



## **Wicked!**

*Jilly Cooper*

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At Bagley Hall, a notoriously wild, but increasingly academic, independent, crammed with the children of the famous, trouble is afoot. The ambitious and fatally attractive headmaster, Hengist Brett-Taylor, hatches a plan to share the facilities of his school with Larkminster Comprehensive - known locally, as 'Larks'. His reasons for doing so are purely financial, but he is encouraged by the opportunities the scheme gives him for frequent meetings with Janna Curtis, the dynamic new head of Larks, who has been drafted in to save what is a fast-sinking school from closure. Janna is young, pretty, enthusiastic and vastly brave - and she will do anything to rescue her demoralised, run-down and cash-strapped school.

Neither parents nor staff of either school are too keen on this radical move, although some can see the possible financial advantages. For the students, however, it offers great opportunities to get up to even more mayhem than usual.

## **Wicked! Details**

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Author : Jilly Cooper

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## From Reader Review Wicked! for online ebook

### Dangermousie says

I love I love I love. I gulped it in two days and was so obsessed, I didn't feel like doing anything else. This one takes place over 3-4 years and follows Janna, a young and idealistic head of school, who is given the impossible task of rejuvenating and saving Larkminster School, the school that is for the kids for the British equivalent of the 'projects' - the neglected kids of the large counsel estate. It doesn't help that the board wants her to fail so that they can close the school and sell the land for a pretty penny.

Janna is a complex character - she is smart, dedicated and infinitely caring, but she also has a disastrous temper and a weakness for married men. One of these married men is Hengist Brett-Taylor, the head of Bagley, the infinitely posh and expensive private school. Driven in part by idealism and in part by Janna's charms, Hengist offers to merge the schools for certain activities and that unleashes all sorts of things. Once again, this has a cast of thousands - the adults include Emlyn, the hunky Welsh teacher/rugby coach; the horrifying Randal Stancombe, who is a ruthless developer; Lily and the Brigadier, Janna's elderly but awesome neighbors; Alex and Poppet Bruce, the second-in-command at Bagley and his wife, who are straight out of Dickens in their awfulness.

The kids include the awful, borderline sociopath Cosmo Rannaldini who is, nonetheless, very entertaining, and his thuggish 'bodyguards'; the gorgeous Bianca Campbell-Black who is the darling of her posh school but is utterly smitten by 'Feral' (no, thank God, it's only a nickname), a kid from the projects with a junkie mother and dyslexia, but utter genius at sports; the bitchy queen bee Jade Stancombe; Pearl, who is amazing at make-up and fashion but shoplifts and cuts herself; Kylie Rose, who's had her first kid at 12; Xavier Campbell-Black, bullied and sullen but who finds himself; and my favorites, Paris Alvaston and Dora Belvedon - Dora being the youngest offspring of a doting (but dead) father and a horrible bitch of a mother. Dora supplements her income by selling things to tabloids, she smuggled her dog to school, and she is hopelessly in love with Paris Alvaston, who has been brought up in various orphanages and has no idea who his parents are (and who would so be my obsessive crush if I read this book at 16). Paris is obsessed with books and is actually incredibly smart, plus good-looking enough to have even the posh girls at Bagley swooning. However, he also has about a metric ton of issues about trust, opening up and affection. He's also coping with some awful stuff but to say more would be spoilery...We also get to see more of Rupert and Taggie (still in love after 20 years, yay!) and their brood and I won't say more except for AWWWWWWWW.

But I must put in a warning - this is, in some ways, a lot darker than her other books - the kids are having underage sex and doing drugs galore, and there is a subplot about child molesters. Doesn't bother me, but MMV though I confess I had to age up all the kids a couple of years in my head, no matter what JC kept telling me about their ages, because I am not going to buy a 12-yr-old selling stories to tabloids, and while I am willing to buy people finding their 'forever love' at a young age, surely three couples doing so is stretching it a bit. But I don't care, even with that, and JC's lack of understanding of tattoos (if you get one at age 10, even supposing you could find someone to give it to you, which seeing it's the slums, you may, by the time you hit 16 and are 6' tall, your tattoo is going to be bent out of all recognition, no matter where it is. I know it's a big plot point, but still, give the guy a mole or something instead) because it's so awesome, I love it anyway because it's so entertaining and emo and hits all the right notes and gives me a ton of ships - Janna/Emlyn, Dora/Paris, even Bianca/Feral.

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## **Katrina says**

This was the first book of its kind that I read, which was, perhaps, a mistake. I found the majority of the characters unlikeable and rather pompous. The fact that they were constantly quoting Shakespeare and other authors (Marlowe on one occasion, which almost made up for it) really irritating me and made the characters seem fake - but perhaps they were supposed to sound fake.

I was frustrated while reading the book, and just wanted to shove the characters in place. Most of the romances between characters seemed flimsy - even those romances that were supposed to be successful.

However, aside from the characters being unlikeable, they were well developed and on rare occasions entertaining. It was obvious which characters the reader was supposed to like and which ones the reader was supposed to loathe. The characters were often well connected, which goes together with them being well developed, I suppose.

On most occasions, the side-plots were all well connected, but a few of them seemed to go a bit overboard. I didn't feel like much was accomplished at the end of the novel, and found it painfully predictable in most parts.

The writing itself was quite a success, and it was not the type of writing that was frustrating to read. It rarely seemed like she was trying too hard to sound artsy, except when the characters were quoting every dead, white, male author under the sun. It was simple and fluffy, but not simple to the point of being boring.

I can understand *why* people would like this novel, but it is simply not the type of novel that I like. It was a painful read by the end, but was entertaining for the first 400 pages, until it just grew tiring.

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## **Amanda Jane says**

I don't make a habit of listing books specifically to say I didn't like them. This is one of the few exceptions.

My major ( and it is MAJOR ) bug bear, is the character of Rocky, a pupil at Lark-hill comp.

I have a son with Autism so I'm always pleased when I hear that a writer has included a character with the condition.

I usually enjoy a Jilly Cooper, but this time I'm sad to say I was tempted to throw the book through the window.

Firstly we're told that Autism and ADHD are names for the same condition.

No,no, no !!! The two conditions can come together, but they are different. It infuriates me that this error was allowed to remain in the finished book.

Worse was the fact that to my eyes Rocky was not a character, but a caricature. I could identify no reason he was in the story, other than to provide, cheap and frankly cruel laughs.

Yes those with Autism can have some odd ways (my son included) but their adorable quirkiness, and the ways in which we can learn to live with, and love them should provide a much gentler humour than this.

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## Tracy says

I'm not even going to rate it. Knew it was going to be an "iffy" as soon as I opened the book and saw the list of characters. Any book that feels the need to list pages and pages of characters has got me worried straight away. After three chapters fast forwarded through other chapters towards the end, glimpsed child abuse and rape together with the most ridiculous names I've ever come across (even for the English) and couldn't be bothered with the remaining 650+ pages that were left. Usually like Jilly Cooper but not this time

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## Karen says

This is one of the best of the books in the Rutshire Chronicles. After the previous book, Pandora, which I thought was the weakest in the series, this was a welcome change. The story is of two different schools, the public Larkshire High and the private Bagley Hall. The story concerns how the two schools differ due in part to the economic disparity of the students, Bagley's students come from privileged backgrounds where the Lark students live in the "inner city," many have with parents with substance abuse problems. In spite of their differences the adults and students have a lot of interaction with one another and that's where the fun begins. As is the case with most Cooper novels, the interaction produces lots of scandal, family drama, and of course romance.

Cooper fans will like this novel because the children of the adults that are featured in her other novels including Rupert Campbell-Black, Anthea Belevdon, Dame Hermione and many others, play starring roles. These are the children whose birth and young childhood we've read about in other novels, but now we get to see how they get into as much trouble as their parents. Note to readers outside of England: Cooper writes a lot about GCSE exams in this book, while these exams are foreign to many, a quick search on Google will explain their significance.

I highly recommend this to fans of Cooper. However, readers new to Cooper should start with Riders, the first book in the Rutshire Chronicles and read them in order. While each book in the series can be read as a stand alone novel reading them in order will allow you to follow the development of the characters and surrounding area as it develops. This makes the a great series of novels more enjoyable than they already are, so read them all and have fun.

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## Arlene says

I plowed through this book, at times trying to figure out what was going on. Some of this I attribute to the fact that I really don't know anything about the English education system or country life. Once I got into it, I found myself crying over the frustrations of Janna Curtis, our heroine, a public school teacher who is brought to Larksminster comp. She arrives to find a crumbling building, out-of-control students, indifferent teachers and little local support. Everywhere she turns, it seems like someone is trying to just shut the place down and a local developer is wanting to bulldoze everything and build a shopping center and high end houses, replacing the low income "estate housing" where her students live. Against these odds, she makes friends with the students and their community and is able to inspire the teachers and hire some new ones who work with her. They team up with another local private school, Bagley Hall to do a wonderful rendition of

Shakespeare. Some of the scenes and happenings are awful and scandal rocks the neighborhood. Will there be a happy ending? Will she find love?

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### **Cathy Ellis says**

What a load of old tripe! Picked this up on audio from the library without realising it was Jilly Cooper. It goes on forever. Has way too many sub plots with the main plot frequently pushed aside and a ridiculous amount of main characters, pretty much all of whom are unconvincing. I constantly found myself thinking "who is she talking about now..."

Cooper is obviously known for her sexual plots but the 16 year old having sex with a teacher was weird and so was the hastily added on plot about child abuse. This was the last thing I was expecting and was not needed.

Can't help but notice that many of the people who rate this book highly state how it gives them a taste of England...um no! Not the England I grew up in!

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### **September Dee says**

A very long, fun and entertaining romp. A great escape for school teachers. Read it while on vacation.

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### **Samantha says**

I normally read "bonkbusters" as a guilty pleasure but this one was just poor. The first problem was it that was waaaaay too long, 1000 pages too long. The second problem was there wasn't enough sex. It takes about 200 pages to get to the first sex scene and it's not that great. Also I didn't care about which teenager was dating another teenager and it got a bit creepy when the pupils started having sex with one of the teachers. I know kids get crushes on their teachers but acting on it is a bit predatory. I also found the ending was a bit rushed, which was ironic in a very long book. If you're looking for a scandalous romp read something by Shirley Conran or Tasmina Perry instead.

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### **Susie says**

Just to clarify... I was made to read this for bookclub. It should be called 'cliche'.

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### **Abi Fuller-gardener says**

I like this book, but there is too much underage sex in it for me. Though it's charming all the same.

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## **Sara says**

Oh dear. It's so long since I've read a Jilly Cooper. It was fun in parts but repetitive with all the couplings going on. Think I won't repeat the experiment.

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## **Kim says**

Wicked indeed! I love the English terms for everything. Smoking fags, old people are wrinkles, snogging. This is awesome , drama, sex, and fun! My kind of book!! I will be looking forward to the next Jilly Cooper book as soon as I put this one down.

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## **Algernon says**

Jilly Cooper fits like a glove into the "guilty pleasures" category. I knew this book, like the ones before, will be formulaic, poorly written, bloated and with soap opera characters whose priorities will be (in approximate order) : sex, booze, partying, sex, food, pets, glamorous locations, sex, clothes, and so on ... For all these grumbles, Cooper retains some of the energy and risque sense of humor that made me pick her in the first place.

Wicked didn't break the mold. A lot of personages from previous books are present and up to their usual antics. The main theme here deals with education, mainly with the tensions between public and private education in the form of two schools in the idyllic location of Cotswold. On one side the privileged, moneyed and decadent offspring of the jet set; on the other the street urchins of a slummy council estate. Compared with other Rutshire adventures, this one is less about hopping from one posh location to another, and more focused on characters. Dealing with teenagers, but unable to tone down the underage drinking and underage sex that made her books popular, Wicked might be more provocative / cringeworthy than other Rutshire installments. Again I felt the writer might be a little tired or blasé and didn't put as much effort in creating some originality. Most of the women are the clingy sort, prone to tears and in need of a dominating male figure with broad shoulders and predatory urges. Most of the males are cads, abusing their consorts and lying through their teeth in order to get them to bed.

The kids are all right, in general, especially the irrepressible Dora - the best thing I got out of this book. The research and the details about the education system are also quite good, and made the journey more palatable.

In conclusion : a typical Jilly Cooper romp, probably not the best starting point for readers unfamiliar with her style, but a decent addition to the shelves of her fans.

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## **Minty McBunny says**

If I had to choose one series to take to a desert island, I would choose Jilly Cooper's Rutshire Chronicles. These books are the absolute epitome of trashy novel, in the best possible way. Wealth, love, sex, murder, mystery, revenge, drama, gorgeous heroes, dastardly villains, triumph, tragedy, excellent dialogue and laugh

out loud funny puns and double entendres, these books have it all. I have read every book in the series to tatters over the years and still enjoy them every single time. I am so excited to receive Mount! in the mail from the UK soon. Jilly never lets me down, she's amazing.

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### **Katrina Southern says**

Well this book is definitely naughty. Full to the brim of saucy situations, dodgy dealings and political scandal. It focuses on a determined, young, newly appointed headmistress to a failing school. She joins with (in more ways than one) the charming headmaster of the local public school in an attempt to build bridges and raise the profile of both schools. The council get involved, rivalry between pupils erupts and chaos ensues. I did enjoy the story of this one but I probably won't read it again. Why? Too many characters! Jilly Cooper helpfully puts a character list at the front of the book and without it I would have been totally lost! Also the ending is somewhat unexpected and shocking and I was a little taken aback by how the seriousness of it was handled. It just felt out of place from the rest of the book.

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### **Fiona says**

This was a charity shop purchase that stood out to me.. My instincts weren't exactly on the money with this one, as I really disliked this book and couldn't stomach ploughing through another 700+ (!! ) pages..

Completely (completely!) absurd and bursting with clichés, I tried to put my reservations to one side and told myself that I had signed up for a big flashy romp.. No. I couldn't justify spending any more time with a book that I found so exasperating. (I didn't even get to the creepy underage stuff, thank goodness)

I'm sure Jilly Cooper's a lovely lady but I'm now extremely wary of reading any of her other books. I guess I'll have to stick to Penny Vincenzi for the glamorous wordy fare.

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### **Frangipani says**

Another splendid page-turner from Jilly Cooper. There are a few bits of child abuse covered therein, which upset me, but were crucial to the plot, having been perpetrated by the "baddies". I was rooting on the side of the "goodies/underdog" all the way through. Cooper lets some familiar characters loose in that familiar GSOH irreverent style and ties it all in at the end with a few Kleenex moments. It's another toffs v. scum-come-good done in an educational setting. If you've read some of Cooper's other books you'll be familiar with the toff school. A thoroughly diverting good read.

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### **DeB MaRtEnS says**

If you enjoy broad satire, have a bit of a clue about the British class system and are open to novels that lead you on goose trails with hijinks and shenanigans all the way to a neatly and delightful ending, you can't do better than Jilly Cooper. Her books are, to use the English expression, "a lark ", filled with high comedy, pretentious snobs, salt of the earth types, love stories, romps, successes and rightful devastation of the



villains in the plot. The plot, however, is always so serpentine that the reader is usually kept guessing until the end. Farcical fun!

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## **Maggie says**

I haven't read any Jilly Cooper in years but when I saw this on Amazon for 99p and that it was set in schools I thought that it was time to give her another go.

The book is very much in the style of her other books, some of which I've read. It is containing some reoccurring characters- interesting to see how some of them have developed over the years. Many of her characters are real caricatures but there are many who really do capture your heart. I did find some of the under age sex rather disturbing. Some of the events were also very far fetched- but then you don't read Jilly Cooper for reality!

This book had me laughing out loud, cringing and reaching for the tissues- there are a couple of bits I found really pulled at the heart strings.

I raced through this book and although in all honesty I couldn't give it five stars I do find myself missing all those 'Wicked' characters!

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