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NEED



Synopsis

“No one gets something for nothing. We all should know better.” Teenagers at Wisconsin’s Nottawa High School are drawn deeper into a social networking site that promises to grant their every need . . . regardless of the consequences. Soon the site turns sinister, with simple pranks escalating to malicious crimes. The body count rises. In this chilling YA thriller, the author of the best-selling Testing trilogy examines not only the dark side of social media, but the dark side of human nature.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

A Conversation with Joelle Charbonneau The best selling author of the Testing trilogy discusses her newest stand alone book, NEED.

How would you describe your new book, NEED? NEED is a stand alone thriller that jumps headfirst into a new social media site that allows users to say what they need and offers them a chance to get it “for a price. Because so much of the user behavior and the rules of the site are based on things I’ve actually witnessed on the Internet, I can honestly say I think this story is creepier and more intense than anything else I’ve ever written. What can fans of the Testing trilogy expect to find in NEED? Even though this is a contemporary set thriller instead

of a science fiction story, I think Testing readers will be happy to find a fast-paced plot, strong characters that you can root for and against, and a dark mystery of the powers hidden behind the network and the reason why it exists. Hopefully, readers will also find the same intensity and connection to the story that they embraced in the Testing trilogy. NEED is, in part, about the darker side of social networking. What drew you to this subject? The Internet and specifically social networking is really fascinating. For some reason, a great number of people behave differently online than they do in real life. I see friends of mine say things to people on their social media pages that they would never say in person. That kind of behavior made me wonder “what would people say if they were anonymous online and thought no one knew it was them” and what would they do if they thought they could get things they needed? Once I asked myself those questions, I had no choice but to answer them, which is why I wrote NEED.

The book jumps around to different teens’ stories and points of view. Was this planned? The initial idea story started with Kaylee. I wanted a character who had been hurt both on and off of social media and had a strong desire to keep her distance from people in person and online. That gave her a strong conflict from the start. But everyone has different reasons for being on social media and unique things that motivate them into taking risks. So, before I wrote the first page, I realized I needed to explore more than just Kaylee’s point of view. I needed a much broader cast of characters. However, it wasn’t until I was writing the story that I learned who those characters would be.

Since her younger brother, DJ, developed a life-threatening kidney condition, Kaylee has been doing everything she could to find a compatible donor who might save him, even if it means unintentionally alienating many of her classmates and developing a reputation as a drama queen who stretches the truth in order to get what she wants. (Her mother also is quite displeased with her tactics.) Their father might be a compatible donor, except that he has moved out, and no one knows his whereabouts. When Kaylee’s only friend, Nate (popular but overshadowed by his athletic older brother in their family) introduces her to a new social networking site for students in their high school, she is interested but skeptical. The site promises to fulfill a “need” of each user, as long as he or she does something for NEED in return. At first, students can get something they need, simply by signing up friends for the site, but soon, after it reaches its peak capacity, NEED begins to request tasks that end up hurting others without explanation. When it looks like NEED has targeted DJ, Kaylee’s mother takes him for a visit out of town, leaving Kaylee behind. Since the police don’t

take Kaylee's theories about what's going on seriously, she is left to piece together the clues herself, with Nate and another classmate. When Kaylee finds herself targeted and framed, presumably to further discredit her, and yet another student's life is placed in jeopardy, she must race against time to discover who exactly created NEED, how to stop them, and if possible, still find a way to get her brother the help he needs. The novel has a lot of strengths including a mystery that must be solved by piecing together multiple narratives (all are in third person, except for Kaylee's) like a jigsaw puzzle. It also boasts a smart, moral protagonist who at the same time often has the believable impulse control of a not quite mature teenager. Kaylee's reaction to her friend who begins to want to be more is unique among teen novel girls her age and refreshing. At the same time, Kaylee is presented at least at first as a possibly unreliable narrator, which adds to the suspense. At the end, the door is left wide open for a sequel, as it's made clear that the heroine has only temporarily stopped the creators of "NEED."

This is quite a thriller, and not quite over-the-top. The heroine's story is told in the first person, while alternating chapters are told in the close third person. Kaylee is living a stress-filled life in a small town. Her little brother is gravely ill, her mother doesn't seem to be doing anything about it, and Kaylee's efforts, to date, have all been well-meant but so misguided (even illegal) that she's up to her eyeballs in trouble. When a new social website appears, and everyone in her high school signs up, she finds herself on it as a last-ditch effort to help her brother. Instead, the website, called NEED, gradually seduces the teens into doing mischief, and the mischief has consequences no one could predict. Who is behind this? Why are people dying? And how is Kaylee getting caught in the net of mayhem and murder? I found my heart pounding as I read along. There are, of course, some YA tropes, such as the inability of adults to understand anything or take control. It's all up to the teens. Overall, I thought this was a truly scary book and well worth reading.

The author states that this is a stand alone thriller, but the ending suggests that she could change her mind and write a sequel. I personally hope it remains a stand alone. This is suspenseful. The premise is that a new social network targets a specific school and promises members to answer their needs whatever they may be. However, those participating are then asked to perform innocent appearing tasks. Naturally, these tasks turn out not to be innocent at all. The book does have a body count. The main character narrates the story in the first person, but a number of other characters are followed in third person narration. It's fast reading and the temptation is to try to read it all in one sitting. It's definitely mystery style. This should be a real winner for teen readers. Anyway, I certainly

recommend it.

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