



A Really Awesome Mess

Trish Cook, Brendan Halpin

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A hint of *Recovery Road*, a sample of *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist*, and a cut of *Juno*. A Really Awesome Mess is a laugh-out-loud, gut-wrenching/heart-warming story of two teenagers struggling to find love and themselves.

Two teenagers. Two very bumpy roads taken that lead to Heartland Academy. Justin was just having fun, but when his dad walked in on him with a girl in a very compromising position, Justin's summer took a quick turn for the worse. His parents' divorce put Justin on rocky mental ground, and after a handful of Tylenol lands him in the hospital, he has really hit rock bottom.

Emmy never felt like part of her family. She was adopted from China. Her parents and sister tower over her and look like they came out of a Ralph Lauren catalog-- and Emmy definitely doesn't. After a scandalous photo of Emmy leads to vicious rumors around school, she threatens the boy who started it all on Facebook.

Justin and Emmy arrive at Heartland Academy, a reform school that will force them to deal with their issues, damaged souls with little patience for authority. But along the way they will find a ragtag group of teens who are just as broken, stubborn, and full of sarcasm as themselves. In the end, they might even call each other friends.

A funny, sad, and remarkable story, A Really Awesome Mess is a journey of friendship and self-discovery that teen readers will surely sign up for.

A Really Awesome Mess Details

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From Reader Review A Really Awesome Mess for online ebook

Debbie Narh says

1.5 Stars

As the title says, this is a mess. But not an awesome one, more of a sloppily done one. There is so much that's just horribly wrong with this novel that I get mad just thinking about it. Very little in this novel actually makes sense. Very little. And that made me really sad because I actually had really high hopes for this one.

The book skips over really important stuff like Justin's relationship with his mother and step dad and there's more telling rather than showing in the story. It's also obvious that every single one of these characters are underdeveloped especially, Emmy. That girl is just all over the place with her problems. She's supposed to be angry (she's in the anger management group for crying out loud!) yet, not once does she spaz out and yell and hit anyone when they don't allow her to do what she wants. All of the characters have problems but they feel very half done, like the authors didn't research these problems enough or very well. And even though I don't mind romances in these kinds of stories, the romance in A Really Awesome Mess is very contrived. Everything about the relationship between Justin and Emmy feels very fake to me and it annoyed me to no end the way Emmy is around Justin, like he's her world. *Rolls eyes*

But believe it or not, I did enjoy a few things about this book. I loved that Justin's dad walked in on him doing the dirty. It's funny and adds in the light mood the book was trying to mix in with the serious topics. Justin as a character starts off pretty strong and he's the only reason I kept reading to the very end because his story is one that I can relate to. But other than Justin and his problems, I didn't find anything else likeable about this novel.

I'm so disappointed with A Really Awesome Mess. Books about teenagers and depression and all that serious stuff speak to me! This book has put me in a bad mood and I don't recommend this to anyone because it's poorly executed and isn't researched enough that also has a romance that could have gotten two stars out of me if it didn't have.

Delores says

This was disappointing. Don't read.

Sheri (Tangled Up In Books) says

51% DNF

I made an honest attempt to make it through this book but I came to a point where I just can't take anymore.

First of all from the summary: "A hint of Recovery Road, a sample of Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist, and a cut of Juno. " Now I've not heard of Recovery Road but I am very familiar with and adore both Nick and Norah and Juno. There is **nothing** even remotely close to either of those in this book except maybe character age range.

Second it's supposed to be full of humor and heartbreak and such. I'll admit here and there I felt sorry for these totally screwed up kids. But only to a point. And humor? If things like one of the main characters Justin cracking a joke in his "Sexual Reactivity" class about how the word "therapist" is just one space away from "the rapist" yeah. Funny.

Third. The porn obsession is over the top in this book. I made it to 51% and I can't count on two hands the amount of times I had to hear about porn.

A small bit of background for my breaking point. In one of the Anger Management sessions one of the girls asks to play a game and Tina the therapist was like sure what game. And the girl says the ass game. Replace the word heart with ass in any song. The group went wild while Tina tried to regain control and get everyone to quit yelling out song titles. Finally "accidentally messing up" and saying something about the rules at Assland (Heartland is the name of the reform school). Whatever I had to roll my eyes at that but that wasn't the big thing for me. Here at 51% she takes this same group of kids on a "field trip" to a county fair type thing and as she's trying to warn them about the fact that yes they were away and nobody was hovering about the rules of Assland. The group was like whoa you said Assland! She said she was proving a point about the temptation to misbehave and one guy says "Ooo you said ass big deal." the **THERAPIST** then says and I quote "Shit. Fuck. Queef. Happy?" Are you kidding me? An "adult" "therapist" says this to a group of severely fucked up teenagers? That's classy and highly appropriate! I was done after that sentence. I just can't finish.

It was more of a hot mess then an awesome one.

Kristen says

Warning: If you have or have ever had an eating disorder, this book will likely be **VERY** triggering for you. At first, I found myself really intrigued by this novel. Ever since I was a teen, I have adored novels that are set in psychiatric facilities and deal with mental illness. Unfortunately, after reading about 100 pages, this interest quickly turned to anger. One of the novel's main characters, Emmy suffers from an eating disorder. In the novel, not eating is shown as being Emmy's decision, not something that is out of her control, as eating disorders are. She is also very judgemental of the weight and appearance of other people. This is inaccurate as those with eating disorders are judgemental of themselves, but not others. They see others as being beautiful and thin, even when they are much larger than the person with an eating disorder. The novel's portrayal of eating disorders is **VERY** infuriatingly inaccurate. I was outraged when Emmy and her peers when to a carnival and she spontaneously decided to eat a huge hot dog fully loaded with all available toppings. Worse, the other patients joke and humiliate Emmy about her lack of weight and her eating disorder which is completely normalized in the book.

The facility, if it were real, would seem to be very sketchy and poorly run. Emmy is easily able to get away with pawning her food off to other people and 'coughing' out her food into her napkin. The patients are shockingly allowed to wear their own clothes, which Emmy could easily hide food in. The supervisor for Emmy, the other main character, Justin and several other patients allows them to go on a special trip to a

carnival when they don't seem even remotely ready to venture out with limited supervision. The counseling seems very unhelpful as the patients are simply asked a lot of rhetorical questions.

The other main, Justin has very little personality. He is simply crude and rude. He is obsessed with sex and pornography. I'm a little confused as to why he is in the facility. To me, he doesn't seem mentally ill, he simply seems like a jerk. He often tells rape jokes and believes they are hilarious. While his obsession with sex and pornography is very annoying, over-done and immature, it doesn't seem to be unusual. Most 17-year-olds (male or female) are becoming interested in sex and want to explore their sexuality. While I do think he needs more hobbies than watching porn and fantasizing about women, he doesn't need professional help.

I was frustrated by the novel's approach to sex in general. Justin is portrayed as being a deviant for any interest in sex, while Emmy, who has had some sexual experiences is portrayed as being a victim when she consensually had sexual relations with a classmate during study sessions. Other patients at the facility are labelled as lesbians for being rough and tumble females. *sigh*

I don't know if I would feel comfortable with teens reading this book as it negatively and inaccurately portrays so many topics and issues, bu maybe that's just me? My verdict: avoid this book!! You'll be better off for it.

Susana says

Arc provided by netgalley

DNF at 60 %

I really try not to leave books unfinished, but any more of this, and I would be the one needing psychiatric help!

To say that this didn't correspond to my expectations would be putting it mildly.

This was just unbelievable bad... in a sort of reality kids' show bad!!

I read the synopsis and it sounded like this could be something interesting: kids with very different problems coming together and helping one another.

What I got: spoiled brats who care only about themselves...

One of these characters, Emmy, has an eating disorder. But does her disease get treated with respect by the other members?

Or even by the authors?

The answer is a big fat **NO**.

The other kids have the social skills of cockroaches.

And the authors would have us believe that a kid with this sort of problem wouldn't have to start adjusting her eating habits!

No, she gets there and immediately starts being forced to eat everything they place on her plate!!

Amazing...

Then, immediately after the story starts, there's an attempt at insta-love! Right!!

Because that's what matters... who cares if the girl is trying to starve herself to death, and the guy tried to kill himself?

This is an YA book! Of course there's got BE LOVE!! And LOVE directed at a shmuck who treats her as if she's only being fanciful about food... yeah, he makes a lot of interesting remarks.

In fact, pretty much all the teens in the book come out as spoiled brats!

I guess the authors were aiming for troubled and problematic, but as far as I'm concerned, they only got into the spoiled brats level.

The comments, and remarks, display an incredible nonexistent level of empathy for anyone that's not themselves. They're arrogant, snarky, politically incorrect characters, who enjoy making cruel/racist and stupid remarks.

“Honestly, don’t you see how stupid this skinny thing is? You have no tits or ass left. No guy is ever gonna think you’re hot.” (Diana to Emmy)

Yes, they're basically too stupid to live...

Maybe further along the line, they won't be half as bad, but honestly I've had enough of this.

Sofia Lazaridou says

I loved the book. I honestly wasn't expecting to like it so much but I did. I remembered why I love YA books after reading this.

Justin and Emmy are two teenagers who suffer from something that could happen to you and me. Many girls want to have the perfect figure to get to that "chic double 0" as Emmy said. Emmy wants to look like a model and is happy when she sees her bones in the mirror. She is starving herself and leading her into an early grave. So her parents decide to send her to Assland/Heartland Academy.

Justin is depressed. Many people are these days. He is sent to Assland Academy to get better. He says that he feels numb.

There they meet 4 other kids. With a purpose they form a team and try to make things work out to get their reward. What I loved about that was seeing them, those 6 teenagers acting selfishly in the beginning but as the book was progressing seeing them work together, understand what the phrase team work means and forming bonds. They became better, healed a little.

In the end I had a positive feeling. Things can get better. As I turned the last page of the book I had a smile on my face and happy thoughts.

Clara Cortés says

Hay que decir que al final este libro me ha gustado mucho. Las 90 primeras páginas ha despertado mis instintos asesinos más puros, no voy a mentir, pero entiendo que esos eran los personajes, y estoy absolutamente satisfecha con la evolución de todos (no solo de los protagonistas, sino de los secundarios también, sus relaciones y sus logros). Muestra las enfermedades mentales de una manera bastante explícita y pura, es decir, lees cómo se sienten y es literalmente así, sin florituras ni mierdas, y mola. Y otra cosa que me ha gustado: nadie salva a nadie, nadie arregla a otra persona. Son ellos solos se las apañan (o no), y está bien.

Ellis says

Disclaimer: I received this ARC in exchange for an honest review. I was not compensated in any way.

Disclaimer le deux: This review contains slight (untagged) spoilers, sarcasm, snark, swearing and so-not-amusedness. In addition to all that S-rated material, the length takes on ranty proportions and there are pictures.

Full disclosure: my main problem with this book is its insensitive and inaccurate portrayal of eating disorders. If you enjoyed the book and think I'm being too harsh on its content, this is not the review for you. In any case, please refrain from mocking and/or attacking people with mental disorders in the comments.

I can honestly say that I didn't laugh once with this book. I did not find this an endearing novel with a cast of quirky, albeit screwed-up, characters, and I take so much offence with so many of the messages that I should probably insert a bad sports joke here. There is a lot to be covered.

While my rating, introduction and status updates might not have suggested it, there are some positive things in here. For one, the racial diversity is treated much better than you'd expect from a mainstream YA title. Secondly, as long as it was shown how either protagonist had to live and deal with their particular disorder - suicidal ideation for Justin and anorexia in Emmy's case -, the portrayal was semi-believable and many of the details were often spot-on. However, this became problematic when the narrative mode shifted to *telling* and when interactions with other patients and/or caretakers came into play. Lastly, the authors experimented with the typography in chapter headings and opening sentences. Personally, I didn't get the meaning behind it, but I can't say I wasn't intrigued.

I'll start with Justin. When we meet him, he states that he merely overdosed on pills to "give his mother a good scare". This knowledge is casually dropped between pages and pages of masturbation talk and sex references. Sigh. You know, on the one hand I can forgive this. As far as the masturbation goes, I have a

pretty dirty mind of my own, so I didn't really mind. I can even understand his cool guy attitude about the suicide attempt, because it's so obvious that he's in denial. He's also angry with his parents because of the way they react, but he eventually acknowledges that therapy was indeed the best option.

Those are all good things, right? So what the hell is my problem then?

Well.

How do I put this delicately?? First of all, sex jokes are all good and well, but rape jokes are a whole other matter. In one of his uberfunny episodes, Justin decides to christen his therapist "the rapist". Behold his brilliance:

"I'm Justin. I was just thinking about how one little space is all that separates therapist from 'the rapist.'" I paused for the laugh.

Don't worry, this is not just some one-time fling. The rape jokes have finally found their peeps.

Even better for us, Justin is a plain old enabler. He constantly body-shames Emmy, ~~because anorexia cannot possibly be a serious disease~~, and even literally sabotages her recovery process. He takes her food, then mocks her because she's too skinny to be attractive. He gives her ideas about how she should overeat right before they take a drive, since it will make her puke, but it won't look suspicious, because these things happen, *right?* Yadayadayada worst love interest ever. Good thing he's not alone. Their whole band of misfits constantly gangs up on Emmy and almost beats it into her that she should be ashamed of herself, her body, and her eating habits. Abusive peer pressure is SO adorable. It makes characters instantly relatable.

Furthermore, I do not appreciate the gendered politics behind the assignment of mental disorders here. Naturally, Justin has actual problems with serious disorders such as depression and suicide, while Emmy should just get over her "vanity disease" and grow some ass and boobs already. Seriously girl:

"Honestly, don't you see how stupid this skinny thing is? You have no tits or ass left. No guy is ever

gonna think you're hot."

Why am I even surprised that out of all the reasons why people are sent to this rehabilitation centre (addiction, suicide, depression, mental/physical/sexual abuse, mental disorders, etc.), the single most ridiculous one is to stop eating? It's not as if serious trauma could be the underlying force. Nope, it's perfectly all right to still bully The Skeleton while she tries to get better.

It's not as if YA is already in enough Gender Trouble to make Judith Butler write a whole new book on it.

To round off Justin's arc, this is the conclusion these characters come up with:

"We all smiled because it was the truth: living did take a lot more guts than giving up."

Naturally, this is said by our wonderful female lead, Emmy. Don't worry, I'll get to her in a minute.

I mean, can you tell how utterly delighted I am by this statement?

It's almost as genius as saying suicide is the sum of a bunch of reasons.

Part of me just doesn't get how this is possible. On the one hand, there are these subtle and well-developed details about depression, but then they actually have the audacity to throw in the single most clichéd and insulting misconception about suicide this bigoted society has to offer. I know you can argue that Justin still struggles with depression towards the end, and that such a thing undermines this stereotypical truism, but the lack of respect for each other's problems just oozes through the screen.

Now, before I move to Emmy:

"Any more crap and I'll get you put in the SR group with the hardcore dykes. They'll love your skinny little ass."

Okay,

we all know that the average Thesaurus lists "lesbian" as a synonym for "sexual predator". This can't possibly be a homophobic and misogynistic slur all wrapped in one, now can it? Im-possibruh.

Apparently, sexual diversity is a big no-no in this universe. Le sigh, sigher, sighest of them all.

Oh, but kids these days. They say the darndest things.

Big fucking spoiler :

The "dyke" threat is levelled by an authority figure. That's too bad, but every institution has some less-

than-impressive characters, right? Yeah well, I don't think Heartland even screens their personnel.

How to be a honourable Anger Management therapist at the Heartland Academy:

Dear diary,

Jenny finally opened up today in AM. I've been waiting so long for this moment to happen. I cannot say exactly what motivated her to speak today, but I'm so glad she did. There were two new kids, Emmy and Justin. I thought it was a good idea to add them to this group. Depression and Eating Disorder bring some variety to Aggressive Abuse Victim, Pathological Liar, Gamer Addict and So Traumatised That She No Longer Speaks.

It all started with a joke about bacon. Jenny loves pigs. She became more upset by the minute, but Emmy obviously wanted to impress Justin with her wit. I thought it was a good idea to let the honesty juices flow. When Emmy entered upon Cruel territory, Jenny punched her in the gut. Not that Anorexia minded. Now she has a semi-valid excuse to puke up all the calories she didn't want in the first place. As girls do, the three of them started a cat fight. Suddenly, two of the boys started one as well, but I wasn't worried. Boys are cool enough to forgive each other instantly.

Actually, I thought it was a good idea to let them fight it out. It was interesting to observe. Eventually, I asked them to take their seats. The little buggers wouldn't listen, so I had to raise my voice. Since I have some goddamn authority in this place, they listened.

However, I'm on to Emmy. She started this fight because she didn't want to keep her food down. I'm going to address her tomorrow. Children beating each other up is nothing, but I'm not letting that Skeletor get her way.

Love and kisses,

Tina.

*P.S. I was thinking of taking them on a trip. It would be the ideal opportunity to make out with some random dude on the top of my car, while they run along **unsupervised**. Need to think more on this, though.*

I only mention "skeletor" because it's apparently okay for these characters to constantly address Emmy as such. BFFs For Life Never Lose You Till The World Ends And Beyond.

Forget about inappropriate. In this setting, such behaviour and ignorance is downright **dangerous**. They do not care about the patient's health or safety and I refuse to find this amusing.

Frankly, nothing about Heartland makes it a good place for people with eating disorders.

1. Patients are "cured" when they are fat again. No need for psychological help, since anorexia and the like are obviously about being skinny and beautiful. Ergo, if the girls (~~because boys cannot possibly have body issues~~) are no longer size zero and under, they are healed.

2. Patients can sit with whomever they want. Obviously, there has to be some supervision, but they can behave as if they are in any high-school cafeteria. None of the patients would dump their food on someone else's plate. None of the patients would actually enable one another, publicly shame someone's disorder or tell them how fucking worthless and unattractive they are **on a daily basis**.

3. Patients can wear whatever they want when they have to eat. It's not as if they would ever stuff the food in

their sleeves or pockets. It's not as if other institutions insist they have ponytails while eating, **to prevent them from smearing the food in their hair.**

4. We do not discuss specific body issues and societal ideas/perceptions about the human body. Let's give our "students" some vague classes. Obviously, they will connect these random stories to their personal situation and magically heal. **NOT.**

5. The best way to improve the patient's relationship with food is to just force 3000 calories a day down their throat. It doesn't matter that they are accustomed to only a quarter of that amount. There is no possible way this plan could backfire, so why even bother with a process of gradual acceptance?

6. Again, the most important thing is to fix their eating habits. It's unimaginable that anything other than the desire to be thin and beautiful could be the basis of an eating disorder.

Case in point: Emmy. Of all the possible experiences that could trigger an eating disorder, do you know what finally drove her to it?

...

How else would you take revenge when someone dumps you? It's not just her. His ex-girlfriend began starving herself when they broke up. The other girls Emmy has brief interactions with do it because they want to fit in sizes zero to zero-zero. This means that **100% of the people suffering from an eating disorder in this book are advocates for it being a vanity disease that only silly teenage girls engage in.**

OF - FUCKING - COURSE.

Emmy:

I know the goal of this book was a humorous rather than in-depth approach of serious issues, but the overall shaming and lack of respect made that I just couldn't enjoy it. Cory's review warned me, but I had to see it for myself. Frankly?

I cannot enjoy such an ignorant portrayal of eating disorders because I have been battling an eating disorder for five years. I have to put up with enough prejudicial shit about it being a "vanity disease" on a daily basis.

I cannot enjoy such a casual approach to suicide because every four days, someone in Belgium jumps in front of a train. 3/4 of those attempts are unsuccessful. It has happened several times that I was on a train that stopped in the middle of its journey, because the previous train had to stop for someone who tried to commit suicide this way. One of my best friends was on a train that ran someone over. The guy across from her

tweeted his frustration over the reason of this delay. Five minutes later, he got a call from his parents that his brother was that reason. These suicide attempts happen so often that many people aren't even surprised when their train doesn't arrive on time.

These are very personal reasons. I honestly tried to go in with an open mind, but there was just too much that bothered me. When it comes to serious issues that are already extensively ridiculed and belittled in mainstream media, I would appreciate some consideration in my literature thankyouverymuch.

If there are people who are interested in accurate information on eating disorders, visit The Fementalists. You should definitely read these articles:

- Fatphobia and Eating Disorders
- A lived experience of anorexia, a lesbian feminist perspective
- Do you see what I see? (a post on Body Dysmorphic Disorder)

Aa'Ishah says

3.5 stars

On the surface, *A Really Awesome Mess* doesn't look like it has much to boast about. And despite my love of contemporaries, it's not necessarily something that I would usually go for. But there was a small part of me that was curious and, as often happens when it comes to me and books, that small spark of curiosity was enough to prompt me to read this. Now I can say that I have absolutely no regrets, because this proved to cover a multitude of issues, present interesting character relationships and be completely hilarious all at once.

Welcome to Heartland Academy, a reform school in the middle of nowhere meant to deal with a whole range of mental health, emotional and other issues, from anger management to eating disorders to compulsive lying to addictions to suicidal tendencies and more. In Heartland Academy we meet six key people - Emmy and Justin are the two protagonists, yet alongside them are four friends, and it is through all of these characters that Cook and Halpin explore such issues. These were managed nicely so that they interwove together; while all these problems weren't explored in detail - indeed, there were too many of them for that to happen - it was still enough for me to appreciate them and what the characters were going through. There were also layers created, particularly in Emmy's case: just when I thought I knew about her life and why she felt the way she did, I learned something else about her.

I thought the authors had also done a remarkable job with the characters in bringing them alive and making me connect with them all. Admittedly I was annoyed at certain times, but the more I read the less this was so. For me, the last third or so of the book was the strongest, at least in terms of character relationships. I loved watching them all work together, encouraging each other to work past their issues and really come to be friends. The plotline this took place around was undeniably ridiculous - several times I stopped to reflect on what exactly was happening and why these characters were working together - but it was so funny and actually not at all bothersome, that I just accepted it and read on. I had this near-constant grin on my face, and I was content to just be along for the ride, however unlikely it was.

A Really Awesome Mess turned out to be a quick, almost surprisingly enjoyable read. I usually like my books dark and emotional, yet this somehow turned out to be a mix of emotional and quite funny, one that was strangely compelling in this case. I'm definitely glad I decided to give this one a go.

This review is also posted on my blog.

Philomena Callan Cheekypee says

I thought this was an interesting coming of age read.

Justin is a sixteen year old who finds himself attending Heartland Academy, a reformist school for troubled teenagers, after he takes an overdose of Tylenol. He meets Emmy there who also has her own problems.

I really liked this read. I thought it had a good storyline with great characters.

Ange says

This book is a total fucking mess. So completely wrong about how people in treatment behave. Completely insensitive/not accurate eating disorder portrayals. It appears to have been written by people who have never talked to real live human teenagers before.

Kara says

This book was kind of cute. First of all, let me just say that it gets MAJOR points for having a minority as one of the lead characters, and another minority as a supporting character. MAJOR. Honestly that's one of the reasons I liked it as much as I did, which isn't to trivialize the rest of the book, but to show how geeked I get when authors remember there are other races walking the streets!

The book centers on two teens' struggles to adapt when they are both sent to a sort of psychiatric school for troubled teens, which provides as much individual and group therapy as it does geometry and history. the group classes are designated by the needs of the kids, and Justin and Emmy end up in the same Anger Management class.

While tackling pretty serious topics, this book is more cute and light hearted. Some might criticize this turn, but as it is geared for teenagers I thought it was nice to show 14 and 15 year olds that there can be fun and upbeat moments no matter what your situation.

I also thought that Justin and Emmy's situations, and their reactions, were very realistic. Particularly Justin's battles with anger and depression. They struck me as realistic and understandable. Though I question whether what Emmy did was enough to get her sent somewhere like this, I let it slide because she did have serious issues that needed to be addressed.

What I didn't like was the data dumping at the beginning. While I'm always suspicious of people who over share, especially to strangers, I'm more suspicious when this is done by kids who are apparently hiding their

real feelings from everyone, including themselves. Granted, talking to the reader isn't really "sharing" but it still struck me as unrealistic that they would narrate so much of what was in their head, when they had not yet gotten to the crux of the issues that got them sent there in the first place. On a related note, I also thought that their revelations come like these big "aha moments" way too soon after they got there. I didn't think the time lapse was realistic.

Further there were the other kids in the Anger Management group, which the story centered around. They were creative and it seemed like a realistic bunch, until I learned they were (supposedly) further along in their progress than Justin and Emmy, who had just arrived. Throughout much of the book, they exhibit the behaviors that got them landed in the school in the first place. Which was fine, and enjoyable to read, but contradicted the idea that they had made significant progress in their emotional lives.

But with that, I still found it to be a fun read, and with some caution as to the more explicit language and themes, I'd recommend this one for teenagers.

I received a copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for my honest, unbiased review.

Crystal says

This is the kind of book that will stay with me for days. Is it mind blowing no, is it beyond exciting not even a little bit, but it is about real issues and shows the true side of teens. I appreciate what Trish Cook and Brendan Halpin have written and I really wish I would have had something like this to read when I was younger.

In this story we have Justin and Emmy, 2 teens who have been sent to Heartland Academy. Heartland Academy is a reform school and they have been sent there for very different reasons but their families both hope for the same conclusion, they hope Emmy and Justin will become mentally and physically healthy again.

I have read books like this before, but honestly none of them have come anywhere close to this one. It kinda felt like 28 Days the movie just for teens and well I won't lie I loved that movie. Justin and Emmy were two amazing characters. They both were honestly very messed up and they each had their own issues and watching them understand what those issues really were was just awesome. I used to want to be a therapist when I grew up so maybe that is one reason why this book talked to me so much, but it also has to do with the authors. I don't know how they did it, but they really captured teenagers. The teens in this book cursed, yelled, got into fights, and just told it how it was. That was exactly how I was when I was younger, well I didn't speak my mind all the time but some of my friends did. On the flip side of all that anger though we get to see each teen work through their problems and realize that they need to trust each other including themselves or they are never going to work through their problems. Again I really wish I had read this way back when because it would have helped me figure a few things out.

I was proud of the characters in this book by the end, they deserved where they each ended up and honestly I want a sequel. I am not sure what that sequel would include, but I just want to know the outcome of certain characters. I kinda feel like we are left hanging even though it did end on a happy note. That just proves how good a book this was, if you read something and you just want more no matter what that more would be then that makes the book just read pretty fantastic.

Cherene says

Here's the deal, this book is **a real awesome mess.**

Literally.

The author seems to be aiming for a situation in which we find the characters implorable and we suddenly come to an understanding, and growth, with the characters as they develop themselves.

The problem is, that I do not believe, not for a second, that teens that are troubled - as the ones in this book - are so cruel and removed.

Not towards themselves, but towards others.

Are we really supposed to sympathize with a character who used internet bullying as a defense against a bully? Where she decides to openly mock him, disgrace him, and create viral content with irremovable damage from cyber space, whilst she grows up and realizes (in about three years), that, really, he's just an asshole.

Are we supposed to ever learn to respect a group of troubled teenagers that, during their own personal struggles, aid in helping a severely anorexic female **not** eat?

Are we supposed to side with the therapists that eat sugar crackers in front of a female that is starving herself to death?

Are we supposed to find it believable that the main reason for that female lead character to starve herself is to look thin? And that, moreover, she **still** has the confidence to think she can pick a guy up some time before they, "force her to get fat again?"

Are we also supposed to believe that a Level 5 student - that is someone that is near release or made massive results in recovery - would be snide, sarcastic, and rather cruel to a Level 1 female with the **exact same eating disorder!** Is this because Trish Cook believes that anorexia is only a problem for shallow girls? Or, was she totally misinformed about the myths of eating disorders before writing this?

Also, are supposed to understand or side with the parents that allow an academy that limits the amount of time, and scripts the conversation, between child and parent?

Are we even supposed to believe that in an academy of violent, troubled teens, an all out brawl, complete with vomit, blood, and name-calling, does not come with any sort of security team or extra measures besides **yelling really loudly to stop it?**

More so, are we supposed to be convinced that this highly costly facility has therapists that encourage troubled teens by telling them that they need to spend time in their own heads to figure out their problems? With **no** psychology experience at all I can tell you that depression feeds on our minds. Someone that deep inside themselves has a **distorted view of reality** and is past the point of being able to self reflect or self help without guidance without otherwise causing worse destruction to their confidence, psych, and well-

being.

It is not that I dislike the way this author writes. It is that I find this book such a snarky, sarcastic, misguided view on troubled teens that I wonder what made the author ever decide to publish it. I cannot, in good conscious, recommend any teen reads this book due to the insensitive nature of this novel.

Also:

Dear Authors,

If you are writing a book about troubled teens, keep in mind who your audience is going to be.

I am sure with some reflection you can discover that it will be troubled teens, with some other odds and ends thrown in.

*In which case, at what point in your mind did you decide that **rape** and **racist** jokes were okay?*

When did you decide they would add to the story?

Did you really think that what teens of today were missing was more jokes that downplayed the seriousness of sexual abuse and segregation by race and or profiling?

*Or, did you just think this would help your readers relate? In which case, I'm insulted **for** them.*

Or, did you just think it would add to Justin's troubled outlook and his further development? In which case, why are all your troubled teenagers unlikeable? Is this how you see troubled teens?

Please research further into depression, eating disorders, aggression, etc. before your next reform school attempt.

Liz* Fashionably Late says

It's a big fat NO.

Inaccurate and misogynistic.

Depression, attempt of suicide and eating disorders are serious issues and should be addressed likewise. I've seen some of these problems in people around me and there's no way we are going to reduce a girl's eating disorder to a broken heart, it's more complex than this. And for the record, boys have eating disorders too. It's not a *girly* issue.

The sex/rape jokes and the slut-shaming were uncalled for, the message that **you have to eat healthy just because otherwise no guy is gonna think you're pretty**, is very offensive. And fuck this, a therapist that take the kids out for a trip an and leaves them ALONE just to make out with somebody's boyfriend is not

cool. It's completely unprofessional and unrealistic, for that matter.

The resolution of every fucking problem was such a lame excuse for an ending. I know the system is not perfect, but this was plane ridiculous. Eating disorder is not *cured* by just gaining weigh. Ugh.

I'm not recommending this book. Read it at your own risk. You won't get to see a realistic portrait of mental illness.
