



RUIN ROAD

BY LAMAR GILES

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The Story

Cade Webster lives between worlds. He's a standout football star at the right school but lives in the wrong neighborhood—if you let his classmates tell it. Everywhere but home, people are afraid of him for one reason or another. Afraid he's too big, too fast, too ambitious, too Black.

Then one fateful night, to avoid a dangerous encounter with the police, he ducks into a pawnshop. An impulse purchase and misspoken desire change everything when Cade tells the shopkeeper he wishes people would stop acting so scared around him, and the wish is granted . . .

At first, it feels like things have taken a turn for the better. But it's not just Cade that people no longer fear—it's everything. With Cade spreading this newfound "courage" wherever he goes, anything can happen. Fearless acts of violence begin to escalate in both his neighborhood and at school. With the right moves, and brave friends, Cade might have one—and only one—chance to save all he loves. But at what cost? After all, the devil's in the details.

Reading Group Questions

1. What is Cade afraid of in the book? How does he navigate those fears? When he's thinking about fear, he wishes away other people's fear of him, instead of wishing away a fear of his own. Why do you think he does that? What circumstances and situations in Cade's life lead him to this wish?
2. How the world views Cade often changes person to person and based on where he is. Think about how he is perceived by different people in different places in the book. For example, when he's home at the Court or on the public bus or at school, etc. how does that perception change and why? Find at least three different people and locations that Cade experiences and compare and contrast them. Do you experience anything similar in your own life? Discuss that.
3. Cade's dad says that "Everyman is a con man." What does that mean? Pick two characters and discuss how they are a "con man" in their own way.
4. There are few chapters from perspectives other than Cade's. Why do you think the author chose to switch perspectives? How did they help the overall storytelling? What did they add to things? Whose perspective was your favorite and why?

About the Author



Lamar Giles is the critically acclaimed author of *The Getaway*, a YALSA Top Ten Best Fiction title and a Quick Pick; *Spin*, a *New York Times* Editor's Pick; *Overtaken*, a *Kirkus Reviews* Best Book; *Not So Pure and Simple*; *Fake ID*, an Edgar Award finalist; and *Endangered*, also an Edgar Award finalist, as well as numerous middle grade novels and comics. He is also the editor of the anthology *Fresh Ink*. Lamar is a founding member of We Need Diverse Books. He resides in Virginia with his family. Find out more at lamargiles.com.

Author Q&A

One of the things that you do really well is you take something so mundane and make it terrifying. In this case, making a throwaway wish. Cade's wish for people not to be afraid around him comes from a good place, and yet chaos and evil are born from it. What is it about wishing and wanting that seems to be sort of at the heart of humanity?

I always think of a wish as a fantasy of instant and painless change. So how cool would it be to fix a problem, whether it's personal or global, with desire and magic? But a wish story, and particularly the story in *Ruin Road*, will tend to illustrate why that's not possible and why you shouldn't want it to be. Life is difficult even when it's going exactly the way you want. Which means life is about who you are, how you treat others and yourself, regardless of your circumstance. So wishing for a different version is one of those fun thought exercises. But if it comes true, it becomes the dog catching the car. You don't really know what to do with it, and it's more trouble than it's worth. Yet a fantasy is a fantasy for reasons we all desire, but can never have.

Our world tends to be divided into good and evil, right and wrong, light and dark. But then there's always a gray area which gets explored a lot. The Sunken place, purgatory, the Upside Down, or for Cade, Ruin Road. What fascinates you about that ambiguous place?

I think the ambiguous place is the realist place. I've never been a person who can think in terms of absolute good or absolute evil, because I don't know anyone, including myself, who classified something they did as evil. Other people may be evil, but I have reasons. If you take that bit of ego off the table and be honest, none of us are above reproach. And I like spending time with characters who, if they don't know that at the beginning of the story, are going to learn some hard lessons, as Cade does. And what's satisfying to me, particularly in a protagonist, is the acceptance that if I'm capable of doing bad things, of messing up, of being less than what my fellow humans need, then I'm also capable of trying very, very hard to be the impossible good guy, even if I fall short.

There's a really great theme of fathers and sons in the *Ruin Road*. Did you plan for that as you were sort of conceiving the book and the characters or was that something that sort of naturally just threaded itself through and became apparent to you?

I don't know that I ever have a plan. But the parent-child connection is one that emerged. I have a daughter now, so this was probably heavy on my mind while I was writing. And I can look at her some days and think of mannerism or something she says is definitely me or definitely her mom. And then that makes me think about stuff inside of me that maybe I don't feel that good about, like anxiety and self-doubt. And I think, *I hope I didn't give that to her too*. But what if I did? And there's a ton of that in *Ruin Road*, but way more dire. I hope I didn't pass on a vendetta that endangers your immortal soul. But maybe I did.

Final lightning round question: Who was your favorite character to write in this?

My favorite character to write in this, honestly, was Booker. Because I love writing like super smart guys, particularly the kind that know their full potential unleashed can be dangerous.