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# The London Free Press BOOKS & CDs

**Languages professor Vladimir Tumanov hopes his fantasy novel will turn children on to math.**

**Prof's children's book adds up**

It doesn't add up. How does a professor of modern languages used to writing for academics suddenly turn to writing fantasy fiction that is winning over children to mathematics?

**Vladimir Tumanov** solved that puzzle with his book *Jayden's Rescue* (Scholastic, \$5.99).

In the process, the University of Western Ontario professor has given his young readers more puzzles to solve.

*Jayden's Rescue* is structured so that the 10-year-old heroes, Alex, Vanessa and Sam, must answer a series of mathematical riddles to move along the plot of a magic book they have found.

Each solution helps Jayden, the scholarly young queen of Idyllia, get one step closer to escaping from Rechner, the evil king of neighbouring

by **Sandra Coulson**  
The London Free Press



**RESCUE JOB: Vladimir Tumanov**, a professor at the University of Western Ontario, wrote *Jayden's Rescue* to help children learn math. He named characters after his daughter, Vanessa, and son, Alex. — *Geoff Robins*



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Lugubria.

"Until this book, I had written only academic books and articles," Tumanov says.

"But being a parent changes you. You start responding to an entirely different world."

His motivation was to help his nine-year-old son Alex.

"I saw Alex was not particularly inspired about math, but he liked fantasy fiction, particularly Harry Potter.

"I thought, 'What if I piggybacked math on top of fantasy fiction so that fantasy fiction becomes a vehicle for turning math into an adventure?'"

It's not co-incidental his main character is named Alex. As well, Tumanov's five-year-old daughter, Vanessa, gives her name to another major character, who is a few years older than she is.

The real Alex says it's fun to have a character named after himself.

"I get to read about myself. You think you're the person, so you think you're having that adventure in your head."

He adds he's much more interested in math since reading dad's book.

Vanessa shyly agrees she likes having a character of her own, too.

But her father says when she first saw illustrator David Bordeleau's drawing of Rechner, she ran and hid under her bed.

Rechner, by the way, is German for calculator.

But Tumanov won't go so far as to say there's anything evil about calculators.

Tumanov took no formal training to adjust to the style of children's literature. But he was avid about reading aloud to Alex.

"I didn't realize this was my education because I was learning intuitively about children's books by reading a lot of them and discussing them with him," Tumanov says.

Tumanov found a welcoming publisher in Scholastic.

"This is topical today," he says.

"There is a math crisis." Kids don't find the subject interesting and fewer are enrolling in upper-level courses.

Using his son's textbook, Tumanov tracked the

[Book Review: "The Math Book"](#)

" But being a parent changes you. You start responding to an entirely different world." Prof.

**Vladimir Tumanov**

[Idol entry awaits tonight's verdict](#)

Using his son's textbook, Tumanov tracked the math problems children in Grades 4 to 6 study -- patterns, exponents, pre-algebra.

Book Reviews

The transition to children's writing worked so well that Tumanov has been asked by Western to teach a course on international children's literature.

[NEIL BISSOONDATH -- The Unyielding Clamour of the Night](#)

Tumanov, who came to Canada from the Soviet Union when he was 12, teaches Russian, German and French.

[DAVID STOUCK -- As for Sinclair Ross](#)

Teachers find Jayden's Rescue an imaginative tool.

[J.P. WEARING -- Bernard Shaw and Nancy Astor](#)

Susana Soler read aloud a chapter a day last spring to her Grade 5 class at John P. Robarts public school. She then set them to work solving the riddle.

[WILLIAM JOHNSON -- Stephen Harper and the Future of Canada](#)

"It was the end of the year and I thought it was perfect to fill in the time and get them to think about math without realizing they were doing math," she says.

[JAMES BARTLEMAN -- Rollercoaster: My Hectic Years as Jean Chretien's Diplomatic Advisor](#)

They thought the riddles, written in the form of poems, were clever and found the characters realistic.

[CARL BERNSTEIN -- All The President's Men](#)

Each puzzle builds on knowledge learned earlier. Students often came up with different ways of solving questions than the ones Tumanov used in the book.

[IRENE GAMMEL - The Intimate Life of L.M. Montgomery](#)

Soler says the book was a good summary of lessons the class learned during the year. She says a Grade 6 teacher could use it to start the year.

[KELLEY ARMSTRONG -- Haunted](#)

Tumanov wants to continue the series with Alex, Vanessa and Sam.

[CHARLOTTE GILL -- Ladykiller](#)

He has sent a manuscript for a geography book to his publisher and would like to do a history book next.

[NELOFER PAZIRZA -- A Bed of Red Flowers](#)

I am the father of nine sons,  
all one-eyed monster boys.  
I keep an eye on all my lads,  
as they play with their toys.

Book Features

A three-eyed monster once dropped in  
and brought his sons along.

[Storytellers set to spin yarns in St. Marys](#)

Three bulging eyes were on each guest;  
oh, what a blinking throng!

[For kids, the plot thickens](#)

Together all the monsters

[Life & Luck](#)

had exactly forty eyes.

[Project seeks memories of Fox](#)

How many three-eyed kids were there?

The numbers tell no lies.

[Young readers make a fast start](#)

From Jayden's Rescue

[Grisham thriller outdraws latest Harry Potter](#)

2002-08-22

[Londoners race through Potter saga](#)

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