

Carl Zimmer's new book walks us deep into the 'thickets of genetics and genomics'

Our word for a diagram of the lines of descent—pedigree—is probably derived from the French *pé de grue*, or “crane’s foot,” evoking an image of a pencil-like leg ending in straight, splayed toes.

Yet linear thinking doesn’t begin to do heredity justice, and in his sprawling, magisterial new book, the science writer Carl Zimmer shows why. “[She Has Her Mother’s Laugh: The Powers, Perversions, and Potential of Heredity](#)” brims with rich stories and colorful actors—some sinister, some brilliant, some both—and delves into scientific research, history, and ideas made intimate through the author’s personal experiences. The result explodes any unitary idea of heredity.

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Step by measured step, Zimmer walks us deep into the thickets of genetics and genomics, revealing complications and exceptions that challenge what we think we know about heredity.

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Engineering the global genome could save millions of lives—or produce a chimeric hybrid of Gattaca and Jurassic Park. We could alter the gene pool of the future in ways we cannot yet even imagine, let alone understand. Zimmer is excited about the possibilities, but in a world where headlong innovation always trumps careful contemplation, he urges scientists and the public to learn from history. “We would do well,” he writes, “to look back at how the tools we’ve already invented have altered our ecological inheritance over the past ten thousand years.”

Read full, original post: [The Weird, Ever-Evolving Story of DNA](#)