

DEEP DOWN DEAD by Steph Broadribb

Published by Orenda Books

I was lucky enough to attend the official launch of '*Deep Down Dead*' by Steph Broadribb recently. Having read the book in advance, I found it hard to equate the gentle and modest author I met with the breath-taking adventure thriller she has written. It is action-packed from start to finish. I rarely manage to read and review two books in a month but this one positively screamed for attention.

THE PLOT

Lori Anderson is a bounty hunter. She is also a single mother to nine-year old Dakota, who is in remission from leukaemia. So far, Lori has managed to keep the two aspects of her life separate, but now, with her daughter's medical bills mounting up and the rent imminent, her two worlds have finally collided. Forced to accept a lucrative job to cover her costs – one that unfortunately means travelling the country for three days – Lori is left with no option but to take Dakota with her. It is a decision she will bitterly regret.

The fugitive Lori is sent to collect, and bring to court, turns out to be her old mentor, JT. Ten years ago, he taught her to be the best at her profession, but he also knows all the secrets of her past. Shocked to discover the identity of her charge, she nevertheless remembers her training and pushes her emotions and feelings to the back of her mind – something she had previously neglected to do.

However, unbeknownst to Lori, JT has been attempting to expose a child exploitation racket, which is secretly operating behind the scenes of a large Florida theme park, 'Winter Wonderland'. Its ringleaders are now trying to silence him and, on top of this, the Miami Mob also want him dead.

As a relatively simple retrieval job suddenly turns into something far more dangerous, Lori finds herself not only protecting herself and her daughter but also trying to keep JT alive long enough to collect her desperately needed money.

After the three of them are ambushed at a service station and Dakota is kidnapped, the situation transforms into something agonisingly more personal for Lori. Her only priority now is saving her daughter's life.

MY REVIEW

Having just read one of Peter James's Roy Grace novels – all of which contain the word 'dead' in the title – I have to admit I was expecting '*Deep Down Dead*' to be another murder investigation story. However, after reading it, I was left in no doubt this novel is anything but. In fact, it is definitely in a league of its own... although I'm still not convinced about the title. In my opinion, it does not do justice to the story.

'*Deep Down Dead*' has been described as an adventure thriller, which is exactly what it is. Although it begins with a straightforward and seemingly simple storyline, it soon

develops into something more dangerous and menacing. It is fast-moving and packed to the gunnels with breathtaking action. Like a snowball rolling down a hill, the danger grows in magnitude... right until its explosive conclusion.

Written in the first person singular, the story is told from the viewpoint of Lori Anderson, a bounty hunter who is simply trying to make ends meet while taking care of her sick daughter. She is a strong and feisty woman, forced to reinvent herself to escape a violent marriage and a difficult past. However, although a trained professional, her emotions occasionally betray her carefully hidden vulnerability, causing her – and her mentor – more than a few problems.

The slow-burning love story between Lori and JT adds another dimension to the drama. Even after going their separate ways ten years ago – following Lori's emotional lapse in professional judgement, which resulted in a fugitive's death – unresolved feelings are still bubbling away. The only difference being JT is now the fugitive and Lori is determined to remain objective.

When Lori's daughter, Dakota, is kidnapped – by the very people JT has been investigating for child sexual exploitation – the emotional tension escalates. It is impossible not to experience the anguish Lori feels as she desperately tries to rescue Dakota, while at the same time trying not to imagine what her daughter might be subjected to.

It is one of the great strengths of this novel that it manages to combine dynamic action with convincing human relationships.

As a bounty hunter, Lori Anderson is totally believable, due to Steph Broadribb's own training, which has obviously paid dividends. Procedures are explained in detail, including the use of taser guns – not something I would recommend you try at home.

The author's style of writing – particularly at the height of the action – cleverly builds the excitement. Her sentences are often short and punchy, sustaining the suspense and anticipation.

This is a very American story, impressively told by a British writer. If you were unaware of her English nationality, you would think you were reading a novel written by an American. That in itself is no mean feat, and should definitely add to its appeal in a notoriously difficult marketplace.

Steph Broadribb's vivid descriptions of the Florida landscape, and the area around the Everglades – both key participants in the unfolding drama – bring the various locations to life as the protagonists cross the state. It is therefore easy to envisage each scene as the action takes place.

'Deep Down Dead' is a first class adventure thriller and an outstanding debut novel. I highly recommend it.

THE AUTHOR

Steph Broadribb was born in Birmingham and grew up in Buckinghamshire. Most of her working life has been divided between the UK and USA. As her alter ego - Crime Thriller Girl - she indulges her love of all things crime fiction by blogging at www.crimethrillergirl.com, where she interviews authors and reviews the latest releases.

Steph is an alumnus of the MA in Creative Writing (Crime Fiction) at City University London, and she trained as a bounty hunter in California. She lives in Buckinghamshire surrounded by horses, cows and chickens. *'Deep Down Dead'* is the first in the Lori Anderson series.

You can follow Steph Broadribb on Twitter [@CrimeThrillGirl](https://twitter.com/CrimeThrillGirl) and on Facebook at [Facebook.com/steph.broadribb](https://www.facebook.com/steph.broadribb), or visit her website: www.crimethrillergirl.com.

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