



# Girl Against the Universe

*Paula Stokes*

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## **Girl Against the Universe** Paula Stokes

From the author of *The Art of Lainey* and *Liars, Inc.* comes a fresh, contemporary story about a girl coping with PTSD and the boy who wants to help her move on from the past.

Sixteen-year-old Maguire knows the universe is against her. No matter how many charms she buys off the internet or good luck rituals she performs each morning, horrible things happen when she's around. Like that time the roller coaster jumped off its tracks. Or the time the house next door caught on fire. Or the time her brother, father, and uncle were all killed in a car crash--and Maguire walked away with barely a scratch.

Despite what her therapist tells her, Maguire thinks it's best to hide out in her room, far away from anyone she might accidentally hurt. But then she meets Jordy, an aspiring tennis star who wants to help her break her unlucky streak. Maguire knows that the best thing she can do for him is to stay away, but it turns out staying away might be harder than she thought.

## **Girl Against the Universe Details**

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Author : Paula Stokes

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# From Reader Review *Girl Against the Universe* for online ebook

## Stacee says

Absolute perfection. Loved the story, the characters, every single thing about it.

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## Maggie says

*“There's a thing that sometimes happens in your brain when you're the only survivor of a horrific accident. Part of you is happy because you're alive, but the rest of you is devastated. Then the sad part beats up the happy part until nothing is left, until all you feel is a terrible sorrow for the people who didn't make it. And guilt. Guilt because you wonder if the Universe made a mistake. Guilt because you know you're not any better than those who died.”*

I don't think I've ever read a book so relatable in any way. A book where everything feels normal in a way and where I am able to say *"me too girl me too."* It involved therapy and mental illness, and it was all done in a way where I thought they both wouldn't be able to blend in. Somehow, Paula Stokes made it possible and was able to blend them both together, creating a novel where everything about it is relatable in some way and one where everything is set right.

*The world is full of holes and uneven seams, wrinkled places that you can't make smooth, no matter how hard you try.*

First line in an I'm already all the way **in**. Never have I ever read a novel where the first paragraph and chapter is something I feel attached to and is able to comprehend in a different way. I've never dealt with therapy or mental illness (even though my mom used to want to put me in therapy sessions because of how "depressed and sad" I was) but because Maguire looked at life differently and would blame herself for the accidents and bad things that have happened in her life or that she has caused, she always blames herself. I'm sure there are others who relate as well, but I was able to relate because I would blame myself so many times for so many things in my life. Either for starting a stupid discussion and wishing I never spoke, or just plain existing in someone else's life because I would feel like I made everything worse.

*Girl Against the Universe* is about a teenage girl named Maguire Kelly. She's got the kind of name where some people could mix it up since it sounds like the last name was switched with the first name. Maguire tells herself she is cursed and is bad luck, since she always seems to start an accident or bring bad luck when she's around people. Either with a family member or a friend, there's always something bad that happens and she would always blame herself. She's either in a car accident and because everyone has died and she hasn't even bruised her arm or anything, she blames herself for the cause of the accident and for her loved ones dying. If she's with her friend and she falls on the steps, she blames herself like if she pushed her, even if she didn't. If she's playing a sport, she blames herself for hitting another person with the sports equipment. She just calls herself bad luck and sometimes wishes she wouldn't be alive because of the bad luck she brings.

Maguire has been taking these therapy sessions her mom has been taking her too to see if there would be a change in her life and she would try it out. Even when Maguire thinks nothing can change her life and make it better, there might just be a solution to all this "cursed" and "bad luck" she thinks she has. But every time she goes to a therapy session, it's the same. She gets asked what she did over the weekend, what she's planning to do, anything new, is she trying to make some changes, or if she's just gonna talk to her doctor and actually tell him what's wrong. The problem is, *she doesn't know what really is wrong*. Sure she knows she doesn't like talking about her past and she knows there are things that could improve her life a little, but she doesn't really know how to fix it and really take step into trying out something different.

Days pass, with the same ol' same old things happening, Maguire meets this strange boy who also attends the therapy sessions she attends. They're not the same, but it's the same doctor. It might be a different topic and there's a different reason he's there, but he's not much different then Maguire attending these sessions. His name isn't told until Maguire finds out his "secret," but in case you were wondering, it's not a spoiler or anything, his name is Jordy. Stanford. Stanford Jordy Wheeler. Just like Maguire, his last name was switched with his first. Jordy is known as a famous tennis player and even though he can be known as a celebrity who can get into famous tennis matches for free and has to attend online schooling because of what could happen in public schools (even though nothing happened) he isn't someone who wants to keep playing tennis forever and isn't someone who wants to be **known** as this Famous Tennis Jordy. He wants to know as Normal Jordy, Jordy who enjoys hanging out with friends and making changes in his life as well; Jordy who can talk to his friends and tell them anything (or something); Jordy who can drive in a car with his friends and cruise around, laughing and doing something fun other than playing tennis and hitting a ball with a racquet; Jordy who can express the real him to others. It seems like there isn't anybody like Jordy expects and wants but Maguire. She didn't even know he played until she saw him at her practice session, only ending up helping her and teaching her basics, helping her with her serve, and making sure her hit is strong. *You know the normal practicing.*

The reason Jordy attends these therapy sessions is similar to Maguire—he wants to make some changes in his life. Because he is controlled by his parents sometimes, (that is why I don't prefer having rich parents since they always seem to control you because of the "power" they have) he wants to find these challenges and take them, proving himself and his parents that he can do something that doesn't involve parent controlling all the time. His life is different than Maguire's, but at the same time it's very similar. She's the only who actually understands him and likes him for him, for who he is. She likes seeing the real Jordy and not the Tennis Player Jordy who pretends to be having fun when sometimes he can't hide a frown because he wishes to be doing something else.

As the two start becoming apart of each others lives a little more and getting to know each other, they both seem to understand each other and find ways to help each other. Either with a sport or with therapy homework. And as the two start catching feelings for each other and either missing each other or wishing they were next to each other and not apart, they both start realizing there is a way to prove others wrong about you and prove yourself you can accomplish a fear you've been holding for a while.

*Once I accepted the fact that I was bad luck, I shied away from group actives. And groups. And activities. I started spending a lot more time in my room, tucked under my covers reading books. There's only so much damage a book can do, and I wasn't worried about hurting myself. Accidentally hurting yourself is better than hurting other people.*

I probably fell in love with **Maguire's** character too much. Everything she told herself and things she did, I

was able to relate. She kept wondering if the universe was a mistake or if she was the mistake, not really caring about which was the answer and which wasn't. She would consider herself bad luck because of everything that happened around her, but I was glad she was able to try some challenges and see if they would work. She went from being a little shy and insecure to not caring what other thought and actually being happy with the progress she's made. She was pretty funny and she sounded nice, in need of friends even though sometimes friends make everything worse. But I was glad she didn't trust anyone completely and as a first, but took some time to see how the people around her were and if they had any bad luck as well. She grew into a young girl who wasn't afraid of taking her past back and doing the things again, only being scared but taking the fear out and being proud of it. Her therapy sessions seemed to work and I guess her mental illness was either PTSD or OCD but in my opinion, it was more like PTSD since she would think back to her past accidents and failures and wouldn't want them happening again.

**Jordy** was definitely a respectful and caring guy and I saw he was not so different from Maguire in the beginning. It's like he understood her from day one and didn't give up on trying to start a friendship with someone unknown. Although his sessions were different, they were similar in a way. He needed to make a friend who didn't know him as the "Fake Jordy" but as the "real" one. He was able to help Maguire with her needs and was always able to comfort her and be there for her. He was nice and cute all the way through and I was glad someone like him understood Maguire and her life, only making it a little more complicated but much better. I was glad he enjoyed being the real him and not the Jordy he's known as and I was glad he was able to be **him** around Maguire, enjoying it more and letting her know his secrets when others don't know any. He was kind since the beginning and kept his nice personality through, sometimes being serious but needing to be since there was a reason. He decided to take some of his time off to help Maguire and I was glad he really didn't care what would happen, since he really only cared about her. He was just one of those typical nice and caring guys that I wish existed in my life.

**Jade and Penn** are definitely friendship goals. I can't say much about Penn since she wasn't a friend of Maguire since tennis tryouts, but she was also very nice and was supportive of her relationship with her brother. She also was able to understand Maguire even when she didn't know what the whole and main problem was and I was glad she was able to communicate with Maguire, and not be like Kimber and the rest of the girls and just talk about Jordy and be a show off. She didn't show much interest in it and didn't really care either. She was herself as well when she was able to and spent some of her time with Maguire when she needed it. Jade was another supportive friend of Maguire and a hilarious one as well. She was the friend Maguire really needed and again, was able to understand her when she didn't know the whole problem. She and Penn got along well and there was no problem with them in any way. They weren't annoying but they made everything a lot better, and they weren't rude at any time but they gave Maguire time and space when it was needed. They would always manage to make Maguire smile and laugh and I was glad some people decided to come into her life and give her a chance, see where a friendship might build up.

**Kimberly** wasn't really a friend. I didn't hate her, but I didn't like her either. She was rude in the beginning and would boss Maguire around just because she was around Jordy and how she "distracted" him when it was really Jordy who distracted Maguire. She thought she was all pretty and the Queen of Tennis or something but she was just a plain bitch at first. She turned nice at once and I couldn't tell if she was bipolar because her attitude changed from being a rude ass to warning Maguire and telling her to be careful, to not worry and that everything is going to be fine. She went from yelling at her and telling her to leave Jordy alone because his main focus was tennis and studying but then she softened to a completely different person.

Maguire's **parents** were the kind of parents any girl or boy suffering from some kind of mental illness or has to take therapy because there is something wrong with them need. They were supportive in any way they could've and didn't make anything worse. They never yelled at her and completely understood what she was

going through. They were able to understand Maguire and gave her time and space as well to think about anything and when Maguire came up with an idea or new plan for herself, they were always happy and were happy with her idea, even if it was a bad choice. They would try and encourage Maguire to go out even with all the bad chances there are that can happen when someone is out, they were able to help her and support her. They never made anything worse since they would always stick to helping and listening.

*My mom was thrilled to hear I was going out for the tennis team. She's always telling me I need to get out of the house more and meet people. It is me, or is my mom the only mom in the history of ever who told her kid to spend less time reading and more time being social? Doesn't she know the chances of me getting drunk, pregnant, and/or arrested are much lower if I never leave my room?*

I was glad I finally read something written by Paula Stokes. She one of those authors who write novels that vary from genre and they go from Fantasy to Contemporary to Thriller. I still need to read her other books and I'm really looking forward to it. I know this is her recent published work, so they might lack in some way or be a lot different, but maybe there's a chance I will love everything as well and not feel like something was off or dull. Overall, *Girl Against the Universe* was a quick and engaging read. I was glad I finally found a book where it inspires me to give the universe a shot and finally accept the fact that it will be tricky and not always love me, but that's life. It'll help me get out of my comfort zone and maybe, like Maguire, I'll feel a change in my life.

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**Rose says**

## **WHEN AUTHORS DO MENTAL ILLNESS AND THERAPY RIGHT.**

ME: \*flailing\* \*twirling\* \*wants to go out and take on the universe\*

GUYS. GUYS. THIS BOOK!? How do I write a review on a book too precious and perfect for this world?

I can't remember ever having read a book about mental illness that was so **positive and hopeful**, but still *so incredibly realistic*? It gave an honest look into how a girl worked through her trauma with the support and encouragement of her family, friends, and therapist.

Maguire is the main character, who lost her father and brother in a car accident years ago, but can't seem to stop thinking that it's her fault. **They died, while she lived** (and without injury). Her life following their deaths is just a series of events that involve everyone around her getting hurt *while she remains completely untouched*. She pretty much becomes a hermit so that she won't hurt others around her anymore... until she decides otherwise.

**UGH, I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO START?!** I'm just gonna list things because paragraphs can be boring and I can't even form proper sentences right now.

**1. MAGUIRE DIDN'T NEED A SAVIOR.** The synopsis made it sound like Jordy would be her savior.. *but, no*. She's the one who pushes through her fears, and makes the decision to do so on her own. Jordy's

there, but he's her support, not her sole reason.

**2. JOOOOORDY.** Boy who deflects people from really knowing him with his cocky-womanizer persona? *Have we seen this before?* **Yes**, but trust me when I say he's different. Also, his adoration for Maguire melted my heart into a big, messy puddle. \*sighs\*

**3. PENN. JADY.** *Maybe Kimber?* Friends with bold, fun personalities that support and motivate you? Yes, please.  
*#FriendshipGoals*

**4. INVOLVED PARENTS.** No missing-parent syndrome here. There's a mom who listens, and a step-dad who truly cares. They both hear her, and they try, which is what I think what always matters most, you know?

Oh, and **I think therapy is so awesome.** This is Psychology-Major-Rose talking, but seriously. I've seen how therapy has completely changed peoples lives. It not just for survivors of trauma, but also to help people go through their everyday lives. **I'm so incredibly happy that Paula brought such a positive light onto something that people seem to make wrong assumptions about.**

So, overall Girl Against the Universe is a refreshing look at mental illness that kept things light, but honest. Seriously this review does no justice for the book, and I highly recommend it people!!! **And shit!** I totally skipped out on the romance aspect, but ugh it's sweet and real, and it gave me Anna and the French Kiss feels (**my highest praise for cuteness**).

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**may 🌸 says**

***DNF @ 25%***

I'm unsure whether I dislike the general feel of the book, or the cliché-ness of it, or if this is just a strange slump that's making EVERYTHING hard to read but I just don't have the heart to continue.

There's not *WRONG* with it, it's just blehhhhh and the plot is kinda **just** romance and im bored and not invested at all so like imma pass yo.

1.5 stars!!

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**Keertana says**

Stokes is one of those authors who can write *anything*. The light tone of this, combined with the deep and thoughtful subject matter (not to mention stellar romance) really reminded me of her debut, *The Art of Laine*, which is an absolute favorite of mine. I think this might even be better.

*Girl Against the Universe* is about Maguire, a girl who believes she's cursed. Ever since she became the sole survivor in a car accident which killed her father, uncle, and older brother, Maguire has kept to herself. She has a "Luck Journal" in which she chronicles all the events in which she has escaped unscathed while those around her suffer. The only commonality that Maguire can find is herself so, she does the only reasonable thing and withdraws into herself.

Our story begins, though, in a therapist's office. I loved how Stokes chose to tell Maguire's story through her challenges with therapy. Maguire not only believes that she's bad luck, but she has OCD tendencies in which she watches for accidents that could happen around her and surrounds herself with "lucky" objects. It's heart-breaking. I was instantly rooting for Maguire to battle her inner demons and her journey throughout this novel is phenomenal. It's realistic, paced well, and most importantly it stems entirely from Maguire. It isn't motivated by romance or fear or any other type of catalyst. Maguire has her goals and no matter how hard they are or how many times she fails, she picks herself back up and tries again. I *love* this girl.

I particularly want to point out that *Girl Against the Universe* breaks down so many barriers and stigmas in YA. Not only against mental illness, but it also defeats the trope of mean-girl-cliques and girls-"competing"-for-a-guy (all silly, absolutely false constructions with no basis in truth but somehow we all think that these are the "norm"). Maguire joins the tennis team and while some members seem hostile at first, the situation isn't at all what it seems on the surface and my heart gave a little leap of joy every time Maguire opened herself up to someone new. Moreover, Maguire isn't the only character struggling with a mental illness of some sort and I liked that she had someone to talk to about her challenges and didn't feel isolated the way so many teens *can* feel (and how she *did* feel for so long).

The guy in question is none other than junior tennis star Jordy and their friendship won me over even more than their romance did. Jordy is such a *sweetheart*. He's not a perfect guy--there are rumors flying around him from the start and he's had his fair share of mistakes--but he respects Maguire and doesn't push her, instead taking baby steps until she's comfortable with him. I enjoyed how their relationship played out with minimal drama and lots of honest, open dialogue. Plus, Jordy's presence isn't solely to be the romantic interest or Maguire's therapy buddy, it's also to show that there are more than one type of mental illness. Jordy struggles with staying true to himself in the face of his fame and fortune and I think a lot of teenagers struggle with the first part of that and can really relate to Jordy. I know I could.

Gosh, this book is just *so good*. I want everyone to read it. It has fantastic friendships, a swoon-worthy romance, step-fathers who slowly become allies, families who become support systems, and a kick-ass heroine who overcomes her own fears. *Girl Against the Universe* is inspiring and wonderfully written and, perhaps best of all, you'll learn some tennis from it. I hope now I won't be among the few readers who actually watches tennis with an equal passion as I read books. (Note: key word being *watch*.)

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## Sarah says

(Source: I received a digital copy of this book for free on a read-to-review basis. Thanks to HarperCollins and Edelweiss.)

***“Bad things happen to other people when I’m around.” I sigh. “It’s like I’m bad luck.”***



This was a YA contemporary story about a girl who believed she was bad luck to those around her.

Maguire was an okay character, and it was easy to see why she'd believe she was bad luck. To be in more than one accident where people died, and she walked away unharmed did seem a little strange, and I could understand her not wanting to get on a plane with what was left of her family just in case she caused the plane to crash.

The storyline in this was about Maguire overcoming her fears and learning to realise that maybe she could live a normal life, and wasn't really cursed. We also got a bit of a romance brewing between Maguire and Jordy, and some tennis tournaments too.

The ending to this was pretty good, and I appreciated the little twist at the end.

6 out of 10

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### **Paula Stokes says**

A funny thing happened on the way to publication. We changed the title and then thanks to the brilliant suggestions of my editor, I changed a LOT of the book. Like 40% of the book. And although it's still swoony and funny and I still think fans of *The Art of Lainey* will enjoy this, it's taken on a darker, more serious tone.

But not too dark. Page one is a therapy session so I don't feel like it's spoilery to tell you that Maguire is struggling with some psychological issues. A lot of my own struggles with anxiety are reflected in these pages, as well as research I did online and in graduate school. I also reached out to readers who have struggled with anxiety and PTSD and recruited them to review the edited manuscript and give me feedback. We all hurt and heal in different ways, so obviously this story won't work for everyone, but my goal was to write something that struck a balance between realism and hope.

ARCs will be available on EW. If you're interested in the changes made between printing the ARC and the final book, see the discussion thread at the bottom of the page. Thanks and happy reading :)

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### **Fafa's Book Corner says**

Review posted on Fafa's Book Corner !

Beware spoilers ahead!

I had heard about this book through GR. For awhile I was very hesitant to read this book. Not gonna lie but the first time I came across this book I only read the first sentence and immediately thought Maguire was crazy. I went back again and this time finished reading the synopsis and I actually liked it. A few months passed and I found out about the mental health in this book and I put it together. It's not that Maguire is crazy but it's because of several incidents that makes her believe that she is bad luck. Another reason I decided to read it is

because of this post . In this post Paula Stokes had a guest post on The Midnight Garden. Paula talks about how anxiety doesn't make us weak. She also mentions Girl Against the Odds and all the research that went into the book. I was in awe after reading the guest post and decided to read it. I am happy to say that I enjoyed it!

The book begins in August and Maguire visiting her cognitive behavioral therapist Dr. Leed. For the first few visits Maguire doesn't say much. She has no interest in seeing Dr. Leed and certainly doesn't want to talk. One day she explains Dr. Leed about the car accident that killed her brother, uncle, and father, but she stayed alive. Then when she was 12 years old she went to a sleepover. Somehow all the other girls got food poisoning but she was fine. The girl who held the sleepover spread a rumor that Maguire was bad luck. After that Maguire put everything in her life together and started to believe it.

She begged her mother to homeschool her without mentioning the bad luck. Her mother said no so Maguire developed coping strategies. Every morning Maguire has a morning good luck ritual. She wears a lucky pendant. She does five second checks to look for any hazards. She knocks on wood or any other textured table three times. And has a luck notebook where she records every bad thing that has happened to her.

While this does work for her purposes she isolates herself from everyone. She spends most of her time in her bedroom and avoids everyone so that she doesn't cause them any harm. One day her mother brings up her grandmother and going to visit their family in Ireland. Maguire has a breakdown because she can't go to Ireland because that would involve traveling by plane. If Maguire were to go on a plane she wouldn't be able to control her surrounding and it would become overwhelming to do her five second checks. Maguire is absolutely devastated because she would like to see her family again. Maguire brings this up to Dr. Leed and together they come up with a list of seven tasks the goal being to go to Ireland.

I am a little disappointed that I didn't like this book as much as I thought I would. Nonetheless I still enjoyed it! This book is written in first person in Maguire's point of view. It is divided into parts from August to December. And there are 20 therapy sessions. As usual the writing style was well done!

I absolutely loved the relationships in this book! Maguire's family was so supportive and sweet. I loved reading about the interactions between Maguire and her step-father. And hello a well done relationship with a step-parent is always good in my opinion! Her half siblings Erin and Jake (short for Jacob) were so cute! Her mother was so sweet trying to help Maguire get out of her comfort zone while always remaining there. Also her mother was unemployed and it was portrayed nicely! No one made a jab at her for being unemployed so that she could be there for her family. Like I said I absolutely adored the family aspect!

During her tennis tryout (part of her tasks list) Maguire meets Jade. Who later becomes one of Maguire's best friends. Jade is informed about Maguire and how she believes she is bad luck. After finding out Jade remains with Maguire throughout the whole book and never once does she assume that Maguire is crazy (like I did when I read the first sentence of the synopsis). There's also Penn who is Jordy's sister. Penn also remains supportive just like Jade and Maguire's family. When Maguire meets Jordy they agree to help each other in achieving their goals. Jordy also visits Dr. Leed but for very different reasons. Dr. Leed is also supporting Maguire and helps her with coming up with some tasks for her list. I loved reading about the therapy sessions!

When Maguire and Dr. Leed made her task list Maguire assumed everything would go perfectly. Of course that didn't happen but she did grow throughout the whole book. And most of the time the tasks were accomplished. Even if they were accomplished in very unexpected ways. Jordy also grew through the whole book. Maguire and Jordy were able to help each other achieve their goals. It's revealed pretty early why

Jordy is seeing Dr. Leed. I felt pretty bad for him but it was nice that he had Penn to support him as well.

I'm not exactly sure how to categorize the romance. Jordy falls for Maguire pretty quickly. And while the two have a lot of make-out sessions they don't start dating towards the end of the book. Maguire spends most of her time with Jordy to try and push him away because she's afraid that she'll hurt him and he's not exactly in the position to date her. Maguire wants to get her life sorted out first. Which was admirable but it was pretty obvious that Maguire had feelings for Jordy. The romance really confused me.

I had a few problems with Girl Against the Universe. During the October section I found that it started to drag. And it became boring to read about the daily activities. Now I know that this is a contemporary and you do read about daily activities, I just found this to be very boring. I didn't like how most of the times Jade and Maguire would talk to each other it was about Jordy. I know that girls will talk to each other about their crushes and whatnot but Jordy was in most of their conversations.

As mentioned above the romance really confused me. Especially how Maguire would want to focus on herself but still kiss Jordy back and not admit that she had feelings for him. I feel somewhat indifferent to Jordy. Jordy actually confused me most of the times. This was definitely done on purpose because Jordy didn't really know himself. While yes he was nice to Maguire with helping her and understanding, he still said stuff that I didn't like. And overall he was confusing to read about. And lastly I felt that I didn't know Maguire. Maguire is written quite vague which might come from the fact that she doesn't get out. But I'm pretty sure that it was done on purpose. Nonetheless I still enjoyed this book!

Overall this was a good book! I recommend it to everyone because I feel that while I didn't love it, it's important to read this book.

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## **Stacee says**

By now we all know that I'm quite picky about my contemps. I was lucky enough to read an early MS of this and then got to read it again officially for review.

I love Maguire and Jordy. They're strong for each other and so supportive. I loved reading them work through the shrink challenges and figure life out. Penn and Jade were awesome friends and I could easily read a companion book about either of them. And don't get me started on Dr. Hottie...

The plot was captivating. I celebrated the highs and was broken-hearted over the lows right along with Maguire. And I was rooting for her right from the beginning.

Overall, it was an important and serious book without being stuffy and textbook-y. I loved the way Paula handled the topic and sincerely believe this is the best thing she's written so far.

**\*\*Huge thanks to Harper Teen and Edelweiss for providing the arc in exchange for an honest review\*\***

**\*\*Squishy hugs to Paula for letting me beta read for her and then sending me an arc for my collection\*\***

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## Lola says

*“Bad stuff happens around me.” I fold my hands in my lap. “You’re risking your life just by being in this room with me.”*

### I have finally read a book by Paula Stokes.

**Paula Stokes is a lovely discovery.** Her writing is eloquent, her characters are relatable and her love-interests damn charming. I don’t even care if Jordy is slightly clichéd (hot, popular, chick-magnet guy), because she makes everyone in the book likeable.

The humor is never contrived and the atmosphere of the book is very light when we think about the fact that it deals with mental illness. **I truthfully expected it to be darker**, but Maguire is such a dynamic narrator that the sadness she often feels never really reaches a climax.

I often read mental illness-themed books with main characters that struggle to overcome their fears, obsessions, personality disorders, etc. by seeing therapists and creating themselves challenges to accomplish in order to ‘heal’.

**But Girl Against the Universe manages to be original nonetheless.** Maguire thinks she’s bad luck. She thinks bad things happen when she’s around and that it’s mostly because of her that half of her family died. Her therapist recommends she joins a sport – she picks tennis – to help her deal with everything.

Joining the tennis team is the best choice Maguire could have ever made. She makes new friends, learns new skills, cultivates Jordy’s love and simply mingles with the rest of the world. No more isolation – she’s out and she’s going to stay out until she overcomes her phobia.

It’s like a journal log of Maguire’s **step by step process at getting healthier**, mentally speaking. I liked that. I enjoyed how honest Maguire was with the reader and how her situation ‘made sense’. It’s not every day that we hear about people thinking that they are bad luck, yet Maguire makes us understand *why* she thinks that of herself. She’s very convincing.

However, I found two rather important weaknesses to the story, actually linked to one another: **the length of the story and the series of events**. For the first time ever, I read this book on my tablet without checking every thirty minutes what page I’m at. Four hours later, I decided to check, thinking that, surely, I must be at the end. Guess what. I wasn’t. I still had a hundred pages to go.

It’s not that I didn’t enjoy reading it or that it felt too slow, but the events went back and forth. There is, of course, character development regarding Maguire, but the actual series of events usually **revolve around tennis and the therapy sessions**. When she’s not throwing balls, Maguire’s at a tennis competition or paying a visit to her doctor. It’s not *all* that happens – otherwise I would have stopped reading it quite quickly – but it’s a lot of that.

I’m rather happy I gave this book a shot though. Otherwise, I would never have gotten acquainted with this author’s beautiful characters.

## emma says

meh. no, thanks.

i get what this book was trying to do and that's rad and if what it's trying to do managed to be what was done for you...well, uh, good. but it didn't work for me.

this kind of reminded me of Made You Up in that the world feels so surreal and ridiculous and the high school experience is so simplistic and easy and friends and love interests just pop up right when you need them but only disturb you when it will further the plot and so all of that just makes the mental illness rep feel un-f\*cking-real. (i hated Made You Up with my life. one star!!)

again. if this book does it for you - great. not tryna take that away from you. but i was so distracted by the weirdness of the world and the flatness of the characters - they all exist only in how they interact with this girl, which is to say "perfectly acting as a proponent of her larger character arc"!! ugh. so boring and meh to me.

bottom line: no thanks, but it's not that deep. so like. don't get mad at me thank u plz.

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## Aj the Ravenous Reader says

***"The first thing that you need to realize is that mental health is fluid. It's not like you have an infection and a doctor gives you antibiotics and then you're cured. No matter what the two of us accomplish together, you're still going to have good days and bad days. Makes sense?"***

This is another winner in the contemporary YA genre that deals with mental health issues. There came a time when I thought I have had enough of these books but recently I've learned that I could never have enough. There is always something to learn about general mental health condition and Girl Against the Universe is another great read that deals with multiple disorder.

In Maguire's case, she developed an irrational fear of being around people in her belief that her mere existence can cause danger to other people's lives after being the only survival of a fatal car accident that took away the lives of three people she loved. Coincidentally, since then she had been the one always spared of accidents whether petty or grave and has since decided to generally stay away from people and learned to live and accept life mostly in isolation.

It was written very well, kind of lightheartedly and I completely enjoyed her progress as her therapist guides her one step at a time through cognitive behavioral therapy during the course of which, she met friends, a romantic interest which also adorably started with friendship and a great relationship with her stepdad and new siblings.

The sports element is also a plus as well as the humor and the overall easy approach of the author on the story. I also love the strength of Maguire's character and how she resolves to help herself and cope with her

condition without having to sacrifice her or other people's well-being and happiness. Another recommended read!

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### **Rane says**

Some books hit you right in the feels and this book did more than that. It felt real in its portrayal of mental illness and the slow baby steps it takes in therapy and the way Paula Stokes showed how therapy really works was something I applauded. I think this was the best portrayal of how real therapy works I've ever read.

Maguire was a wonderful heroine who trials tugged at my heartstrings. Each step she took you were cheering for her, every challenge she conquered you felt proud for her. All the people she meets along the way shine in their own way from her friends Jade and Penn to our hero Jordy who has his own fears to overcome.

The beauty of the romance between Jordy and Maguire is that it felt natural and not forced. Neither one was the crutch for the other, they both helped each other and letting the other stand on their own two feet standing by their side.

The even pace was never hindered by over the top drama or any pity party on Maguire's mental illness. It was just matter of fact and her journey. The trouble I did have was the ending felt a little too down pat, while it wrapped everything up nicely I just wish it may have went a different direction.

Still, I hold this book close to my heart for those of us who are still on our journey...

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### **Alyssa says**

\*\*\*Review posted on The Eater of Books! blog\*\*\*

Girl Against the Universe by Paula Stokes

Publisher: HarperTeen

Publication Date: May 17, 2016

Rating: 4 stars

Source: eARC from Edelweiss

Summary (from Goodreads):

Maguire is bad luck.

No matter how many charms she buys off the internet or good luck rituals she performs each morning, horrible things happen when Maguire is around. Like that time the rollercoaster jumped off its tracks. Or the time the house next door caught on fire. Or that time her brother, father, and uncle were all killed in a car crash—and Maguire walked away with barely a scratch.

It's safest for Maguire to hide out in her room, where she can cause less damage and avoid meeting new

people who she could hurt. But then she meets Jordy, an aspiring tennis star. Jordy is confident, talented, and lucky, and he's convinced he can help Maguire break her unlucky streak. Maguire knows that the best thing she can do for Jordy is to stay away. But it turns out staying away is harder than she thought.

From author Paula Stokes comes a funny and poignant novel about accepting the past, embracing the future, and learning to make your own luck.

What I Liked:

I'd like to start my review by saying that this book was not nearly as difficult to read as I'd expected. See, the thing is, I do not like to read books that focus on "tough issues", such as mental health, or rape, or suicide, or depression. Fiction is a means of escape for me, and reading those difficult (yet SO significant) issues makes me incredibly discouraged and sad, no matter the outcome of the book. *Girl Against the Universe* is about a girl suffering from a number of mental illnesses, such as PTSD and OCD; it's also about a boy trying to figure out what's best for himself, and not what everyone else wants from him. I honestly wasn't all that interested in this book, because I thought it would be on those typical heavy YA contemporary novels that I try to avoid. But, I'm glad I gave the book a shot, because I did like it a lot.

I'm counting this as this month's Pili-Pushed novel, even though I downloaded the book from Edelweiss before needing a push... I've read Stokes' other five novels, and for the most part, liked them. To see other Pili-Pushed recommendations, click on the "Pili-Pushed" tag!

Maguire is convinced that her mere presence puts people in danger. Years ago, she was in a car accident in which her father (the driver), uncle, and older brother died, but she did not get hurt at all. A series of extraordinary events followed, in which everyone but Maguire was hurt in some way. Maguire doesn't like to use public transportation, or being in a car with others. She constantly checks for potential hazards, and has all kinds of good luck charms and rituals. She's been doing great, no accidents lately; she's also been a granite wall to her therapist. But meeting Jordy changes everything for Maguire. Can she trust herself to be around him, or is her bad luck going to strike once again?

Maguire is a strange girl, as we see from the very first chapter. We meet Maguire in her therapist's office, in which she is dodging his questions and being cryptic and not talkative and basically wasting everyone's time. Leaving the session, she meets the therapist's next patient, a boy who won't tell her who he is, but wants her to help him with his therapy session "homework". As it would turn out, he's Jordy, a famous junior tennis player, and guess what else? Maguire had decided to join the tennis team (she used to play), as part of her goals (she isolates herself, so joining the tennis team is a huge step for her). She and Jordy becomes friends.

I liked Maguire almost immediately. I was a tiny bit surprised because often I'll be frustrated with the protagonist of a YA contemporary "tough issues" novel, but I really felt for Maguire. She has all these coping mechanisms in the form of good luck charms, and she selectively blames herself for things out of her control. Logically, you're probably thinking, that's ridiculous! I would probably be thinking that too; but you can really see Maguire's state of mind, and understand what she's thinking and why. I think Stokes did a really good job of making Maguire who she is, and in an authentic and interesting way.

Our other protagonist, Jordy, is equally as complex and strange and interesting. This book is told from Maguire's first-person POV, but we get to experience Jordy's character development parallel to Maguire's. Jordy is a tennis star whose parents dictate every aspect of his life. He's a people pleaser, so he doesn't fight it. But he's been seeing the therapist because he feels like "tennis Jordy" and "real Jordy" are two completely different personalities, and he doesn't know who he really is. Seeing Jordy work through his problems

(familial and otherwise) is just as wonderful as seeing Maguire do the same. Both characters have been through so much, and work hard to overcome.

Did I mention that this book isn't as heavy as you'd think? Don't get me wrong, Stokes really REALLY captured PTSD and OCD, and portrayed the illnesses not how one would think (OCD isn't just straightening pages or matching corners). But the book wasn't constantly bogged down by tragic and heartbreaking event after tragic and heartbreaking event. Maguire's (and Jordy's) story is quite uplifting, with plenty of mountains and valleys.

Of course there is a little romance in this book! Maguire and Jordy are cute and sweet together. Maguire doesn't think she's ready for a relationship, and she's also heard certain things about Jordy. But I like how Jordy is a totally \*real\* guy; he's also very straightforward and tells her he likes her as more than a friend (in my experience, guys are not so direct). Jordy is a sweetie, a patient and kind person who probably gives nice guys. I love this pair!

Tennis! My favorite sport (well, it's a tie with soccer). I love seeing sports play a big role in YA novels, especially featuring a female athlete protagonist (and in this book, also a male one). Maguire is pretty hardcore! Not as hardcore as Jordy though. Being a huge tennis fan, I loved following all the tennis speak!

Overall, I'm pretty satisfied with this book. Of Stokes' three books, this would be my favorite. Of the author's six books (three of which are under her pen name), it'd probably be tied with Starling (I REALLY liked Starling). My next Stokes book is Vicarious!

What I Did Not Like:

This could totally just be me, but I thought the climax was a little cliché? Maybe cliché is a bad word for what I'm thinking. Like, the climax just seemed like one of those scenes that unfolds and you're just like, of COURSE that happens, because duh, it just happened to be that way... it seemed way too obvious of a climax and I'm kind of disappointed that the author took that route. But this is a small (Alyssa) thing; I think the climax worked with the story, but it seemed cliché.

Would I Recommend It:

If you like YA contemporary, I'd recommend this book. I don't like and recommend too many YA tough-issue contemporary novels, so I'd like to say that it probably means something, that I'm recommending this book. \*nudges\*

Rating:

4 stars. A cute, not-so-heavy, important novel on making your own destiny and taking the reins of your life. I'd love to read an epilogue featuring Jordy and Maguire!

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### **Jamie (The Perpetual Page-Turner) says**

This book was just sooooo delightful! There needs to be a proper word for something that makes your heart a little sad but equally giddy. Maybe there is a word for it? I don't know but this book is whatever that word is. I'm sad I made my YA contemporary beach read list already because this one would have definitely been at



the top — compulsively readable and just heart-melting. And YOU GUYS...one of the sweetest, swooniest dudes in YA.

I LOVED the relationship between Maguire and Jordy. So banter-y. So cute. I want you to discover it for yourself so I don't want to say too much about it. I just loved how they met and how they opened up to each other and helped each other.

I love books that deal with grief/loss and read a lot of them but I actually really loved that this one wasn't directly dealing with the grief and loss of losing her father and brother. I loved that it was still showing the lasting effects of losing someone especially so tragically as well as some of the other things she went through. While on the surface it seems silly that she would really think she's cursed and live her life in the careful manner she does, it's actually amazing what your brain convince you. I really felt for Maguire especially because I could relate. After my mom passed away from brain cancer in 2006 I convinced myself I was dying or that I was going to die. Like some days I just laid in bed so scared of dying. It really hit pretty personally how one can hold themselves back from living because of a fear and belief so tight within your gut that no matter the logic people try to use on you you just can't shake it.

I think the shining star of this novel is how positively therapy is portrayed. Honestly I wish I had this book after my mom passed away because maybe I would have gotten the help that I needed to deal with my issues. Watching Maguire put in that work and do these scary assignments, that to others would seem easy, was just wonderful. I really enjoyed watching her (and Jordy) tackle them even though they were hard. I really loved that therapy wasn't just a convenient plot thing for her and Jordy but I really felt like the author showed how important it was for her.

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