

The Timematician: A Gen M Novel: Book 2

Steven Bereznai

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(180pp)

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The science fiction novel The Timematician includes considerable mayhem before making poignant points about companionship, love, and the need for connections.

The Timematician is the rollicking second installment of Steven Bereznai's Gen M series—a surprising and comedic adventure about world domination and finding love in unlikely places.

At first glance, Doctor BetterThan appears to be a typical mad genius. Shunned by society but gifted with the ability to jump back and forth in time, he's armed himself with battalions of robots and a death ray in his war against mutated supergenetic humans and DNA regulars alike. He's placed himself in position to eradicate all life, and to ensure a future in which he has the planet all to himself. But when a group of genetically enhanced warriors, led by Caitlin, intercedes, it sets off a chain of events that places Doctor BetterThan's plans for world domination in jeopardy.

With vibrant, sardonic style, the book goes into BetterThan's head and hidden heart. The would-be villain comes off as pompous and egomaniacal, with a predilection for elaborate costumes and florid Latin phrases, but underneath it all, BetterThan is a misunderstood, sensitive boy who's learned to cut himself off from human contact. All he needs is a worthy foe to bring him out of his shell, and that frenemy arrives in the form of Mairi Lin, a superpowered human whose consciousness persists, despite her body being in a coma. Mairi Lin has her own army of robots at her disposal, and soon she's matching BetterThan's efforts, outmaneuvering him even as the duo edges closer to an unlikely friendship, thanks to their mutual love of the *Lost in Space* television show.

The book's action sequences are fast and furious. BetterThan's time-jump powers lead to numerous attempts to improve on the past, and these rewind sequences bristle with cartoonish energy. It's no coincidence that BetterThan watches *Groundhog Day* at one point: like the film, the novel tackles the philosophical questions of whether a perfect moment is attainable, and whether it can, or should be, relived once it happens. The book also includes quirky, humorous touches, including BetterThan's assistant robot, Genetrix, a bossy mother figure who enjoys hectoring her master. Above all, the book has sympathy for its misfit, gender-fluid characters, even as their battle of wits threatens to destroy what's left of the world.

The book's latter half finds BetterThan mounting an unorthodox counter-offensive based on the Marilyn Monroe movie *Some Like It Hot*, Madonna music videos, and Fritz Lang's landmark science fiction film *Metropolis*. Staying true to the story's course, an apparent victory turns into defeat, and then into victory of a different sort, as BetterThan's relationship with Mairi Lin blossoms in truly bittersweet fashion.

For all of the science fiction novel *The Timematician's* almost overwhelming mayhem, its poignant conclusion makes a strong statement about companionship, love, and the need to move forward and connect with others.

HO LIN (August 7, 2021)

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