

Blood-Red Mist: A Jena Halpern Thriller

Michael Allan Scott

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In Michael Allan Scott's paranormal thriller *Blood-Red Mist*, a psychic police consultant tries to save a life, rather than solve the mystery of a murder after the fact.

Jena travels home to attend to Jim, her dying stepfather, who contracted cancer while working as an enforcement agent and is in the process of suing a conglomerate to ensure they don't get away with killing thousands of others like him. Jena and Jim's unusual relationship has been strained by the loss of Jena's mother and by Jim's unspoken bond with Jena.

Under duress, Jena's empathic ability pings; she traces the source to the head of an FDA division tasked with approving new drugs, Thomas, who's been threatened after discovering the truth behind a dangerous drug. When Thomas attempts to extort a pharmaceutical company for millions and then flees, Jena wants to save him, but Thomas's mental and physical health is strained. He believes that everyone is out to get him; he doesn't trust Jena.

The story weaves together two disparate threads: the story about Jena's stepfather, and Thomas's attempts to escape. The book alternates well between Jena's quiet moments of reflection, Thomas's paranoia, and the fact that corrupt corporate officials and government agents have Thomas and Jena in their crosshairs.

Jena anchors the story. Her warmth and compassion draw people in, opening doors for her that enable her to retrieve sensitive data from the FDA by charming its director. Her drive to save Thomas and bring Jim's lawsuit to light highlight her passion, while personal details—her love for her cat; her shared past with Jim—round her out. Others are developed with the same depth and personality, down to an Uber driver and a pharmaceutical executive who's tasked with silencing Thomas at any cost.

Moments in which Jena researches and travels around town showcase her abilities, but are less compelling than faster sequences, as with Jena's last-ditch attempt to save Thomas by speaking into his mind using her psychic abilities. Conversations are sometimes more casual than appropriate: Thomas's conversations with his coworkers veer between sounding professional and being filled with slang.

Though the conclusion is hopeful, elements of it are unfinished; it relies on Jena's gifts for its closure. Still, *Blood-Red Mist* is a heartfelt paranormal mystery whose endearing heroine overshadows its darker elements.

JOHN M. MURRAY (January 8, 2020)

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