

Moxyland by Lauren Beukes

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South African author Lauren Beukes has written a unique and edgy tale in Moxyland. This debut novel will leave readers with many questions to mull over. How much technology is too much? What are the benefits of individuality? How important is holding those in control accountable for their actions? Kendra, Toby, Lerato and Tendeka, the four main protagonists, have diverse, albeit interwoven, lives and dreams in Capetown, South Africa. Kendra dropped out of art school to focus on old-fashioned photography and is a sponsorbaby, which means the logo of the soft drink, Ghost, shimmers on her skin. The nanotechnology responsible protects her from viruses but not from an addiction to the drink. Toby shunned his rich family and education and now takes drugs and wears a 24/7 streaming blog on his jacket, mouthing off to all and sundry whether they deserve it or not. Lerato, raised in an orphanage, works as a programmer for one of the all-governing corporations, but she only cares about getting ahead and isn't above biting the hand that feeds her. And Tendeka is an idealist, leading protests against the corporations, mixing with the homeless and disconnected and always taking on more than he can handle. Each character alternately narrates portions of the story, often giving us differing views of situations. The four characters retain diversity to a point: Kendra is insecure, Toby is over-confident, Lerato is Brazen and Tendeka is bossy. They and the supporting cast represent black, white, gay and straight segments of the population, but Beukes doesn't delve too deeply into personalities. Perhaps, it's because some individuality gets lost in a world so controlled by technology. The underground system, network cafes, and police recognize people by their cell phones, and one of the punishments for breaking the law is being disconnected which translates into not getting into one's building, not riding the trains and not being able to access money. So how much do we want technology to advance? Already, it's hard to live without cell phones and computers, but do we want police who have nano-enhanced dogs? Below the surface of these intertwined lives and experiences lurks something more sinister, but Beukes uses a subtle hand when revealing details. Don't read this gem too quickly or you might miss the laugh-out-loud lines, and more importantly, those thoroughly surprising twists. Beukes includes lots of slang — South African I presume — that's easily understood in context and lends credibility to the bustling world she has created. Her style is distinct, comprising short, almost staccato sentences that mimic the pace of the people and the society itself that seems to spin frenetically like a gerbil on a wheel. Vivid descriptions nearly assault the senses: you can almost hear the yammering in a market, the scrabble of dog's claws on cement and see the bot pop out from under a bed to grab a scrap of paper that's fallen to the floor. Beukes has done a fabulous job of world building, although it's a world I'm glad I don't inhabit! You can find Lauren Beukes online at <http://laurenbeukes.book.co.za/>. Overall, I highly recommend this novel for fans of William Gibson and others who are fascinated by a talented new writer with a distinct style. I look forward to reading Zoo City, her second novel, due out later this year. For more information on Beukes, check out her website at <http://www.moxyland.com>. Buy Moxyland from Amazon.com using this link to support The Specusphere.