

Hazardous Lies

Stephen J. Wallace

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The minutiae of engineering and safety protocols is on display in the knowledgeable thriller Hazardous Lies.

Corporate shadiness and bureaucratic red tape are spotlighted in Stephen J. Wallace's thriller *Hazardous Lies*. It delivers a story replete with the requisite instances of fabrication (as the novel's title alludes to), but also the resilience of those for whom justice is still a fight worth pursuing.

Jon is a rookie investigator for a brand-new division of the Department of the Interior in Washington, DC. He's assigned to investigate a fatal explosion at a chemical plant, Chemtrifuge, in Charleston, Virginia. From the outset, the company impedes rather than assists his efforts. Meanwhile, Jon's boss tries to keep the division's budgetary windfall from becoming annexed by other governmental entities before the investigation can be completed.

Jon's past work as a mechanical engineer in similar environs to those at Chemtrifuge is helpful; he has insight into numerous aspects of the plant and sees the accident from a unique vantage. He also recognizes the token nature of the efforts of the plant's operating managers and leadership. Through a series of ceaseless deceptions and hushed admissions, Jon remains dogged. His investigation exposes the measures that the big business went to in order to keep its profits in the black.

The novel does an able job of unpacking various behind-the-scenes scenarios, which in turn drive Jon's sense of right and wrong, even as inevitable doubts threaten to derail his momentum. Jon is sympathetic, developed with heart and vulnerability; his position across the proverbial table from a bevy of antagonistic company men propels him into the hero's realm. Throughout, he continues to fight for the truth, even when doing so seems as though it may not be worth it. The book's inclusion of a true villain only solidifies its expansiveness.

While there are occasional instances of spoon-fed conclusions, the labyrinthine inner workings of the industrial plant are handled with spatial and procedural consideration. And there are subplots involving a local political scandal and complications from a hasty environmentalist group that reveal the multipronged hurdles that honest investigations must leap over in order to get closer to the truth. These additions to the plot are thoughtful, ratcheting up its continual sense of a discouraging underworld.

The infuriating greed of corporate machines is dissected in the brutal, honest thriller *Hazardous Lies*, a book with innate suspense.

RYAN PRADO (March 25, 2024)

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