

***Slay* by Brittney Morris**

Kiera Johnson is a seventeen-year-old honor student, one of just four black students at Jefferson Academy. When she's not at school or tutoring her friends in math, she is the creator of a secret online video game exclusively for the black community, called *Slay*. Her game provides a safe space for black gamers to be themselves online, able to create characters that actually look the way they do, without being called racial slurs. *Slay* comes under worldwide public scrutiny when a teenager is murdered because of a dispute in the game. The media is calling the game racist, an outsider infiltrates the game, and Kiera has to decide whether or not to out herself as the mysterious creator, Emerald.

While I am very much not the intended audience for this book, I thoroughly enjoyed it. The many reviews and blurbs calling it a mash-up of *Ready Player One* and *The Hate U Give* were the main reason that I picked it up, and those are apt comparisons. Kiera is smart and sassy and one heck of a STEM role model. She's not perfect, as evidenced by her relationship with her manipulative boyfriend, but she learns and grows by the end of the novel. The game Kiera has created is beautiful and immersive and Morris's descriptive power makes it easy to picture in one's mind.

It's a very timely work, one that I personally feel is important for everyone to read. The discussions Kiera has with her white classmates about race are realistic and enlightening. Morris doesn't set out to teach antiracism techniques to anyone, but to see life through Kiera's eyes is to better understand the need for the racial justice movement. While some of the subject matter in the book is at times very heavy, and there are difficult conversations, it's a really fun and quick read. I did not want to put it down, and stayed up entirely too late reading it. I'd say it's one of the best books I've read so far this year.