



Cruel & Unusual

Patricia Cornwell

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Virginia Chief Medical Examiner Kay Scarpetta is called in to autopsy the body of convicted murderer Ronnie Waddell after his execution. Several days after the execution, a young boy is discovered murdered in the fashion of Waddell's earlier killings, with Waddell's prints near the body. Scarpetta, along with FBI Agent Benton Wesley and Detective Pete Marino, try to discover how a dead inmate could have possibly committed another murder after his death. As the story progresses she seeks the assistance of her 17-year-old niece Lucy after she discovers a strange folder on her computer.

Cruel & Unusual Details

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From Reader Review Cruel & Unusual for online ebook

Maureen says

I've recently finished reading Patricia Cornwell's "Cruel & Unusual", the 4th installment (but only my second reading) of her Dr. Kay Scarpetta series, and I have to say that I enjoyed it, quite a bit. This was actually my third book by Cornwell, having originally "discovered" her by reading "Isle of the Dogs"; she has an interesting voice and sense of place in her writing, and I find Dr. Scarpetta to be a believable and very sympathetic character. While I haven't read every installment, I am trying to read them in order, and Cornwell, gives enough background in each installment that I don't feel "lost" when I pick up the next book.

In this book, Dr. Scarpetta, along with Lt. Pete Marino, try to explain how the only fingerprints at a recent crime scene belong to an already executed criminal. With the help of Lucy, her now 17yo computer whiz & niece, they find the clues lead into Virginia's corridors of power, perhaps even inside Scarpetta's own office, and the answers could destroy her unless she can provide proof to clear her own name.

Rob says

Number four in the Dr. Scarpetta series and for me the best to date.

I found this book to be a bit more of an on the edge of your seat type thriller than the other three.

I found the whole premise of the book intriguing. A death row prisoner is executed and the Dr. Scarpetta is called on to do the autopsy. Everything seems to be straight forward until fingerprints start turning up at the scene of recent murders that belong to the executed prisoner.

When the police investigate they find a lot of missing evidence from the office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Dr. Scarpetta finds she is under suspicion. More information comes to light that further implicates Dr. Scarpetta.

With the help of her friends, Detective Pete Marino and FBI Agent Benton Wesley, Dr. Scarpetta embarks on a fight to clear her name and to discover how a man that she did an autopsy on is out there killing people.

This book took a hold of me right from page one and kept me held until the end. There's enough dead ends to keep you guessing and keep you reading.

Not so much in the way of solving by forensics. It's more about old fashioned police work.

An engrossing read and I give it a five star recommendation.

Charlynn says

There was something slightly off-putting about this fourth novel in the Kay Scarpetta series. While key personal details were skimmed over, trivialized, and told post the actual events in past novels, in Cruel and Unusual, Cornwell killed off an important if not often seen character between books, dropping the news in an offhand manner and never actually dealing with it or its implications for her heroine. Granted, the focus of the series is not on Dr. Scarpetta's personal life, but, when said personal life becomes central to both the current case and the lead character's very personality, then the issues which shape Kay as a person need to be explored on a deeper level.

Speaking of Dr. Scarpetta's personal life having an impact upon Cruel and Unusual's cases, this seems to be a pattern for Cornwell: her heroine gets way too involved in her work. Given the nature of her responsibilities, their depth and weight, this is to be expected to a certain degree, but to feature Kay as such an integral part of every single crime – whether she's a potential victim, a victim's friend, or a suspect, by Cornwell using this approach too much, it's going to become staid and predictable. Rather, the plot device should be saved for special books, should be used sporadically, and should be something that is unexpected for readers. At this point, the question is just how is Dr. Scarpetta going to wind up in trouble this time?

Finally, despite multiple murders – some of which hit a little too close to home for Cruel and Unusual's heroine, the novel seemed to move much slower than some of Cornwell's other Scarpetta books. It wasn't really until the last fourth of the book when the pace seemed to pick up, when the suspense seemed to really pull in the reader. Plus, because of the nature of the clues – the hacking, the feathers, the average reader in all likelihood would struggle to follow their trails and could very easily get bogged down in all the technical jargon bandied about. Essentially, this novel wasn't as reader friendly for those who like to attempt to solve the cases right along with Kay. As a result, Cruel and Unusual wasn't as entertaining of a read. While the series' strengths are still there: the varied natures of the homicides, the friendship between Kay and Marino, and the great mix between science and psychology, there were more flaws to be found, the biggest of which is the fact that, at the end of this book, the murderer is still at large and, after more than four hundred pages, nothing feels resolved... whether professional or personal for Dr. Scarpetta.

Ellen says

Scarpetta is such a cool cat. Enjoy her strolling through morgues dropping truth bombs and dodging murder raps in this latest outing.

Sarah says

SPOILERS!!!!

26/3 - One of my favourite Scarpetta mysteries and another that gets to keep its five star rating. It sets up a long-running battle between Scarpetta and Gault and her continuing problems with the politicians/her bosses. I had forgotten the way things, big things, happen 'off screen' so to speak and was practically having a heart attack when Mark's death was casually brought up which left me thinking I'd somehow missed a book. Then I remembered, things happen in the time that passes between the books, and I calmed down.

Lucy was my favourite character for a long time (I forget what happened with her from around book 10, so I'm not sure whether she continues to be my favourite, I'll see when I get there) and this is the first book

where she really gets to shine and show her future potential. If she was a whiz with UNIX I can't wait to see how she deals with today's computer technology (I'm nowhere near up to date with this series, so no spoilers about what's happening with her, or any of the other characters, in the comments).

Anyone who knows me knows that I am concerned about climate change and can see its effect on Melbourne's (and the rest of Australia's) weather, the winters are getting shorter and warmer and the summers just keep getting drier but I still wouldn't want to live through winters like Cornwell's Scarpetta does. Melbourne's traffic is bad enough, we really don't need to add snow to the problem.

Throughout this book, and to a lesser extent *All that Remains*, Scarpetta is constantly paging Marino and then bemoaning the fact that he probably can't find a payphone to call her back, all I keep thinking is "I can't wait till he gets a mobile, it's going to save him and Scarpetta so much time and annoyance, possibly even save lives" (like in *All that Remains* when Pat Harvey has to go searching for a phone after Abby is shot, maybe if she'd had a phone in her pocket Abby could have been saved). Going straight to the (home) library for *The Body Farm* for bedtime tonight.

Marko Radosavljevic says

Odli?no štivo da malo odmorite od teških tema. Li?no volim tematiku, radnja je kao iz epizode serije Body of proof... Karpetina sestri?ina je malo bacila u zasenak glavnu protagonistkinju, od ?ijeg sam lika o?ekivao malo više dubine i slojevitosti. Rado ?u se vra?ati dogodovštinama Kej Skarpete

Claire - The Coffeeholic Bookworm says

Kay Scarpetta steps up her game in this series. She confronted the most bizarre of the many investigations she had uncovered in her body of work yet. Everyone wonders how Ronnie Joe Waddell's unique fingerprint appears at the murder scene of Eddie Heath a few hours after Waddell was executed. Dr. Scarpetta, together with her expert team consisting of the charismatic Pete Marino, Benton Wesley and her niece Lucy, they went to great lengths to investigate and expose the murderer, but not without her getting practically destroyed.

Among the female crime writers I've read, I think the legendary Patricia Cornwell is my favorite. She's got to be an exceptional author who uses her expertise in the investigative field to make sure that there is substance in the novels that she write. I like how her stories get me engaged until I have reached the last page of the book. Truly this has been a nail-biting suspense mystery that readers and thrill seekers would appreciate and enjoy.

Tea Jovanovi? says

Javno priznajem da sam ja jedini krivac što je ovaj nastavak kasnio... :) Želela sam da ga prevedem a nisam imala vremena da se bavim prevo?enjem... :)

Sherri F. says

#4 of Dr. Kay Scarpetta series and 4th I've read just not in order and some I liked more than others. Very intelligent medical, forensics & computer sci language, but still good stuff. This one did remind me a lot of #1 in not only there were multiple murders happening, but that (1) KS was eventually being targeted or set up to look like she may have done 1 or some of them or was somehow involved; (2) someone broke into the medical examiner's database (UNIX system?) for confidential info or changing it; (3) her niece, Lucy, was visiting and help solved the computer break-in problems; (4) that people both working under her and officials above her were up to altering info, making false accusations and criminal activity and, of course, this in addition to regular characters & them going to bat for her, pulling strings & illegal or borderline illegal things on her behalf (since it's 22 yrs old, I'm ok with the spoiler that she doesn't kill the unsub at the end this time)...which I didn't think a lot at first but looking back it kind of was esp. for two books so close in order. Maybe it was more pronounced b/c I read them 5 months apart than the 5 or 6 yrs they were published apart--so mabe would lower it a little to just 3.5ish stars. Either way, there were enough differences and I like the characters and the procedures (but have to remember that it is 22 yrs old & esp. when referring to a case 10 yrs before that so 32 yrs for some things, and technology in forensics as well as business and personal life as changed dramatically. Somethings do get figured out and some people punished at end of this but it is also a cliff hanger ending. Oh, BTW, since it's on my mind, I have started the next book and already a discrepancy since in this book, Lucy was 17 & I think in her sr year (so maybe close to 18) BUT next book says is 2 yrs later, but more like 2 & 1/2 (since this ends in Feb & next begins in Oct) but Lucy is now 21--I guess it has that soap opera aging up syndrome.

FYI, if you happen to reading out of order, there are some that should be read together more than others b/c they are continuations or chasing same criminal or somehow otherwise related. This one falls into that category. I was starting #10 Points of Origin and realized quickly in, it was strongly centered around a previous case or criminal. Then after reading summaries and reviews that really #4, #5 & #6 were relevant and after reading this I'm glad I didn't try without it.

Li'l Owl says

Excellent!

Andy says

I only really read this as I was sick the other day at work and needed some way to keep awake in the evening of my long day with nothing to do. With the small choice available in the staff room it was either that, James Patterson or the Twilight books. Tough choice. I'm very rarely without a book or two on my person so more fool me.

In the interests of disclosure I actually used to read the Scarpetta novels when younger (probably read about the first 6 or 7) but eventually gave up when I realised I didn't care enough. Much like Patterson's Alex Cross books. It was only at the very end of this that I realised I have probably read this before. That it took me so long to realise says a lot.

What I now remember is that Cornwell's prose is rather dull, bordering on tedious at times and unnecessarily

bogged down in technical jargon (in this particular case, loads of talk about UNIX which becomes very annoying). It's all rather perfunctory as we cruise through the story which, though at times interesting, never really geared up any excitement or suspense. Everything plays out and then after a few small revelations it ends in an unsatisfying manner with little in the way of closure (leaving the way for the next 3 books she wrote to continue on some of the characters).

When you add the fact that Kay Scarpetta is actually quite an unlikeable character and her niece Lucy profoundly annoying it just makes it all a little difficult to engage with. I think I'll avoid reading any more of them again in the future unless really stuck for choice (nothing will ever make me read the rest of the Twilight books). This will be returning to sit on the shelves at work rather than my bookcases.

James says

Review

Cruel & Unusual by Patricia Cornwell, the fourth in the "Kay Scarpetta" series was a solid book with a little more edge than some of the others, hence the 4 rating. Two key parts of this one that appealed to me:

1. Scarpetta learns more about the prison system, in particular how a newly killed inmate's finger prints could show up on a dead body several days after the inmate died. The "gimmick" has been used before, but Cornwell keeps it tightly wound until the end of the book. It's a page turner, for sure. You think you've figured it out, but more details come out. And it gets very scientific, which really helps push you closer to the edge of not wanting to stop reading it. That said, the technology is almost 25+ years old compared to today's standards, so it's nothing earth-shattering at this point. It was something to read in the 90s to truly get the best impact. Still a good read today, I'm sure.

2. Kay and her niece, Lucy, continue to play the game of mouse and cat, so to speak. I'm not sure who is the mouse and who is the cat anymore. But what's fun here is that Lucy ends up helping on the case, despite the risks. And it all comes down to computers, which again, are much more advanced in the last ~30 years. Reading how people thought back then, how they interpreted and stored files, is amusing for someone in the technology field. I read this shortly after it came out but I was still very close to technology way back then.

The series is still solid at this point. And I'd recommend this read for someone who isn't too particular about tools and techniques in the fields of investigation, criminology, computers and DNA changing significantly over the years. Enjoy this for the puzzle it was at the time, not the slightly slower path it would be today. All in all, as much as she annoys you, Scarpetta is one of those people I wish I knew in real life. A bit too brilliant in some ways tho!

About Me

For those new to me or my reviews... here's the scoop: I read A LOT. I write A LOT. And now I blog A LOT. First the book review goes on Goodreads, and then I send it on over to my WordPress blog at <https://thisismytruthnow.com>, where you'll also find TV & Film reviews, the revealing and introspective 365 Daily Challenge and lots of blogging about places I've visited all over the world. And you can find all my social media profiles to get the details on the who/what/when/where and my pictures. Leave a comment and let me know what you think. Vote in the poll and ratings. Thanks for stopping by. *Note:* All written content is my original creation and copyrighted to me, but the graphics and images were linked from other sites and belong to them. Many thanks to their original creators.

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Tara says

[Basically in the first chapter you find out that Mark who had been a love interest for Kay over the past few books had been killed.

Shawn Byrnes says

I was a bit skeptical over whether or not I should have picked this book up. This is due to the fact that I hated how the previous one ended. However, I must admit that I was really wrong. This book was great and my new favorite of Cornwell (who I think is the master at this genre) This book was totally creepy, and I loved every page, and the fact that the killer runs at the end, really intrigues me to keep up on these novels. The thing I love about Cornwell, is that she makes getting from point A to B, so much fun. I've read so many mysteries where getting from these two point was just pure BLAH, and the action never came until the killer was revealed. This is not the case with this book. I thought it was just amazing

Meags says

3.5 Stars

Chief medical examiner, Kay Scarpetta, gets embroiled in another murder case when she is called in to perform an autopsy on a convicted killer named Ronnie Waddell who has just been executed on death row.

Things get complicated soon after when another unthinkable crime is committed, leaving a young boy dead and brutalized in the same fashion as Ronnie's previous victim. It seems to imply a copy-cat is on the loose - either that or the wrong man was just executed for a crime he may not have actually committed all those years ago...

This 4th installment has been my personal favourite of the Kay Scarpetta books I've read so far. I was intrigued by the premise and the whole idea that 'a convicted killer may actually be innocent' thing. It was interesting and engaging, and I liked how the story played out.

Sadly, I'm still completely uninterested in Kay herself. To me, she's such a flat, boring character; I just can't seem to find anything appealing about her. Thankfully, the more I read, the more I'm warming to secondary characters like Wesley Benton and Pete Marino, but even then, I wish my enjoyment of the characters was so much more established by now - I kind of figure, if I don't love them all by book four then I probably never will.

Daniel says

Dr. Kay Scarpetta is in it up to her neck this time. A death row inmate, Waddle, is executed, but before his body is even cool, murdered corpses start piling up with Waddle's fingerprints found at the scene of the crime. Next thing you know, people are dropping like flies, some of them close to Dr. Kay, and she is publicly implicated in the deaths.

Cornwell has written a workably entertaining mystery here. The plot is engaging and bubbling with intrigue, and the writing isn't hampered by too much extraneous detail or incidental goings-ons. There is a subplot with Kay's niece, Lucy, that I found a tad ingratiating and annoying, but for anyone reading the Scarpetta mysteries in order, it is an understandable and rather necessary bit of character development.

I do, however, object to Cornwell relegating some of the more serious character development to the back story. I'm talking about the sudden death of Kay's long-time love interest, Mark, (and, to a lesser extent, her decision to quit smoking). These are pretty significant events in Kay's life, and to leave them in the background as part of the story dressing seems at odds with an author who wants us to sympathize with her character.

To that end, some of the story ended up either ringing false to me, or just falling flat. For example, there is much made of Kay's financial secrets, which she refers to in connection with embarrassment and rage. When the secrets are finally revealed, I found them to be maudlin and a little silly. It baffled me why Kay would take such pains to keep them hidden.

Furthermore, I respect Cornwell's decision to keep her novels secured solely in the Holmesian realm of mystery solving, but this means that there is very little action in the book, and a lot of key details are discussed and reviewed over and over again by the characters. It makes for repetitive reading. It also means that the actual discovery of the culprit's identity is never as important as the sleuthing that went into discovering that identity.

In other words, if you're looking for closure with this story, you won't get much. Cornwell does a great job of setting up quite a puzzler, and it will keep you guessing. But, much like a magician with an amazing magic trick, once you learn the secret, you're bound to be a little disappointed.

Jenn says

Scarpetta reminds me somewhat of Bones. But s more likable version. A little more human. I enjoyed this and the relationships she has was everyone, including her niece Lucy.

Matt says

Cornwell's fourth novel presents some of her best work yet. With twists and turns throughout, the storyline, Scarpetta goes through a gamut of emotions before the reader's eyes. With the execution of a child killer, Scarpetta's autopsy seems to be a foregoing conclusion. When called to help with the discovery of a murdered teenager, Scarpetta begins to probe deeper and discovers things are not what they seem. Could the executed man be someone other than the convicted killer? With added deaths, the mystery widens to the

point that Scarpetta is tangled in a political web that could cost her more than the case's easily resolution. Seeking the help of a long-ago acquaintance, Scarpetta tries to tie up loose ends before things slip through her fingers...

Cornwell, the master wordsmith, does wonders with her narrative description of scenery, characters, and situations, so much so that the reader can actually consider themselves one of the characters. Continuing her development of the character's backstory, Cornwell does a wonderful job of treating the reader who has invested time in reading the series sequentially (this writer being one) to details building on revelations from one novel to the next. With the ongoing development of the relationship between Scarpetta and her niece, as well as Scarpetta and her colleagues, the reader can see a pattern and divine those relationships that will continue to play a central role in the progression of the Scarpetta series. With a powerful ending to the book, Scarpetta fans are left to wonder 'what lies beyond?' and posit that the drama has only begun.

Kudos Madam Cornwell. Your books just keep getting better and I cannot stop reading.

aPriL does feral sometimes says

'Cruel & Unusual' is incredibly exciting! I couldn't put it down. I passed the last three days being tremendously entertained by book 4 in the Dr. Kay Scarpetta series!

Scarpetta is slowly recovering from the death of her unrequited love, Mark James, FBI agent, who was killed in a terrorist bombing in London in the previous book. She is going about her duties as Virginia's Chief Medical Examiner emotionally numbed. However, several cases of murder begin to interest her, especially since they appear linked to a killer, Ronnie Joe Waddell. He could not possibly have committed them, although his fingerprints were found at the various sites of the murders and the brutal manner of killing he had done were copied perfectly. But Waddell was executed by electrical chair at the local prison on the same day the first body mutilated in the same style as he was known to do is found!

Before long, other bodies are turning up, and Scarpetta is in the middle of the investigation by confused police and the FBI. Is it a copycat at work, or was it possible Waddell escaped from his cell and another man was executed in his place? Was Waddell's body, supposedly lying in the morgue, misidentified? And was important confidential information about Waddell's murder victim stolen from the morgue's computerized files about the case? Is someone on Scarpetta's medical staff breaking into her computer? Soon Scarpetta is being accused of a variety of felonies and malfeasance by her boss and she is being vilified in the front pages of the press! She is certain to lose her job if she can't find the mole in her department, if there is a mole, or maybe, even if she does uncover a conspiracy, she will still be out of a job from a lack of confidence in her abilities. The miseries keep piling up.

She remembers how her niece, Lucy, was able to track down a previous intrusion into her computer before (previous book), so reluctantly, she asks her niece to come up again to Virginia from Miami. Now seventeen, Lucy begins to crack open the mystery of whether Scarpetta's computer was secretly tampered with, but will she be able to help before more people die, or save Scarpetta's job?

This novel is a wild twisting rodeo from beginning to end! I regret only one thing - it ends with an important plot thread dangling dangerously. So, obviously, gentle reader, I will be continuing to the next book in the series!

Donna says

This was 3.5 stars, but I will round up because I read another book today, that I absolutely hated so this one gets elevated by comparison.

I like the main character in this series. She is flawed but strong. The author describes her well including her struggles and disappointments. The other characters were also well thought out. The story moved along quickly. I have read three other book by this author, and I either really liked them or I really didn't. There doesn't seem to be a middle road.
