



## Challenge

*Edward Castle*

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When virtual reality becomes real enough that people feel as if they're being transported to another world, Valia Online arrives.

A man running from his past joins the game to forget it all. Calling himself Jack Thorn, he chooses an undead race, Deathlord.

A mage by choice, and a swordsman by necessity, he soon finds out that he'll need to use much more than magic and steel to survive; strategy, creativity, and carefully chosen words can often accomplish what simple attacks can't.

As the game becomes too real and touches a part of him that he'd rather leave buried, he is faced with two questions:

Who is he, really?

And who should he become?

## Challenge Details

Date : Published November 1st 2016

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Author : Edward Castle

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# From Reader Review Challenge for online ebook

## Nicolas Lagrand says

In the interest of full disclosure, I am the editor credited above. I did my work on the book pro bono, so I'm certainly not being paid for this review.

Since I was the one who primarily wrote the blurb in the description above I don't think I could do any better here. So let me just say that I really enjoyed the book a lot. As someone who has read most of the currently published LitRPGs, I really felt this story brought a good number of new ideas to the table, and furthermore the author is a great guy and dedicated to improving his craft. I'm sorry it isn't perfect, I'm new to this and to complicate matters I didn't have an unlimited amount of time to edit, and it is a LONG book. I used my own money to buy a copy to add the little "Verified Purchase" tag to this review, hopefully that tells you how strongly I recommend it. My E-mail address is in the book, feel free to let me know what you think.

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## Dániel Farkas says

It is a solid 4 star book.

I have seen some errors about the words and grammar, phrasing etc but i was curious enough to get those behind me and keep reading. If some little mistakes makes you frustrated, maybe wait. Probably there will be another editor or anyone who will read this through, looking for errors. After that you can enjoy it.

Well, as much as you can enjoy a selfish prick with hard childhood going wherever he wants and doesn't look at anybody and what they may want or need. By that i do not mean that he is a loner and mean, he just mess around. A lot. More than i can handle. I know, big boy, strong, raised by inhuman parents and by the street but still.

For a first book it is good. I will buy the next one, even after those things i did not like.

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## Samantha says

This is the first time I've read a book in this genre and I LOVE it! It gave me the same feeling of when I watch a friend play a game while still giving me the more engaging feeling of reading a book. This was also quite funny and just all around well done, especially for a first book from this author. I will definitely be back to read the rest of the series when it's out.

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## Seth Silvernail says

### Absolutely Fantastic New LitRPG Book!

Wow! I'm not quite sure where exactly to start with how good this book was. I'm floored that this was a first novel for the author because it is so well done, definitely felt like a book from a veteran author.

This is Fantasy LitRPG at its best, with a very interesting (and well integrated) real world component as well

which I won't go into so as not to introduce any spoilers into this review.

Great Main Character who I cheered for and whose cheekiness I laughed at quite a few times throughout the novel. Absolutely unique game world which was well thought out and well implemented in the novel.

And this book was huge! Even with a high page count the story pacing was great and I devoured every single and want more!

I can't say enough good things about this book so just stop reading my review now and go check it out!

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### **Jeffrey Thomas says**

#### **Really good**

I really enjoyed this book. Great opening to a series. Can't wait for book 2. Keep up the good work.

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### **Chris Evans says**

Deathlord is a pretty standard, 'not stuck in the game' LitRPG. Castle does break the mold somewhat in his race selection and location, but not by a lot. Instead of Human, Pointy Eared human, short bearded human, and very short human he has Undead Human (several types), Zombie Human, Ghost human, Dark Pointy Eared human, and Dark Short Bearded Human. It's something at least. The setting is an underworld one (deep underground, not afterlife) so at least it's different.

What brings this story up from the standard 2 to 3 stars I was thinking of giving it through most of the story is actually the very end which sets up future books very well and retroactively improves the earlier parts of the book. I'll be interested in seeing where he takes this now.

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### **Lukas Lovas says**

Terrible cover, but a reasonably good book. Not all of the NPC actions made sense to me, and it did seem a bit overly convoluted, but I mostly enjoyed the game, so I have no regrets. I'm curious to see what happens next :)

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### **Bill Scoville says**

#### **Very enjoyable story**

Enjoyed reading this book and I'm looking forward to the next one the ending was probably one of the best cliffhangers I've come across in a long time.

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## **Ross Walker says**

### **Wonderful LitRPG**

Wonderful book! I enjoyed this book greatly. Great leveling and magic systems. I wouldn't want to get on Jack's bad side! Lol

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## **Arne says**

It's an okay read, especially considering the genre. There's a lot of bad LitRPG :)

My main problem is that the MC is supposed to be a smart guy, that has been trained (unwillingly) to be politically savvy. But to me it feels like the author just isn't all that good at writing that, so it gets annoying after a while.

It's pretty easy to ignore in the first book, but it keeps getting worse in book 2, which I have started reading. I'm not sure that I will finish the second book, even though I have a weakness for LitRPG.

It also feels like Valia Online is less imaginative and less interesting than some of the better LitRPG I have read. The stats/traits/titles for example are mostly boring and simple. The same goes for the equipment.

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## **laeaurra flamehawk-mitchell says**

### **Big boom!**

Started this around noon. 13 hours later I'm champing at the bit for the next one. Big explosion big fun. Smart NASA's NASA's 1

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## **Steven Naylor says**

Rating 4 stars, I'm on vacation in San Francisco, review to follow.

I am back from vacation. This is a LitRPG book, so if you like that genre, I would recommend this book.

This story has a different spin on the typical LitRPG story. Most books are written in the point of view of the hero, usually a human, elf, dwarf, etc. This book is focused solely on the underworld characters. This story is set a couple decades in the future where a company (V-soft) has come up with an immersive VR game. Players can either come into the game whenever they want or they can pay for a suspension pod that allows them to stay in the game almost indefinitely. Jack Thorn is one of those players. He is sort of tired of the real world and wants to take a break. He is planning to go into the game for a long time. There are some hints that there is something special with his family since he states once he comes out of the game he knows he has to get married and have a child to pass on his legacy, but initially it is only hinted at.

Jack enters the game as an unbound deathlord. Which means he is a human magic user that deals in death but he has not bound his service to a higher level being for more power. The other characters in the underworld

include: vampires, ghosts, ghouls, zombies, wraiths, draugh (dark elves) and probably a few more that I am forgetting. From the start I had a hard time understanding why someone would play an immersive game like this as one of these characters. For example, Zombies get their strength back by eating the people they kill in this world! All the characters talked about how real the world felt, so this was a little hard for me to understand. Toward the end of the story I did find out why Jack picked to be an unbound deathlord (view spoiler). In my opinion the story was actually better than a lot of other LitRPG out there, the characters actions were a lot more logical. As with most characters in LitRPG Jack was very sarcastic and contrary, always trying to buck the system and break rules. (view spoiler)

Overall I really liked it. My initial misgivings about the story being revolved around the underworld, turned out to make the story that much more unique. My biggest problem is that when I read a story, I try to put myself in the main characters place (especially in LitRPG books) and compare what decisions I would make with the main character. In this case, I could not see any way I would have made my character a deathlord, which is why I had a hard time getting into this story at the beginning. By the end though, while I still could not put myself in Jack's shoes, I at least understood his reasoning more and appreciated what he was going through. I recommend it to anyone who is a fan of LitRPG, especially if you are looking for something a little new.

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## **Logan Horsford says**

This book does a few things really right:

a) first the author used a bit of creativity and did NOT make the MC a paladin. Holy crap, everyone else seems to. I think it's because they are trying to ramp up dramatic tension by having the MC get wounded and then need them to be able to heal up. If I had a nickel for every LitRPG book that had a paladin MC, I'd have a shitload of nickles.

b) the MC has a messed up but interesting back story. It's not the usual crap that a couple minutes in makes you wish they were grown in a vat with no back story.

c) the MC is clever (and a bit evil). This is a good thing. Too many authors are writing the lazy way where the MC is a bit of a dolt then is saved by 'hero luck'. Writing about the stupid takes a lot less cleverness than writing about the smart.

My only real complaint about the book is the reading of the character sheet. If it was done 1/3 as often that would be super. In a paper book, we can skip over it if desired - in an audio book it is an eye rolling event we have to sit through or spend just as long jumping around looking for when the pain stops.

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## **AudioBookReviewer says**

**My original Challenge audiobook review and many others can be found at Audiobook Reviewer.**

“Challenge” is the first book in the “Unbound Deathlord” series. The book is authored by Edward Castle

and the audiobook's narration is expertly performed by, as usual, Jeff Hays. In the very crowded Literary Role Playing Game (LitRPG) genre, this book sets itself apart by approaching the story from the perspective of a more evil or dark character (a deathlord) instead of your usual paladin or hero character. It is a rather large book containing almost a thousand pages in the print edition and comprising nearly eighteen hours of audio. Unlike many in the category, this book makes you feel you are actually experiencing a virtual game world. If you enjoy LitRPG books, I believe you will enjoy this one. Just be aware, the book is the first in a series, and it is the only one currently available in audiobook format. I will be interested to see the direction the author takes this book.

If the sentence, "You awaken in a cold and damp dungeon", sounds familiar to you, I think you get a good idea of the direction this will go. The beginning of the story is nothing new from others like it, however I really was able to enter the world and it felt like a game rather than just another fantasy novel. It felt polished and well edited. One really gets a sense of the characters powers and abilities as he levels up; and who did not like this aspect while playing such games? You felt the initial pain and struggle of a newly created level one character, and as the book progressed you felt the weight and struggles lift somewhat.

However, some of the newer quests matched or even exceeded the players skill level. I thought the ranking system was also interesting. Not only are we given a skill tree to understand, but the book also contained trait and class details as well. Again, simply a nice touch adding depth to the story.

The world the author created consisted of many of the expected fantasy or adventure items and creatures. There were swords, spiders, rats, but the author additionally included some different things such as a quite powerful illusion ring along with others. Because the book was mostly focused on more dark characters, we were presented with vampires, ghouls, witches, along with other creatures who prefer the night. Because the main character was a dark mage, there was some good detail provided around the magic system and the character's process of learning it. In many ways, the book is really a struggle between good and evil, however you are hoping evil wins in this case. Jack thorn seems to be a rather unique player with a rather unique voice; covered in the narration section.

Although the book often filled with pokes, zings, or bantering between the players and NPCs, it also contained some serious and emotional scenes as well. I thought the author did a decent job of taking us on an emotional rollercoaster from start to finish. The opening sequence is action filled and emotionally charged. That is not to say the book is overly deep or touchy-feely. There is plenty of gaming humor and fun found within its pages. The story is a bit darker than others in the genre, but it also deemed more complex and complete even though it is only the first book in a series of books.

The book's narration was done very well by Jeff Hays. With this book, I felt he was trying a new technique by voicing the main character and the narrator as two separate people. Although the story was told from the perspective of the main character, the voice Mr. Hays used when the character spoke was quite different. I'm not sure the voice of the main character fit what I expected him to sound like, but as with other parts of this book, it grew on me. For the length of the book, the audio was performed flawlessly. No noticeable audio artifacts were heard. I also thought he did a good job of pacing the book's narration. I even enjoyed the games female Artificial Intelligence (AI) voice at the end of each chapter. I will say that I did not enjoy the character stats given at the close of each chapter, however it began to grow on me and I wanted to hear how the character grew from the previous chapter. Again, his level and skill elevation seemed to be in line with the actions he took during the chapter.

For parents of younger readers, I would not recommend this book as the subject matter is geared more towards an adult audience. The book contains a fair amount of vulgar language (rather heavy at times), high-level sexual topics, and a few scenes containing intense graphic violence. If any of these offend you, I

suggest you grab a different book.

For someone to want to be placed permanently into a virtual world due to a life event, you have to feel for him. Yet, even though he selects a dark character type, the story is written in a way that you want him to succeed. The writing is descriptive and not overly verbose. If you are a fan of the genre, I recommend you pick up Challenge by Edward Castle, and give it a listen.

Audiobook was provided for review by the narrator.

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## **Paulo says**

Definitely a stand out book in the genre. It's fun and clever. The MC has layers of good and evil which makes him more believable. He's also a clever guy who sometimes lets his emotions do somewhat stupid things but he mostly relies on his determination and intelligence to get by. This is a clear contrast to most books where the MC is usually an idiot who gets lucky breaks all the time.

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