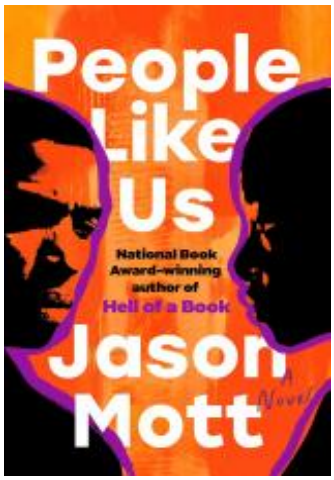
People Like Us

by Jason Mott



About the Book

The riveting new novel by the author of the 2021 National Book Award winner and bestseller HELL OF A BOOK.

PEOPLE LIKE US is Jason Mott?s electric new novel. It is not a memoir, yet it has deeply personal connections to Jason?s life. And while rooted in reality, it explodes with dreamlike experiences that pull a reader in and don?t let go, from the ability to time travel to sightings of sea monsters and peacocks, and feelings of love and memory so real they hurt.

In PEOPLE LIKE US, two Black writers are trying to find peace and belonging in a world that is riven with gun violence. One is on a global book tour after a big prize win; the other is set to give a speech at a school that has suffered a shooting. As their two storylines merge, truths and antics abound in equal measure: characters drink booze out of an award trophy; menaces lurk in the shadows; tiny French cars putter around the countryside; handguns seem to hover in the air; and dreams endure against all odds.

PEOPLE LIKE US is wickedly funny and achingly sad all at once. It is an utter triumph bursting with larger-than-life characters who deliver a very real take on our world. This book contains characters experiencing deep loss and longing; it also is buoyed by riotous humor and characters who share the deepest love. It is the newest creation of a writer whose work amazes, delivering something utterly new yet instantly recognizable as a Jason Mott novel.

Finishing the novel will leave you absolutely breathless and, at the same time, utterly filled with joy for life, changed forever by characters who are people like us.

Discussion Guide

1. ?People like us? is a refrain said by characters time and time again throughout the novel. What do the characters mean

when they say it to The Author? Why do you think he always repeats the phrase back as a question?

2. ?And, just like that, there I was. Freshly minted. A bona fide Author of Some Renown.? The Author tells us this when he wins an important literary award, The Big One, near the beginning of the book. How does this win affect him, and the way others treat him?

3. Both main characters are trying to reckon with their pasts: the Author is being haunted by a physical manifestation of his fate even as he leaves America, and Soot spends his time reliving pivotal moments with his family. Do you think you can ever outrun your past? Can you ever fully understand it?

4. What questions does the novel raise about being Black in America? How do the characters grapple with their American identity and the meaning of home as Black men?

5. The story is told with elements of the fantastical, with characters time traveling and sea monsters beckoning from the deep. Why do you think these supernatural elements are woven into the narrative? What does it say about our characters? psyches?

6. What do you think the book is saying about our American fixation with guns? Why do you think our main characters own guns, when they live with the constant threat of gun violence? What effect does the mere presence of the guns have in the story?

7. The tone of the book is often funny, and the pages are filled with irreverent comedy, even as the story deals with serious themes. How does humor help us understand the meaning our characters are trying to make of the world, even in the face of all its brokenness?

8. Where do our main characters look for peace and belonging in a world that has precious little of that to offer? Do you think they succeed?

9. PEOPLE LIKE US is often self-referential to itself as a book, with allusions to the construct of the story and the presence of an author. What do you think the book says about the power of fiction and the role of the author in our world?

10. Why do you think Jason Mott chooses to share his own story in the final chapter of the book? Do you see the fictional characters and their journeys differently after learning about the author?s own experiences?

Author Bio

Jason Mott has published five novels. His first novel, THE RETURNED, was a *New York Times* bestseller and was turned into a TV series that ran for two seasons. He has a BFA in Fiction and an MFA in Poetry, both from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. His poetry and fiction have appeared in various literary journals, and his fourth novel, HELL OF A BOOK, was named the winner of the National Book Award for Fiction, 2021.

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