



Head Case

Jennifer Oko

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Meet Olivia Zack, neuroscientist, pharmaceutical consultant—and murder victim.

A humorous mystery from an author whose work has been called "simply riveting" by The New York Times and "sharp and fast-paced" by Publisher's Weekly—it's Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* meets Carl Hiaasen's *Nature Girl* (with a dash of Janet Evanovich's *One for the Money*) as Olivia embarks on a postmortem quest to deconstruct the events that lead up to her mind-altering death.

A comic satire of the influence of the psychopharmaceutical industry on American life, *HEAD CASE* takes Olivia and her estranged friend and roommate Polly Warner on a collision course involving ethically challenged executives, spotlight-hungry celebrities, third-rate mobsters, and drug-dealing babushkas. A smart and savvy page-turner, *HEAD CASE* explores the meaning of personal relationships, emotional intelligence, and mental health while taking the reader on a synapse-stirring, neurotransmitting rollicking ride.

Head Case Details

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Author : Jennifer Oko

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From Reader Review Head Case for online ebook

Yawatta Hosby says

I received a free copy in exchange for a book review

I enjoyed this 54 chapter book. It was told through Olivia's first person point-of-view. She was murdered so it's actually through her ghost's perspective. It was pretty cool that she could access other character's memories, showing a full picture of what lead to the hit on her life. Polly, her best friend, was a very important person in Olivia's life; therefore, sometimes it seemed like Polly's life was discussed more than the main character. As a reader, I understood the reasoning behind it from Olivia's explanation.

My favorite lines: 1) My body froze—not just in the sense of standing still, but like I had just taken a dive into a snow bank. A stinging, prickly freeze. 2) I get to play the role of wise sage, and with an amazing perspective. Because when you die, not only can you flit around the present, you also get to watch stuff in rewind. 3) ...What would you do if you were locked in a New York city taxicab with only fifteen minutes left to live? What issue would you want to resolve?

I loved Olivia's sarcastic sense of humor. It made sense that she'd be bitter over her death. It was scary when she drove in the cab and the driver went in the wrong direction, locking the doors. Chills went down my spine. The spookiest events are the ones that can happen in real life.

I liked that the story focused on the conspiracy in pharmaceutical's R&D (research and development)—how they hid the negatives of side effects and made up lies in order to focus on marketing. I could definitely see this happening in real life.

I thought the author did a great job with characterization. They all had good and bad qualities, all three-dimensional. I liked that Olivia and Polly weren't Mary Sues. They got a hold of prescription medicine to sell to celebrities. Even though they were drug dealers, Olivia didn't die directly from that life of crime.

It was good that Polly was determined to investigate her best friend's death, to not settle for a "wrong place at the wrong time" scenario the news tried to spin. Her and Olivia had their disagreements before she passed away, so Olivia appreciated that Polly still had her back. A bittersweet moment that they could never officially make up.

I RECOMMEND this book to read.

Judy says

This review is for the book Head Case by Jennifer Oko. We are introduced to Olivia Zack right after her death. And in a series of flashbacks and current scenes she explains the events, decisions and reasons that lead up to her death. It is an unlikely tale, dealing with superstars, Russian Mobsters, and pharmaceutical companies. Olivia sets up each scene and provides a running commentary on where things went right or wrong and why things happened the way they did.

I went into this book wanting to like it. After all, a ghost is basically solving her own murder. Perfect mix of paranormal and mystery, right? Eh, not so much. The story is told mostly from Olivia and her best-

friend/roommate Polly, who is a celebrity publicist. While Olivia flips back and forth between current events and the events that led up to her death, she gives us a running commentary on what and why stuff is happening. I was not a big fan of this. But then, I can not stand the commentary on a DVD either. Who in their right mind could enjoy a movie (or in this case book) with someone talking over all the action and dialogue and basically ruining the feeling of immersing yourself in the story. Not me anyway. I have never really understood the concept of "telling" a story versus "showing" a story, but this one felt very "tell"-y. Another problem I had was connecting with the characters. I never felt any real connection with them. To be quite honest, I really didn't care that she was dead. Awful, right? I can't quite put my finger on why I didn't like them, but there it is. They just seemed like spoiled, little rich girls who were so used to doing what they wanted and disregarding the consequences. In a lot of instances, I felt they really deserved what happened to them.

Overall, I just couldn't get into the book and lose myself in the story. It felt too much like a Brussels sprouts story, you know, one that is good for you, but just doesn't taste all that great. But that could just be me, after all, some people actually like Brussels sprouts. Anyway, I only gave it 2 stars on Goodreads.

Sasha says

Do you like mysteries? Do you like humor? This one is the book for you... chuckles and even some tears! Seriously, a very funny mystery with a strong, quirky, cool female protagonist... at times alive, other times a ghost. Let me shut up now. It is a mystery after all. Read it for yourself!

Dan McGirt says

Head Case is an enjoyable gem of a mystery, and more. Our narrator, Olivia Zack, starts the book dead and things go backwards from there. Olivia takes us hopping and skipping through time as she gradually unravels how she came to be no longer eligible for the census. She relives all the mistakes she made along the way in true neurotic New York girl fashion and brings us along for the ride. There are drug-dealing grannies, pill-popping celebrities, Russian mob bosses, eccentric ex-Soviet chemists, feuding roommates, faltering friendships, bad bosses and a rat named Raskolnikov – so how can you not have fun?

(Well, murder is never fun, but there isn't any dwelling on blood and gore. All deaths occur more or less offstage, so this book is safe for the squeamish.)

Olivia is a likeable and appealingly flawed character -- the whole story hinges on her flaws, if you think about it. She is witty and, if not wise, a touch more perceptive and self-aware in death than she was in life. This is apparently a perk of being dead and it adds an extra layer of goodness to the book – you experience still-alive Olivia alongside post-mortem Olivia providing DVD commentary track about her past actions. It is deftly done.

Head Case also takes satirical aim at the aforementioned celebrities, as well as drug companies, the news media, and our over-medicated society with a pill for everything. The notion that, *of course*, everyone is in therapy and, *of course*, everyone pops a pharmacopeia of mood-altering pills to get through the day the way Olivia and her friends do is alien to me. (I hate to even take an aspirin.) But the author makes both the good and bad of that way of being relatable even to readers who live lives unmediated by anything stronger than caffeine.

Head Case also raises some important questions about how we maintain the integrity of our identities in a culture that seeks to pathologize, homogenize and commodify us. Not in a portentous way – this book is more contemporary comedy of manners than “book with a message” – but the theme is there, interlaced with the action, and it is worth pondering.

Or maybe I’m reading too much into it.

Bottom line, **Head Case** is funny, well-written, moves fast, entertaining, a good read.

(If you like it, you’ll probably also enjoy Jennifer Oko’s first novel, *Gloss* which carves up morning television and fauxvestigative journalism.)

Burns Strider says

Jennifer Oko has written a great book, perhaps her finest to date. *Head Case* was part a cerebral (and still funny) *Bridget Jones Diary* and part Elizabeth Wertz’s exploration of life and culture in *Prozac Nation*. Yes, a great book full of humor and thoughtful cultural commentary all wrapped up in a flowing and engaging narrative. A must read.

Yvonne says

Olivia Zack is a smart, hardworking neuroscientist and pharmaceutical consultant. She’s also very much dead. Now, she wants to know who was behind her murder and she intends to find out.

It all started when she was hired by Pharmax to research a new drug that will make people who are unhappy with their jobs, very happy. They lavished her with money and she was totally taken in by them, but then she became suspicious that there was something underhanded going on. It even caused her to lose her best friend. Unfortunately, she also lost her life.

Olivia gives us an hysterically funny narration of her quest to learn the details of her murder as well as a satirical look into the pharmaceutical industry.

I loved the character of Olivia. She wasn’t perfect, but she was strong and witty. This book gave me many hours of enjoyment and laughter. It has everything you’d want – a humorous premise, an intriguing mystery involving everyone from the Russian mob to celebrities to unethical executives. It all mixes for a fast-paced mystery that will leave you laughing. Jennifer Oko is an author I’ll be adding to my “must read” authors.

FTC Disclosure: The author provided me with a copy of this book for a review. This did not influence my thoughts and opinions in any way. All opinions expressed are my own.

Monica says

I admit I did not finish this book. I had a hard time following it and keeping up with who was who.

Sheila Carsins says

There's a Whole Lot of Wisdom and Insight in this Book! I Highly Recommend It!

I firmly believe in the premise that this book is based upon. As someone who has cared for sick loved ones, I can vouch that not every drug prescribed helps the condition that it's prescribed for, in fact for every one drug prescribed, there are usually many unacceptable and disturbing side effects. So then, you're stuck- take the recommended meds and get something to counteract the side effects-if you even can- or quit the prescribed meds and play Russian roulette with another drug, or several drugs, or keep adding drugs to counteract the effects of the first drug, and hope that it doesn't kill you, before it can cure you, or that it won't create new and additional problems with other body parts that will also require different meds, surgeries, cause dementia, mood swings, or even death. I highly recommend this book! I believe that the pill companies are more interested in profiting from their wares, than curing illnesses, despite the side effects on their consumers. Where else but in America will a person take a drug designed for one purpose, and risk over twenty side effects, or more, that are worse than the original complaint, some even leading to toxicity and/or death? It doesn't help that many people in the health care industry receive incentives to promote various companies drugs, which may lead to perks, more income, vacations, etc. from the pharmaceutical companies for the health care worker as well as the pharmaceutical employees. The price for these "miracle" cures are often dictated by the greed of the health care and pharmaceutical industry as a whole, and how much sick people can be pressured into spending. Who can you trust?

Somekindofnobody says

I started off with this book having a preconceived idea about what it was going to be about. Let me tell you that from three pages in I had already done a mental double-take multiple times. That is when you just say, "Whaaaat...?"

And it was an idea that I have never read before. The closest storyline would be Memento and that was a crazy, wild and fun story. THIS...oh my. Oh oh oh my. All I can say is that if you don't put ALL YOUR OTHER BOOKS AWAY and read just the FIRST chapter, you will find yourself going and going and I will just say it now --your welcome!

This is the most fun I have had reading in a long time. It is a FUN and unique read. Its a strange book in that its such a light read but with dark undertones that make it delicious. I loved this. Highly recommend.

Anna says

Great fun! Very easy read - the author writes like she talks. Which I love because makes me feel like I'm actually part of the conversation. Definite read.

Amanda Kelsey says

This wasn't the kind of book I'd typically read, I'm more of a chick lit kinda girl but I actually enjoyed it! The book was narrated by a girl named Olivia, who told the story about her and her best friend Polly's life. Olivia was actually murdered and throughout the book she tells stories about her life before her death and also what's happening currently to try and figure out who the killer is! I really enjoyed this mystery and found it a really interesting read!!!!

Anne Stoddard says

Olivia Zack is a neuroscientist who has just been murdered after being kidnapped and brought to a Russian mobster. The book is told from her ghostly point of view, dialing back and clock and recounting the events that led up to her death, as well as a few that happened after. Olivia recalls events and conversations with her best friend, celebrity publicist, Polly Warner. The two girls got mixed up in the sometimes glam, sometimes sordid world of dealing prescription drugs. While dealing pills has its perks, it also has its price: which is how Olivia ends up with a bullet through her skull. It's up to her spirit to sort through the mess that led up to her death and to send Polly and her boyfriend Mitya a few clues from the great beyond in order to not only solve her murder but to also save the day against the Russian mafia, drug-dealing grannies, corrupted cops, and some nasty unethical pharmaceutical execs.

I loved this book. Being in my twenties, it was very easy to relate to--who doesn't know someone--in their circle of friends or otherwise--that has suffered with addiction or substance abuse? And who hasn't seen one of those pharmaceutical commercials for a pill that marketers will convince you that you need while downplaying the long list of potential health hazards and side effects attached? Yes, even with prescription substances rather than drugs. The story is one that, while the stakes are much higher, can still, at the core, hit close to home for a lot of readers.

While there are a small handful of editorial errors/typos and the jumping around in the timeline can be a little confusing, overall this is a great book and a fun read. I even found myself tearing up a little at times. Oko has a great tale on her hands, told with a perfect blend of snark and heartfelt emotion about the bond between two friends separated by death.

I would recommend this book to anyone who is on the fence about reading it--and to anyone else, for that matter.

Christoph Fischer says

"Head Case" by Jennifer Oko to me is a very gripping and powerful read. Although intended to be more satirical and entertaining I personally found the important points and messages within the book very well presented and not at all trivialised by the more quirky approach.

The story is told by a dead woman, Olivia, a phd student in neuro-chemistry, who gets herself involved in the wheeling and dealing behind prescription drugs to the stars and other users.

Her friend Polly scores samples from her father and sales rep Missy Pander, who in turn drags Olivia into the pharmaceutical approval committee for new drugs.

When Polly starts going out with Russian DJ Mitya a connection is made to his autn on Brighton Beach and

what becomes known as the Russian Black Market Babushkas.

But all is not well with the drug Ziperol, there are side effects and other issues around the release.

At first I found the narrative a little difficult to follow as it jumped between before death and after death, but once I settled in the story ran away in a pleasantly fast pace as we try to figure out exactly why Olivia was killed and by whom.

The story is spoken at the readers, something that gives the narrative an extra edge and intensity.

The book is clearly well researched or takes very educated guesses at the connections between black market, research, health care and organised crime. Since "Love and other drugs" and "The Constant Gardener" many of us are aware of the connections between crime and prescription drugs that can exist. Issues of self medication and the consumer approach to mood enhancers are hinted at in the foreword and are part of the story, making this a very rich read, despite the more casual style in places.

The friendships and relationships however do not disappoint and manage to transgress the limits of stereotypes and bring more interest to the story.

This is a promising author and a well written book.

Karen Hosman says

Great writing, Hope it's the start of a series

Kimberly says

Well, I loved this book. It was great fun to read and was written with both wit and intelligence - something I don't often find in the chick lit category. It's nice to run into an author writing in this category who cares enough about her work to write multi-dimensional characters and a well-planned, very original plot. I'll be looking for more from her.
