



Glitch (A Glitch Novel)

By Heather Anastasiu

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In the Community, there is no more pain or war. Implanted computer chips have wiped humanity clean of destructive emotions, and thoughts are replaced by a feed from the Link network.

When Zoe starts to malfunction (or "glitch"), she suddenly begins having her own thoughts, feelings, and identity. Any anomalies must be immediately reported and repaired, but Zoe has a secret so dark it will mean certain deactivation if she is caught: her glitches have given her uncontrollable telekinetic powers.

As Zoe struggles to control her abilities and stay hidden, she meets other glitchers including Max, who can disguise his appearance, and Adrien, who has visions of the future. Together, this growing band of glitchers must find a way to free themselves from the controlling hands of the Community before they're caught and deactivated, or worse.

In Heather Anastasiu's action-packed debut, *Glitch* begins an exciting new young adult trilogy.

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Editorial Review

Review

“A taut and twisty novel.” ?*Publishers Weekly*

“An instantly involving page-turner...sure to have readers clamoring for the next book.” ?*Booklist*

“A taut, irresistible novel, *Glitch* delivers a pitch-perfect blend of action, romance, and twists that take your breath away.” ?*Andrea Cremer, New York Times bestselling author of the Nightshade series*

“GLITCH kept me up long past bedtime with its quick pace, wonderfully creepy technology, and a frighteningly believable world. Fans of dystopian novels will love this delightful debut.” ?*Jodi Meadows, author of Incarnate*

“*Glitch* is full of twists that will make you think right is wrong and up is down, not to mention keep you guessing until the very last page. A thoroughly enjoyable read, with a world that is both frightening and intriguing, and a romance that will leave readers breathless.” ?*Elana Johnson, author of Possession*

About the Author

HEATHER ANASTASIU grew up in Texas and now lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota with her husband and young son. She spends most days most days writing at a coffee shop or daydreaming about getting a new tattoo.

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Chapter 1

I FELT IT COMING THIS TIME. I shoved my drawings into the hidden slit I'd made in the back of my mattress, then grabbed the metal bed frame to steady myself as my brain suddenly jolted back into connection with the Link.

The retina display flickered into view and scrolled a chatter of data at the edges of my field of vision. Auditory inputs clicked back online too, a slight hum in the background. One by one, each of my senses dimmed, replacing my connection to the physical world with the connection to the Link. In a blink, the small bit of color in my room seeped away to a monotone gray. I inhaled deeply and tried to hold on to the smell of my small concrete quarters—antiseptic and dust—but they, too, were lost by my next breath. Panic gripped my chest as I drowned in the Link's rising tide, but I concealed it behind my perfectly still mask. I was lucky it happened while I was alone here in my quarters, where I was safe. I could use the practice. I focused, carefully relaxing each of my facial muscles into perfect, expressionless stillness, betraying nothing of the turmoil inside.

I'd glitched for a little over an hour. Precious silence in my head. Sometimes I could fight the creeping dullness of the Link, but I didn't have any time to waste this morning. The glitching woke me an hour before my internal Link alarm, but if I didn't get moving, I'd be late.

Still, I allowed myself to pause at the door to my quarters and smile defiantly for one last, fleeting moment

before the Link made me forget what smiling was. I reached back to make sure my hair was secure, and my fingers brushed against the input port at the base of my neck. My smile dimmed. It was the same port we all had implanted at birth: slim, less than half an inch long, and only millimeters wide. I knew from looking at other people's ports that thin subcutaneous wires with tiny lighted microfilaments swirled out in rectangular patterns on both sides, glowing visibly through the skin. The port connected straight into the V-chip at the base of the brain, enabling the Link connection.

I ran my fingers over the port, tracing the ridges nervously. What if there was something different about it? There was no way for me to get a good look at it, since we had no need of mirrors in the Community. Maybe the light filaments surrounding my neck port had stopped glowing, or changed color, or the port itself was noticeably damaged somehow. Something had to explain why I was different, why the glitches were happening to me. I hurriedly tugged on my long loose curls, arranging them carefully down the back of my neck and over the port, just in case.

I opened my door mechanically and walked five paces down the hallway to the largest room in our unit. The retina display readouts bounced at the edges of my vision, unnecessarily showing the schematics for the room: ten-by-ten-foot area, concrete walls, a simple table and four chairs, room enough to prepare food, eat, and at night pull down the wall equipment to exercise. *A healthy body means a healthy Community*. The phrase from the Community Creed sounded over the Link and seemed to ping around my skull.

Father was in the room, his back to me as he prepared breakfast. I lifted a hand to tuck a loose wisp of black hair behind my ear. Orderly.

"Greetings, Father."

"Greetings, Zoel. Materials Allotment duty this morning, correct?" He didn't look up from the protein patties he was taking out of the thermal unit. He dished the patties and equal portions of hard bread onto four white plates.

"Correct, Father." I picked up the plates and set them equidistant on our tiny square table, perfectly aligned in front of the four chairs. Markan, my sibling, was already sitting down, staring blankly at the wall, no doubt zoning out to the video and audio feed of the Link News playing in the million silent theaters of everyone's heads.

I glanced cautiously at him. He was thirteen, four years younger than me. He'd already set out silverware and napkins folded into neat, orderly triangles. Order first, order always. I studied his face, looking for a trace of the smile I'd been secretly drawing in my room this morning. We didn't look alike, but I could see bits and pieces of our parents' features in his face, features carefully selected and manufactured at the laboratory from the blend of perfect gene partners. He favored our father, with a wide nose and thin lips, but his round cheeks betrayed his youth.

His expression was blank. Detached. No trace of a smile or any emotion. Watching him felt like looking at an empty room—the walls and furniture were all perfectly in place, but it had no life.

Did I look like that when I was lost in the Link? The question was my own, a wisp of smoke snaking through the foggy cloud of the Link. After glitching, reconnecting with the Link was like a sliding door closing over my mind, severing my connection to my own thoughts. But if I focused intensely on a few specific details, it was possible to let just a sliver of myself slip through the crack. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't, but with enough practice I planned to eventually find a balance between myself and the Link. With that tiny inch of control, maybe one day I'd be able to control when I glitched. I could keep the glitches to myself, safe from witnesses. Safe from possible deactivation. This morning was my most successful practice yet. It had been ten minutes since I'd stopped glitching, and I could still hear the occasional whisper of my passing thoughts amid the constant din of the Link News.

My gaze settled back on my brother. My emotions were still almost completely dulled by the Link now, but I felt my stomach twist ever so slightly as I watched him. It was a strange mixture of feelings I couldn't sort out—sadness and pain and happiness all at the same time, blinking into sharp focus one moment and then slipping away into Link numbness the next.

The feelings had started only after I started glitching. The word *sibling* had begun to feel like more than just

a word. I imagined looking at Markan and taking his hand, protecting him from harm. It was impossible, I knew. Just one more of the many things I couldn't change. But deep inside I clung to the hope that one day I might see his face light up with the same warmth, the same life, that I had drawn on his face this morning.

* * *

Market Corridor. The hub of our underground city. The subway train had stopped with a hiss of brakes, exchanging passengers promptly every quarter hour. I breathed in and looked around me. It was overcrowded as always, but subjects entered and exited the train in evenly spaced, perfect lines. Order first, order always. Light green schematics and readouts laced the edges of my vision, analyzing measurements and quantities. I exited the subway, turned eighty degrees, and moved twenty paces toward the Bread Supplement Dispensary line.

The Corridor was an expansive tunnel with high, rounded gray ceilings that echoed with the methodical sound of shoes on pavement and the high trills of machinery. There was a muffled hum as subjects carried on short, efficient conversations and waved their wrists over ID scanners. Dispensaries lined both sides of the Corridor, providing everything a healthy subject could ever need—clothing, toiletries, protein supplements, hard bread, beans, rice, occasional allotments of fresh fruits and vegetables.

I'd let myself fade to gray for the ride here. Individual thoughts had grown hazy around the edges. Unique sights and smells were overcome by a block of unisensory experience. The sliding door of the Link had closed completely. It always did, eventually.

I proceeded to the stack of lightweight collapsible carts and unfolded one, catching a glimpse of dull blue out of the corner of my eye. Several Regulators were stationed against the far wall of the platform. Their hulking forms kept silent watch wherever large numbers of subjects congregated, impossible to miss with their blue coveralls and intimidating bionic additions. For all regular subjects the inserted hardware was discreet, but the Regulators had large, glinting metal plating over their necks and arms for protection. Protection from what, I couldn't say.

I'd never given the Regulators much thought before, but now whenever I glitched I found them terrifying. Maybe it's because they were looking for anomalies, for things out of order. Things like me.

I looked away, my face as blank as those surrounding me. The Regulators scanned the crowd, their heads turning in methodical, measured movements. Their eyes did not follow me when I passed by.

Three rising tones sounded in my head, signaling the start of the Link News. For a few seconds, all subjects froze in place. People stopped midstep, the allotments workers paused with their arms outstretched, holding boxes of food and supplies. Total, hushed silence. The only movement was a fallen bean spinning at a man's feet.

Then, right after the three long tones ended, the movement began again as if it had never stopped. The Link News feed reeled out in mechanic monotone: *Flu 216 vaccinations available next week in local Sector Six dispensary. Continuing water shortages in Sector Three. Chancellor Supreme of Sector Five visits to discuss trade agreements. Beware anomalies: an anomaly observed is an anomaly reported. Order first, order always.*

Anomalies. They were talking about me. Glitching meant something was broken inside me. I'd remembered seeing other subjects behave anomalously before. One time at the Academy a girl had started screaming uncontrollably, leaking water from her eyes. The Regulators spotted her and dragged her away and she came back the next week in complete working order. Better than new. If I reported myself, they would just fix the anomaly. I should report myself and get f...

Users Review

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Tiara Arnold:

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