



## Dead Point

**LaVonne Griffin-Valade**

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In LaVonne Griffin-Valade's spirited mystery novel *Dead Point*, an officer carries the weight of her town on her shoulders while trying to solve a gruesome series of murders.

After twenty years away, Maggie returns to her hometown, John Day, as a sergeant for Oregon's state police. Most of the population keeps to itself, harboring simmering hatred of authority figures. The lack of funding and personnel leads Maggie to take on extra responsibilities, starting with monitoring hunting in the surrounding forests. An anonymous tip directs her to two brothers who were seen skinning a deer. When the brothers are found murdered, Maggie tackles her first homicide investigation with a partner, Hollis.

The brothers' murder reveals much about the town and the surrounding valley, including the fact that violent crime is rare there, and that the people are interconnected. Maggie knew the brothers; it becomes apparent that the killer is someone in town. Before long, more bodies stack up, motives are revealed, and several suspects are named.

Maggie's investigation uncovers the good and bad of her small town, in which gossip travels fast and everyone has secrets. As she works to find the killer, sifting through all she's presented with to determine what gossip is correct, and which secrets are relevant, Maggie's limits are pushed, and her morality is tested, but she persists with grim determination.

The book's colorful characters include a friendly Scotsman who runs the feed store and Maggie's protective landlady, who's eager to see her married off. The violent nature of the crimes are contrasted with the stark beauty of the land, the fierce independence of the town, and Maggie's drive to keep John Day safe.

*Dead Point* is an engrossing neo-Western thriller in which justice and morality clash.

JOHN M. MURRAY (May / June 2021)

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