

Death at the Point

Andrew Dutfield

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Death at the Point is a compelling mystery novel in which a vibrant former detective relishes his surroundings—and fights against those who disturb them.

Andrew Dutfield's atmospheric mystery novel *Death at the Point* reads like a love letter to Canada's Hecla Island.

Henry, a former police officer, loves visiting Hecla Island off of Lake Winnipeg with his recently retired wife, Julia, and their dog, Skip. During an expedition to the island's first, now decrepit, New Icelandic settlement, Henry and his neighbor Chris find a body. The former crime detective can't resist a mystery—even though the deceased, David, seems to have died of natural causes. Henry's curiosity and his profound love for the island compel him to determine the true nature of David's death; along the way, he uncovers a century-old mystery as well. The result is a compelling whodunit—though one whose plot is sometimes loose.

Indeed, the book moves at a slow pace as Henry luxuriates in Hecla Island's sensory features. But the omniscient narration also seems self-aware: seen through Henry's lens of profound love for it, for example, the small village is rendered as a sparkling Eden. And metatextual commentary is sprinkled throughout the story as Henry dives into murder mystery books with strong senses of place—and even admits to his wife that his obsession with solving the mystery is due to his disgust over how it's sabotaged Hecla's tranquility. Despite these preoccupations, Henry is a dynamic hero—stubborn, loyal, and curious throughout. He notices details that civilians would not (as with David's alarm-inducing “snow-filled eye sockets”), has the benefit of a severe uptick in his free time, and cares about protecting the island community that he now calls home.

Julia is fleshed out via Henry's love for her, which is deep, true, and uncomplicated. He takes her needs—including the maintenance of his own health—into account while he's pursuing clues, and he glows with happiness when she displays curiosity about his self-appointed task. The couple's sweet love propels the book forward in tandem with its mystery. However, people's conversations are often more stiff-sounding than their well-individuated actions and thoughts; most people speak in the same wooden monotone.

Though at times it reads more like a slice-of-life retirement tale than a murder mystery, *Death at the Point* is a compelling novel in which a vibrant former detective relishes his surroundings—and fights against those who disturb them.

LEAH BLOCK (November 16, 2023)

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