

Regular People of the Weak: A Rebel's Experience with the Spiritual Chief of Poets

Shareef Mabrouk

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A young man searches for his place in the world in this philosophical coming-of-age tale replete with poetic prose.

When Zackery finds himself taking care of a disabled Native American man as part of his community service sentence, he is unprepared for how the next five days will change his life forever. In *Regular People of the Weak*, Shareef Mabrouk creates a deeply philosophical look at one young man's journey from naïvely rebellious boy to responsible man.

Mabrouk is a poet and artist in New York City, which is evident in this debut novel. The prose takes on a spiritually poetic feeling, particularly in the chapters that portray Zackery's relationship with Neolin, the elderly, wheelchair-bound man he is tasked with helping after being arrested for his behavior during a bad trip on shrooms.

The moments between Zackery and Neolin are the strongest in the narrative. Neolin is both funny and wise, and he challenges Zackery, but he is also deeply disturbed by the tragedy that has befallen his family and left him paralyzed. He and Zackery are the two characters that feel fully realized, with Mabrouk showing their inner souls through their music, writing, and spiritual debates.

The rest of the book does not feel as magnetic, and the other characters are not as fleshed out. Zackery's life away from Neolin is told in a series of facts rather than shown through his or other characters' emotional behaviors, creating a feeling of distance. In one instance, Zackery catches the fiancé of a woman he likes in the act of cheating on her:

I saw her fiancé at a huge coffee spot with a girl I recognized as one of the students from the high school Amelia and I worked in. Chewy and the student were holding hands, kissing on the lips, and talking like a cute couple. It was so much agony trying to figure out whether it was right or wrong for me to say something right then and there.

This scene and others like it would have more impact if Zackery's agony and other actions were shown through his behavior rather than stated as a simple fact.

In addition, mechanical errors such as awkward prepositional phrasing, time line issues, and incorrect facts pull attention away from the story. Some housekeeping in these areas would improve the flow of the novel.

Overall, Mabrouk offers an interesting coming-of-age tale, with the young man forced to switch the roles of mentor and mentee when dark secrets from the past come to light. Nicely packaged with attractive cover art and intriguing back cover copy, this book will appeal to older teens and college students who are also seeking their place in the world.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (June 3, 2014)

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