

# HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



HC: 978082349118 · E-Book: 9780823450329

## STAR STRIKER #1: GAME ON!

by MARY AMATO

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Cut from the soccer team, Albert's dreams of playing soccer are over . . . on Earth that is! Join in as he and the alien Zeenods dribble, cross, and score in this interstellar adventure.

The day that aliens abducted 13-year-old Albert Kinney was the day he was hoping to make the school soccer team. Like the rest of Earth, he'd never heard of the Fūigor Solar System; he didn't know the ten planets in the system even existed. That afternoon Albert only cared about making the team. That's the way life works sometimes, especially for Albert.

Astonishingly, the Zeenods don't want to harm Albert, they want him to play . . . soccer! And so, Albert jumps at the chance to join the Zeenods. Yet just as he is introduced to the specifics of their game and all their high-tech gear, he faces a series of direct threats to his life. Does someone have a mysterious vendetta against Albert? Or does their first opponent, the ruthless team from Planet Tev, want to guarantee that they win?

Action-packed, yet filled with humor and heart, *Game On!* is the first book in an action-packed series that features thrilling play-by-play soccer scenes and an intergalactic plot with far-reaching consequences for the Zeenods—and Earth.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Define science fiction. How does the opening sentence of Amato's novel suggest that it belongs to the science fiction genre? Science fiction often poses everyday questions or problems that are solved in other galaxies. What is the everyday problem that is presented on the first page of *Game On*? How does Albert Kinney travel between solar systems? Explain the concept of the "ahns" and "zees." What other objects and concepts in the novel help the reader understand the science fiction genre?
- The novel is written in third person, which allows for insight into characters other than Albert Kinney, the main character. Describe the primary and secondary characters in the novel. Which are humans, and which are robots? Mehk, the botmaker, keeps a log, which is presented in a different font. How does this log reveal who he is, and what his motives are? The narrator takes the reader inside Tackle's mind. How is this an effective way of adding suspense and advancing the plot?





- Albert Kinney and Trey Patterson are neighbors and have always played on the same soccer team. How does their relationship change after Trey returns from summer soccer camp? Explain how Trey's behavior is more grown up and mature than Albert's. Cite scenes to support your thoughts.
- Explain why the Zeenods chose Albert to be their Star Striker in the next Fügör Johka Tournament. Why do they ask him to sign a contract? What could happen if he breaks the privacy agreement? Kayko, the tactician, is the one that wants Albert on the team. Discuss why Unit B was dead set against Albert. Albert has many questions for Kayko. When does he learn the answers to some of his questions? Debate whether he still has questions by the end of the tournament.
- At practice with the Zeenods, self-doubt overtakes Albert. He deals with potential failure, intensity of competition, cruelty from the other team, and hate directed at him from another player. How do these things mirror what he deals with at home? Who is his biggest competition at home? Who spews mean and hateful comments to him? How does he deal with potential failure? Explain how he is in competition with himself.
- What is a *shawble*? Discuss what Albert learns about his personal shawbles. Which of his shawbles is the most difficult for him to address? Debate whether fear is a shawble. Discuss how Nana and Mr. Sam, his clarinet teacher, recognize Albert's earthly fears. How do they try to help him? Explain how playing in the tournament helps Albert confront his fear and deal with all his shawbles.
- Who are the "evil" characters in the novel? At what point does Albert learn that he is in danger? Who is primarily responsible for this danger? What is President Lat's role in putting Albert in danger? How are her actions strictly political? Explain Tackle's role in protecting Albert.
- Several times in the novel Albert considers quitting the tournament. Explain why Vatria, the star striker for the Tevs, tells him to quit. Discuss Mehk's scheme to get Albert to quit the tournament. In what ways would it be better for Mehk if Albert did quit? What makes Albert stay and play the tournament?
- Albert says that the Zeenods play with such "heart." How does this make him want to win the tournament for them? It's clear that Albert is a skilled soccer player on Earth. Debate whether it was the absence of "heart" that kept him off the middle school soccer team. How does he learn that "heart" and conviction are important in any endeavor?

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Mary Amato** writes fiction for children, such as the hilarious Riot Brothers series, but she is also a singer-songwriter who performs in the Washington, D.C. area. In addition, she is a co-founder of Firefly Shadow Theater, a puppet company for which she writes and directs shows. Her novels have appeared on children's choice state award lists around the country. She lives in Hyattsville, Maryland.



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