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Heidi Ayarbe

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Magic.

I look at the clock.

10:14 AM.

Ten fourteen. One plus one is two plus four is six plus ten is sixteen minus one is fifteen minus two is thirteen. OK.

I turn from the clock and walk into the hallway. "Ready."

Saturday will be the third state soccer championship in a row for Jake Martin. *Three*. A good number. *Prime*. With Jake on the field, Carson City High can't lose because Jake has *the magic*: a self-created protection generated by his obsession with prime numbers. It's the magic that has every top soccer university recruiting Jake, the magic that keeps his family safe, and the magic that suppresses his anxiety attacks. But the magic is Jake's prison, because sustaining it means his compulsions take over nearly every aspect of his life.

Jake's convinced the magic will be permanent after Saturday, the perfect day, when every prime has converged. Once the game is over, he won't have to rely on his sister to concoct excuses for his odd rituals. His dad will stop treating him like he is some freak. Maybe he'll even make a friend other than Luc.

But *what if* the magic doesn't stay?

What if the numbers never leave?

Acclaimed author Heidi Ayarbe has created an honest and riveting portrait of a teen struggling with obsessive compulsive disorder in this breathtaking and courageous novel.

Compulsion Details

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Kelly says

3.5.

Let me start with what I didn't like. I thought that the tactic to make us feel what Jake felt was fine. But it became overbearing. It made me dislike him, even when I know I shouldn't have. Combine that with the fact that Ayarbe then numbered the chapters as prime numbers. It was a little much. I GOT the purpose of it, but I could have done with a little less of that and a teeny bit more character coming through. Or maybe more emotion. Something other than the "putting the reader in Jake's head" tactic. It dragged the narrative and pacing.

THAT SAID, holy crapsticks. Can this family be any more dysfunctional? I loves me a good dysfunctional family. This one satisfied. The last few chapters, from the moment he realizes his sister is in trouble through to the end, I couldn't help but get angrier and angrier at Jake AND at his dad. Both for being totally inadequate communicators. It was such an interesting parallel to his friend when he comes over. They sit in a comfortable silence but it says SO MUCH MORE about them than the silence between Jake and his father. That's sheer ignorance. His dad royally pissed me off, but Jake made me angry too. He kept trying but kept failing even though he knew he needed help.

BUT.

That is EXACTLY how these relationships work. It's sick, and it's unpretty but dammit, that was spot on. I was so angry when I finished the book but then so satisfied that it wasn't a happy ending because that would have been really unfair to me as a reader and to the characters.

I like when no one walks away happy.

Kritika says

In case you couldn't tell by the one-star rating, I hated this book. I probably would have abandoned it halfway through if it weren't the last book of a reading challenge.

Qualities you need to enjoy this book:

1. You enjoy stories about boys who are jerks - Jake is...unlikeable to say the least. He doesn't seem to care about anyone, except perhaps his sister. He's selfish, always thinking about himself and forgetting friends and breaking team rules for soccer because he's *Magic Martin* and thus the sole reason the soccer team wins games...um, yeah right. Jake Martin lacks personality. The only thing that makes him vaguely interesting is his obsession with prime numbers, but after a certain point, when there's no explanation (ok fine, no satisfactory explanation) about why it exists and what makes it so hard to break the habit, even that gets tedious. I never understood the math behind it - he'd add the numbers of the time and then randomly add and subtract until he got to a prime. So...shouldn't any time be ok?
2. You don't mind swearing - The f-word is quite literally on every page of this book. And if by some

miracle it isn't on a page or two, do not fear, because it will crop up five times on the next page to make up for it.

3. There's no such thing as TMI - Jake ogles at girls. A lot. Ok fine, ogle all you like, but I don't need to know what's going on inside your pants while you're doing it. Nor do I need to know about your "pubes" going down the drain. Goodness.

4. It doesn't bother you when there's no plot line or character development to speak of - It's simply all about Jake's obsession with prime numbers, and how he expects it to magically go away when he wins the third soccer championship in a row...and then it doesn't. He doesn't try all that hard to fight it - a couple of paragraphs and then it's just too hard for the guy and he gives up. I'm sorry, but sitting outside a friend's house - a friend you haven't talked to in years, for that matter - and admitting you have a problem after her constant asking isn't heroic. It isn't particularly difficult to do either. You are not redeemed, Jake Martin. Nor do I care that I have no inkling about whether you ever get better or not.

So...if those 4 things describe you, you might enjoy this book. I certainly didn't. I can't think of a single thing I liked about it, which is saying something, because I didn't start this book expecting to hate it. The concept of OCD and trying to overcome it is a good one, but it's not even explored half as much as it could have been. The main character wasn't particularly likeable or memorable, and the writing wasn't particularly great either. I'd call this book a complete waste of time - save yourself the frustration and go read something else.

illi says

*1.5/2 god where do i even begin with this one.

okay so my girlfriend sent me this book for my birthday, because it's one of her favorite two books ever and i really really did not like it. i found it borderline offensive actually.

for starters: fuck all of these characters, like they're all so annoying and have no depth. like the main character, the only two things used to describe him are his OCD and that he plays soccer. and the whole soccer team. okay as a mexican who grew up in a heavy spanish community i found the way the author wrote the spanish kids sO offensive. just the fact that they all play soccer and the use of certain spanish words sprinkled into every god damn sentence that left their mouths. and the careless use of "joto" don't even get me started.

also this whole book was just soooooo teen boy. like i get it an honest portrayal of teen boys on a sports team, locker room talk, etc etc. but that doesn't make it any less annoying or offensive. i swear to god every single time they referred to a girl as a "chick" i wanted to chuck the book.

also nothing about the writing was all that great. like the only thing that would set this apart from being any other YA book would be the OCD rep, which in my opinion was poorly done. now i don't know if the author herself has OCD in anyway, and honestly i don't think whether this is own voices or not changes my opinions. now as someone who suffers with their own mental illnesses i did appreciate that there was no cop out fix it all ending. and i know that everybody's experiences are different, but the overwhelming and all consuming aspect of mental illnesses was very present in this book but at some point it stopped being informative and bordered being exploitive. like it was the only thing used to describe the main character and it felt more like a plot device to move the book along so the author wouldn't have to come up with an actual

story line. and there was just no resolution, like i get it not everything is going to be rainbows and sunshine. but it just ended ??? and it wasn't very well anything. like it didn't seem like he was ever going to grow from anything or like any of the characters learned or grew from anything. i just felt it was lacking in every department.

Anne Jordan-Baker says

I don't have OCD, but from what I know about it, I think this author truly understands how OCD works inside a person's head and how that affects all aspects of life: family, friends, school, work--every aspect of life. Not only a good book with OCD at the center of it, but also a great story, so well told. I found this book hard to read and heartbreaking but amazing, too.

Barbara says

This book was difficult for me to read and difficult to like but it did pull me into its world. I've given it three stars because of the reason I found it difficult. This is an in-depth portrayal of the life of Jake, a young man with OCD. Heidi Ayarbe brought me deep into a disturbed mind that knows his life is not normal and feels his only hope of becoming normal is "magic." The magic of prime numbers and the hope that winning his third soccer championship will break their control over his life. Keeping himself a secret grows harder every day, as does his fear of what will happen if anyone figures him out.

I don't have OCD, I don't know anyone who does. Compulsion truly took me to a foreign state, and I totally recommend this book to anyone trying to understand this insidious illness. Watching Jake was uncomfortable for this so-called "normal" person. I knew his belief in magic was wrong but prayed with every page I turned that maybe in his case I was wrong. That is the power of this book, I had to root for this boy compelled to do things I could not understand and hope he would succeed.

Jake is compelled to look at clocks, knowing that some times were good - those he could manipulate into a prime number like 7:31 where $7-3-1=3$. Other times were bad and left him literally frozen in place while friends and family complained until the clock changed. This is not MONK, Jake needs more than just to have the shampoo and conditioner equal. One of the most compelling scenes occurred after well-meaning friends disturb his morning ritual and he is forced to risk losing his spot in the all-important game because he has no choice. He MUST leave school and go all the way home and back to bed so he can start his day over again correctly.

The story also covers his best friend Luc, a young man suffering anger issues after living with an abusive father. We also meet Jake's younger sister who is sometimes forced to assume the role of mother because their own mother has her own form of OCD but really just wants to believe that her brother "has her back". When his father tells Jake he needs to help keep the family together and promises he won't ask the impossible of his son, it was hard not to cry as Jake thought, "You already have."

The weakest part of the book was an attempt to go into the past and offer an explanation for Jake's OCD and obsession with clocks and time. I didn't care why. It simply was, and as a reader I was content with that. I just wanted to know what would happen to him and his family next.

This book does not have the conventional "happy ending." But it does offer hope, and for that it deserves to be read.

Wisteriouswoman says

I loved this book. I felt anxious the whole time I was reading it and couldn't put it down. Jake has OCD and calms himself by adding numbers and coming up with prime numbers. It is his way of coping and using 'magic' to feel he has some control of his life. The numbers while annoying are an important part of the story. I just skipped reading them because it was like someone saying abracadabra over and over--you just ignore it because you already have an idea what the magic is all about.

Everyone in my family has a mental illness so I could relate to the fact that there is no one for Jake to turn to that can help him escape the trap he is in. Adults that are mentally ill don't usually develop a safety net of friends and extended family for their kids. With a mentally ill mother and a Dad that escapes into his work, you see Jacob and his sister trying to help each other cope with their own issues and find a spot in the high school scene where they can fit in and feel normal.

Even though it is obvious to the people Jake interacts with everyday that he has a serious problem they are never able to ask the right questions that will lead Jake to trust them enough to ask for help. Everyone is relying on him to be a great soccer star and win the championship for his high school. When they ask 'are you okay' they need him to say 'yes' rather than delve deeper and expose the truth.

Mera, a childhood friend, quotes from East of Eden, 'You are one of the rare people who can separate your observation from preconception. You see what is, where people see what they expect.' He desperately needs for someone to 'see what is' and help him escape the OCD hell that he is trapped in. Mera ultimately plays an important part in helping Jake realize that he needs more than the 'magic' of numbers and rituals.

Compulsion reminds me of Multiple Choice by Tashjian. In both books the teens are unable to take care of another child because their OCD rituals get in the way of functioning and something terrible happens. I believe it is important to feel compassion for kids with OCD and I think both these books let the reader do just that by entering into their hell.

Taylor Brett says

The book "Compulsion" by Heidi Ayarbe shows the readers what genuinely, severe OCD does to a teenage boy mentally and physically. In this story the protagonist, Jake Martin, a seventeen year old boy has an obsession with prime numbers. He deals with his OCD by adding, subtracting, dividing, or multiplying numbers to the time on the clock in order to make it a prime number. If Jake can't make the time prime, he freaks out and begins having an anxiety attack. When Jake has anxiety attacks over his addiction to prime numbers, he must go home and restart his day and complete his morning routine in order to calm himself down.

Jake is a soccer star at his school. His coping with prime numbers helps him gain the confidence to doing

good at his soccer games. (view spoiler) . He stresses about what he will do when he no longer relies on his prime numbers. I rated this book with 4 stars because it shows how Jake changed greatly from the beginning to end in a realistic way. Jake goes from caring so much about what others may think about his mental illness, to worrying about what he is going to do about it. If you like realistic stories about the struggles different people go through, this book is for you.

Irm says

I like the premise and I like the obsession but I was ultimately, somewhat dissatisfied with the ending and how Jake got there. Interested to see if my teens will pick it up and give me feedback.

Helene says

WOW - I wish I could give this 4.5 stars. I couldn't put this book down. It's hard to sustain that type of interest in a character-driven novel (rather than plot-driven) but Heidi Ayarbe did it in *Compulsion*.

The plot of this book can be found elsewhere so I won't repeat it here but I will say that Ayarbe did a great job of writing about Jake's OCD, almost as a separate character. Jake's struggle with his issues as well as the fact that no one knew or wanted to know about his problems was heartbreaking and made for an appropriately uncomfortable read.

I'm glad that all was not wrapped up with a pretty bow at the end because life isn't like that. But this book left me rooting for this very interesting and well-developed character.

Kathy says

This won't be much of a review because it is difficult to fairly review a book I couldn't finish. I signed up to review this book through The Teen Book Scene's Blog Tours. The synopsis of the book fascinated me since I have a son who has had some obsessive behaviors around math. I read a few reviews that were very positive and it sounded like a book I would enjoy so I signed up for the tour.

Unfortunately the reviews I read failed to mention the amount of language in this book. I've not come across a book with as much language as this one had in it. I'm a little surprised this is being marketed to teenagers grade 9 and up. Being someone who generally speaking chooses book that are free from graphic sex, gratuitous violence and strong language this book was one I just couldn't keep reading. I'm very sensitive when it comes to language in literature. I tried skipping ahead a few chapters but it was more of the same which was really disappointing to me because without the language this is a book I would like to have been able to finish. So reader beware there is a lot of strong language in this book including dozens of uses of the F word in just the first chapter.

On a positive note here is a really cool thing about *Compulsion*. The main character has an obsession with prime numbers.... Thus the chapters are all prime numbers, there is no chapter 1, 4, 6, 8, etc. The portions of the book I did read were eye-opening for understanding what life is like for someone suffering from OCDs.

Nancy says

Today has to be perfect.

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I turn from the clock and walk into the hallway. "Ready."

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Jake's convinced the magic will be permanent after Saturday, the perfect day, when every prime has converged. Once the game is over, he won't have to rely on his sister, Kasey, to concoct excuses for his odd rituals. His dad will stop treating him like he is some freak. Maybe he'll even make a friend other than Luc.

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My take: I love that someone wrote a book about Obsessive Compulsive Disorder from the POV of the person suffering from it. I loved *Monk* because 1) It brought OCD some daylight and 2) OCD makes no sense at all except inside the person's head but it can be entertaining to everybody else 3) even a person suffering from OCD. Not that I'd know anything about that. AHEM.

In painstaking detail, the author provides the thinking process of Jacob Martin, a person suffering from OCD all the time. She also provides a peek into Jake's cognitive understanding that he is not normal. He knows he is crazy and he wants to stop but until he can "magically" stop believing in magic (circular, isn't it?), he has to hide his crazy. He walks to tightrope of satisfying his compulsions yet acting reasonably normal. Both of these pulls are extremely strong.

The irony is painful. Jacob does his rituals to satisfy the "safety god" who will keep his sister, Kasey safe. The time must add, subtract, multiply or divide into a prime number. He must count so many times as he takes each step in his routine. He must touch the grandfather clock three times (prime) and a million different rules that, if he messes it up or thinks he might have messed it up, he must start over. Meanwhile, his sister is in mortal danger. But he can't break away until he has done everything "right."

Jacob's mother is also a flaming OCD-ist, manifesting in her obsession that she has hit someone in the car. She will backtrack all night to make sure she didn't cause injury. And, yes, the irony is not lost on the mental health professional or even the person suffering from OCD. The more backtracking a person does, the more possibility she has of hitting a pedestrian, cyclist, or whoever which causes more backtracking. Ultimately, the reader understands that OCD is genetic.

The only disappointments I had were these:

1. The swearing. I would LOVE to use this book to help some of my clients not feel so isolated and weird. However, there is also religious OCD and the "f" word does not fit in that framework. And it is abundant.
2. The author begins with the first step for getting help - admitting the disturbing thoughts or rituals. I would have liked to have it named and provided more direction for help.

Despite my disappointments, I found the thought process of Jacob Martin to be exhausting and classic OCD.

Kari says

The Short Version:

Exhausting and engaging, *Compulsion* gives a striking look into the mind of a teenage boy with OCD. Ayarbe has masterfully put into words something that is almost indescribable, getting across not only the mental drives but the physical reactions and the need that cannot be ignored. In addition to how fantastically Jake's world and mindset is written, his relationship with his parents, his sister, and his best friend all play a large role and come through boldly. Raw and gritty, with a well paced and smooth plot, mixed with Ayarbe's flawless writing, *Compulsion* will leave a mark and give a brilliant look into the mind of an often ignored disorder.

The Extended Version:

Take away the OCD, and Jake is a normal, kind, well meaning boy. He has his moments of idiocy, yet plenty of things outshine those. He is incredibly real, having plenty of passing thoughts and Ayarbe has given him a very strong, believable male voice that still holds a large crossover for a female readership. His horny thoughts were hilarious and real but smoothly inserted, without being overbearing or a turn off. The depth of Jake's disorder, however, comes through more strongly than anything else, pulling the reader in and making them feel as much of an outsider as Jake does. The fear of someone finding out, and what they'll think, is constant and understandable, pitched in a very sensitive way.

Jake's obsession and need to understand and function with prime numbers is truly exhausting. Ayarbe often includes the way Jake sees the time, figuring out quick math equations in his head that will make the numbers equal a prime. The way he reacts when it is a prime is very different from when it isn't, and it's heartbreaking to see the constant, unavoidable struggle. There are some clear differences between Jake and his peers, with a wall he maintains constantly, which often made me question how different he would be if he didn't suffer from the OCD. When no pep talk could calm him, and when his daily functioning was impaired because of the drive, it truly brought the entire thing up front. Soccer, however, is Jake's saving grace, and the way this incorporated in was handled flawlessly and expertly.

Luc, Jake's best friend, is an interesting counterpart, cocky and arrogant and quite the player, but even without the soccer team that unites them, there was a clear connection and underlying kinship between the

two. Their home lives are very different, but they really do have each other's back. Luc was an amusing character, as well as frustrating, but his large presence throughout the book really brought him out as a three-dimensional character. He's jerky and flawed, but still a good person, and a product of his upbringing as much as anyone else while still trying to resist the worst of it. Not to mention, he garners some hotness points simply for being Colombian in heritage.

There is a very large internal component to this book, centered around the OCD and Jake's determination to keep it hidden that is as large as the drive to obey the numbers. With several intense and emotional scenes, and a growing sense of foreboding, Ayarbe truly shows just how far this disorder can go to really tear a family apart and disrupt even the simplest of daily activities. Though the source of Jake's issues are his OCD, there are some universal truths and feelings that come out, which are masterfully woven in. From being in a group but feeling alone to a closed in, lost and scared feeling, there is something everyone can relate to and understand, giving an easy bridge to understanding the feel degree of Jake's disorder.

Add in Jake's intense love for his little sister and their relationship, his mom's own issues and OCD which has done some damage to their family, and a father trying to keep it together, and there is also a strong family component. Dysfunctional but still there, Ayarbe really blends Jake's school and home worlds, along with his friends. The plot has some twists but primarily, it is focused on Jake trying to make his way through everything. The pacing is steady, giving humor at the right moments and intensity at other, each one timed perfectly. A very strong, authentic male voice, unerring grit, and a stunning writing style all pull together to make one truly compelling, emotional and beautiful book.

Shoshana says

So I just finished this and I cried at the end.

It's a little bit of a tricky book, because of all the numbers - which I know are there because they're all there for Jake, and they absolutely bring his brain into your brain, which is vital for the book to work - but I just can't read all the numbers, so I end up skimming and skipping. Which is fine, except that when I get in the habit of skimming and skipping I do it with other text too, especially as the pace of a book picks up and everything gets more tense. It's hard to slow down and read each word of a book when it becomes gripping, and it's virtually impossible when I've already sped up in a way.

But that's a personal thing, and I actually can't say whether it detracted from or added to the experience of reading *Compulsion*.

BTDubs, it's gripping in a good way - not suspenseful because of scary things happening, but suspenseful because life is suspenseful for Jake. That's suspense I can deal with, because you can step away from the voice of the narrator and understand that nothing dangerous is actually going to happen. But you can also allow yourself to be absorbed in his voice, and it's like the world swirls around you, and you just have to get to the end.

I read the whole thing today.

Anyway, also, every character is likable on some level, which I appreciate. Every character is trying their

hardest. Nothing is neat and tidy, but there is hope.

I guess I have a lot of feelings about *Compulsion*, and as I finished it like two minutes ago I haven't had time to sort those out or get super analytical, but I just wanted to jot the gist of it down right away. Conclusion: I highly recommend it. I'm checking out Heidi Ayarbe's website and bibliography right now. Then I'm going to bed.

Raven DeLajour says

I loved *Freeze Frame* and *Compromised* so much that I was sure this novel was going to be great, too. Unfortunately, it didn't draw me in. I tried so much to get into the story but it seemed to push me away.

Rene Kirkpatrick says

I don't know if I can say I enjoyed reading this. It was really good, it was well written, but I found myself taking huge gulps of air throughout because of how tied up this kid is by his OCD.

Jake Martin is a soccer star at his high school, certain to get scholarships for college, and he only has one more game to play. He has the Magic, a series of rites to keep his good luck going, and this Saturday all the primes come together.

The rites he has developed to keep his family safe have begun to take over his entire life. He is unable to leave his house without an elaborate routine, one he has to start over if he misses a single piece or if he can't finish before the clock ticks over. He is constantly checking his watch, to the second, adding and subtracting just so he can hit a prime number, the only number he can move to. He is constantly late because he may miss that moment for leaving and have to wait for the next prime.

It seems like such a simple thing: just don't do it, but he is sure that if he wins the game, the spiders that clog his brain and make him do this will go away and he'll be normal, he won't be crazy anymore. He can't talk to anyone about it, everyone else on the team has these rituals- one guy wears the same socks, never washing them, surely this is the same kind of thing. But when the compulsions finally harm someone he loves, rather than keeping them safe, he begins to realize that he has bigger worries than he ever thought.

I wondered if he could really hide his problems as well as he seemed to, if people really wouldn't notice and ask him about it, but, he's in high school, he's popular and smart, he's the soccer star. Those people are often as invisible as they are visible. Things get overlooked and left behind when you're popular and, in Jake's case, no one wants to see that anything's wrong. Only an old friend who resurfaces, one who doesn't sleep through the night, can see how much he's changed.

I really did like the story, I loved Jake and his sister, I found myself fascinated with his rituals and his whole family is in crisis. I couldn't put it down, once I took a little break from the constant counting.

