

## A Children's Story Series: Will a Game Help Books?

By JULIE BOSMAN

Scholastic, the American publisher of the Harry Potter novels, is set to introduce another major successor to that blockbuster franchise by J. K. Rowling.

"Infinity Ring," a seven-book series on time travel with an online game component, will begin its roll-out in September, the publisher plans to announce officially on Tuesday. The first book, "A Mutiny in Time," will be written by James Dashner, the best-selling author of "The Maze Runner."

As it did with "The 39 Clues," a major multimedia series first released in 2008, Scholastic will

*Young readers of 'Infinity Ring' could skip paper entirely.*

throw its considerable resources and marketing muscle behind "Infinity Ring" to try to continue the momentum it started more than a decade ago when it released the first of Ms. Rowling's books in the United States.

Like "The 39 Clues," the new series is intended for children ages 8 to 12 and will explore historical events in both the print books and online game.

"I would never put anything in the same category as 'Harry Potter,'" David Levithan, a publisher and editorial director of the trade division of Scholastic, said in an interview discussing "Infinity Ring." "But certainly we think that it's on the same level as '39 Clues.' And we are really following the same innovative approach to storytelling."

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## In Children's Story Series, Will Game Lead to Book?

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There will be at least one major difference: Unlike "Harry Potter" and "The 39 Clues," Scholastic's latest series will be released at a time when many preteens own or have access to e-readers. Children reading "Infinity Ring" could skip paper entirely, reading the books and playing the online game on a smartphone or a tablet.

The series will be about the best friends Dak Smyth and Sera Froste, who have found the key to time travel, a hand-held device called the Infinity Ring. Once they discover the device, the pair are swept into a secret war over the future of mankind and are sent to travel back in time to change the events when history went off course.

Along the way Dak and Sera encounter historical figures like Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Louis XVI and Harriet Tubman. Children reading the books and playing the online game can interact with the characters and

*In a parent-pleasing move, some clues will be provided in print but not online.*

press them for historical information. Playing the game — which will be available on the Web, smartphones and tablets — should lead children back into the books, which contain clues and information that will not be online. That feature may satisfy parents and teachers who are concerned that the series could be consumed for the gaming component only and not the books.

"We are making sure that the books and the reading are the essential part of this," said Stacy Lellos, the vice president for multiplatform publishing and marketing at Scholastic's trade division. "You won't know who the characters are, and you won't



KEN KARP

A new Scholastic series will be written by six authors: front, from left, Lisa McMann, Carrie Ryan, Jennifer A. Nielsen; rear, from left, Matt de la Peña, James Dashner and Matthew Kirby.

know which characters to use unless you've been reading the books."

The series will be written by a team of six authors, beginning with Mr. Dashner, who is well known for "The 13th Reality" series as well as his "Maze Runner" books. Scholastic has also signed the authors Carrie Ryan, Lisa McMann, Matt de la Peña, Matthew Kirby and Jennifer A. Nielsen. The books will be released every two to four months, starting in September.

Mr. Dashner, who lives in South Jordan, Utah, said in a telephone interview that he became involved more than a year ago when Mr. Levithan of Scholastic approached his agent with the

idea.

Within weeks Mr. Dashner wrote a 15-page outline of the basic story and its dramatic arc, with plans that he would write both the first and the last books in the series.

As a father, Mr. Dashner said he has had his own concerns about the video-game habits of his children. One of his sons, who is 12, prefers video games to books, a source of occasional frustration, he said.

But integrating reading with playing games could lure the reluctant readers like his son, he reasoned.

"It's so different from when I was a kid, and they just pushed the classics on you," Mr. Dashner said. "I think the parents and schools are figuring out now that we need to associate reading with fun. This is just a new, innovative way to do that."