

Codon Zero

Jim Hendee

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An international terrorist, a young son with a rare blood disease, and a deadly virus that could potentially wipe out the Middle East are just a few of the crises ex-intelligence officer Jason Stouter has to deal with in *Codon Zero*.

Jim Hendee's action-packed thriller has all the makings of a Robert Ludlum saga: sensual, female intelligence agents; continent hopping; deadly missions; shootouts; and a variety of weapons at the hero's disposal.

Lured by the possibility of curing his son's disease, newly divorced Jason agrees to join forces with a group of underground genetic engineers who are seeking to end the conflict between Israel and the Arab nations. The engineers, led by Dr. Chance Bonnard, coerce Jason into abandoning his corporate counterintelligence firm located in Florida to spread a virus called Codon Zero. "What we have done," explains Dr. Bonnard, "is to find a way to make those who receive the gene temporarily sick until they agree to stop fighting. If they stop, we tell them how to cure the disease, if they start up again, we infect others with a modified form of the disease which requires a different cure."

Unfortunately, after Jason sprays the virus on the Israeli and Arabian heads of state, the formula for the contagion falls into the wrong hands: Khalil Zufar. Jason enlists the help of his chain-smoking best friend, Agent Sali Bryant, and his recently hired secretary, Celine Venturi, to stop Zufar from using the virus to kill all Arabs and Jews. During the mission, Jason encounters an old acquaintance, the sexy Mossad agent Roxanne Allon. The four travel to Israel, where they fight to prevent World War III and to ensure the antidote to Codon Zero gets into the capable hands of Arab and Israeli doctors before Zufar can release more of the virus into the population.

While Hendee's characters are thriller stereotypes, his flair for action-driven storytelling is considerable. Pitting good guy against bad guy, his story recalls the pulp fiction of yesteryear. The author's narrative is not always logical, but he can be forgiven his lapses because the book is so much fun to read.

Codon Zero is a well-researched and imaginative foray into the world of bio-terrorism. It is perfect for those who like a story that moves at a swift clip.

MONICA CARTER (September 19, 2011)

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