



# Perfect People

Peter James

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When a young couple join a fertility programme run by a clinic in America they little suspect that the happy day that follows is the last day of mankind's evolutionary supremacy. Mankind is facing its greatest challenge: obsolescence. Longlisted for the 2012 Wellcome Trust Book Prize.

## **Perfect People Details**

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Author : Peter James

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## From Reader Review Perfect People for online ebook

### Diane S ? says

Perfect People Alternately chilling and heartbreaking, James portrays couples who will do anything to have a child. In this book it is a genetic disease and the loss of the child due to that disease that send Jack and Naomi to a renowned geneticist that is said to perform near miracles. Anything, of course, that can be used to help people can also be taken the other way and used to enrich and pervert the very person who is supposed to be helping the situation. People who swear they are not in it for the money or the power, they just want to help those poor unfortunate souls that come to them.

Good, suspenseful, characters that one can root for and characters that one can hate, definitely worth a read.

ARC from Netgalley.

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### Sarah says

I have read a couple of books by this author which I absolutely loved, so was very much looking forward to reading this one

To start with I have to admit I did find it a bit slow going but once I started getting into it, I was well and truly gripped.

As a parent I could fully empathise with John and Naomi. To lose a child has got to be one of the worst things in life possible. So to get the chance to have another baby that can be guaranteed to have none of the illnesses that can be passed on in the genes from the parents, well who wouldn't take it?

The author has created a story that is extremely thought provoking. Scientists have come so far and designer babies is something that is probably very possible if not already. I certainly don't agree with people playing god and dictating what a human being is going to be like but the thought of also putting a stop to illnesses that leave devastation in its trail is a very positive part of it.

Having a child should be some of the happiest times in a parents lives, but for one, John and Naomi are still trying to recover from the fact that even though they only wanted one child they have twins, also they have to get used to the fact that Phoebe and Luke are unlike any other child of their age.

Perfect People after the slow start is one that literally had me on my seat. Not only does John and Naomi have to learn to cope with being parents to two highly intelligent twins, they are also living in fear as there are people out there who are very much against what they have done.

This is one story that I won't forget in a hurry. It would also make a brilliant film. John and Naomi's story is one that will really pull on your heart strings and I found it quite an emotional read towards the end.

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### Kaitlin says

I picked up this book purely based on it having been long-listed for the Wellcome Book Prize and I am very glad I did actually because I ended up really enjoying it, even though it definitely has its flaws. I've never read anything else by this author, and from what I understand he's mostly a crime-thriller writer, but this book has more of a pure thriller and action vibe to it. The whole way through the story was pretty intense and there was a lot of very interesting research involved to make it quite a unique read. I found I really enjoyed it.

The story follows John and Naomi, a young couple who comprise of a Swede and a Brit who have married, had a child and then lost that child. They are both carriers of a rare gene which gives a horrible and tragic illness to their first son, so they grieve his loss deeply when it comes. In the end, they decide they want more children, but they don't want to have to watch them suffer too so they seek out the help of a geneticist who is working on cutting edge gene-alterations and 'designer babies' to see if he can eradicate the gene for the illness from their next child. Little do the couple know, this scientist may well have his own aims...

What I loved about this story is the huge amounts of research surrounding the 'designer babies' themselves. This was immediately obvious and super fascinating as it's a topic I haven't looked into much prior to this, but I really am curious now... Pheobe and Luke end up becoming some of the real stars of the entire book. They are just wonderful curiosities, and clever doesn't begin to describe them. They have built in qualities to make them succeed in life. They have the genetic advantage, but it doesn't ever quite go to plan and quickly their parents are unsure how to really deal with them.

One other element of this story is the crime/terrorism group that crops up fairly early into the story. This was a needless waste of time in my opinion and was purely there to add drama, because all the major events of the book could still have been met without including chaotic, sometimes a bit ridiculous, plots and sub-plots. I definitely think this could have been cut, so this is the major reason why this book isn't getting a higher rating despite just how much I really enjoyed it.

Overall, a solid read and, without the niggle of the cult plotline, it was great. I very much enjoyed it, and read it quickly over just two days, so I would say it's very fun read with some quality moments of science also included (though I am sure things have rapidly moved on from a few years ago when this was written now!). I gave it a strong 3.75\* and had it just cut the over-exaggerated drama storyline then I would have loved it :) Still recommended :)

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### **Cindy Ng says**

I had high hopes for this book as the topic of genetic engineering and the issues surrounding it really interests me, and reviews all seemed pretty positive. I also really enjoyed the movie Gattaca which is on a similar theme.

However, just a couple of chapters in I couldn't believe how naive the two main characters were, and they seemed to be making stupid decision after stupid decision. This continued throughout the book and really affected my enjoyment of the story but I pushed on, partly because I hate putting a book down midway but I was also curious as to how it would all play out.

Things started to get interesting about 75% of the way through, but the turn of events was just too far-fetched, and too many questions were left unanswered. There was a lot of potential that was left unexplored, and the whole reason behind any of the events ever happening in the first place was explained in just a

couple of pages.

Overall it was disappointing, predictable, even irritating in some parts, and has put me off trying any of Peter James' other books.

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### **Hannah says**

Amazing. Brilliant. Breath taking!

It is my favorite book of adult fiction, it has everything I have ever asked of the story. Plus, as a geneticist myself and believer in transhumanism this is just a must read and must love and ah I am just going to take it into my bed instead of a teddy bear!

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### **Andy says**

Another of my wife's books, read while in India.

I really can't tell why most people are raving about this (note: spoilers present). The central concept is interesting but James doesn't go anywhere with it. We're stuck throughout with an annoying, rather generic couple who make a poor choice and then seem continually perplexed at the unusual consequences of their actions. I appreciate that they were (naively?) expecting something else but it's patently obvious to us as the reader that the mysterious doctor has a hidden agenda. He practically screams 70s-era Bond villain, private ship and secret island hideout included.

From the beginning they should realise something is not quite right, yet they never fully seem to. Even at the very end do they seem to forget everything and wonder if maybe it'll work out this time. Every time the twins do something unusual the parents act as though they cannot possibly understand what could be happening or why. They wanted the kid to be smarter yet act fearful and freaked out when they are. Despite the Dad thinking on a number of occasions that perhaps they should be treating the twins not as toddlers, but as older children/young adults (and indeed, being told the same by the psychologist) they immediately do the opposite. There is also some rather suspect parental behaviour and odd decisions throughout. Emotionally they're all over the place and rather immature, completely unprepared for what they were attempting (as an aside, I'm not sure what happened to the genetic counselling they should have received after the death of the first child but it should have explored many of their issues).

The sub-plot involving a religious assassin is initially interesting and though we don't get much characterisation, he's cold and relentless and a distraction. Until he gets to our family, when for no apparent reason he loses his cool completely, forgets how to shoot and stumbles all over the place before effectively getting killed. It seems like a completely different character.

I liked the Sussex and Brighton locations (places I've lived for years) and it's interesting seeing the Royal Sussex County Hospital show up (somewhere I've worked). That's not enough to make a good book though. Plus, as a doctor, some of the medical info in this is highly suspect. The c-section scene without anaesthesia was laughable.

And finally we come to the ending. Which is pretty much all it is. The book ends. Though some form of masterplan is revealed, it's really only the blueprint of that plan. Super-smart people will cure the world. How precisely? Well, we're not let onto that information, we're just lead to believe they will. It was unsatisfying, making the whole book seem redundant. James says that he struggled with this book for many years despite lots of research and I think it clearly shows.

The concept would probably have been better handled and expanded by a sci-fi author. We're not given much to think about in terms of nature/nurture, the ethics of genetically altering your children or the social difficulties, other than it's probably not a good idea. That's a shame.

The writing itself is fine but that's about it and I couldn't recommend this unless you're a big Peter James fan.

Edit: something that I just remembered - the mother sits down to read the Daily Mail. I cannot possibly see how someone who would genetically engineer their own child would choose to read the Daily Mail. Seriously, a suspension of belief too far.

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## **Bibi says**

**When John and Naomi lost their 3-year son to a genetic disorder, they turn to a geneticist who, for \$400,000, promised to assist them in conceiving a genetically superior baby, one immune to the recessive genes.**

**Naomi becomes pregnant with not one but two babies and with the series of bizarre events leading to their birth, we, the readers, know something is amiss. When the babies start behaving abnormally, the couple reaches out to the good doctor only to find he'd disappeared.**

**Then an even more ominous threat gets interwoven: a religious cult on a crusade to take out said couple and their "designer" babies.**

**We then are taken on a trip far into a psychological sci-fi realm that the plot lost its appeal midway.**

**Here's where I think the story missed the mark.:** the book would have been more suspenseful had the author excluded the lead-in to the conception of the babies and instead started with a pregnant Naomi then, perhaps, through flashbacks, provided the back story. By writing the plot in real time, the plot sequences and the ending were blazingly obvious, making it rather unsuspenseful.

To then have the doctor presumed dead only to come back to life, made it more contrived. That the kids turned out to be abnormal in a wholly different manner, was too glaring. The doctor returns to claim the kids? The kids ageing abnormally? Throw in the doctor's covert team of genetically altered super spy group, and all I could say was: Come on.

This was a plot driven book and although the premise has been previously explored by the late Michael Crichton, Mr James' spin was different enough to have made this utterly gripping.

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**Instead, we got a riddled plot, protagonists that we couldn't empathise with, kids straight from "Psycho" and some rantings by a Cult. Altogether, I think Mr James overreached with this one.**

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### **Wizpunzel says**

Not having read any of this author's other novels, I didn't know what to expect however I found the plot disappointing, the characters implausible - principally the unlikely, naive couple paying almost ½ million pounds for a 'designer' baby, because their firstborn son dies from an appalling but wholly imaginary disease (there are already many hideous fatal conditions, so why invent one?), who then continue to lumber through the story making one moronic decision after another. Amazing considering the husband is himself a scientist, driven on by his stupid "I-just-want-my-babies-back" wife. Nor did I have any time for the suave and devious geneticist doctor, (well, he was obviously going to be a villain - what a surprise) and the far-fetched subterfuge surrounding his secret SPECTRE-type fantasy hideaway.

As for the pick-your-own-genes babies - well, can I accept that this mad Frankenstein-alike was conducting all his research and experiments on a ship and no-one knew? Yet dozens of scientists he claims supported and applauded his activity because they were afraid of religious extremism threatening science? Too facile, sorry.

The style of writing is bland and banale, the frequent time jumps irritating and unsatisfactory and, although things picked up two-thirds of the way through, the ending seemed rushed and the justification for the evil Doctor's extreme objectives over-simplistic and unexplored. The author tries a twist at the end but it was predictable, given the accelerated development of the so-called 'perfect' children.

What is this book? A thriller? A sci-fi? Or a protest statement about GM and eugenics? For me this easy-read didn't satisfy on any of these counts. So it's one star for the novel but, in Mr James's favour, I've awarded a second star for it's consistency in expressing the unconditional love parents demonstrate for the most difficult of children, and his raising awareness of the irksome matter of genetic meddling (which should concern all of us) and bringing it to the attention of a wider audience.

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### **Joanne Sheppard says**

Peter James is an impressively prolific bestselling thriller writer, of whose books I had before now read precisely none. I picked up *Perfect People* at a low-price book sale along with various other thrillers this summer because I was keen to know what Peter James does that sells so well, and because I was interested in the subject matter: a couple who agrees to have a genetically engineered son to avoid losing another child to the hereditary disease that killed their first baby, Halley, at the age of four.

*Perfect People* brings to mind of those high-concept, borderline sci-fi thrillers that were popular in the 1970s – think Ira Levin's *The Boys From Brazil* or *The Stepford Wives*. As such, despite its contemporary themes of 'designer babies' and elements involving a religious fundamentalist terrorist organisation, there is something about it that feels oddly dated. This isn't helped by the slightly Bond-villainish character of Dr

Dettore, the geneticist who convinces John and Naomi Klaesson to agree to have a child with favourably tweaked genes. To avoid having to conform to US or European law, his clinic is located at sea on board a mysterious cruise liner, and there are chapters set on a mysterious island that can't be located on a map. For the duration of the book, I rather felt as if I was reading a novelisation of a film, and not a recent one at that.

Perfect People's plot certainly does make you want to plough on quickly to end, despite the enormous suspension of disbelief required. I did keep turning the pages, despite my misgivings about elements of the story and frequent irritation at the writing style (heavy on the telling, light on the showing, and peppered with mundane exposition).

I don't, however, think the story that will stay with me, and I felt none of the chills or unease that the 'perfect people' of the title should have conjured up. John and Naomi's designer children (apologies if you consider this a spoiler, but the fact that there are two of them is already annoyingly revealed by the book's own cover art) are obviously not like other toddlers, but their 'otherness' is all cliché: the idea of the cold, insular, unnaturally academic, freakishly beautiful and potentially psychic blonde child is a familiar one from The Bad Seed or The Midwich Cuckoos. They may be called 'New People' in certain quarters, but there's nothing really new about them from the reader's point of view.

Moreover, the relationship between parent and child here is infuriatingly inconsistent – neither parent is really shown to bond with their children as such, and Naomi in particular behaves as if she actively dislikes or even fears them, but suddenly when required for the purposes of the plot, they suddenly begin to behave completely differently towards them. I fully understand that the parent-child relationship is a complex one, but I don't find the sudden turnaround in Naomi's maternal instincts particularly credible. Other inconsistencies include the claim that the 'new people' abhor violence, which seems deeply out-of-kilter with the children's ability to butcher their own pets or inspire outright terror in the other toddlers at their playgroup.

A bit of a wasted opportunity, this one. Plenty of potential, but just felt careless in the execution, as if the author was taking a paint-by-numbers approach to fiction.

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## Ivy says

Sehr unheimlich...

Das Buch macht auf jeden Fall nachdenklich.

Der Anfang ist wirklich gut und die unheimliche Spannung kommt schleichend. Die Story entwickelt sich ganz anders als ich erwartet hatte und obwohl ich mit Science Fiction nicht viel anfangen kann, fand ich den Aspekt hier total spannend.

Der Gedanke, Krankheiten ausschließen zu können wäre noch nachvollziehbar aber bei äußerlichen Merkmalen und Charakterzügen wird das mit den Designer Babys ziemlich krank.

Naomi und John waren mir beide nicht sympathisch aber mit dem Verlauf der Geschichte habe ich mit den beiden gelitten.

Das Ende ist dann aber over the top. Mir ist das dann ein wenig zu viel. Zu viele Ideen, zu viel Neues und Abgedrehtes kommt dazu und es wird dem interessanten Thema nicht gerecht. Da hätte man meiner Meinung nach viel mehr draus machen können

3,5 Sterne aber sehr lesenswert

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### **Elaine Browne says**

This is very different from what I normally read.

It's very science fiction and I normally detest that genre of literature but this is extremely well written.

The characters of John and Naomi are extremely realistic , they are flawed humans who long for intelligent children.

The whole plot of designer babies brings up a fascinating subject and is dealt with fabulously in this book. Luke and phoebe are monsters and they contribute greatly to the ambitious story line of where science will eventually end up leading the human race.

A fascinating read

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### **Louise says**

not the usualsort of thing from James, but he pulled off a different style of writing very well.

taking something that is becoming less like science fiction everyday, and giving it a twist like this was clever.

No matter how good the intentions were of the parents, you have to wonder should they have tinkered with mother nature for their designer babies, and were the people they were left with just payback???

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### **Best Crime Books & More says**

I hold my hands up; I am a true Peter James fan and in particular am partial to a bit of Roy Grace! For those not aware of Mr James or indeed my lovely hero Mr Grace, start paying attention! Peter James has been writing for many years and his most recent and very popular series of books features Superintendant Roy Grace. Although many of Peters fans, myself included) may prefer the Grace novels, Peter James has been writing stand alone novels since the very early eighties. His latest release entitles Perfect People is quite possibly the perfect book?!? I shock myself with that statement, but I seriously feel that this book is quite possibly one of the best I have read in a very long time.

When I read the back of the book, and realised that the story dealt with a couple who would follow the path of genetically modifying their child, I worried. What was Peter James thinking? Why on earth would a brilliant author like him want to write about such a controversial subject that could possibly go belly up? Well, having finished the book I can tell you there must have been blood, sweat and tears from him to produce such a fine book, clearly he worked hard to achieve the perfect balance and it resulted in just that!

The book is as usual a good example of how skilled Peter James is as a writer and within the first few chapters I was completely absorbed. The two main characters were a couple; John and Naomi, and all they want is a child that will not be born with the same disease their last little boy had died from. Having lost their little boy, this normal couple decide to put their faith into the hands of geneticist Dr Leo Dettore. Right from the beginning I couldn't stand Dr Dettore but as the story progresses and you see the couple follow the

procedures to choose what they do and don't want their future child to have, you can understand with how badly they want this. I could even understand how they put Dr Dettore's scientific brilliance before his less than appealing personality.

I was slightly concerned that I would be baffled with too much of the science side of things but thankfully, everything you read and the way it was written made it easy by anybody's standards to understand the basics. The story itself picks up pace as major events happen in the first quarter of the book. I worried we had seen too much too soon, until you realise that the main event is lurking around the corner. I shocked myself at just how badly I had to keep reading this. Each time I think things are settling, something else shocks me and once again I feel that I just can't put it down.

Before I started reading, I was very specific about my feelings on messing with genetics, and I can truly say that by the end of the book it made me re-think my opinions. The subject matter is certainly different, but the issue itself is dealt with in such a way that you empathise with the people making the decisions and the eventual outcome. It is very difficult for me to expand on this review as should I do that certain spoilers will ruin it for people.

What I will say is that the only reason I actually brought this was because I am a Roy Grace fan. Had the book been written by somebody else, I may have given it a wide berth. I am extremely glad that I didn't do that as this book opened my eyes. The writing was brilliant, the tension high and the underlying 'horrible feeling' I had didn't leave me all through the book. I think for me one of the main underlying thoughts I had all through the books is that one day, this could actually happen. What would I do if I was in their shoes? Decisions that I previously thought would be easy to make, have now left me feeling like I didn't have the first clue.

I can honestly say that this book truly took me by surprise. Touching on subjects that I had no interest or real in depth knowledge of yet had me staying up way past my bed time as I had to finish. If I could give you one piece of advice, it would be to go and buy this book, no matter what you think of the synopsis. This is normally not the sort of book that I would read, but am truly grateful I did. HIGHLY recommended.

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### **Colin Andrews says**

One of the most thought-provoking thrillers I've read. Scary too, not so much in the blood and gore sense, but in the implications of genetic engineering of the human species to a level far beyond what eugenics in the conventional sense might ever achieve. When the book was first started, designer babies were still a subject for science fiction, but judging by scientific advances made over the past 10 years this fiction could so easily become fact. There is no reason to believe that violent conflict between science and fanatical religious beliefs will be any less of a threat in the future as it has been in the past.

For the most part I found the actions and emotions of the couple grieving the loss of their first child through a genetic disorder quite believable, likewise their difficulties in coming to terms with the consequences of their decision to conceive the perfect child. The story takes some surprising twists and the end is really chilling. The description of the secret facility for the genetically engineered children struck the only really far-fetched note - something more fitting to a James Bond movie.

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## **Chris says**

Initially Perfect People felt like it could have been written by any number of American authors; the style of writing could have come from Linwood Barclay, Michael Connelly or even Jonathan Kellerman. I assumed Perfect People was an attempt by Peter James to increase his popularity and following within the US; Perfect People didn't have the normal 'Peter James' style about it....

Soon however, Peter James stamps his trademark style on the pages – not with his normal police procedural and forensic knowledge, but meticulous scientific and medical details. The authenticity of the dialogue must have taken months of research; but were critical if this book was going to succeed.

This book raises a number of both moral and ethical questions about the role science should play within our lives.

Aspects of the plot were rather predictable, and at times a little farfetched. The story is easy to follow, and lacks the sophistication of his Roy Grace series.

Generously out of respect for the huge amount research and effort this book must have required, I've given it four stars... However the quality of the writing was not close to his normal high standard.

For those loyal Roy Grace fans, the next in the series 'Not Dead Yet' is out in 2012....

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