Pandora’s Poison by Patrick McKeon

CDC epidemiologist FRANK SKORZENY is sent to Arizona when a member of a Grand Canyon hiking party is evacuated with bubonic plague. As it becomes apparent that the plague strain is resistant to antibiotics, an urgent search is initiated to find fellow hiker MIKE CARTER, who has returned to Manhattan. In searching for Mike, the FBI enter his apartment and discover his girlfriend lying dead in bed as her dog whines nearby. When Mike is eventually located, he tells Frank that his girlfriend will have been taking the dog to local parks, potentially spreading the disease. Efforts to close the parks are thwarted by Health Commissioner PAWEL POLOPOFF, who fears the political fallout a month before the mayoral election.

When the New York Coroner, JANE SIMMONS identifies a pneumonic version of the plague in a body under the Manhattan Bridge, Frank realizes that the disease can now be spread with the ease of a common cold. In desperation for a treatment, he contacts his mentor, RUDI KLARKOPF, who suggests the little know antibiotic alternative of bacteriophages. While Rudi is working to isolate the proper phage, the number of plague cases grows every day and the disease begins to spread beyond New York. Jane notices while working with Frank, that he is uncomfortable dealing with the patients on a personal level, a difficulty attributed to his having failed to save his wife from a resistant infection several years earlier.

While investigating activity at the closed Staten Island Landfill, reporter BROOKE DANIELS discovers that the city has contracted out the disposal of plague victims to a company called Potemkin, which has installed incinerators to dispose of the corpses in reopened dumps. During an interview with a plague survivor, Brooke learns that a rich Russian has been offering thousands of dollars to anyone who has survived the plague to make their immune blood available for transfusion into his daughter, ELENA GORDOVSKY, should she become infected. One of those who has agreed to the deal is Mike Carter, who moves into an apartment provided by the Gordovskys. Brooke encounters Elena in the street outside the Gordovsky’s building, and asks if she knows anything about the blood deal. Elena identifies herself and tells Brooke she’d like to meet one of the donors. Brooke arranges a meeting with Mike, where Elena reveals that Potemkin is her father’s company and warns Brooke not to become too inquisitive.

Frank and Jane must choose which patients to save after Rudi tells them he has identified a phage which is effective against the plague bacillus. As he prepares the selected patients for the phage infusion, his attempt at emotional detachment crumbles when one of the patients, a ten year old girl, thanks him and says she loves him. The next morning Frank and Jane are ecstatic as the phage treatment brings dramatic improvements to all the patients. Before they can publicize the results however, Polopoff fires Jane for experimenting with the patients and expels Frank from the laboratory, cutting them off from the phage cure.

Brooke is fired after having a tirade at her office when she learns that her story about the incineration of plague cadavers has been published by another reported. As she wanders through the streets contemplating finishing the story as a freelancer, she calls Mike for commiseration. While they are talking she sees a news bulletin that the reporter who stole her story has been shot and killed. Mike suggests that they would have killed Brooke if her name was on the story, and offers her the key to his old apartment for safety. She decides the best way to protect herself is to continue the investigation which she does by interviewing inmates employed loading the incinerators.