



This Perfect World

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Laura Hamley is the woman who has everything - a loving and successful husband, two children, an expensive home and a set of fortunate friends. But Laura's perfect world is suddenly threatened when she receives an unwelcome phone call from Mrs Partridge, mother of Heddy - the girl Laura and her friends bullied mercilessly at school.

This Perfect World Details

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From Reader Review This Perfect World for online ebook

Bookread2day says

I find Suzanne Bugler's novels easy to get into and enjoy reading them all. I thought This perfect World was fab!.

Karen Wickham says

Totally engrossing story. The author has a way of showing people at their worst and digging into so called perfect families to find the lies we tell ourselves.

David Hebblethwaite says

At the age of thirty-six, Laura Hamley lives the life of a stereotypical 'yummy mummy' — married to a successful lawyer, attractive children, yoga classes, paninis and air-kissing and dinner parties with friends. She has attained an aspirational dream of the times, but a phone call threatens to dredge up her past. The caller is Violet Partridge, whose daughter, Heddy, went to school with Laura. Heddy has been placed in a psychiatric institution, and Violet wants to get her released; perhaps Laura, being married to a lawyer, could help? There's a very good reason, however, why Laura doesn't want to get involved: she hated — and bullied — Heddy at school; but, try as she might, Laura can't seem to extricate herself from the situation.

This Perfect World (Suzanne Bugler's first adult novel, following two YA books) is a sharp character study. Bugler paints Laura as someone who's only too aware of the artificiality of the world in which she lives ('Do any of [her friends:] have a skeleton rattling around in their cupboard? [...] We meet, we chat, we think that we are the dearest of friends, but we all keep our cupboard doors firmly shut' [41:]), but clings on to it regardless, for fear of where she might be otherwise — the world she came from, as exemplified by Heddy and Violet Partridge.

I think Bugler spells out Laura's view of her current life rather too much — it becomes clear enough in quite subtle ways, and we don't really need (for example) Laura to reflect ruefully on her vow never to become like *The Stepford Wives*, because we've already understood the point. This is a collective problem, however; individually, Bugler's observations are incisive and striking.

The author also establishes some effective parallels within her narrative. As far as Laura is concerned, Heddy Partridge is a blank screen on which to project her memories; she remembers what she did to her, but has never thought about Heddy as a person in her own right — what matters is that Heddy was, and is, the polar opposite of Laura. So, when Laura learns from Violet that Heddy has been cutting herself — like Laura did as a girl (because that's what her friends did) — she has to consider the uncomfortable possibility that she's closer to Heddy than she thought.

Bugler also skilfully portrays Laura's adult social world — with its social conventions, and boundaries of speech and action that you don't cross — as being every bit as mired in politics and snap judgements as was

the playground. Laura's discontent with her life bubbles under throughout, eventually bubbling over — and the result is a fine novel that stays in the mind afterwards.

Maxine (Booklover Catlady) says

I really enjoyed this book a lot and am eager to read more from this author I have just discovered. **This is a fantastic contemporary women's fiction novel that tackles some uncomfortable themes exceptionally well.**

Laura has a perfect life, or so it seems. The big house, successful husband, lovely children and the "right" group of friends. But Laura hides away a part of herself, from her past that she dare not share with her circle of perfect friends. What would they think!

Heddy is in a mental hospital. Disturbed. Depressed and damaged.

The book explores the childhood connection between these two women but most importantly what happens when their lives cross paths again and Laura's perfect bubble is starting to crack open.

Laura is not an easy character to like but I did by the end of the book. She's damaged and flawed as are many of the characters. The pace is strong and steady and I was eager to read this when I could.

Tackling bullying, mental health issues, the rich/poor class divide and true friendship vs superficial friendships this book has a lot to offer as the story is told from both Laura's childhood days and the here and now.

The weight of guilt is a heavy thing indeed.

This was a perfect read for me as a break from a lot of the darker fiction I read. It's well-written and I loved being immersed in the story. I'm keen to read more from this author. 4 well earned stars!

Nicola says

I was a bit unsure about starting this book, because I wasn't sure if it would really be my kind of thing. However, after only the first page, I was completely captivated.

It was so refreshing and different to read from the point of view of a character who is terribly flawed, yet still be able to empathize with her. Laura is living in a world of French classes for toddlers and play-dates only with the "right kind" of children.

She thinks she has left her past behind her, until the mother of a girl she bullied horribly phones her and asks her to help get her daughter- Heddy- out of a psychiatric hospital. Laura knows she contributed to Heddy's breakdown, yet only agrees to help in order to get Heddy out of her life for good. The story that follows was completely compelling and I loved every second of it. Laura really grows as a character, and I found the stories of her past very intriguing- even if they were a little disturbing.

I loved every minute of this book and would recommend it to anybody.

Danielle says

A quick read, but a FANTASTIC one! So tense and deep, and definitely makes you think about decisions you've made, and how those decisions may have affected people. The topic of bullying at school is a big one here, and so realistic. A really excellent book I thought.

Sarah says

I stumbled across this book while looking for something similar to Sophie Hannah's crime novels (which I love). At first glance it seemed to have the same sort of heroine with a dark past and promised intriguing plot twists. In reality it proved to be very different in style and genre. Despite the dark themes in Sophie Hannah's books, they are ultimately redemptive and have a positive vibe running through them - you know everything will turn out well for the central character in the end, even if a few bodies have piled up along the way, and you definitely know the narrator innocent and one of the good guys.

Not so in this novel - the narrator is a former school bully and the present-day story is punctuated with a recount of some of the despicable things she did to poor Heddy Partridge as a child. I felt deeply uncomfortable reading the early chapters as I was painfully reminded of my own experiences being bullied at school. The narrator's almost total lack of conscious remorse at the start bothered me, not because it makes her an unsympathetic anti-hero (which it does) but because it seems simply unrealistic. Could someone this smart really not appreciate how horrible she was as a child?

The portrayal of Laura's mundane life and vacuous social scene is also relentlessly negative. All the supporting characters seem like grotesque caricatures - but I have been assured by my friends that people like this really do exist - I just move in the wrong social circles so have never met them.

Heddy's lack of a voice also bothered me. She seems to exist only in relation to Laura, a helpful therapy tool to get Laura to face her problems.

Somehow I got sucked into the story though and the unobtrusively smooth writing style and entertainingly dreadful characters kept me entertained. Laura's gradual rebellion was fun to read, although I wish she could have changed more. I expected it to turn into an upbeat chick-lit story about how she completely turned her life around; instead she remained resolutely shallow and self-obsessed, just changing her focus a little. (view spoiler)

Anne says

This Perfect World is a spellbinding read, that draws the reader in from page one. Well written and a fairly quick read but also at times, a very difficult read.

Narrated by Laura, a woman who lives the seemingly perfect life - with the perfect children, husband, house and circle of friends. Her friends are women who are all married to rich men, women who spend their time talking hair, shoes, lunch and judging each other by what they have or do not have. A totally superficial life based on wealth, appearance and greed.

Laura gets a blast from the past when she receives a call from Mrs Partridge. Laura bullied the woman's daughter - Heddy. Bullied her so badly that it is clear that Heddy's life has been formed by her childhood experiences. Heddy is in a psychiatric ward and her Mother wants Laura's help to get her home.

As Laura reflects on her past and the awful things that she did to Heddy, it's clear that underneath the glam exterior she too is a scarred and somewhat damaged woman.

This is a fast flowing read but one that really makes the reader consider the consequences of our actions. How many of us went through our child and teenage years without saying or doing something nasty to another child? How many of us were the victims of bullies?

Psychologically tense with characters that jumped from the pages - I will certainly look out for more work by Suzanne Bugler

Ceri says

This year so far hasn't been a good one for reading, I haven't read a five star book yet so I had high hopes for this book especially as I'd read some great reviews about it. It's a shame to say I was thoroughly disappointed, it wasn't until 250 pages in that the book moved on from the first page. It was very slow paced and seemed to go over the same thing, the main character in the book (Laura) and her friends just seemed to get shallower and blonder as the story went on.

As the book has received some great reviews then I wouldn't say don't read it but don't be surprised if it's a bit of a let down.

Chrissi says

I thought this was a brilliant book. It was hard to read at some points because of the subject matter. I felt for the character Heddy. Great writing and well worth a read.

Andrea says

I can't believe I persevered through all the main character's drivel to come to the 'twist' in the tale of death possibly due to asbestos. A chap that smoked heavily! Oh wow, won't be taking any recommendations for similar novels in future.

Dan says

This was a fantastic book which called back the narrator's memories of childhood bullying, but from the perspective of the perpetrator.

Laura recalls Heddy Partridge's treatment at her hands when Heddy is brought back into her life following a call from her mother.

As Laura questions her actions in childhood, the thin veneer of her seemingly perfect life as a middle-class suburban housewife starts to crumble.

This is a sad and soul-searching tale of bullying, self-harm, guilt and the question of if we can ever make amends for our past actions.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, it's so well written. Laura's guilt and emotional turmoil are perfectly described, and in spite of her despicable actions in childhood, I ended up sympathising with her character to some extent in the end as the full truth is uncovered.

Cleo Bannister says

What a thought-provoking read!

This book is well written and very engaging.

Despite not liking the protagonist Laura at the start of the book it was a compelling read. The stories of life in the playground were uncomfortably realistic as were those of the "school mums." I am sure we all know or have known people like these.

The book is really about the consequences of our actions, Laura has to atone for her actions as a child and in the process questions her current life.

This is not an easy book to read but I was engrossed and wanted to find out why Laura's parents were so keen for the girls to be friends.

Looking forward to the next book by Suzanne Bugler

Chloe Stam says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book - it was well written and it explored nicely the themes of guilt and the emptiness of a materialistic status-seeking and status-maintaining suburban life for women, how it can trap you into convention. It was also nice to read a book that centred on a bully rather than the bullied. The way we actually see very little from the victim's point of view, but in a way that represents life - how often would the bully really see or understand things from the victim's point of view? But when, years after the school yard bullying, how might the adult bully reflect upon their behaviour when the consequences are resented to them?

Fiddlesticks says

I did not expect to like this book. I read it because it was chosen for a book club I belong to. I actually found it incredibly readable - so much so that I read it in one day! And the story told is terribly touching. It is one of those stories that is about being human and being fallible, and about the way that as fallible humans we can do horrible things. Sometimes that we realise are horrible, and sometimes that somehow we manage not to see. As a result, this book is heavily about guilt and about the fronts we put up in life to fit in and to protect ourselves. It is a quick read, and light in writing style - but it is not a light book. It has aspects that could be triggering to some readers, particularly relating to self harm and bullying, which may be important to anyone thinking about recommending it to others!

Amanda says

The long term consequences of childhood cruelty are explored in this very nuanced book. Consequences to the victim yes, but also to the bully. When Laura is reluctantly forced to confront her own past behavior she is horrified by her actions. As she slowly works towards some kind of redemption, she begins to examine everything that makes up her own "perfect life".

I enjoyed this very much. An uncomfortable read at times. The cruelty to "poor Heddy Partridge" was painful to experience, but the slow and steady deconstruction of everything Laura thought was important was so compelling that I couldn't look away. The denouement was very unexpected to me and the note the book ended on was kind of unusual but I think that increased my enjoyment. I'm actually sorry to have finished. I really wanted to know more.

I picked this up in the UK last summer after seeing it everywhere. It needs to be more available in the US.

Jo Barton says

Laura Hamley has everything - a perfect life, good husband, beautiful children and supportive friends, but old memories are reopened when she receives an unexpected phone call from the mother of a girl she once bullied at school. Laura has managed to successfully block from her life all the unpleasantness which was associated with her unusual relationship with Heddy Partridge, but when Heddy's mother asks for Laura's help in getting Heddy released from hospital, Laura must face the hidden demons which have plagued her life for so long.

This is a strange book to enjoy, on the surface it's a rather unpleasant tale of abject misery, brought about by the insecurities of life, and yet it is also one of those stories which compels you to keep reading 'just a little bit more'.

The characterisation is excellent -

I didn't like Laura, she is remarkably flawed, and yet there is an underlying insecurity which reveals itself as the story evolves.

Heddy is a strange and enigmatic character, who lies in isolated splendour in a hospital bed, gloriously obese and incredibly vulnerable.

Mrs Partridge reminded me forcibly of the Dickens character Uriah Heep, on the surface meek and mild, and yet creepily manipulative.

Piece by piece the story of Laura and Heddy's childhood relationship is explored, until long buried secrets are revealed.

Tracy Fenton says

A truly uncomfortable look at childhood bullying and the ripple effects into adulthood. Thought provoking, sad and gripping.

Brigitte says

Zeer aangrijpend verhaal over een vrouw die in een elitair en uiterst oppervlakkig wereldje van "ons seurt mensen" leeft en dat wereldje in ziet storten als zij plotseling weer in aanraking komt met haar verleden door een vrouw die zij in haar jeugd op afschuwelijke en wrede wijze gepest heeft.

Kim says

This is a book about childhood bullying written from the bully's perspective. Laura and her friends made Heddy's life a nightmare- but her father continued to insist that she accompany Heddy to ballet and brownies.

Out of the blue Heddy's mum calls her and asks for her help. Heddy has suffered a breakdown and is in hospital. She wants Laura's help to get her home again. She reluctantly gets drawn in- and reveals images of the past. Her seemingly perfect world begins to unravel and the 'friends' she has drawn away.

It was very well written- but such a sensitive subject. You don't feel sorry for Laura- because she's living a very superficial life and is still the sort of person who has the malicious thoughts about people who don't fit into the 'perfect' mould.
