



Hotel Cartagena

Simone Buchholz

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In Simone Buchholz's original, stylish thriller *Hotel Cartagena*: during a high-stakes hostage situation in a high-class hotel bar, the past catches up to the powerful.

While celebrating a birthday atop a hotel overlooking Hamburg, Germany, a snarky and observant prosecutor, Chastity, is taken hostage with her friends, an awkward gathering of off-duty cops. It's not clear to her what the hostage-takers want, leading her to quip that maybe they have Stockholm Syndrome in mind.

Chastity suffers from worsening sepsis and growing delirium after cutting her hand on a cocktail pineapple. Her off-kilter viewpoint and deteriorating mental state make the captives' peril even more captivating: she navigates the crisis as the gunmen live stream their vengeful act against the hotelier, Konrad, who remarks that "nobody ever got rich from being a good man." And in the story's background is a restless German expat, Henning, whose role becomes clearer as the tale unfolds: he sails to Columbia and gets ensnared in a drug cartel, and his mounting travails result in an ominous atmosphere, while also deepening the underlying humanity of the story.

The book's spare, staccato prose crackles with energy. Its sensibilities are neo-noir, and its wit is wry. Buchholz doles out delicious black humor: a bang "could be anything: an explosion or an explosion or possibly even an explosion." Actions are described in a palpable, immediate manner, as with a revenge scene in which Konrad is stuffed with fatty sausages. And the book's progression is high-octane: it alternates between plot threads that appear unrelated at first, but are interwoven in a manner that ramps up the intrigue and tension. All ties together before the book's explosive climax.

Hotel Cartagena is a hard-boiled crime novel in which bystanders at a hotel bar become unwittingly entangled in someone else's retribution scheme.

JOSEPH S. PETE (September / October 2021)

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