

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

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★ **Starvation Lake.**

Gruley, Bryan (Author)

Mar 2009. 384 p. Touchstone, paperback, \$14.00. (9781416563624).

Gus Carpenter's big-city journalistic career has gone down in flames, and he returns to Starvation Lake, a faded resort town at the northern end of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. There, he faces another ignominy: everyone in town remembers that he is the goalie who gave up the winning goal in the state ice-hockey championship more than a decade before, and many relate the town's economic slide to that loss. Soon after his return, evidence that might explain the mysterious snowmobiling death of Gus' coach is found, and as de facto editor of the local paper, Gus must pursue the truth—but the cost of redemption is high, for everyone. *Starvation Lake* is a wonderfully polished and assured first novel. Gruley's portrayal of a struggling small town in a harsh environment rings with authenticity. His characters are believable small-town archetypes; some are self-aware, some are in denial, others are oblivious. The plot is convoluted, but Gruley maintains the suspense very effectively. Ice-hockey scenes not only advance the plot but also offer insights into the sport's culture and its importance to small, very cold towns. Many good crime novels appear every month, but few have the depth and poignancy of *Starvation Lake*, which deserves comparison with Dennis Lehane's *Mystic River*.

— *Thomas Gaughan*