



Kill Code

Luna Kayne

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Kill Code is a shocking thriller whose many revelations stem from a woman's horrible past.

Luna Kayne's taut thriller *Kill Code*, the first novel in the Kill Code Trilogy, combines computer hacking, covert operations, and past brutalities.

Jack is the head of a special operations team that's been tasked with a dangerous mission: to bring down a hacker collective led by the evil mastermind Zane. The operation sees twofold violence: not only do bullets and fists fly, but Jack finds Jessa, his old flame, in the midst of the madness, though she supposedly died ten years ago.

Jessa, confirmed alive but working with the enemy, has time-sensitive intelligence that could disrupt Zane's network. The problem is that this information is stored in the deepest and darkest corner of Jessa's mind—that part which refuses to relive a brutal rape.

This deceptively brutal thriller includes Jessa's history of sexual abuse, which is depicted in graphic terms. Elsewhere, piling instances of sexual violence enacted by intelligence agents reek of exaggeration. Still, such disturbing scenes are effective in pushing the story forward, and Jessa's trauma holds the key to breaking the case, while also giving her a warped *modus vivendi*. Jack is there as a stabilizing force—the one character who can give struggling Jessa a reason to keep fighting.

Jack and Jessa's love centers the novel, its traces of dark romance complementing the book's thriller elements. Jack struggles to come to terms with Jessa's existence and seeming betrayal, while, for Jessa, meeting Jack again is the catalyst for healing. Her healing process is far from easy; the novel does an excellent job of showing Jessa's inner turmoil, exemplified in her shared thoughts. The battle against Zane and his crew becomes another push toward Jessa's psychological growth.

Much of the story's action takes place in Jessa's mind, so the book balances cerebral elements with visceral ones. Shifts in narration styles lead to some confusing passages; it is not always clear whether something is being spoken aloud or considered internally, and inner monologues play an important role.

The novel is the first in a three-part series, so its conclusion is not final. Its true power is in the lengths and depths of emotional disturbance that Jack and Jessa go through in order to reach a safe conclusion. Their love is rekindled, and Jessa and Jack become a crime-fighting duo with a lot more work on their horizons.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (April 22, 2020)

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