

## Crazy Hawk: A Post-Apocalyptic Thriller

**R. J. Stewart**

Hovartus Books

(380pp)

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*A kidnapping forces a warrior on a journey of discovery in the future-set Western novel Crazy Hawk, an exhilarating story about love and family set in a postapocalyptic landscape.*

In R. J. Stewart's intense postapocalyptic novel *Crazy Hawk*, family bonds are tested, broken, and forged.

One hundred years ago, a series of civil wars decimated the United States. Vehicles requiring fossil fuels were replaced by horses, mules, and donkeys; gas refineries and factories disappeared. Highways are littered with tanks left to rust, and people depend on nineteenth-century weaponry.

In this landscape, Dierdre is known as Crazy Hawk because of her deadly abilities. Astride her horse, she scours the desert in search of her teenage sister who was taken while on patrol. While tracking the kidnappers, whose child abductions trail from Arizona to California, Dierdre meets and falls for peaceful, gentle Jube, who works as a photographer. Her new love, her spirit-horse, Danny, and her notoriety as a fearsome and brutal killer are her most valuable resources through her travels.

The book's worldbuilding is thorough, in particular when it comes to the various communities that have formed. The sisters are Hussars—horse-riding raiders who believe in intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual development. The Nations, a unified collective of Indigenous tribes, hate Dierdre for killing one of their leaders in an act of vengeance. There are also motorcycle gangs, roving thieves, and a group near Sacramento that preserves some of the technology from the old world, including medicine and automatic rifles. However, the details of the apocalyptic event that left most modern technologies useless and impractical are too scant, impeding full immersion.

The ubiquity of black-powder guns, horses, and outlaws gives this future-set novel the intriguing flavor of a Western, as do its gritty scenes of graphic violence. Though its pacing is frenetic, the story is exhilarating: bullets are shot through eyes, bones are broken, and wounds heal over time if at all. Meanwhile, people's relationships evolve in unexpected ways; all are complex. Indeed, as Deirdre tracks her sister, her relationship with Jube forms a compelling secondary thread: she falls for him despite viewing his kindness as exploitable; he falls for her despite his disapproval of the Hussars' way of life. As their lives grow more entwined, they envision a future together based on compromise and mutual appreciation.

In the heartfelt postapocalyptic novel *Crazy Hawk*, a warrior woman fights to find her lost sister and protect those she cares about.

BEN LINDER (July 16, 2024)

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