



# A Superior Death

*Nevada Barr*

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Park ranger Anna Pigeon returns, in a mystery that unfolds in and around Lake Superior, in whose chilling depths sunken treasure comes with a deadly price. In her latest mystery, Nevada Barr sends Ranger Pigeon to a new post amid the cold, deserted, and isolated beauty of Isle Royale National Park, a remote island off the coast of Michigan known for fantastic deep-water dives of wrecked sailing vessels. Leaving behind memories of the Texas high desert and the environmental scam she helped uncover, Anna is adjusting to the cool damp of Lake Superior and the spirits and lore of the northern Midwest. But when a routine application for a diving permit reveals a grisly underwater murder, Anna finds herself 260 feet below the forbidding surface of the lake, searching for the connection between a drowned man and an age-old cargo ship. Written with a naturalist's feel for the wilderness and a keen understanding of characters who thrive in extreme conditions, A Superior Death is a passionate, atmospheric page-turner.

## A Superior Death Details

Date : Published February 1st 2002 by Avon Books (first published 1994)

ISBN : 9780380723621

Author : Nevada Barr

Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Thriller, Mystery Thriller, Crime

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# From Reader Review A Superior Death for online ebook

## Karmologyclinic says

I was going to give it one more star or even a 3 as a lukewarm light mystery novel that you read for passing time and relaxation. But then it started tackling things like violent death, incest, pedophilia, domestic abuse (all different stories, mind you, happening in a small village), using a nonchalant attitude of "hey, this happens, we drink some wine in pajamas and forget about it". I was not annoyed by the difficult themes (I read Val McDermid and love her) but by the indifference and casualness the themes were approached by the author.

It ended with me wanting to punch the book in the face.

The end.

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## Bonnie Irwin says

While the plot and pacing of this novel were not as good as previous installments (i.e., I could put this down occasionally), the cast of characters that Barr creates in the Lake Superior region were engaging and challenging for her protagonist Anna Pigeon.

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## Nancy says

I am so glad that I went back to this series. The first book, Track of the Cat, was very good, but I am beginning to think that I liked this one better. Nevada Barr has a way of drawing in the reader in from the very beginning and holding your full attention straight through to the end. Even if you think you have figured out where she is going, you still hold on to each word in case there is something there that you might not have picked up on in the beginning, but you are darn sure you want to know in the end.

This time Anna Pigeon has been reassigned to Isle Royale in Lake Superior, hence the name, where one of her assigned duties is watching over the Kamloops, a vessel that sunk in 1927 with 5 sailors on board. Well, that is what she has been told, but up comes a diver swearing that there are six men down there. Now Anna is not a big fan of deep diving considering the fact that if you come up too quickly the closest decompression chamber is two very painful hours away. That is if you do not die in the mean time.

Yep, there is an extra body down there and why is he wearing an old-fashioned sailor's uniform. Darn, the peaceful summer with the entertaining wild life and the adventuresome scuba diving tourists just got a whole lot more troublesome.

This is not the only story going on. Nope, that would be too easy for Anna. You also have the missing wife of a fellow ranger, you have a head twisting "what did you say" relationship involving Hawk and Holly who are members of a dive team and you have a young incorrigible named Carrie Ann who keeps sneaking off to the utter frustration of her mother.

I know it sounds like a lot to keep track of, but Ms Barr writes each character so clearly that the only confusion that I had was which boat belonged to whom.

Without being repetitive, there are occasional get-caught-up sections where things are re-analyzed, much in the thinking aloud concept where the reader says "oh, that's right, that makes sense". The who-done-it part is not apparent from the beginning and the reader is lead down many different paths as Anna herself is trying to figure it all out at the same time.

I really enjoyed this book and I will definitely move the next in the series up on my list. The books are not deep, but they are twisty so you will have to pay attention.

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## **Carolyn F. says**

### **Audiobook**

As I was listening to this book, I kept thinking "This sounds familiar." And then when I started either guessing what was happening next or using my psychic powers, I knew that I had. I remember it was a good book and it took me a while to figure out who did it.

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## **Bill Kerwin says**

I enjoyed my five-day/four-night trip to Michigan, but the two nights I had reserved for the U.P. left me no time to visit Isle Royale (the island national park a six hour ferry ride from Houghton), so when I returned to Ohio I decided to extend my vacation mentally by reading "A Superior Death," a Nevada Barr mystery in which Ranger Anna Pigeon solves a murder while stationed on the Isle. I got the park atmosphere I was looking for, and an enjoyable mystery too.

I guessed the solution to the murder about thirty pages before Anna did (just about right for my taste), learned a lot of interesting things about the day-to-day activities of park rangers, and found the last third of the book very suspenseful, filled with exciting accounts of deep-diving and dangerous boat battles.

Since I'm not really a nature-buff and I didn't fall in love with Anna, I may not read another book in the series, but I liked this one and would recommend it--particularly to my nature-loving friends.

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## **Olivermagnus says**

This book is the second in the long running Anna Pigeon series and is set on and around Lake Superior. The main character, Anna Pigeon, is a park ranger who has recently transferred from Big Bend National Park in Texas to the summer chill of Isle Royale National Park on Lake Superior. Due to terrible storms, Lake Superior has claimed many ships including the Edmund Fitzgerald, famously memorialized in a Gordon Lightfoot song, and the Kamloops, which sunk in 1927 and is the focus of this book. In fact, there are five perfectly preserved corpses still on the Kamloops.

When a diving team returns from a dive there, they show Anna a video of six corpses floating in the ship. Anna knows there are only five, so she and a ranger team, accompanied by an FBI agent, dive down to bring up the body of a local man. It turns out there are plenty of suspects, including his diving partners, an alcoholic park ranger who is jealous, and he disappeared on his wedding night but his wife never reported him missing. It's a complex story filled with colorful characters. The history of the island is a character in itself.

This was a clever and suspenseful mystery with an interesting plot. The characters were very well written and there were plenty to choose from so the eventual killer is not apparent from the beginning. Anna is a great main character, flawed and struggling, and I look forward to reading more about her in the future.

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### **Skip says**

The book started very slowly, and much of the book revolved around Anna guessing who was behind the various crimes or her personal loss of her husband, killed by a NYC taxicab. There is a murder, with the dead body being dressed as an old time sailor and left in a wreck on the bottom of Lake Superior, and the disappearance of his supposed lover. Mix in some mischief by her fellow park rangers, who are suspects at various points, but guilty of transgressions other than murder. The ending was a surprise, and Barr's gift is her descriptive prose in the state parks, involving flora and fauna.

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### **Susan says**

The second book in this series finds ranger Anna Pigeon working in the Isle Royale national park located on Lake Superior. I enjoyed this well-written, twisty mystery with an interesting heroine. Nevada Barr excels at finding realistically dangerous situations for her characters. My only quibble is that a map of the park would have been helpful.

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### **Nadine Jones says**

*For a while they sat without talking. Anna got her daypack and dug out a paperback copy of Ivanhoe. It produced a book's inevitable effect. In cats it stimulated the urge to sit on the pages. In humans it stimulated conversation.*

Yes! so true! And who can resist reading a book with witticisms such as these? and then there's this:

*"What if he wasn't psychotic? What if he just ate her to dispose of the corpse?" "Anna, you've been out in the woods too long. If he ate her, for whatever reason, doesn't that seem a teensyweensy bit psycho to you?" "I guess," Anna conceded. "I guess," Molly confirmed.*

This is my second Anna Pigeon novel (the first was High Country, I am reading them completely out of order). As with the first one I read, there is a certain j'ne sais quois that keeps me from fully loving it. It's

almost as if Ms Barr is trying too hard to be literary or lyrical, when really her nature is to write a hard boiled straight-up murder mystery.

*The drizzle had stopped and the sun was piercing through a rent in the clouds above the island, pouring gold down onto the treetops until they glowed a rich green against their shadowed fellows. Sparks of sunshine reached the water. Where they touched, the lake turned emerald and azure. Light, life, color: Anna breathed deeply and knew the breath for a miracle, a celebration, an act of devotion.*

I want the straight-up murder mystery. I like Anna, but I think I wouldn't really want to hang out with her, she's a little too mopey and snooty. And just like with the first book I read, I keep getting confused about who people are and where they are: I need an appendix that spells out the Park Ranger hierarchy, because I can't ever seem to keep it straight, who's the boss? what's that guy's job? And I really needed a map of Isle Royale National Park because I NEVER knew where Anna was or where she lived or where she belonged or where the Park headquarters are or if there was actually a hotel on one of the islands or just a Ranger center. The only location I could keep straight was the Kamloops wreck. It wouldn't bother me that much except she keeps mentioning where Anna is going, which island she is docking at, where she is walking, etc. The book is littered with passages such as this:

*Coming around Blake's Point, eyes glued to the Loran, Anna was half sorry the water was so flat. Even the slamming of the hull against hard water would have been preferable to the absolute nothing she felt. Between Blake's Point and Steamboat Island, Anna executed a turn to the 248-degree heading dictated by experience and charting. Amygdaloid Channel, usually a narrow comforting waterway, took on a different aspect when neither shore was visible. She threaded her way carefully down the center. The dock at the ranger station was deserted. Having eased the Belle Isle into her space, Anna disembarked.*

Where is Blake's Point??? Is Steamboat Island next to Amygdaloid Island??? *I DON'T KNOW!!!*

All this confusion made me a fidgety reader; since I was never quite sure what was going on, it was difficult for me to stay focused on the story. I read the ebook, and - unusually, for me - I kept clicking over to the main page of my device to check for Facebook updates or find a game to play. So I guess that means the story was boring me. And that's not for lack of descriptions or creepiness - the scene when Anna had to dive down to the Kamloops to retrieve the body had me feeling cold and wet and shaking. There's a gripping story here. But I kept getting knocked out of the story by my confusion about where we were and/or who that person is (wait! Is he Anna's boss? Or her boss's boss? Or a peer?).

I enjoyed this okay, but I guessed who the perp was early on in the book (which is unusual for me) so it just made Anna seem slow to not suspect the same person. Once Anna was hot on the trail, things got more exciting and I lost my fidgetiness. As in so many mysteries, Anna does stupid stuff, but maybe that's written into the contract of a mystery author? "Character must do stupid things and throw themselves into harm's way, the readers expect it!"

To continue with my quibbling, twice (*twice!*) Anna left something lying around, and *we never find out what happened to it!!* Once, she leaves files open on her boss's desk and then jumps out the window to track a suspicious character ... *what happened when her boss returned to his office the next morning and found files spread out??* And once she leaves photos lying on a front porch, fluttering in the wind, while she runs off to talk to a harried parent. *Did the photos blow away? were they discovered by someone else??* First this:

Beside Anna, on the step, were the underwater photographs of the Kamloops. A breeze stirred

them, and she tucked them under her thigh lest they blow into the dirt. "Maybe I'll learn something by osmosis," she said to Knucklehead.

and then this:

The roar of a motorboat broke up the fray. Flashes of red enlivened the bushes as they all disappeared, running as if they'd not been born and raised with the sound of boat engines. Anna stood to see who was causing the ruckus.

What did she do with the photos??? We never find out. That's sloppy editing.

Plus, I really like beer, but I'm very particular about my beer. I do not care for the German style and I don't really like Leinenkugel. Frequent mention of drinking Leinenkugels made my stomach a little queasy. It's right up there with Corona and Stella so far as I'm concerned - gack. Okay okay, to be fair, Corona and Stella are InBev brands and Leinenkugel is a SABMiller brand. So I should say it's right up there with Blue Moon and Pilsner Urquell, to stay in the SABMiller family. None for me, thanks! I'll take a Sierra Nevada! (Better yet, a Founders All Day.)

I read this book to fulfill the "takes place on an island" category of the 2016 Popsugar Ultimate Reading Challenge.

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### **Allie Mayenschein (alliecatreads) says**

I really enjoyed this book! I read it for my Detective Fiction class, and it is one of my favorite books we have read thus far. Despite it being only around 300 pages long, it packs so much into it, but all of the subplots did not seem overwhelming at all. I felt like they really added something to the story, and I really loved all of them! They really kept things interesting from start to finish, which I enjoyed!

I think Anna is my favorite detective I have ever read because she is badass and independent, but is also incredibly realistic because she has flaws just like every other person in the world. I also really loved that even though she was a woman, people still respected her. Unlike the other detective fiction novels we have read for my class, there was little to no sexism in this book, which was so refreshing!

I really enjoyed all of the subplots. I am not really going to go into them because spoilers, but I thought they really added this extra element to the story. They kept you interested while Anna is trying to solve the murder, which is obviously the main plot. I really enjoyed seeing how all of these really were interesting and didn't take away from the story at all. They really were an extra element that wasn't really present in the other detective fiction novels I read for class, and I don't think I would have enjoyed it half as much had they not been there.

I also really enjoyed Nevada Barr's writing. Its descriptive without being overly so, and it's simplistic, but in the best way possible. It was incredibly easy to just fall into this story, and it just really added something to this novel because I enjoyed how easy to read it was, and it made me fly through this book.

Overall, I really enjoyed this story, the writing, and the characters, and it gave me a new appreciation for the detective fiction genre. I definitely recommend it, and I do plan on reading more of Nevada Barr's work in the future!

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## **Kathleen says**

This author sets her murder mysteries in national parks, like Yosemite. This book is set in my home waters (Upper Michigan / Wisconsin) , on a national park that covers an entire island in the Great Lakes — Isle Royale on Lake Superior. Hence the title.

I read this murder mystery some years ago. As I recall, the mystery itself was slow going at first (the heroine, Anna, was sad and pensive because her husband recently died in NYC). Eventually, the plot picked up and became suitably intense at times. I remember a vivid and dangerous dive scene, down to the submerged shipwreck. Also, there was some weird incest / sibling love thing going on.

However, I was disappointed in how Barr portrayed the setting, on Isle Royale in Lake Superior. I have been there, hiking and camping for about 4 days. It's a unique and fascinating place -- an international biosphere, with wild wolves preying on the wild moose, and with carnivorous pitcher plants and other interesting flora. The rocky volcanic island is turning to soil almost right in front of our eyes. Scientists from all over the world conduct research here. I vividly remember my visit, 25 years later.

But from this story, one wouldn't really know. It could have been set on any island.

So I was miffed. Why set your murder mystery in such a location, if you aren't going to make something of it?

I've read a few of the Nevada Barr mysteries. Some are better than others. Some are more grisly than others. This one wasn't too gruesome, but the one set in Yosemite National Park -- High Country -- is grizzly. Er...grisly. Very gruesome.

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## **Lisa Kay says**

*Isle Royale National Park,  
Lake Superior, Michigan  
Photo by Lorelei Lane*

*Rocky lichen-covered shoreline of Mott Island  
Photo by gsgeorge*

*Rock Harbor Light in Fog  
Photo by ohkayeor*

*Underwater photo from: Scuba Emporium  
Chicago, Illinois*



★★★½? (This is a review of the audiobook.) Though this novel isn't written in first-person point-of-view, Barbara Rosenblat sounds like the way I think Anna Pigeon would. She does a nice job here narrating. While she doesn't do a lot of vocal ranges for the *many* characters, she does a good job of telling the story, and delivering Anna's thought process.

Each book in this series has a different background setting in a U.S. National Park; this one is set in Isle Royale National Park, an isolated spot where wolves and moose abound, far from the sights and sounds of everyday civilization. As a protagonist, I enjoy Anna Pigeon, the autonomous - but insatiably curious - ranger employed by the Park Service. In this second installment of her series by Nevada Barr, I like that there is a complex mystery – or should I say mysteries – running throughout. So much so that I'm glad **Shelfari** has a list of characters to which an audio listener may refer.

I like Ms. Barr's writing style, and she has a way of describing the stunning beauty of Anna's soundings, be they an eerie underwater dive to a 1927 shipwreck in Todd Harbor off Kamloops Point in the depths of Lake Superior, or the kayaking sites around lichen-covered rugged coves of Passage and Mott Islands.

*The island's somewhat gruesome history—it was named for Charlie Mott, who had tried to eat his wife one long and hungry winter—was all but exorcised by the banal necessities of bureaucratic life.*

In addition, I like that the multiple mysteries are solved along the way, not all at once at the end; some are connected, some not. I did have some issues with the ultimate justice for some of them, but not enough that I won't continue with this series. Plus, it really did make me want to visit this beautiful National Park on the Canadian boarder.

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## Book Concierge says

Anna Pigeon returns for her second mystery. This time she has left the southwest and is now assigned to Isle Royale National Park, in Lake Superior, just north of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. It's remote and a very different environment from what she was used to, and she's having some trouble adjusting. She continues to rely on frequent phone calls to her sister, Molly, in New York, and to the numbing effects of a bottle of wine. When a body is found floating within a wreck on the lake bottom, Anna has to confront some of her own fears to help recover the victim. But it seems this was not an accidental drowning – the man was murdered.

There are plenty of suspects, despite the remote location – an alcoholic has-been with marital problems was jealous of the him; the victim's own wife didn't report him missing; his boat and business were left to two twin siblings who are not relatives; a sleazy park employee who had to leave his previous post quickly has been seen sneaking around; and a hippie couple who are being blackmailed may have had enough.

Barr writes a decent suspense novel. The action moves fast and I was caught up in the mystery. There are enough clues to let the reader guess the perpetrator, but I was certain only a few pages before Anna herself had figured it out. I like that Anna is intelligent, strong and resourceful. In general, she takes matters into her own hands and acts with due caution. However ... the book had several serious editing flaws. We're told Anna is a vegetarian – several times – then she's eating a tuna fish sandwich. The name of one of the twins is suddenly changed to that of Anna's sister for 4 or 5 mentions on a single page before being correctly referenced for the balance of the book. A key piece of evidence is "stolen" by one of the suspects, and later the authorities are examining it.

What really made me lower the rating, however, is an issue with a senior administrator making a joke about having a child “escorted” by a known pedophile. That is just NOT funny, and such a comment would – I hope – get said manager fired. But no one even raises an eyebrow in the novel. Anna actually smiles! I know this was first published in 1994, but really, **WHAT** was Barr (and her editor and agent and publisher) thinking?!

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## **Nancy says**

An enjoyable read. The author, Nevada Barr, is a National Park Ranger. She writes mysteries set in national parks. A Superior Death is a murder mystery set in Isle Royale National Park, Lake Superior. Barr includes descriptive details about the flora and fauna that are actually in the park so it’s like visiting through reading. As she gathers clues to solving the mystery she reviews them so the reader can follow. The combination of suspense and humor make this a book you don’t want to put down.

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## **Jane Stewart says**

OK as a mystery. Fabulous audiobook narrator. Bad recording equipment.

### **I BOUGHT THIS BECAUSE OF THE AUDIOBOOK NARRATOR:**

Authors: one way to get people to read your books is to have a great narrator. The best ones have fans. I wanted to buy more books narrated by Barbara Rosenblat, and this was on her list. I probably would not have purchased it otherwise. The narrator was great.

**THE RECORDING EQUIPMENT WAS POOR QUALITY. YOU COULD HEAR THE NARRATOR’S BREATHING AND SWALLOWING.** This was recorded in 1998. Maybe the equipment wasn’t as good back then. The breathing was distracting.

### **THE STORY:**

This is part of the Anna Pigeon series. She is a park ranger, has a gun, and can arrest people. Each book has her working in a different national park. In this book she works on an island in Lake Superior near the Canadian border. Someone is killed, a woman disappears, someone is being blackmailed, and there is a problem happening with a teenager. It is a typical mystery-detective story with Anna talking to many different people and gradually solving the various mysteries. Anna’s job is patrolling the area in her park ranger boat. She works alone, no partner. Her husband died several years earlier.

### **OPINION:**

There are several interesting characters. Clues surface during the story which I like. Anna was facing danger a couple times. She impressed me with her competence at catching and arresting those stronger than she - and when she did not have her gun. There are some diving scenes with danger. Overall I have to say it was OK, but it never really grabbed me. I want to be surprised, or delighted, or smiling, which didn’t happen. But I think readers who love mystery-detective stories will be happy with this.

You need to suspend disbelief to enjoy it. Anna does some things that would not happen in real life - or should not happen - kind of stupid. Like chasing a dangerous criminal without a partner or a weapon. In one

chase Anna's fellow rangers were occupied, but she could have used her radio to get other locals or other authorities involved. Anna was new to diving, yet she was diving alone at night in dangerously deep and frigid water.

DATA:

Narrative mode: 3rd person. Unabridged audiobook length: 11 hrs and 37 mins. Swearing language: strong including religious swear words, but only used once or twice. Sexual content: one sex scene occurred. It was referred to with no details. Setting: around 1990 mostly Isle Royale (in Lake Superior) near Houghton, Michigan. Book copyright: 1994. Genre: mystery detective.

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### **Karen says**

Between Nevada Barr and the fabulous Barbara Rosenblatt (vocal actor) you can hardly put this down.

Anna is sent to work in Isle Royal in Michigan on Lake Superior leaving her beloved desert behind. Now she has to deal with black fly's, mosquitoes the size of Montana and a whole new crew of park rangers. On top of all that she has to improve her diving and boating skills.

A dive instructor is found at the bottom of the lake which might not be so odd if he weren't dressed in a captains uniform with no dive tanks nearby. Considering he was just married why didn't his wife report him missing?

Thank you Nevada and Barbara for this amazing look at Lake Superior!

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### **Sarah says**

Why have I never picked this series up before?! I've been vaguely aware of it for ages, but it never appealed to me for whatever reason. But I wanted a book set in Isle Royale to read on my trip there, so I decided on this one. So good! It was lovely to read this book while I was on the island, but beyond that connection, the way Barr writes about nature and the park is spellbinding. What a wonderful way to learn about a National Park. Additionally, I found Anna Pigeon to be a really compelling character--loved her inner voice and the fact that she's a 40 year old woman with no kids leading a not so traditional life. Will definitely be reading more of this series!

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### **Liza says**

This was the first Nevada Barr mystery I read. I think I've read them all now. It is well written, full of surprising twists and gripping- just what you want in a mystery. I am JEALOUS that Ms. Barr gets to travel around living in our wonderful national parks and making up great stories about them. Fortunately she is very good at it.

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## Judy says

In September I turned to mysteries as a way to ease my overworked brain. A good thing about mysteries is the bad guy or gal gets caught and also gets what is coming to him or her, unlike our current morally ambiguous society.

After reading *A Mind to Murder* by P D James, I picked up Nevada Barr's second novel, *A Superior Death*. Early this year when our current President seemed to be overriding the sanctity of the U S National Parks, I vowed to read one a month of Nevada Barr's mysteries, each set in a different National Park. As with other vows I have taken in my life, I have been faithless. In nine months I have only read one.

Anna Pigeon is a park ranger who also fights crime. In *A Superior Death* she has been transferred from the dry heat of the Texas high desert (*Track of the Cat*) to the chilly dampness of Lake Superior at Isle Royale National Park. She is moping a bit and shivering a lot, getting chomped on by mosquitoes and meeting a wide range of eccentric characters, when a grotesque underwater murder surfaces.

A current resident of Isle Royale is found dead in the wreck of an old cargo ship. The few clues available do not add up. The man had seemingly no enemies and was a partner in a concession that provided boat tours to summer visitors at the park. The discovery of his body 260 feet below the chilly surface of the lake coincided with the disappearance of another park ranger's wife, a woman with whom he was rumored to be romantically entangled. Had he made an enemy after all?

As I learned in *Track of the Cat*, Anna Pigeon is a fearless and determined woman. In this book she is required to learn how to dive deep in the freezing waters. An annoying FBI agent sent in to assist in the investigation is convinced that the crime stems from drug smuggling. A kooky couple, new-age types, believes that the missing wife was eaten, cannibal style, by her husband. If that were not enough, a teenage girl seems to be the victim of an adult sexual predator.

Barr juggles a large list of characters (I wish I had made a list) and is forever moving Pigeon around the island into various coves as well as back and forth between different settlements. I found a great map online allowing me to track her movements. I also learned from my husband, who grew up in Michigan, that he had gone to Boy Scout camp on the island. He is reading the book now.

As the deep dives take their toll, as the chilly fogs move in and out, a bewildering list of possible suspects grows and danger mounts. This was an exciting read full of extreme adventure but also occasional humor. I have renewed my vow!

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## April Jones says

Trigger Warning:

Book contains topics of incest and child sexual abuse/pedophilia. My main problem is how the abuse is somewhat downplayed in seriousness, and not handled appropriately by the parent and law enforcement characters in the book. This may not be a big deal to some readers, but it bothered me a great deal and overall detracted much from the reading experience. I really think Ms. Barr is a wonderful storyteller and hopefully this is just a "one off" faux pas on the author's part, as I look forward to reading the other books.

