



## Circle Nine

*Anne Heltzel*

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**Circle Nine** Anne Heltzel

**Who was Abby then? Who is Abby now? An unsettling psychological thriller, seen through a lost girl's eyes.**

She knows only Sam, a mysterious teenage boy. He is her sole companion; her whole life. She was born, already a teenager, lying outside a burning building in soot-stained clothes, remembering nothing, not even her name. He showed her the necklace she had on, the one that named her: Abby. Sam brought her to live in his cavepalace, where he gives her everything she needs. He loves her. He protects her from the world outside, from everyone who wants to hurt them, like the denizens of Circle Nine, Dante's deepest circle of hell. But even in a charmed, brand-new life like Abby's, change will come. Sam falls ill. A new girl comes to stay, and Abby begins to question Sam's devotion. With doubt comes emotional turmoil, changes in perception, and glimpses of her past identity. In this courageous psychological thriller, Abby tells the story of living her new life and discovering her old one, while grappling with an ever-changing reality.

## Circle Nine Details

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Author : Anne Heltzel

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## From Reader Review Circle Nine for online ebook

### CrystalBookSnob says

I had a really hard time reading most of this book because it was all just so confusing. The premise of the story is that Abby doesn't know who she is and she can't remember anything before a couple days ago. She knows only Sam because he was there when she woke up. She sees the cave they live in as a lavish palace with very expensive furnishings and everything she needs. Then Sam begins disappearing for long periods of time with another girl and she begins to doubt what he's been telling her: that she shouldn't go out of the cave without him because the outside world (which they call circle nine) is dangerous and they will hurt her. When she begins to doubt, she also begins to see the world as it really is and that their cave is not a palace at all, but rotting food, moldy sheets and broken furniture.

The hardest part when reading Circle Nine is the fact that it's all from Abby's perspective so you have absolutely no idea what's going on. The only reason I continued reading the book and finished it was because I wanted to know who she was, where she came from and how she met such a scum bag like Sam. In the end all these questions are answered and then some.

Circle Nine shows how extreme a person can react to a trauma and how the mind copes and protects itself. Abby wasn't ready to deal with what she had done therefore her mind forced her to forget what had happened and made her perceive her surroundings as safe and desirable. As she started to come out of it, she was getting back pieces of her life and what had ultimately led to her hiding out.

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### Debbie I Heart YA Books says

This is not an easy review for me. When a story deals with abusive relationships, I normally don't read them. Books with sexual abuse or drug addiction usually a hard read for me. But this book was on my new release list, so I said I'd give it try. I'm so glad I did. I really did fall in love with the story between Sam and Abby. I would have liked to have known more of what happened to Sam, seen more of a resolution for him. Sam really grabbed a hold of my heart and I couldn't let him go. The choices he made took him down a road he could never return from, but I still thought of him as messed-up little boy that I wanted to love and fix. I was, however, happy to see that Abby's terrifying experience made her a better person from where she first started in this story. Anne Heltzel has an amazing way of writing about a subject that I have a difficult hard time reading about. This is a very serious and dramatic situation between Sam and Abby, so be ready with the tissue box. I will definitely be reading more of Anne Heltzel's books. Circle Nine is an amazing story and a definite must read!!

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### Annika says

I find it difficult to review and rate *Circle Nine*. But lets cover what the book is about first.

Abby lives with Sam in a cave, not knowing her past, not knowing what happened to her, not really knowing

who Sam is. She knows she loves Sam, because he saved her and cares for her. But as times goes on Abby starts to remember and life with Sam doesn't seem as rosey as it used to.

*Circle Nine* was a depressing and difficult read for me. It's not light literature, something that can be read within a few hours. I had to put it down several times because it became too much.

I don't want to give away too much, because that will ruin parts of the book but I feel the need to warn that *Circle Nine* covers emotional and sexual abuse. It's not a fairytale and the end is not what you'd expect it to be.

The writing is precise and straight-forward which brought the right edge to the book. It felt a bit chaotic at times but since we're in Abby's head and read about her thoughts, it fit very well.

Anne Heltzel writes with enough urgency but the plot never feeling rushed.

Abby is a sympathetic character but there are times her thoughts can be confusing and not understandable. This can be attributed to her situation which at times confused me, because of Abby's thoughts. She slowly comes into her own and starts breaking free, to become a stronger person. Something very well shown and done.

Anne Heltzel makes you feel for everything Abby goes through and doesn't hold back on unveiling the truth. I have to applaud her for writing in such a way that I felt utterly depressed after finishing *Circle Nine*. I prefer books that have me smiling like a goof but she did it so well that I can't help but appreciate it.

**Edit:** Now that the cover has been officially put up - it fits the story very well!

An ARC has been provided by Netgalley and the publisher for reviewing purposes.

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## **Danielle Ellison says**

This is a weird book. Seriously. It's effed up. Yet, I couldn't stop reading it.

I was so drawn in that I wanted to know what was happening. The whole time I'm reading I'm thinking this book is weird and I have no idea what's going on but I like it! Unfortunately it takes have the book to know and then you're so invested that you have to see how it plays out. It was really well written--and that kept me going.

There's a girl named Abby and she is 16, living with Sam in a cave-palace. To her everything's perfect. She loves Sam so completely even though she shouldn't. She doesn't remember her past and the whole outside world is called Circle Nine. (Dante's Inferno) Come to find out her perfect world isn't all that perfect--in fact, it's so bad that she can't even face it. But slowly Abby starts to remember who she is and why she's there and what happened to her.

I read a review that said the book was about sexual abuse and drug addiction. Ok. I can say those were definitely there. BUT the thing that really ruined this book for me was the ending. I mean, for 200 pages we're sifting through this world that may be reality and may be pretend--and then when we're shown the reality, when we're told what's really, really going on--it ends. I can't really talk about it without spoiling but I feel so robbed.

I wanted to like this weird, weird book. I DID like a lot of it. But that ending totally frustrates me on SO MANY LEVELS. I think there are people who would like it. It's dark and weird and twisty and beautifully written--and I liked that too. But that ending. Irsome.

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### **Melissa (i swim for oceans) says**

Abby can't remember anything. When she wakes, she doesn't know where she is, who she is, or what is happening, but there is a fire, and she has to escape. The only person around to help her is Sam. She doesn't know who he is, but he says he can help her, and she feels as though she can trust him, so she does. The pair begin a life together in what Sam calls a cave-palace - a world central to the two of them alone, with the world outside called Circle Nine. Abby can't remember anything though, and her dark, blank past is edging into her deliriously simple life. When the fragments of memories begin flooding back, the darkness begins to consume her life, and she realizes that Sam, her life and all her surroundings are false...but is she strong enough to escape them, or will her past consume her future, too?

I rarely read a book that leaves me so completely speechless that I'm unable to post a review on the day I'd planned, but Circle Nine has presented that to me. Anne Heltzel has spun an equal-parts mesmerizing and horrific psychological thriller with Circle Nine that grips the reader with talon-like prose from start to finish. Calling such a book simply "horror" or "contemporary" would be a crime because Circle Nine manages to merge the genres into one potent, powerful and hard-hitting book that is sure to affect every reader in a different way. With a voice that's achingly raw and ravaged, Circle Nine still has me in its grip long after I've finished it.

I cannot say that I loved Circle Nine because to say I loved it would mean that I completely missed the story of Abby altogether. I loved the writing, I loved the power behind every word and I loved that every action and inaction in Circle Nine had a purpose. That said, there was so much about Circle Nine that made me angry, frightened and hollow, too. Abby's world was written in an almost dreamlike state from her first-person perspective, making it that much more tangible, so when it began to crumble around her in a world of sexual and emotional abuse, the reader is strung along as Abby endures and struggles to survive in a world that's ravaged and without a past. We don't watch her world crumble around her; we live it with her, and as it spirals into that ninth circle of hell, we long for relief, too. Sam was a character that I loathed (and for good reason), and yet from Abby's perspective, there was a part of me that wanted to find that child within him and set him free, too. That, and all the conflicting emotions I felt, is what made Circle Nine such a powerful and tumultuous read.

Circle Nine is not for the faint of heart, but if you want to read an incredibly powerful read, this is the book for you. The only thing that left me unsatisfied was the ending, but that's just my desire for a true sense of closure, and all I felt was an unsteady calm. I give this book a 4 out of 5, and I'd highly recommend it to fans of upper YA and adult books, especially those who enjoy dark contemporary fiction and psychological thrillers.

I received this book free of charge from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. This, in no way, affected my opinion or review of this book.

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## Rose says

When I come across a book that deals with a subject matter that's so bleak, where the character has to walk a hard path towards redemption in an internally damaged mindset, it usually gets to me depending on how well it's written. Many times, I may not like who a character is or the things they do, but if I can understand where they are physically, emotionally, and the surrounding aspects of their lives that contribute to the state of mind they're in, I can follow their story, sometimes even be moved by it. But being able to write well about a character so inherently damaged, especially through their direct perceptions, is a difficult thing. If done well, it can stay with a reader for days, leaving them to think about the trials and circumstances long after they've turned the final page, even consider the psychological underpinnings of their decisions, thoughts, and ideals. If done poorly, it can come across as offending, appalling, even offset the message the writer conveys.

Asking me whether I loved "Circle Nine" is probably akin to asking if I would like to have my wisdom teeth pulled willingly. For all intents and purposes, I probably should've hated this book. Heck, even considering the aftermath of it, there were things I did actively dislike about this book that I didn't agree with in portrayal, but I think it had something quite constructive to convey when considered as a whole.

I don't like reading about passive or submissive characters, I don't like reading about abuse and cognitive manipulation, and if I read about characters mentally and emotionally manipulating a psychologically damaged character, I rage quickly. This book features those elements and quite a bit more. Even thinking back over the scheme of events, readers will probably find the fact that the protagonist of this novel so willingly accepted the things around her (at first) that it seems unrealistic, but I'm going to play the devil's advocate with saying that it's horrifyingly accurate in portrayal. It's clear from the commencement of the work that Abby's a teenage girl who carries a lot of emotional baggage. She's young, though showing a lot of naiveté for one her age, but considering the trauma that's ultimately unveiled in this work, I thought it was convincing. The challenge of "Circle Nine" poses itself in trying to uncover Abby's identity through the lens of her damaged mind - not so much delving to answer the "what" as much as the "why". It doesn't shy away from shifting tones - from an active sense of deluded, whimsical contentment and jealousy, to guilt, horror, and numbness, in a kaleidoscope of various minds and perceptions Abby takes on as the pieces come together. Anne Heltzel writes the psychological undertones of this work spot on for the most part, but it takes a bit of wading through some frustrating turns to be able to see the fruit it has to bear. It's more or less what you're able to take from it.

The story commences when Abby wakes with no memory of who she is or any other facet of her identity, though she seems to recall basic knowledge (facts, figures and such) well. A boy her age, Sam, claims to know her, even after she's survived what seemed to have been a fire, judging from her sooty clothes and the burning building she's near. The two flee in the measure of creating a new life, living inside a cave, shielded from the outside world in what Sam describes as the dangerous "Circle Nine," an active allusion to Dante's *Inferno*. Abby accepts Sam's interpretation in almost a cult-like fashion, and the two have what could be the definition for a trainwreck relationship. Both are emotionally dependent on each other, and there are obvious cues that suggest that Sam is under the influence of drugs, infrequently tender towards Abby and mostly a raging, manipulative and needy jerk who keeps her around to exert power over her. But we only get a limited scope of what this relationship is really like through Abby's eyes in the beginning - she doesn't recognize it, but the reader does, and I think this disassociation is intentional. Abby does have the active perception that things are wrong in her world, but she seems unable to reach out and change them - whether by the limited scope of her being able to reach out of her dreamish mindset, or out of fear (or both) it can be challenging to say, but Heltzel makes it clear that there is something wrong with the perception Abby has - in Abby's own voice.

There's another added element to this relationship when a girl from Sam's past, Amanda, enters the picture. Ugh. This part of the book frustrated me because Abby takes on a mad jealous streak that doesn't make her endearing at all, but at the same time, Amanda really isn't much better, as she actively berates Abby - calling her stupid, crazy, any sorts of terms. But I think as time goes on, Amanda realizes the truth of the relationship between Abby and Sam, and it's noted to the reader how Amanda learns how horrifying the manipulation goes even when Abby is only partially aware of things. The events following in what happened to Amanda didn't surprise me, but it still made me consider a lot of things as to how far Sam would go to keep his relationship with Abby intact, as well as how far gone Sam was in his own mentality.

The second part of the book was a much stronger, constructive add to the story, as it shows Abby realizing the truth of what happened to cause her amnesia, and making more of an effort to get out of her abusive situation. It involves a sequence of memories surrounding her true identity, her family, her actions, and Sam being a small part in it. In truth, Abby doesn't know Sam as well as she thought she knew him, and the way she's found and the way her condition comes to light in her recovery is plausible. I probably felt more for Abby in this part of the book than the former because it shows how she cognitively deconstructs at her role in the tragedy, and the negative affirmations in her head are brutal, yet realistic. I think Heltzel handles the underlying psychological issues Abby has with sensitivity, and concludes the novel in a way that's appropriate - Abby herself wants to try to reclaim her life on her own terms, but it portrays her as having a long way to go, with a flawed mentality that doesn't suddenly revert itself immediately. It's somber, yet somewhat optimistic.

This is neither a dystopian work, romance, nor a fantasy - it's realistic fiction portraying a relationship of abuse, cognitive dysfunction, and the road to recovery for an emotionally damaged young woman. I wouldn't say this was a mystery either, at least not a strongly constructed one, because the elements in the novel make it obvious as to how certain events are, but you're not sure of the why in only a few measures. I'm hesitant to recommend it only because I think there will be a fair amount of readers who will think Abby is insufferable, the style of the storytelling is convoluted in a way that might be confusing to the reader. In my view, at least from what I was able to take from Heltzel's writing, Sam was never meant to be a romanticized character, but rather an idolization/dependency in Abby's mind, as she notes in the latter part of the book, who still seems to grip her even when she's removed from him.

This was a difficult book for me to read - despite being a work that immersed me enough to read (listen) to it twice in a 48 hour period - Heltzel's prose was vivid and smooth and I would check into her other works, personally to see if she could write something stronger than this. I understood where "Circle Nine" was coming from and took from it some of the constructive insights it had to offer. However, I still think it could've come across more than what it did to create a better connection to Abby's trauma in the reader's mind, and playing up some of the tensions in a smoother format that still manages to show the break in Abby's psyche and the eventual road to recovery.

Wonderful audiobook narration by Julia Whelan.

Overall score: 3/5

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## **Heather says**

Just to quickly summarize: This book starts off with "The Night Of" and then switches to "14 Weeks Before" where the main character wakes up outside a burning building with no memory of who she is or what her

name is or anything. Except there is a boy with her who calls her Abby, so that's her name. And the boy, Sam, tells her that they know each other and they have to get away from "them". So, Abby goes with Sam to this cave in the forest where they live. And some stuff happens that I don't want to say because spoiler. And eventually the book shifts to the "30 days after"; which is referring to Abby regaining her memory. So the first 14 weeks is Abby living without her memory and then there is "the night" where she remembers and then (you probably see where this is going) the 30 days after. So during the 14 weeks before, Abby keeps having these dreams/nightmares that actually turn out to be her memories and so she slowly learns the truth about herself and what not.

ok review time:

Because this is just a period of time in Abby's life, you don't really see too much character and plot development (other than Abby remembering who she is). Which makes this book unique. Some people will love it and some people will hate it. That's just the way it is.

For being what it is, I think it is a great book. I was a little disappointed because I was expecting an entirely different story all together but I'm going to give it 3.5 out of 5 stars.

I just want to inform everyone that the description for this book is extremely deceptive (that's why I added my own sort-of description/summary). It sounds like it might be a dystopian or fantasy kind of book, but it's not! Which is fine. I was just expecting it to be something else. Anyway, so this book deals with a lot of dense topics; like drug abuse, abusive relationships, sexual abuse/trafficking/date rape, being orphaned, mental disorders, and the recovery process that a person goes through after all of that. And it's really hard to judge that; because it is a really serious topic.

This next part may get a little spoiler-y so if you haven't read the book yet, proceed with caution!

I think that Anne did an excellent job showing the mental processing of a person who is in this abusive relationship and how Abby (the one being abused) mentally reasons with herself to justify her staying with Sam. And then you have Sam, who is a drug addict, which you don't find out until like the end of the 14 weeks before section. Until that point they refer to the drugs as his "medicine", which makes you think that he is just sick, but really he's an addict. And because of Sam being on drugs he is like really crazy; he tells Abby all these lies about who she is and what the world is like. And he is really obsessed with Dante's Inferno. He teaches Abby that the outside world is like circle nine (hence the name of the book) and that it is really dangerous and what not. Eventually he runs out of money to buy the drugs, so Sam takes Abby into "circle nine" and has her get all dressed up and he takes her to the drug dealer and they like sedate her and (because it is from Abby's perspective you assume/infer) she is raped by this dealer so that Sam could get his fix. Really dense stuff here guys.

Anyways, I kinda rambled on there for a bit... I really think that this book is something to read. It is a wonderful example of what it is like to live a life of drugs, and lies and what not. Although it's now one of my favorite books in the world, it is definitely worth picking up!

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**Wendy Darling says**

NO. Just no.

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## Precious says

The story started out as sweet and confusing. Abby had no memory of what her life was, who she was and what her name was. She didn't even know the mysterious boy who was with her. Everything was lost. But she woke up and her angel was in front of her, waiting for her, ready to save her from the chaos. She trusted him, even though she was wary and confused. She was lost and it would not be so hard for her to be anchored to the only person she knew: Sam. It was as if I walked into a fantasyland filled with love, hope and smiles. Sam and Abby were the sweetest couple I've ever encountered in YA. They even rivaled the sweetness of Sam and Grace from *Shiver*. I couldn't stop smiling at their closeness. But like every relationship, this was not a perfect one. The shift from beautiful to ugly was jarring and saddening. I loved how Heltzel made me feel for the characters.

As Abby's dreams and flickers of memory continue to invade her mind, she became more curious. Her unanswered questions only made her think more and probe more into her aching mind. Then things get more complicated when Sam came home with another girl, Amanda. She told and showed Abby things that Abby never considered. Jealous and even more baffled, Abby tried to come up with reasons behind Amanda's actions.

Sam was a character with two sides. He was the sweet, smart and charming type who could easily make you like him. He was also the manipulative, short-tempered and cold type who could make readers hate him. I admired, hated and pitied him. Like Abby, he was also vulnerable, needing someone to hold onto, someone to stay with him. Whenever I think about this, I can't help but feel sad for him.

The plot was smooth. Every chapter had me intrigued and hooked more than the last. I just read this in one sitting. I was that addicted to *Circle Nine*. The writing was amazing. Two thumbs up! It was so good that I was tempted to add around a hundred lines as quotes in Goodreads. Every line was mesmerizing, a painting of extracted beauty from *Circle Nine*'s world.

I was greatly intrigued with Abby's vision and how it changed sometimes. Most of the time, she saw the world around her as completely beautiful but at other times, this 'beauty screen' slipped and Abby would see the world as it really was. I was convinced that something was wrong with her. Maybe she just saw what she wanted to see. It reminded me a bit of the movie *Sucker Punch* and how the character built a world she could escape in. It was fascinating to read about how her mind worked, no matter how silly and overly passionate her thoughts were. Her insights and observations of her world, of *Circle Nine*, of her relationship with Sam, and of her past had a childlike curiosity that burned so fierce it became one of the things that cracked her perfect little world. Her past and the truth were stronger than anything she had ever known before. Would the truth free her or would it bind her?

*Circle Nine* is an engaging, powerful and riveting psychological thriller. This extremely dark debut will shock, chill and terrify readers. I highly recommend this to readers of psychological thrillers, dark novels and twisted love stories. Don't miss out on this one. It's worth it.

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## Chelsea says

I really wanted to like this but I did not get past the first 30 pages of this book. It was just so bizarre and

confusing. Not to mention I could not get my head around the writing style and sheer ... I don't know sluggishness of the storyline? It was not a smooth read, it was rather lumpy and unpolished.

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### **Angel L. says**

This book is really good

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### **Tasha says**

Circle Nine.. Well, I will certainly be reading more of Anne Heltzel. Her writing is LOVELY! I really, really enjoyed this read.

In the beginning of the book there is a large house fire. A girl, our main character, wakes up with absolutely no memory of her past. She doesn't even know her name. There is a boy next to her, pleading for her to run with him away from the fire. The girl, Abby, sees only this boy's face. She feels that she has been re-born, detached from all previous memories. She runs with this strange boy, Sam, to a hidden cave that is Sam's home. In this cave, Sam keeps Abby hidden. He tells her that the outside world is dangerous, an equivalent to the ninth circle in Dante's Inferno. He refers to the outside world as Circle Nine, and convinces Abby to do the same.

It is in this cave where Abby dwells, so consumed by happiness with her life with Sam. But quickly things turn very dark, and Abby starts to remember things from her past. Heltzel writes about a topic that is hard for a reader to even read about, never mind write. And she does it in such a lovely way, it is impossible to turn away from this story.

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### **Lucille says**

This is one of those books where the blurb on the jacket is deceptive. A lot of this book is deceptive. If you're looking for dystopian or some sort of paranormal, go find something else.

Abby wakes up and doesn't know who she is. She is inside a cave palace with Sam, who tells her that they have always been together. He is her protector, her defender from the harshness of the outside world, her one and only true love. The only problem with her fantasy life- Sam is lying to her.

As Abby goes through her routine existence with the overbearing Sam, she begins to form memories of her past. She becomes curious. Her delusions start to shatter, and she starts to question the truth of what Sam has told her.

There were some parts of her awakening and search for identity that were interesting. There were some things that I thought would actually go somewhere that ended up being throw away plot points, just to fill in the short space of the book. But more than these glimpses of things that I liked were the parts that made me feel angry and disturbed. This book took sensitive material and never really dealt or engaged with it. In the end, I was left feeling unsatisfied and disgruntled. The things that I had hoped for never came to pass, and the redeeming actions and events that I was counting on just didn't happen.

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## Beth says

I don't generally read teen fiction, but I'm glad I read this one.

Reading through some prior reviews, I read at least one that mentioned the recent novel *Room* and its similar vibe. While that is true in some ways (both narrators are vastly unaware of what is actually happening to them), I think the things I liked most about this story were the ways that it is different.

The elements of psychology that come into *Circle 9* were my favorite aspects. I loved that things weren't overly simplified and explained in the end when she is diagnosed. The therapist makes it clear what was wrong with her, but there is no exhausting play-by-play of each thing she saw one way that was actually another. It's so much more interesting to let them slowly wash over you once you're done with the book - her beautiful tea cup that she drank everything out of, her birthday cake, the wine they drank with dinner, shouting across their huge oak dining room table to be heard, and asking Amanda to get something out of the fridge. It really brings home the sickness of the situation, the length at which Sam would allow 'Abby' to live in her pretend world, how disturbing it must have been even for the highly disturbed Amanda to be a part of it for a while.

I think the other great strength of the book is the ending, as sad and even frustrating as it is. I so wanted her to embrace the offered help of the therapist. I wanted her to tell her story if only for the relief it would surely bring her to stop bottling it all up inside. But I think it's more sadly realistic that she does not. She's a 17 year old girl, heartbroken and terrified and destroyed by her past, and I think it's realistic that she decides to run for it instead. Probably the most heartbreaking part to me was when she said something like even the thought of getting help and eventually getting better seemed like more than she deserved after what she had done to her family.

Just vaguely imagining what happened that firey night was enough for me to understand why her brain would go into self-preservation mode for a while. She was in hell, in Dante's *Inferno*, for quite a while without knowing it. I think I understood her carrying around *Purgatorio*, not able to read it yet. She was finally facing her hell with a clear head, and while she was still in it, she could not start to think about rising out of it yet. I believe she'll get there eventually, and she'll open that book. But not yet.

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## Rachael says

When she wakes up, Abby can't remember anything. She doesn't know where she is, why there's a fire, or even what her name is. She doesn't know who Sam is, but she thinks she can trust him. After all, he was the only other person around when she woke, and he says he'll take care of her. Abby starts a new life with Sam, one filled with only nice and happy things—but one that is devoid of a past. Abby can't live in ignorance forever. She can't overlook the holes in her memory where she must have had a life before Sam. And when she begins to remember, her entire new world starts to unravel. Now Abby knows that there is something seriously wrong, with herself, with Sam, and with the entire situation she's been living in. The question becomes not whether Abby will be able to break free—but whether she'll have the strength to live on her own.

*Circle 9* is one of the more unusual psychological thrillers that I have read, and I mean this in a

complimentary way. Heltzel writes from the perspective of protagonist Abby primarily in first person stream of consciousness with sporadic flashbacks. This gives incredible insight into Abby's fragile mind and allows the reader to plainly see all her thoughts, wants, and, most of all, confusion. I just loved how I was just as much in the dark as to the realities of Abby's situation as she was; this made the revelation of each new truth so savory to read about. What made Circle 9 really stand out to me from the other psychological thrillers that I've read is that the tone was slightly more contemplative rather than edge-of-your-seat suspenseful. There was much less urgency and action in the plot because the focus was more on Abby's inner struggles. As a result, Heltzel's crafting of Abby's character really shined in this novel, leading to a thoughtful and subtly thrilling read.

Circle 9 will be enjoyed by fans of Imaginary Girls by Nova Ren Suma. I greatly look forward to what debut author Heltzel will produce next.

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