



The Black Widows

Doug Zipes

iUniverse

Unknown (pp)

978-1-936236-47-3

In this tense, fast-moving thriller, murder victims are turning up with their chests slashed. NYPD Detective Zach Dayan, an ex-Israeli cop, needs plenty of wit to connect the seemingly unrelated cases from around the country. Working with his junior partner Harry Scarpia, he witnesses autopsies and queries a cardiologist friend for advice—while young Harry may succumb to the wiles of a sexy suspect who has a great body and a .45-caliber handgun she calls Boom Boom. Before getting into police work, Zach had spent two years as a medical student, which serves him well in this case. The first autopsy scene may remind mystery fans of Tess Gerritson's gasp-inducing cadaver cut-ups—this is meant as high praise. There is also a spectacular scene where an unknown assailant runs Zach's car off the road and sends him to the Emergency Room.

Meanwhile, what are the killings about? All of the victims have something sought by a pair of apparently harmless Jewish women, Ruth and Sarah. Author Doug Zipes takes readers through a number of sharp twists that come back to the Black Widows, a secret group of Arab women whose husbands have fallen in the service of jihad. Nothing will suit these women but utter, blind vengeance against the West, and the individual killings are but a prologue to a main event the world will never forget. Meanwhile, Zipes weaves in plenty of back story without slowing the overall pace.

The only concern about *The Black Widows* is the sense of a world divided between the good guys of the West and the bad guys of Islam. The world doesn't need or benefit from such stark divisions. Fortunately, Zipes slightly softens that impression late in the book.

Many of the chapters feature Zach Dayan's first-person point of view, and he comes across as a decent man whose ex-wife Miriam and children still love him. Other chapters show the shadowy Wahad, who assists the Black Widows in exacting their vengeance. In his path of discovery, Zach comes in for serious unpleasantness while tension escalates at a brisk pace that moves literally to a cliff's edge.

Zipes himself is a cardiologist and a *Saturday Evening Post* columnist. Readers will sense that he knows his way around morgues and ERs. *The Black Widows* equals the quality of traditionally published thrillers in every way and stands out as one of the best in a sea of thrillers.

BOB SANCHEZ (February 17, 2012)

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