

## Wherefore art thou, Shakespeare gamers?

**Shannon Proudfoot**

CanWest News Service

*Tuesday, April 24, 2007*

When he began his teaching career, Daniel Fischlin couldn't help noticing the faces staring back at him when he lectured on Shakespeare looked "really turned off."

So when Fischlin, now a university research chair in English at the University of Guelph, started working on a project to make the Bard relevant to young audiences, he considered which medium would be most likely to appeal to them.

The result is 'Speare, an outer space shoot-'em-up video game version of Romeo and Juliet, the most teen-friendly of Shakespeare's works. The game, which like the play is in five acts, was launched Monday at Ontario's University of Guelph, the Bard's birthday.

Players must capture knowledge "spheres" from enemy spacecraft and reassemble them into famous passages from the play to restore galactic peace between the Capulets and Montagues. The creators' goal was to create something fun to play and helped develop literacy skills.

'Speare was created by Fischlin and a team of computing and information science undergraduates under the auspices of the Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project, a group he founded to catalogue reworkings of the Bard in this country. To date CASP has identified 500 Shakespeare adaptations, one-quarter of them from Quebec, since Confederation. Fischlin concedes purists might cringe at his video game, but he insists they'd be missing out.

"There is a tendency to simplify this sort of approach as a gimmicky approach, but it's a big mistake to do that," he says.

"We're in an age where media are changing around us, and we don't pay attention to those media at our peril."

Using flashier media appears to yield educational results, too. Literacy scores jumped by 72 per cent after just an hour of play when he tested 'Speare, Fischlin says. The game was designed with students aged 10 to 15 in mind, but younger audiences have mastered it and at least one librarian has declared herself addicted, he says.

Beth McEwen, a teacher-librarian at King George Public School in Guelph, took 25 of her grade 8 English students on a field trip to test-drive the new game at the university Monday. The students were enthralled for more than two hours, she says -- not an easy feat in the potentially daunting world of Elizabethan theatre.



CREDIT: Associated Press, Files

Gwyneth Paltrow and Joseph Fiennes dance in this scene from the film *Shakespeare In Love*. A professor has created a video game based on the playwright's *Romeo and Juliet*.

"I try really hard to make the Shakespeare unit really fun and not turn the students away," she says. "It's really high-energy teaching in this era, because there's so much to compete with, so much media stimulus, that you have to be really on top of it."

Her students have just started studying their first Shakespeare play, *The Merchant of Venice*, and 13-year-old Alexandra Steau was impressed to find in 'Speare a literature lesson presented in the guise of a video game.

"It mixed the video games you'd usually play on the computer ...with the Shakespeare trivia facts," she says. "It was really interesting, I would have never expected it."

A free demo of the game is available at [ApolloGames.ca](http://ApolloGames.ca).

© The Leader-Post (Regina) 2007

[CLOSE WINDOW](#)

---

Copyright © 2007 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.