

★ **Overkill****Vanda Symon**

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Vanda Symon introduces a cheeky, brave new heroine in *Overkill*, the first in her Sam Shephard series of mysteries set in New Zealand.

When Sam, the lone officer in tiny Mataura, is called in to investigate a missing person case, she certainly doesn't expect it to be the wife of the ex-boyfriend she's been trying to find. The situation goes from bad to worse when Sam discovers the woman's body washed up on the banks of the nearby river and the apparent cause is suicide.

It doesn't take long for Sam to realize that the woman certainly did not kill herself. Instead, she may have stumbled upon a conspiracy that could rock their close-knit community. When Sam becomes a suspect, she draws on all of her emotional and investigatory resources to clear her name and bring closure to the only man she has ever loved.

This atmospheric thriller provides a haunting backdrop that weaves together the harshness of the landscape with the often more harsh realities of small-town life. As Sam battles against prejudices, ignorance, and the ever-growing suspicion that the people she's known her entire life could very well be murderers, the tension mounts and the stakes get higher and higher.

Sam is a tough-talking tomboy trying to make it in a man's world, yet her tender heart shows through in almost every scene. She struggles to conceal all of the emotions that are churning within. She's the perfect heroine to take on a bleak crime in a landscape marked by the desperation of dying resources. Her complicated relationships with the townspeople add another layer of intrigue, and her increasing loyalty to her ex-lover's murdered wife gives her a welcome depth.

*Overkill* is an achievement that blends heart-stopping thrills with deep, believable characters in a stark New Zealand setting. It will leave readers reaching for the next Sam Shephard mystery.

ANGELA MCQUAY (May/June 2019)

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