



The Carrier

Sophie Hannah

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An edge-of-your-seat novel from the phenomenal Sophie Hannah.

When her plane is delayed overnight, Gaby Struthers finds herself forced to share a hotel room with a stranger: a terrified young woman named Lauren Cookson - but why is she scared of Gaby in particular? Lauren won't explain.

Instead, she blurts out something about an innocent man going to prison for a murder he didn't commit, and Gaby soon suspects that Lauren's presence on her flight can't be a coincidence. Because the murder victim is Francine Breary, the wife of the only man Gaby has ever truly loved.

Tim Breary has confessed, and even provided the police with evidence. The only thing he hasn't given them is a motive. He claims to have no idea why he murdered his wife...

The Carrier Details

Date : Published February 14th 2013 by Hachette

ISBN : 9780340980736

Author : Sophie Hannah

Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Thriller, Mystery Thriller

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From Reader Review The Carrier for online ebook

Hannah says

'Tension, thy name is Sophie Hannah' - The Guardian

Although this comment was printed on the back cover of the edition I was reading, after finishing this book I'm afraid I can't agree with it in the slightest. I've read other books by Sophie Hannah and enjoyed them very much. However, with this book, Hannah seems to fail to live up to my expectations of her.

The entire book just felt like a repeat of the blurb: Tim Breary admitting to a murder he may well have committed, Gaby Struthers and the police not believing he actually did it, his friends backing him up and everyone generally being confused. No clues as to what really happened seemed to be given until the very end of the book, when the actual series of events is unravelled. The unravelling also failed to leave me satisfied. It was so simple, that I suddenly understood the lack of clues: because otherwise I would have guessed the plot before reaching the end.

The only reason Sophie Hannah gets 2 instead of 1 star for this book is because her writing style is pleasurable and because I know she can do better!

Lynne says

This is not 'edge-of-the-seat' and its author is not 'phenomenal' by any means. Nevertheless, it's more middle-class crime in the same vein as Susan Hill's Serrailer and PD James' Dalgleish novels. All the characters live in suitably aga-ed (detached) houses, with names like Dan, Gaby and Tim. The obligatory chav characters (Lauren, Wayne and Jason, obviously) are replete with foul mouths and tattoos do the menial work, whilst Tim and co spout poetry and sit around on the proceeds of Gaby's marvelous technological development. I've lost count of how many outings Charlier Zailer and her posse have had by now, and have to admit to reading them all, mainly because it's more of a habit than anything I particularly enjoy these days. Some of the Spilling novels, including The Point of Rescue and The Other Half Lives have been serialised by ITV (another reason not really to bother)as Case Sensitive. I watched a couple and won't be repeating the experience.

Whilst this is quite cleverly plotted, the characters are really two-dimensional and cliched. I did like the multiple narrative (which seems to be on-trend at the moment) but none of the characters are remotely empathetic or even sympathetic. For some reason this series is apparently classed as psychological thriller, but personally I don't see how either of those adjectives fit this holiday read.

Apparently there's yet another out next year. Not holding the breath.

Lindsay says

This was our book club choice for September and another new author for me. The blurb sounded promising so we were all keen to get reading.

Each chapter is dated and with that brings a different person's view, I'm usually a fan of books set out like this but I don't think it really added anything.

I didn't really get the relationship between Tim, Kerry and Dan and why they were so devoted to him, it was

all a bit odd. Oh...and the letters to Francine which are interspersed are actually really cruel which doesn't help you like the Kerry and Dan any more (although some were quite amusing but I don't think I was supposed to be smirking as I was reading them).

Unfortunately I really struggled with this book, I don't like giving up on books so persevered but it was hard work. I didn't engage with any of the characters and found them to be totally unbelievable; so didn't really care enough to be interested in what happened to them and towards the end I really didn't care if Tim had killed his wife or not. In fact, I hoped he had to give the book more of a twist.

This book is billed as a psychological thriller but I didn't feel that at all, it actually feels quite ploddish.

I believe this novel is part of a series of books and therefore is probably better aimed at fans of this series rather than as a standalone. I really dislike giving a negative review but this really left me feeling cold and I'm afraid this book doesn't inspire to read any more of Sophie Hannah's books. Sorry!

Bet Spencer says

Her worst book yet. Absolutely irrelevant police 'side story' Perseverance was not rewarding.

Celina Grace says

Why do I never learn? The next time I decide to spend my hard-earned cash on a Sophie Hannah book I want someone to give me a slap. A proper, big, roundhouse slap to the head and when I've picked myself up off the floor, to lead me gently away and say in a sad tone, "Celina... Celina... do you never learn? Can't you see how this is going to end (or not end, as is always the case)? Did the steaming pile of horse manure that was Kind of Cruel teach you nothing? You know the plot is going to be a labyrinthian pile of nonsense, that the same unattractive characters are going to have the same annoying arguments over and over again, that Hannah will write herself utterly into a corner in an attempt to marry the ridiculous motivations of her protagonists with some semblance of narrative sanity? Don't you remember that you finish every book she writes running the gamut of emotions from bafflement to annoyance to teeth-grinding fury? WHY DO YOU NEVER LEARN?"

All right, enough facetiousness. The Carrier tells the story of the investigation into Francine Breary's death. Her husband has confessed to killing her (this is not a spoiler) but says he doesn't know why he did it. That's about it, for the mystery, although a second murder is thrown in at the end for reasons that I cannot comprehend even now (apart from possibly putting something into the story to give the reader back their will to live). The big plot twist left me completely nonplussed as I assumed the characters had been doing that all along (well, why wouldn't you?). This gets an extra star for a laugh I got from one conversation between Simon and Charlie and for the unique trick of actually making me feel a measure of sympathy for Proust at one point.

The thing is, I would love to read something that Sophie Hannah writes that isn't set in blasted Spilling. I reckon she could write a literary psychological thriller that knocks something like dull-as-carrots The Goldfish into a cocked hat. But I guess these ridiculous procedurals are too profitable for her publisher to give her the chance...

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go give myself a slap.

Liz Barnsley says

As usual for Ms Hannah, I found this book to be extremely intriguing and very well written. Having read an odd review I expected to be reading mostly poetry, but in fact the poetry used was relevant to the plot and indeed, moved things along apace without being at all intrusive. All the old favourite characters were back, and still managed amidst the mayhem of their own personal lives, to solve the mystery.

Tim Breary has confessed to the murder of his wife, Francine, however all is not as it appears. Did he really do it? Can he possibly be literally unable to give a motive? Simon and cohorts unravel the truth behind the lies with the help of Gaby Struthers, ex "lover" of Tim's, who having had a rather odd experience whilst abroad in Germany finds herself embroiled once more in his life.

As is often the case with Sophie Hannah's novels, you are not going to like everyone you meet - in fact I found myself actively disliking a lot of them and feeling sorry for the victim, who supposedly was a bit of a monster in life. I was very satisfied with the solution and it was great fun getting there!

Jane says

Oh, Sophie!

Over the course of seven books and seven fiendishly complicated cases investigated by the Spilling police force we have had some ups and downs. There have been more fabulous stories, and even when there have been flaws they have been balanced by good things that have stopped the lows being too low.

Until now. There are good things in *The Carrier*, but they were weighed down by things that weren't so good, and things that just didn't work.

The premise was, as always, far-fetched and brilliant:

When her plane was delayed overnight, successful businesswoman Gaby Struthers stepped in to calm a young woman, an inexperienced traveller, who was distressed by the situation. They shared a hotel room, and as they spoke Gaby realised that Lauren was scared of her. She had no idea why.

And then Lauren began to speak about an innocent man who was going to prison for a murder he didn't commit. Gaby slowly realised that she was talking about the man she loved and lost.

Tim Breary had left his wife for Gaby, but something had gone horribly wrong between them, and when his wife suffered a devastating stroke he went home.

Now Francine was dead, Tim had confessed to her murder, and Lauren, her carer, insisted that he was innocent.

That was a set-up with potential.

But I struggled from the start, because I couldn't find anyone to identify with.

Usually I find Sophie Hannah's heroines intriguing: capable women faced with extraordinary situations, who want to find out, and who may not be entirely reliable. Gaby fitted the mould, but she was a little too cool, a

little too capable, and it was a little too obvious that she wasn't telling all that she knew.

And there was no one else. Everyone involved in the Breary case was holding something back, and worse I didn't believe in any of them. Not the characters, and definitely not the relationships.

Why did Tim marry, stay with, return to, a ghastly, manipulative woman like Francine? Why did his friends, Kerry and Dan, turn their own lives upside-down to support them? What did Gaby stay in a relationship with Sean, when they didn't even like each other?

I have no answers. What I do have is a feeling that Sophie Hannah wanted to write about abusive relationships, but if that was the case she compromised that by working those stories into an ineffective crime story.

There were dialogues, interrogations, and letters written to a woman who would never be able to read them, that were psychologically pitch-perfect, and utterly readable, and there were moments when I was intrigued.

But the plot didn't expand and grow; there weren't the twists and turns that I had expected. Just one dramatic event near the end of the book, which was effective but a little forced.

And the business of 'The Carrier' was a bit of a side-issue. I suspect it was there to allow the author to thread her love of poetry through the story, and she did it well but it felt like a distraction, something else sitting where the development of the story and the characters should have been.

There were ideas that went undeveloped, there were loose ends, but I held on, in hope, until the very end.

The final resolution to the story was right.

But it made me realise that there was a simpler story, a story of dysfunctional relationships, a story of a particular type of crime, trying to get out of this rather large, rather messy book.

It leaves me wondering if Sophie Hannah is bored with the kind of books she's writing, and if she wants to write something different. If that is the case, I wish she would. I loved the books she wrote before she turned to crime fiction, and I even can remember being disappointed that she had gone down that route when I first spotted 'Little Face.'

And look how well moving away from crime fiction - albeit of a very different kind - has served Kate Atkinson!

But whatever Sophie Hannah writes next I'll give the benefit of the doubt, because while the 'The Carrier' is a disappointing book Sophie Hannah is still an interesting author.

Barbara says

I was tempted a few times to discard this book but persevered because I liked Sophie Hannah's other books. This was a 2 1/2 star book for me. I bumped it up to 3 but then lowered it to 2 after writing the review reminded me how little I liked it. The ending, though "tidy" made me wonder why it took almost 500 pages to get there.

The story revolves around a man, Tim, who confesses to killings his disabled wife but won't give a reason. There is another woman, Gaby, who is or maybe isn't part of a triangle. But in the end I really didn't care about Tim or Gaby. They deserved one another. The psychological part of this thriller centered on the fact that the wife was a horrible person who became paralyzed and unable to speak after a stroke. I just wondered why the people who surrounded her got involved with her to begin with. Life may be too short to read books this long with so little to offer.

Batsap says

I like Sophie Hannah's books. I always know when I pick one up that all my spare time will be devoted to it, her writing is very compelling. But I don't always like her characters or her characterisation. She tends to tell rather than show. For instance, and I've complained about this before, Giles Proust is set up as some kind of tyrannical monster but I see no evidence in his actual behaviour 'on screen' of his being anything other than a cranky, slightly sarcastic man. You'd think for a writer as talented as Sophie Hannah that she'd be able to show more of his evil ways so I don't have to rely on other character's opinions as to how bad he is. Or maybe I'm just missing something. But it was the same with the Tim Breary character. Everyone went on about how he was so amazing and special and messianic, but he was just a stupid plonker. Everything I read of his behaviour made me think he needed a slap upside the head, and I only had the other character's word for it that he was worth all the trouble they went to. But again, maybe I'm missing something clever and subtle here. All the characters were terrible people in this, they all needed to be locked out of the way somewhere. It's indicative of Sophie Hannah's writing talent that I kept reading, even though everyone was so infuriating.

Karen says

I've read two of Sophie Hannah's earlier psychological thrillers in the Spilling CID series and enjoyed both but sadly this one is not one of her best. I was way of out date with the lives of the police detectives and in particular with that of Charlie Zailer and Simon Waterhouse, which only added to the frustration and I would therefore recommend that the series is best read in order, I believe this book is number 8.

I don't know how to review this book – I don't like giving negative reviews as I do appreciate just how much work goes into producing one and it's not something that I could do but I really didn't enjoy this and it became a chore to read, if I hadn't been reviewing it for Vine I would have abandoned it.

It started off well enough with businesswomen Gaby Struthers being delayed for her homeward journey at Dusseldorf airport, and being stuck in a hotel room with a foul mouthed and aggressive young woman Lauren Cookson, who makes an admission of a man accused of murder being innocent, whom we subsequently find out is well known to Gaby. There were some very amusing exchanges and a promising storyline and I had high hopes for the rest of the book. Unfortunately into the second chapter the whole story started to go downhill. Basically a man confesses to killing his wife and the police spend the next 400 pages attempting to prove he didn't do it. I struggled to the end to find out who did commit the murder only to be left disappointed at the finish.

I won't reiterate the plot as this has already been done but one of the main problems I had with the story was understanding why Tim Breary inspired such loyal devotion from his friends Kerry and Dan Jose. They conferred on him a god-like status; gave up their homes and their careers to accommodate him and then after

his confession, constantly lied to the police. The reader is constantly being told both by Gaby Struthers herself and indeed, by other people, how clever she is and yet how did she end up with the obnoxious Sean? Francine came across as a truly horrible person so why on earth did Tim marry her in the first place? The only pairing I can understand is Lauren and her husband Jason, the thug. They were well matched

Running alongside the Tim Breary storyline is a separate one involving some of the detectives being at odds with each other as well as infidelities with a colleague's family member. There was obviously a problem between Simon Waterhouse and his boss, Proust and, whilst this may be a follow on from the previous book, it would have been helpful to have included in this one the reason for the disagreement.

The book is marketed as a psychological thriller but for me there wasn't much tension or suspense, just a slow frustrating plod. I think the book would have benefitted from some aggressive editing to reduce it by at least 100 pages.

There was a positive for me, I did like the way that the back story from the viewpoints of Kerry and Dan Jose, Tim's friends, was done by way of a letter to Francine. This did work very well, as to have this narrative included any other way would have made the book even longer.

Its a sad thought that if new readers of Sophie Hannah buy this book and don't enjoy it they may well give up on her books altogether. That would be a real shame as her earlier books are very good indeed.

Emma-Louise says

Warning: if you want to read a Sophie Hannah book, DO NOT choose this one first!

I am usually gripped by Hannah's books, she's a fluent and engaging author, her books are well plotted and the twist is difficult to work out until very late on.

The Carrier began promisingly but I fully got the feeling the author got bored or distracted whilst writing it. The logic behind Francine's death is something I still don't understand, and the reasons why all the characters got tangled up in this web of lies still isn't clear. Hannah's characters are always psychologically complex, as everyone is, and in her other books the relationships between the characters are logical. Unfortunately, this one was beyond the realm of my belief in Sophie Hannah and her writing. I look forward to her next book though, and sincerely hope the plot and characters come together much better than in this one.

Gervy says

I am not sure if this was actually not as good as her previous novels or if I am just wearying of the torturously complicated plots and uniformly dysfunctional relationships.

Karen says

A disappointment. In previous books Hannah has often made irritating errors, especially in relation to police procedurals. However, on the whole I have found her novels thoughtful, well-plotted and with well rounded and largely sympathetic characters - with the exception of the irritating detective couple. I struggled with this

from the beginning. The relationships of the main protagonists were senseless, the characters one dimensional and the plot infeasible; especially the ridiculous dream interpretation towards the end (what??). I didn't care a jot for any of this lot. Further, the author's attempts at persuading us that the Simon Waterhouse character is some kind of genius, or even just terribly clever, fail miserably. I would prefer to see less of him, his wife and the cartoon sister character. I've read all of Hannah's books and thoroughly enjoyed the vast majority; however, after reading this I will probably think twice in the future which, is a shame.

Donna says

Not an edge of your seat novel and certainly not phenomenal. The potential for a great story was there but the ideas were half baked and there were so many threads of the story that were mentioned then not explored at all. There were no explanations offered for the often bizarre behaviour by the characters and it just appeared as if the author couldn't be bothered. So as a reader, I would suggest not to bother either.

James says

This review may contain some spoilers. The first of which is that it is an oddly terrible book. I have never believed that you need to like or be able to relate to a character in a novel to enjoy it to the fullest, but you do need to find their actions feasible in whatever stretched reality the author chooses to construct. Characters like Patrick Bateman are fantastical misallocations of reality, but appear all too credible. With an authors skill their choices make sense albeit in a warped world.

In the carrier, the author rather lazily puts three to four characters at the core of the plot who are both utterly befuddling and annoying. There is the high king of passive aggression called of all things Tim whose friends seem to believe he is some form of the messiah and act accordingly. Tim in what the reader begins to suspect is a classic Tim move has a really mean girlfriend and instead of deciding that losing her number might be a plan marries her thereby ensuring his life is total hell. One of the signs that he is making a mistake is that post agreeing to marry her he suffers from a recurring nightmare that she wants to kill him. This does not lead to any second guessing of his decision. His friends are even more inane, not only do they accept the dreadfulness they twist their lives around like pretzels to accommodate it. Lastly a woman who is depicted as smart, capable and in charge follows Tim (honestly the Tim bit kills me) around through his entire martyrdom.

Having characters who are inexplicable in a psychological drama is a fundamental flaw from which this novel reels around in a slow motion car crash only punctuated by snorts of derision. There are some great sparks and the author can write really well and the final twist does bring some redemption but by the eighth in the series I would have smothered the lot of them with a pillow.
