

The Gold Mystery Adventure

R. R. Kaufman

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Spurred forward by a whirlwind of fights and strange inventions, this climate change-inspired novel introduces its complex world with verve.

A tyrannical megalomaniac instigates pollution and interplanetary environmental collapse in R. R. Kaufman's fantastical novel *The Gold Mystery Adventure*.

Living in an underwater city on the planet Odyssey, Zhen is an avid rock climber and the daughter of one of the planet's leading engineers. When her mother and uncle go missing in Brix, a nearby above-water city, Zhen goes on a rescue mission. Instead, she's sent tumbling into an existential struggle with the power-hungry Razor, whose rapacious industrialization is laying waste to Odyssey.

Evading Razor's army of gold-powered robots, Zhen races to unravel the secret of who Razor is, what she wants, and where she comes from before the damage to her planet and her family become permanent. Moving between Odyssey's lush rivers and dystopian cityscapes to the ravaged surface of Earth, Zhen soon becomes the figurehead of a clandestine resistance movement bent on restoring peace and balance.

Spurred forward by a whirlwind of fights and strange inventions, this climate change-inspired story introduces underwater breathing devices and uncanny power sources with verve. It also investigates the apathy that stymies action in the face of world-changing events. Using a teleportation device called the Lux to reach Earth, Zhen finds only scattered islands as evidence of its once massive continents; she sails between them on heaps of floating plastic. Locals share conflicting stories about how combinations of greed, convenience, and self-interest paved the way for climatic destruction and created the callous Razor.

However, the story lurches between its episodes: at various points, Zhen escapes a robot army, dodges a surprise attack, and decodes a hidden message in a computer chip's design. These complex challenges are described in minute detail, but they too often conclude with fast, credulity-straining solutions. Further, the book evades developing its climate change themes beyond binary depictions of good and evil. Herein, some individuals are bent on inexplicable destructiveness; others are filled with innate goodness. Further, characters' exchanges are too driven by exposition, to the point they become dry and mechanical, explaining elements of the story while leaving their speakers and relationships underdeveloped.

Further, the book's many action sequences, which include rock climbing, exploding boats, and near drownings, are rendered in ambiguous language, making their movements difficult to visualize. For instance, when Zhen falls into the sea with her hands and feet bound, concerns about her being able to breathe are foregone in favor of lengthy explanations of how she moves her hands and legs to squirm free of the ropes; there's a sense of detached unreality to the scene, draining the tension from its extreme nature. In addition, the plot's development is predictable; there's little doubt established regarding the novel's ultimate conclusion.

In the foreboding science fiction novel *The Gold Mystery Adventure*, a headstrong girl decides to protect her planet from the ravages of climate change and pollution.

WILLEM MARX (March 7, 2024)

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