

## Teacher's Notes:

### *The Maximus Black Files*

#### *The Only Game in the Galaxy*      By Paul Collins

#### **Synopsis**

*The Only Game in the Galaxy* is the final book in the series *The Maximus Black Files*. The trilogy includes the previously published and very successful, *Mole Hunt* as well as the intriguing *Dyson's Drop*. Author Paul Collins imbues his characters and settings with detailed descriptions of futuristic worlds.

The story is set in a far away galaxy in a time where life on earth is a distant memory. Maximus Black is a Special Agent for RIM, an intergalactic law enforcement agency. Previously, he had set out to kill Anneke Longshadow who was his sworn enemy and also an agent at RIM. She is just as smart, just as talented, and also prepared to do just about anything to survive. Unlike Maximus however, she is loyal to RIM. She survives Max's attempt on her life but suffers a strange type of amnesia. Whilst Max curses about her survival he is determined to 'use' her on a dangerous mission that should lead her to a hapless death.

These main characters, Maximus Black and his nemesis, Anneke Longshadow, continue their rampant dislike of each other. However, this story also includes events where they are dependent upon each other not only for their own survival but also the protection of their family and future.

They travel back in time encountering strange and dangerous virus-infected planets, grossly fierce and ugly beings, as well as attempting to solve the code that will fulfil their destiny.

Other characters including Jeera, Alisk, Lotang, Herik, Esprin and Deema become involved in violent conflicts in cyberspace. Outcomes are morbid and hopeless for lesser beings. Even the Envoy who appears then disappears for unknown reasons, is often confounded with certain events. However it is the past that Maximus is challenged to change, to rewrite history. This becomes a major focus for this psychotic person who does reveal some details of his past that may influence his determination to build his own empire. His relationships and actions along this journey often end in a futile death or redemption for a colleague. Then they are forced to join Maximus in the final and only game in the galaxy.

The resolution to this adventure-crammed story allows Max to become aware not only of his past life but that his mother and sister have survived. He finds himself weakened by this knowledge, yet fighting to over-ride any emotional attachments that would stop his ultimate mission. He finally conjures up enough courage to rejoin the Quesadans – his mother watching as he leaps from the airship. The Quesadans are quickly overwhelmed, Maximus 'making no attempt to defend himself'.

The Epilogue reveals the return to ‘normality’ and queries the death of Maximus or did he just disappear? It also reveals that *Deema was special*. ‘Just how special, only time would tell’.

## Preliminary Ideas and Activities

*The Only Game in the Galaxy* is a wonderful example of the Science Fiction genre. As a science fiction novel, it presents an opportunity to study this genre and the ideas that drive it. Science fiction is traditionally the most socially conscious of narrative genres so there are a number of contemporary issues that appear in this story. See below for suggestions for student research or debate. Readers will find traces of espionage, corporate culture, biotechnology, plus examples of futuristic life-forms and weaponry.

### Prior to reading the novel –

- Establish the experiences your students have encountered with Science Fiction materials . . . books, films, games, apps etc.
- Discuss the major features of science fiction – its futuristic characters, intergalactic transport etc. List examples, to refer to, as students read *The Only Game in the Galaxy*.
- Students should also be aware of the sub-genres included in Science Fiction – the legendary fight(s) between good and evil, comments about social justice, romantic relationships. These sub-genres can be researched prior to reading *The Only Game in the Galaxy*, or incorporated at the conclusion of a unit of work. Other examples include Space Opera, Scientific Romance, Hard Science Fiction, Speculative Fiction, Military Science Fiction, Cyberpunk, Biopunk, Steampunk, Time Travel and Fantasy/SF.
- *The Only Game in the Galaxy* can be presented independently, or, if appropriate, divide the class into 3 groups with each group reading a title in the trilogy – *Mole Hunt*, *Dyson’s Drop* and *The Only Game in the Galaxy*.
- Make multiple copies of the following worksheet which will assist students in following the narrative.
- **Sample recording design: Fit 2 per A4 sheet, double- sided. Add lines to complete ½ page.**

| Page | Chapter: Main Ideas/Characters |
|------|--------------------------------|
|      |                                |
|      |                                |
|      |                                |
|      |                                |

- Use copies of another recording sheet – specifically for Maximus and Anneke – this can be found in the Teacher’s Notes for *Mole Hunt* and also on the Ford Street Publishing website.
- Read the initial pages of *The Only Game in the Galaxy* as a class/group. This will allow students who have not read the other titles in the trilogy to orientate themselves to the author’s style and the format of the chapters i.e. most chapters alternate their focus on either Maximus or Anneke. Whilst the chapters do overlap in some instances, students may find it helpful to note the main ideas and focus of each chapter using the worksheet, as suggested, above.
- The early chapters re-introduce the main characters as well as certain aspects of their lives and the setting for following events.

## Presenting and Reading

Ideas and activities are divided into the following sections.

Each section is set out sequentially to affirm the flow of the narrative.

1. **Respond:** students answer comprehension questions.
2. **Explain:** students explain a quotation from the text or answer why something in the text occurred. The answers should be several sentences/a paragraph.
3. **Describe:** students reflect on sections or events and write a descriptive passage, which indicates their interpretation/understanding of the text.

### 1. Respond to the following questions by answering in a sentence or paragraph:

- Who was Selude and where did she live? (Ch 1-2)
- What is an ‘off-worlder’?
- What is a ‘hush’ corner? Why was it used?
- Why did Maximus take Anneke to a safe house?
- Why did Maximus use a disguise (Nathaniel Brown)? Re-read p66 for a clue.
- What was Jeera afraid of if she was recaptured?
- What did Anneke do to stop falling? Do you think that Anneke was ‘in control at this stage?’ (Ch 6)
- What was the important information revealed by the Envoy? Why? (Ch 6)
- What was Alisk’s mission? (Ch 8)
- When did Anneke’s memories begin to return? (Ch 8)
- What did Deema tell Anneke? (Ch 8)
- Who was Benthos? (Ch 9)
- What happened to Anneke at the beginning of Chapter 10?
- Why did Maximus question the protection he and Anneke shared? (Ch 11)
- What unnerved Maximus as he followed his plan? (Ch 11)
- What happened before Maximus and Anneke were led down the cave? (Ch 11)
- Why didn’t the Envoy understand . . . ‘unfathomable’?
- How did the caves differ as Maximus and Anneke progressed? (Ch 11)
- What was significant about the Old Fortress on Se’atma Minor? (Ch 12)

- What happened to the truce?
- Who was Herik of Vane? (Ch 12)
- Who was the ‘Monster of Markum’? (Ch 13)
- What was Maximus’s new role? Why did he attain this status? (Ch 13)
- Why did Maximus doubt helping Quizko to win? (Ch 13)
- What was Herik’s mission? (Ch 13)
- Who was referred to as ‘Angel of the Gods’? (Ch 13)
- How did Anneke help Herik to get to the secret chamber? (Ch 13)
- What happened to Herik? (Ch 13)
- What was the Doomsday Virus and its effects? (Ch 14)
- What were Max’s feelings when he killed Quizko? (Ch 15)
- How did Anneke and Herik escape? (Ch 16)
- What was on the paper map? (Ch 16)
- What did Maximus question about the virus? (Ch17)
- What happened when the spaceship went out of orbit? (Ch 17)
- How and why does Maximus control Esprin? (Ch 17)
- What was the relationship between Anneke and Herik inside the Fortress? (Ch 18)
- Do you think that Esprin was part of Max’s destiny? Why? (Ch19)
- Was the speech given by the Envoy about humans significant? Why?
- What is revealed on p 272? (Ch 20)
- Why was Deema confident that Maximus would return? (Ch 21)
- Who told Maximus about his mother and sister? (Ch 21)
- How did Maximus react when he realised the virus would kill his mother? (Ch 23)
- Why did Maximus begin to doubt himself? (Ch 23)
- How did Maximus trick the assassin? (Ch 23)
- What was the Envoy predicting on page 317? (Ch 24)
- Where was Mirella hiding and why? (Ch 23)
- How did the Envoy help? (Ch 23)
- What happened to the Omegans? (Ch 23)
- Why do you think Maximus rejoined the Quesadans? (Ch 23)

## 2. Explain the following quotations from the text or the example given in the text:

- What happened to Anneke in the slave market?
- The relationship between Maximus and Esprin. (Ch. 3)
- P 42 *'Maximus and Anneke were covering each other as they fought a rearguard action'* – explain what was 'unusual' about this event.
- Why Maximus was troubled by Anneke's memories of Tormat. ( Ch. 3)
- What was happening in the bunker? What were Karl, Mika and Jeera trying to do and for whom? (Ch.5)
- The Envoy's role in informing Maximus about Anneke's escape. (Ch.5)
- What happens with a 'Hatsu renovation'? (Ch6)
- What Max meant when he said *'to see where the chips fall'* (Ch7) What made Maximus feel 'Harried'? (Ch 7)
- Maximus – *'we will not cease playing the "game" – it is, after all, the only game in the galaxy – but it is time to make a substantive move'*. ( Ch7)
- Alisk's relationship with Lob Lotang. (Ch8)
- Discovering the lost weapon caches in terms of 'the game'. ( Ch 8)
- Anneke's and Bodanis' roles. ( Ch 8)
- Maximus thought cynically: *'There is camaraderie in Hell.'* (Ch 9)
- The unease felt by Maximus and Anneke as they proceeded through the cave. ( Ch 11)
- *'With great repugnance, she grasped Max's hand. She felt like colluding with the enemy.'* (in reference to Anneke's feelings) (Ch 12)
- Maximus' thoughts – *'Was there another game being played here, one that dwarfed his own manoeuvrings, making them seem childish?'* (Ch 13)
- Max's fingers returning to their pre-injury state. (Ch 13)
- Anneke's realisation that she had travelled back in time. (Ch 13)
- The dreadnoughts could not fire on the Old Fortress. (Ch15)
- What was to be the *'ultimate act of treachery'*? Page 200, include the historical context.
- The secret virus and its importance. (Ch 15)
- The importance of the key. (Ch 16)
- Anneke's conversation with Ethan.(Ch 16)
- Reference to *'the greater good'*. (Ch 16)
- Draconius Minor (Ch 17)
- Read the last paragraph on page 235. Explain what Maximus was thinking.
- Max's revelation about being the 'mole'. (Ch 18)
- Alisk's movements. (Ch 20)
- Anneke's ability to get data. (Ch 20)
- *'It might be the single most important thing in this conflict'* p274

- Maximus responding to news of his past and his family: '*Maximus stared, a ghastly fear evident on his face*'. (End Ch 21)
- How the word 'sacrifice' applies to Alisk. (Ch 22)
- Esprin returning to Maximus' ship. ( Ch 23)
- '*The screen went dead and so did Maximus' heart*'. (end page 312)
- The process being carried out in the 'ready room'. ( Ch 23)
- The upset between Deema and Mirella. ( Ch 23)
- The effect of Deema's blood. ( Ch 23)

### **3. Describe the following extracts or events from the text:**

- How Mirella felt about leaving with Anneke. (Ch. 2)
- Anneke's escape from the safe house. (Ch 4)
- What happened when an explosion hit the bunker. (Ch. 5)
- Pt. Hacker's mission. (Ch 6)
- The use of 'implants' to reveal danger. (Ch 7)
- Sentinel Ekizer's information (Ch 8)
- The plan Maximus was going to implement. (Ch 9)
- The type of setting on Arachnor (Ch 11)
- The Envoy's planet. (Ch 11)
- The lake in Chapter 11.
- The feelings between Maximus and Anneke whilst going through the lake. ( Ch 11)
- Max's realisation of the time frame. (Ch 13)
- Max's feelings and regrets in relation to Hester. (Ch 13)
- Anneke's assisting Herik. (Ch14)
- The scene when Max's ship was taken over. (Ch 15)
- The significance of the 3 cache's secrets. (Ch 16)
- Jeera's expectations of Maximus. (Ch 17)
- Max's decision about the dreadnoughts. (Ch 19)
- A 'seeding shredder'. (Ch 21)
- Alisk's personality. (Ch 22)
- The battle scene in Chapter 22.
- Max's dilemma in following through with his plan. (Ch 23)
- Esprin's plan. (Ch 23)
- The 'ready room'. (Ch 23)
- Maximus' failure to defend himself against the Omegans. (End Ch 23)

## **Additional Character studies:**

Ask students to choose another character from the text to produce a 'character profile' – refer specifically to the text to include quotations or dialogue that supports the description. For example: Arvakur, the Sentinels, Jake Ferren, Bodanis and Sesume.

## **Discussion and Debate**

1. Discuss: Are you convinced that Maximus perished? Is there a possibility that he managed to survive? What do you think his plans would be if he did survive?
2. The author's writing 'style' – for example, the use of changing time frames, his use of short sentences to conclude many of the chapters and importantly the addition of an Epilogue. Was an Epilogue necessary or not? Why?
3. Social and political references:  
Select one of the events below and compare with our own situations either currently or from the past. Explain the links. Information below each example could be used as the link.
  - Maximus' plan to use a deadly virus on a whole planet  
The use of mustard gas in WW1, the Nazis' use of gas to kill Jewish people.
  - The constant battles between the different planets throughout the galaxy.  
The state of conflicts around our world.
  - Maximus' thirst for power and domination.  
Powerful tyrannical leaders – China, some Asian and African countries
  - The use of the heat-seeking shredder.  
Development of nuclear weapons – are they controlled?
  - Non-committal of RIM to interfere between the Quesadan Confederation and The Imperial Myotan Combine.  
The effectiveness of the United Nations in global disputes. (eg in Africa)
  - Spaceships' occupants who would not surrender were sent to their deaths.  
(p223)  
The treatment of prisoners in war camps . . . WW11 – Germany and Japan.
  - Peace continued for 1000 years after the establishment of RIM and the threat of the dreadnoughts.  
The Cold War period between Russia and the Western powers, U.N.

4. Debates based on issues arising from this text:

- The mistreatment of women (Maximus and Hester)
- Females participating in conflicts in top leadership roles.
- If time travel were possible would this be an advantage or not . . . ability to change the past, etc
- Does the possession of a threatening person/weapon help or hinder society?

## Curriculum Links

- ❖ The Literature strand of English for Years 7-10 suggests that:

*Students are introduced to increasingly sophisticated analysis of the differences between various kinds of literary texts, popular-culture texts, and everyday texts.*

*The Only Game in the Galaxy* is a novel that challenges the idea that texts must be either literary or popular. It is a book that incorporates the pace and imagery of contemporary action films and games but also utilises many traditional literary techniques.

- ❖ The strand also says that the ‘*notion of valuing of certain texts as literature is discussed*’.

*The Only Game in the Galaxy* provides an excellent example for a lively debate on the matter.

- ❖ The Literacy Strand at this level also advises that ‘*Students engage with a variety of genres and modes. They re-enact, represent and describe texts in order to display their understanding of narrative, theme, purpose, context and argument and to defend their ideas in written and oral modes*’.

*The Only Game in the Galaxy* is a science fiction text and an excellent starting point for a discussion of that particular genre and genre in general. The structural elements described above are accessible to students in this engaging novel. Students will enjoy *The Only Game in the Galaxy* and will be keen to explore the ideas that drive the narrative.

## Beyond the text

- ❖ Read the two preceding titles of the Maximus Black files by Paul Collins
- ❖ Research examples of the sub-genres contained in *The Only Game in the Galaxy*, eg, the romanticism.
- ❖ List some of the technical or scientific items from this text – write about their use and consider if there may be something in our future that could be similar.
- ❖ Read about the author, Paul Collins below and read another of his science fiction-based titles.
- ❖ Research the history of science fiction authors. Select one of their titles to compare with the work of Paul Collins.



## About the Author

Paul Collins is one of the most important figures in the development of homegrown science fiction in Australia. Both as a publisher and a writer, he has helped to forge a local tradition in this genre that has, in turn, encouraged countless other Australian writers to craft their own stories. He has written more than 140 books and well over 100 short stories, and edited numerous collections of science fiction and fantasy.

It is also worth noting that he has black belts in two separate martial arts traditions. He has also served time in the commandos and worked as a night club bouncer so he knows a thing or two about hand-to-hand combat.

<http://www.paulcollins.com.au>

## Supportive Resources

Jules Vern: <http://www.biography.com/people/jules-verne-9517579>

Arthur C Clarke : <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002009>

[www.fordstreetpublishing.com.au](http://www.fordstreetpublishing.com.au)

<http://listverse.com/2008/03/03/top-10-most-influential-science-fiction-writers>

<http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2010/01/sci-fi-weapons>

<http://news.discovery.com/space/the-great-escape-intergalactic-travel-is-possible.htm>