



J is for Judgment

Sue Grafton

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"J" is for Jaffe: Wendell Jaffe, dead these past five years. Or so it seemed until his former insurance agent spotted him in the bar of a dusty little resort halfway between Cabo San Lucas and La Paz.

"In truth, the facts about Wendell Jaffe had nothing to do with my family history, but murder is seldom tidy and no one ever said revelations operate in a straight line. It was my investigation into the dead man's past that triggered the inquiry into my own, and in the end the two stories became difficult to separate."

Five years ago, when Jaffe's thirty-five-foot Fuji ketch was found drifting off the Baja coast, it seemed a sure thing he'd gone overboard. The note he left behind admitted he was flat broke, his business bankrupt, his real estate gambit nothing but a huge Ponzi scheme about to collapse, with criminal indictment certain to follow. When the authorities soon after descended on his banks and his books, there was nothing left: Jaffe had stripped the lot.

"Given my insatiable curiosity and my natural inclination to poke my nose in where it doesn't belong, it was odd to realize how little attention I'd paid to my own past. I'd simply accepted what I was told, constructing my personal mythology on the flimsiest of facts."

But Jaffe wasn't quite without assets. There was the \$500,000 life insurance policy made out to his wife and underwritten by California Fidelity. With no corpse to prove death, however, the insurance company was in no hurry to pay the claim. Dana Jaffe had to wait out the statutory five years until her missing husband could be declared legally dead. Just two months before Wendell Jaffe was sighted in that dusty resort bar, California Fidelity finally paid in full. Now they wanted the truth. And they were willing to hire Kinsey Millhone to dig it up.

As Kinsey pushes deeper into the mystery surrounding Wendell Jaffe's pseudocide, she explores her own past, discovering that in family matters as in crime, sometimes it's better to reserve judgment.

"J" is for judgment: the kind we're quick to make and often quicker to regret.

"J" Is for Judgment: Kinsey Millhone's tenth excursion into the dark places of the heart where duplicity is the governing rule and murder the too-frequent result.

J is for Judgment Details

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Beverly says

I loved this one! The last two seemed to be a bit slow moving, but this one had all the right things. On to K!

On a side note, the one thing that REALLY bothers me in this series that I didn't notice the first time around (which was almost 20 years ago, so please forgive the memory lapse) is the constant body shaming. Kinsey describes Vera, her closest thing to a best friend, as a "big woman" then follows it up with the description of her being 5'10 and 140 lbs. IN WHAT UNIVERSE IS THIS A "BIG WOMAN"? I'm not sure if it's Grafton trying to make a point that Kinsey notices a person's build, because she's a PI and takes notice, or if it's a fat-phobia that Kinsey has. Most people in the book, save a very few, have "extra flesh", "need exercise", "carry 20 extra pounds"...it's just kind of a weird thing to continually focus on. I also have to remember this was written beginning in the 80s - this particular installment in 1992, and times were different then.

Mark Baker says

Kinsey is surprised to be hired once again by California Fidelity. They've just paid out a claim on Wendell Jaffe's life insurance five years after his supposed death at sea only to hear he's been spotted down in Mexico. Kinsey locates Jaffe only to have him vanish again. Can she prove he is still alive?

This is another fantastic mystery. The characters are strong and help pull us in. The story itself has plenty of twists and turns before we reach the climax. We have some time for updates from the series regulars, and I love what is happening there. Kinsey also stumbles on a surprise in her personal life. I'm curious to see how this sub-plot plays out in future novels.

Read my full review at [Carstairs Considers](#).

Linda says

I'm a big fan of this series, and "J" didn't disappoint. PI Kinsey Millhone is a good character, and this story about a Ponzi Scheme crook who faked his death and then suddenly reappeared was engaging and perfect for the beach, which is where I was while reading it.

Phrynne says

A fun, entertaining read but for me not one of her best. I am still debating whether I like Kinsey or not but I will say she certainly has no shame!

The story in this one was good and I totally missed on who the murderer was going to be. There is a great need to suspend belief while reading though because many of the events are unrealistic.

Anyway - good entertainment when you need a light read!

Beth says

Originally seen on my book blog!

I knew from the beginning that this had a great story line and was hopeful that it would be a promising book. It was. From the beginning we are thinking a lot of things, for one, why did he fake his suicide? For two, what is now going to happen to his widows insurance money? And for three, is he going to get caught?

The only thing that doesn't thrill me about these books is that there are always new characters and it can sometimes be hard to keep track of who is who and how they are related to the story. This one had a few characters, but it never got confusing. I would suggest to other readers to write down character names and any information that they get about the characters while reading. It's a lot less confusing. But like I said, J is for Judgement had a good amount of characters to make the story good, but not enough to where I was confused.

I'll get back to the characters. First I want to talk about the story line. There were a few different ways that this book could have gone. Jaffe could have come back to California and apologized and made up with his family. Jaffe could have never gone back to California and his family never would have found out he was alive. Jaffe's family could have been behind his "death" five years ago and this was all a big scheme to get money from the insurance company (okay, I admit, I was sorta hoping for this one.) We didn't find out what was going on for most of the book which made it a quick read because I just *had* to know what was going on. I had tons of questions during the book and once they were answered, I felt like I had even more. The story went the best way that it could have; I wouldn't have changed any of it.

When Kinsey wasn't working on the case, her life was far from boring during this book. When she thinks she may have found someone that she is related, she has no idea what to do about it. Does she call them and say "Hi! I'm your long lost family member!" or does she ignore it and continue living her life in solitude. I couldn't help but think this was purposely put into the same book where a long lost family member "rises from the dead." When she wasn't at work, we got to see a new Kinsey that we are not used to- a somewhat vulnerable Kinsey. I'm not sure if this story line will make it into future books, but I would like to see it extended in the later books.

As for the other characters, Henry was not much of a big character in this book. With Kinsey in Mexico trying to find Jaffe and all over different cities, she wasn't at home all that often. Other than the regular characters, we met Jaffe, his new wife, his "widow", and his sons. There were some minor characters thrown in as well, but they weren't there often. I never got confused with the characters because each character was different. His widow was a bitter lady that refused to believe her husband was still alive. The new wife was quiet and compliant. She never wanted to upset Jaffe. The sons were world apart- one a troublemaker and another could only be described as sensitive and forgiving. Every character was important to this story and made the book better.

When there is a series that is going for 26 books, it is hard to not get repetitive with stories while also staying true to character. Kinsey isn't one day going to pick up knitting or move into a mansion. There has to be a balance between repetition and consistency. Grafton does this with ease (or that's how it looks to the readers.) Every book has a different plot but Kinsey is still the same Kinsey. She's still breaking into places with her lock-picking tool, she's still eating peanut butter-and-pickle sandwiches, and she's still waking up at 6 am (HOW!?) to run three miles (almost) every morning. For the most part, Kinsey is the same Kinsey that

I met in A is for Alibi and I'm sure she'll be the same Kinsey in the last book of the series.

Kinsey Millhone was introduced in the 1980s and has been an important part in the mystery and crime genre for women authors and for women protagonists since then. I would recommend this book, and this series as a whole, to everyone.

Alondra says

3.5 Stars

Pretty good, drama-filled story; with Kinsey being on the slightly bitchy side. I know her job is to get at the truth; but she is NOT a cop. Her self-righteousness, and her being hell-bent on getting at the truth irked me something fierce. She has no right going into other peoples lives. No one has to tell her a damn thing. She is persistent to the point of bullying. People aren't able to grieve, because she is right there saying, "Hey, give me what I want!"

I still love her spunkiness; but she bugged me. Putting this series to bed for a month or so... then, K is for Killer. :)

Kricket says

in which kinsey visits mexico on the lookout for wendell jaffe, a ponzi schemer who staged his own suicide before leaving the country.

the thing that struck me yet again is that, for a self-alleged misanthrope, kinsey is really good at getting people to talk to her and trust her. she's constantly showing up unannounced at people's homes demanding information and they all invite her in for coffee and a chat, and allow her to come back even after she pisses them off. i know that this stuff makes the investigations work in the plot (dialogue with people face to face is much more interesting than reading transcripts of phone calls), but it's not that realistic.

not that i'm reading these because they're realistic or anything.

Michelle Beteta says

I'm partial to this series because I went to school near Santa Barbara and lived in San Luis Obispo, CA for five years. The author does a fair job of describing costal living while weaving murder and intrigue along the way. The main character is whimsical and I enjoy her relationships as they are unconventional and unpredictable.

Quenya says

Another one of those where I didn't really like any of the characters, they weren't as bad as the characters in

“D is for Deadbeat” but still kind of unlikable. Given that most of them have some past experience with Wendell Jaffe the reasons for the actions a little more understandable.

The best part of this book was all the insight we gained into how Kinsey thinks and her moral code. I really admire her drive for the truth and the value she places on human life – any human life. She really wanted to know the truth about Wendell Jaffe and couldn't understand why everyone else was happy with accepting what appeared on the surface.

The one big moment this book gave us and it gave it to us big time was the information on Kinsey's family. It is hard to review this portion of the book without spoiling it for readers who have not read the series. I will just say that if the book had spent more time on that I would have probably rated it higher. What a revelation and an added aspect to her personality.

Marsha says

Well, after reading ten of them, I'm reasonably certain that Sue Grafton does not know how to write a bad book. I feel a bit repetitive, but J is for Judgment is terrific. Well written, strong characters, emotional roller coasters, suspense and mystery. Such a great detective series. Kinsey is fantastic, and I love seeing her adapt and grow. I also love the lack of technology and how she always makes it work for her.

James says

Book Review

4 out of 5 stars to J is for Judgment, the 10th book in the "Kinsey Millhone" mystery series, written in 1993 by Sue Grafton. As I read the book details of this one, I vividly recalled the main character, Wendell Jaffe, and Kinsey's pursuit of this case. Wendell supposedly died 5 years ago, and his wife collected major bucks from his insurance policy. But when he's spotted alive not all that far away, Kinsey takes the case. And when she gets into it, her life starts to explode. She's such an amazing character to keep reading about. Always humorous, but not in a laugh-out-loud-non-stop way. More like a witty chuckle each chapter. And her friends and neighbors are truly great supporting characters. I like that she takes a trip out of Santa Teresa in this one, but is also around the homestead for parts of it. She's more open about her own life and history, which we needed more of in this series. And the mystery, a normal one -- is he or isn't dead -- turns the whole case upside down. There's more going on that Kinsey realizes, and I was glad to keep reading about it.

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.

Denise says

Another great read. More personal facts revealed about the main character. As usual, this novel kept me guessing to the last page.

Stephanie says

This is the first book in the series I gave a 5 star rating too because it was that good. I love that Kinsey stuck it to her old employer and office provider and that she learns some things about herself in the process.

The scene where she sneaks into the hotel room of a suspect is one of the best in the series and I loved the book from beginning to end.

I can't believe how good this series is.

MaryG2E says

Kinsey Millhone is one of my favourite fictional detectives. I read several books in Sue Grafton's 'Alphabet' series some years ago, and loved them. It was a pleasure to reacquaint myself with Kinsey this time, with the letter J, which I had not read previously.

As always, Kinsey is an endearing mixture of gauche and genius, as she darts around, following leads and munching on junk food. 'J for Judgment' concerns a case of life insurance fraud, in which a supposedly deceased businessman seems to have come back to life. The story is nicely structured, with not too many extraneous sub-plots. The secondary characters are well-drawn, and recurrent cast members continue to be appealing. Kinsey has a healthy sense of self-mockery, and her internal monologue is often hilarious. As always, she manages to muddle her way through to the denouement despite various set-backs and false leads.

4 ★s

Benjamin Thomas says

This 10th book of the "Alphabet" series is the first one I've rated with 5 stars. I'm having a hard time pinpointing exactly why though. It's not specifically because Ms. Grafton has "stepped it up a notch" in her writing although the writing has gotten better and better over the series and she is now content to let her characters interact naturally instead of forced into a plot. It's also not due to our heroine Kinsey Millhone becoming an even more interesting character, even though I find myself identifying with her personality and actions more than ever before.

This is the first novel in the series that I recall where Kinsey is not out to solve a murder (although I could be mistaken in that). Rather she is doing a side job for her old employer, an insurance company, trying to prove a dead man is still alive and thus avoid a large insurance settlement. The danger level is actually ratcheted down a notch or two from previous novels but that seems to allow room for a better story to be told. I don't

always need edge-of-your-seat action or for Kinsey to get shot at the end to enjoy a good story.

There is a great mystery here and we also get to see Kinsey's personal back story develop quite a bit. We've known her as having been raised as an orphan from the age of 5 but now she (and we) get to have the gaps of her back story filled in. Add some fundamental new information from that backstory (no spoilers) and it should be an interesting recipe for changes in future books.

Maybe this was just the right book for me to read at the right time. Enjoyed it a lot and plan to continue at my present rate of reading 4 of these each year in order to finish up at just about the same time the last book ("Z") is published.
