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The Testing (The Testing Trilogy Book 1)



Synopsis

It's graduation day for sixteen-year-old Malencia Vale, and the entire Five Lakes Colony (the former Great Lakes) is celebrating. All Cia can think about is whether she'll be chosen for The Testing, a United Commonwealth program that selects the best and brightest new graduates to become possible leaders of the slowly revitalizing post-war civilization. When Cia is chosen, her father finally tells her about his own nightmarish half-memories of The Testing. Armed with his dire warnings (Cia, trust no one), she bravely heads off to Tosu City, far away from friends and family, perhaps forever. Danger, romance and sheer terror await.

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Customer Reviews

A conversation with Joelle Charbonneau The author of the best-selling Testing trilogy discusses the series, her background, and her next project.

This is a trilogy. Did you know how the series would end when you began writing? I wish I could say yes, but I really didn't. I don't know where the whole story arc was going to take Cia. The only thing I was certain of was what I wanted the final scene to be. I knew I wanted to show the moment that occurs either during or just after college when you realize that home will always be there, but that it isn't your home anymore. That your life is no longer just about the place where you grew up or about what you dreamed you'd be doing as an adult. It's that moment when you understand that your life is yours and that the choices you make are the ones that will define how that life goes. In your opinion, what are Cia's biggest strengths? How do they help her survive? I think that Cia's greatest strength would also be considered a liability—her compassion and willingness to see the world for what she hopes it will be. Those traits motivate her to continue forward even when she knows there is a chance she will fail. I think so often in life, people don't take a difficult step because there is a chance of failure. Like all of us, Cia doesn't want to fail, but her compassion and wish to contribute to helping her society is more compelling than the fear of taking a wrong step. Why did you choose to set this series in the Midwest? The Midwest, to me, is an ideal place to set a dystopian society. Most people associate the Midwest with very traditional American values—values that Cia and her family embrace—so setting the series in the center of the country seemed like an obvious choice. For the center of my new government and society, I then needed to pick a city that I felt would not only survive a world war, but also could weather the environmental changes that would occur after such catastrophic manmade damage. Wichita provided an ideal location since its moderate size and location in the middle of the heartland would allow it to avoid being on an international government's first-strike list. Also, the lack of towering skyscrapers would help much of the city's infrastructure withstand the environmental upheaval.

All three books were published within a single year. Does your brain hurt from all that writing? Is my editor reading this? That might change my answer. Writing the entire series posed a huge challenge. There were times that I wasn't sure I would be up to the task, but I am so grateful that I was given the opportunity to push myself. It was a unique opportunity to be able to write the story from beginning to end without feeling the expectations or anticipation of the next installment from readers. Cia, Tomas, and the world of the United Commonwealth were mine and mine alone throughout the writing process. And now I am thrilled that the readers who have joined me in the journey get to come along for this the final ride. The series asks questions about

courage, loyalty, duty, and honor. What drew you to these topics? I am a huge civics junkie and I love debating politics. Every time an election come around, I hear people throw around words like courage and loyalty and honor all the time, but rarely do they seem to connect with what those things mean in the larger context of the world. While writing, I wanted to explore the words that our leaders use in sound bites and test what they really meant to me. For Cia, she thinks she understands what those words mean. But it isn't until her beliefs are tested that she truly understands the importance of loyalty and how there are different kinds of courage required in our leaders. Most people believe it takes courage to face an enemy head-on. People understand the ideas of duty and honor when the choice appears black-and-white. But I believe the greatest forms of courage happen in the choices that no one sees, and that duty and honor are most important at times where there are no good answers. You're a singer, an actress, and a voice coach. In what ways does this inform your writing? When you perform on stage, you have to create a character that audiences will connect with and make sure that you perform each scene with enough energy and interest that the audience will want to come back after intermission. When I write, it often feels like a performance, because the characters have to be well-rounded and each scene has to make the reader come back for more. And since both fields involve a lot of reviews and rejection, I tend to be really good at dealing with both of those, too!

Graduation Day is the third book in the series. Do you have any advice for graduating teens? I think a lot of graduating students feel pressured to know where their life is going and to have a plan that will get them to those predetermined goals. My best advice is to remember that life is about the journey and that learning new things doesn't stop when you get the diploma. If you are open to taking the journey and exploring where it takes you, you'll end up where you are supposed to be . . . even if it is the last place you ever expected. In my case, I thought I'd be singing and dancing on Broadway. Turns out, I'm behind a computer writing books. You just never know. In general, what do you hope readers take away from this book, and the series as a whole? Our education system has put so much value on testing. Everything relies on how well students do on tests • school funding, teacher evaluations, and our students' belief in their own potential. If readers take one thing away from the series as a whole, I hope it is that a single test doesn't define anyone. Test scores prove only one thing • how well a person did on that test. There is no foolproof test to determine what a student's future should be. Futures are determined by the choices our students make along the way. To think we can create tests that

provide the sum of the true measure of a person is foolhardy, and the people that suffer the most from that ill-advised belief are our children. What's next for you?

I'm currently typing away on a new young adult thriller that is set in a small town in Wisconsin. It involves an elite social networking site that invites teens to say what they think they need and offers them a chance to get their desire. Only there is a difference between a want and a need, and students eventually learn that sometimes the price for what we want can be too high to pay. The manuscript is currently titled 'N.E.E.D.' and I am both excited and a little freaked as I explore the world of social media and how safe people feel sitting behind their computer screens when they think nothing they do on the Internet is truly real.

I cannot believe I let this book sit on my shelf for almost 4 years! I really could have used it to placate my Hunger Games withdrawal. With that being said I did find a lot of similarities between it and the Hunger Games. I am sure the author hates hearing that by now, but there were enough to distract me from the story. The story itself was interesting and I found myself cheering for the characters but I wasn't as emotionally attached to them as I normally am to characters. Cia, for example, was too wishy washy for me. Sometimes she was borderline paranoia and other times she shrugged things off too casually. I mean she is practically fighting for her life here! The connection between the major romance in this story was not there or underdeveloped which lead me to question how quickly the two involved hooked up. It didn't fit well for me. It seems like the shy girl and the cute popular guy hooking up has been done too often in other works. So you have to get it just right or bring your own unique twist to it in order for a reader to accept it. It wasn't done well enough for me as a reader. I also had a problem with the depth of the characters. For me, most of the characters lacked a deeper level of development and I think that is where the connection was lost. Even with Cia, we only get a surface view of her thoughts and feeling, and she is the one telling the story. Yes, we get her fear for her family and her gushy feelings for that one special boy, but there was no explanation or deeper emotional appeal other than she liked him because they had similar interests and he was popular or cute. With that being said, I still enjoyed the story itself. I liked the different scenes for the testing and even the brutality amongst the different competitors. I enjoyed the mystery with the different adults that sought to help Cia along and how I questioned everything that happened. Was it all part of the test? Were the adults really trying to help or were they setting her up? Do I recommend the book? Yes. I still think the story is interesting enough and this is the first in the series. I have already ordered the second book in the trilogy because I need more of this world. Remember that this

review is my own honest opinion and should not deter you from the series.

I didn't even think about "Hunger Games" when I began reading this book. Within the first hundred pages I realized that it was a clone of that type of story. I decided I had invested too much time to quit reading, so I read on. This is NO clone. It is unfortunate that this book came out after "Hunger Games," because it shares a lot of story points. The heroine is a teen who is forced to face a life threatening challenge because of a murderous government. That is where the similarities end, however. This is a much richer and more complex story. At the end of book one, the trials of Cia and her friends are just beginning. Possibilities are still nearly endless at this point. I won't tell you any more because this is cutting into my reading time and book two awaits. Read this!

I've had my eye on THE TESTING long before it was released. I even received an eARC from the publisher for review. I was just sooo excited to read this, but for some crazy reason, I didn't. I kept thinking how awesome this series sounds, and how much I love dystopians, but I kept putting it off. So finally, when I received my credits from audible audio, I said what the hell, it's finally time to give THE TESTING it's fair shot. And OMG, I found myself instantly drawn into this story. The narrator was amazing, and the mystery was alluring, and I was easily able to get into the vibes. I couldn't help but to pick this audiobook up every free chance I got. THE PLOT... Cia has always lived a fairly good life, better than most anyway. With a big family, all brothers, and two loving successful parents that any child would appreciate. She's been preparing for the opportunity to be chosen for The Testing. But when the time comes to graduate and become an official adult, Cia's world becomes a living nightmare. Cia's dreams have finally come true, she's officially been chosen for The Testing!! And she can't be more thrilled. She's always hoped for the opportunity to show her government just how much she can contribute in making the Commonwealth a better place for their future. And now after all her hard work, it's finally paid off. Until The Testing actually starts and Cia finally sees The Testing for what it really is, a death trap in waiting! Cia has no choice but to go through with The Testing, or risk treason against the United Commonwealth. And that right there could mean a death sentence in itself. But Cia's not giving up, she's smart, determined, and not easily manipulated. And besides, Cia has one thing that gives her an advantage, and just might keep her alive long enough to get through The Testing. She has her father's words, his warnings, his own experiences through The Testing. But as The Testing gets deeper, and Cia finds herself getting closer to the finish line, her father's words ring in her ears "Trust no one." But Cia finds herself drawn to her childhood friend Tomas, and feels for some reason, he can be trusted. But what about the other Testing

Candidates? Can they be trusted? Who's real, and who isn't? Who is befriending her to betray her? And who is befriending her to ally with her? As the plot thickens, and The Testing Candidates get further into The Testing, they will have to determine who is deadly, and who is just trying survive. Because before all is said and done, they will come face to face with death, but whether or not they survive is up to them. But Cia may find that there is more cutthroats than not, and if she has any chance of surviving, she will have to do as her father said "Trust no one!" But surely, she can trust Tomas, can't she? THE TESTING was a great addition to the Dystopian genre, that is sure to please many readers. I'm looking forward to finishing this series and seeing what happens next in Cia and Tomas's adventure! Overall, THE TESTING was a fast-paced, action-packed, thrill-ride, that is not to be missed! If you love action, adventure, corrupt governments, rebellions, and overall, a great dystopian novel, then THE TESTING is sure to please!!!NOTE: I received an eARC from Houghton Mifflin Books for reviewing purposes. All opinions expressed are my own and are not influenced in any way!

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