

**Lifezones: Awaken****P. B. Molinar**

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*In the ambitious dystopian novel Lifezones, three citizens on a desert planet seek freedom from oppression.*

P. B. Molinar's science fiction novel *Lifezones* follows three separate missions to subvert a dystopian regime.

The people of Caranda rely on symbiosis with worms in order to survive on their wasteland planet, H3. A corrupt government given to violent forms of oppression controls the population. Rebels have tried and failed to take down the abusive regime.

Now, three people on different missions fight to overthrow the horrible caste system once and for all. River seeks purified water to free people from the worms; Pide is on the run (with the help of a warrior, Chukjo) and wishes to return home; and Emo traces the steps of his dead rebel brother, hoping to decipher a mysterious text. The book's perspective alternates between the three, who unite at various points in their long and winding adventures, working to restore the planet's environment and bring peace to their world.

The book's worldbuilding is vast and comprehensive, teeming with intricate details and imaginative ideologies. However, the world is so immense that it proves difficult to contain in the novel's limited space. Its particular place names, cultures, languages, and singular objects and concepts are overwhelming in their volume, and many of the settings are addressed in too dense terms, impeding immersion. This exhaustive worldbuilding ends up overpowering the book's characterizations, as well.

Complex exposition comes to drown the story out; in the process, the cast's personal histories are subverted by world histories. Though the central three are clear products of their elaborate environments, their individuality is lost. At one point, Emo contemplates the idea that the worm makes people believe the planet's dead zones will last forever, but his musings incorporate facts about the world that contribute little to the issue at hand.

Still, the prose is vibrant, with powerful images that are used to capture settings and relay complex concepts. There are majestic citadels, fog-shrouded mountain caverns, and noxious slums. Battle scenes on the ground and in the air are choreographed in an exciting manner. Indeed, the book's imagery is innovative, contributing to poignant ideas about power in politics.

As the story winds down, it begins to switch between viewpoints at a faster rate, increasing the pace toward the climax. An abrupt ending stalls this momentum, though its satisfying developments hint at a sequel.

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AIMEE JODOIN (March 12, 2022)

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