

SYNOPSIS

The Dead Stars by Jesvinder Singh Judge

The Dead Stars is set in a world reeling from the after-effects of a global nuclear terrorist attack. As a result of the attacks, the world's population now resides in one of 48 RIDs (Residential Interim Districts) – autonomous insulate societies derived from more “innocent” periods of world history. The most successful example is RID-48 also known as 80s Town – an exact recreation of the 1980s where residents can choose to assume the identity of a famous person from that decade. Individuals with any similarity to the terrorists have been incarcerated and people can now live a life of fame without fear, paranoia or crime, albeit with the loss of many freedoms. It has been 49 years since the terrorist attacks and an election to decide if it is safe to dismantle this system is looming.

Detective Niles Deacon, a serial killer profiler, resides in the only “free” RID and he has been campaigning against the atrocities inherent in the system. His mental state is at breaking point. Every night, without fail, he is awoken by the same nightmare of his son being killed, a nightmare that has resulted in intractable insomnia, the slow destruction of his marriage, and the loss of his son who was sent away for safe keeping. To make matters worse, he has been requested to assist with a murder investigation in the usually crime-free 80s Town; murders which the 80s Town police, trained on a diet of TV-cop shows, are inept at solving.

Deacon is thrust into the 80s-era time-warp, a hedonistic and decadent world where being famous is everything and pop culture rules! He meets his counterpart in the case, Detective Sonny Crockett, a narcissistic underachiever who spends his days grooming his TV-cop identity and flaunting his encyclopaedic knowledge of 80s pop trivia. Despite their opposing philosophies, they form a bond from a unified love of music. There are 9 murders with no clues or motive, except that the victims are all famous 1980s identities that are killed in ways that match their notoriety – Crocodile Dundee is knifed, Indiana Jones is crushed by a boulder, Margaret Thatcher is chained in iron, and Michael Jackson is suffocated by plastic.

As the case unfolds, Deacon is shocked to discover that the murders were designed to lure him to 80s Town for personal and sinister reasons. Deacon learns that the religious fundamentalists blamed for the original terror attacks were innocent – the real terrorist having perpetrated the greatest cover-up in history. Deacon's father discovered the *real* culprits and killed their ringleader, but he was killed before he could stop the attacks. This clandestine organisation has been torturing Deacon for years – implanting his nightmares via his thought-phone and planning to frame him for the murders – as retribution for his father's actions years previously.

Crockett starts to question the artifice he lives in and gains a new-found confidence. They solve the case and the 80s Town mayor, who orchestrated the murders, is arrested. However, the identities of the remaining members of the organisation remain unclear. Deacon returns home determined to find the people responsible for the terrorist attacks, his father's death, and the cruel manipulation of his life.