



## Setareh Doctrine

**Mark Downer**

Old Stone Press

(313pp)

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*Setareh Doctrine is a gripping thriller about a terrifying viral threat, and about the everlasting moral battle between good and evil.*

Mark Downer's fast historical thriller *Setareh Doctrine* concerns a retired general and his talented team, whose ultimate mission is to avoid a mass genocide caused by a viral weapon.

Seventy-five-year-old retired General Jake Woods is on a new mission to expose and stop the spread of a lethal biological weapon that fell in the hands of Iran's Defense Ministry and Revolutionary Guard Corps. When Chinese General Tzu Huang shows up uninvited at Woods's house, he warns him about a viral creation that was used forty years previous to exterminate thousands of people in Mancuria, and that is now being weaponized by Iran to eliminate opponents and create a "new Persia," the *Setareh Doctrine*.

With the help of Wiston Cromer, a patriotic and wealthy ally, Woods recruits a brilliant team of elite special operatives, intelligence, military, and IT experts; they take the name of the Themis Cooperative. Their goal is to infiltrate Iran's Defense Ministry and prevent the death of thousands of innocent people.

The book jumps back and forth in time and space, taking the Themis Cooperative on an epic, dangerous journey through the Middle East. Its narrative deals with many interesting themes at once, including the immense value of teamwork and friendship, the ethical implications of creating a potentially harmful weapon in order to pursue personal objectives, and the dangers of extremist ideologies in modern society.

The prose is sharp and concise. Despite its multiple layers and twists, the plot is easy to follow and engrossing. It follows its various characters well, zooming in on their actions and thoughts for clarity. Still, because of their quantity, the character index at the beginning of the book proves to be a useful navigational tool.

The book establishes interesting historical contexts with stand-out details, covering the 1970s war in Cambodia and conflicts in the Middle East. Its settings, from the general's home in rural Kentucky where the novel starts, to the mountains of Israel where the story ends, are established using clear descriptions with a strong sense of place and time.

While the characters are compelling, their physical appearances are over described—especially those of the book's strong women, who are described in predictable terms. Some of the same women have prominent roles within the story; some even drive the narrative, helping to distinguish *Setareh Doctrine* from other military thrillers.

An elite team that knows that society is in danger leads *Setareh Doctrine*, a gripping thriller about a terrifying viral threat, and about the everlasting moral battle between good and evil.

ANNA MARIA COLIVICCHI (March 27, 2021)

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