



Alaska Deadly

J. L. Askew

Covenant Books

(369pp)

978-1-68526-885-5

In the energetic supernatural thriller Alaska Deadly, frightening circumstances beset the residents and visitors to an Alaskan village.

In J. L. Askew's thriller *Alaska Deadly*, a private investigator goes to an Alaskan village that's surrounded by rumors of ritualistic ceremonies and local trafficking rings.

Race Warren, a budding Memphis investigator, flies to Alaska in search of Ron Billings at the request of Billings's estranged wife. He hopes that this is the job that will make his business lucrative. Intrigue builds: on the flight, Warren meets academics who are going to the same village that he's traced Billings to; they're out to learn about the sacrificial ceremonies of the local Indigenous people, who are rumored to shapeshift into wolves. And while in Anchorage, Warren learns about a woman's mysterious death (supposedly the result of an animal attack) in the same community. Another mutilated body and an assassination attempt leave Warren entangled in this unexpected darkness.

The book includes a multitude of plot points; Billings's missing daughter, and his wife's ties to a human trafficking ring, also factor in. But while these storylines lead to constant activity, they're also hindered by narrative repetitions: sometimes, events that transpired in the previous pages are covered again. For instance, the academics recount their findings at a conference at length, but for the audience, this is a tedious recapitulation of earlier scenes. Further, the book's coverage of mundane details is too frequent (there are multiple references, for example, to Roberts's tendency to take the stairs over the elevator).

While professors Hartley (an expert on Alaskan Natives) and Dunbar (an expert on wolves) both share credibility-building details from their fields, Billings himself is constructed as a former police officer who inexplicably struggles with his nerves while working undercover at a bar to gather information about his missing daughter. And people's interactions are too awkward; they speak to each other in formal, dry tones that obscure their personalities and impede true connections. Indeed, two separate people have the same reaction to Warren's disclosures of vital information, saying, "That is important."

As the book races toward its violent climax, new issues arise: Billings and Warren are thrust into a new fight to save another girl from the trafficking ring, the academics share shocking hypotheses, and there's a chilling encounter with a murderer. In the midst of such pervasive excitement, multiple plot points are left unresolved.

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LEAH WEBSTER (May 5, 2023)

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