

## Paradise, WV

**Rob Rufus**

Keylight Books (Jul 20, 2021)

Hardcover \$29.99 (320pp)

978-1-68442-670-6

In the layered thriller *Paradise, WV*, a rural town suffers from the “municipal leprosy” of the stigmatized opioid epidemic. A string of grisly murders links the misery of the town’s present to its gory past—and to a convicted serial killer, the Blind Spot Slasher. Paradise’s younger generation, including Henry and Jane, the killer’s children, unwind the mystery that links the Slasher to a decrepit cult.

This is a small town thriller with a little of everything, including spunky neighborhood kids, sinister faith healers, and condemned movie theaters. Its heady combination of chilling noir details includes the angle of a stab wound and the tattoos that creep over a pimp’s track-marked arm. Paradise is a grim place, and the devastation wreaked by opioids is just as present and threatening as the killer who lurks in the shadows.

This skillful tale is bleak, but with occasional glimmers of hope in the form of shots at redemption. These opportunities to undo the damage of the past are a welcome reprieve from the town’s overwhelming darkness. Still, each character is drawn with care and respect; in spite of straitened circumstances, they are dignified. Jane, a budding soccer champion, withstands merciless teasing, while her brother takes refuge in his heavy metal cassette collection. Henry’s friend Otis is a brainiac who recognizes the parallels between his father’s addiction-related fall from grace and his friends’ losses. The children’s ally, police officer Elena Garcia, takes an outsider’s view on the town as she burrows into its history. The cast’s genuine exchanges are realistic in conveying how the small, forgotten community clings to the edge of survival.

Unsettling and unforgettable, *Paradise, WV* walks a line between pulp fiction and compassionate storytelling.

CLAIRE FOSTER (July / August 2021)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission’s 16 CFR, Part 255.*