



People Like Us

Dana Mele

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"Mean Girls meets Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* with a little bit of Riverdale mixed in. So yeah, it's epic."--*HelloGiggles*

"In *People Like Us*, Dana Mele delivers the Gossip Girl meets Pretty Little Liars young adult novel you've been waiting for."--*Bustle*

Kay Donovan may have skeletons in her closet, but the past is past, and she's reinvented herself entirely. Now she's a star soccer player whose group of gorgeous friends run their private school with effortless popularity and acerbic wit. But when a girl's body is found in the lake, Kay's carefully constructed life begins to topple. The dead girl has left Kay a computer-coded scavenger hunt, which, as it unravels, begins to implicate suspect after suspect, until Kay herself is in the crosshairs of a murder investigation. But if Kay's finally backed into a corner, she'll do what it takes to survive. Because at Bates Academy, the truth is something you make...not something that happened.

Debut author Dana Mele has written a taut, sophisticated suspense novel that will keep readers guessing until the very end.

People Like Us Details

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Author : Dana Mele

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From Reader Review People Like Us for online ebook

Melanie (TBR and Beyond) says

Wow, I just rated a YA thriller five stars! This was fantastic!

Even though Dana is visiting my book group later this month, this is 100% my honest opinion. This was fun! This is what I wanted *One of Us is Lying* to be. Give me more of this in the YA thriller/mystery genre.

Although I've read many thrillers/horror/mystery in the YA category - I've also bitched and moaned about how little the categories have to offer in YA. I've been clinging to hope that we'll start getting solid entries and we've slowly started to get some I believe and this book is no exception. I was sold almost from the minute I started. I found myself constantly shocked at all these girls behavior, but in the best way possible. Our main character Kay is one of the more popular girls - she isn't a nice person by any stretch of the imagination and she is perfectly ok with that. When Kay and her group of friends find a dead girl while partying, things get crazy FAST.

I'm going to be really vague with this review because this is one where you want all the twists and turns to be revealed as you're reading. I mean what would be the point otherwise? My favorite thing about this book is that there are no red herrings, everyone was suspect but for actual legitimate reasons. All these girls have done very questionable things that would get them on that suspect list. No one is accused for no good reason. Also, all the characters get developed - they aren't one-dimensional but they aren't exactly likeable most of the time either. It's very well put together. I did guess the ending but it didn't take any enjoyment away - I wanted to see it all play out. It also took me at least halfway to even begin to have a clue what was going on. Usually within the first few chapters I have it all figured out.

I would highly recommend this book if you want a great binge read. Go read it now! Tell me what you thought!

Amelia says

This book was so hard to put down!!

It is one of those books where you get hooked in on the first chapter and all you want to do is continue reading it just to find out what happens next.

Something I love about it was the range of diverse characters. We have characters who are from the lgbtq+ community and characters of different ethnicity. A lot of YA books don't have this representation so it was good to see this.

I also liked seeing the bullying aspect of students lives and seeing some of the effects bullying can have on people. This doesn't get spoken about in most YA books so I loved seeing this story be told to young readers.

Highly recommend this enjoyable read!

Elise (TheBookishActress) says

Okay, I knew. I knew going into this that I was going to enjoy it. But I was not actually really expecting this to be one of my favorite YA suspense novels of all time. But I swear to god Dana Mele could have been looking into my brain's idea of a perfect YA thriller and STILL would have nailed it. ya girl just read and adored an arc of the **fucked up sapphic mean girls book** and is *officially* living life to the fullest.

People Like Us is a thriller driven first and foremost by **character dynamics**. Most of which are either vaguely twisted and/or vaguely gay. It's almost a love triangle, but it's also... not. It's more like a twisted web of character dynamics that just got me more and more enthralled. It's a book where everyone is holding secrets, everyone has something up their sleeve. And thankfully, **that is exactly my genre of thriller**.

While the characters felt occasionally hard to keep track of at the beginning of the book, it's hard to overstate how much the character focus helped my reading experience – **there were so many possible suspects and motives that I had no clue who it could be**. And even better, literally no character in this book feels totally flat; even very minor side characters are given sympathetic moments that they wouldn't get in any other book. I've seen several reviews criticizing the fact that all of these characters are pretty awful people, and... well, they're not wrong. But for me, **these characters were interesting and sympathetic, despite some of their awful deeds**.

Something I definitely noticed was just how well Kay's narration fit her characterization. Kay's voice is very engaged with the situation, yet she is strangely cold and undramatic in her telling. No moment was given more drama than it warranted, creating a situation in which the audience simply must process the sheer gravity of what is occurring. And it completely fits Kay's personality - I don't even know how to explain it, but her narration fit *her* so perfectly. I got so attached to her by the end.

Something I *really* liked about this is that it's essentially set in a world where being sapphic is totally normalized - there's not even any angst over unrequited crush on a straight best friend. I'm sure someone will be upset by the lack of labels, but for me the book felt like a breath of fresh air. I loved that Kay's crush on Bri isn't the main plot point, but is still a major factor. Even that love-triangle-with-boy-and-girl thing couldn't bother me in the totally normative space of this book - it is written so perfectly and not at *all* as a sexuality crisis. No character is bothered by Kay or Bri or any other character being sapphic. This is everything I've ever wanted: a queer girl thriller where the drama isn't that they're queer. Come on, you have to admit that's awesome. You *have* to.

Something that struck me a lot about this book is that there's no red herring; **it's just a slow buildup to a final reveal**. And while the reveal isn't actually the *most* shocking thing I've read in my whole life, it still surprised me. Which is a really hard to do after a long life reading thrillers, but just to reiterate: this really was not your typical YA thriller on a lot of levels. And even if it had been, **it's not the who that impressed me - it's the why**. I didn't guess the who, either - couldn't pin my guess down - but I *really* did not guess the why.

I've been thinking about why the reveal stayed with me so well, and I think it's because **I genuinely didn't want any of these characters to be the killer**. I knew one had to be. Of course. But I felt genuinely attached to these awful, terrible characters. That's another thing sticking with me as I finish this book – *People Like Us* could have survived off its reveal alone or its characters alone, but Dana Mele chose to go further, to pull off both. **It's an achievement worth reading this book for**.

→ *elise nitpicks her faves* ←

Very minor spoiler, but tagged anyway: (view spoiler). And major TWs: (view spoiler).

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Laura says

It's the sort of thing that bugs you after someone dies. You remember little ways you wronged them. Even if they deserved it.

This is exactly what I wanted it to be. Different books popped into my mind while reading..among them: Dangerous Girls, Pretty Little Liars, Allegedly. These have always been my favorite kind of YA books. I can't help it. I live for a thriller. And there is just something about murder mysteries and mean girls that go hand in hand. It just works. Fill them with twists and unlikable characters...I am here for it.

Kay Donovan reinvented herself when she came to Bates Academy, an all-girls boarding school. She left everything from before behind. No one has to ever know about how she lost her best friend and brother. Kay became the cool, mean girl who everyone wants to be friends with. She's captain of the soccer team and ringleader of her friend group - the type of group that thinks they're funny coming up with witty insults about everyone around them and doesn't think about how anything makes other people feel.

"I can't believe she hurt you that bad and you never said anything."

Well, the story starts with a tradition..skinny dipping in the lake after the Skeleton Dance. Only it doesn't go as it usually does. Kay's best friend Brie jumps in first only to discover a body. If only they knew this was only the beginning...

The next day, an email shows up in Kay's inbox from the dead girl. It is blackmail. If Kay doesn't complete each item on a list, her secret & proof of her crime will be sent to her parents, the police and every student at Bates. What's interesting is the list just leads to more secrets and lies and puts Kay in a position to hurt her friends.

And a whole string of secrets and investigating and hookups ensues. Something I really loved is how there wasn't just one mystery to the story. There is who killed Jessica, of course. But also, who is blackmailing Kay? What is the secret Kay has about what she did in the past? & I accumulated a few other mini-mysteries as they were introduced, but mentioning here would be pure spoilers. I enjoyed figuring out all the bits and pieces along the way. I also really liked figuring out the dynamics of Kay's friend group with Tai, Tricia, Maddy, Brie and Cori. There's something about female friendships that can be so twisted and messed up, but still completely fascinating and even relatable. I enjoyed the psychology of it all.

Does someone who does one bad thing, even one really bad thing, deserve bad things to happen to them? Deserve to be murdered or framed for murder?

Oh and did I mention that most characters in the novel appear to be sexually fluid. It's not explicitly discussed with labels, which I am 100% on board for and wish more books would take note. It's normalized and no one is bothered by what gender you're having sex with or want to have sex with. It just is.

I can't go without mentioning that I was super annoyed for the Game of Thrones spoilers. Thanks. Because I have been saving the show for an epic binge later & I dodge spoilers like a boss. But it's a bit difficult when you put them IN A BOOK that has nothing to do with GOT, by the way.

There were a couple minor plot-holes in question that weren't actually that big of a deal in the grand scheme of things. (Do not click the spoiler tag or you're asking for spoilers. This should be read AFTER finishing the book). I did however want elaboration on (view spoiler) Even if you figure out some things along the way, it's still a fun, wild ride. I put together the who, but couldn't for the life of me figure out the why leaving me still thinking it could be other people too. Oh, and I really liked that extra final reveal.

The writing is sharp and beautiful. I actually tried to take my time to appreciate the gorgeous descriptions among the binge-worthy mystery. It's official: Dana Mele is on my radar.

I can already foresee the *Riverdale* and *Thirteen Reasons Why* comparisons on top of the YA books I mentioned above, but honestly this hit that sweet spot for me. If you enjoy any of the aforementioned shows or book, or just love a good YA mystery, this isn't one to miss.

Carol (Bookaria) says

Ever since I read *One of Us is Lying*, I've been looking for another YA suspenseful read and this one fit the bill.

Going in I figured out the culprit but that didn't diminish my enjoyment one bit, I really had a good time with this book. The characters are compelling and complex. There is LBGTQ representation and lots of boarding school drama and murder to keep things interesting.

The story takes places (mostly) in a boarding school and it is told from the point of view of one character. You might enjoy this book if you liked *One of Us is Lying* or *We Were Liars*.

Overall, this book was entertaining and fun (in a murderous sort of way), I recommend it to readers of YA, thrillers, and contemporary fiction.

Stacee says

That cover and the synopsis were like a dream come true. Boarding school murder scavenger hunt? Count me in. Sadly it was meh.

Kay was okay? And yes that's a question. She did have some redeeming qualities and mostly it was that she's ambitious. Yet as the story progressed, she became the sort of character I struggle with. I didn't like the choices she made or the way she treated people. There are a lot of other characters, but it didn't feel like we got to know them. Perhaps it was a way to show how closed off Kay really was.

Plot wise it was booooooooring. Even when things started happening, nothing really happened. And when it came to the reveal and reason for all things, it was a let down and dare I say, stupid. (view spoiler)

Overall, it was an awesome idea. I loved the creativity of the website and poetry. And the gay/bisexual rep was nice to see {even if some of these characters acted like sociopaths}. Ultimately, the story lacked tension

and a sense of urgency that I was expecting.

****Huge thanks to GP Putnam's Sons for providing the arc free of charge****

Dahlia says

This was a motherfluffin' WHIRLWIND. I would've happily taken it a hundred pages longer and some of the stuff slowed down and explored, but like, I wanted a gay Mean Girls book and this *delivered*. There's something to the comps to *Pretty Little Liars* and *13 Reasons Why* in an obvious way, but for those who are really into these kind of books and looking for less generic ones, I'd say this is for the more Abigail Haas/Stephanie Kuehn corner of psych thriller fandom, aka my favorite corner. *pets ARC* *thanks publisher for it*

Trina (Between Chapters) says

A copy of the print book was provided to me by the publisher without a review obligation. I listened to the audio format instead and all opinions are my own.

I predicted a big element of the mystery but still enjoyed this! I was never bored. I enjoyed the pacing, atmosphere, and the main character's arc. Loved the revenge blog/scavenger hunt aspect. A pretty solid mystery, would recommend.

Didn't hear anything about the representation before picking this up so I want to point out that the main character is bi (probably, labels aren't used) and there are two wlw side characters as well.

may ↗ says

as someone who is thoroughly afraid but also in awe of thrillers, THIS IS SO GOOD

like I kind of guessed the murderer? but then I also had other suspects as well? and then add to the boarding school aesthetic + mean girls + character arc + queer girls and this was AMAZING

Lola says

I am obsessed with boarding school stories. Probably because I never went to such a school myself and am having so much fun living vicariously through these characters.

Lucky characters. I mean, I go to university, but I'm not in a dorm, so I've truly never experienced anything that even comes close to living with my classmates.

Though after finishing PEOPLE LIKE US, I think maybe it's a good thing that I'm staying far away from these kinds of places.

Imagine you're living with, let's say, five hundred other teenagers. From the amount of crimes committed today, it's possible at least one is or will become a pathological killer. Unfortunately for Kay Donovan, that pathological killer has come in contact with her and wants her to ruin the lives of her friends.

It's a sick game. Kay doesn't have a choice, because she herself has some secrets she'd rather people didn't know about, and the police already suspects her for the death of Jessica Lane. So she plays the game, and gets other people, as well as herself, burned.

Kay Donovan never hides that she's an unreliable character. It takes time for her to give us detail about her past, and more often than not those details are confusing, but at least she's not pretending she is totally innocent.

I've read better YA mysteries and boarding school tales – give PREP SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL a try! – but this is an engaging story regardless. I personally prefer my mystery heroines to not be innocent or naïve, since they must be smart and have enough grit to want to solve the case in the first place and not just wait for things to happen to them. Kay shows those qualities.

A little too focused upon relationships and surely it could have been shortened, but I liked that as readers we didn't know if the murder was premeditated or a crime of passion.

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Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

“We should definitely be nicer to people. You should think about that.”

“Nice is subjective.”

If your reaction to a “Mean Girls” type of story is

Then we probably shouldn't be friends. Just kidding. Maybe. Whatever. At minimum you probably don't want to read this book. I obviously **lurrrrrvvvvvv** mean girls stories so I wanted this as soon as I saw the title and cover. Oh those private school uniforms. You just **know** all the characters are going to be twats!!!!

The story here is about Kay, or as my brain liked to call her

And her fellow In Crowd who happen to discover a dead body in the lake near campus. The slit wrists and floating corpse would make one think it was a case of suicide, but when ~~mmm~~Kay receives an e-mail threatening to out her sins of the past unless she follows the instructions contained in a website link, things get a little grey and **everyone** might be a suspect.

At some point this was popping up for me (even though I already had the sucka on hold at the library) as a “Recommended To You” selection because I enjoyed One Of Us Is Lying. Much to my surprise, that

comparison isn't half bad, actually. I really did have a fun time with both books. *Lying* due to *The Breakfast Club* similarities and *People Like Us* for the ~~beat-to-death~~ aforementioned *Mean Girls*. I'm telling you, I don't think I'll ever get tired of these little bitches. Especially the rich ones. Oh how they go from this

To this

In a nanosecond.

Once again I did know what was going on way early: **DO NOT CLICK IF YOU DON'T WANT SPOILED!!!!**

(view spoiler)

Even the old superbadaful stuff that was going to come back to life wasn't a shocker

(view spoiler)

That one ended up being not *quite* as bad as ~~my demented mind~~ I thought it would be since this was a YA story.

The good news was it didn't even matter because I was having such a good time

"So. Are we finally going to trust each other?"

"Trust is a strong word."

"Fair enough. We'll keep things casual with a side of paranoia."

4 Stars. Until next time

Lala Books and Lala says

great writing and pacing, sooo entertaining, weak ending

Kathryn says

People trust people who are like them.

People Like Us by Dana Mele. . . . oh, what to say about this book that could ever do it justice?! Seriously, words fail me. **I just fucking LOVE this novel. LOVE. IT. Like buy-every-copy-available-and-force-all-my-friends-to-read-it LOVE.** Can my review just end here? No? Well, I guess I should tell you what it's

about....

Actually, the premise isn't my fave. There's my one criticism about this book. **The blurb just doesn't fully convey the story's brilliance.** But here you go, the premise as written on the inner flap: *Kay Donovan may have skeletons in her closet, but the past is past, and she's reinvented herself entirely. Now she's a star soccer player whose group of gorgeous friends run their private school with effortless popularity and acerbic wit. But when a girl's body is found in the lake, Kay's carefully constructed life begins to topple. The dead girl has left Kay a computer-coded scavenger hunt, which, as it unravels, begins to implicate suspect after suspect, until Kay herself is in the crosshairs of a murder investigation. But if Kay's finally backed into a corner, she'll do what it takes to survive. Because at Bates Academy, the truth is something you make...not something that happened.*

So *People Like Us* sounds like a *Pretty Little Liars* knockoff. It's not. **Well, it is if *Pretty Little Liars* were written by Donna Tartt or Tana French.** Basically, it's what *Pretty Little Liars* *should* have been. A **snarky, spot-on commentary of adolescence in the internet age.** The computer-coded scavenger hunt is actually a revenge website set-up by the dead girl to take down Kay's inner circle. Like a cyber-version of *A*, Kay is forced to reveal her friend's most intimate details or her own secret shame will be revealed. To the entire school. Essentially, **it's kill or be killed and Kay's a born predator.**

Now, you may say that the above description may sound like standard mystery fare. But oh, how wrong you would be. *People Like Us* is so much more than a mystery. It's more than just another Mean Girls redux. It's a **savage dissection of high school in the 21st century. Of what it's like to be a teenager when your entire life can be dismantled by the click of a mouse or the tap of a finger.** *People Like Us* is just.... **GENIUS.** Dialogue is razor sharp, characters exquisitely crafted, writing on point. But what makes *People Like Us* so much **better than the average bear are the universal truths it exposes:**

Hands are the biggest obstacle. There's nothing for them to do. It was the hardest part of picking up soccer. My reflex was to grab at the ball, protect my face, flail. Hands are too much a part of us. They give us away.

People Like Us reaches into the recesses of your brain, picks out your innermost thoughts, and records them for posterity. The musings that are so accurate to life, but never verbalized. Because of this, the **elite prep school setting and Gucci-clad characters, become relatable.** A feat that many books with similarly exclusive surroundings fail to do.

There are self-preserving lies and there are anesthetic lies.

Characters are further made accessible by their complexity. Stereotypical villains are rendered sympathetic. "Nice" characters aren't always so nice. Sexuality is fluid. In other words, *People Like Us* **features HUMANS. People with foibles, quirks, and intricacies. Teenagers in all their bright, shiny hormone-laden glory.** And those characters elevate *People Like Us* from *Pretty Little Liars* knock-off to perhaps **one of the best books written about teenagers this decade.**

Summary: If you haven't already surmised: **READ. THIS. BOOK.** But give yourself a good window of time because you won't want to put it down. Actually you won't be able to. It's that compelling.

Larry H says

I'm about 3.5 stars here.

"Does someone who does one bad thing, even one really bad thing, deserve bad things to happen to them? Deserve to be murdered or framed for murder?"

Kay Donovan wanted a chance to reinvent herself after a pair of tragedies marred her life and tore apart her family. She gets that chance by attending exclusive Bates Academy.

Although she is on an athletic scholarship, which sets her apart from her incredibly rich classmates, she becomes a star soccer player and part of the school's most exclusive clique. These girls are notorious for their cruelty, and while everyone wants to be their friend, it's more out of fear than popularity.

"You can get away with murder if you're lucky. You don't even have to be smart. Just have a social or political one up on everyone else. People look the other way if they want to. Everybody knows it."

One night before a ritual post-party swim, the girls make a horrifying discovery: the lifeless body of a fellow student. No one seems to know who she was, but it's not long before they all become suspects in her murder, especially Kay.

Then it turns out that the dead girl got her revenge, as she created an online scavenger hunt-of sorts for Kay, forcing her to expose her friends. At the same time, her new friendship with a girl they once ridiculed is causing a rift between Kay and her best friend, Brie, and making everyone around her suspect she had a hand in the girl's death.

While trying to solve the challenges the dead girl has given her, Kay has to come to terms with the betrayal of those she cares about, and figure out whom she can trust. But more than that, she has to decide who she is, and whether she's ready to come to terms with the destruction she's caused.

Dana Mele's *People Like Us* strives to be a cross between *Mean Girls* and *Heathers* , with a little bit of Karen McManus' *One of Us is Lying* , with mixed results. Mele tells a good story, and throws in lots of twists so you're not sure which characters to trust. I also liked that the characters' sexuality was presented in a matter-of-fact way.

The problem I had with this book is that none of the characters were sympathetic, especially Kay. That made it difficult to get fully immersed in the story. I also was a little disappointed with the way some of the plot was resolved, because I felt with all of the possible solutions Mele had, this was a bit of a cop-out.

In the end, however, this was an entertaining read, and I think it would make a fun movie.

Zoe Wilson (yerabooknerdzoe) says

I really liked this one! I had an inkling about who the killer was near the beginning of the book, but I did not expect the reasoning behind it at all! I also didn't suspect how fucked up Kay's secret was.

While I did enjoy *People Like Us* , it wasn't a 5-star book for me. I loved the mystery and the twists, but I just didn't really care about the characters that much. Nothing about them stood out to me, and some seemed like they'd play a bigger part and then were never heard from again.

All in all, though, I was pleasantly surprised by this book.
