# The Ultimate Escape Short Guide

## The Ultimate Escape by Tom Clancy

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

# Contents

# Overview

A socialist dictatorship wishes to stage a fake election that will fool people into believing that the populace of Corteguay actually prefers the dictatorship over democracy. It imprisons a political candidate and his family in an underground cell in a fake water pumping station. Using the virtual reality of computers, it tries to brainwash the family into telling the world that the imaginary election campaign was real. One of the members of the family is a Net Force Explorer, Julio Cortez, and his life immersed in computer simulations gives him an edge over his captors that no one, not even the Americans, suspect. In virtual reality, he is a star aircraft pilot, and in The Ultimate Escape, he flies to his friends thousands of miles away in a quest for help before he and his family are used and then murdered.

# About the Author

Thomas L. Clancy, Jr. had published only a letter and a short article before he submitted his novel The Hunt for Red October to the Naval Institute Press, a publisher devoted to scholarly writings about sailing and the sea. Only recently, the editors of the press had decided to add fiction about the sea to its publications. An insurance salesman with a bachelor's degree in English, Clancy had never served in the Navy. Even so, his book was accepted for publication, and in late 1984, it appeared. He later sold the paperback rights to The Hunt for Red October for $49,500.

Since the publication of his first novel The Hunt for Red October in 1984, Clancy has become an internationally famous writer and something of a cult personality, especially among technophiles. Each novel that he has published since the blockbuster Hunt for Red October has been a best seller, with sales numbering in the millions.

Although The Hunt for Red October was published with little initial fanfare, it caught the fancy of book reviewers. Some reviewers objected to the novel's improbable plot (Clancy says that it was inspired by a reallife incident, the attempt of the Soviet missile frigate Storozhevoy to defect in 1975), but most admired the detailed and accurate representation of ships and life at sea. Nearly all reviewers agreed that the novel was a rip-roaring adventure with well-sustained suspense. Alerted by the reviewers, the public made the book a best-seller.

Others besides reviewers were also interested in the novel. President Ronald Reagan and members of his administration were reported to have read and admired the book. In addition, diplomats ordered copies of the book, with the embassy of the Soviet Union purchasing several copies. Public officials were interested in Clancy's careful comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the Atlantic navies of the Warsaw Pact of the Communist East and of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization of the West. Since that time, his books have continued to be read by public officials and military people seeking to understand the intricacies of technology and power, often becoming bestsellers even before they are published because of advance orders.

Steve R. Pieczenik is a modern Renaissance man—a psychiatrist, a statesman, and an author. He received his B. A. in 1964 from Cornell University, his M.D. in 1968 from Cornell University Medical College, and he completed his residency in psychiatry in 1974 at Harvard Medical College. In 1982, M.I.T. awarded him a Ph.D. in international relations. In addition to having a private psychiatric practice, Pieczenik has served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs for Secretary of State James Baker, and under Secretaries of State George Shultz, Cyrus Vance, and Henry Kissinger in a wide variety of capacities, perhaps most significantly as a negotiator of peace treaties, negotiator for deployment of United Nations peacekeeping forces, and negotiator for efforts to provide medical and other humanitarian relief to nations in distress such as Cambodia. From the early 1970s onward he has been at the heart of decision-making and management of America's resources and diplomatic relations, and has often been called to direct American foreign relief efforts. Of particular

interest to readers of Net Force and its sequels would be his work to create America's antiterrorist policies under Cyrus Vance and Henry Kissinger. His work in the health field, especially in setting up health agreements between the United States and other nations, has been immense.

Somehow, he has found time to write books. His My Life Is Great. Why Do I Feel So Awful? (1990) is about women's mental health issues, with advice for overcoming obstacles to self-esteem and happiness. He has written several novels about international intrigue, drawing on his firsthand experience, and it may be these works that attracted Tom Clancy. Pieczenik and Clancy created the Op-Center series of international espionage novels, aimed at a grownup audience, and they are responsible for creating the Net Force books, aimed at a young adult audience.

# Setting

There are three principal settings in The Ultimate Escape: Corteguay a South American "island nation" cut off from the world by a socialist government, the virtual reality of the flight simulations, and Washington, D.C. In Corteguay, "The importation of any high-tech device was punishable by immediate confiscation, imprisonment, and even death." It is a grim nation where only the political elite enjoy a good standard of living, and although supposedly free elections are scheduled to appease the outside world, the political elite will do anything to retain its power and its privileges. Torture and murder are routine instruments of the government.

Much exciting action takes place in flight simulations, in which young people demonstrate their skills at flying a great variety of aircraft, from World War I biplanes to high technology concept aircraft yet to be built. The problem the Net Force Explorers face is especially complicated: Once they are sure that Julio is in trouble and is communicating with them within the simulations, they no longer have an objective of winning the contest—the objective becomes to survive long enough to hear what Julio has to say. Complicating matters further are two "virtual assassins"—men said to be able to kill over the Internet. They pop up in simulated aircraft of technology superior to that of the Net Force Explorer's planes. To beat them, the Net Force Explorers learn to cooperate; their sacrifices in order to hear Julio mean that they lose their contest, but they also mean that they win the real battle against a despicable enemy.

The computer simulations include other dangers such as the "Rifts" that occur after Julio first few appearances: A Rift was a software glitch that supposedly broke down the boundaries between the computer and the user's mind. The user's thoughts, experiences, and feelings could feed into the program, and vice versa. Tales were told about kids who played games in "veeyar", and came out of them with all of the injuries they had incurred while on-line.

Rifts have the air of folklore about them— rumors that have turned into stories, but as far as Megan O'Malley is concerned, "Rifts are dangerous." In addition to Rifts, there are seductive dangers such as Mindcandy: "It [Mindcandy] was a very addictive and very illegal veeyar program add-on that directly stimulated the pleasure centers of the brain while playing a scenario chosen by the user." There is also "Drex-Dream," a drug that stimulates the brain, making a person faster and deadlier while in virtual reality; one of the virtual assassins is a "Drex-Dream addict." Users of the drug die quickly; they remain on the Internet at the expense of eating and taking care of themselves.

Washington, D.C., serves as the reality check for the Net Force Explorers. The youngsters must cope with their families and their schools, as well as with Net Force officers. It is a world of responsibilities and liberties and serves as a contrast to the vile world of Corteguay. In it, youngsters visit the State Department, Matt's mother visits a Defense Department office, and in so doing must deal with bureaucrats who may or may not be hiding information. People's lives are at stake, and the youngsters learn some heavy lessons about how to behave in order to save lives, not lose them.

# Social Sensitivity

In The Ultimate Escape, computers are a liberating force. In real life, the Soviet Union found computers to be among its greatest headaches—computers with modems allowed for nearly instantaneous transmission of information throughout the country, and this contributed to the downfall of the dictatorship, because it no longer had complete control of the news. In The Ultimate Escape's Corteguay, a socialist government has banned most forms of advanced computer technology. Holographic equipment is banned because it is easier to fake two-dimensional images than it is to fake three-dimensional ones. Virtual reality is limited to the power elite because with virtual reality comes communication with the outside world. Julio proves that even in the most restrained circumstances, a connection to a virtual reality simulation provides an opportunity to break free of imprisonment and contact the world outside of Corteguay. At first, the dictatorship's control of high technology seems to give it a frightful advantage over its people because it can create imaginary events and make them look like real news, as well as because it can be used to control minds, as it has been used on Mateo Cortez and is being used on Julio and his family. This is a frightening vision of how a dictatorship can use computer technology to enslave a population, but in The Ultimate Escape, the liberating effects of uninhibited transmission of information can overcome the efforts to control people's lives. The mere fact that Julio is able to communicate with his Net Force Explorer friends is enough to lead to the government's exposure as a criminal fraud.

The Ultimate Escape extrapolates from a present-day phenomenon, the online computer game. Online games take many forms, but they are all played via the Internet, usually from a personal computer and a modem. Games can take the forms of traditional card games and board games, war games in which battles old or modern or future are fought, fighting games in which players engage in combat either hand-tohand or with modern weapons such as rifles and rockets, role-playing games in which a player assumes the identity of a fictional character and has adventures in a fantasy or a science fiction world, or simulations such as flying jet aircraft. In The Ultimate Escape, the simulation games have become elaborate educational contests. Winners of the Ace of Aces competition often become fighter pilots in real life. For the Net Force Explorers in the annual competition, the air combat simulations provide lessons in cooperation. Just as American pilots learned in World War II, cooperation can be the key to victory. When American pilots realized that just two fighters cooperating with each other could overwhelm Japanese aircraft, the Pacific air war turned dramatically in their favor. The youngsters in The Ultimate Escape relearn the same lesson, becoming formidable once they begin working together rather than separately.

# Literary Qualities

Like The Deadliest Game, The Ultimate Escape begins with misdirection; Julio appears to be the main character, only to be replaced by Matt and the other members of the Net Force Explorers who try to help him. Julio's opening portion of the novel serves to introduce the situation that will be the focus of events. The focus on Julio is not the only bit of misdirection in the opening; the relationship between Mateo Cortez and Manuel Arias is muddied, awaiting clarification much later in the novel. In addition to this, the opening introduces the mystery of Mateo's betrayal of his brother and the menace that betrayal implies, thus creating elements of suspense that may be developed through the rest of the narrative.

The Ultimate Escape echoes One Is the Loneliest Number's Aristotelian view of the independence of the mind. In One Is the Loneliest Number, characters argue that the mind is independent of the body, that the brain is like a virtual reality interface that the mind uses to perceive reality. In The Ultimate Escape, this idea, although not spelled out, underlies much of the action and much of the suspense. For instance, the "virtual assassins" employed by the Corteguayan government supposedly can kill people on the Internet, making the mind register death even though the body is not touched. This would require a mind that could be affected independent of the body.

In terms of suspense, the matter of what is real and what is not is debated through much of The Ultimate Escape. When the Corteguayan government presents a virtual reality interview with Julio's family, the people talk and behave realistically, and they look real, but the Net Force Explorers are not fooled because the essence of Julio, his mind is not present. His realistic simulacrum does not know what Julio knows. The conclusion of the novel plays on this: Julio, although physically dead, makes an appearance in a flight simulator, helping a German youngster. "What better place for Julio to leave behind a piece of himself than in a flight simulator?" Megan asks. Matt takes comfort in the idea that a product of Julio's mind lives on in a virtual reality that is a product of the imagination.

# Themes and Characters

Julio Cortez muses that "all I ever wanted to be was a fighter pilot!" In an ironic way, that is what he becomes. Trapped in a virtual prison, his mind undergoing brainwashing techniques via computers, he uses his experience in computer flight simulators to find a way out of his prison and onto the Internet, where he seeks out his friends in a flight simulation competition. There, as a master pilot of several different kinds of aircraft, he finds his friends and manages to elude his captors long enough to eventually tell them where he is imprisoned. Although he dies, in the end he is what he always wanted to be: His alter ego in the flight simulator remains, manifesting itself to help a friend. That piece of Julio is a fighter pilot.

Sixteen-year-old Matt Hunter and thirteen-year-old Mark Gridley are the first to encounter Julio flying a tiger-striped aircraft in a simulation. Matt reports, "Julio acted as if he were suffering terrible pain, like it was difficult for him to even speak to me .. . He kept looking over his shoulder, like he was searching the sky for something that was after him.. . something that wanted to pull him back into his virtual prison cell." It does not take Matt long to discover that Julio is "In a virtual political prison, with the rest of his family ... " A virtual prison is a computer generated place in which minds are trapped; Julio and his family are lying naked on benches in a real underground prison while they are hooked up to computers that control their thoughts.

Horrors are visited upon them in virtual reality, tortures intended to make them slaves of their torturers. Matt remembers a favorite saying of his father, after seeing that the dreaded German fighter pilot Dieter Rosengarten has bad eyesight and is "portly": "The real world and the virtual world are very different places." This concept is part of what enables Julio to overcome his virtual torture chamber: As an experienced user of virtual reality, he knows it is not real and that it can be changed by the power of the mind alone. This gives him an advantage over his captors, who do not know quite what to do about his resistance to their programming.

Once Matt, Mark, Megan O'Malley, David Gray, and Andy Moore realize what Julio is doing, the central theme of The Ultimate Escape kicks into high gear: teamwork, a theme important in the first novel in the Net Force series. The efforts of the young people go astray at first as they follow their own individual inclinations.

As they get together and share their discoveries, they learn that they are most effective when coordinating their efforts. This is reinforced by their experiences in virtual flight simulators. Andy in particular, a thorny individualist at all times, has trouble staying in flight, because he is forever chasing after Dieter Rosengarten and being shot down. When the simulations stop being educational games, becoming instead desperate fights to stay in the air long enough to meet with Julio, the young people learn that they can best defeat their opponents by sticking together. In this they learn a vital lesson for combat pilots, one that in real life could mean the difference between living and completing missions and death and failure. They coordinate their attacks as they are

supposed to do, and they sacrifice themselves to defeat the virtual assassins in order that at least one of them stays in flight long enough to talk with Julio.

A good, telling touch is the response of Dieter and the German team. Dieter and his teammates have evidently been flying as a coordinated team—one of the reasons they have been beating the Americans. Dieter has seen Julio's aircraft, appearing out of nowhere and shooting down the American's opponents. When he and his team observe the Americans' efforts, they actually help, making the teamwork a moral choice, one in which independent people freely give of themselves to help another.

The villains of The Ultimate Escape go largely unseen, but their notion of teamwork is very different from that exemplified by the American and German youngsters. For them, teamwork is a matter of obedience. To get that obedience, they murder those they cannot control and torture others until control is assured. Mateo Cortez, Julio's uncle, is one such member of the dictatorship's team. He was tortured, brainwashed, and humiliated until he saw himself as nothing more that the instrument of his master, whom he credits with saving his life from execution, even though his life is not worth much to him. "Mateo was well conditioned not to question the judgment of the man who owned him." He sees himself as property. The great evil he does seems almost pitiful given that he is a broken mind unable to think for itself. His devotion to his master is not freely given. In this sense, Julio's breaking into the Internet is a triumph of free will, as well as of freedom of association, over the evil of forced labor and denied freedom of association (Corteguayans are denied the means of communicating with and associating with the outside world).

Like the other novels in the Net Force series, The Ultimate Escape tends to be moralistic. Jay Gridley, head of Net Force and Mark's father chides his son by saying that "No one ever does good by doing bad" emphasizing, "And no outcome, no matter how positive, justifies a loss of honor to get there." Corteguay serves as an example of what happens when how is disregarded; murder, torture, theft, cruelty, and rigged elections are all part of the how of the dictatorship. The fairness with which Matt and Mark are treated are part of Jay Gridley's how.

Thus, The Ultimate Escape is a study in contrasts between free people making free choices and enslaved people having their choices made for them. The Net Force Explorers do not always make good choices in The Ultimate Escape, but their freedom to choose unwisely as well as wisely ultimately makes them a force to be reckoned with.

There are other examples such as Marissa Hunter, Matt's aviator mother, who can step outside the rules of her profession and bring information to United States Marine Corps Colonel Max Stegar that the rules would have denied him. It can also be seen in the creative assistance of Net Force officer Joanna Winthrop, who uses her judgment free of restraint. It is even seen in the work of Carrie Page, Washington Times reporter, whose free inquiry into the elections in Corteguay helps to reveal the truth behind events in the island nation. Compare this to the enslaved Mateo and the cruel punishments meted out to Sato and the Cuban Drex-Dream addict when they fail to

stop Julio from communicating with his friends. The freedom to fail turns out to be a mighty freedom; the Net Force Explorers learn from their failures.

All this makes The Ultimate Escape much more than a standard adventure. Its suspense is well developed; events are fast paced and exciting. But the freedom of association, the contrasts in teamwork, and the ability to choose freely make the novel a rich work that will encourage thoughtfulness even as it grips its audience from beginning to end.

# Topics for Discussion

1. Was it necessary for Ramon Cortez to bring his children with him when he returned to Corteguay?

2. Where are the Rifts in the programs where Julio makes his last two appearances?

3. Does Dieter Rosengarten deserve the Ace of Aces trophy?

4. Why would people not accept Julio giving the wrong call sign as definitive proof that his "holoform" is a fake?

5. Why are the villains so sure that they have fooled the outside world with their phony news reports?

6. Why would a dictatorship ban modern technology?

7. Why would tyrants fear computers? 8. Would you want to be a Net Force Explorer? Who would want to be?

9. Why does The Ultimate Escape emphasize young adults taking the initiative?

10. Should Matt and Mark be punished for their computer break-in?

11. Is Walton Paulson the jackass he seems to be, or is there more going on with him than is at first apparent?

# Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Corteguay's government is a socialist dictatorship. Is socialism on the wane?

What are the chances of such a dictatorship existing in the era the events of The Ultimate Escape take place?

2. What role did computers play in the liberation of the Soviet Union? Could they do the same in Corteguay?

3. What nations have banned modern technology during the last fifty or so years?

Did they all have the same reasons for banning modern technology? What was life like in those nations while modern technology was banned?

4. How does an online flight simulation work? Where are such online simulations to be found? What are their rules?

How much do they cost?

5. What is virtual reality? How does it work? Will it become something similar to the way it is depicted in The Ultimate Escape?

6. What advances in technology and software are necessary for the virtual world of The Ultimate Escape to become reality?

7. What is the science behind the techniques Julio uses to communicate with the outside world?

8. The Ultimate Escape has words such as "veeyar" to describe aspects of computers. What other new words and phrases are used in the novel to describe the technology of the future?

Why do people invent new words and phrases to describe new concepts?

# For Further Reference

Bennett, Ralph Kinney. "Tom Clancy's Dream Come True." Reader's Digest (February 1989): 126-131. Tells about how The Hunt for Red October came to be written and published.

Clancy, Tom. "The Hunt for Tom Clancy."

Publishers Weekly (July 13, 1998): 43. In a brief interview by Jeff Zaleski, Clancy says, as he has said before, that he has not used classified information in any of his books.

Cohen, Rich. "Novelist Tom Clancy Keeps Making New Enemies." Rolling Stone (December 1, 1994): 114-18. Critical of Clancy's political views.

Dampier, Cindy. "Patriot Games." People Weekly (January 13, 1997): 37. About Clancy's computer game company.

Hyman, Mark. "I Led Three Lives: Tom Clancy May Be about to Reinvent Himself Again." Business Week (February 23, 1998): 110. About Clancy's bid to buy the Minnesota Vikings football team.

Jacobs, Alexandra. "Split Decision?" Entertainment Weekly (May 9, 1997): 74. About how much money Clancy's wife may receive from their divorce.

Kennedy, Dana. "Clear and Present Anger." Entertainment Weekly (October 10, 1997): 58-59. An account of Kennedy's effort to interview Clancy about his views of the future for the Internet and the World Wide Web. "He's not that interested in the Net," says Kennedy.

Maryles, Daisy. "The Cardinal of the Lists."

Publishers Weekly (July 13, 1998): 52. Notes the fabulous success of Clancy's fiction, mentioning that he has first hardcover printings in the millions of copies.

Pompei, Dan. The Sporting News (April 6, 1998): 29-30. A sanguine account of Clancy's buying the Minnesota Viking football team, published before Clancy's divorce made Clancy's financing of his end of the purchase unlikely.

Quinn, Judy. "Clancy's deals top $100 million." Publishers Weekly (August 25, 1997): 12. About Clancy's latest contracts for books.

Schindehette, Susan. "Storm Rising."People Weekly (June 15, 1998): 141. An account of Clancy's divorce. "Inside electronically controlled iron gates that secure the 416-acre Maryland estate known as Peregrine Cliff stands the oddest of lawn ornaments: a military tank. A gift to Tom Clancy, 51, from his wife, Wanda, 50, the tank long stood as a monument to derringdo and to Clancy's nine best-selling techno-thrillers. But it now

seems a testament to something more prosaic: the asset battle surrounding the dissolution of the couple's 28-year marriage."

Victory, Dick. "Clancy's Game."Washingtonian (January 1997): 49-52. Victory discusses Clancy's popularity, attributing some of it to his careful presentation of facts about important issues.

Zinsser, John. "Clear and Present Sounds."

Publishers Weekly(July 13, 1998): 51. Mentions the adapting of Clancy's fiction to audio recordings.

# Related Titles

The Net Force series begins with Net Force, which is almost a hybrid novel, seeming to be aimed at adult audiences but with long sections seemingly designed to attract young adult readers. In the passages detailing how youngsters help to identify and then track down the terrorist responsible for ordering the murders of Net Force and Mafia leaders and for numerous computer virus attacks on important computer systems, Net Force lays the groundwork for its sequels, all aimed at young adult readers.

The first sequel, Virtual Vandals, establishes the settings and atmosphere for the novels to follow. The year is 2025, and the Internet has become an intricate world of interconnecting virtual realities. People have implants that allow them to blend their consciousnesses into the imaginative, fabricated locales created by individual people, as well as by governments and businesses.

The implants are supposed to give each person a unique, irreproducible identification when they enter the virtual reality of the Internet and wherever they wander in the various virtual settings. Although people are not supposed to be physically affected by events in their virtual worlds, leave it to a clever, sinister hacker to find a way around the limitation.

The Deadliest Game offers a deeper, more enveloping experience of the virtual reality of 2025 than do its predecessors. Much of the action takes place in a grand, richly detailed online computer game called Sarxos, a fantasy world of wizards and lords and a multitude of quasi-medieval figures, some played by real people and some invented by the game and its designer. The events are not far removed from present-day reality; there are already online games that some people play for more hours than they work and sleep. In The Deadliest Game, someone finds a way to evade the identification implant, and adds some real world violence to an obsession with a game that some players find more real than the real world.

In One Is the Loneliest Number, the virtual reality of the Internet, a technology on which most of the world is dependent, takes on a sinister new reality when "sims", games that focus on creating accurate computer versions of real world technology such as jet aircraft and railroad engines (very similar to the "sims" that are very popular as computer games, today) or of historical events, cross the line between imaginative modeling and outright reality. A bitter young hacker makes an intellectual leap in reasoning, and opens the way for invasion of the human body from the web.

In these novels, teenagers, mostly members of Net Force Explorers, a group sponsored by the FBI's Net Force and led by the somewhat obtuse Captain James Winters, defy authority, use deductive reasoning, and through courage and intelligence track down evildoers. Each novel is a tale of the potential virtual reality has to revolutionize life for the better, as well as of the dangers presented by those who wish to use the technology to harm and rule others. The Net Force Explorers are the vanguard of the forces of freedom, using their ingenuity to keep the Internet a place of liberty and safety.

# Copyright Information

**Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction**

Editor
Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design
Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotes Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)
ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)
ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature☐Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction☐19th century☐Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction☐20th century☐Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3☐dc20 96-20771 CIP

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996