



Who is Pufferfish?

Franz Heineken's Tasmania

by CARMEN CROMER

When does a person end and a place begin? In crime fiction, particularly that which hinges on psychology and secrets rather than blood and gore, the scenery is often as potent a character as the cast themselves. This is particularly true of David Owen's enigmatic Detective Inspector Franz 'Pufferfish' Heineken, and the brutally complicated and painfully beautiful Tasmania he inhabits. If you're a born and bred islander, much of Franz's story will come as no surprise; if you're an import to the state, you'll probably wish you'd read of his experiences sooner; and, if you're planning to move for a peaceful sea change, let Franz and his complicated Tasmania serve as a welcome and a warning.

The Present is Tense

It would be easy to draw a link between the man and the island. Especially when you hear his mobile phone ring ... A simple, unpretentious *brr brr*. No modern theme tune or quirky abstract sound – just the kind of ring that says the owner of the phone doesn't really care what others think of him, is someone who has better things to occupy his time than contriving to make good first impressions. Obviously no slave to others, or technology, he doesn't answer the phone. Instead, he hangs his turd-brown overcoat on the chair behind him, and orders a coffee – black and strong (of course).

Detective Inspector Franz Heineken – otherwise known as Pufferfish – is fifty-ish, devoid of any pretensions and as nondescript as you'd expect a middle-aged plain-clothes policeman to need to be, to swim largely unobserved through the criminal depths of Tasmania. Heineken is, for someone who's not local-born, strangely similar to the island: both hard to get to know, they are resolutely take-me-or-leave-me, enigmatic, and prickly if you're yet to prove yourself, or if they feel you're trying it on.

So yes, it would be easy to draw the line between Tasmania and the imported cop who's driven to clean up its messes. Yet, as with all easy comparisons, it's too simplistic and does the man and the island a deep disservice.

If we're to believe what we're told, there are more than one hundred crime families operating in Tasmania; there's a generational badness and sadness that

flows through the state like tannin river water. The serene face of Tasmania is apparently a front for some seriously dirty stuff. Who would've thought? And this is Heineken's milieu. Yet there is so much more to Tasmania – in its small country towns, sophisticated urban spaces, desperately unhappy and trapped people, others blatantly enjoying and exploiting the cream – and, equally, to the Detective Inspector than what is immediately obvious on the surface.

Sharp as a blade, pragmatically intelligent and with a poet's appreciation and expression for the world around him, what's perhaps most commendable about Heineken is his ability to treat himself and his actions in the same honest way as he treats those around him. He doesn't suffer fools, especially when he believes his own actions have been foolish. He'll say what others have been thinking, but been too afraid to say for fear of backlash in Tasmania's merry-go-round society. And he's quietly funny, in a very dry way. Living in Tasmania, this sense of humour comes in handy.

Heineken's modern Tasmania is a geographically neat triangle under mainland Australia, containing approximately half a million people. The local tourism industry and Tasmanian government's official and officious line is that the island is a pristine landscape of impeccable visual and cultural credentials; here, you'll find charming people, quaint towns, gourmet produce and fascinating heritage. What's not on the glossy brochure is that Tasmania is also what academics like to deem a 'contested landscape' – and they're not just referring to bitter environmental wars; there are the undisputedly deeply divisive social ones as well, as Heineken knows all too well. The physical boundaries of Tasmania have created a hothouse of ideological battles and archaic, impossible to navigate conventions. For many on the island, to live here is to find oneself in an antipodean Groundhog Day, forever watching the repeat of mistakes while hoping for a different result.

So it's refreshing to see the state through the baleful eyes of Heineken, where the bureaucratic version of Tasmania's landscape, history and people is peeled back – and what's revealed, without fear of favour, is a true and complicated character worth knowing.

Heineken has lived in Tasmania for thirty years; currently in upwardly mobile, yet still bohemian, South Hobart. He's far from stupid and is under no illusions about the fact that he is still – and forever will be – an outsider. Interestingly, he could have had a way 'in', so to speak, being Dutch. If he'd been the kind of man who needed support networks, he could have ingratiated himself with the state's large Dutch community. But it's a mere coincidence that, as a Dutchman, he's in Abel Tasman's stomping ground; he's not here to be with his people, you understand. Even his accent, once quite strong, is now blurred, and his speech is locally blokey, Tassie vernacular, *mate* – but again, and who knows, the way he talks might all be a clever construct, since any good policeman (and Heineken is a very good, if often misunderstood, policeman) knows the value of being a chameleon, fitting in to get what they want. And there's an unsettling element of the mercenary to Heineken.

In fact, DI Franz Heineken has a reputation that precedes him. By all accounts, his nickname – Pufferfish – dates back decades, referring to his brittle persona, acerbic nature and the fact that he's a man that's easily riled when poked at. Interestingly, when you get to know him a little, that explosive description doesn't seem so apt; it's like a front that appears from nowhere, a southerly that blows up the Derwent, and then dissipates just as quickly as it came. He definitely swims against the tide, but there's also something keenly human and sensitive about Heineken, and you can imagine him being far more comfortable in the company of other cold-climate-living, deeply-thinking cops – like poetry-writing Dalgliesh, pathos-ridden Morse and socially conscious Wallander – than the gritty, hardboiled, gun-toting cops of America's mean streets.

For one thing, there's his barely hidden admiration for nature – evident in the way he talks about his fiercely protected patch of Tasmania (a shack on South Bruny, which we'll come to), and in the way he relates to the varying landscapes he is thrust into in the course of his investigations, as he is drawn across Tasmania in his hunt for answers and criminals (the wild west coast, the silent rivers of the south, the brutal highlands). A moment spent with Heineken's internal dialogue is like standing in a Piguénit painting, with the mist roiling around you, the angry sky above you and the blunt rock jutting through wind-weathered scrub. In Heineken's world, Mother Nature boasts a mercurial personality that evades definition, and her sheer power is undoubtedly the state's real puppetmaster, commanding locals to do her bidding. As for visitors, she plays with beguiling and then trapping them – often fatally – disorienting them with her wild and won-

derful unpredictability. This malevolent female force is Heineken's constant companion, and sometimes his unlikely ally in catching crims.

With his independent spirit, the police force and its machinations are almost an afterthought for Heineken. Certainly, he's a ready and protective (if gruff) mentor to young detectives Rafe and Faye, but you won't find him out socialising with them at the pub after work. And his eternally difficult relationship with Walter D'Hayt, his immediate superior, is not earning him any brownie points, but it's also revealing in that it shows Heineken's utter disinterest in ingratiating himself. While the besuited, Stepford-married, family manned D'Hayt insists on putting on a PR show for the Tasmanian people, Heineken doggedly pushes back on any bureaucratic plans to scale down his Major Crime South squad. He has no need to play the game that D'Hayt does, since he doesn't plan on climbing the internal police force hierarchy or Tasmania's colo-

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nial social ladder. He doesn't need, or want, D'Hayt or anyone else like him. He is, always, the independent, intractable outsider.

This is a man with an effortlessly, elegantly strategic brain, and it's an impressive thing to see in action – whether Heineken is coordinating faked roadworks to cut violent drug runners off at the icy bridge on the way to Strahan, or cold-calling at the Huon Valley home of dignified career crims like Fink Mountgarrett, he can foresee all the possibilities unfolding in front of him, knows how to wait patiently to get what he wants and never lets his guard down. (Well, almost never...)

What does Heineken do with his time when he's not chasing crooks and dealing with D'Hayt's policy-and-procedure demands? Well, he likes a second-hand bookshop and a Tasmanian red. Loves

liquorice allsorts (a particular British variety, to be found in a shop in North Hobart). He knows his geography and history better than most Tasmanians you'll ever meet. He doesn't own much, just a two-roomed apartment on stilts with glimpses of a tip, so he's certainly not burdened with possessions.

And this is where the waters get murky.

No man is an island, although Heineken tries hard to cultivate a void around him. Despite being able to dig up the dirt on others – generally criminals, as he's not particularly interested in small talk, gossip and the affairs of his fellow men – he's intensely private and self-sufficient, and it seems unlikely that many of his acquaintances, such as Magnus Salisbury (Heineken's closest male friend, disgraced ex-copper and now happy sax player in over-sixties jazz band, The Swinging Todgers), know much, if anything, about his student daughter, Nora, or his casually intimate, satisfyingly visceral relationship with colleague, Hedda.

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Hedda: kayaking, karate-kick-wielding, four-wheel driving, fit as hell and taller than Heineken. He's clearly not fazed by powerful women, has no need to exert clichéd behaviour to feel masculine. She calls him Puff, or mate. A pair of her bathers resides permanently at his Bruny shack. And they obviously live in the moment together.

And Nora: lived in Fremantle, now recently of Tassie for study purposes; comes to her dad when she needs money and validation, but otherwise keeps him somewhat at arms' length. Hates her mother, 'the bitch'; definitely loves her father.

What Heineken *has* let slip is that Nora's Tasmanian-born mother – unnamed – no longer has anything to do with him. Which kind of explains his deeply enjoyed, yet lightly held onto, relationship with Hedda. But there are other things Heineken

won't tell you, such as the backstory behind his wealthy ex-wife's intriguing convict heritage, why she's inherited vast tracts of land interstate, and why it went wrong. And you'd be wrong to presume he moved to Tasmania because he fell in love with her.

So why and how did he end up in Tasmania?

The Past is Imperfect

It was thirty years ago when Heineken found himself in Tasmania – not through active choice to make a sea change (a concept that barely existed in the early eighties, anyway) to a lovely isolated island, but via something of a necessary, urgent escape from the rest of the world. To somewhere, presumably, he hoped he could lay low.

Because, thirty years ago, trainee constable Franz Heineken killed a man.

Seeking retribution for the torture and murder of his fiancée, hot-blooded Heineken, through the help of his Rotterdam colleagues, shot a man in cold blood. The trade-off for this maverick justice was that the young constable had to disappear, taking his pain and his secret to the other side of the world. Yes, he delivered vengeance in circumstances that those of us who value justice higher than the law would have understood, but there's no getting away from the fact that Heineken is himself a criminal. He doesn't shrink from this truth, but he undoubtedly had to sink away from his northern life.

But not to Tasmania – yet.

Finding himself doing time as a waiter in Brisbane, Heineken's life turned yet again on a moment. It was late following a shift, and Heineken pulled a drunk man from the river – saved his bacon. The man was Grif Hunt, a Tasmanian-born copper who returned the life-saving act with one of his own – calling in a Hobart favour, which led to Heineken landing a job in a police force at the bottom of Australia. And in an ironic illustration of what Tasmanians know all too well – that it's a small, small world – Hunt is now Heineken's, and therefore Tasmania's, Chief Commissioner.

Heineken's relationship with Hunt is one of silent respect; they are forever trapped in each other's debt. On the face of it, Heineken could be ruined, to some he would seem as villainous as the crims he pursues; and the respected Hunt is only alive because Heineken saved his drunken arse. They are the keepers of each other's dark secrets.

It seems, however, that the isolation of Tasmania was not enough for Heineken. Early on, he secured a hideaway off the 'mainland': a shack on a Southern-Ocean-battered part of Bruny Island, an island off an island. Once part of a rundown 'resort' and destined – in yet another familiar Tasmanian quirk – to be compulsorily acquired, swallowed up in state forest and turned into a logging coupe. Heineken

saved this piece of paradise, with its structurally dubious wooden dwelling, its buffeting gum trees and tiny squeaky beach, by buying it from the resort's indigenous caretaker, Willard. Despite being from 'different universes', Heineken and Willard got on, forming an unusual bond with 'a shared love of fishing, solitude, and reds'; reds generally consumed beside the night fires at the shack.

Thirty years ago Heineken, like many imports into the island, was given no option but to get away from life for a while, found that Tasmania suited his purposes – and has simply stayed. And even if you think you've gotten to know him over the decades, just when you think you've got him worked out, he evades your definition, and shows another side of himself. A bit like the island itself.

And the Future's ...

The Tasmania of the early nineteen eighties into which Heineken was unceremoniously tipped is one that, in some ways, seems a long way away. Historically speaking, this bitterly divided and happily inward-looking place brought plenty of unpleasant times for people who were different. Now, some would say, *things* are different. Others would, of course, say that nothing's really changed. Differences are still too hard to swallow for some, there's no meeting ground for opposing opinions – you're either for something or against it; you're either from here, or you're not ... And punishments for not obeying the status quo are made all the worse for being intangible, slippery and meted out by those you'd least expect. Still, there's no doubt that this ethereal island is being forced, in some ways against its will, to join in and catch up. Heineken, being the outsider, will note the changes but because he operates in a world that is essentially unchanging – the world of the criminal – he'll view the changes with a detached interest, rather than a passionate involvement in them. Survival instinct, perhaps. But more likely his ingrained philosophical approach to life.

What probably won't change with the years is Heineken's ability to live in the moment – policing, by its nature, demands that you live in the present tense – yet also grasp the big picture of the island and its inhabitants with such skill.

His tough exterior will continue to be tested, and who can blame Heineken for being a cynic. Or perhaps he's simply a realist – he knows and daily sees the continuing disquiet between the landed gentry and convict underclass, the corruption that doesn't stop at the criminal level... yet despite a career of curtailing major crime, he's remarkably well-balanced, and will probably continue to be so. He's unlikely, for example, to develop an excessive reliance on substances to get him through a dreary

D'Hayt-filled day or the persistent Tasmanian winters (unless liquorice allsorts count as a vice).

And there are whispers on the wind that Heineken's not done yet, not by a long shot. The very near future has some unpleasant surprises in store for the man *and* the island; troubled times are ahead, and you can expect to be hearing a lot more from Heineken.

But looking beyond the immediate, it's hard to imagine that the future holds promotions and great accolades for Heineken, not being a player of the game. He's just finished his third stint of long service leave, and he's probably got about fifteen years left at the force – if he's lucky enough to dodge the bullets that come his way. He'll continue to do his job, what he's paid (and seemingly personally motivated) to do, until the state retires him.

And then you can bet that, if you want to find him for a talk about Tasmania, its crims and its mysteries, you'll have to head to Bruny, and wind your way through a couple of kilometres of bushland. Heineken, if he's not having his daily dip in the freezing sea, will be sitting on the dilapidated porch of his shack with a lunch of just-caught southern rock lobster, washed down with a tinnie. Or he'll be on the edge of the beach, watching the changeable weather do its thing as he pushes his bare feet into the damp sandy soil, the pink pigface and native coastal grasses underfoot.

And, if you truly want to know what lies beneath the surface of Tasmania, try to convince Heineken to take you on a drive – what he has to say about the sunny edges and the dark heart of the island is like nothing you'll hear anywhere else. ▼

Detective Inspector Franz Heineken is the protagonist of David Owen's *Pufferfish* series of crime novels: *Pig's Head* (1994), *X and Y* (1995), *A Second Hand* (1995), *The Devil Taker* (1997), *How the Dead See* (2011) and *No Weather for a Burial* (2011).

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ginen tidelands [latte stone park] [hagåtña, guåhan]

by CRAIG SANTOS PEREZ

[for my dad]

~

i baligi:
a pillar

i tasa:
a capstone

i tataotao:
a body

~

bis bands
huuk coconut –

cook and
feed [u]

stories: *this*
raised house –

~

at quarry –
outline forms

to sing
forward – carve

limestone to
sing backwards –

~

citizen – drafted
to vietnam –

the rifle
he kept –

bis uniform
bis fatigue

~

soak coconut
fibers, dry,

braid hair
"like this"

he says:
"make rope"

~

pull 'baligi' –
pull sky –

pull 'tasa' –
"pull, son"

with [our]
entire breath

~

these latte:
our bones

removed from –
to museum –

to bere –
to [u] –

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