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As chilling as Stephen King as credible as Michael Crichton - a gripping novel of terror and suspense

Alchemist Details

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Author : Peter James

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From Reader Review Alchemist for online ebook

Fiona Ingram says

Be afraid, be very afraid of big pharmaceutical organisations. When Montana Bannerman's Nobel prize-winning father sells his company (including his genetics research and laboratory) to a giant corporation, Bendix Schere, that labels itself as 'caring,' she and her father think their financial problems are over. All they need to do now is research for cures that will benefit mankind. Right? Wrong. Within a short space of time, a pushy reporter (Zandra Wollerton) working on a wild and seemingly far-fetched story is dead. Too many babies are being born with Cyclops Syndrome. Is this coincidence or genetic engineering? Then when more people connected to the company and the investigation start dying—sometimes in front of Monty—she takes fright. Who is behind the world's most caring company's hidden agenda? And when Monty narrowly escapes an attempt on her life, she wonders who can she trust? A co-worker? The police? Everyone she speaks to ends up dead!

What a thriller. I read this book a while ago and enjoyed it even more on the second read. It is a thought-provoking novel with enough of a sprinkling of the occult to remain credible. The Satanic/occult side is not overdone, and wasn't magic really science in disguise thousands of years ago? There is also enough science and genetics to keep the reader interested without overwhelming the layman with too much 'stuff.' Flashbacks are relevant and add to the story. The author has a way of keeping readers intrigued as new information filters through. I liked the characters very much and found them believable. The action jumps between scenarios to keep the readers on the edge of their seats. The plot is complex, but 'big reveals' are surprising and conspiracy theorists will be satisfied with this book.

One wonders, after reading this book, if the author knows something we do not. Even though this book was published in 1999, its relevance for today is perhaps even more compelling. We have become so dependent on medication, and (most interestingly) a new trend coming to the fore is genetic analysis. People can have themselves tested to see what diseases they might develop in the future and take steps accordingly to prevent such diseases developing. Perhaps big pharmaceutical companies will see a gap here and fact becomes stranger than fiction...

Farhaanah says

"In the past one hundred and fifty years the pharmaceutical industry has gone from selling snake oil to controlling the future of the human race. The problem is, it's still run by the snake-oil salesmen."

Monty Bannerman, daughter of genetic scientist Dick Bannerman, a Nobel Prize winner, is elated when the pharmaceutical giant, Bendix Schere, offers to buy Bannerman Genetics Research. Dick Bannerman is against the concept of patenting, but recent money troubles leaves him with no choice but to take the offer and join Bendix Schere. Monty is instantly taken by Sir Neil Rorke, chairman of Bendix Schere.

Monty is drawn to Conor Molloy, a patent lawyer from Washington, who had joined Bendix Schere recently. Conor has his own agenda for joining the company and secretly gathers information against Bendix Schere.

A few weeks later Hubert Wentworth, a reporter, comes to Monty's house and tells her his daughter, an ex-employee of Bannerman Genetics Reserch, had died in childbirth and given birth to a Cyclops baby, a rare syndrome. He claims while average Cyclops syndrome is two per year, but in the last two months there have been three cases. The link between them is Maternox, a product of Bendix Schere. Monty doesn't believe the Maternox is the cause but promises to investigate all the same.

She seeks out Jake Seals, chief lab technician's help. He agrees to help and finds out all three women had taken the same batch of Maternox. On the day he was supposed to test out the samples he has a lab accident and meets an untimely death. Monty too is hurt in the accident and believes Jake's demise was a coincidence. But when people involved with the investigation suddenly dies, even though they were accidental and natural causes, she wonders was it really a coincidence?

”Where does the point come at which you stop believing in coincidence?”

She finds herself an ally in Conor, who is more than happy to help her. Together they start investigating. The deeper they investigate the more they find the truth behind the 'Most caring company' of the world. Monty manages to find a sample of the suspected batch but not before she finds out her friend had become pregnant by the same batch. Conor tests it out and finds out it was a faulty batch. When they hit a wall Monty is forced to seek the help of her father. What he finds out is more sinister than their enemy.

A wrong move made by Monty puts all of their lives in grave danger. Will they be able to outsmart their enemy? Will they be able to prevent any further deaths?

It started out as a slow read but quickly picked up pace. The author did keep me up in my toes guessing who the antagonist was. His descriptions managed to quite literally paint a picture in my mind. I have to admit that I didn't care for the whole supernatural/occult concept. Truthfully the book would have done well even without it. That being said I did enjoy the book quite a lot.

Ayla Kosmonova says

Liked the science/pharmaceuticals aspect from the first few chapters but was put off by the occult materials. I stopped reading after went through 1/3 of the book.

Anike Kirsten says

Intricate sub-plots, science, mystery, superstition, and the supernatural, James has it all combined. I really enjoyed the story, being led through the events with the characters. I'd have liked to give another star but the

characters were somewhat cardboard, except for the main female protagonist and the main male protagonist's mother who had personality I could immerse in. I think the story could have been tightened down, but this is just one reader's preference and a bit of one writer's learning opinion. However, it was surprisingly difficult to predict what would happen in the plot (the characters are another story) and that was refreshing.

Andy Holyer says

Ok, major spoiler in a slightly different way than normal, Peter used to be my brother-in-law, and I helped him a lot with the science.

In fact if you read chapter 117, I turn up as a supporting character.

Haven't re-read it since it first came out. Not entirely sure whether or not it's an entirely good idea to try.

Geoff Battle says

Alchemist was written during the tail end of a surge in conspiracy thrillers. The mid-90s saw many authors writing stories involving sinister organisations and cabals, each with their own diabolical schemes and malevolent plans for domination. James has tweaked it, adding an unusual tilt which means this novel doesn't sit squarely in any one genre.

It's a lengthy yarn though and at times it rinses and repeats its content rather than just getting on with it. The characters are interesting enough however James' insistence on keeping back information for big reveals near the end can be somewhat frustrating. These flaws are smoothed over by the sheer scale of the hopelessness the central characters must face and the claustrophobic nature of the plot.

Benjamin Stahl says

When I began this one, I was soon under the impression that I was going to hate it. The writing was bad and the characters unlikable - the main protagonist is first described as looking perfect and handsome and sort of like Tom Cruise - how original, I thought.

It takes about one hundred tedious pages before any kind of plot manages to take shape. But then it suddenly changes, and before you know it, the story begins unfolding into a shockingly dark and sinister tale about evil pharmacists, human-sacrificing satanists, and a global medical company that is a messed up and deranged as it is rich and powerful. This book starts off slow and boring, but before too long it morphs into a fast-paced thriller that I thoroughly enjoyed...

Aileen says

One of Peter James' earlier novels from 1996, this deals with genetic modification. Monty and her Nobel winning scientist father, agree to be taken over by huge pharmaceutical company Bendix-Schere based in London. Monty meets Hubert, the father of one of her previous employees, who has recently died after giving birth to a Cyclops Syndrome baby. She had been taking a fertility drug, Maternox, made by Bendix and Hubert has details of two identical cases. A really good, detailed story that lays open the greed of such

companies and the lengths they will go to, to make more money

Bev Taylor says

genetic engineering - the breakthrough to save the world? or to control it?

Monty is the daughter of a geneticist father who is against patents but due to lack of funds signs an agreement with Bendix Schere - 'the world's most caring company'

Then she is contacted by a newspaper reporter who tells her that 3 women have fallen pregnant after taking a fertility drug manufactured by Bendix Schere. They suffer the same symptoms and die giving birth to a cyclops baby

Can Monty believe this? She is joined in her search for the truth by an American who has just joined the firm. So they start to unravel an occult, genetic engineering and the lengths that they will go to achieve their aims

Nearly 600 pages of small print paperback that you will have to read slowly to truly absorb but well worth it. A classic Orwellian nightmare

bev

Libby Andrews says

An intriguing plot about the daughter of an eminent scientist who uncovers wrongdoings at BigPharma, Bendix Schere. Montana Bannerman and her dad Don join BS so that he can do more gene therapy research. BS want him on the payroll so that they can doctor existing drugs to carry diseases, which they then cure - at a price. Patent lawyer, Conor Molloy joins the team with the secret goal of avenging the death of his father. Satanism plays a big role in the book with the interwoven story of Daniel Judd, a boy who is persecuted by religious parents.

Lauren O'Dwyer says

A clever storyline; part of which is not outside the realm of possibilities as technologies continue to advance.

Perhaps the most amusing part of this book though was the long descriptions of how to create and use an 'eMail', which swiftly dated the text, but also provided for some amusing chapters.

G1smclarens says

Not for the fainthearted

Well constructed with clearly a very well researched story line that provokes deep thought and concern. Intertwined with a satanic storyline that some readers may find deeply disturbing. Spoilt as so often by far to many careless and stupid typos. The author thanks his editors, the reader may wonder why. It seems the art of proof reading no longer exists.

Tracey Honeyman says

not as good as the Roy Grace series but still a cracking read.

Samantha Cosham says

I have read nearly all of PJ back catalogue now and this was one of the slower burners but was very absorbing for that.

My one comment was that the main protagonists just accepted everything without question, the deaths, the threats, the supernatural connection. It's inconceivable and improbable and made them a little less realistic in my eyes. This is something that I have seen others note about other books in the collection so it is not exclusive to Alchemist.

The non-Grace Peter James books are formulaic in the the extreme. A man and a woman, often married, if not they are by the end. One harbours a secret/connection/skeleton in closet/longing for a child that ultimately brings them into the supernatural realm to varying degrees. This is no different but for me struggled with gaps and non-explanation of characters back stories. Those that seemed embroiled escaped unscathed (Gunn) and those that appeared to have some of the power of the devil (Crowe) died without a real explanation. Was it him doing the dowsing? It was unexplained but hinted and if so where in hell did he come from? It would have been better if we had been introduced to him in the Daniel Judd sections. Rorke was too obvious and Montana banging on about how she trusted him, he'd be so shocked etc etc did NOTHING to make him appear innocent, in fact the polar opposite.

There was just no connection between Daniel Judd/Theutus/Sir Neil Rorke. Why had he chosen that path, why pharmaceuticals? Why? Why did Conor want to go to the cave, why did they kill his mother, what was her link to the occult? Why was he so convinced he could protect Montana in America? The ends floundered around aimlessly and without conclusion.

The conclusion was weak and the attempt at the twist with the son....boring. Why mention the 'black moods' then take it no-where, not even a hint of lasting damage or something carried through to his son. It felt unfinished.

It sounds like I didn't enjoy it. I did I just think he has better books available to be read. This is a good gap filler.

Mrs. Watermelon says

A brilliant, if not slightly predictable thriller/horror book dealing with medicine and genetic engineering. I've

noticed that several of Peter James's books follow a certain formula where the two main characters meet and then predictably fall in love. Some really messed-up things happen in this book, as well. Hell, as early as the prologue you've got Satanic rituals, goat sacrifice and a torn-apart human torso.
