

Generation Manifestation: A Gen M Novel: Book 1

Steven Bereznai

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In this layered dystopian novel, teenagers fight to survive the cruel manipulations of an unjust society.

A teenager tries to distinguish herself in a world divided by beliefs about genetic superiority in Steven Bereznai's dystopian novel *Generation Manifestation*.

Following a genetic war, sixteen-year-old Caitlin is a dreg, or a person born with regular DNA, and as such is relegated to second-class citizenship. She yearns to be one of the Supergenics—people blessed with, and prized for, their fantastical abilities. Caitlin believes that her only chance to escape her impoverished borough is to pass on Testing Day, which separates out dregs who manifest powers. Instead, she's funneled into vocational training to become a protector, or the equivalent of a state police officer.

Caitlin is uneasy about her future role as a protector, not only because protectors impacted her family in the past. Still, she relishes the new friendships she forms in training. She becomes conflicted, torn between following protocols and acting on her moral principles; the tension is fascinating. When Caitlin discovers the truth behind how the protectorate operates, such tension crescendos, and Caitlin risks losing her sense of self.

Caitlin's daily life is shaped by the realistic tactics of the oppressive regime. She and others face frequent identity card checks, seek out contraband literature, and witness executions, all while they live in a world that includes menacing mutant beasts. Scenes are detailed in terms of their gray uniformity, but also with flourishes like a pre-war comic book shop that serves as a beautiful oasis in a patrolled, forbidden zone. Here, harm is wrought because freedom has been curbed, but dreams thrive just the same.

Caitlin forms a warm friendship with a blunt and perceptive neurodiverse classmate; it is fostered by their shared love of comic books. Their clandestine meetings exist as a narrative counter to the book's action sequences and lead to heartrending twists about their connection. However, the classmate is more than once compared to a robot because of his demeanor and speech; combined with his OCD and savant behavior, such moments are too stereotypical.

The book's secondary story lines, which follow a fellow protector whom Caitlin is romantically ambiguous about, and Caitlin's troubled home life, are underdeveloped; the latter is covered only in the book's early sections. Still, the novel's groundwork for additional stories in Caitlin's universe is intricate.

A teenager must determine where her true alliances rest in *Generation Manifestation*, a dark dystopian novel directed by tough choices and earned wisdom.

KAREN RIGBY (April 12, 2021)

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