



# Huge

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Life hasn't been easy for Eugene "Huge" Smalls.

Sure, his IQ is off the charts, but that doesn't help much when you're growing up in the 1980s in a dreary New Jersey town where your bad reputation precedes you, the public school system's written you off as a lost cause, and even your own family seems out to get you.

But it's not all bad. Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett have taught Huge everything he needs to know about being a hard-boiled detective . . . and he's just been hired to solve his first case.

What he doesn't realize is that his search for the truth will change everything for him.

## Huge Details

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Author : James W. Fuerst

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## From Reader Review Huge for online ebook

### Mike Dickenson says

I picked up this book from a library and almost didn't read it, but I'm really glad I did. It's a coming of age book with a lot of adult language. Fuerst does a good job of putting us into the mind of a crazy pre-pubescent 12 year old, who makes a lot of bad decisions that keep the tension high and the reader curious. Recommend.

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### Scot says

Excellent first novel by James Fuerst. A great coming of age story that instantly gets into your head and infects you with the voice of Eugene "Huge" Smalls who channels the identities of the classic noir detectives of yore like Marlow and Spade. In fact from the opening paragraph it is hard not to hear the narrator's voice as that of one of the classic black and white movie voiceovers from the 50's. The story was a good mix of those classic detective stories and Mark Haddon's "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time" which for those of you that haven't read it is also a detective story featuring a young boy with a rare glimpse into living life with Asperger's Syndrome. In this case, our hero, Huge, is a 12-year old genius who bottles everything up inside and explodes out of control when it all boils to the top. In and out of therapy, with a best friend who is a stuffed frog, Thrash, who is the only person he can talk to, we get a rare glimpse into the mind of a child with a different disorder, but with similar results. We follow Huge working to solve the case of the perpetrator who painted his Grandma's retirement home sign to say Retarded rather than retirement. Along the way we watch Huge stretch and grow, with set-back after set-back and a host of hilarious characters like Grannie, his client and dementia ridden grandmother, Staci, the girl who thinks everything is okay, Darren, his sister Neecy's stoner boyfriend, or Razor, the middle school bully who lacks brain and control. All of these elements combine to keep you laughing all of the way to the last page. Highly recommend this one to anyone that likes dark humor, mystery, coming-of-age stories, or wants a sneak peak into the mind of mixed-up big-hearted kid and the day to day struggles of life stuck in your head.

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### Autumn says

Kid's 80s summer adventure caper told in the voice of hard boiled detective novel. Also touching coming of age story.

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### Jaime says

First of all, I feel like this novel is a bit mis-characterized. It didn't feel like a YA novel to me (and I do read YA). Instead, it felt like a coming-of-age story with a 12 year old protagonist that is written for adults. Which is perfectly fine! Just not what I expected.

The tone of the novel was a \*little\* bit overdone. Huge (Eugene) is very brash, very angry, and not quite as tough or mature as he thinks he is. It took me a while to convince myself that his speech/actions/thoughts/etc were realistic, but since I am neither an extra-intelligent 12 year old boy, nor have I spoken with one in a few years, they're probably not that far off.

Once you get past all that, what you have is a story about a kid who is lonely. His sister won't hang out with him anymore, his grandmother is becoming senile, his mom works all the time, and the few kids who used to be his friends are no longer allowed to associate with him, since he has a bit of an anger management problem. His solace is found in his stuffed frog, Thrash (a pretty blatant symbolic manifestation of his suppressed rage) and in the classic noir detective novels that his grandmother thrust upon him during his 3 month suspension. Thanks to those novels, he is prone to finding mysteries in the mundane and making more out of situations than what is really there. In the end, this story is about Huge finding his place, and realizing that life doesn't have to be him against the world.

He really did grow on me, and one particular passage struck me as a perfect illustration of Huge.

*"If I ever got out of this, I'd start a new, top-secret journal, which I'd keep in a booby-trapped safe, and I'd compile my own list of pointers or rules that other detectives never told you. And my first rule would be: If you were going out to the woods in homemade ninja shorts after a day of hard rain, you \*always\* had to wear underwear, just in case you fell on your butt, because having to deal with swamp ass for the rest of the night totally sucked. That was a solid first principle — Keep your ass dry — and I wish I'd thought of it earlier because it didn't do me a damn bit of good now."*

So if you like coming of age stories about brash, over-the-top, slightly damaged boys, don't be afraid to pick up this book. And keep your ass dry.

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## Alison says

\*spoilers\*

There's so much to love in this book, and it's hard to really say a lot without more \*SPOILERS\*, so be forewarned. There's the swift pace; the evocation of NJ in the '80s (Manhunt in the mall? there's the best of my junior high experience in 4 words); the unraveling detective plot; the humor (see Thrash; see the final "look out"; and every single reminder that our hero isn't just twelve, isn't just not a professional detective, but also, in fact, a real child, who isn't allowed to use the stove unsupervised); some wonderful women characters (Neecey, Mom, Toots) whom Fuerst develops as complex individuals to a degree far beyond the aims (or abilities?) of many novelists male or female. *Huge* is so much more than a detective story, so much more than a coming of age, and yet, while honoring (and subverting, which is another form of honoring) the conventions of both genres, it seeks to do more: it is profoundly concerned with the problems of how to conduct one's life for the good of oneself and for the good of others, and of how to reconcile the two. Thus, the really beautiful moments like the art class freakout, the introduction of Thrash into Huge's life, the early morning mother-son conversation, Toots during Huge's suspension from school, the McDonald's breakfast and Huge's realization that girls carry baggage too (another thing that many novelists won't or can't do), and the concluding paragraphs.

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## Joan says

Who was this book written for? A coming of age book that might be a young adult tale, but with enough swearing to make the school librarian blush. It's never easy to be a middle schooler, so why did I read this?

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## Will McGee says

I liked this book, and I appreciated how the narrator--Eugene "Genie/Huge" Smalls--thinks he has everything figured out, and his take is as sordid and rotten as anything he's read in a hard-boiled detective novel, but then realizes he doesn't know anything. But there seemed to be an awful lot of loose threads, like those on a pair of cut-off jeans, that dangle noticeably and threaten to unravel and render the cut-offs unwearable. First, there's Thrash, Eugene's stuffed animal "partner" who is introduced so that he seems like a human being but then is revealed somewhat cleverly (I guess, although it was half clever and half confusing) to be a large, embarrassing frog. Sometimes he seems to goad Eugene into doing things he maybe shouldn't, and sometimes he talks Eugene down from doing other things--until the final mission where Eugene leaves him home. So is Thrash Eugene's dark side, his conscience, or a large, embarrassing stuffed frog? Maybe all three? I felt like this wasn't decided--but maybe that's the point, that Eugene doesn't know what Thrash is supposed to be. Then, there's Eugene's older sister Necy. She appears to be loyal and protective in some scenes, but then she appears to be double-crossing and back-stabbing in other scenes. Of course, this is probably due again to Eugene's different takes on things, but add her apparent desire to expose her beautiful, young naked body (not to mention her friend's) to her brother, and I really don't know how to understand her. Then, there are two antagonists, Razor and Tommy, who begin as two separate individuals but midway through only seem to differ in the size of their biceps--but then, a later confession from another character works to distinguish them again. And that scene with the later confession--well, let's just say that Eugene's dreams come true (and then his heart is immediately broken) in a scene that seemed a little too sudden, too rushed, too unbelievable. It all seemed a little too tidy until it all became a little too messy. Finally, some of the 80s references were a little too easy (if it's already been talked to death on I Love the 80s, then no one needs to hear about it again) and a little too off, like when Eugene says he wasn't "on the jazz like Hannibal from The A-Team." Maybe it's me, but I don't ever remember thinking that George Peppard's character ever seemed "on the jazz." But the book is funny, and I guess it's supposed to be about a confusing time in life, and it is, as Booklist describes, a whodunit which turns into a "search for self and sense in a world," so some of the loose ends might be appropriate.

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## Sara says

This book is amazing - but not in a good way. It revolves around a foul-mouthed 12-year-old wannabe detective named Huge, who's hired by his grandma to investigate the mystery of who tagged the sign at her retirement home. The mystery is fun enough, though the resolution to it is underwhelming, and most of the book plodded along awkwardly.

I have absolutely no idea who is the target audience of this book. It's shelved with adult fiction but the main character is 12, and the text is WILDLY inappropriate for the typical crowd that reads about 12 year olds. Actually, I think most people in general would find parts of it wildly inappropriate. Not that I'd recommend this book to anyone, but if I wanted to... who would I even recommend it to?

So many scenes were awkward and uncomfortable, Huge wasn't very believable as a 12 year old, and the writing, although occasionally witty enough to make me smile, did not tell an interesting or realistic enough story to hold my attention. And, certain scenes left me going "ick". Never a good sign. Lots of characters were introduced and scenes were shown without purpose, and much of the book, while purporting to be about the mystery holding the story together, felt completely gratuitous. The more I read, the less I liked, as the bit of charm in the beginning faded away and was replaced by awkwardness and ridiculousness.

I can't believe I actually finished this (though, to be fair, I skimmed a lot of it after a while). I was interested in the mystery, and the funny lines in the beginning that I remembered made me curious enough to read on,

but overall, I didn't enjoy it much. And, like I said before, the resolution to the mystery was a let down. Ho hum. Now, to move on to another book and purge the squicky scenes from this book from my mind!!!

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## Tony says

I'm kind of a sucker for coming-of-age stories written for adults, and this debut fits the bill. Set on the New Jersey shore in 1980-something, we follow 12-year-old Huge (aka Genie, aka Eugene) for a few weeks over the summer between 6th and 7th grade. Thanks to his severe anger management problems, he's got a well-deserved reputation as the meanest (not to mention smallest) kid in his peer group. However, he's also the smartest -- a combination that leads to his utter isolation and hilarious but sad friendship with a stuffed turtle.

Huge finds solace of a sort in classic detective novels pushed on him by his grandmother, and as a result, his first-person narration, and some of his speech, is heavily influenced by noir lingo pioneered by writers like Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. (His pseudo-gumshoe patter gets old pretty quick and I found my eyes gliding over much of it as the book went on.) The role of the outcast but noble private eye so appeals to him, that when a real-life mystery presents itself, he leaps at the chance to play detective. And thus he embarks on the case of the defaced retirement home sign.

As he works the case, we learn more and more about what makes him tick, and how his paranoia further isolates him from others. He's a disturbed little boy, and there's a great deal of tension generated by the question of whether he'll get worse, or be able to get his head straight on his own. As with many underage fictional narrators, he often sounds a good deal more perceptive than his years. Nonetheless, the story does a very nice job of exploring the explosive combination of raging hormones and undeveloped impulse control that can arise in adolescent boys. There's a nice subplot involving a love interest, some decent '80s nostalgia stuff (including a supporting character who speaks in a kind of super-charged Spicoli slangese), and, like the best '80s films, the climax takes place at a party.

Note: This book is just the latest manifestation of a mini-trend in storytelling -- the underage noir. Other examples include the 2004-07 TV series *Veronica Mars*, the excellent 2006 film *Brick*, and the 2008 film *The Assassination of a High School President*.

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## Jill says

Oh, James Fuerst, how you have wronged me!

The character of Genie (aka "Huge") had such potential. A 12-year-old with a filthy mouth, a violent streak, and a checkered past who also happens to love detective novels, is unabashedly "friends" with a stuffed turtle named Thrash, and is fiercely protective of his senile grandmother -- really, what's not to love?

Oh, right. I forgot to mention that he also has some sort of creepy relationship with his sister in which it's okay for them to see each other naked and speak quasi-affectionately about each other's private parts. And in seeking to save the aforementioned sister from the claws of a local hood, he manages to a) get a hand job from the girl of his dreams (beautifully written, I might add), and b) take down his archnemesis with a header to the crotch.

Yeah, this one went downhill *fast*. I kept waiting for Genie -- and Fuerst -- to redeem themselves. Didn't happen. Surprised? No. (And really, how could I be? The voice of reason at the climax of the novel had the

vocabulary of Crush the Sea Turtle from *Finding Nemo*.) But disappointed? Definitely.

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### **Karl says**

Has the world gotten to a place where one should assume a book is full of profanity and vulgarity unless told otherwise? This was the third such book in a month I selected based on blurbs that hinted at nothing of the sort. I thought I would be safe with a pre-teen coming of age story that prominently features a stuffed frog, but apparently this is a pre-teen coming of age story for adults only. At least, I wouldn't be comfortable letting my children read this, as I wasn't even comfortable myself. I'm not sure how big the target demographic is.

That being said, the title character was well-developed and well-written. The author did an excellent job of capturing the feel of a highly intelligent person with hardly any real world experience. The detective part of the story was fun and unique. One doesn't often see a detective hero who jumps to conclusions and can't control his temper. The change in the character as the book progressed was also handled very well.

As is often the case when the main character is so well done, the supporting characters fell by the wayside a bit. Darren's dialog, especially, was a little over the top. The female characters were portrayed chauvinistically, although one could argue that may be appropriate from the point of view of a young angst-ridden boy.

If the profanity and some sexual situations don't bother you, the book is worth a read. As it stands, I won't be recommending this one to anyone I know.

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### **Lisa says**

I really wanted to finish this book, since the start of it was very intriguing. Love "Huge" and the premise of the story. However, it just went downhill from there. Who is the audience for this book? I was confused. Huge is a kid with an adult hard-boiled detective brain. The dialogue is very witty and too detailed for someone who doesn't do well in school. The cursing is probably how kids talk today, but it distracted me somehow, and I curse all the time! I couldn't recommend the book to young kids, and I couldn't recommend it to older folks. I guess it's one of those books that doesn't fit in a genre. Perhaps I'll finish it some day, but I kind of lost interest.

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### **Matthew says**

Twelve-year-old Eugene "Huge" Smalls wants the world and everything in it to be huge like him. But Huge—too small to even make the junior high football team, though he's the fastest kid at practice—doesn't exactly live up to his moniker.

His uncontrollable temper and sardonic wit leave him isolated from his peers, and his obsession for the detective stories of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett drives him to question the motivation of everyone around him, even his doting mother and older sister Neecey—leaving Huge feeling even more alone. On his custom bike (The Cruiser) and with his constant companion (a stuffed frog named Thrash who only encourages his rage), the amateur sleuth prowls the dreary New Jersey town, longing for a life of

intrigue he's only read about. His grandmother readily provides an opportunity for Huge's mischief, however, when she hires him on his first real case. But Huge's quest to solve it quickly deteriorates into a pursuit of vindication and personal retribution.

Then everything changes for Huge when his detective work leads him to an unsuspecting high school party one night and a furtive encounter with classmate Stacy Sanders, a shapely but quiet girl Huge has had a hopeless crush on since he first laid eyes on her.

In the end, the quest for revenge turns into a desire for forgiveness. And it's not just the rampaging Huge who must be forgiven. He himself must learn to forgive and to face a world often ripe with disappointment. The boy who wants everyone to call him "Huge" must not just grow taller—he must finally grow up.

A charming story, though the narrative is at times a bit clumsy. I'd recommend Huge to anyone with nostalgia for banana seats, striped tube socks, and that time in life when having friends meant the world ... or anyone just looking for a book that's really fun to read. Huge won't disappoint.

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### **Matt Fitz says**

I really wanted to like this book, but I don't know who the author was writing for. It's premise reads like a YA coming-of-age story about a 12 year old kid who struggles to fit in with his peers/family and takes solace in three things: His grandmother living in a nursing home, his stuffed frog companion that he talks to, and detective noir books his grandmother turned him onto. Set in New Jersey in the 80s, the protagonist (he prefers to be called huge) tries to solve a "crime" and along the way discovers life around him isn't just his series of clues for a detective looking inward, but actual lives being lived and that he needs to interact. Lots of overt sexuality and complex relationships seen from that of a 12 year old with a host of problems, but it didn't seem to be written FOR 12-year olds. Or fans of detective fiction.

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### **Brent Legault says**

If I took the time, I'm sure I could think up a kitbag of cheap shots to hurl at *Huge*. Instead, all I have to offer is this soiled hanky of a Goodreads "review."

After I (somehow) finished reading this novel, I sat in my rumbling and uncomfortable bus seat, fuming, shaking a mental fist (like a regular fist but made of mind mist) at the rotten world and its many injustices, injustices like the publishing of *Huge: A Novel*.

Uh, oh cripes, I'm dizzy with upset and my mouth tastes like sick. There are so many wrong things about this novel, not least of which is it's many unnecessary lists. Every other page has a long and useless inventory of clothing or set dressing of some kind. That would be fine if I were playing an Infocom game, where I'd need to know what the furniture was like so I could search it for treasure or clues. But otherwise it's a tad tiresome. Here's a sample from page 234: "I caught a quick glimpse of the wood decking at the back of the house with it's crepe paper decorations, citronella candles, patio chairs and lounges, umbrella-ed tables with plastic plates, cups, and napkins on them, the trash can for the keg, one for the wine coolers, and one for the trash. . ." Again on page 236: "I hated Razor and kids like him, bullies and babies and everyone like that; I hated the kids at the party, kids at school, teachers, counselors, coaches, cops, priests, principals, and mall security;" It goes on. I just turned to two random pages, by the way. There's plenty more of that scintillating stuff, believe me. And for the record, the first list is noted by the main character as he's *running at full speed*.

Now here are some worries I won't bother to cite, unless someone wants to call me out on them, that is:

Fuerst likes to explain what's happening even while it's happening. He's cuckoo for Action Verbs! He freaking loves anachronisms and caricature and cliché. He takes to cliché like a hog takes to mud. And that's something else he goes gaga for: colorful, folksy analogies, like "hotter than a cookout in hell." (It's meant to be an homage to Raymond Chandler, but it is not. Oh god, it is so not.) Most everything else he does, most every word he writes, is just off somehow. He likes to "slow down the narrative" for us, to make every second seem like an hour so that we, lucky readers, can savor his words. He wallows in nostalgia, the nostalgia of the 1980's, that carefree and innocent time. Aw, jeepers, there is just nothing good about this book. It angers me. It is an affront. And it will probably be a big hit.

One last note, and then I'll go back to my cave. In the acknowledgments, Fuerst thanks a certain Markus "the Hammer" Hoffmann "for all his patience and toil, all the edits, critiques, suggestions, reading and rereading, late-night phone conversations, drinks, football matches, and friendship." First, let me speculate that Mr. Hoffmann got his nickname after hitting his own thumb with a hammer. And next, let me say that he should have spent less time on "drinks" and "football matches" (Matches? Is he talking about soccer?) and more, much, much more time, a helluva lotta time with the "reading" and the "rereading" and especially the "edits." In other words, he should have done his job and edited this book out of existence. It is an insult to us all.

And it will probably be a big hit.

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