

Perfecter

I don't like the regulars. I hate to say it, and I know it's a condescending thing to say, but it's also true, and no matter what all the regulars who raised me may have taught me, they were regulars, right, so how much could they really know? Even as a teenager I knew enough perfects to have a better attitude toward the differences, and of course it's a lot better than the attitudes regulars have.

I've tried to like regulars, because that's my duty, and it's also my natural inclination, as you will see. They're nice, and often quite capable, although sometimes I wonder why we keep all of them. Some of them really aren't pulling their weight, and I've heard talk among other perfects that the day is coming when society just won't waste all the time and money required to accommodate them. The extremely regular ones, of course—not all of them!

Apparently when I was born there were hardly any perfects at all—mainly just certain immunities for MS and a few kinds of cancer. Some IQ perfects were in circulation, but the geneticists had wildly overshot the mark, and although they were probably a lot more perfect than me, intelligence-wise, they had no chance of fitting in with a population that's 99% regular. At least nowadays there are enough of us (and why not? really!) to stick up for our rights. And we've been around long enough to begin getting into some top positions in the legislative corporations, so it's pretty obvious where that's going.

Speaking of rumors, there's a persistent theory in some circles (of perfects) that actually the regulars are themselves the result of crude antique perfect programs, where gene stitching wasn't very accurate, and

women were spitting out whole generations of regulars who were actually way below the norm. In fact, the theory says *we're* really originals, and not any more perfect than they used to be, before the first few generations of genetic screw-ups. This theory may be bogus, but a lot of people think that not all regulars are originals.

I know that many scientists say we should keep some originals around in case they have to reconstruct a previous gene pool, but I don't see why. We're going to run out of regulars eventually anyway, because who wants them? No, really, I just mean they may be good for certain kinds of work, but in every case you can get better results than any regular by going with the right kind of perfect. So the originals pretty much fall into the same category, I would think.

It may sound like I'm prejudiced against regulars, or even originals, but believe me, I'm not. I fell in love with a regular girl a few years ago, and we had a very productive relationship. She was fun to be with, and even if she didn't understand everything, she kept me feeling cheerful and sort of special. It's hard to feel special, even if you're perfect, when there are so many other perfects around, and some of them very recent designs, with new features they hadn't thought of when my zygote got stitched. This is of course yet another advantage of having perfects doing that kind of work. It must have been a real nightmare when regulars were trying to design perfects! What a mess! And those first few generations prove my point awfully well.

This regular girl—of course after a while it got a little embarrassing, because I'm also very tall and muscular, and tremendously well endowed (another one of those early ideas about what perfect really means), and I was forever accidentally making her uncomfortable, one way or another. I'm quite well adjusted to being tall and strong and handsome (by admittedly slightly out-of-date standards), but I think she began to feel inferior. I hear that happens a lot when regulars have long-term relationships with perfects. It's not that either one doesn't love the other, but having to deal with being inferior in so many ways, for such a long time, eventually makes some regulars go a little batty.

I think that's what happened with my regular girl. She'd been snapping at me a lot, especially when I might bump into her in a restaurant or a floater terminal, and I was forever telling her that it wasn't cool for a regular

to be seen criticizing a perfect. It's embarrassing for everyone involved, if you think about it. Nobody wants their nose rubbed in the differences, even if you're the better man, so to speak. But still, she really caught me by surprise that morning with the carving knife. I'd never even glimpsed the ferocious side that so many regulars must have, but it's a good thing it's not a trait we're supporting anymore. She jumped me as I was getting out of bed, and she was yelling something about Saint Lorena, whom I don't know from Adam, and trying to hack at my groin. Of course I was ten times quicker, and I'd flung her against the far wall of the bedroom before I fully realized what was happening. I didn't mean to do that much damage, of course, but like I said, I'm pretty big, and very athletically refined.

There wasn't much trouble fixing her spine, or the cuts she got from falling on that big knife, but they said her personality "issues" might not be fixable at all. After a lot of really hard thinking, and some deep conversations with the best perfects in my area, I had to make the tough choice and have her put down. It wasn't easy, and I felt bad about it for months. Fortunately, I have the anti-PTSD gene mod, so I got over it and I've had dozens of very healthy relationships since then. With perfects, of course—I still like regulars, and I wouldn't mind dating one again sometime, but no more long-term stuff. I'm not a masochist!

I've had lots of regular friends, too. There's this regular family in a unit in my building, and they've gone through quite a lot. I made friends with them when I first moved in—they were young employees like myself, full of plans for the future, and we had a lot in common. When they had kids, I got a little attached to them, being so cute and funny-looking, a little, but I wasn't ready to have kids yet, and I hadn't even met that regular girl I told you about. When the kids were going on to college, I even helped get them into a good school, but in those days the big institutions still mixed everybody up, part of the old "well-rounded" theory of child development.

Then, after the kids had become employees and gotten married and started having kids of their own, the parents began to act funny around me. They became more and more grumpy, and didn't invite me over to meet the grandchildren, not after that first time. I don't think I did anything wrong that day, but something must have happened. It was sunny and we'd all gone out to the fourth balcony for a walk in the grass, and I was tickling the grand-kids and drinking with everybody, and I suddenly realized that the

mom and dad didn't look so great. They had wrinkles all over their faces, and in the bright sun I couldn't stop staring at the way they walked. They even seemed to have trouble getting up from the lawn chairs, or lifting the grandchildren. They're all regulars, of course, and I felt really sorry for them. When we were going back inside, I told them I'd always be there to help out if they needed anything, but they didn't seem glad to hear that.

The grandchildren are all grown up now, of course, with their own kids and their own lives to live, and they barely remember me. They moved into their grandparents' unit, so I see them once in a while on my way back from tennis or climbing, but when I wave, they usually don't notice. I don't want to make a big thing about having known the family, because there's been so much water under the bridge, especially this last century. I don't think regulars can assimilate more than a few decades of experience, at least not without some amount of confusion.

So in the end, I have to conclude that it's not realistic or practical to have too much connection with regulars. Like them or not, the biggest problem is that even if they don't have as much to contribute, and even if they don't get personality issues or one of the big diseases, even then—they don't live very long.