

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Publicity Contact: Karter Powell

P: +1 (212)414-3671 | E: kpowell@prh.com

AN UPBEAT AND FAST-PACED STORY ON OVERCOMING GENDER STEREOTYPES AND PERFORMANCE ANXIETY IN THE COMPETITIVE WORLD OF CHESS

MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN

By Kyla Zhao



On September 17, 2024, G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers will publish **MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN** by *Fraud Squad* author Kyla Zhao (Hardcover; 9780593615867; Ages 8-12; \$17.99). This fast-paced STEM-inist middle grade tackles the overwhelming feelings of performance anxiety in one of the world's the fastest-growing games: Chess.

Chess is more popular now than ever according to outlets ranging from *The Washington Post* to *PBS*. Demand for chess clubs continues to rise in schools across the country, and, in 2023, Chess.com saw the biggest growth among players in the youngest age bracket. **MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN** taps into this excitement and brings young readers love for the game to the page.

The clock is ticking for May Li, whose middle-school chess team just earned a victory at the state championship—and with it, a ticket to nationals. What's even more exciting is that May got an award for being the top female player and a splashy feature in the biggest chess magazine in the country. May should be thrilled. But some of her teammates, including her supposed-to-be-friend Ralph, aren't too pleased with the attention she's getting—and they're even questioning her skills. Backed into a corner, but not one to back down, May makes a move as bold as any of her chess tactics: She bets Ralph she can win the school's internal tournament and be chosen as team captain for nationals. The crown is May's for the taking... except she's starting to crumble under the weight of everyone's expectations. Anxious feelings begin to affect her performance and, what's worse, eat away at her love for the game. Now May is left to wonder: Can you still play for fun when you're playing to win?

Historically chess has been a male-dominated sport, but the number of women playing the game continues to rise. Using a kid-friendly touch this STEM-inist story examines the gender bias that surrounds the sport and celebrates the female players who, like May, are changing the game.

While fast-paced and humor-filled, **MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN** addresses the reality of the high expectations often placed on children to perform well in and out of school. With rates of anxiety in children on the rise, young readers can relate to May's struggles to cope with her performance anxiety.

Author Kyla Zhao delivers a story with authenticity and charm, writing from her own experience as a former member of Singapore's Junior Chess Squad. **MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN** is Kyla's middle grade debut and is perfect for fans of Kelly Yang and Celia C. Pérez

After graduating from Stanford University in 2021, Kyla's now a Silicon Valley techie by day and an author by night. Her books have been featured by CBS, NBC, Good Morning America, Vogue, Elle, BuzzFeed, South China Morning Post, and more. Kyla was also selected as a Forbes 30 Under 30 honoree, a Tatler Leader of Tomorrow, and awarded a Certificate of Recognition by the California State Assembly for her contributions to Asian media representation.

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Penguin Random House, the world's largest trade book publisher, is dedicated to its mission of nourishing a universal passion for reading by connecting authors and their writing with readers everywhere. The company, which employs more than 10,000 people globally, was formed on July 1, 2013, by Bertelsmann and Pearson. As of April 1, 2020, Bertelsmann is full owner of the company. With more than 300 imprints and brands on six continents, Penguin Random House comprises adult and children's fiction and nonfiction print and digital English-German-and Spanish-language trade book publishing businesses in more than 20 countries worldwide. With over 15,000 new titles, and more than 600 million print, audio and eBooks sold annually, Penguin Random House's publishing lists include more than 80 Nobel Prize laureates and hundreds of the world's most widely read authors

Praise for MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN

"This book is a game-changer for readers of all ages, regardless of whether you play chess! *May the Best Player Win* captures the thrill of competition, the weight of expectations, and the sting of naysayers." —
Carissa Yip, 2x US Women's Chess Champion & Women's Grandmaster

"Compassionate, empowering, and full of heart, *May the Best Player Win* reminds young readers that sometimes, the only limits on our potential are the ones we place on ourselves." —Rebecca Mix, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Mossheart's Promise*

"May Li is the type of fierce, loveable, larger-than-life heroine who stays with you long after the story ends. Readers will root for May and her friends from start to finish in their epic journey to nationals!" —
Katie Zhao, author of *Last Gamer Standing* and the Winnie Zeng series

"Zhao explores gender bias as well as performance stress, and the book's valuable life lessons will speak to anyone who's lost their love for a pursuit... An emotionally intelligent work that explores socially relevant themes." — *Kirkus*

"Digestible chess strategy breakdowns and terminology scattered throughout serve as an approachable introduction to the sport." —*Publishers Weekly*

"A fierce yet tender narrative [that is] rich in emotions and facts. It will enlighten the young audiences' minds with the usage of a smart and educative language, sharp puns, easy-to-understand chess terminology and history. A top recommendation for young readers." -Tatiana Flores, Women's World Chess Champion for People with Disabilities

"Kyla Zhao's novel convincingly portrays chess players and their emotions and makes the reader care about these characters... *May the Best Player Win* is a winner." - Dr. Alexey Root, 1989 U.S. Women's Chess Champion and author of *United States Women's Chess Champions, 1937-2020*

"*May the Best Player Win* is a great read for almost any age group! It offers the opportunity to discuss critical issues such as gender and culture. It also explores emotional challenges that are relevant and relatable for all ages, such as dealing with internal and external expectations. I like the way the story ended and look forward to more books like this by the author!" --Jerry Nash, Chairman of International Chess Federation's (FIDE) Chess in Education Commission

"The author was able to spin a very beautiful narrative around very important and pertinent themes, such as performance anxiety and sexism towards female chess players, without ever sounding very preachy. She has you rooting for the protagonist from the get-go and also packed in tense moments that leaves you flipping the pages to find out what happens." —*Chessbase India*