

Title: *Don't Hate the Player*

Author: Alexis Nedd

Genre: Contemporary Fiction, Romance, Young Adult

Reviewer Name and Grade: Julianna V., 11th Grade

Date Reviewed: July 27, 2022

The novel *Don't Hate the Player* written by debut author Alexis Nedd follows the two main protagonists Emilia Romero, a junior, and Jake Hooper, a sophomore, who both attend the same high school in Pennsylvania. The story takes place in the present at the start of the new school year. Emilia is unique compared to her other classmates. Her friends and family see her as an overachiever; because of pressure from her parents, especially her mom, she is an intelligent student who tries to take as many advanced classes as possible with a high grade point average. She is also keeping up with her many extracurricular activities including field hockey and Model UN in hopes of getting into the Ivy League. However, this is not what she truly wants. At night, without anyone knowing, she is an incredible video game player who plays *Guardians League Online*. She is so passionate and so talented at this game that she was recruited to the “best” esports team, Team Fury. Emilia tries her best to make sure her two lives remain separate, until Jake comes along. Unlike Emilia, Jake does not receive the same grades as Emilia and struggles to fit in at school. However, he is also very passionate about *Guardians League Online* and is a very good player who also joined another esports team called Team Unity. Jake and Emilia have known each other and shared a bond over video games since they were in elementary school when they met at a birthday party. However, since they did not see each other often, they drifted apart as they grew older. Recently, however, their lives cross during an esports tournament held in Philadelphia where both Emilia and Jake’s teams were invited to play. Without both their parents knowing, Emilia and Jake participate in the esports tournament in hopes of coming in first place to win a large sum of money and much more. Unintentionally, however, Emilia and Jake run into each other. With Jake now knowing Emilia’s secret, she fears that her two lives will cross as she experiences a series of unexpected events.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

Yes, I feel that the plot was very interesting and many things were happening throughout the book which kept me wanting to continue reading. At times, though, the book felt stressful because many things were happening and it felt high stakes.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

I feel that the overall pace of the book was just right. Although at times it felt stressful as I mentioned before, it kept the book interesting without going at a too fast or too slow pace.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

I believe that this book is appropriate for high schoolers (grades 9-12). The main characters of this book are high schoolers so I feel that older kids will relate closer to the characters. Also, there is some mature language throughout the book, so it is more appropriate for older grades.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to any type of reader, but especially those who enjoy romance and video games. Although some parts of the book relate to Emilia's life regarding her relationships and school, a large aspect of the book is about gaming so I feel that those who enjoy video games will enjoy this book. Also, readers who enjoy books about cute romances will definitely enjoy this book.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

As I previously mentioned, a large aspect of this book is about gaming, and therefore, the author utilizes a lot of gaming terminology. I didn't figure this out until I was almost finished with the book, but there is a glossary at the very end of the book that explains all of the gaming terminology; I personally found it very useful because it made it easier to understand what was happening. This book also contains some mature language, and I always advise to look up trigger warnings before reading any book.

I would rate this book *4 stars: I enjoyed this book and found it worthwhile reading.* Honestly, I picked up this book on a whim because it sounded interesting. Although, I am surprised that this book is not that popular. One aspect I enjoyed about this book is the author's description of the fictional game *Guardians League Online* because it added a fantastical element to the book. Personally, I do play a few video games, but I am not super passionate about them; however, nevertheless, I thought the gaming aspect of this book was interesting. I also enjoyed how the author incorporated a few surprises and twists which kept the book interesting. Finally, I personally really like the characters throughout the story. Emilia is strong, intelligent, and she always tries her best, and Jake is sweet and always cares for others. The side characters, specifically Emilia's close friends and some of the members from Jake's team, always have Jake and Emilia's backs and they are honest with each other. This book explores the important themes of friendships, relationships, and online harassment. I would recommend this book to any high school readers.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Ashley L., 10th Grade

Date Reviewed: March 20, 2023

Emilia Romero, who is currently leading a double life, is the subject of *Don't Hate the Player*. She is a field hockey star by day and has a grade point average of A in school along with a well-liked boyfriend. But at night, she is the lone female player on a fiercely competitive eSports team. The success of Emilia's two worlds depends on their total separation, which she has accomplished. In addition to keeping her safe as female gamers frequently experience harassment in the online community, this is done in part to keep her parents from finding out about her gaming. Emilia is desperate to show herself to her squad and the predominantly male gaming community when a significant eSports competition arrives in her city. But when Jake, a player on a rival squad, recognizes her, her seemingly normal life is turned upside down. He comes from a broken family and when they meet again, it is on opposing sides of a gaming tournament. When they were younger, Jake and Emilia played arcade games together. Now that they are both in high school, Emilia not only excels academically and athletically, but she also moonlights as a semi-pro gamer. She is astonished to see Jake and even more shocked to learn that he is playing on one of the rival teams when she and her squad are selected to compete in a massive competition that could result in some significant awards.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

The plot did keep me mostly interested.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was just right.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

For Grades 8 and up.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

Readers who read and liked *As If on Cue*, *We Can't Keep Meeting Like This*, and *The Girl Least Likely* will also like this book.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

There is sexism and desensitization of the LGBTQ community in the book.

3 stars: It was okay; I had hoped for better.

An excellent book overall for young gamers. The game descriptions are pretty interesting, and romance is very cute. The romance was adorable and I enjoyed seeing him and Emilia's friendship turn into a romantic relationship. They were both incredibly considerate and helpful to one another. Emilia had to cope with some real misogyny, no doubt about it. Despite the fact that I know very little about the gaming world, I believe this was an extremely important topic to cover because I'm sure individuals in real life have experienced similar situations.