

Panic

Lauren Oliver

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Lauren Oliver's *Panic* stars Heather and Dodge, two high school seniors residing in the small town of Carp. Every summer, all the seniors have a chance to participate in Panic, a series of competitions in which one faces his deepest fears. If one shows a hint of fear, he is disqualified from the games—the final remaining competitor takes home a pot of money that everyone has contributed to over the year. The story is told through both Heather and Dodge's perspectives.

Heather plays for the money—with a drug-addicted mother, sole responsibility of her younger sister, and a fresh breakup with her cheating boyfriend, winning the pot is the only way for Heather to escape town and find a brighter future. For Dodge, Panic is a chance for revenge. After his sister was paralyzed from the waist down during a car crash in the final round of Panic, Dodge lost his best friend—he also knows that a fellow competitor had hijacked the car that she had driven. Now it's his time for redemption: "a sister's legs for a brother's life." Yet throughout the games, both Heather and Dodge discover that the town of Carp holds more than it first appears—with chances for friendship, happiness, and even love, hearts will be mended as Panic rules.

As an avid reader, an aspect of *Panic* that I enjoyed was how no character was perfect—in other books, it is common for the characters to seem either perfectly good or evil. Heather, Dodge, and the rest of the characters were damaged—they made bad choices and willingly did the wrong thing—yet that made it is much easier to connect to them. The town of Carp seemed so normal, there was no supernatural or magical influences. Even the backstory of each character made it is that every reader could connect deeply through the everyday problems that were happening. However, I did not like how the story began. I felt that the book did not explain clearly how Panic worked until later in the book, so for the first few chapters I was kind of confused.

While there is not a lot of sexual content, except for a few kisses, I would suggest that the book be rated 14+. There are several scenes where drugs and drinking are present, and Panic itself is not something for younger readers. Readers should be mature enough to realize that the various parts of Panic should never be recreated in real life due to the danger and crime involved. There are also several other serious issues present throughout the book such as running away, illegally keeping wild animals, and breaking into houses.

Because *Panic* is not part of a series, I believe that it could serve as both an ideal gift or as a book that one would check out from a library. If you enjoyed reading this book, I would also suggest the following books:

1. *Before I Fall* by Lauren Oliver
2. *The Delirium Trilogy* by Lauren Oliver
3. *Vanishing Girls* by Lauren Oliver
4. *We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart
5. *Half Life Series* by Sally Green