Once upon a time, there were four of them. And though each was good at a number of things, all of them were very good at games...

Dagmar is a game designer trapped in Jakarta in the middle of a revolution. The city is tearing itself apart around her and she needs to get out. Her boss Charlie has his own problems -- 4.3 billion of them, to be precise, hidden in an off-shore account. Austin is the businessman -- the VC. He's the one with the plan and the one to keep the geeks in line. BJ was there from the start, but while Charlie's star rose, BJ sank into the depths of customer service. He pads his hours at the call-center slaying on-line orcs, stealing your loot, and selling it on the internet.

But when one of them is gunned down in a parking lot, the survivors become players in a very different kind of game. Caught between the dangerous worlds of the Russian Mafia and international finance, Dagmar must draw on all her resources -- not least millions of online gamers -- to track down the killer. In this near-future thriller, Walter Jon Williams weaves a pulse-pounding tale of intrigue, murder, and games where you don't get an extra life.

Features:
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My Personal Review:
This Is Not a Game (2008) is a standalone SF novel. It is set in the near future within Jakarta and Los Angeles.

In this novel, Dagmar Shaw is the executive producer of Great Big Idea, an alternate reality game company. She stages fictional conspiracies that involve thousands of players. She developed her interest in games at Caltech, where she played roleplaying games with Charlie, Austin and BJ. She married BJ for nine months, but then remarried and moved to England.
Charlie Ruff is the owner of AvN Soft, a software company that produces various forms of computer agents. He also owns the Great Big Idea game company.

Austin Katanyan is a venture capitalist. Charlie had helped him start his own business, which has been a huge success.

Boris Jan Bustretski is a customer service representative. BJ had been a partner with Charlie in the AvN Soft startup, but they had gone broke and Charlie kicked him out of the company. Now he is poor and bored.

In this story, Dagmar has just completed a game in India and is flying to Jakarta to catch a connecting flight to Bali. Her plane is late getting to Jakarta and she misses her connection. She gets tickets for another flight the following day and looks for a place to stay. The American hotels are full, so she takes a room at the Royal Jakarta.

Indonesia is suffering from a currency collapse. The government has fallen and the military intends to take over again. Many citizens have lost their jobs as well as their savings. People are rioting in the streets.

Dagmar informs Charlie of her situation. Other countries are planning to evacuate their citizens, but all American naval forces are committed to the Persian Gulf. So Americans in Indonesia have no way to leave.

Charlie hires a mercenary company to get Dagmar out of Jakarta. All the local security firms are already busy, so he hires an Israeli group. They will have to get their resources to Southeast Asia before Dagmar can be rescued.

Meanwhile, Dagmar appeals to her fans on Our Reality Network. She explains the situation and lets them start planning a rescue. The ARG fans get her out while the mercenaries are still trying to get their equipment in order.

When she gets back to Los Angeles, Charlie presents her with a new task. Dagmar uses her experiences in Jakarta to create a new scenario. Then someone murders Austin and Dagmar uses the ARG fans to discover the killer.

This tale also leads Dagmar to distrust Charlie and to hire BJ as a consultant. There are other murders and the ARG fans keep providing information on the real life crimes. Although Dagmar's rescue was TINAG -- see the title -- some fans are beginning to confuse reality with the game.

BTW, the chapter titles can be a little irritating. All start with "This is not...". Just keep on reading and eventually you can ignore the titles.
This novel drew my interest from the first page. It is mostly about Dagmar developing a healthy dose of suspicion in her culturally naive mind. Read and enjoy!

Highly recommended for Williams fans and for anyone else who enjoys tales of roleplaying games, realworld murders, and smart women.

-Arthur W. Jordin

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This Is Not a Game: A Novel by Walter Jon Williams - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!