



## Headcase

**Marc Rosenberg**

Lulu (Apr 3, 2014)

Softcover \$17.99 (274pp)

978-1-4834-0229-1

*Murder is never pretty. Headcase is an admirable depiction of just how ugly it can get, and what can lead some people to kill.*

Marc Rosenberg kicks aside stereotypical notions of mental illness in *Headcase*, choosing instead to neither excuse nor glorify the characters affected by it. The result is a perfectly paced, intricately drawn story of love gone wrong, despair that wins, and the wreckage obsession can leave in its wake.

Detective Ash Aiken is leading an investigation into a set of murders that could be the work of one killer. He has to deal with an overambitious and gung ho partner, his recent return to duty after a major breakdown, and the doubt of his fellow officers over whether he can even do the job anymore. He's a mostly good cop with a serious obsession: to locate his ex-wife so he can see his son again.

Out in the city, there's a killer who preys on women; a therapist with doubts about her ethical obligations; a verbally abused young woman who's approaching her personal boiling point; and a college student who never gets the chance to change his life for the better. Their paths will converge in a horrifyingly logical way. Aiken will meet them all, and with them be drawn down the dark wells of their own psyches to a point where each must choose to get help or let go.

The novel's title refers to nearly every substantial character in its pages, a daring move that Rosenberg executes with great skill, precision, and loving care. The characters here are definite individuals, neither all good guy nor all villain, not solely defined by mental illness. This is one of the rare novels that depicts a psychotic break with both realism and compassion.

Rosenberg's authorial voice is strong and clear without being flashy, which suits the themes of the novel very well. He knows the rules of writing as well as when to break them (incomplete sentences, for example, used to expert effect)—not an easy feat by any means.

*Headcase* is a finely tuned engine of pacing, fueled by experience, well-developed writing style, and muscle—not surprising, since Rosenberg is the executive producer of Lost Highway Films. The story is suffused with visuals as well as internal monologues for the major characters, a formula guaranteed to bring those characters to life. For a debut novel, this crime thriller shines like a bloody diamond, as it should.

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J. G. STINSON (January 9, 2015)

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