

Point B (a teleportation love story)

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Drew Magary. *Point B (a teleportation love story)*. Independently Published, 2020. 461 pp. Paperback. \$13.99. ISBN 9798637737680.

DREW Magary's voice in his SF novels *The Postmortal*, *The Hike*, and now *Point B*, remains steadfastly blunt: he hammers and harrows his characters and his readers with to-the-point prose and blistering dialogue. He recently told me that "there's a LOT of dialogue in *Point B*, because I had written a couple of novels already that were more spare in dialogue and wanted to go the other way. Dialogue is a blast to write." Coming from the sports blogosphere into popular SF, Magary follows the long tradition in his fiction of posing interesting questions about the possibilities of technological revolution, and then measuring the fall-out of such novums as the end of disease and instant travel through space-time.

Magary, formerly of *Deadspin*, *GQ*, and other outlets, now writes for *GEN*, Medium's cultural magazine, *Vice*, and *SFGate* where he can hurl bile at the inequities and cruelty of our contemporary world. But ultimately, Magary is a humanist in the Vonnegut tradition, looking at how bad actors will always pursue money and power at any cost to human lives, and *Point B* is a strong novel for the strange times we find ourselves in.

Because of breakthroughs in "anti-hydrogen," the novel tells us, people can use their smartphones to instantly teleport from nearly anywhere on Earth to nearly anywhere else on Earth—China, e.g. has locked down the country and so there is no access in or out—but while the tourism business booms for popular destinations, whole industries such as car manufacturing and airline travel have completely tanked. Global climate change is solved because who needs to burn fossil fuels to move about? Whole cities such as Cleveland are abandoned for who needs to live in Cleveland when work opportunities are everywhere and anywhere—temporary housing is easy to come by and travel costs are negated.

Point B follows the adventures of 17 year old Anna Huff as she enters Druskin, an elite preparatory school in New Hampshire. An accomplished diver and pianist, Huff is awarded a full scholarship to the school and finds herself rooming with

the daughter and half-sister of the novel's respective antagonists, Emilia and Jason Kirsh. Huff becomes quickly enamored of Lara Kirsh, but Lara leaves Druskin after just a few days after the girls are caught in a late-night swimming excursion in the on-campus river. Finding friends in two boys named Burton and Bamert, Huff tries to survive her time in detention as a test subject for Jason Kirsh's attempts to broaden transportation weight-limits from 2 kilograms to 3 in teleportation. Kirsh is a sociopath who, Anna learns, tortured her sister into suicide by using secret teleportation protocols to stalk Sarah.

Point B has a great deal to say about stalking, sovereignty, security, and other techniques of domination in our seemingly always connected world and much of it should give us pause. Magary's best moments in *The Postmortal* and *The Hike* asked us to consider the Faustian bargains we make every day in the name of convenience and connectivity and of life without disease or introspection that can rob us of real meaning. In *Point B*, when a boy dies on Everest because he can port near the summit without any mountaineering experience, most in the novel's world take it as a dumb stunt gone awry—the thrill seeker getting his just deserts. But Magary takes it a step further, looking at how the boy's death leaves a hole in his family and how his mother's quest for truth leads her to be, the novel suggests, another of Jason Kirsh's victims who asked too many questions of the purveyors of so-called easy happiness and infinite, instant, once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Point B also asks us to consider the impact and limits of education—especially elite educational state apparatuses—in creating responsible citizens when anyone, can step past the old velvet ropes and create Insta-stories formerly only available to the ultra-rich and powerful. How will the powerful set up new boundaries to keep the plebes out? Why spend time in a school when nearly anywhere in the world can be seen and experienced first-hand and what will those who run such powerful institutions as Druskin do to keep their privilege? For the novel, the answer is nearly anything—the Kirshes, mother and son, donate huge amounts of money to the school to buy access not just to power but to control how the powerful continue to exist at all. Magary further uses that cliché of prep school life, the monied dandy with a drinking problem at 17 because Daddy doesn't love him, to look at the toxic values institutions like Druskin can promote and sustain. (For the record, I also went to a New England prep school and knew a few Bamerts who bounced from school to school with fine minds who only used them to scheme their way into securing

alcohol and hiding their Kodiak addictions because why bother studying when the path to financial success was already set in stone through family connections?)

Overall, I recommend *Point B* and am surprised that Penguin, Magary's publisher for *The Hike* and *The Postmortal*, passed on the novel. It's a good diversion in these trying times, and like the best of mainstream SF, has a great deal more to say than celebrating a novum like teleportation and what it might offer to us.