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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ MYSTERY

A Pointed Death

Kath Russell
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In *A Pointed Death*, Kath Russell, a corporate biotechnology veteran, has combined her work experience and love for the bioscience field with an assertive and talented female protagonist.

Nola Billingsley's dot-com company has sunk beneath the waves of failed start-ups, partly due to the embezzling ways of Roger Chen, a former employee. She is forced to fall back on her consultancy skills to earn a living, and is just starting to build a client list when, on a walk with her short-haired pointer, she stumbles over the head of that same Roger Chen, whose body is propped up on a nearby bench.

During the ensuing investigation, Billingsley meets Bob Harrison, a detective with the San Francisco Police Department, who's been assigned to the embezzlement case involving Chen. Once their professional relationship has ended, they begin to date, and Billingsley feels herself falling for the tall and burly cop. Still, she is determined to get to the bottom of Chen's death despite being warned off by her new beau. But this forty-something independent woman isn't deterred, and she gathers a group of friends and former employees to help her plumb the cyber-depths of two different companies, certain that they had something to do with Chen's murder. What she discovers cracks open an international scandal and Billingsley is soon running for her life. Her stubbornness also lands her in hot water with Harrison, and she faces the likelihood of another failed relationship.

Russell has crafted a sharp, creative, and thoroughly-rounded character in Billingsley. The story is refreshing for its unusual focus on the biotechnology industry, and the technical explanations are presented clearly enough for any reader to understand. Furthermore, a healthy sense of humor runs through the entire book. In a morning scene, Billingsley notes that her Southern-belle-mother's question about her robe is two-sided: "She was just making the point that I looked about as much like Loretta Young as a lumberjack doing a pole dance." The romance between Billingsley and Harrison is mature and convincingly rendered, and never sidetracks the main story.

Further books are expected in Russell's Pointer Mystery series, and if later additions are at this level or better, mystery readers can look forward to an enjoyable ride.

J. G. STINSON (November 1, 2010)

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