



Deadly Payload

Karen Randau

Short On Time Books (Jul 17, 2018)

Softcover \$10.99 (270pp)

978-1-71736-016-8

A thriller set amid a public health emergency, Deadly Payload is full of compelling characters and suspense.

A small-town bioterrorism nightmare springs to frightening life in Karen Randau's vivid modern-day thriller and detective procedural *Deadly Payload*.

Dead birds raining from the sky herald a toxic attack on the water supply of Rim Vista, Arizona. By a lucky coincidence, Rita Avery—a wife, grandmother, and newly minted private investigator—is one of the few townspeople unaffected. With her poisoned son, husband, and most of the town—including its police force—barely clinging to life, it's up to Avery to use her skills to find those responsible and answer the question of whether there is worse to come.

The story, narrated by Avery, shows in vivid, realistic terms what such an attack would look like. While following clues and researching suspects, the pragmatic yet compassionate Avery must deal with a quarantined town in which essential services are limited or shut down, family members and friends are sick and scared, and there are threats to her safety.

Active voice, verbal narration, snappy dialogue, and cliffhanger chapter endings keep the story moving along. Well-described settings, from hospital rooms to dangerous dirt roads through the mountains to Avery's middle-class suburban neighborhood, add to the story's credibility.

Well-described characters also help to bring the story to life, including "Crazy Mary," a homeless veteran of the war in Afghanistan, who holds a key to the mystery and is a fixture in the neighborhood. Details about Mary's hair, scars, scent, and PTSD bring her to colorful, if disturbing, life.

Avery is the most intriguing character. As she uncovers and sorts out the details of an all-too-possible terrorist plot, a portrait emerges of a likable, resourceful, courageous, and sometimes guilt-ridden woman. She carries both a handgun and anti-anxiety pills. Though mechanically inexperienced, she's unafraid to try changing a tire in the rain on a remote mountain road.

The mystery of the story is intriguing and layered. Avery tries to discover both who is behind the attack and why they have targeted a small, seemingly obscure town rather than a larger, more newsworthy target. The story presents systematic, credible detective work; clue by clue, Avery puts the puzzle together.

The narrative also delves into the medical mystery of what kind of pathogen sickened the town, as researchers race to find an antidote. Medical clues are there as well. First responders and doctors must deal with frightening, potentially deadly symptoms as time ticks away. The story presents its technical medical information in a clear, accessible, and even dramatic fashion, adding to the tension.

A thriller set amid a public health emergency, Deadly Payload is full of compelling characters and suspense.

GARY HENRY (June 8, 2018)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.