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Chaos: A Scarpetta Novel



Synopsis

Number-one New York Times best-selling author Patricia Cornwell returns with the remarkable 24th thriller in her popular high-stakes series starring medical examiner Dr. Kay Scarpetta. In the quiet of twilight, on an early autumn day, 26-year-old Elisa Vandersteel is killed while riding her bicycle along the Charles River. It appears she was struck by lightning - except the weather is perfectly clear, with not a cloud in sight. Dr. Kay Scarpetta, the Cambridge Forensic Center's director and chief, decides at the scene that this is no accidental act of God. Her investigation becomes complicated when she begins receiving a flurry of bizarre poems from an anonymous cyberbully who calls himself Tailend Charlie. Though subsequent lab results support Scarpetta's conclusions, the threatening messages don't stop. When the tenth poem arrives exactly 24 hours after Elisa's death, Scarpetta begins to suspect the harasser is involved and sounds the alarm to her investigative partner, Pete Marino, and her husband, FBI analyst Benton Wesley. She also enlists the help of her niece, Lucy. But to Scarpetta's surprise, tracking the slippery Tailend Charlie is nearly impossible, even for someone as brilliant as her niece. Also, Lucy can't explain how this anonymous nemesis could have access to private information. To make matters worse, a venomous media is whipping the public into a frenzy, questioning the seasoned forensics chief's judgment and "a quack cause of death on a par with spontaneous combustion".

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I am sad to say that while I have been a fan of Patricia Cornwell's for years, this is the last time I will

buy one of her books. This has been building up for awhile (probably starting 3-4 books ago). I am not sure what's happened, but it seems like she's gotten stuck on themes and characters in a way that is suffocating her writing. Her main characters are becoming one-dimensional and even unlikable, and her repeated reliance on the 'Carrie Grethen' subplot has become incredibly tedious. She seems as trapped and bewitched by the imaginary Carrie as her characters supposedly are. And the results are just as unhealthy. Her apparent need for this character, and for her increasingly extreme portrayal of Lucy, has actually become a little disturbing. My overall experience with this book was one of constantly feeling like a great, addictive story was somewhere just out of reach, interspersed with being either bored by the repetition or jarred out of the narrative by what I felt were the author's personal obsessions rather than points of character development. I kept hoping she could break through and get to the story, but everything just bogged down and in the end, reading this was very much like experiencing the crushingly oppressive heat that she endlessly described throughout the book. She was a great writer who provided me with many happy hours of reading in the past, and I will really miss her books. But I'm not willing to pay the premium price expected for 'book by a well-known author' for the kind of writing I experienced in 'Chaos'. It honestly saddens me to give this one star, but I just can't give it more than that.

"Chaos", by Patricia Cornwell, is the 24th book in the Kay Scarpetta series. I believe it's time for Scarpetta to retire. This series has run its' course. "Chaos" was a disappointment. The plot was weak and moved slowly. There were a few twists, but nothing shocking. There was nothing exciting happening to keep me interested in the story. Many books in this series contained a lot of interesting forensic scenes. "Chaos" doesn't contain any. There were no scenes where Kay investigates a murder. That's what made the Scarpetta books so interesting. This one is a dud. Lucy, Kay's niece is back. But her role is small. Police Investigator, Pete is back. He's as mean and annoying as ever. It's getting old and predictable Dorothy, Kay's sister and Lucy's mother pays a visit and has a significant role in "Chaos". Carrie Gretchen, a major character from previous books is back and is as cruel as ever. Colonel Briggs briefly makes a return. "Chaos" opens with the discovery of the body of a young woman, in a park, at Harvard University. Cause of death is mystery. A mysterious phone call is made to 911, about "an incident in the park". Marino receives a strange call. Caller says he is from Interpol and mentions the "incident in the park". Meanwhile, Kay is receiving strange emails with voice recordings. The sender identifies himself as "Tailend Charlie". He knows a wealth of private information about Kay and her family. Lucy tires to find out who he is. Also, someone observes Kay and Bryce, her Chief of Staff, having an argument, and makes a 911 call. We learn

what Dorothy and Kay were like as kids. We learn of Kay's twisted relationship with Dorothy. Kay nicknamed Dorothy, "Sister Twisted". Pete Marino and Dorothy hook up together. Kay and Lucy are against their relationship. We learn the identity of the girl in the park. A major character dies. It's about the 92% mark, a powerful character makes a return visit. There is one scene that contains a surprise, as to the identity of Desi, Lucy's adopted son. As "Chaos" builds to a close, Cornwell answers many questions and ties everything together for the reader. Nothing exciting here. This is not one of Patricia Cornwell's best Scarpetta books. Fans of the series will be disappointed. I cannot recommend "Chaos" to you today.

I rated this book a 2 because for me at least it is not the good follow-up to the last book it could have been and that when I finished it I felt like I had wasted my time in reading it. Cornwell's books are generally captivating and advance the bigger story much further than this one did. I kept waiting for this book to start but all it seemed to have was a big beginning, a short ending and nothing much in between. The book is mostly about one day and goes into a lot of detail on setting up tents to house the crime scene that began the book. Once you wade through that you find you have read 70% of the book and it feels like it is still just starting. The last bit of the book is about Carrie Greiten and what she is currently doing to threaten the life's of Kay Scarpetta and those dear to her. The one good scene in the book is Kay disabling Carrie's latest weapon with a fishing pole and monofilament line. Unfortunately we don't get to read about the capture of Carrie as Kay is knocked unconscious. We only hear about bits and pieces of it from Kay's reflections on what she was told. Carrie is not killed so I suppose we will hear about more of her insane machinations in future books, although it is long past time for Carrie to make a permanent departure from the story. Cornwell would do well to return to some of her earlier books and try to write another one with the same vim and vigor those contained. Those were enjoyable and riveting. This book, however, is a sad example of her talent as a storyteller. I had looked forward to this book since reading the last one but it disappointed me and left me wondering if it wasn't time to bid Scarpetta adieu.

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