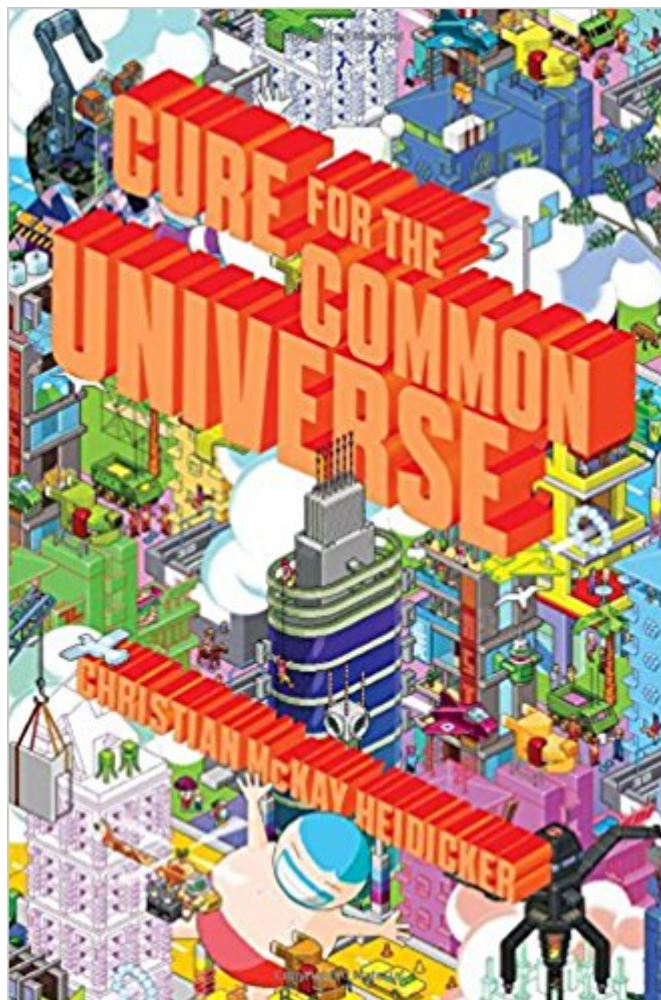


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# Cure For The Common Universe



## Synopsis

Prepare to be cured by this quirky and hilarious debut novel about a sixteen-year-old loner who is sent to rehab for video game addiction. Perfect for fans of Ned Vizzini and Jesse Andrews. Sixteen-year-old Jaxon is being committed to video game rehab. Ten minutes after meeting a girl. A living, breathing girl named Serena, who not only laughed at his jokes but actually kinda sorta seemed excited when she agreed to go out with him. Jaxon's first date. Ever. In rehab, Jaxon can't blast his way through galaxies to reach her. He can't slash through armies to kiss her sweet lips. Instead, he has four days to earn one million points by learning real-life skills. And he'll do whatever it takes to lie, cheat, steal, even learn how to cross-stitch in order to make it to his date. If all else fails, Jaxon will have to bare his soul to the other teens in treatment, confront his mother's absence, and maybe admit that it's more than video games that stand in the way of a real connection. From a bright new voice in young adult literature comes the story of a young man with a serious case of arrested development and carpal tunnel syndrome who is about to discover what real life is all about.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up • A plugged-in young adult comedy about the pain of unplugging. In this debut novel, video game-addicted 16-year-old Jaxon is about to play the most challenging game of his life: escaping from video game rehab. His father and stepmother commit him moments after Jaxon

meets the girl of his dreams, Serena, who is the first person he ever gets up the nerve to ask out on a date. In order to make his date, Jaxon must earn enough points during his rehabilitation, one million to be exact. It won't be easy, though, as Jaxon needs to connect with his peers in person instead of through technology. Heidicker aptly conveys the reality of today's groups of teens who may be more present in the virtual world than in the world that is right in front of them. The characters eventually learn to look within themselves and accept the help of others to improve their lives. Heidicker keeps readers informed of how many points Jaxon has earned toward his freedom at the top of the page for each new chapter. VERDICT This is perfect for teen gamers and readers who are fans of Jesse Andrews and John Green. An excellent purchase for YA shelves. —Kevin McGuire, Woodland Hills School District, PA

—“A plugged-in young adult comedy about the pain of unplugging —| perfect for teen gamers and readers who are fans of Jesse Andrews and John Green. — (School Library Journal) —“Heidicker —,s debut crackles with twitchy energy —| this is a fun, absurdist romp through gaming culture, populated by zany characters and a quest narrative worthy of its own game. — (Booklist) —“Where the novel really shines is in Jaxon’s interactions — as a white, upper-middle-class boy — with campmates who are diverse in terms of both ethnicity and sexuality, and who challenge some of his preexisting assumptions. In confronting Jaxon’s privilege and complicated family history, the book eschews easy answers for a more authentic ending that promises that the work of self-improvement is ongoing and difficult. — (Publishers Weekly) —“This novel is reminiscent of Vizzini —,s *The Other Normal* or Yang —,s *Level Up*. Notably (and happily), however, it avoids the typical game-blaming and recognizes excessive time online as the symptom, not the cause, of these kids —,c problems —| Gamer readers will flock to this novel and fall in love with its insider jokes, game-allusions, and snarky attitude. They —,re also likely to identify with Jaxon —,s frustrations, root for him to win, and appreciate seeing him learn a (very) little something in the end. — (The Bulletin of the Center for Children —,s Books)

The first two thirds of this book are great fun: they’re full of weird, but sharply-written, characters, and a really strange, but very relatable, quest. And, of course, lots of video game references. But the last third of the book is where its heart lies. That’s when the book does some really interesting, really bold things with its characterization. And by the time the book ends, you’ll have a completely different outlook on what you’ve just read. In some ways, I’m jealous, since it treads ground that I

wanted to write about myself. But I think that Christian has done a good job with its gamer protagonist and with the culture that he comes from. You feel his pain, but at the same time the book subtly interrogates the whole awkward heroic nerdboy trope, until you finally find yourself asking, hmm, why is he the hero again?

This book is not as good as my favorite novel (Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*) but by the standards of young adult fiction, it is among the very best. It takes an innovative idea -- video-game rehab -- and inserts realistic characters with an interesting message about what it means to become better. Unlike Proust's 4500 page novel, this one is much shorter. Like Proust's novel, the main character exhibits some of the same traits such as separation anxiety and deceit. The overall arc of this story is also similar to Proust's novel, but without the endless introspection. If I had to choose between re-reading *In Search of Lost Time* or re-reading *Cure for the Common Universe*, I would choose *Cure*. It's that good. It's an *a la recherche du temps perdu* for the younger generation.

For the first time in his young adult life, Jaxon has made a girl laugh. Unfortunately for him, he secures a date with the girl on the same day his dad commits him to video game rehab. Now he must find a way to earn enough points to exit the program so he can hook up with this stranger who may actually like him. Problem is, there are people at the rehab camp who Jaxon has pissed off, either online or in person, and want to see him fail. Now he must see if he can level up in the real world as well as he can in the game world. I gave this book to my 14-year-old, game-obsessed son and he actually put down the Xbox controller to read the book. Twice. For this reason, I was very intrigued and read the book with interest. Heidicker understands the gaming world well, but more importantly, he understands teens. His characters are all wonderfully flawed and trying their best to improve their lives and relationships with others. The story has a lot of great twists and unexpected surprises that kept me thoroughly entertained. A funny and moving story that I recommend wholeheartedly.

A really wonderful summer read. If you've got a kid who spends a little (ok, a lot) of time playing video games, this is the perfect book for both of you to read and discuss. It's a fun and easy read, but the message is powerful. It makes it an easy intro into a tough conversation about the pros and cons of playing video games. Something to discuss while you are out playing *Pokemon Go*?

I finally got to read this after my daughter read it first... I'm not a gamer and was worried I'd be lost

here. NOPE, NOT AT ALL. Anyone who has kids can relate to the difficulties of teens adjusting and the social pressures that go with it... This book communicates that growing up is hard for everyone but there's light at the end of the tunnel. I like that Heidicker distracts enough with the story to keep changing which tunnel and where it will end up. Great read!

As an adult who did not grow up with video games - knock hockey was the game of choice - I found that I was aware of the phenomenon/problem of video game addiction from the outside in. I had no personal experience with anyone who had an addiction to video games although throughout my life I have been exposed to many who were addicted to other substances. As a curious adult I often ponder how it is that people regardless of age can become addicted. Christian's work nicely stays away from how one becomes addicted to the effects on the individual and others who are caught in the trap. While, understandably so, I missed many of the references that gamers would immediately recognize, I did realize how gaming is a world unto itself and this is but one story of one out of millions of people for whom gaming is not just an idle distraction. Christian brings his personal experience of people who are addicted to video games along with his ongoing and continuing interest and connectedness with people in general. This is not the story of a basically sound and "good" kid having gone awry, but reminds the reader that this addiction runs deep and severs someone from being connected with others in any meaningful way. Yes the characters are "quirky" but Christian effectively separates out the main character who is not going to all of a sudden see the light and in some new age epiphany suddenly acquires all of the social skills that take years to develop. Through the use of humor and a well crafted story, I think he helps the reader maintain a safe distance from the abyss. For parents of a "child" addicted to video games, this work may help them to stop asking the question, "Why are you playing video games all the time?" as if the answer would (1) bring about an immediate end to the addiction and (2) cause the gamer to suddenly become a socially connected and empathic human being. This is a good read for anyone interested in the real downside of video gaming.

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