

# DRAGON GAMES

THE BATTLE FOR IMPERIA

BY MADDY MARA

SCHOLASTIC INC.

If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

Copyright © 2023 by Maddy Mara

Illustrations by James Claridades, copyright © 2023 by Scholastic Inc.

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

ISBN 978-1-338-85196-0

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1      23 24 25 26 27

Printed in the U.S.A.    40

First printing 2023

Book design by Stephanie Yang



Luca hurried into the school cafeteria. Lunchtime was nearly over, but he had to eat something! As he was grabbing a tray, the doors swung open. A girl with dark hair and green eyes rushed in.

“Yazmine!” Luca was surprised. Yazmine was not the type of person who ran late for anything.

“I’ve been trying to make it here all

lunchtime,” Yazmine said, also taking a tray. “Ms. Long asked me to return some books to the library.”

“She got me to take our camp forms to the principal. I just got here, too,” Luca said.

He felt a little awkward. He and Yazmine didn’t really talk much at school. They had totally different friend groups. But they had been on a couple of big adventures together in a mysterious land called Imperia. They were part of a three-person team trying to bring dragons back to Imperia.

Luca had seen Yazmine in dragon form. She’d seen him in dragon and beast form. But they’d never eaten lunch together.

“What would you like?” asked a bored-looking woman behind the counter.

There wasn’t much food left. Luca and Yazmine looked at the gloopy pumpkin soup and shriveled fries.

“I guess I’ll take the soup, please,” Luca said.

“Fries for me, thanks,” Yazmine said.

As the server began dishing out their food, the cafeteria doors opened again. Someone hurried in, running his fingers through his hair. It was Zane: football star and third member of the Imperia team.

“Any food left?” he asked. “I’m starving!”

The woman serving smiled at him. She didn’t look bored anymore. “You’re Zane, right?”

This woman was new at the school cafeteria. How did she already know Zane's name?

But Zane didn't seem surprised. He was used to everyone knowing who he was. "Yup," Zane said cheerily.

The server reached below the counter. When she straightened up, she was holding a steaming bowl of spaghetti and meatballs.

"For you," she said, handing the bowl to Zane.

"Wait, what?" Yazmine said, outraged. "How come he gets that and we get sorry leftovers?"

"Special order." The woman shrugged. "You'd better eat quickly. Bell's going to ring in ten minutes."

Luca, Yazmine, and Zane sat at the nearest

table. A strained silence fell. The three of them never sat together at school.

Yazmine speared a soggy fry with her fork and nibbled the end. Luca looked at his soup. Maybe it tasted better than it looked? He tried it. Nope. Worse. Definitely worse.

Only Zane was enjoying his food.

Luca frowned. Why had Zane gotten a special meal?

Luca looked up as Ms. Long, their teacher, stuck her head around the half-opened door. “Ah, there you three are. I am glad you’re eating. You’re going to need a lot of energy this afternoon.”

“Why?” Yazmine asked eagerly.

Clearly, she was thinking the same thing as Luca: Were they returning to Imperia?

Ms. Long just smiled. “I’ll see the three of you later.”

Then the door closed again.

“This is SO good!” Zane said, shoveling in mouthfuls of spaghetti.

Yazmine eyed it enviously. “That’s a huge serving. There’s no way you’ll eat all that. How about you share?”

“Of course I’ll eat it all.” Zane looked insulted. “But sure, you can share.”

“Thanks!” said Yazmine and Luca at the same time.

Zane was annoying sometimes, but he could also be generous.



Luca stuck his spoon into the spaghetti and tried to twirl the strands around it. As he lifted it, the pasta slipped off. He really needed a fork. He tried again, this time digging the spoon in deeper. His utensil hit something.

“There’s something hard in there,” Luca said.

“What do you mean?” Zane stuck his fork deep into the mountain of pasta. There was a muffled *clink* as Zane’s fork made contact with . . . something.

The three teammates looked at one another.

Luca’s pulse sped up. Something was about to happen. He could feel it.

Yazmine attacked the pasta, sending meatballs flying. One of them flicked out of the bowl, pinging Zane on the nose.

“Hey, careful!” he said, wiping off the sauce and then licking his finger.

Yazmine paid him no attention. “Look!”

There, at the bottom of the huge bowl, was a rock, draped with strands of spaghetti.

Luca leaned forward. “Is that a Thunder Egg?” he asked doubtfully.



The last two Thunder Eggs they’d returned to Imperia had been football-sized. This thing was no bigger than a baseball.

“Come on, Luca! What else would it be?” Yazmine teased. “A giant meatball?”

“Maybe!” Zane grinned. “Let me check.”  
Zane reached into the bowl. The moment his  
fingers took hold of the strange lump, the  
room plunged into darkness.