



The Cheerleaders

Kara Thomas

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There are no more cheerleaders in the town of Sunnybrook.

First there was the car accident—two girls gone after hitting a tree on a rainy night. Not long after, the murders happened. Those two girls were killed by the man next door. The police shot him, so no one will ever know why he did it. Monica's sister was the last cheerleader to die. After her suicide, Sunnybrook High disbanded the cheer squad. No one wanted to be reminded of the girls they lost.

That was five years ago. Now the faculty and students at Sunnybrook High want to remember the lost cheerleaders. But for Monica, it's not that easy. She just wants to forget. Only, Monica's world is starting to unravel. There are the letters in her stepdad's desk, an unearthed, years-old cell phone, a strange new friend at school. . . . Whatever happened five years ago isn't over. Some people in town know more than they're saying. And somehow Monica is at the center of it all.

There are no more cheerleaders in Sunnybrook, but that doesn't mean anyone else is safe.

The Cheerleaders Details

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Meredith says

Page-turning mystery!

5 cheerleaders in a small town die, in 3 separate incidents, within a month's time. Is it a coincidence or is there something sinister going on in the town of Sunnybrook?

“Some people say a curse fell over our town five years ago.”

The Cheerleaders is a compulsively readable YA mystery with a strong, intelligent female lead.

When Monica Rayburn finds her sister's phone hidden in her stepfather's desk, she begins searching for clues about what might have led her sister, Jen, to commit suicide 5 years ago. No one in Monica's family likes to talk about what happened to Jen, so she begins to look for answers on her own. As she begins to put the pieces together, not only does Jen's death seem suspect, she realizes something is off about the deaths of 4 other cheerleaders.

Told primarily from Monica's POV, as she finds clues about the deaths of the girls, perspective shifts to Jen in the weeks that lead up to her death. Monica's character is dynamic; she's appropriately angst but at the same time sincere. I thought Thomas did a good job of painting a realistic picture of a high school junior struggling to find out who she is and what she stands for, while at the same time capturing small-town dynamics.

The Cheerleaders is a dark, traditional mystery that uses social media to enable Monica to gain a glimpse into her sister's life before her death. **This a tension-packed read filled with some inappropriate and creepy characters.** I figured out some events early on, but I didn't know the why of what happened. The ending felt a little a rushed and the final chapter had me groaning. For me, this would have been stronger if some loose ends remained unsolved. With that being said, I still recommend to those who love a good mystery!

I received an ARC of this book from NetGalley and Random House Children's/Delacorte Press in exchange for an honest review.

Carrie says

The Cheerleaders by Kara Thomas is a young adult mystery that I've been anxiously awaiting having read this author before. Before I get too far into this review though I need to warn yet again that this one is going to be for the older crowd with a lot of darker content that may be disturbing to some.

As the book begins readers are introduced to Monica who is now in high school and battles the memories of her older sister every day since she's been gone. Five years before Monica's sister was a cheerleader at Sunnybrook High when tragedy struck the town in three different incidents. First an accident took two of the girls then a murder took another two leaving Monica's sister who then took her own life.

As one can imagine it's been a rough few years for Monica and now that she is in high school and on the dance team since cheerleading is no longer an option Monica lives with the memories every day. While searching for some pain medicine Monica finds letters sent to her step father insinuating there was more to the girls deaths than mere coincidence so Monica couldn't help but begin to look into the past and try to find some answers.

It honestly did not take but a few pages for me to become completely engrossed in this book after I picked it up. Monica immediately became someone I needed to know more about when it became apparent this girl was bordering on spiraling out of control herself. A hook up with an older man has Monica recovering from an abortion so already the dark content seeped into the story and I became engrossed in getting to know her and learn her sister's story.

The majority of the point of view comes from Monica but occasionally you get to also go back and learn Jennifer's situation from her point of view as Monica uncovers just what happened five years before. Really, anyone that knows me at all can see a 4.5 star review for an almost 400 page book and know that it had to be pretty intense if I'm not complaining of the story dragging. Instead with this one I thought it flowed rather nicely with plenty of things happening to hold my attention so I'd definitely recommend checking this one out.

I received an advance copy from the publisher via NetGalley.

For more reviews please visit <https://carriesbookreviews.com/>

Jillian (bookishandnerdy) says

HOLY CRAP. this was so good. so freaking good. i've heard so many good things about kara thomas and her books and this lived up to all that praise. the pacing was excellent and the reveals were so GOOD. ugh i can't wait to read more from her.

arc provided by delacorte press from yallwest 2018

Suzanne says

This story was addictive within the first few chapters. I actually did not find it predictable. I loved it as much as I did the author's other book, Little Monsters. I love a book where there are so many shady characters that you are basically enthralled just to see what dark skeletons they have in their messed up past. Makes for a fun read.

My quick and simple overall: very enjoyable read!

bran (brandonthethebookaddict) says

This sounds so fucking legit and interesting wtf **I NEED IT NOW.**

(like every book ever)

Chelsea Humphrey says

"I am a victim, whether or not I feel like one."

^

I wanted to include more of this quote, but it contains spoilers, so I'll let you experience the rest of what Monica has to say there when you read the book for yourself. ;)

I know some readers like to write off any type of YA novel as cheap and unworthy of the same type of attention that adult literature receives, but I'm here to tell you that's a load of BS. I've always tried to review each genre of book that I read based on the target audience that it's marketed toward, so when you see a review I've written for a book created for teens, it's those readers that I have in mind. That said, Kara Thomas has a way of taking YA thrillers and turning them into an experience that is appealing for both youth and adults alike, or at least those who are interested in reading about characters in that age range. I thoroughly enjoyed reading *Little Monsters* last year, so much so that I finished it in one sitting during our annual expedition to Alabama, and knew this writer has something special going for her. While I'm sure I could have read this one in similar fashion on our trip next week, I simply couldn't wait that long to dive into *The Cheerleaders*.

"I just have so many questions still."

"I do too," Mrs. Ruiz says. "But after a while, searching for answers felt like grasping around in the dark. At some point, you have to choose to live in the light."

Even though I flew through this book due to its compulsive nature and easy readability, I feel it necessary to state that this story is anything but light and cheesy. It's heavy, it deals with real issues that plague teens currently, and absolutely nothing is sugar coated. {Content Warnings will be listed below in spoiler tag.} Most of the story is told from Monica's present day POV, but we also get some sections from 5 years prior narrated by Monica's deceased sister Jennifer. (Also, we have one section narrated by a character I'll leave nameless to wrap up one section, which was classic KT and absolutely brilliant. Tehehehehe.) The idea is that there are many working parts that come together in the end; think of the old saying of how a butterfly flaps its wings and causes a tsunami halfway around the world. We have three separate mysteries here: the car accident that killed Bethany and Colleen, the murder of Julianna and Susan, and the suicide of Jennifer. It seems overwhelming at first glance but trust me, it works well.

Clearly Jennifer's death is what drives Monica's initial investigation, but I adore how this rogue journey slowly brings Monica back to the land of the living. When the book starts out, she's not in a good place. We learn early on how she's spent her summer and what she's been going through, and my heart just broke for her. She makes a bosom buddy in Ginny along the way, and I love how the author chose to focus on this blossoming relationship without ruining Monica's other relationships; sure, they have to work through some things but it's refreshing to see an author choosing to build up female relationships with characters who overall support each other, rather than only showing us the backstabbing, catty nature of teenage girls.

If you've enjoyed Thomas's books in the past, I can't see you feeling any differently about this one. I had pieces of this one figured out before the reveal, but man if Kara didn't get me on that last one. The tiny details she chose to use to connect various aspects were so clever and engaging that it's easy to see how

much she grows as an author with each book she writes. Highly recommended! I'm off to grumble and complain about having nothing good to read until her next novel is published. *All hail the queen of the YA thriller!*

Content Warning ---> (view spoiler)

**Review copy furnished via the publisher.*

Rachael says

Review trigger warning: statutory rape, pedophilia mention, abortion mention

Arguably my largest pet peeve when it comes to reading is when a book seems awesome but then it decides to do you wrong and include unchallenged problematic crap.

This book was amazing for the first 75 percent. Maybe a tad heteronormative, but a person can forgive. The writing style was compelling and easy-to-follow, the characters were three-dimensional and relatable, and the mystery was original and had me at the edge of my seat. It was gritty, dark, and dealt with real issues.

and then it had to go on and **rUIN IT** and it makes me so **angry** because this book would have been so perfect

six words: statutory rape. victim blaming. pedophilia culture.

In *The Cheerleaders*, the main character, Monica, had a summer fling with a guy in his mid-twenties, and Monica gets pregnant. The book begins right after she has an abortion, and it's causing her a lot of physical and emotional grief and trauma. The guy is a capital-D Douchebag.

There's a conversation between Monica and him that goes like this:

”’This is a really bad idea,’ [he says].
‘I know... I know. I’m sorry.’ [sic]
‘What made you do it?’ he asks. ‘What you did. With me.’ [sic]
‘Because I was sad.’
[He] puts his head in his hands.
‘I’m sorry,’ I say. ‘Why did you do it?’
‘Because I liked you.’ [He] laughs. ‘And I told myself that you looked older, and you acted older, so it wasn’t as wrong.’
‘But now you do think it was wrong.’
‘I don’t know. It just feels like you used me to avoid your problems.’
My throat tightens. He’s right – I knew what we were doing was wrong, and I didn’t care.”

now hold on just one dang second.

excuse me? **EXCUSE ME????!!?!!?**

can someone **please explain to me** how this situation is in any way Monica's fault?? why tf is she apologizing?? she is sixteen!! the guy is twenty-freaking-seventeen. he got her PREGNANT, for pete's sake. He is over here acting like this whole situation is Monica's fault,,, and she (and the narration) are going along with it,,, when,,, it really isn't her fault,,, and victim-blaming pisses me off to such extents I mean I was about ready to DNF right there.

but, I mean, like, I thought that this was all going to be a part of Monica's character development, and that she would eventually grow to realize that this whole situation is not her fault, that he was an adult that took advantage of a minor. but, like, silly me thinking that character development would be a thing in a book!!! like,,, what was I thinking?

(okay and I swear that I'm not trying to take away from Monica's character development because her arc having to do with depression and accepting her sister's death is top-notch, but the internalized victim-blaming?? booooooo)

There's another quote a good 91 percent into the novel "*My pathological need for attention from guys is why I'm in this mess with [him].*" I mean,,, like,,, there's only like twenty pages left in the novel it's getting a little too late for her to go through character development and realize it's not her fault. Her "need for attention" isn't at fault here because the dude is **literally an adult who can make his own fricking decisions and KNEW she was a minor but still pursued a relationship and got her pregnant!!!!** but what do I know??

All my hope was pretty much lost at this point, but then, hallelujah, (view spoiler) but just when I was ready to bump my rating up to three or four stars, it does this crap **A G A I N**

*“You didn’t do anything wrong,” Ginny’s voice is soft. ‘He used you...’
‘I used him. I was tired of being numb and I wanted to prove to myself I could feel something.’”*

and I'm just like jfc I can't freaking breathe without y'all shoving this victim-blaming crap down my throat can I

And, I mean, the outward retribution just didn't taste as sweet because at no time did the narration/Monica even begin to realize that she shouldn't be apologizing to this guy's manipulative, pedophile self. Until the very end, Monica is still 100 percent believing that **her pregnancy and the statutory rape that happened to her was her fault** and that just did not sit well with me. I didn't like that. Instead of it making the book seem gritty with flawed characters who have gone through traumatic experiences, which is what I'm pretty sure it was going for, it perpetuated the wrongful blaming of victims of statutory rape. I'm not mad at Monica I'm mad at the book. lol.

And maybe the external arc is enough for some people, but it just wasn't for me.

If Monica had more growth in this department, this would have honestly been a four- or even five-star read. It was that good. And that disappointing.

Book Trigger Warnings: teen pregnancy, abortion, several non-graphic instances of throwing up, statutory rape, violence and some gore.

Thanks to NetGalley for providing me with an eARC in exchange for a complete and honest review. All

opinions and quotes are taken from an unfinished version.

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Pre-review:

not today satan!!!!

full rtc (rant to come ??)

Dennis says

3.5/5 stars

First, I'd like to thank the lovely Chelsea for providing my copy of *The Cheerleaders*. Chelsea knew that I needed this book as soon as it was being publicized. I've never read a book by Kara Thomas, and although I am hesitant with YA novels, I have heard amazing things and was excited to give this book a try. In Westchester, New York, there resides a town called Sunnybrook. Five years ago in Sunnybrook, a tragic series of accidents took place with the school's cheerleading team. Two girls were killed in a horrible car accident, followed by another two murdered in cold blood. Police reports claim that the two homicide victims were killed by the neighbor next door, but he was shot in a police apprehension and is now dead—unable to speak for himself. Sadly, days later, a fifth victim (Jen) in the cheerleaders's saga commits suicide after her struggle with depression.

Current day Sunnybrook has disbanded the cheer squad, while memorializing the five women annually. Jen's sister, Monica is still having trouble coping with Jen's suicide and the suspicious turn of events leading to five deaths in such a short period. One day, after dance practice, Monica stumbles across documents that detail the town's tragedy. This leads Monica on suspicions that things aren't quite what they seem. As Monica begins investigating, she finds Jen's phone. Why is Jen's phone still active? Even more so, why was there a seventeen minute phone conversation right before her apparent suicide with a random number that nobody knows of? The cheer squad's five year old mystery is about to be reopened, but does Monica want to know the truth?

Alright folks, let's be clear—I generally destroy Young Adult novels in my reviews. It's rare for me to actually enjoy a YA story, because it's usually campy and unbelievable. *The Cheerleaders* is anything, but campy and unbelievable. The story dives right into topics of statutory rape, suicide, depression, and teenage growing pains; **and it covers these topics so respectfully and articulately.** *Romance in this story is kept at a minimum, thank the Lord almighty!* Never once did I feel that the story was handling controversial topics in a demeaning or unbelievable way—it was raw; it was real. *The Cheerleaders* is more of an investigative murder mystery, and although I binge read it (I love binge reading, eating, and drinking), I urge you to take your time with this book. As the story develops, Kara Thomas tries to immerse you into the story by getting you to know and understand the characters. As I was binge reading this, it just felt like a lot of fluff to me (hence why this rating is 3.5). This is a good writing tactic for many slower paced readers, because it pulls you into the emotions of the characters. For me, it just left me a little bored, but that's because at this stage in my life, I've been reading so many mystery novels and can't be bothered with fluff. If you're not as psychotically obsessed with thriller novels as I am, you should be bothered with fluff! It's going to immerse you into the story and hold you until the end.

Overall, *The Cheerleaders* is a solid YA mystery novel, and it's definitely opened my eyes into pursuing Kara Thomas's previous works. I heard *Little Monsters* is a great story, would you recommend it to me?

Stacee says

2.5 stars?

This book looked to have everything I could have ever wanted, even down to the blood spatter on the cover. Sadly, I'm wondering if 2.5 stars is too high.

I think I liked Monica. She's got a lot of things going on and I could understand why she was doing the things she did. I mean, not all of them, of course. There were a lot of characters here, but the only one I really liked was Ginny.

Plot wise, I was intrigued. I was hoping there would be more tension, but the slow reveals were satisfying. The problem is that I just felt so indifferent about the story. I had read halfway and then skipped to the end and I was interested, but I struggled to read how we got there. (view spoiler)

Overall, I loved the premise, but the execution wasn't for me.

Huge thanks to Delacorte Press for providing the arc free of charge

Laura says

I don't know if we're cursed. All I know is that my sister wouldn't have killed herself. But if she did, why didn't she leave a note explaining why?

Five cheerleaders dead over the course of three weeks. This happened five years ago. One of those girls was Monica's sister, Jen, and it's been haunting her ever since. Jen was the last of the five to die and it has never made sense. First, two girls hydroplaned and hit a tree in a storm. Next, two girls were strangled by the man next door. And last, Jen committed suicide. That was the end of the cheerleaders. The school disbanded the squad.

When we meet Monica, she's going through a tough time. Not getting into detail with what's happening with her, but it's not something I expected. I enjoyed that the plot went there, though. It's real and emotional. Due to what's going on with Monica, she finds herself drifting from her friends. It doesn't take long for questions to arise about what really happened five years ago starting with an old cell phone in her stepdad's desk.

The majority of the story is told from Monica's POV, but it occasionally switches to Jen's from five years ago in the time leading up to her death.

Okay, so this is my least favorite Kara Thomas book so far. Let's just put that out there right now. I sat on this for a week or so and that's just how I feel. "Least favorite" is also very poor sounding, but you should know that I gave her last two books 3.5-4 stars. And there's no way I'm missing her next book. So there's

that. Certain aspects of the plot were forgettable, unfortunately. However, I still liked this one. Thomas's display of relationships whether friendship or familial are written realistically and accurately. She always knows to show the hidden layers beneath the surface and I, for one, appreciate it. Here, the female friendships are mainly those of support and it's refreshing to see. I just wish this had been faster paced and had a twistier mystery to it. I'm leaving it at that.

Aimee ♥ | Aimee, Always says

"Everyone goes through shit, and there's always someone somewhere who has it worse. It doesn't make what you're feeling any less real or any less shitty."

Reading *The Cheerleaders* made me both excited and scared at the same time. I mean, hello, a book about cheerleaders suddenly found dead days within each other? Anyway, safe to say, this book did not disappoint.

? The heroine? Raw and honest. She's not always very likable, but that's okay. She's lost; she feels like everything's falling apart, and that no one has her back. But she's also driven, and determined, and won't stop at nothing to find out the truth.

? The family dynamics? Realistic. We have a few flashback scenes from her sister Jennifer's POV, where we find out that they didn't always get along--they annoyed each other constantly, like any other pair of siblings. They both love and are loved by their mother, who is genuine and caring. They also have a step-dad, who, unlike step-parents in YA, is involved and protective.

? The friendships? Truthful. Monica didn't want her friends to be involved in her search for her sister's murderer, to the point where she felt herself drifting apart from them. In fact, she felt more comfortable talking to her colleague, Ginny, with whom she forms a new friendship with. Ginny's sweet and soft, and we get why Monica opened up to her so quickly.

? The writing? Easy to get into. Take note that I'm not as big of a thriller reader as others might be, but I found Thomas's writing to be really smooth and natural. It kept me turning pages, never needing to stop in confusion (or, like in some other cases, irritation).

? The most important thing? You'll be kept at the edge of your freaking seat. I promise! You won't know who to trust. Who's innocent and should be handled with love and care? Who's the cold-blooded murderer you need to stab with a thousand pitchforks? Take a good guess--you could be on point, or you could be dead wrong.

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Kayla Dawn says

More like 2,75* - the ending kind of ruined everything for me. It was so... anticlimactic? I don't know, I thought it would be smarter than that.

I'm pretty sure though, that most people who like dark young adult temporary thriller type of books will enjoy this.

It was written very well and it deals with a lot of interesting and problematic topics. I personally was just let down by the conclusion.

PS: The description on the back that says "A little bit Riverdale" is definitely accurate lol.

Khanh, first of her name, mother of bunnies says

I've enjoyed the author's Prep School Confidential series, so I had high hopes for this one. I wasn't disappointed. It did drag on a little, but overall, this is an excellent addition to the YA mystery genre.

This isn't a fluffy murder mystery, despite what its title would imply. It deals with some very dark issues. Abortion, suicide, murder.

Its title and description scream TEEN HORROR MOVIE. It's nothing like that. No campiness and slapstick here.

Still, it reads like a YA novel, and I don't mean that in a bad way. We get the sense that the character is in high school, and the people in the book rings true. There's not much about cliques, no overt stereotypes. We get the teenaged attitude without the "oh my god I want to strangle the characters NOW" feeling. It had just the right amount of angst and childishness that teenagers of that age would portray.

The investigative part wasn't outrageous. The main character wasn't a fool. The book, the setting, the characters *felt* realistic, and even if the book felt like it was too long, I enjoyed reading it.

Kristy says

There are no longer cheerleaders allowed at Sunnybrook High School. It's been that way for five years, ever since five members of the team died within a short span of each other. One of those girls was Monica's sister, Jen. Jen committed suicide after four of her fellow cheerleaders died--two in a car accident and two in a brutal murder at the hands of a fellow Sunnybrook resident. That man is dead, killed by the police. Still, Monica doesn't understand why her confident, beautiful sister killed herself. And now she's finding strange things about Jen's death that don't add up: her phone, left behind in her stepfather's desk, weird letters in his drawer, and more. What really happened five years ago? And are people done dying?

This was my first book from Kara Thomas, but it won't be my last. While this is billed as a YA novel--and there are definitely some aspects--it's also dark and twisted. I found it to be a compelling mystery that kept me guessing the entire time. Thomas does a wonderful job of painting suspense and unease as Monica slowly unravels more and more details surrounding the cheerleaders' deaths. It's impossible to trust anyone in this

novel, which makes it all the more delightful. From one page to the next, I was convinced someone else was the culprit.

There's a varied set of characters in this one, but *Monica* is definitely the star. She's a strong narrator, even she doesn't always make the best decisions. Again, this isn't a sweet, touchy feely YA novel and neither is our narrator. She's made some bad choices (and been through a lot), but she's also feisty and determined.

Overall, this has a Pretty Little Liars vibe at times, but it's also a *captivating mystery with some heartbreak, dark undertones*. It will keep you guessing and engaged. Plus, *there's that wonderful, twisty ending*. 4 stars.

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NZLisaM says

Five dead cheerleaders all in a row!

'They all smile at me: Jen, Juliana, Susan, Colleen, and Bethany. It really is a beautiful picture. By the end of the season, everyone in it is dead'.

There's been no cheerleading squad at Sunnybrook High for the past five years, following three separate tragedies involving cheerleaders. Bethany and Colleen were the first to die, killed in a car accident when their car hit a tree. Then, Susan and Juliana were murdered – strangled by Susan's neighbour (who was stalking her) while the girl's were home alone – the neighbour then subsequently shot by police. Finally, Jennifer (who was supposed to be at the sleepover the night Susan and Juliana died, but fell ill at the last minute), unable to come to terms with her friend's deaths, commits suicide.

Jennifer's sister, Monica, living in the shadow of her perfect sister, is trying to move on, even though her life eerily mirrors her sister's five years ago – she's popular, has two best friends, and is a member of the dance team (the club that replaced the cheer squad). But the past won't let her go, and upon discovering an ominous note citing a connection between all the cheerleaders deaths, Monica starts to unwittingly look into her sister's past. But unravelling the truth, is a dangerous game, one she just might not survive!

Back in April, I was so impressed with 'Little Monsters' that I promptly pre-ordered 'The Cheerleaders', and then waited impatiently for the 31st July to roll around. And I'm pleased to report that this one was just as good – suspenseful, tense, shocking, and emotional. Have to say I was definitely led down the garden path on this one. The author did something different and clever that I totally fell for, that still has me thrilled.

Chapters were told in the present, from Monica's POV, as well as flashbacks in Jennifer's POV. Timelines set five years apart meant there were two sets of students (since Monica was only in middle school when Jen was in high school) so there were quite a few characters to keep straight. But that's what I love about Kara Thomas's books, is that her characters don't live in a bubble – they have parents, family, friends, acquaintances, frenemies, teachers, faculty, friend's parent's, parent's friends – most only get a mention, or a small role, but this high calibre of attention to detail really bring her characters to life. And not just her characters, but the setting and lay-out of the town as well – like how every October the businesses on Main Street compete to display the best dress-up scarecrow, and when two characters walk into a cafe one mentions to the other that it's just down the road from where her mother works – had me thoroughly

immersed in her fictional world.

Kara Thomas is now my top current author in the YA mystery/suspense genre, as well as the queen of the high school setting, and I will be racing to pre-order her next book.
