



*Newton Park's
Twisted Tales -
Gary The Gaming Goose*



Gary the Gaming Goose

Deep in the rural countryside, somewhere in the heart of Norfolk, there was a farm. Maybe this doesn't seem like an amazingly exciting thing, as there are so many farms and fields everywhere, especially through the east of England. However, this farm was a uniquely, special one.

On first appearance it didn't look all that incredible, it had wooden barns and fenced paddocks for all its animals. There were countless fields and meadows for the livestock to graze and play, even a huge kidney bean shaped lake where the ducks, swans and geese would refresh themselves on a baking hot day. Many different types of fish would swim speedily through the crystal clear waters, it was an idyllic place.

On the outskirts, there were lines and lines of big oak trees and ferns, these protected the farm from the rest of the world. There were countless rabbit holes and mole hills scattered on the vast woodland floor. At night, these gigantic trunks and dark shadowy leaves provided perfect protection for the naughty predators, like foxes and wolves, who were attracted there by the sacred bounty of the plump, well fed farm animals. Because of this threat, the farmer had to put a curfew on his animals. They could roam the fields freely until the sun began to set, but then they needed to be locked up safely in their homes.

Their wellbeing was the farmer's main concern and quite rightly so. When I said earlier about this being a special farm, I wasn't implying that the barns or meadows or the place itself was somewhat magical. The animals that lived there were the extraordinary thing about the place. They had such advanced brains that they could talk and think for themselves, the fully grown adults could actually farm their own wares. The cows milked their own milk, the chickens collected their own eggs, the sheep sheared their own wool and so on and so forth. The farmer had no clue how this had come to pass, he guessed it could be the food and grain or the water they drank, but in fairness he didn't worry too much about it. After all, it made his job an awful lot easier. In fact, the farmer's sole job was to keep his livestock safe from the equally intelligent hunters that lurked in the neighbouring forest.

With such advanced minds, the animals would interact in a similar way to you or I. They would have conversations about the weather and discuss all the events of their action-packed days. The younger creatures would attend schools to learn the art of farming, then after lessons were finished they would head out into the fields and play happily until the sun began to set. The cows, sheep, pigs, chickens, goats, horses, ducks and geese would all mix together, chatting and just having as much fun as they possibly could.

All except Gary.

Gary was a young goose, who didn't really enjoy being sociable. After school, he would hide himself away in his pen, put on his headphones and play games on his console all night long. Gary was definitely a gaming goose as he would play all the latest titles and chat with anyone who happened to be online. It didn't really matter what the game was. He liked football games, building games, problem solving games, fighting games, the list could go on. But all the time the young goose was plugged into his console, he would block out the rest of the world and allow his life to just pass him by.

His mother, who understandably was at her wits end, told Gary, "Enough is enough. You play on that console all day and all night, you need to get outside and make some real friends."

"That's so unfair," Gary sulked. "I have real friends, look. Gamernamer1000, I talk and play with him everyday."

His mother shook her head. "That's not what I mean, Gary. There's a whole world out there, you should be out exploring and using your imagination." She sat next to her son and put a reassuring wing around his shoulder. "Look, if you go out and spend some time with the other youngsters around the farm, then I won't ban you from playing on your console."

Gary thought for a moment and with a wry smile replied, "OK, it's a deal." He was a smart little thing and had already thought of a way around his mum's demands. Gary knew full well that he could find people on his computer, animals like him, creatures who just want to play games. He often talked with strangers and sometimes gamed with them.

Gary never met these strangers of course because that would involve leaving his pen and most of them lived very far away. In his school though, he knew of quite a few animals who played a bit, so finding a friend to game with shouldn't be that hard.

So, the next afternoon he began work on his plan. After school he rushed home and switched on his console, he searched for other gamers who were online and near his location. Almost at once a name appeared. Charlie Chicken was playing in the pen next door. He didn't really know Charlie, even though the young chicken sat five chairs away from him in class. The little goose was shy and awkward around other animals. He never knew what to say or how to instigate a conversation, but knowing they shared a love of gaming filled him with a surge of confidence. Gary sent a request and they started to chat, "Hello Charlie," Gary said with glee. "If I came to yours would you game with me?"

"Of course," Charlie replied. "And we can have dippy eggs for tea."

So, Gary told his mum he was going out with a friend, but just went to see Charlie in the next pen. At first it was difficult, neither boy knew what to say. So they played games together and then everything was OK. They began to chat, the pair had dippy eggs for tea, Gary had a wonderful time and he went home happy. His mum was so pleased he'd been out with a friend, that she didn't even ask questions about who he had seen.

The very next day he did the very same thing. He got home from school and switched on his computer. He widened his search just a little further and found that a little cow called Cobie was living in a nearby meadow. Just like Charlie, Gary didn't really know who Cobie was. Even though she sat directly behind him in class. He was worried about Charlie, but at least he was a boy. He had no clue at all how to talk to a girl. Gary apprehensively sent a request and they started to chat, "Hello Cobie," Gary said nervously. "If I came to yours would you game with me?"

"Of course," Cobie replied. "And we can have milk and cookies for tea."

So, Gary told his mum he was going out on the farm, but just went to see Cobie in a nearby barn. They played games in silence, but their confidence grew, then they had some milk and cookies too.

In the end, Gary had such a wonderful time, then he went back home and felt just fine. His mum was so happy he'd been out with a friend, that she didn't even ask questions about who he had seen.

The very next day he thought he'd meet someone again. He got home from school and switched on his computer. He widened his search just a little further and found that a little rabbit called Freddie was living within the forest floor. Yet again the little goose didn't recognise his name and couldn't remember the lad from his classroom. It worked out well the previous two days, so he figured he'd get in touch and keep being brave.

Gary sent a request and they started to chat, "Hello Freddie," Gary said with glee. "If I came to yours would you game with me?"

"Of course," Freddie replied. "And we can have carrot cake for tea."

So, Gary told his mum he was meeting a friend by the big barn, but just went to see Freddie instead.

Gary crept to the outskirts of the furthest fields. He was very careful not to be seen, because leaving the safety of the barbed wire fence was just not allowed. He reached the point where all the youngsters knew there was a little dip in the ground, just big enough for a small animal to slip through unharmed and unnoticed. He stood in the long grass for a moment, had one last look and saw no one around, so he carefully slid under the sharp fence and went out into the gloomy woodland.

The small goose was a little afraid, he had always been told of the dangers of the forest, but he pushed on knowing that his new friend, Freddie would be waiting.

Finally he approached the entrance to Freddie's warren. He was pleased to have finally reached his friend's home and breathed a huge sigh of relief. He peered into the deep, dark hole, but there was no movement, no noise, no signs of life. Gary started to panic, he called out desperately into the shadows, "Freddie, Freddie!"

Unfortunately the only thing he could hear was the echo of his own voice bouncing off the tall, imposing tree trunks. He suddenly felt a huge surge of fear and dread and turned back for home. Just as he was about to rush off through the forest, back to the safety of the farm, he heard a voice calling in the distance, "Gary, is that you?"

"It is," the startled goose replied cautiously.

"Don't be scared," came the voice. "It's just your friend, Freddie the rabbit. Follow my voice, I've brought you some yummy carrot cake."

"OK," said the far too trusting goose. Gary slowly went into the woods, following the voice of Freddie.

Time went incredibly slowly as he carefully tiptoed through the gloomy, eerie forest. When he finally arrived where the rabbit had beckoned him, no one was there. Gary was scared stiff, in that moment he realised he was in real peril. Then from out of the shadows, a large figure approached. It had pointed ears, four legs and a huge bushy tail. When Freddie finally stepped out into view, Gary realised he had been tricked. Freddie wasn't a little rabbit at all, he was a big, hungry fox with long, razor sharp teeth and saliva dripping down his powerful jaws. Gary gulped and shook as the fox moved menacingly towards him.

"You should be more careful who you talk to online, little goose," Freddie cackled with delight. "Now I'm gonna to eat you all up, you look like a very tasty treat."

Gary started to cry, there was nothing he could do, he was frozen to the spot. He swallowed a lump in his throat, closed his eyes and braced himself to be gobbled up by the ferocious fox. He could hear Freddie's footsteps getting closer and closer. He could feel and smell the warmth of his pungent breath.

Then, from out of nowhere there was suddenly a huge bang. It sounded like a blast of thunder just above his head, but he dared not open his eyes, he stayed motionless, hoping the danger would just pass him by. Unexpectedly, he was pulled up into the air and when the panicked goose eventually opened his eyes he saw nothing but darkness. The poor little thing was terrified, what was happening to him? When his senses slowly returned, he knew he was being taken somewhere. He must be on his way to the fox's den, surely there he would be dinner for the whole of Freddie's family.

After what seemed like an age, the bag was undone and Gary tumbled out. He was petrified as he lay on his back shaking. There was now absolute silence surrounding him. The quiet scared him even more, the fear of the unknown. When finally he was brave enough to open his eyes, to his relief he discovered that somehow he was back by the kidney bean shaped lake next to his pen.

The confused little goose saw the bulky frame of the farmer walking away into the distance, he had a bag in one hand and a shotgun in the other. The farmer, whilst patrolling the fences, must have seen the little goose and the hungry, cunning fox and decided to take action. He felt so lucky and relieved that he wasn't going to be dinner for a family of foxes and extra thankful to be back home safe and sound.

His mother was relieved to see her son once more and held him tight in her soft, white wings. Within the embrace, Gary decided that he would never again befriend or meet anyone online he didn't already know, he was much wiser and smarter now. But when he remembered the fun he had had with Charlie and Cobie, he decided that he would stick to playing with his classmates and try really hard to make more friends in his school. When he told his story to Charlie Chicken and Cobie Cow, they all agreed that it would be safer and more enjoyable if the three of them met up once a week for a gaming night. Leaving the rest of the week to run about the fields and having fun with all the other little animals on the farm.

The End...