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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ MYSTERY

A Cure for All: A Detective Thriller

Russell G. Johnson
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Two scientists at BioGenTech think they've discovered a cure for cancer. Just before the research report is released to the public however Dr. Jeremy Branson turns up dead—a supposed suicide—and the other scientist Dr. Gustof Stilinski disappears. Doctor Branson's parents don't believe their son could have killed himself and they hire a private detective Jefferson Stewart III to look into his death.

Investigator Jefferson Stewart is Special Forces veteran who joined the Washington D.C. police force after the military. A man of contradictions and conflicts he wears expensive suits to a dilapidated office and walks the highroad of a failed marriage. As he begins investigating the Branson death he finds that the case is as complicated as he is and there are many layers to peel to get at the heart of the matter.

Motivations to declare the suicide a homicide bring Stewart to the office of an economic analyst who shows him a model forecasting trends were the cancer cure to go to market. It isn't pretty: millions of lives are saved but the global economy is plunged into chaos as medical systems collapse. Drug research companies hospitals medical equipment sales and manufacturing are all impacted negatively by the cure. Moreover longer life spans strain the elder care industries even the food chain.

The executive committee of the Society to Preserve the American Way (SPAW) isn't going to wait for that to happen. Bodies begin to pile up and the hunter becomes the hunted. Stewart calls in the cavalry and his friends from Special Forces and well as the local gang all pitch in to keep him and his girlfriend-sidekick alive. But when all is said and done Stewart must ask himself whether the cure isn't worse than the disease.

Author Johnson a cancer survivor himself has certainly done his homework on drug research companies and how they fit into the medical community. His characters are convincing although a bit stereotypical: the good guy is very very good; the bad guy is disfigured; the local gang leader has a heart of gold. Dialogue reads stiffly at times and is printed double-spaced which takes the reader out of the story. Excessive background of the drug industry and Special Forces stall the momentum.

But *A Cure for All* starts with a fascinating question: What if the cure for cancer causes the global economy to crash and what if big business actively worked to prevent such a cure? Russell G. Johnson does a good job answering the question in his debut thriller that twists and turns right up until the very end.

JAMIE ENGLE (October 27, 2006)

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