

Clarion Review ★★★★☆

MYSTERY

Karma Wears Versace

Rod Palmer

Black Wren Press (May 28, 2019)

Softcover \$15.99 (326pp)

978-1-73396-330-5

The excitement in this police procedural hinges on science and on the book's great central character.

Rod Palmer's stylish and heavy-hitting detective thriller *Karma Wears Versace* features a tenacious detective who takes on a vicious vigilante in Atlanta.

Aisha Sawyer is a new type of detective—a tough, no-nonsense cop who uses both her intuition and her training and who is also street smart and tender. She investigates homicides in Atlanta.

In this story, the city's hip hop scene and its academic complex collide when local rap legend Kendall "Trap" Miller ends up dead, and Megan Appleton, a medical school student, ends up on life support. All evidence points to a culprit with advanced knowledge of medicine, especially of diseases and infections. The Atlanta Police Department and Sawyer, neither of whom know all that much about medicine, are in a race against time to stop the killer from striking again.

The best scenes take place either on Atlanta's streets or in the bustling police precinct. Both environments become like characters in the story, with the boisterous squad room, filled almost entirely with men, driving the investigation forward, and Atlanta's streets providing the on-the-ground intelligence needed to solve the case. Both are portrayed with some artistic license.

Sawyer is the shining star. All of the book's best lines are uttered by her, and almost all of the case's legwork and brainwork is accomplished by her. Compared to the humane and introspective Sawyer, every other character is less compelling. Sawyer's fellow detectives are abrasive, and they utter ill-founded theories while displaying a lack of charisma.

When Sawyer isn't involved in them, the book's conversations tend to be less interesting. The text favors dialogue over descriptions, and many of its conversations are rote. The central crime is a fascinating one, blending hardboiled reality with the intricacies of science. The righteous serial killer who's armed with knowledge of low-grade biological warfare is convincing, though their identity can be gleaned too early on in the book.

Though there's a fun sociopolitical argument given at the end, Sawyer is the most surprising factor of the novel. The story's predicted conclusion falls flat when it arrives: because of her dynamism, it is a given that Sawyer will catch the villain and will look great while doing so.

Karma Wears Versace is a police procedural with a scientific twist and a great central character.

BENJAMIN WELTON (May 15, 2019)

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.