



STARRED REVIEW

The Last Football Player

John Blossom

John Blossom, 316 pages, (paperback) \$10.99, 9780999615614

(Reviewed: August 2023)

John Blossom's new YA novel follows a futuristic teenager on his quest to design a better football game.

In the mid-2050s, eighth-grader Dude and his father, Dudley Senior, disagree on the merits of playing football. Dudley thinks the sport is outmoded and dangerous, and that kids should be contented with virtual gameplay. Dude, on the other hand, loves the sport and can't wait until high school when he'll be on the JV team.

When Dude is injured during a game, Dudley has had enough. As an employee of Circle, one of the two rival tech companies that dominate their Silicon Valley community, he uses his clout to get football banned from Dude's school.

Despondent and ostracized by his former teammates, Dude winds up working in his school's advanced "Tech Lab," a place where students can innovate under the supervision of an artificial intelligence known as "Master." With a quirky crew of fellow students, Dude works to create a new kind of football game: played by robots, but powered by human skills and foibles.

The Last Football Player offers an unusual mix of sportiness and nerdiness, both delivered with irresistible enthusiasm. As the students' robotic football game gets off the ground, Blossom delivers enough complications to keep things interesting, in the form of hijinks from both Circle and a rival school.

Blossom's references to real tech companies – for instance, Dude attends Circle-sponsored Honeycrisp School, and his school's biggest rival is Zinkerberg Academy, which is sponsored by Circle's rival, Zetta – are sly enough to make young readers feel clever but not so sophisticated as to go over their heads.

The novel is also a good candidate for young people to read with the adults in their lives. Spirited discussions of business ethics, the role of technology, and the value and risks of sports will ensue.

Overall *The Last Football Player* is charming and captivating, with much to offer a broad range of readers.

Also available in hardcover and ebook.