

Wynne Leon (00:01)

Pooja.

P. J. Gudka (00:02)

Hey there guys!

Wynne Leon (00:05)

Vicki and I are so excited to talk to you. just, congratulations on the release of your first novel, Perfect, which is such a great title and we want to talk about that, but we're so excited to talk with you today.

P. J. Gudka (00:19)

Thank you. Thank you both so much for having me on. I am like so excited. I've been fingers crossed like for so long to be on the podcast. I'm so excited. Thank you.

Wynne Leon (00:30)

So good.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (00:31)

Gosh, our pleasure for sure and we loved Perfect.

Wynne Leon (00:36)

So I'm going to read a description part of the description from Amazon. Perfect is an emotionally gripping psychological domestic thriller that explores the impact of dark family secrets and the generational trauma it leads to. It will have readers questioning how well any of us know those we love and how far we're willing to go to protect them.

And it's so, mean, both Vicki and I said this, it's so good. mean, great pacing, captivating plot. We love the characters. But you gotta tell us how you managed the transition from poetry to thriller.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (01:15)

I Yeah.

P. J. Gudka (01:17)

Thank you so much both of you. I'm like I'm so happy to hear that you enjoyed the book that obviously means the world to me like this is my first book so it's you know all nerves like so scared but thank you so much. ~ It was a very weird transition because poetry is so different than a novel but in

Wynne Leon (01:28)

Mm-hmm.

P. J. Gudka (01:38)

The funniest way I feel like poetry was much harder because I wouldn't say poetry is my strong suit. It's just something I enjoy. And the first book was basically just kind of to dip my toes into the publishing world and just see what that's like. So I felt like poetry would be perfect for that. But with the novel, I just have had it in my head for so long that it's felt, it's felt so natural to put out there.

It's just been the most to have so many great reviews and so many people telling me they enjoyed it including you guys like it's just it really Validates all that hard work. It really feels like the effort was really worth it

Wynne Leon (02:20)

So you feel like you lived with this story for a long time. just was, you just had it in the back of your mind or kind of running. Did you keep notes on it or was it just sort of ~ a storyline in your head?

P. J. Gudka (02:32)

No, no notes.

No notes. But yeah, just in my head, I've been thinking about the story. It's changed a lot from when I first thought of it, but I have been thinking about it on and off for a long time, and I've just never been able to sit down and get the entire thing out. So when I was finally able to do it, that felt like getting a weight off my shoulder. I had held onto it for the longest time, so probably years.

Wynne Leon (02:42)

Mm-hmm.

interesting.

Interesting. That's so...

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (03:02)

It felt,

yeah, and it felt like one of the things that Wynne and I really enjoyed is that the characters had a lot of depth. So I'm wondering based on what you just said, Pooja, if you had an idea kind of of the arc of the story, but then because you're a poet, you know, and you're just a beautiful writer, I wonder if some of what happened when you started to write, did you let the characters speak to you a little bit as you got to know them? And that kind of changed some of the

flow in this story? that, am I guessing close?

P. J. Gudka (03:35)

You're absolutely right. ~ I think the characters really felt like their own people to me. And I was doing the writing, but they were the ones like telling me what to write in the funniest way. And it just, I was so connected with them that certain things that I sort of had thought that would definitely be in the book, it just didn't feel right for the character anymore. So there were those changes. There were certain aspects of the character that I never even imagined until I

wrote down ~ everything and it just fell into place and actually this is like a fun little bit about the book but I did not think of the end until I got to the end. had no idea who like you know who the person would be. Yeah I had I felt like at different points of the book I had everyone was a suspect sort of like it could have been anyone in the book so different parts I thought would be different people and then

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (04:04)

Mm-hmm.

Wynne Leon (04:18)

Really?

Wow.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (04:26)

Yeah.

P. J. Gudka (04:32)

I got to the end and I was the person I hadn't even considered while writing the entirety of the book. was like, that's actually perfect.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (04:36)

Yeah.

Wynne Leon (04:39)

That's perfect. That's perfect. And we love your characters. mean, there's this one and because you have this dialogue and description of people that are, as Vicki says, maybe it's your poet's ear, but ~ you just have these great descriptions. one early on, Sally, the mom, gets drawn into a conversation in a grocery store with like gossipy mom. And she says.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (04:40)

Yeah, yeah.

Mm-hmm.

Yeah.

P. J. Gudka (05:02)

Yeah.

Wynne Leon (05:05)

Yeah, I guess so, I responded, trying to figure out a way out of the corner she had literally backed me into. It's like, yes, we've been in that corner before. So did you have inspirations behind your characters? Like people that...

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (05:12)

Yeah.

P. J. Gudka (05:22)

Yeah, absolutely.

Yeah, sorry. Yeah. Yeah, no, I absolutely did. She was like one of my favorite characters to write, because she was just so annoying. And I think we know, like, we've all been in those conversations where we're just dying to leave, or just very, people who are like very aggressive about their behavior. So I was like, this is

Wynne Leon (05:26)

No, no, baby.

P. J. Gudka (05:50)

I thought it would be like a nice break from all the tension like sometimes you need a bit of comedic break. I thought yeah, I think all the characters in a way are like based on people but maybe like much more exaggerated and the three main characters Sally, James and Lily I think those are kind of like

Wynne Leon (05:56)

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (05:58)

Yeah.

P. J. Gudka (06:16)

got from myself. think the reason that the characters are so alive and real because I have been them at one point or the other, obviously not to the greatest extent, but a little bit like with Sally and like her perfectionism and her like struggles with that. can, that was like very inspired by my own journey with the same things. And then with James, like people don't know this about me, but I used to have like a really bad anger problem and

Wynne Leon (06:26)

Mm-hmm.

P. J. Gudka (06:43)

It was difficult to deal with. So a lot of things that James experiences is things that I might have experienced or that ~ I felt like I could relate to. that was inspired by my own journey with my own issues with my anger and just dealing with all that when I was younger. And the same with Lily. A lot of times when we're in difficult situations, it's so easy.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (07:00)

Mm-hmm.

P. J. Gudka (07:09)

to lose our faith and our hope and just go down the worst paths possible. ~ thankfully I moved past that, but a lot of Lily's character is also inspired by things I've gone through when I was younger too.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (07:23)

Yeah, what I love about all of that is that you wrote so well about characters that were, so I like to think of it this way, flawed but functional. And so they all had challenges that made their relationships with themselves difficult, their expectations and things, but then also complicated how they interacted with each other, so much so.

Wynne Leon (07:24)

Hmm.

P. J. Gudka (07:25)

Yeah.

Yeah.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (07:48)

But I like that there there was a lot of dimensionality to that when you wrote about them because they were also redeeming, you know, they weren't bad people, but you could see the struggle that they were going through and like Wynne said that comes from a place and you just, you know, shared that Pooja which is so lovely to hear ~ because I think

That's what makes writing really compelling. And I also think because it's a mystery, it keeps the reader guessing because there are enough flaws in what the characters are revealing that really anyone could have been a suspect. Yeah.

Wynne Leon (08:21)

Right.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

P. J. Gudka (08:26)

Yeah, think

that was like the, for me the biggest goal was to have characters that are not bad people, people who have had circumstances that they're not exactly in control over. for me, like I've always been fascinated by morals and ethics and I always feel like it's really easy to say that you'll be ethical, you'll always be moral and make the right decision. I think when we...

Wynne Leon (08:51)

Mm-hmm.

P. J. Gudka (08:54)

are actually put in that situation, it's very different. Like a lot of us would react in a way that would surprise ourselves. And that's what I wanted with the characters. wanted, you know, the whole point of perfect is to show that like no one is really perfect. I think when we are put in certain situations, none of us react perfectly. None of us, ~ you know, experience the same life either. So it's just like the importance of empathy and

Wynne Leon (09:01)

Mm-hmm.

P. J. Gudka (09:22)

knowing that not everyone is just bad or just good.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (09:23)

you

Wynne Leon (09:26)

Right, right, right. That's such a good point and such a good segue of, in empathy. You are so supportive of other writers. And you especially in the blocking community, and you've just lifted up so many people. So tell us why you think it's so important to have such a community and

why it's worth the time to that encouraging and lifting up others.

P. J. Gudka (09:56)

~ Thank you so much. Yeah, I think I would have to start by saying it's like I think WordPress is one of those places where it's not even just me like so many people are so incredibly supportive of one another like as much as I try to support others I've gotten so much support from others as well including both of you and You know, you can see that by

like how much ~ I've gotten how much support I've gone for this book for my last book for my blog everything even just

things that are going on in my life. So I'm just someone who really, know, for me, blogging and writing has been like a lifesaver. It's like, it feels like this is what I was made to do. This is what I'm here for. So if there's any way I could help someone else, you know, find their voice, find their, ~ you know, be able to get their writing out there even more, I am happy to do it.

Wynne Leon (10:26)
Mm-hmm.

P. J. Gudka (10:50)

Another thing I've noticed, especially with this book, just going on the journey of deciding to publish myself instead of going with the traditional publisher, I think what I've noticed is that these days the whole market is so insanely obsessed with income and just making a profit off writing. But to me, there are so many amazing writers on WordPress. The only reason they don't have best sellers is because

they are not being accepted by traditional publishers and not because their writing is bad, just simply because they don't have maybe the money to get themselves out there or they are not well known in the field already. ~ Or maybe traditional writers just don't want to take a chance, which is what happens a lot. They no longer want to take a chance on people who are talented but might not sell, which I see.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (11:30)
Thank

P. J. Gudka (11:46)

on WordPress all the time, all these incredibly talented writers and I just want to help get their writing out there because they deserve it. Like they're the ones who put in the hard work to write a book. It's like one of the most difficult things you could ever do. So I'm just really happy to be there and like help them get their books out there, get their writing out there. Even if we're not supported by traditional publishers, that doesn't mean we can't like be someone, you know?

That doesn't mean we can't have more readers enjoying our work.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (12:16)
Yeah.

Yeah.

Wynne Leon (12:21)
Right? And even with

traditional publishers, it's hard to make income too. mean, it's not any, it's not a walk in the park. Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (12:24)
Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think what

P. J. Gudka (12:29)
Yeah, yeah that's really true. Yeah.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (12:34)
you're both describing is that thing that's really hard to explain to people that aren't bloggers, what the richness of the community, what it feels like, because people really are very genuine and authentic and we build deep relationships with people.

Wynne Leon (12:40)
Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (12:51)
you know, like pretty quickly because I still say there's no better way to get to know someone than to pay attention to what they write and you know, their heart song and what comes through and but I think it also we were talking before when hit record, it also takes some time, you know, to not only, you know, write Perfect and you know, take the risk and all of that and do the promotion but then you know, when's point is well taken to lift up other authors at the same time.

P. J. Gudka (12:52)
Yeah.

Wynne Leon (13:00)
Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (13:19)
But you do that really well, Pooja think it just injects so much positivity into the community. You have a wonderful following for a good reason.

Wynne Leon (13:29)
Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

P. J. Gudka (13:30)

Thank you so much. Thank you.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (13:31)

Yeah, yeah, but I have to have to say something about

Wynne Leon (13:32)

2-2. 2-2.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (13:36)

characters, right? Is that okay? Okay, so there there are so many lines in this book, you know, and there are lots of things that we love so

P. J. Gudka (13:38)

Of course, yeah.

Wynne Leon (13:39)

Yeah.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (13:46)

you know, the risk taking that's involved in the characters and the development and all of that. But there are two things that really stood out for me. One was you do such a good job with chapter endings and hooks. And when and I were talking about that the other day, like kind of keeping, you know, the readers engaged. And I don't know where that came from for you, but you did that really well, not just in a couple of chapters, but you'd wrap something up and you'd leave us all with like our mouths hanging open going, wait, what?

~

Wynne Leon (14:15)

You

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (14:16)

So that was just amazing. And then the other thing I wanted to call out, there's a character in the book who is Lily's friend. And it's a small thing, but it really, it will stick with me for a long time. Her name was Fiona. And I don't know if you remember this, but you described Fiona as being artsy and androgynous. And she ate a tomato like an apple. And I was like, what? Right? And so I...

P. J. Gudka (14:30)

Yeah.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (14:43)

They're just, it just made me so happy because not only did I see her, but the eating a tomato like an apple, I felt like I knew Fiona just like that. Right? I don't know. So does that make you happy or does that sound weird?

Wynne Leon (14:53)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Thank

P. J. Gudka (14:58)

No, that makes me really, really happy. I think at the end of the day, every writer just wants their characters to be seen. That made me so happy. Thank you. Yeah, I love that character.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (15:02)

Good.

Wynne Leon (15:07)

Yeah.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (15:10)

my gosh, the notes that I was taking,

I was like, it's Fiona again. ~ So I'm going to go out on a limb and say more Fiona, please. Fiona needs her own book. All right? Yeah. I love.

P. J. Gudka (15:17)

Thanks.

Wynne Leon (15:20)

Ha ha ha ha ha ha

P. J. Gudka (15:20)

Yeah, I think so. She's like

one of my favorite characters to write. She's just like that fun, like does not care, does whatever she wants character. And she's actually like so smarter than everyone gives her credit for. So I just wanted to like, yeah, I love her character. She's very fun.

Wynne Leon (15:26)

you

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (15:33)

Yeah. Yeah.

was so good.

But you did the artistry of the writing, never having written in this genre before, like Wynne said, I would never have known that reading it. I was like, this is just Pooja's latest book, not first, right?

Wynne Leon (15:40)
Awesome.

P. J. Gudka (15:52)
Thank you so much.

Wynne Leon (15:53)
Well tell us about the title because Perfect is such a good one word title. Did you know the title all along or did you write your way to it?

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (15:58)
Yes.

Yeah.

P. J. Gudka (16:06)
I think with the title, it's like I'm always drawn to like really short titles mostly because I'm very bad at like coming up with titles and it's sort of I was not thinking of Perfect as the title. I had the word Perfect in the original title that I was gonna make the book and then so much changed with the edits, so much changed with even just writing the first draft.

that title no longer felt appropriate and then I was trying to find out, like figure out what all these characters have in common and I realized that all of them, they are searching for perfectionism and like the perfect life without realizing that that's not possible and it's just something they're all struggling with in different ways.

Wynne Leon (16:37)
Mm.

Okay.

P. J. Gudka (16:56)
And it just felt like the right title. But yeah, I came up with it, I think like halfway through the book, it just felt like the right title.

Wynne Leon (17:03)

Mm.

So good.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (17:06)

Well, and I think it

was also one of the things I really appreciated was the relationship between James's mom and his what we'll just say mom and his dad. don't want to give anything away, he.

in that relationship, he was trying to help her be this perfect mom that she wanted to be. And in doing so, he withheld a lot of information. So I think there were some really interesting nuances about what we do to try and help those that we love maintain this illusion, you know, or this motivation for perfection, even though when we, know for sure it's not really attainable, we still do these dumb things trying to like feed the monster. Right. And so I thought,

That was a really interesting element in their relationship. won't say anything else, but what he was trying to do to help her keep the illusion alive, which really was not helpful.

Wynne Leon (17:59)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So...

P. J. Gudka (18:03)

Yeah, I think that's

what, in my opinion, that's what happens when we are out looking for perfection, right? Like, you're never gonna find perfect, you just become more delusional about it, I guess, like, and people around you just are forced to keep that illusion alive. It's sort of like the perversion of perfection where you go so far with it that you are on the other side and you do a 180 and everything is a mess, you just don't know it.

Wynne Leon (18:14)

Right?

That's

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (18:30)

Ooh,

I love that, the perversion of perfection. Are you a writer by any chance? Hmm. Oh yeah, good idea. Yeah, yeah.

Wynne Leon (18:32)

okay. That is good. Yeah. Yeah. Totally.

P. J. Gudka (18:37)

No, but I'm thinking about getting into it, yeah.

Wynne Leon (18:39)

Hahaha

What's

next on your creative radar?

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (18:46)

Yeah

P. J. Gudka (18:48)

Honestly, I am working on another book, same genre, a little bit different, but yeah, same genre. I've been hearing a lot about maybe a sequel, so it was not something I originally planned to write. I liked where this ended, most people for whatever reason. I'm not one for a happy ending, so well, maybe I shouldn't say that. anyway, I like that it ended in a bit of an my god moment, but... ~

Wynne Leon (19:16)

Mm-hmm.

P. J. Gudka (19:17)

You know, people are interested in sequel, so I will consider it, but right now I'm working on another novel as well, unrelated to this one.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (19:26)

you

Wynne Leon (19:27)

Yay!

I'm so excited. That's awesome. We love hearing that. Yeah. Yeah. Love to hear it.

P. J. Gudka (19:30)

Thank you. Thank you. If I ever finish

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (19:31)

That's hard to do.

P. J. Gudka (19:36)

marketing, I'll get to the next one. Exactly.

Wynne Leon (19:38)

Right, Both are full-time jobs, that's for sure.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (19:39)

Yeah. But it's funny, once you've done this

now, it's kind of like that itch you need to scratch, right? You're like, OK, I did it. But it becomes a little bit of like an adrenaline high that you're like, OK, I did that. What else can I do? Yeah? Yeah.

P. J. Gudka (19:48)

Exactly.

Wynne Leon (19:55)

Mm-hmm.

P. J. Gudka (19:56)

Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

And also you feel like, I can do even better in the next book. Like now I know so much more than when I started. So like, it's like you just want to keep getting better every single time.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (20:01)

Mm-hmm.

Wynne Leon (20:04)

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (20:08)

Yeah. my gosh. What a treat. Well, we highly recommend, highly recommend.

Wynne Leon (20:09)

~ Right, so good. Highly recommend, we're

so, it's so much fun to talk to you. Thank you so much for your time, it's so, so fun.

P. J. Gudka (20:21)

Thank you, this was really great. Thank you. I really appreciate both of you having me on. I love your blogs and very excited to read your book, Vicki. So excited.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (20:30)
Thank you so much. It was

Wynne Leon (20:31)
Good.

Dr. Victoria Atkinson (20:33)
a treat to spend time with you around the globe here. Yeah. So good. Yeah. But all the best. Yes. my gosh. Yeah. But take care of much success. And I know all the details are going to be linked for everyone to kind of dive in because this is one you don't want to miss. Get on board. Thank you.

Wynne Leon (20:36)
Mm-hmm. So true. Covering three time zones. Thank you.

P. J. Gudka (20:37)
Yeah.

Yeah.

Wynne Leon (20:52)
Nope, absolutely, absolutely. Thank you.

P. J. Gudka (20:54)
Thank you.