

Book Review: Toxic Prey
By John Sandford

Author John Sandford has written 35 novels highlighting the exploits of maverick detective and investigator Lucas Davenport. More recently, he's written two Letty Davenport novels – Lucas's daughter, who is in a similar line of work. I've read several in the Lucas series, and both of the Letty books, and enjoyed all of them.

So, you might think that when Sandford decided to combine the father-daughter crime fighters in his latest novel, "Toxic Prey," the result would be pretty awesome.

Unfortunately, two heads are not always better than one.

In "Toxic Prey," Dr. Lionel Scott, a British expert in infectious diseases, has become obsessed with Gaia, the Greek goddess of Earth, mother of all life. He, and the small but dedicated group of cultists he has gathered, are convinced that there are too many people on this planet; that Gaia is dying because we are snuffing out all of its natural resources. The solution: conjure up and release a virus that will wipe out half the world's population and thus save Gaia.

Right, I know – interesting, but a bit far-fetched.

The concern among governmental powers is that Scott has disappeared somewhere in the U.S., and of course he must be up to no good. Letty is tasked with finding him, and a team is quickly assembled around her led by none other than her father, Lucas. And rather than compliment one another, I found too much of a push-pull dynamic going on. Like, who's the Alpha dog in the story?

But of greater concern is the plot – a bit unbelievable – and the flow of the narrative – slow and tedious. Many characters are introduced, so keeping track of each is challenging. But the pacing just plods along, making it hard to feel a sense of danger or

gloom and doom surrounding the potential threat of half of humanity – that’s five billion people – being wiped from existence.

I suppose if I understood better *why* Dr. Scott has developed this obsession, I might have been more drawn to the story. And while I certainly support efforts to save the planet from global warming, hunger and the like, Sandford weaves too much of the political angle into the story and it becomes a bit preachy.

And not to be nitpicky, but I had issues with Letty, who on her first day on the case meets and is paired with Alec Hawkins of England’s Secret Service. And – you guessed it – she’s in bed with him. It seemed like a forced effort to introduce gratuitous sex into the story. It also lessens Letty’s moral character, I think.

The book certainly has its moments, and much blood, sweat and tears flow periodically, but as a whole “Toxic Prey” did not meet my expectations. Perhaps Sandford should stick to separate novels for the father-daughter duo. Sometimes, less *is* more.

Two-and-one-half out of five stars for “Toxic Prey.” I welcome your thoughts if you choose to indulge.