



## Playing Tyler

*T.L. Costa*

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*When is a game not a game?*

Tyler MacCandless can't focus, even when he takes his medication. He can't focus on school, on his future, on a book, on much of anything other than taking care of his older brother, Brandon, who's in rehab for heroin abuse... again.

Tyler's dad is dead and his mom has mentally checked out. The only person he can really count on is his Civilian Air Patrol Mentor, Rick. The one thing in life it seems he doesn't suck at is playing video games and, well, that's probably not going to get him into college.

Just when it seems like his future is on a collision course with a life sentence at McDonald's, Rick asks him to test a video game. If his score's high enough, it could earn him a place in flight school and win him the future he was certain that he could never have. And when he falls in love with the game's designer, the legendary gamer Ani, Tyler thinks his life might finally be turning around.

That is, until Brandon goes MIA from rehab and Tyler and Ani discover that the game is more than it seems. Now Tyler will have to figure out what's really going on in time to save his brother... and prevent his own future from going down in flames.

## Playing Tyler Details

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## From Reader Review Playing Tyler for online ebook

### Laine The Librarian says

Playing Tyler has not come out yet, but I was approved of reading it a head of time using Netgalley.com. It is a great site that lets you read the books before they come out. As a Librarian this is a great advantage for me so when the books come into the Library, I am able to inform our patrons how good the book is and if it is worth reading :)!!!

You have ADHD. You can't sit through class. You're always fidgeting, always wanting to move. Don't like the pills for the pills always give you a weird feeling. So what do you do to pass the time of day?

Play games!!

As someone who has little ADD, games always seem to calm me down. I don't know what it is, but I relax when I'm playing any kind of game...mostly Call of Duty. I think mostly because my brain thinks so fast on things, and I'm always fidgety myself, being able to do ten things at once calms my mind. And that's Tyler MacCandless. A teenager who feels the love of every game for it keeps his mind active, and will try any kind of game.

Especially a game that is invented for the Air Force, and a game created by his huge time crush. And this is his one chance to get into Flying School he will do anything to get there. Even play a boring game.

Or is it JUST a game?

Follow Tyler and Ani through a whole new gaming world, fighting the Air Force, everything they believe in even family, deception and their attraction!!

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### Faye, la Patata says

Read this and my other reviews at **The Social Potato!**

*An ARC was provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest review. This did not influence my thoughts in any way. Thank you so much, Strange Chemistry!*

**Disclaimer: This can get quite ranty. And spoiler-y. Read at your own risk**

**Mother of all migraines.** If there's a book that pushed me to become an angry Hulk, it's this. *Playing Tyler* is definitely one of my biggest disappointments this year, as it was successful in making me rage, stomp the floor in frustration, and put down my kindle because my brain was having its own form of seizures. There are just no coherent ways of expressing my utter hatred for this book. *UGH.*

First, don't get me wrong. I didn't go into this book expecting to hate it. I'm not the kind who'd willingly punish herself to get a kick out of it. To make things straight, the synopsis of *Playing Tyler* absolutely captivated me in its web. I have this soft spot for stories that have "game" concepts but eventually turns out to be more than what it is. There's just something so exciting and bewitching about characters being so into

something that initially looked innocent, only to feel betrayed later on when they find out about the horrible truth. Such a concept has potential to be an awesome and epic book, but *Playing Tyler...* did not play its cards well. There were just so many problems that I don't even know where to start.

**The blurb is somewhat misleading. It gives us that thriller, fast-paced vibe of uncovering truths and conspiracies within corporates and governments, but the first 60% of the book is like... drama. A long-winded, dragging, soap opera that is just so cringe-worthy that the word "failure" doesn't even cover it.** So there's Tyler, a teenage guy with ADHD who's apparently a legend in online games. OK. Fine. I'll go along with that. He gets invited to beta-test this new flight simulation game, and if he plays long enough, he'll be offered a place in an aviation school so he can fly for real. Ok. Fine. I'm still nodding here.

AND THEN... he meets the programmer, who turns out to be Ani, who's - *dun dun dun duuuuuuun* - also a legend in the online gaming world! And of course, Tyler goes, **Ohhhemmmmgeeeeeee a guuuuurl  
gaaaameerrrrr OMFGHAXORZ!!! And it's not just any gurl-omg-gamer, it's THE gurl gamer, like, she was number 1 until I dethroned her!!!**

This book made it seem like guuurrll gamers are sooooo rare and it's just so utterly unbelievable that they can be as good as guys, and as a gamer myself, I am deeply insulted. But that's not the focus here. It's the pointless drama-rama. So, ok. Upon recognizing the girl, Tyler's eyes immediately goes *Ka-ching INSTALOVE!* and he transforms into one creepy mofo stalker. NO JOKE. **If you thought Edward Cullen was creepy, you haven't seen Tyler yet.** He freaking adores and worships the girl, keeps on thinking how she's so cute and so awesome and so cute and so awesome and so so so cute, as if saying it a gazillion times just wasn't enough. I know he has ADHD, but it was just so tiring for me to see him repeat it over and over without commas and periods because authenticity, yo! Anyway. Right. He wanted to ask her out, to date her, to make her his girlfriend, but she made it clear from the very beginning that she doesn't want to. So you know what he does? He texts her. Over and over. He sends her an e-mail *every day for WEEKS ON END.* Pleading, wanting to know her, wanting to visit her, wanting her to visit him, etc. etc. OMFG. If I were Ani, I'd have run for the hills already!!!

But nooo... not Ani. Of course not. She eventually gives in, they gorge on pizzas, have a kiss outside (with Tyler describing his excitement of that kiss and the fact that he was kissed for a page or two), and they fall in love... and... there goes the first 60% ... -\_- (It is at this point I'm internally screaming: *"I DID NOT SIGN UP FOR THIS!!!"*)

But even if the romance part was nonexistent, Tyler as a character was fucking annoying as hell. (view spoiler) Whatever. Fuck you, Tyler. Fuck you.

Anyway... the prose is easy to read but it can be very very annoying in Tyler's POV. He has ADHD so he narrates with run-ons that are oftentimes lacking commas and periods. For authenticity I guess that works, but I just couldn't deal with it. It bothered me too much and it failed to connect to me. If it's full of *I want to kiss her oh my god she's so cute and so pretty and so awesome look at those eyelashes she's really so cute ah I wanna kiss her so bad* for half a page, then I'm sorry, it's not going to work with me. Nice try for that, though. Other people could probably appreciate them but count me out.

*Why doesn't he care why doesn't he just now I need him why can't he see and now I'm going to fucking die and no one will be here to save him to care when he dies to cry when they put him in the ground and all I ever wanted to do in my life was see him get better and now we're both hit.*

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At the end of the day, I couldn't deal with Tyler and his endless focus on kisses and his cute girlfriend and their eyelashes that "go on forever" (x\_x) and the overall execution of the plot. The pacing was just so off... if we go by content, it was more of a romance than anything else... a romance that was seriously badly developed and weird and *disturbing*. The *real* plot could've been good but Tyler and Ani, who has a pretty bland personality, were just too big epic failures I couldn't ignore. I wanted to love this, because that blurb is fucking perfect, but unfortunately, I've found too many problems and thus have to conclude this review by saying this gets nothing more than **1 STAR** from me.

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### **Michael Underwood says**

The thing that struck me right away about Playing Tyler was the voice. Tyler MacCandless has ADHD, and the narration shows it, loud and clear. The narration is more choppy in places where Tyler is stressed or un-medicated, and becomes smoother when he is in control, at peace.

The plot focuses around Tyler's work testing a new flight simulator, which he thinks will be his ticket into flight school and out of his dead-end life. But there's a whole lot more going on than a fancy beta test.

One of my favorite parts about this novel was the romance between two 1337 gamers who are outcasts in their own world but connect through their shared love of gaming.

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### **AH says**

*Initial thoughts* - Great debut book for author T.L. Costa. I loved her characters and the story, while a little predictable, kept me on the edge of my seat. Nicely done.

#### *The Review*

**Playing Tyler** by debut author T.L. Costa was a nice little surprise, a breath of fresh air among all the Young Adult novels available right now. The author captures all the insecurities, incoherent thoughts, and emotions of the main character so well. Compounded with the usual angst of being a teenager, Tyler also suffers from a learning disability as well as ADHD. The result is a realistic depiction of a character whose disjointed inner dialogue is not only entertaining, but authentic.

The story is told through alternating first person points of view. I love this method of storytelling – you really get to be inside the characters' heads. Both characters play off of each other very well. First, there's Tyler, who has difficulty focusing on his schoolwork. His mother doesn't seem to be around much and when

she is, she is usually inattentive. It's really hard not to fall in love with the main character Tyler. He is, endearing. He has lofty goals – he wants to become a pilot, however his marks at school will not allow him to pursue that dream unless there's a "backdoor." Tyler's mentor Rick offers him a chance to pilot a drone aircraft in a new video game.

Enter Ani. Ani is a 16 year old computer genius and a student on scholarship at Yale. Ani has designed the program that Tyler will be playing. Ani is a sweetheart and she's also known as SlayerGrrl, an epic gamer who Tyler worships.

These two are so cute together. At first I couldn't stop chuckling at both of their inner dialogues. So awkward! So sweet. At first they are not allowed to have any contact, but that quickly changes. All is not as it seems. Tyler has a brother who is fighting an addiction to drugs and his mother is dysfunctional. Ani has issues of her own. Then as Tyler makes a realization (sorry – I so saw that coming), the plot picks up and the pace is non-stop as Ani and Tyler need to get out of town, fast.

Ani and Tyler find themselves en route to Canada. I can't even begin to imagine rowing across Lake Memphremagog in the summer, let alone in November. Very cold! Oh, and a shout out to Montreal, too – cool!

**Playing Tyler** is a wonderful debut novel that should appeal to both girls and boys from middle grades and higher. Oh, and adults who enjoy a young adult read will like this book too.

Highly recommended.

**See DG's excellent review on Badass Book Reviews.**

*Thank you to NetGalley and Strange Chemistry for a review copy of this book.*

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### **Leah says**

This book was like nothing I expected! It was a whirlwind of events and I ate it up. I expected the book to be slightly sci-fi with the whole 'what if it's more than a game?' type of thing. I expected it to be sort of similar to Gibson's Neuromancer but I was so wrong. For that, I am so happy. It opened my eyes to a new genre and also surprised me in my way of thinking. Half way through the book, I looked up the author and discovered that she was female. Having read the back and roughly half of the book I found myself surprised. I'm really interested in gender and its stereotypes so this was really refreshing for me to discover that women are now writing books 'like this'. 'Like this' meaning military, hi-tech style. I loved it.

The characters developed within the book were amazing. I loved Taylor and felt genuine sadness and pain when he suffered during the book. He is a well developed character and someone that it is impossible not to sympathise with. His sufferings are so very real and Costa deals with issues which plague many families across the world. He has lost his father and his eldest brother is battling a drug addiction. His mother is mentally absent more often than not and Taylor is left to pick up the pieces. The game sent to him in which he will be acting as a military pilot seems like the perfect thing to distract him from what is happening in his

day to day life.

I also absolutely loved Ani. She is a strong, feisty and very intelligent teenager who is currently studying at Yale university way ahead of her time. She is the creator of the program that Taylor is now testing. Contact between the pair is forbidden by her boss, Rick. Ani is an interesting and exciting figure. Similarly to Taylor, she has essentially lost her father to war as he came back with PTSD and is now in prison for assault. Despite this, she continues with her life although he misses her father each and every day. Not only does she protect herself, but she ensures that her programs are easily accessible to her at all times despite the threat of prison looming over her head thanks to Rick. I loved seeing her break the rules as her and Taylor get closer and many secrets are unveiled.

A book filled with so many twists and turns and excitement in every chapter, this is not a book to be missed. It features military action, blackmail, love and plenty of excitement to keep you turning the pages. I highly recommend this book to everyone!

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### **Whitley Birks says**

This review and others are on Whitley Reads

*This book was provided free by the publisher in exchange for an honest review*

I'm just going to get something out upfront. This book is pretty good at doing emotional responses. When it comes to family drama. There were a few points where I would get choked up *even though* I wasn't agreeing with what was going on. And awkward teenage dating? Spot-on accurate.

Okay, we clear on that? The book did some stuff well? Got that out of the way? Good.

Everything else was shit.

A lot of what I disliked about this book was based on my politics, and if you disagree with me on those points, that's fine. A lot of people are going to, and more power to you. As long as you put a bit more thought into your position than this book did. This book is a hot mess of buzz-word issues that picked the easy answer, stopped thinking after that, and declared the other side to be evil. Then, apparently, it realized the other side wasn't evil enough so it tacked on some more shit to make the main characters look better. Yeah, it was one of those books where the characters know someone is evil and *then* all the evidence comes out.

But let's tackle all of this in order. First up. The pacing was horrible. The first half of the book was nothing but personal drama. Someone came and set up a supercomputer in Tyler's bedroom, called it a simulator that he's supposed to beta-test, and then he was barely on it until about the 60% mark. He didn't quite ignore the thing, but the book sure as hell didn't care. It was more interested in setting up romance.

And fuck that was a creepy romance. I mean, after it got going it was cute enough, but the set up? Tyler straight-up *stalked the shit* out of Ani for weeks. She gave him a very clear 'no,' but he decided that she was just so pretty and awesome that he had to have her, so he started *emailing her on a daily basis*. For WEEKS, even though she wasn't giving him any replies. And the way he kept going on and on about her skin was just weird. It was like looking at the mind of a demented serial killer. I thought he was going to try and peel her and wear her.

Tyler's ADHD pissed me off to no end. This was yet another book that tried to push the whole "you don't need you meds, just stop taking them, having ADHD is awesome" message. Sure, Tyler's brain was able to handle the complexities of flying, but that's not good enough. An ADHD brain that can read a dozen dials on a monitor is the same kind of brain that will glance over a flight plan, think it knows everything, and then barrel on. It's the kind of brain that doesn't do double-checks, gets distracted during safety briefings, and easily misses errors. Oh, yeah, and if you don't fucking die from that, good luck reading through any employment contract or mortgage paperwork.

ADHD isn't something to fuck around with, alright? It's not awesome. It's not a superpower. It's not going to make your life better. It's not "the next stage of evolution" as this book puts it. And for the love of god, stop telling impressionable teenagers that the councilors and psychiatrists are trying to hurt them. Because that's exactly what this book ends up saying. Tyler doesn't have any consequences from his ADHD. He's all distracted a lot, but nothing bad happens while he's distracted. About the only actual impact his ADHD has on the book is that most of his narration is done in run-ons and sentence fragments.

Which, by the way? Terrible way to display that. Bad grammar is not a side-effect of ADHD.

And then there's all the lines where Tyler thinks Ani is just so fucking special because apparently NO OTHER GIRL ON THE PLANET actually likes video games. Nope, just her. Every other girl is a faker trying to impress her boyfriend. NO OTHER FEMALE is capable of liking games just for the sake of liking them.

God, just fuck this book so hard.

And all of that is even before you get to the political stuff. Do you know what the message of this book is? War is bad. That's it. No, wait, that's not it. War is bad, but it's okay for other people to do it, just so long as your own hands stay clean. That's the only concern the kids have. That they, personally, don't have to kill anyone. At the end of the day, when all their work is being spent on other people flying drones and killing people? Oh, yeah, that's cool. That's just fine and dandy, apparently.

The worst part is that there's so much that could have been done here. I mean, Ani doesn't have any room to be whining. She knew she was building government equipment. The fact that it went online a little early should not matter, because she knew it was going to be used on real drones eventually. I have no idea why she acted all shocked. But Tyler has some legit stuff to complain about. They tricked him into killing people. Even if you take a "few broken eggs to make an omelet" approach to war, I think we can all agree, you don't trick people into killing. You give that shit to the people who know what they signed up for *and actually signed up for it*. But Tyler has no fucks to give over that, he's just upset that people are dying.

Well, dumbshit, that does tend to happen in a war.

Actually, it's kind of amazing how many actual issues this book brushes against and then ignores. There's all sorts of stuff it could have discussed. But as soon as it found a real issue, it backed off again and said "oooooo, but they're killing people and that's bad!" Dafuq did you think was going on? You're working for a military contracted; how did you not know that they kill people and then get paid for it?

And their ultimate answer was "don't kill people." Well, no, it was "you, Mr. Bad Guy, don't kill people. The real military can keep doing that, though. That's cool." I just don't even know. I just...ugh, what? Look, I'm all for not killing people. Not killing people is great. But you can't just say "stop" and then pat yourself on the back. It's more complicated than that.

And they come up against the idea of collateral damage and then back up from that, too. Their ultimate answer? “Don’t kill three innocent people, even though doing so could save thousands more.” Which, while I don’t agree with it, a lot of people do and it’s a valid position to take. But I *swear*, there’s a scene later on where Tyler thinks about those *other* thousand innocent people and he just sticks his fingers in his ears and sings “lalalalalalala.” This book does not have the metaphorical balls to tackle the issues it wants to be about. It dances around shit and gives easy answers and then ignores any complications.

And then they tried and pull the whole scandal angle, saying that what the company was doing was just soooo evil and they were going to take their intel to a reporter. What was the scandal? The locals they were providing protection for were also running drugs, and Tyler was all “OH NO, NOT DRUGS, THAT’S THE WORST THING EVER.” JFC, book, were you written in the 90s? If you take that shit to a news station, not only will they laugh you out the building for being behind the times, they’ll refuse to take your STOLEN TOP SECRET INFORMATION all for the sake of something that’s pretty much sanctioned. And I mean really, there’s nothing in this book that hasn’t been done legally already, except the tricking-people-into-fighting thing. I really don’t think that would warrant mid-day assassinations, especially since it’s probably buried in the fine print of all that paperwork you didn’t bother to read, Tyler.

...in fact, yeah, I think this book was written in the 90s. All the issues are a few decades old, and the fact that it’s all about drones didn’t really factor in. Drones were set dressing. They didn’t work into the morality questions.

One last parting shot: the whole premise doesn’t make sense. Why would you give real missions to someone who thinks it’s a game? Do you know what bored gamers do when they think everything isn’t real? They take pot-shots at the NPCs. So, yeah, give a bunch of teenage boys a “game” that’s boring as shit and expect that to work out. Brilliant.

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## D.G. says

*Check out this review and others at Badass Book Reviews*

**Playing Tyler** vaguely reminded me of Ender’s Game meets Ready Player One, but in the real world. I won’t tell you what I mean because I’ll give away the plot, but rest assured that this is a refreshing story with appealing characters, a very interesting premise and thought provoking questions about patriotism. This is a book that I think every teenager (and grown up) should read because it deals with important issues happening in the world today.

Tyler suffers from Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a disorder characterized by hyperactivity and impulsiveness. He’s having problems in school and at home. His older brother is in rehab and his mother is so damaged by her son’s addiction that Tyler has had to become the adult in the family. He’s a great kid, with a huge heart, understandably angry with his brother and mother but loving them all the same. Tyler hasn’t turned bitter even with all the horrible things that have happened to him.

The story is told from Tyler’s and Ani’s point of view. Tyler’s narrative is full of sentences that run into one another and jumbled thoughts, specially when he’s nervous. He gets distracted easily so even when he’s in grave danger, he notices irrelevant stuff like ugly vases or squishy couches. The author did an amazing job portraying the mind of a person with ADHD so the reader could understand his struggles.

The romance between Tyler and Ani was among the cutest I've seen in YA. They were just so insecure and their exchanges left me smiling like a dufus. I particularly laughed out loud at Tyler's consternation after ordering a caramel macchiato on their first date:

*"Oh shit. Girly. It's girly, isn't it? That much sugar, that much milk. Shit. I should have asked for just a black coffee. Black coffee is plain, manly. Tastes like piss. But manly."*

While Tyler is pursuing Ani, he has to deal with his brother's addiction and the discovery that the game is more than it seems. The second part of the book is more exciting with action packed scenes and terrible heartbreak. One particular part towards the end made me cry like a baby.

This story is particularly timely, becomes it refers to some of the issues we've seen in the news lately about spying, 21st century warfare, and whether patriotism can justify really heinous acts. Please don't think that there is preaching or military bashing – on the contrary, Tyler is very patriotic and proud of his father's service. But once he's in the middle of a horrible situation, he has to decide for himself what is the right thing to do. I confess I understood little of this type of warfare and I'm ashamed to say that I haven't been paying enough attention to fully understand what's going on. Maybe out of cowardice or plain laziness, I've been trusting that our government is making the right decisions. But given that our military-industrial complex employs hundreds of thousands of people, including companies that are lining their pockets, how can we trust that every decision they make is right and not motivated by greed or power? Like President Eisenhower said: *"Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals so that security and liberty may prosper together."*

**Playing Tyler** reminded me to open my eyes and be more invested in the world at large. For that reason alone it will stay with me for a long time to come. I wholeheartedly recommend it!

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### **Aa'Ishah says**

I have absolutely no idea where or how to start this review, since T. L. Costa seems to have robbed me of my ability to think, so I'm just going to jump right in and say this book was wonderful. It completely took me by surprise. I looked at this and I thought videogames, which is fine, since I read *Ready Player One* and loved it, even though it was completely - *completely* - out of my comfort zone. *Playing Tyler* is not so far out, but enough that I was hoping this would work for me. And of course I had expectations. What I did not expect, however, was for this to be as deep and emotional and explorative as it was.

Tyler has ADHD and consequently has difficulty focusing on things. His only real strength is playing videogames, but he knows that this isn't exactly going to get him very far in life. As well as that worry he's got to look after his older brother Brandon, who once again is in rehab for taking heroin. When his mother's at home he's looking after her, too, since the death of Tyler's dad hit her hard. Things look up when Rick, his Civilian Air Patrol Mentor and the only person he can count on, provides him with a game to beta test. It's a flight simulation, one that would actually be used in training pilots if it works out. If he scores high enough, Tyler gets to go to flight school and possibly have a career doing the one thing in life he most wants to: flying. Then he meets Ani, the game's designer, and it seems like maybe his life won't be a disaster after all. But that's before he discovers that there's much more to the game than he first thought, and before his brother goes missing. Now it's not a question of what he's going to do with his future. It's a question of whether he's going to live that long at all.

I may as well say now, the writing style here is probably going to be very hit or miss, I think because it's specifically meant to show us Tyler's thoughts as a person with ADHD. For some it works and for others I know it doesn't. For me, it was brilliant. It allowed me to truly appreciate Tyler's difficulty with keeping a single, focused train of thought, and with actually being able to verbalise those thoughts. But even aside from that, he was an extremely tough and likeable character, and one I felt a lot of sympathy for. His mother, at the very least, is the one who is meant to be looking out for him, yet instead it's the other way around; it takes her far too long to realise where she should be focusing her attention. And as for Brandon, well, he was as much of a disappointment, if not more, and it was only towards the end that he decided to step up and do something for his brother - although I'm still not sure that it wasn't just a cop-out for him. There is a lot of focus on character and relationships in this book, making it one that actually brought out a lot of emotion in me. The only issue I had in this area was Tyler's reaction to Ani when he first met her: I got that she was someone he admired for her position in the gaming world, that she was someone who understood him and who he could communicate with relatively easily; I just think that it could have been taken a bit slower. But otherwise theirs was a sweet relationship.

Of course there was the videogame aspect as well, and all the technical details that brought. Costa brought alive an intriguing plotline, which would no doubt actually be something possible in real life, a scary thought when you discover the truth of the game. I appreciated the layers there were to it, so that when I thought I understood what was happening, other elements were added, and it was these that also reinforced a character issue and vice versa, making it all the more relevant to Tyler and therefore the reader. The full import of what the realities of the simulation meant was conveyed clearly, as was the danger that Tyler and Ani are in when they discover the truth. The last section of the book really emphasised this; it was the ending that was the most action-packed and had me absolutely refusing to put it down until I reached that last sentence. There was a lot of urgency and the pace quickened to fulfil that, and it really meant that this book ended on a superb note.

*Playing Tyler* was so much more than I expected. With only minor flaws, this was an absorbing read that realised both the need for plot and character investment. Going into this I truly had no idea that it would be so emotional and with such serious issues. I can see how this isn't for everyone, but I feel T. L. Costa has added something worthwhile to the YA market, and I will definitely be keeping an eye out for more work from her.

*This review is also posted on my blog.*

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### **C.G. Drews says**

When words fail, compare PLAYING TYLER to the Bourne series.

I loved this book! It had the perfect balance of epic action and contemporary normality (er, jury's not out on definition of "normality" yet, though). Of all the contemporary's I've read this year, this had the highest stakes. Yesssss. High stakes, the odd gun, computer games, and a totally goopy romance to hold it all together (it's like eggs in a cake!).

Speaking of cooking, if you threw the Jason Bourne series in with ENDER'S GAME and CLICK TO SUBSCRIBE, you'd have something like PLAYING TYLER.

Plot? I figured it out (insert happy dance)!! I feel so intelligent! (coughcough) Usually, a book sweeps me up

and I gobble everything inside without thinking twice about solving the riddles myself. But I read ENDER'S GAME this year, and a lot of the plot hinges on the same principles. (Minus the sci-fi stuff, that is.) But the ending? AAHHH. The ending. I hoped the author would play with her poor reader's emotions and horribly mutilate them. And she did! Full marks to the author! Alas, I can't explain, but the ending (though not unexpected for me) was pitch perfect.

Writing? WOW. Just wow. The writer perfectly reflected Tyler. He has ADHD, a screwed up family, and he's a professional computer-game geek. The kid obviously has issues, right? Well, the writing STYLE reflected that. The short and choppy sentences. Loved. It. I think it's really special when an author doesn't just delve deep into the head of the character, but everything (from the description to the tense to the style) reflects who the character is. When Tyler was worked up, the sentences went shorter, harder, more fragments. I just loved the writing from the moment I flicked those pages up on my kindle screen. Only downside was the high amount of swearing.

Characters? I can't say how happy I am with Tyler! He narrated so well, and he felt so real. I loved the way his character developed. I loved the relationship between him and Brendan (who he called "B", which is utterly lovable). Family relationships always hit big scores for me. While the mum kept dropping out (as happens when parents in YA get in the way) for "business" or whatever (I don't buy that as a legitimate excuse to remove the parents from the scene, by the way) – Tyler had a sweet relationship with his older brother. Brandon was in drug-overdose recovery, in a heap of trouble. Tyler was everyone's guardian it seemed. He tried so hard, yet he was still such a kid beneath all his adult attempts at fixing his family. So much emotion and depth flowed from his character. I'm impressed.

Now, believe it or not, this WAS a split POV book. Pity, I know. Ani was the "other half". The total "tech geek" who designs games. She's very smart and also reads like a closed book. Literally. I liked Ani fine, until the end. She basically falls out of the picture, even though the book is "half" hers. This is NOT Ani's story. It's Tyler's. I understand why she had half the POV. If she hadn't, I would have thought her a total coldhearted loss. Even with her chapters, so I could understand how she felt/thought/acted, I still didn't feel connected to her like I did Tyler. Her relationship with Tyler is quite cute and well done, though I was a bit creeped out by the extent Tyler went to "get" her. It was stalking, people, and that's not okay.

With an action/thriller twist to the average contemporary romance, PLAYING TYLER is a sweet book that plays all the right cards. Sacrifice. Love. Family. And the occasional explosion. Oh. Yeah.

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### **A.G. Howard says**

This book's flawed and authentic MCs wrapped themselves around my heart and had me rooting for them from the get-go. Gamers will LOVE the twisty-techno rich plot, but you don't have to be a gamer to appreciate the genuine relationships and emotions between all of the characters. A must read for anyone who loves conspiracy theories, action with a side of romance, or voice and character driven contemporary YA.

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### **Hannah says**

I received a copy of this from netgalley in exchange for an honest review. So I won't lie.

I utterly, utterly loved this.

Tyler's voice in this is so distinctive. It would have been possible to tell who was telling their story (Ani or Tyler) without any of the chapter headings. There was no mistaking Tyler's speech patterns. I mean this in a good way. What was told from his perspective was often quite staccato - showing his ADHD - but then the sentences would become shorter, choppier as he became more stressed, or longer when he was focusing on something.

Ani isn't shortchanged in this either. She didn't feel like a token love interest. She had depth and backstory.

Their relationship was just adorable and awkward. And then even more adorable.

They are wonderful characters and the story is gripping. I'd definitely recommend people give it a go - if only to see how character voices should be done.

For a slightly more detailed review check out my blog.

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### **Christian says**

Playing Tyler T.L. Costa captures the voice(s) of her two teen protagonists with pitch-perfect accuracy, and then layers these two real-as-they-come characters into a story crackling with emotional tension, highlighted by a totally authentic, deftly constructed romantic approach-avoidance dance powering a plot that dares the reader to guess which way the high-tech, vid-game-savvy intrigue will dodge-and-weave next. Playing Tyler is a superb read that any fan of tight-and-fast YA thrillers will want to dive into, the sooner the better.

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### **Christopher Nelson says**

I really wasn't sure what to expect when I opened *PLAYING TYLER* by T L Costa. The vibrant elements of the cover alone were enough to make me stop and devour the details with dark intrigue.

And I was taken after the first paragraph, my life consigned to Tyler and Ani for the next fourteen hours. I could not put it down.

The voice of protagonist Tyler MacCandless is rendered in perfect ADHD, so much to the point that I found myself reading faster and pedaling my own foot with each moment spent with him. Tyler is the perfect teen hero, complete with foul mouth yet strong moral compass, the selfless pariah navigating through a collapsing world of selfish adults. And every moment is a whirlwind of screaming, random thoughts he must overcome just to get through a day.

Ani Bagdorian, the second voice of *PLAYING TYLER*, is just as conflicted, a sixteen-year old prodigy feeling her way through a similarly outcast life of being too young for her peer group at Yale University, too girl for her boy-dominated world as a champion gamer/ programmer, and suddenly dealing with the most complicated first romance she could possibly imagine. One that puts her on a jeopardy-scale that starts with

academic stability but quickly slides to a threat far worse.

Without going into spoiler detail, **PLAYING TYLER** takes on very real issues that have come to the forefront in modern society thanks to multiple wars and unmanned war-fighting technology, as well as the demons of drug abuse and family disconnection. The themes of selfless service and staying true to oneself despite the odds drive the continually intensifying plot. Connecticut's teenage setting comes to life thanks to inclusion of actual pop culture icons: anime interests, real video games, and movies. Finally, the teen dialogue is fresh and believable, as are the idiosyncrasies of military radio communications/ COIN Theater tactics, and a certain technical lean on programming expertise that seals the plausibility of **PLAYING TYLER**, sure to raise many a young hacker to an accord of head nods and Mountain Dew salutes.

T L Costa brings the intrigue of Tom Clancy, technical wizardry of Dan Brown, and the heartthrob of Stephanie Meyer to life in a voice that is entirely her own, one that speaks for the new generation of teenage survivors. A must read for YA and adult audiences alike, **PLAYING TYLER** is a story that will stay with you for a very long time.

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### **Greg says**

This a story about an kind of ADHD who is a great at video games and get's recruited to beta test a new piece of hardware being developed by a subsidiary of a Blackwater type corporation.

You know this isn't going to go well.

The software in the hardware was developed by a gaming/hacker prodigy girl, whose now attending Yale at sixteen years old and has also developed some kind of massively popular game that people wiser than me into gaming might be able to tell if it's some shooter, *Call of Duty* type thing or a MMOG (true story, I'm now the overlord of the Fiction section in the bookstore I work in. Part of fiction is Science Fiction, and part of Science Fiction is Series Science Fiction which is where books written about video games and movie franchises are generally kept. A couple of weeks ago I found some titles mis-shelved in the M's of the section. I asked someone if he knew why they were there and he said he put it under MMOG, and I had to explain that MMOG wasn't the name of a game, but a type of game. He seemed happy to not have known that). She's also really hawt, but no one seems to notice that because she's 16 years old in college and people have always been intimidated by her mad gaming skills.

Guess what's gonna happen?

You're right. And as some other reviews point out there will be a possibly creepy amount of stalking involved to get there.

I kind of missed that part of the story, or I saw it but it didn't register. Maybe because I just felt like this was a foregone conclusion in the book and it wasn't something I was thinking about it (will they or won't they?)

It's not much of a secret, the cover of the book kind of gives it all away, but Tyler, the main character finds out that he's not been beta-testing a new flight simulator, but is instead flying Drone missions in Afghanistan. Killing bad guys, causing some collateral damage, possibly instigating some blowback.

There are also some other 'unintended' consequences of the missions he's flying.

Some ethical decisions have to be made all around. Ani (the girl) feels betrayed that her software is actually being used for drone technology. Tyler starts questioning the collateral costs of what he's doing, but he generally doesn't have a problem with flying drones.

If only it were just to kill bad guys.

Or maybe that's bad.

I liked the book well enough. It was a good quick read while I was just trying to kill some time waiting for Karen to get off work, or for the couple of hours I had in between an appointment and work.

There are elements of the book that I didn't care for too much, but I think they are more the sorts of things that the intended audience won't have problems with. Like subtleties in ethical arguments, the sort of weird ineffectiveness of the panopticon the characters mind themselves in, and certain elements that I felt were sort of unrealistic, but which would have made the story turn out to be the story about a couple of kids who question authority and are killed really quickly.

*Oh, yeah I'm supposed to mention that I got this book for free, from either Netgalley, the publisher, author or through some other way that I get books to read before they are published. Apparently it's a federal law to mention this (for reals?) and not just a cheap reason to float the shit out of my reviews. I haven't been given any monies, nor have I been coerced in anyway to write the review you just read. Huzzah!*

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### **Christian Schoon says**

T.L. Costa's Playing Tyler is a wickedly perceptive, powerhouse YA read from start to jacked-up-pulse-rate finish. Costa has gotten right on into the heads of her two teen protagonists and proceeds to take us for a street-level thrill-ride through their world of high-tech intrigue, computer-gaming-savvy and dark military-industrial espionage and treachery. The characters are cool, engaging and richly authentic, the plot is a deftly routed maze where trust is a lethal luxury and the romance is a perfectly choreographed dance of approach-avoidance, fight-or-flight impulses. Yeah, I kinda liked it. Massively. So... sequel, please?

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