

Manufactured: The Vexton Series (Book One)

Paul A. Trinetti

Iguana (Aug 19, 2015)

Softcover \$17.99 (270pp)

978-1-77180-130-0

Action-packed and featuring strange technologies, this is an intriguing kickoff to a new science fiction series.

Mistrust of the government and rampant sickness are among the ills that threaten to rot America from within in the ambitious science fiction thriller *Manufactured* by Paul A. Trinetti.

The novel is set in an unspecified future. Twenty-five years have passed since a vicious civil war, and the United States is still struggling to recover. Then, a sudden illness begins to sweep through America's youth, seemingly without cause or cure.

Lethargy Reaction Syndrome, or LRS, is soon connected to the government's failure to respond to a catastrophic buildup of acid rain pockets. The already fragile nation splinters, and disparate groups attempt to rise to power. Murders and shifting alliances muddy the waters, and a sinister faction lurks behind the scenes.

Manufactured is the first book in the Vexton series. Much of the book is dedicated to laying foundations and introducing major characters. Writing in these parts of the story is more formulaic, and characters are, at first, underdeveloped.

The underlying mystery is fascinating, but the many characters and the sharing of as-yet-unnecessary information slows the action to a crawl. This remains true until the final few chapters, when the action ramps up and several new mysteries are introduced.

The truth behind LRS and the mystery of the small agricultural town of Vexton drive the plot forward, if in spurts. Between the internal motivations of several groups and the hinted-at supernatural forces in Vexton, it is never quite clear what is going on.

A myriad of possible culprits crops up, from environmental catastrophes to homegrown terrorism to simple negligence. The story highlights issues prevalent in modern society but thankfully never sermonizes.

Several chapters are told from the point of view of Heath Claremont, a worker in Vexton. Through him, the otherwise ambitious narrative settles into a more relatable perspective. With his connections to all of the major plotlines—not only does he work in Vexton, but his father used to run Vexton Land Protection, and his son contracts LRS—Heath gives the story some heart. Whether he is coping with his father's death or his son's illness or is simply keeping his community thriving, Heath grounds the story beautifully.

Manufactured lays the groundwork for future books well, particularly with its introduction of a potentially supernatural/otherworldly aspect. Action-packed and featuring strange technologies, this is an intriguing kickoff.

JOHN M. MURRAY (August 15, 2017)

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