



Word Nerd

Susin Nielsen

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Twelve-year-old Ambrose is a glass-half-full kind of guy. A self-described “friendless nerd,” he moves from place to place every couple of years with his overprotective mother, Irene. When some bullies at his new school almost kill him by slipping a peanut into his sandwich — even though they know he has a deathly allergy — Ambrose is philosophical. Irene, however, is not and decides that Ambrose will be home-schooled.

Alone in the evenings when Irene goes to work, Ambrose pesters Cosmo, the twenty-five-year-old son of the Greek landlords who live upstairs. Cosmo has just been released from jail for breaking and entering to support a drug habit. Quite by accident, Ambrose discovers that they share a love of Scrabble and coerces Cosmo into taking him to the West Side Scrabble Club, where Cosmo falls for Amanda, the club director. Posing as Ambrose’s Big Brother to impress her, Cosmo is motivated to take Ambrose to the weekly meetings and to give him lessons in self-defense. Cosmo, Amanda, and Ambrose soon form an unlikely alliance and, for the first time in his life, Ambrose blossoms. The characters at the Scrabble Club come to embrace Ambrose for who he is and for their shared love of words. There’s only one problem: Irene has no idea what Ambrose is up to.

In this brilliantly observed novel, author Susin Nielsen transports the reader to the world of competitive Scrabble as seen from the honest yet funny viewpoint of a boy who’s searching for acceptance and for a place to call home.

From the Hardcover edition.

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