Dammit,” Will blurted out suddenly. “I’m not so much worried about losing the CEO position. I never liked it. I’m worried who they’ll hire to put in it! Because then whatever Melfina says goes.”

Kendra snuck in closer to re-embrace him.

“No doubt they’ve got some ideal cost-cutting yes-man lined up. A pinch hitter they want to trade in...like this business is just a game of baseball.”

Mark suddenly felt odd in his baseball outfit.

Kendra didn’t say anything. She just hugged him close.

“It means...” Will’s voice faltered a little, choking up. “We’ve lost the company.” Kendra looked up and gently brushed a lone tear off his cheek with her thumb.

Mark came out from behind the corner and pressed himself into Will’s leg. Will put his arm around his son, ruffling his hair with his hands.

Will cleared his throat. “What’s worse,” he said, “I found out today that Newman’s been having personal phone calls with top brass at Melfina for the past month.”

“Behind your back?”

“See, well, I don’t know. Not quite. I mean, it is his job to talk to them. I guess he’s been the one dealing with all the stuff Melfina has been requesting, numbers, documents etc... But I was under the impression that this was all just being fired off to middle management lackeys, as it started out. But at some point it moved beyond that and some of the big brass have been speaking with him directly. I was staying out of it, waiting for an official meeting with upper management before getting involved myself. But since Newman *never told me* that big wigs were now phoning, the only contact they’ve had with Madre is Newman.”

“Do you think he didn’t tell you on purpose?”

“I don’t know. He says not. I had really strong words with him this morning but he said it was *they* who were calling him and if they’d been discussing anything important I’d be the first to know. Whether I believe

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that or not he *should* have told me.”

“Can’t you fire him?” asked Mark.

“Sure, I could do that,” Will said, smiling, rubbing his son’s hair. He didn’t distrust Newman, he just wished they saw eye to eye better. Firing him would do nothing but saddle a financially crippled company with an embarrassingly large severance package and throw away the best card they had in working with Melfina. Melfina could just reverse Will’s decisions anyway, after the meeting. But, most of all, “I’m afraid of who Melfina would put in his place,” Will said to himself more than to his son.

The three stayed there motionless. Heather came over and joined them.

“I don’t know,” said Will. “I don’t know.”

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a novella



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