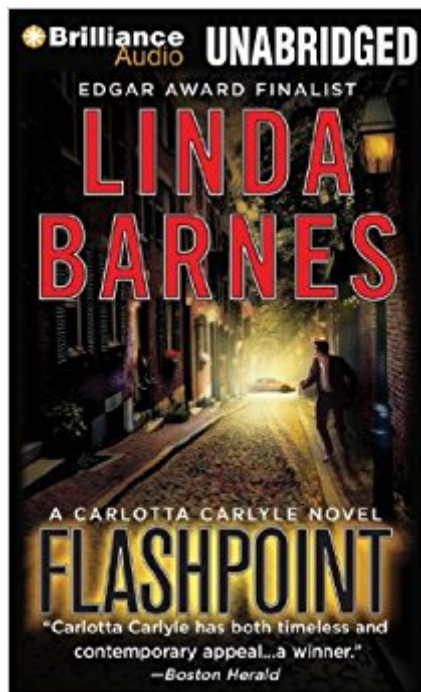


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# Flashpoint (Carlotta Carlyle Series)



## Synopsis

When six-foot redhead ex-cop and Boston-based private investigator Carlotta Carlyle agrees to help an elderly recluse burglar-proof her apartment, the last thing she expected was that the woman would turn up dead. Now Carlotta must find out why the eccentric yet seemingly harmless Valentine Phipps isolated herself—and needed protection. Who would want to hurt Valentine? What was she hiding behind closed doors? Is there a connection between her murder and an age-old mystery that the city's top brass and its real-estate moguls want to keep buried? But the most troubling question of all involves the victim's home health aide, Gwen: Why did she introduce Valentine to Carlotta in the first place? The race to catch one of Boston's most ruthless and ambiguous criminals has just begun.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

With eight appearances in the last 12 years, Barnes's PI Carlotta Carlyle has the full-bodied presence of an old friend. Like most fictional detectives, she's fearless and smart-mouthed. Unlike most, she has a social circle, an exercise regimen and an underachieving id ("I never do seem to come close to figuring out this man/woman thing"). She also has an unusually strong affection for her turf, which is Boston, a city portrayed by Barnes as imperiled by rapacious real estate developers. So when home health aide Gwen Taymore asks Carlotta to provide security advice to Valentine Phipps, an old lady struggling to keep her rent-controlled apartment, Carlotta agrees, as much out of civic duty as out of a desire for a paycheck. But Mrs. Phipps's sudden death, which

may have been murder, casts suspicion on elusive Gwen, as well as on the building's possibly mob-connected landlord. And when music industry mogul Bronson Hohen hires Carlotta to investigate Mrs. Phipps's family tree, she starts to wonder why her old cronies in Boston Homicide are so intent on barring her from the crime scene. Meanwhile, Carlotta has to cope with assorted domestic crises, such as her adolescent "Little Sister" Paolina's homelessness, and her tenant Roz's onslaught of bad boyfriends. The many messy details of Carlotta's life give her character resonance, but they also bog down the rather pedestrian plot, which ends improbably with a twist of multinational intrigue. Still, Carlotta's fans will relish dunking doughnuts again with the genial investigator, a woman who knows a thing or two about urban survival ("Car keys make great brass knuckles"). Author tour. (Sept.) FYI: This is Barnes's first novel with Hyperion, which in September also will reissue Barnes's first Carlotta Carlyle mystery, *Trouble of Fools*, in mass market. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Barnes continues her string of intelligent mysteries in this eighth outing with former policewoman turned P.I. Carlotta Carlyle. The murder of an older woman with a hidden past challenges Carlotta like none other. This case brings potential harm to herself and her loved ones. The victim left behind a rare old Jewish manuscript that Carlotta has to find before it ends up in the hands of someone who wants it solely for profit. Carlotta remains a tough, brassy businesswoman with a soft side, especially for her surrogate teenage sister, her rebellious roommate, and her former love, Mooney. At times, these characters threaten to overshadow the main story, but even when Barnes veers from one issue to another, the plot holds up. Unlike most mysteries, once the antagonist is uncovered, Barnes proceeds to write a smart finish. Recommended for all mystery collections. ACecilia R. Cygnar, Niles P.L. Dist., IL Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Another winner from a favorite author. Sure wish Linda Barnes would revisit Carlotta's life! I miss her!

I am so glad that I read this book without first reading the negative reviews! As a devotee of the Carlotta Carlyle series, I consider "Flashpoint" to be one of the very best so far. As I mentioned in reviews of Barnes' earlier works in the series, she has attained maturity and depth, both in her characters and her plots, and it all comes together in this book. As those who follow the series know,

PI and part-time cab driver Carlotta is a volleyball fanatic as well, playing at the local Y whenever she can. So when one of her team members, a woman she knows only from the games and casually at that, asks for her professional help, Carlotta accepts. In no time, she is drawn into the cruel murder of Gwen's nursing charge: a seemingly harmless elderly woman. Carlotta being Carlotta, she cannot let the murder go, even though her police pals, notably her mentor Mooney, are on the case. And what she discovers leads into a labyrinth of the art world, the music industry and more. Tied in with this interesting plot is the ongoing story of Paolina, Carlotta's Little Sister. For those reviewers who cannot understand Paolina in her present highly obnoxious condition, I say go to the mall and take a look at the typical 14-year-old girl! Not the best age in any circumstances for the average female, and certainly not for one whose mother has suddenly abandoned her completely. Is she a rotten brat throughout the book? YES! Will Carlotta be able to get her through this phase and see her to adulthood? That's every mother's question and fear--and I found it completely believable. What was not so believable was the transformation of the mother, Marta, from a very sick woman disabled by arthritis to a sexy vamp on the prowl for men. This transformation was explained in a sentence or two, and sat badly with me throughout the rest of the book. But it did not ruin the story. There is very little of the wonderful Gloria in this book, and not enough Mooney or Sam Gianelli (all regulars throughout the series), but there is more than enough of Roz, the impossibly erotic free spirit who inhabits Carlotta's rental rooms. All in all, a simply great addition to the series. Don't believe everything you read in the negative reviews--try it for yourself! I think you'll be glad you did.

Having read the five previous unfavorable comments submitted by readers to , my enthusiasm about "Flashpoint" was dampened prior to beginning the book. I've always enjoyed Carlotta's exploits and novel detectival methods(ie. hiding her treasures in the cat box under the litter). However, in spite of my skepticism about this particular adventure, I was quite pleasantly surprised. The narrative never falters as we wander through a tangle of new and established characters. Some of the regulars carve new edges and dimensions to their persona beyond, and often in defiance of, the roles established in earlier books. As the plot twists and turns, Carlotta herself is often baffled as she stumbles through quite a few misleading clues and potential suspects. Although Paolina's drug-lord father has provided Carlotta with substantial funds for his daughter, Ms. C. has been determined to keep their existence a secret throughout this series. In "Flashpoint" she divulges their existence to both Paolina and her mother, Marta, with a pragmatic reluctance. Carlotta realizes that the money, though tainted, is most likely the only realistic way

Paolina and Marta can attain a decent quality of life without resorting to crime and prostitution. This sad commentary on our society strikes a chord of verisimilitude. The exploration of the Jewish Reclamation Fund's activities likewise illustrates the realities of striving to achieve some justice for the many neglected, persecuted, but highly deserving segments of humanity. I look forward to the next installment in Linda Barnes's ever evolving Carlotta Carlyle series.

I read some of the other reviewers, and tend to agree with what they say concerning this particular mystery by Barnes. I've read several others of hers, and enjoyed them. This genre is starting to wear a bit thin, I think. There are too many hard-core women sleuths, who have backgrounds as cops, and most of them seem to reside in different urban areas in the United States. That is the major difference between the books, and that is unfortunate. All these women who write books of this type are good at what they do, but they have been doing it for so long their writing skills have deteriorated, as they churn out mystery after mystery. This is in response to the large body of avid mystery readers out there who I assume do not vary their reading much. This is another part of the problem. If readers do not vary their reading into other genres, they cannot know what they are missing when an author gets sloppy in her characterizations or in her plots. This is not to say this type of book cannot be done well, or that this particular book is not of value. Barnes seems to keep up with current problems in society, one of which is abuse of the elderly and the tendency for property within inner cities to be allowed to deteriorate and then bought up by those predators who will stop at nothing to make a few bucks (with the blessings of many politicians). The premise is good, but not drawn out to a point where the reader cannot tell you what is going to happen next. AS soon as the reader meets the old lady (who is a great curmudgeon), we know she is going to meet her end, and soon! Unfortunately, this mystery was a bit too easy to solve. And Barnes tried to connect the series by throwing in improbable meetings with previous friends and lovers of the protagonist. At the risk of sounding nitpicking, I felt that the title was not very appropriate either. Just because fires were involved does not explain the use of the word "Flashpoint" (which is the point at which a fire goes out of control, or a situation goes out of control as I understand it). Oh well...when I read a book of a series like this and I can see the author is no longer putting a lot of thought into her books or research effort, then I tend not to look for this particular author anymore. Don't want to waste my time. Oh yeah, for those who care about such things, the language leaves a little to be desired! Karen Sadler, University of Pittsburgh

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