



Kaleidoscope

J. Robert Janes

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December 1942. Jean-Louis St-Cyr and Hermann Kohler have been dispatched to Provence to investigate a local murder. A woman lies dead on a hillside, an iron-tipped bolt through her heart. The Proventals are uncooperative, fearful of Nazi reprisals. Before the murder is solved, the inspectors will be drawn into a web of collusion as intricate and shifting as the patterns of a kaleidoscope.

Kaleidoscope Details

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Author : J. Robert Janes

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Lynda says

Where to begin with this book...let's start at the beginning. The title is Kaleidoscope and that figures strongly in the plot. The story takes place in occupied France in WW2. A French Surete detective and his "partner," a Gestapo agent, are sent to investigate a murder in a community that may be harboring Resistance operatives. From the beginning, this book is difficult to follow and I often doubted that I would finish. But the story and not knowing exactly what was going on slowly pulled me in. It is often difficult to understand who is talking or even where the action is taking place. The characters are also difficult to get a feeling for. Yet, every once in awhile, it came together, only to drift off again on the next page. It felt like I was reading a book in a different language that I only had a beginner's knowledge of. Ah, then it hit me. There is a kaleidoscope in the story that plays a big role. It was described by one of the characters as doing just what the convoluted murder did: being apparently random shapes that suddenly collapse into a pattern before resuming chaos. And I saw that the story had been planned like that, as well. It was a very hard read but I think it successfully did what it set out to accomplish. I'm glad I stuck with it, but I also think that reading should not be torturous, and at times this was. I had to just keep moving forward, waiting for the next turn of the kaleidoscope and a brief view of the facts before it was all hidden in chaos again. By the end, I gained respect for this writer.

Eddie says

3rd in the series in Paris; hard to follow at times.

Cerisaye says

28/8/15

Reading this novel reminds me of problems I had with the first St Cyr & Kohler book, most notably its annoying, not to mention confusing, character POV switches and muddling mix of dialogue and interior thought processes. Throw in a complicated murder mystery plot and the result is one somewhat frustrated reader (well, audio book listener). I persevere because I LOVE the premise of the patriotic French *Sûreté* Inspector working with a Gestapo officer in a relationship that develops mutual respect and friendship, though St Cyr who outranks Kohler must serve as the junior partner. Of course Hermann Kohler is a 'Good German' not a Nazi sympathiser, yet there are serious tensions relating to the harsh realities of German-Occupied France which Janes conveys with an abundance of period detail. In *Kaleidoscope* the two detectives are brought to Provence, allowing Janes to show how the war affects ordinary French people, good, bad and indifferent, in and out of Paris.

You must pay attention reading/ listening to these books to make sense of the story. Stylistic quirks can be distracting, for e.g. Janes' use of character descriptors such as 'the Bavarian' and 'the Frog' instead of naming them, and English phrases such as 'my old one' and 'my little' in place of French, which would sound better in context. There are times when I have the impression I am reading a bad translation such is the awkwardness of its writing style. Yet I remain beguiled by St Cyr & Kohler and will definitely keep on with the series. I like that St Cyr has an accepting, positive attitude to same sex relationships and towards women, in marked contrast to Bernie Gunther in Philip Kerr's *Berlin Noir* series.

2/9/15

Well, I finished the book and was disappointed overall. I'm afraid I found the story hard to follow and in fact pretty much gave up trying to understand what was going on in favour of reaching the end and on the way gleaning deeper insight into what interests me most about these books, i.e. St Cyr & Kohler. To that end I must say this book does not deliver much. The (overly) complicated mystery plot takes precedence over furthering understanding of the two men and their complicated working and personal relationship. I just didn't care about any of the characters apart from St Cyr & Kohler, and that's a problem. I have one more audio book from the series already waiting to listen to and if that does not engage my interest any more then I doubt I will continue with this series. Its difficulties simply overshadow my engagement with its two main characters. It's a shame because Janes captures so well the tense atmosphere of France under the Occupation, its distrust and suspicion, no one ever sure who is on the same side, the ever present danger of coming to the attention of the Gestapo.

I might try reading one of the books instead of listening to the audio version because the narrator has a rather odd delivery style, with some peculiar emphases and intonations that might be detrimental to my appreciation of the writing. On the other hand his French accent is natural and works well in the setting, though he does not try to give distinctive voices to St Cyr and Kohler and the women all sound the same. Together with Janes' habit of too frequent 'head switches' this is mightily confusing.

Catherine Woodman says

Canadian author J. Robert Janes takes the detective novel's motif of societal corruption to a new high (or low) in his series of novels about French homicide detective Jean-Louis St-Cyr and his forced partnership with Gestapo agent Hermann Kohler during the World War II German occupation of France. Over the course of their adventures together, the two have gained respect and even a certain degree of affection for each other. In Kaleidoscope, the detectives are again thrust into a case that is far more complex than it seems on the surface.

In December of 1942, St-Cyr and Kohler are summoned from Paris to a small village in Provence to investigate the murder of Anne-Marie Buemonde, who has been slain by a crossbow. Before long they discover that the victim may have been working for the French resistance, that she may have been selling art treasures and other items on the black market to finance medicine for an epileptic daughter and to aid refugees fleeing to Spain, that she has not one but several women for lovers, and that her other daughter is estranged and working as a model in occupied Paris. The mystery is deepened by the intrusion of Louis' old nemesis, collaborator Jean-Paul Delphane, who appears to be more invested in the crime than he should be. Before long, St-Cyr and Kohler are at odds with Delphane and the Gestapo and trying to stay one step ahead of their own arrests in order to unravel the mystery.

The novel is intricate in its scheme, and the setting is marvelously innovative and filled with exquisite details that bring occupied France alive to the reader. However, the plot is at times so convoluted as to defy understanding, and Janes's sentence structure is often awkward and confusing. Nevertheless, the originality and complexity of the novel make it a successful work of the detective genre.

Edmund says

I have now read other books in this series but this one I found rather convoluted by comparison. Quite enjoying the others and, assuming the facts are correct, they offer an interesting view of life in Occupied France.

Chris says

I think the kindle format is off or something. It kept jumping and it was unclear that it was jumping. One sentence one place, next sentence different place and person. Breaks would've helped.

Lou says

This was an incredibly difficult book to read. Half the time I couldn't even tell who was narrating. It also seems to be a sequel to a previous book where several of the characters were introduced. Too bad since the book offers interesting insights into what life must have been like in occupied France during WW II.

I don't think I'll try to read any of the others.

Vanessa says

A twisty mystery (ish?) that revels in the imperfectness of its characters and the compromised morality of almost everyone that breathed European air during WWII. There's no shortage of looking the human condition in the face - I think in the space of three pages the reader gets vomit, pee, human bites, and animal blood matting a woman's hair. It's all a bit much and the herky-jerky writing doesn't help. This series is probably for someone but not for me.

I received an ecopy from NetGalley and the publishers in exchange for an honest review.

Margaret Sankey says

St. Cyr and Kohler are dispatched to Provence to solve the murder of a women entangled with blackmarketeers and a ring smuggling Allied pilots out of occupied France. While they aren't terribly interested in catching traitors to the Vichy government they both despise, two veteran policemen, even in 1942, can't ignore murderous thieves.

Elizabeth says

Too convoluted!!

Tim says

While I enjoyed Mayhem, the first St-Cyr and Kohler novel, the French policemen and German Gestapo member teamed together to solve crimes in occupation France, the plot of the next I read, the Stonekillers,

was too convoluted to enjoy and the characters and their relationship seemed to have slipped into the background. In Kaleidoscope, which I picked up from the library last week to give the series a second chance, the plot was better, but other problems, with the narrative flow this time, made the book much more difficult to read. Jerking from scene to scene and character to character, much description and transition seemed missing. And the relationship between the characters is more assumed than explored. I appreciate the first person which gets into the head of each of the main characters, but in this book it is all about the case and not about how the two very different characters have to get along. There is one more in the series at the library - not sure if I will take it out anytime soon.

Pam says

Yummm. Just loved the whole series!

Joyce says

2 stars

Sadly, I agree with the other readers who complained about the skipping and jumping that this book does. Quite frequently, I couldn't tell who was doing the speaking. I had to keep going back to read over what I had just read trying to clarify the action. The transitions between paragraphs were awful.

The plot was good, but it didn't keep me interested enough to finish the book. Hence I couldn't rate the writing that good because so much of my interest in a book is how I relate to the characters and how smoothly it reads.

There are too many good books to read and too little time. I don't believe I'll be looking at any more of J. Robert Janes' novels.

I want to thank Netgalley and Open Road Integrated Media/MysteriousPress.com/Open Road for forwarding to me a copy of this book to read.

Mark Ames says

I enjoy the protagonists, the setting, and the complexity of the plot. Janes' writing style is so hard to follow. Jumping from character to character and place to place. Almost breathlessly and as if chunks of the book were hacked away? Can't give it more than three stars.
