



A Season of Knives

P.F. Chisholm , Dana Stabenow (Introduction) , Patricia Finney

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In 1592, Sir Robert Carey, a handsome courtier fleeing his creditors, his father's wrath, and the close scrutiny of his Queen, came north to Carlisle to take up his new post as Deputy Warden of the West March. The presence of his true love, the married Elizabeth Widdrington, was no mere coincidence. Before long, Sir Robert was up to his ruff in horse rustling and treason (A Famine of Horses), but he sorted that out with dispatch.

Now he's in trouble again. The rowdy Grahams plan to kidnap Elizabeth as she journeys home to her husband. While Sir Robert storms out to stop them, someone murders the man he has just sacked from his post of paymaster to the Carlisle garrison. When Sir Robert returns, he finds his servant Barnabus slung into the castle dungeon, accused of the crime, and his arch enemy Sir Richard Lowther scheming to have Carey arrested for masterminding the murder...

When even faithful Sergeant Dodd is prepared to believe he did it, the courtier finds his hands full--while ruin stares him in the face--as he juggles the murder inquiry and untangles a skein of love and greed that reminds him most uncomfortably of how carefully he must conceal his love for Elizabeth.

A Season of Knives, based on the real Sir Robert Carey's tumultuous life, is not only a keenly plotted detective story, it's an innovative police procedural and historical writing at its rousing best.

The other works in this series are A Plague of Angels (Introduction by Diana Gabaldon), A Famine of Horses (Introduction by Sharon Kay Penman), and A Surfeit of Guns (Introduction by Barbara Peters). The author is at work on a fifth Sir Robert Carey.

A Season of Knives Details

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From Reader Review A Season of Knives for online ebook

Hilary Elder says

Yes - great stuff again. The Borders come alive and are full of joie de vivre. Still loving the women characters and the plotting and the sense of place and the way the research feeds the story

Heidi says

The whole series is a delight! Her writing style transports you straight to late Elizabethan England, or, more precisely the wild, wild North of 16th century England. Her characters are lovable and most and best of all depicted as being very human, unashamedly displaying an array of emotions (warts and all!). Woven within this rich tapestry of the era is an engaging mystery which doesn't so much dominate the storyline but appears to run in tandem with the main characters' everyday lives. Having said that, the mystery is by no means predictable and doesn't follow a convenient straight line but twists and turns with the unusual and unexpected turns of events that seem to befall this not so quiet English border town.

Patricia Finney's (aka PF Chisholm) books never disappoint and are an absolute joy to read - a hard act to follow for any historical fiction writer. Her research is impeccable and portrays her love for the era which in turn is reflected in each of her books. I cannot shower her with enough praise and only hope that she'll carry on writing many, many more books in the Sir Robert Carey series as I have hopelessly fallen in love with the charming rogue!

Alyssia Cooke says

Having really enjoyed the first in the series, I immediately got stuck into the second and found Sir Robert Carey to be just as irresistible as the first installment. It was easier to get into the swing of this novel as I had already done the hard work of getting to grips with the background of a period I had no knowledge of previously.

The cast of characters seemed far smaller in this novel and the novel was far more directly focused on solving a case rather than the in-depth political and local ramifications of Sir Carey's position, although these are addressed, just more vaguely and loosely. I think I somewhat preferred the multi-string approach of the first novel, but this was still a very fine read, just a little more directly linear in its approach.

The character building was very well done, and allows for a further exploration of Dodd, Carey and Barnaby as well as his sister and her husband Lord Scopes and the distinctly more corrupt Richard Lowther. It builds on these characters extremely well and allowed for several moments where the characters truly came to life. I found myself thinking of them as I was dropping off on an evening.

The detective case itself is complex and well mapped; I hadn't figured out what was going on until it was revealed to me. As mentioned above, this novel is more directly focussed on a single case, whereas the first in the series had multiple threads that you followed throughout. I found the first approach far more engrossing, but that is only a minor niggle as I still very much enjoyed this novel.

It also raises some interesting issues of the times; how the law enforcers are expected to be corrupt and gather blackrent - blackmail - as well as the differences in law for a man and a woman. If a man murders a man, it is a hanging offence. If a woman murders her husband, it is petty treason and a burning offence. These issues are neatly interwoven into a complex and complicated mystery which ends up with multiple confessions and three people in jail for the same offence... figuring out who is actually to blame and who profits from the murder is a neat trick that again, allows for further development of Carey, Lowther and Barnaby.

My main complaint with the writing style is that at moments it seemed as though chunks of dialogue had simply been missed out and this was very offputting at times. I had to read sections multiple times to figure out what was going on because the writing just seemed to cut out and re-join at a later point in the conversation. I came to the conclusion that this is a deliberate writing device, but it did make sections tricky to understand and is the reason I have dropped a star.

Regardless of that, I would more than recommend this novel.

PattyMacDotComma says

5★

“Carey was one of those appalling people who wake refreshed and ready for anything every morning about an hour before everyone else, and then bounce around whistling happily, avoiding death only because they move faster than the people who want to kill them.”

And he'd better be ready for anything, because there are plenty of people who would be happy to assist in his demise. In this instalment of the life and times of an adventurous courtier, still pretty fresh from Queen Elizabeth's London court, Sir Robert Carey isn't fighting as much across the border in Scotland, although there's at least one good battle. No, in this one, he has to become an investigator, because he's being framed for murder from the English side of the border.

The first book, *A Famine of Horses*, introduced us to Sir Robert when he was assigned to be Deputy Warden to his brother-in-law, Lord Scrope, an trustworthy fellow. But Robert and his sister Philadelphia are very close, and she's a forward-thinking, free-spirited girl who's an entertaining character.

I must say, thinking back on these first two books, the women are strong characters. They are opinionated and clever. It's the women who are left to run everything while the men are galloping and gallivanting and stealing horses and running other men through on the fields of battle. The men do stop home to attend to the haying when all hands are needed, making it hard to call up an instant army.

Sergeant Henry Dodd is still with us as Sir Robert's sidekick (excuse me, second-in-command), along with Dodd's fiercely clever, competent, lusty wife Janet. She's terrific, and Henry knows it. She's a great one for knowing when and how to loosen the ties on her bodice to get his attention. Both she and Philadelphia are quick-witted and understand how to pick their moments to influence the menfolk, which is always fun to watch.

These aren't bodice-rippers (so far only loosening), although there is definitely some beating of tender hearts when Sir Robert thinks of the very-married Lady Elizabeth Widdrington. He tells us she's not beautiful, but she's obviously striking and intelligent with a strong personality, and he is smitten.

It's actually almost a standalone mystery. You don't need to know much background, although it's more fun, I'm sure. A dead body is discovered in an alleyway with Carey's glove on top and his knife nearby. Open and shut case. Hang him and be done with it.

Not so fast. His servant Barnabus is known to have been a "footpad" (a highwayman without a horse) and is thrown in a cell, where we are assaulted by all manner of foul smells and disgusting slime. And of course we hear how he and others spend every spare cent at the brothel, which is as great a place for gossip as the local pub.

So Carey investigates and searches for clues. It's very much a detective story, the difference being, that times then are so precarious, that if you ask the wrong question, you may get your throat cut, like the poor devil in the alley.

Sir Robert suspects the evil Richard Lowther for framing him, because Lowther expected to become Deputy Warden before this upstart Queen's cousin was appointed instead. Nobody feels safe between these two.

"Of course, of course, my dear fellow," said Scrope, hugely relieved that he had escaped the whole interview without either blades or blood being drawn. 'I'll see you later then.'"

These were violent times. Everybody's related, up on the Scottish border lands, and the English and Scots spend all their time raiding each other's horses and goods. The raiders are "reivers" (reavers, rustlers), and collect in groups of hundreds of men who answer the call to battle or to raid at a moment's notice. I think one of the highest compliments Sergeant Henry Dodd gives to his master is this.

"It was a pity really, that Carey had had the misfortune to be born on the right side of such a very high-class blanket; he had the makings of a decent reiver in him."

Not only a reiver, but a lawyer, in this book. This series is a lot of fun – plenty of humour, engaging characters, and action – all set in an historical context that lets you absorb the information by osmosis.

On to the next one!

Shelly Lincoln says

This really was easier reading than the first in the series - no stopping every few pages to look something up. As mysteries go, these are not terribly complex but are well told and the historical setting acts almost as another character in the tale. I'll give the third book a try and see how the various players develop.

Carolyn says

Sir Robert Carey has survived his first week as Deputy Warden in Carlisle on the borders of Scotland, managing to avert a plot to kidnap King James VI of Scotland. Now he is being framed for murder and must untangle a web of love, greed and betrayal to find the real murderer and save his own life.

This second novel in this historical series is just as good as the first. Robert Carey, is not quite the naive Englishman the Northerners and Scots take him today but neither is he perfect and that keeps him interesting. The secondary characters are developing nicely too into distinct personalities, the gruff Sergeant Dodd, smarter than he thinks he is, Carey's servant Barnabus, lazy and on the lookout for ways to win money from unsuspecting folk and Carey's nemesis Richard Lowther who would like to see him kicked back all the way to London so he can get back the post of Deputy Warden. The historical details enrich the plot and give a good feel of what it was like to live in the volatile borderlands at the end of the Elizabethan era.

Rhode says

More of a mystery plot than the last one, and than is typically my favorite in books. (I read historic mysteries for the people and history, don't give a damn about solving a plot's puzzle.) That said, this is absolutely lovely.

It does a far better job than the first book did in fleshing out the various secondary characters around Carey (the adventure and Carey himself dominated the first.) So now I have enough interest and love for them to carry me through many more volumes.

Plus, great scenes of card playing, sibling annoyances, women being fed up with men's deductive powers, men adoring their wives, other men loathing their wives, masters and servants being fed up with each other, and Carey's obnoxious, boisterous, pre-dawn good humor in action.

Lastly, we see Carey wake up from his why-can't-we-just-fool-around naïveté regarding his married beloved when he abruptly realizes that her reservations are a matter of life and death. Which, frankly, I think few men then realized, just as few (white, straight cis) men nowadays remotely understand how dangerous the world is for women still compared to them.

Jamie Collins says

This second book is just as good as the first one. It has really great characterization, and gives you a nice feeling of being immersed in Tudor England - not at court, or in London, but out in the Marches where law and order is a vague concept. People don't expect justice, but only hope for the protection of family or those officials they can afford to bribe.

This book has more focus on the murder mystery, and I particularly liked the argument offered by the women for why it must have been a man, and not a woman, who cut the victim's throat while he was lying in bed: the cleaning of the bedroom linens was such a tremendous amount of work that no woman would deliberately make that kind of a mess.

Mike Taverner says

This is a good series and a fine journey into history

Phryne says

I find that I really enjoy historical mysteries and this is another excellent series! The books revolve around the life of Sir Robert Carey, a real person given a personality and imaginary adventures by the author. This is the second in the series and is every bit as good as the first. The historical detail is excellent, the characterisations get better all the time and the story is great fun. I failed to guess the real baddies - there were so many to choose from! If you enjoy this genre then give this series a try. It is worth it:)

John says

Another week of Robert Carey passes by with more murder and mayhem. Great characterization and interesting historical period.

Angel Serrano says

Sir Robert Carey es acusado de instigar el violento asesinato de su antiguo tesorero. Su criado será encarcelado y dos personas confesarán el crimen para evitar que acusen al otro. En medio del pillaje y la corrupción de la vida en la frontera, los pensamientos de Sir Robert estarán siempre con Elizabeth.

Stuart Smith says

Thoroughly enjoyable and laugh out loud funny at times. Just great.

Lexie Conyngham says

Lots of action with convincing historical detail, both amusing and moving.

Keri says

This book in the series is even better than the first and simply put I am relishing that there are 8 in the series.
