

Book Information

Title

Perfect World

Creator

Rie Aruga

Format

Print book

Version

Published copy provided by the publisher

Publication date

2020

Length

169 pages

Audience

General (all ages)



Reviewer Information

JJ Pionke

Syracuse University

Critical Review

The Perfect World manga was a critical success in Japan and ran for twelve volumes. Keep in mind that I am a very casual reader of manga, and I approached reading this manga from that position. I am reviewing this from the perspective of someone looking for positive disability representation that is relatable and affirming to disabled people. I am absolutely not looking for inspiration porn. While I recognize that this series is popular, I think that its popularity is due to its focus on the perspectives of the nondisabled heroine as she learns to address her ableism and bring the hero back into heteronormativity.

The ableist attitude of the main female character, Tsugumi Kawana, towards her former high school crush, Itsuki Ayukawa, who is now in a wheelchair, is pretty disgusting. Throughout volume 1, Kawana consistently makes ableist statements based in the medical model of disability, including: expressing surprise that Ayukawa is not only working but also is an architect (as if any disability means an inability to work or live life); that relationships with people with disabilities are significantly more complicated (how? Aren't all relationships complicated?); at one point Kawana literally KIDNAPS Ayukawa in order to force him to apologize to his former girlfriend that he broke up with when he was paralyzed (how on Earth is kidnapping ok?!?!); and so much more. It's clear that Aruga doesn't have much, if any, exposure to actual people with disabilities. The volume consistently falls into stereotypes and reads like inspiration porn.

Surprisingly, given the ableism of other characters, Ayukawa's character comes across as largely reserved and accepting of his disability. He pursued his dream to become an architect. He took up wheelchair basketball. He's living independently. He's got his own problems, of course, but in volume 1 at least, he seems to be a well-adjusted young man. It is Kawana's character, who is the narrator, who consistently expresses ableist attitudes.

Regardless of who is expressing the ableism, the attitudes expressed in *Perfect World* made this book a painful and embarrassing read. As a teaching tool, this book could be useful in terms of playing the "spot the ableism" game, as the ableism is pretty blatant. As a wheelchair user and a person with other disabilities, this book was highly disappointing. Based on the summary blurb, I was hoping for a feel-good narrative that painted disability in a positive light, with a bit of romantic drama to ease the story along. Needless to say, that was not what I read. Maybe it gets better in later volumes, but for the level of aggravation that I experienced in reading volume 1, save yourself the heartache and give this manga a hard pass, especially if you have disabilities.

In sum, this book is
Not recommended