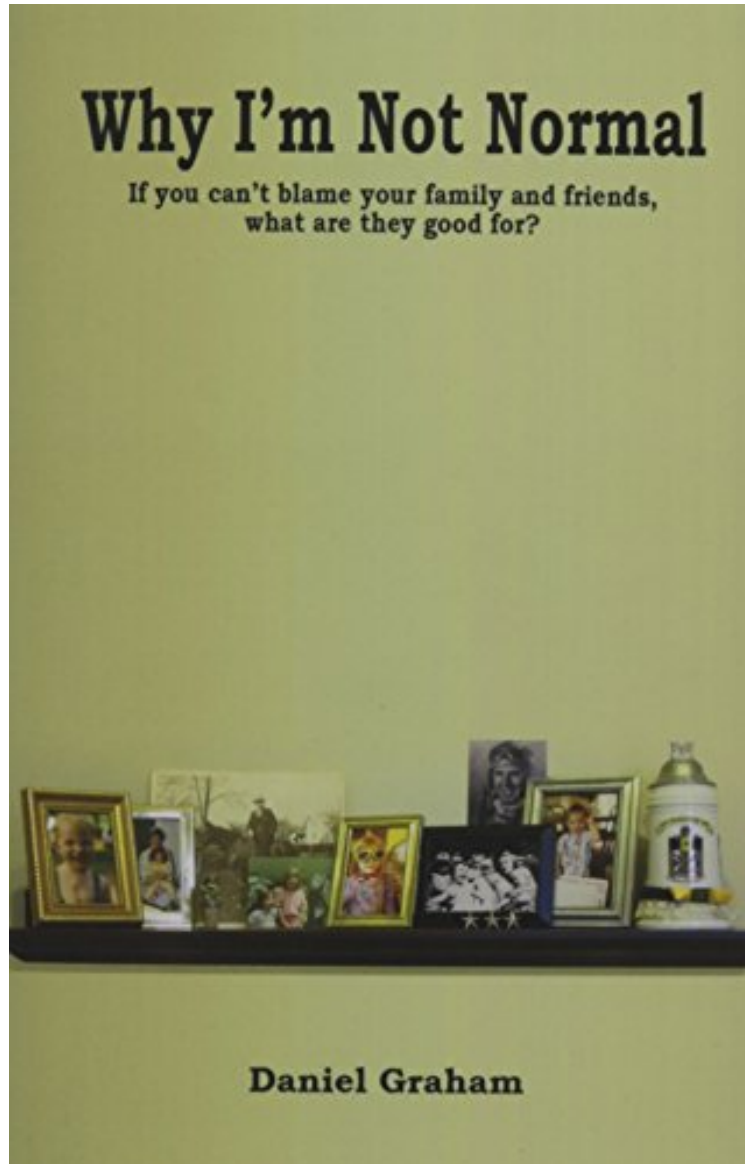


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Why I'm Not Normal

Daniel Graham

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Daniel Graham : Why I'm Not Normal before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Why I'm Not Normal:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Awesome!By Kindle CustomerBERI wasn't sure about this book but bought it to just see if it was any good. After all, being a Star Trek actress doesn't automatically mean you're a good author. Especially a sci-fi author. I was more thankful. The plot and characters sucked me in quickly. I cared what was going to happen to Andrea and the others just got me more and more curious. I was sad when the first book of this

trilogy ended and paused only to write this review, actually just to say how happy I was to stumble upon this book and these authors. Great read. New authors I'll look to for more books. Thanks. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It is a good enough read. By J C LOVII found it hard to really care about what is happening to these characters. It is a good enough read, just lacking a little depth. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Awesome Sci-Fi writing that will entertain you well. By Andres P. Nevarez It was a very curious novel. It actually surprised me along the way. It looks like an innocent bystander becomes the center of a war that no one dared to start. As the clones get the necessary stimulus from Andrea, all hell breaks loose. This book will leave wishing you bought the whole trilogy at once.

Be honest. Are you normal? Are your friends and family normal? If the answer to either question is "No," this book will make you feel better about yourself. Either it will make you feel normal by comparison, or it will help you understand what makes a person become, remain, and grow ever increasingly not-normal. For example, you learn that "not-normal" is... ..genetic. You inherit it from your not-normal ancestors, like the one who drills holes in the floor to fix a leaky roof. You pass the not-normal gene to your children, like the two who play Peter Pan and Captain Hook with real cutlery. ...self-selective, like the high school friends with a roast pig bomb, or an Army staff sergeant with a strong attachment to his wife's prosthetic leg, or the business partner flaunting deemie-boppers at interviews. ...attitude, a wild mixture of payback and chain yanking. If you find that you are not-normal, I have three more questions for you. Are we related? Do I know you? Are you in this book?

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1 Andrea took a sip of coffee, then hiked up her skirt as much as modesty allowed to let some sun on her pale legs. She'd faded during winter, her olive skin now looked ivory in contrast to her raven black hair. But the sun could restore a warm tone to soften her high cheekbones and give proportion to her wide-set brown eyes. She looked over the rim of her white porcelain cup to see her husband shepherd their young daughter, who toddled aimlessly among the crush of people milling about the waterfront. Saturday morning on a vital spring day at Baltimore Harbor -- Andrea had taken this tonic each of the twenty-two years of her life: as an infant buckled into a stroller, as a child dangling her feet from the pier, as a tomboy eyeing the cadets from the nearby Space Academy. As a young single woman she toured the old relics from the Federalist Era: monuments, ancient military forts; and their hardware. Her favorite was a black sailing ship as old as the harbor itself: The Constitution, a ship famous for her thick oaken hide and for fighting unfairly. She had too many guns according to her adversaries, most of whom she sank. In recent years the harbor provided a new fascination for Andrea -- different species. Baltimore had in the past twenty years grown in importance as an intergalactic port of call for the Alliance. Earth had recently become a hot property because the Alliance discovered a second space-faring human civilization living in the Chelle's quadrant of the galaxy. This new collection of humans was known only as the Cor Ordinate, and they fostered a reputation as independent, distrustful, and possibly aggressive. Although Andrea did not appreciate political nuances, she knew that Earth, heretofore the poor relation in the Alliance, suddenly had clout, as the other members presumed that the Cor Ordinate and Terrans would stick together, upsetting the balance within the Alliance comprised of the Jod, the Chelle, and the Artrix. She saw a trio of Chelle -- on Earth the Chelle never traveled alone. She watched with amusement as they clustered about the ornate espresso machine that ground black beans, then hissed and spit steam in a great show of force to produce tiny cups of beverage. The diminutive Chelle were pale gray, with delicate gangly limbs on squat torsos. They wore uniforms without insignia that looked more like lab coats: loose beige knee-length smocks with long sleeves. Skinny gray legs protruded down to narrow shoes with no buckles, ties, or straps. The Chelle stood on tiptoes to look over the brass rail that kept them from touching the espresso machine. They stared with wide dewy eyes, pointing and criticizing the bad design of the machine -- as always hypercritical and suspicious. Terrans simply accepted as fact that the Chelle disliked all things that smacked of Earth. Andrea noticed a lone Artrix sitting on the concrete steps, a mature male judging by the size and color of his fur. The Artrix had a dense short coat of fur, ranging in color from a creamy yellow to a burnt orange, some mottled, some snow-white with age. Females tended to have lighter fur, plus they typically wore gaudy earrings and flashier pantaloons. He studied a slender stalk of chickweed that managed a toehold in a crack in the cement. Just a bunch of hairy farmers, Andrea thought. The Artrix boasted the best agri-science in the galaxy. His face was beautiful: deep-set eyes over a short snout, not at all like a dog or cat, but round and soft with a herbivore's flat teeth. Around his eyes, the facial hair turned pale, almost the reverse of a raccoon's mask. His body was well proportioned by human standards: a muscular creature used to physical labor. Andrea surveyed the crowd looking for the formidable Jod with their military bearing, thick bodies, and hairless scalps, but she saw none. Settling back in her chair, she watched the morning sunshine reflect off the tall buildings of steel and glass that ringed the old harbor, casting dappled light. Even the water seemed active today. An old screw-propeller tug pushed a heavy liquid-hydrogen barge. Bass horns bellowed a warning to clear the deep channel. The cluster of acrylic sails scattered. Hover-taxis veered behind to cross the wake of the precocious tug and her bulbous cargo. Beyond this nautical free-for-all, stood a grassy hill terraced by ancient earthen works, once populated by cannon, now dotted with gray and white grave markers. Among them rose an obsidian mausoleum, a

gigantic black gem. Two years ago, she interred her father's ashes there. She obeyed her father's will and put his ashes with her mother's; it seemed artificial at the time -- a great deal of ceremony, flags, rifle reports, drums, bugles, crisp military orders. Two hours of dramatic flair for a simple transaction: she recovered her mother's urn, added the contents from a silver box engraved with her father's name, then returned the urn into a locked drawer -- much like an old-fashioned bank vault. Andrea was eight months pregnant with Glendon at the time. Her husband Steve stood silently at her side. Hordes of sympathetic people pressed their hands onto hers and looked into her eyes, yet all she remembered was how lonely the day was. Andrea forced her gaze off Federal Hill and the shiny black mausoleum, efficiently dispatching that unhappy day to the past. She looked farther into the harbor to a cluster of bristling, glistening spires. There stood the Space Academy, a ghost town on Saturdays, all the cadets gone except for the few miscreants in blue spacesuits pounding the quad, marching off demerits. The academy stood at the mouth of the harbor flaunting her beauty, an architectural composite of tradition and technology -- seemingly layered. Thick granite walls speckled with moss marked the periphery and bound the institution in a traditional fortress. A few quaint halls and monuments of weathered stone and tarnished brass clung to the past. Then soaring above tradition stood five towers of clear graphite, each crystal edifice catching and refracting light, ever changing, one moment an orange flash of fire, the next the blue reflection of ice. Her father, Commodore Flores, had so often pointed to those spires with pride: Someday you'll be a cadet. Someday, you'll command a starcruiser. The stars. Andrea found herself gazing at the academy's launchpad. She studied the shuttlecraft that sat there -- a squat cone, not an Earth design. She squinted to make out the hull markings, a set of concentric rings in random colors and widths: Jod markings. She smiled with self-satisfaction. She would have graduated from the academy this year if...if she'd followed her first set of dreams. But her dreams got sidetracked as she fell in love with Steve Dewinter, a mechanical engineer and weekend sailor. She married young to the bitter disappointment of her father. His terse rebuke still rang in her ears. You are throwing your life away! Wasting yourself! She remembered the sudden regret that swept his face, but she also remembered his stunning lack of retraction. She chose Steve, and the easy affection she shared with her father withered in mutual disappointment. Steve's foster parents also objected to the match, or more candidly, to Andrea's family connection to the military. Steve shrugged off the Dewinters' nervous pacifism as an annoying, if not culpable, bit of ignorance about the nature of the universe. They reluctantly attended the wedding but excused themselves from the reception at the Officers' Club. Steve still tried to patch the strained relationship. Today was a case in point. He'd wanted to take Glennie to see the reclusive grandparents. She adamantly refused, taunting Steve: If they want to see their granddaughter -- which they don't -- they can just crawl out of their Nabbs Creek bungalow and meet us at the harbor for brunch. Andrea knew her word was final. Steve cajoled but never contradicted Andrea on matters involving their daughter. The Dewinters could wait. Her father, on the other hand, would have melted at the prospect of a grandchild. This speculation pinched her natural smile into stoic resignation. Throwing my life away? Had you lived to hold your granddaughter in your lap, your hyperbolic wrath might have changed to joy. Dad, you were as rash and passionate as you were disciplined and forgiving, and almost randomly so..."Andi." The sound jerked her back from her daydream. Her husband Steve patiently led their daughter Glendon up the terra-cotta steps, one step at a time, to the cafe, both faces wreathed in smiles. Steve continued speaking, assuming he had Andrea's complete attention, "Did you see that street vendor pestering us? Gee, they're getting pushy." "No." She took her eyeshades off. "Where?" Steve pointed in the general direction. "The purple hair." Andrea looked through the collection of street performers. An Artrix juggler levitated four silver orbs. A pale Laviorian woman danced with iridescent hoops around her body before a wall of enthusiastic merchant marines. She sang on the pentatonic scale as her hoops obeyed her exotic movements, each hoop emitting a tone that bent and stretched with her. "Mommy..." Glendon vied for attention, as if the two adults were merely momentarily distracted from her presence. Andrea reached down -- almost a reflex -- and hoisted the pleading child into her lap. The little girl buried her face into her mother's chest, her head nuzzled beneath Andrea's chin, playing a little game of mock shyness. "Mommy. Fee' d' bir's." Glendon's request fell on deaf ears. Purple hair? Finally Andrea spotted a clown, a bit stocky, even grotesque in costume -- a thick shank of dirty purple hair, white face paint, and a red ear-to-ear grin painted on. The clown disappeared behind a cafe, leaving the crowd. Andrea snapped, "Was he human? These Alliance imports ought to be quarantined." "A she. The clown's a woman, I think. She slapped this stupid tattoo on my wrist, then tries to hustle me for two slips." Andrea laughed out loud. "And you gave her the money, didn't you?" Steve had a soft heart, especially for strangers. No hard-luck story was outrageous enough; although she loved his generosity, Andrea felt it her duty to modify this overdeveloped virtue of his. "Well, there she goes with your money. Don't complain about pushy street people when you reward their behavior." "I couldn't let Glendon see me get into an argument with a clown." With raised eyebrow, she said, "Afraid she'd see you lose the argument?" she teased. "Let's see this work of art." Glendon peaked sideways through her mother's curtain of hair to see. Steve showed her the back of his left hand -- just above the wrist, a bright yellow disk with blue halo. "That's it? That's all you get for two slips? Steve, sweetheart, you've been had again." "I didn't get much of a choice. She grabs my hand and..." "Excuses." Steve picked at the yellow. "It won't come off -- must be acrylic." He changed the subject. "Glennie wants to feed the birds. You coming?" "No. I've scrubbed enough stuff off the deck of your boat -- I won't help you refuel the gulls." Spoken like a true waterman. She thought Steve too sentimental, always gushing about the

bay, the harbor, the puling gulls, and his sloop, The Deeper Well. Andrea, on the other hand, cherished everything about the bay, but without the sentimentality -- just practical affection. She fished a small tube from her purse, then began anointing Glendon with sunblock, ending with their ritual, "And here's a kiss on your head." Andrea gave her a squeeze as she kissed the delicate curls. She sent her off with Steve to buy popcorn with a warning, "You keep Glennie away from the edge of the dock. I won't have her falling into the water again." "Don't worry." Steve grinned. "I wone fall'n, Mommy." Glendon grabbed Steve by the leg. "That's right, Glennie. You hold onto Daddy." Andrea softened, and her natural smile broke through the stern front she pasted on for Steve's benefit. "Okay, at least you'll both go together." Andrea watched the brazen seagulls swoop down around her husband and daughter. They gleefully tossed popcorn over the water to those mewling, feathered scavengers who moments before might have been pecking a fish carcass or some belly-up blue crab or a rank scrap of garbage. Gulls don't deserve popcorn. Andrea purposefully stayed aloof at her cafe table and looked over the crowd beyond the frenetic atmosphere to the water. Then, a sixth sense warned her something was wrong -- a mother's instinct beyond explanation. She quickly spotted a congregation of gulls and in their midst, her daughter: toes at the edge of the seawall. Andrea rose and yelled, "Steve!" If she falls in, I'll... Steve couldn't hear over the commotion of frenzied birds and squealing daughter. Or perhaps he simply ignored Andrea's maternal complaints about the water. He grew up on the bay (Andrea said with authority that he'd never really grown up). His daughter would grow up loving the bay. Glendon would grow up savoring the carnival of smells from the waterfront: bay seasoning, cotton candy, coffee, and popcorn -- all blended with fishing-boat smells: oysters, crabs, diesel, and pipe tobacco. Steve would teach her to sail; infuse in her the awe of a September squall -- sixty knots of pure fury blowing up the bay! He'd show her the breathtaking pinks and reds of a Chesapeake dawn, and he'd share the grace of the magical calm found during a midnight dinghy ride under a canopy of stars. All very grand, and didn't she love Steve for his grand hold on life? But Andrea punctured Steve's inflated agenda reminding him from time to time, First, we've got to teach Glendon how to swim. Andrea waved. Steve paid no attention. He bent over their child, laughing as she kicked at an aggressive gull who'd made a grab for her tiny paper sack of popcorn. Tentative kicks. The child's pluck made Andrea smile. Good for you, darling! The offended seagull squawked, wings raised in outrage -- in Andrea's mind a threatening gesture. "Steve!" She raised her voice a half pitch, but with no effect. Now, she'd have to be the spoilsport, snatch Glendon from the dock's edge. But that was her duty. She swallowed her last sip of coffee and put on her eyeshades. She dropped a handful of brass coins on the table, then stepped out from the cafe awning into the sunlight, weaving through the Saturday morning crowd coaxed onto the docks by the ubiquitous street vendors hawking crafts from exotic worlds. Odd, seemingly useless electronic gadgets from the Chelle system; Jodic crystal, and Artrix leather goods filled flimsy stalls. If he lets Glennie fall into that cold water... In her haste, she jostled the juggler, now mounted on a unicycle, causing him to lose the magnetic levitation and spill the silver orbs. She paused for a perfunctory apology, then pressed into the crowd. She heard firecrackers -- pop! pop! The loud noise turned heads. Andrea looked around for the culprit. Punk kids -- they ought to fine the parents. Somebody screeched -- laughter? screams? -- then more firecrackers. There are laws . . . The old red and gold popcorn wagon toppled to its side. This is getting out of hand! Andrea thought. A few rowdy kids are going to spoil everybody's day. The gray-haired popcorn vendor staggered back and collapsed as if the earth shook his legs out from under him. Others fell. The crowd lurched. The Laviorian dancer dropped to one knee, then the other, snared in her hoops. Her long hair whipped about her face. The dancer sat up, confusion and shock in her eyes as she looked down at herself: she clutched her chest and a wet indigo poured through her fingers like ink. The crowd scattered, knocking each other down as they scrambled up the steps. Others leapt into the water. Not firecrackers! The reality stunned her. Gunfire! Andrea stood in the chaos and strained to see the pier, but the crowd blocked her view. Run Steve, run Glennie! People began to fall around her. The noise of shrieks and gunfire deafened. A half-dozen men wearing plain gray overalls bullied their way into the crowd -- all of them intimidatingly large, each brandishing a large-caliber pistol, firing with seeming randomness into the crowd. Andrea found her voice, "Steve! Glennie!" Then she felt herself knocked off balance, backwards. She spun to the left as she hit the terra-cotta steps. Another body fell at her side, limp, shielding her from another volley of bullets. Andrea fought the sudden dizziness that dragged her toward oblivion: she had to reach Steve. Andrea pushed the fresh corpse aside and tried to shift her weight to her knees, but her left arm failed. A ripping pain in her shoulder stunned her. She glanced at the wound and saw the jagged piece of her collarbone protruding through the bleeding hole in her shoulder. The sky turned pink and she collapsed -- nauseous. She lay helpless, watching Steve. Steve had heard Andrea's warning and saw the men. He gathered his daughter in his arms and started to run but two armed men cut his retreat. The men surrounded him and a half-dozen other hapless civilians on the dock, then rained bullets in their direction. Andrea winced with each report of gunfire. She saw Steve crumple and fall to the bricks, sheltering her child. Andrea tried to force herself into the fray to help them, but with her useless left arm, she barely struggled to her knees. The men in gray continued firing as they converged on the wounded clustered at the pier. The random firing ceased as each gunman worked a sector. They moved to the groaning bleeding men, searching each. For what? Andrea held her breath as a gray man walked over to Steve. He turned Steve over with the toe of his boot and Steve lifted his left arm as if to fend off a blow. Then with excited gesticulation, the gunman summoned his accomplices. They surrounded Steve. On the leader's orders, they emptied their pistols into Steve's torso. Andrea

watched in stunned disbelief and horror as the percussion of the bullets and the backslash from the bricks levitated Steve's mangled body. Then the leader calmly spoke into a small black transmitter as the pack ran down the dock to a waiting speedboat. Andrea closed her eyes and tried to will the image away. She opened her eyes and there Steve lay, in an ocean of blood. This can't be real! She finally struggled to her knees and crawled down the steps to the pier. This is a bad dream. This isn't real! She crawled through slicks of blood, past the dead juggler. Andrea felt her heart bursting as she fought reality, as she struggled through her own pain to stand. Then she ran through the gore, finally slipping and falling to her knees beside her husband's riddled body. "Steve! Oh, my baby...." Steve heard his name and rolled onto his side, exposing their lifeless daughter. His lips moved but the sound was a faint, unintelligible gurgle, and Steve went slack. I must get help! Weak from her own loss of blood, she managed a hoarse, "Help them!" She looked around. The dead and wounded lay still. The living cowered behind buildings, peering around corners at the carnage; their bewildered stares offered little sympathy -- only a worse than useless sentiment: that might have been me. Her eyes settled on the one figure standing, a senior Jod Fleet officer. He wore a dark gray uniform, appropriate to oversee death. His large hands grabbed the railing. Younger officers tried to coax the older Jod away, but he stood like flint, his dark, pained eyes staring back at Andrea, communicating his unspoken condolence and the terrible truth: your husband and child are dead. And the truth burned more than the hole in her shoulder. Andrea wailed. She clutched her daughter to her breast with her good arm, rocking as if consoling a frantic infant. But the child was tattered, lifeless flesh; her husband stared up at her in death. Andrea fell over them, soaking their blood into her clothes, sobbing: "Please don't go. Don't go..." Copyright © 2001 by Bill Fawcett Associates, Inc.