

# READING GUIDE

## RAPID READS



### RACE AGAINST TIME GAIL ANDERSON-DARGATZ

Reading level: 2.2

Interest level: Adult

Themes: crime fiction, mystery, journalism,  
female sleuth, amateur sleuth, small town,  
bomb threat, second sight

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#### Summary

Reporter Claire Abbott has had another vision. This time, it comes to her in a dream—and instead of something that’s already happened, this vision seems to represent something that’s yet to come.

In the vision, Claire is at a school that has been cleared by a bomb squad. She witnesses a boy in a red hoodie dash back inside, unseen by the police and firefighters. When the police and the fire chief dismiss her concerns about the teen, Claire herself runs inside. In the hallway, she is met by the custodian, who stares blankly as she tries to explain. “I can help,” he murmurs. Moments later, the bomb goes off, and Claire awakes.

Despite her partner Matt’s calming words, Claire is unable to shake her conviction that something bad is about to happen. She explains the dream to the editor of her small-town newspaper, Carol, when she reports for work the next day. Claire is hardly reassured when Carol commands her to immediately go to the high school to report on a bomb threat. Suddenly Claire understands that her vision was correct—someone is going to try to bomb the local school.

When she arrives at the school, Claire shares her vision with fire chief Jim Wallis, a longtime family friend and someone she worked with on the last case, where she relied on her visions to locate a kidnapping victim. Chief Wallis reassures Claire that there likely isn’t a bomb, and asks her to let the police and sniffer dogs do their jobs. But as he speaks, Claire sees the same boy running into the building that she saw in her dream. Without explaining to Wallis, she takes off in pursuit of the boy. Once inside the school, she sees the same janitor as in her dream, but he refuses to heed her pleas to evacuate the building. Claire runs into Officer Banks in her search for the boy. She explains her dream and urges Banks to check the school a second time before letting the students back inside. Aware of Claire’s visions, Banks makes no attempt to conceal his skepticism.

Frustrated, Claire returns to the school’s exterior to beg Chief Wallis to talk to Officer Banks and ensure a second check of the school, and to apprehend the boy in the red hoodie. As they speak, Ashley, a female student, approaches and informs them she feels certain the boy is responsible for the bomb threat. She says that she overheard the boy—Tyler—trying to convince another student to make the threat. She identifies the janitor as the boy’s father and paints a picture of the



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boy as a lonely teen who hangs out in the basement with his dad during lunchtime. Wallis agrees to speak with Officer Banks about checking the school again.

As Wallis departs, Ashley explains how they've recently been learning about rockets in science class. The boy would know everything he needed to build a pipe bomb. As they stand around outside, Ashley points out Spider, the boy Tyler was speaking with about the bomb threat. As Claire prepares to go and speak with Spider, Wallis approaches and instructs Ashley to go inside and wait in the principal's office. Panicked that they're letting the kids back inside without having located Tyler, Claire protests, but her entreaties are met by Chief Wallis's firm direction to drop it and quit talking about her visions, lest she ruin her reputation.

Upset by having her powerful intuition so completely dismissed, Claire follows the students back inside and into the gym so that she can cover the impromptu police presentation to the school body about the seriousness of bomb threats. As the assembly wraps up, she spots Tyler and makes her way toward him. He swears he has nothing to do with the bomb threat. As the students file out of the gym, Spider and Ashley brush against Claire; Tyler steadies her. The physical contact between her and other people sets off another bomb-related vision for Claire. This time, she sees the bomb beside the furnace, in the school basement.

When the vision departs, Claire is certain Tyler is the bomber—and she's more determined than ever to have her views heard. She steers Tyler toward Officer Banks, then returns to Wallis to ask him to evacuate the school once again. A scene with Officer Banks ensues, no bomb is found, and Wallis tells her to let it go. Claire doesn't. She sneaks back into the school and down to the furnace room, where she once again meets Dean, the janitor. She tells him about her vision. Dean confides that his wife also had visions, although hers were visions of dying prior to her own death a year earlier. Sensing his belief in her ability, Claire exhorts the janitor to help her catch the bomber, and he agrees.

Moments later, another bomb threat clears the school, but this one is easily traced to prankster Spider. Claire adds him to the list of possible suspects. Chasing her hunch to the principal's office, where Spider is undergoing questioning by Officer Banks, Claire tries to find a way to touch the boy so that she can more clearly feel whether he's the bomb threat-maker. Because of her seemingly inappropriate and inexplicable persistence, Claire is thrown out of the office. Chief Wallis, who agrees with the others that Claire is acting crazy, informs her that she has been banned from the school grounds.

Discouraged, Claire returns to the newspaper office only to find that her editor has decided to suspend Claire until the issue blows over. Claire hunts down Matt, who runs search-and-rescue operations for the town, and asks him to help. In a conversation with Matt and her mother—another seer—Claire realizes that perhaps the bomber is actually one of the other children who bumped her in the gym. Trusting Dean's assertion that Tyler would never do such a thing, and knowing Spider is just a prankster, Claire realizes that Ashley is likely the bomber.

Claire and Matt hatch a plan to use video cameras near and inside the furnace room to catch the bomber in action, asking Dean to install the cameras. He agrees, and then Matt and Claire settle in to monitor her mobile phone. Just before 10:00 a.m. the next day, the would-be bomber enters the furnace room. When Claire catches sight of the person's face, it's Ashley after all.

Dean doesn't answer his cell phone when she calls, so Claire is in a race against time as she drives to the school. She calls the school, but the receptionist recognizes Claire's story and hangs up on her. When Claire arrives at the school, Dean is there to help. They blow past the





principal and head down to the furnace room, where Claire disarms the device by pulling out the timer wires. Unconvinced that the bomb won't still detonate, Claire, the principal and Dean alert the students to evacuate the school. When Officer Banks arrives, Claire shows him the footage of Ashley setting the bomb. When Ashley is apprehended, she blames Claire for giving her the idea in the first place: Ashley had overheard Claire's conversation with the fire squad the day before and had realized then that the furnace room would be a perfect place to plant a pipe bomb and create a massive explosion.

As Ashley is taken away in the police cruiser, Claire wonders whether she is indeed to blame for the school nearly being blown up. In the end, though, Claire is feted by the police and firemen, and her job is reinstated.

### Questions for Discussion

1. *Race Against Time* kicks off with a dream. At what point in the text did you realize this?
2. Put yourself in Claire Abbott's place for a moment, and imagine that you experience compelling visions of things that are about to happen. What kind of stress would this ability mean for a person's day-to-day life?
3. Claire is skilled at trusting her gut. Discuss what you know about how intuition works. As you see it, why don't we trust our intuition more?
4. In chapter 3, Claire's editor Carol dismisses the bomb threat as a hoax—as a teenager's desire to exert personal power by calling out the fire trucks and sniffer dogs—but Claire isn't so sure. If you could have a conversation with a youngster who had made a false bomb threat, what would you say to him or her?
5. In chapter 4, when Claire explains to Officer Banks her sense that the boy in the red hoodie might be endangering the school, she knows he doesn't take her seriously. Think about a time when you knew you were right, but when nobody else seemed to believe you, or even care. Describe the physical sensations you felt.
6. In chapter 5, Ashley tells Claire that the boy who likely is responsible for the bomb threat keeps to himself and doesn't talk much. Discuss the effects of social isolation on teenagers, and then, more broadly, talk about its effects on adults.
7. In the last few years, the rate of depression and anxiety among teenagers has increased significantly. As you see it, what factors are likely causes of this negative shift in youngsters' mental health?
8. In chapter 6, when Claire insists on going into the school to attend the assembly after the police are certain the bomb threat was a false alarm, Chief Jim Wallis instructs her thus: "You behave yourself." Can this be read as having patriarchal and sexist undercurrents?
9. When Carol suggests that Claire talk to a counselor, Claire fires back that she doesn't need a shrink (ch. 10). She is not alone in feeling this; many people quail at the idea of counselling. As you see it, what underscores this pervasive fear of talking to mental health professionals? How would society benefit if more people grew to understand their own thoughts, fears, motivations and behaviors?
10. Do you feel Carol's decision to suspend Claire in chapter 10 is justifiable, based on events in





the story? Explain.

11. What is the significance of dreams? Describe a time when you were informed and educated by the workings of your unconscious brain.
12. What other story/stories are called to mind by Claire's struggle to be heard and understood?
13. In a mystery, a red herring heightens suspense and adds challenge to the plot by misleading the reader—or the character who is trying to find answers. List the red herrings in *Race Against Time*. Which is the most effective? Why?
14. All the instructions for making a pipe bomb—and numerous other destructive weapons—can be found online. Additionally, web users post and circulate material about attacks on schools and other places where people gather, as well as material about hate crimes, racist propaganda, footage of people being killed...the list goes on. Is this unavoidable? Discuss the wider societal implications (and complications) of changing access to this kind of information.
15. Claire pities Ashley because it seems the girl's parents don't care enough to be around her. Talk about the pressures facing parents in today's society. What is limiting them from being the 1950s-style parents we tend to extol and reminisce about?

