

Ride the Snake Road: Beamo Roamer's Hardcore Jaunt to the Wasteland

LeRoy Wow

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(310pp)

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A man on the edges of a dystopian society seeks riches in the exciting novel Ride the Snake Road.

A pseudo-Western thriller set in an immersive dystopian landscape, LeRoy Wow's novel *Ride the Snake Road* is set eleven hundred years after a nuclear event, Doomtime.

In Zarkaria, which sits on the territory of the former United States, citizens struggle to survive while the “rich Big Men” run their counties. In this setting, Beamo is a scavenger. When he memorizes and then destroys a map leading to the legendary Lost Fort Knox gold in the former Area 51, it places him in danger: the Big Men in his home, Crans County, want the Lost Fort Knox gold themselves. Thus, Beamo works with Tee, a former friend, and the Sawbird Gang to reach the abandoned military base first.

The stylized prose includes quick-witted conversations replete with inventive slang terms, like “highiq” or “lowiq” to indicate intelligence (or the lack thereof). Heavy dialects heighten its immersiveness, though they are also hard to penetrate at times—indeed, one Sawbird Gang member, Sass, speaks in near riddles. Still, intricate worldbuilding renders Beamo's story both vibrant and grounded: as he and the Sawbird Gang travel west, they encounter dangerous terrors like Mutant Angels, skull-faced former humans who evolved due to nuclear fallout; the Minis, who were genetically modified before Doomtime into primitive, small-brained predators; and the harrowing traps set by ancient Americans in Area 51. Combined with the long trip's natural hardships (Beamo and the Gang search for food and shelter, avoid diseases, and have to work to stabilize their group's precarious hierarchy), such travails vivify the setting and heighten the stakes for Beamo—in particular, after his feelings for Tee's alluring sister, Little Bit, increase, feeding into his desire to protect her.

While the plot is straightforward, it also meanders at times. It delves into Beamo's backstory too often, zooming in on his past friendship with and estrangement from Tee, as well as on his relationships with his late parents. Such interludes help to flesh him out, but they also interrupt the book's action and impede its momentum. Still, the Gang's travels remain high stakes, even when their particulars are relegated to the book's background. There's a palpable sense of danger throughout that makes the adventure engrossing.

A thrilling novel set in a futuristic, post-nuclear West, *Ride the Snake Road* is about survival, legacies, and the dogged persistence of human civilization.

LEAH BLOCK (May 9, 2024)

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