



Isolation Ward

Joshua Spanogle

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Straight out of today's hospitals and labs—and tomorrow's headlines—comes a frightening, scalpel-sharp thriller from medical insider Joshua Spanogle. In an astounding debut, Spanogle takes us on an all-too-real race against time...as a young doctor enters the dark side of scientific research, desperate to stop a terrifying epidemic before it is too late....

In Baltimore's St. Raphael's Hospital, three newly admitted patients are among society's most helpless citizens: female residents of Baltimore's group homes for the mentally impaired, their bodies racked by a virus the likes of which no one at St. Raphael's has ever seen.

Dr. Nathaniel McCormick is one of the first on the scene. A young investigator from the Centers for Disease Control, Nate is paid to explore the bizarre, the exotic, and the baffling—from superviruses to bioterrorism. But as soon as Nate begins to investigate the lives and habits of the victims, he knows something is terribly wrong. Using all his skills as a medical detective, Nate soon zeroes in on the “vector”—the one person who had sexual contact with the first victims. And when that suspect is found murdered, Nate fears that the disease he's chasing may not be an act of nature, but of man.

With his brash style angering his superiors and fellow investigators alike, Nate turns to an old colleague and former lover, Dr. Brooke Michaels, for help. Together the two investigators follow a twisting trail of clues to a discovery that is at once groundbreaking and unspeakable. And as a circle of treachery tightens around him, Nate is about to confront the most chilling revelation of all—and a past Nate himself has been trying to escape.

At once a taut medical thriller and a riveting psychological portrait of a young doctor on the edge, *Isolation Ward* is a tale of runaway tension—with a brilliant “what-if” premise that is harrowing...heartbreaking...and impossible to wrench from your imagination.

From the Hardcover edition.

Isolation Ward Details

Date : Published December 26th 2006 by Dell (first published February 28th 2006)

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Author : Joshua Spanogle

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Cynthia says

Ha ha after my last discourse on only finishing books I really like here is a 2 star rating. It was okay. It was exciting enough that I wanted to finish it but I didn't really care about the characters and Robin Cook does it better anyway. Besides, the older I get the less I want to read books set in hospitals wherein doctors/nurses/orderlies/researchers are sinister and don't have my best interests at heart. Yikes!

Angel says

Another ok book, predictable. I wouldn't re read it nor will I set out to find a second book (if there is one)

Anita says

I really enjoyed this medical thriller. It's the usual plot line of unethical doctors and medical companies, plotting for profit - this one deals with xenotransplantation which I found interesting. There were a couple graphic scenes that should have been left out (they added nothing) but otherwise a good, tense storyline and well-developed characters. Recommended 4.25/5 stars.

Carol says

Fairly predictable, not good enough to encourage me to read Nathaniel McCormick #2.

Vivian says

This book is a medical thriller that will pull you in and make you forget to do all the stuff you should be doing such as going to bed at a decent hour!!! Although some of the happenings were a bit far fetched, it was very entertaining so four stars for that. It had the same issue that I see in a lot of books where the "bad guy" explains everything just before killing the main character who defying all odds, manages to escape not once but multiple times. The medical testing that was the basis for the story is rather chilling. I'm all for finding cures, but at what cost???!!!!??

Elizabeth says

I listened to this on CD in the car over several days. The narrator is not a very charming character and gets a bit tiresome. I really got tired of this story and was glad for it to end.

Perkimom says

Creepy cool, horrific medical thriller!

Bridgett says

Read this book only if you like snarky, smart-ass doctors who use the word "retarded" constantly, and have no respect for nurses...or anyone else, for that matter. Oh, and there is dog mutilation too. This book is just a winner all around. ::Please note my sarcasm::

Felicia says

Eh. It's hard. I mean, there are definitely good and bad things about this. The first thing that one should take note is the use of first person in this novel. I don't particularly fancy this style but I didn't take long to get used to it. The reason why spanogle probably preferred this method was to showcase the protagonist's massive overload of internal dialogue and witty self-remarks to justify the jackass behaviour his character actually says out loud.

It's not necessarily a bad thing, for the most part, Nathaniel McCormick is a... really kind of a prick with wit and afterthoughts of some guilt. The bad thing however, is that for fans of contagious viruses and the urgency these viruses play a part in most of such bioterror tales, the sense of urgency is hugely missed in spanogle's book. You don't actually know much about the virus or disease in question apart from a shallow overview of the symptoms and a preliminary 'autopsy' description. There's no indepth details of the medical stuff, of how the virus replicates itself or how it works. Sure, spanogle attempts to use some medical terms (more like medical programs like the PERV, which he explains in layman terms) but as a reader who essentially floated my way from the detailed 'upbringing' of Richard Preston who spares no details in his incredible adventure of-fiction discovery of the world of smallpox and other diseases, this was quite a disappointment.

I would like to have known what the virus looked like, or if it was a parasite instead, how it worked and broke through the immune system to wreck the havoc Spanogle describes to be close to a haemorrhagic type that causes lesions in the mouth. It would be interesting to learn more about the fictitious virus and yet 90% of the book is dedicated to McCormick's witty remarks and adventures of his once has been girlfriends. I don't really like romance diversions in my novels, I feel that they are an easy way out for most authors to have regardless of what genre they specialize in.

What's really ridiculous is the action sequences near the final portion of the book. It was so out of the world that I suddenly thought I was being warped to a campy, lame sci fi movie that used real bad special effects. It made me really mad!! I felt like I was treated like some fool.

Let me quote some line from the book: (read at your expense. taken out of context, it's no spoiler)

"As I slid the hand up toward the knuckles, there were more dislocations, more breaks."

"My left hand popped from the cuffs, sending a spray of blood across the room."

^ SO i imagine his freaking wrist broke off like a doll's hand? COME ON!!! WTF!!! This only happens in alien movies in the 90s!

What made me even more enraged was that spanogle used medical terms and theory of medicine to explain his situation of this incredibly classless scene. First, the scene was irrational to begin with. Then, he uses his knowledge of medicine to explain this? It was almost like it was just something spanogle knew how a certain type of drug causes a certain type of reaction in the body, so he purposely crafted up a ridiculous sequence just so he could use it. Rather than using his medical knowledge where it should be used (explaining the viruses) he wastes it on hollywood stunts.

That's what got me reducing my score. It was a pity though. Had potential, but really? Breaking bones and knuckles to relieve oneself from cuffs causing blood spray?

No. Not me.

Nikki says

I'm not sure I've read too many medical mystery books, but this one was very interesting. It wasn't too weighed down with medical jargon, and what there was of it was relatively easy to follow. Despite being a medical mystery, it had all the things you want a good mystery to have. Danger, excitement, heroes and villains and even a twist or two.

Kathleen Hagen says

Isolation Ward, by Joshua Spanogle, A-minus, narrated by Scott Brick, produced by Books on Tape, downloaded from audible.com.

In his debut novel, Spanogle takes us on an all-too-real race against time as a young doctor enters the dark side of scientific research, desperate to stop a terrifying epidemic before it is too late. In Baltimore's St. Raphael's Hospital, three newly admitted patients are among society's most helpless citizens: female residents of Baltimore's group homes for the mentally impaired, their bodies racked by a virus the likes of which no one at St. Raphael's has ever seen. Dr. Nathaniel McCormick is one of the first on the scene. A young investigator from the Centers for Disease Control, Nate is paid to explore the bizarre, the exotic, and the baffling, from superviruses to bioterrorism. But as soon as Nate begins to investigate the lives and habits of the victims, he knows something is terribly wrong. Using all his skills as a medical detective, Nate soon zeroes in on the "vector", the one person who had sexual contact with the first victims. And when that suspect is found murdered, Nate fears that the disease he's chasing may not be an act of nature, but of man. Nate does not suffer fools gladly, so he is brash and arrogant with his superiors, with the police, in fact, with everyone. But as he investigates, he finds more and more barriers put in his way. Obviously there are people who do not want him to find out what is going on. He works with a former lover, Dr. Brooke Michaels, and also must confront a past lover whom he has never forgotten. This is an action-packed thriller with so many twists and turns you don't know what's going to happen next, except that you know Nate will always be thumbing his nose at authority figures. Some very good sharp one-liners. Scott Brick is perfect as the narrator representing this brash young man. I happened to read his second book,

"Flawless" first, another medical thriller.

Debra Easterling says

I wanted to jump in and review this book even before finishing. I can't begin to tell you how hard it is for a book to capture my interest right from the very start and keep it all through to the end. This was fascinating. Definitely for those who love medical stories with tons of terminology. It was a nail biter for sure. I have to admit I didn't like the main character and the ending a bit long, but other than that, this was an exceptionally well written book. I have already recommended it to all I know. Awesome mystery.

www.DebraEasterling.com

Brendan says

Isolation Ward follows the story of Dr. Nathaniel McCormick, a cranky CDC investigator on the track of a sexually-transmitted hemorrhagic fever. The trail leads back to corrupt scientists, evil companies, and violence, violence, violence. Spanogle weaves a fast-paced medical thriller that is a bit more Robert Ludlum than Robin Cook, but it has its share of medical jargon. The violence gets a bit over the top by the end, but it's believable for the most part.

I particularly enjoyed Spanogle's regular taunting of himself. At one point, our protagonist reflects that his paranoid conspiracy theory would only make sense in a thriller novel; at another point, he fantasizes about laying on the beach reading "thriller trash."

I liked the first third of the book much better than the latter parts, though. The early section feels like a taught medical thriller, with scary diseases and sympathetic victims and the whiff of corruption or coverup. As the book goes on and the conspiracy gets a bit more involved (or convoluted, perhaps), the action shifts away from the scary disease into a run-of-the-mill thriller; the book suffers for the move.

I was also a bit divided over Nathaniel's misanthropy--he comes off early on as a bit of a hard-ass who doesn't, as the book proceeds, get much more sympathetic. At the same time, he runs up against a plethora of equally dislikable people, so it's not surprising to see that he's cynical. The interaction between McCormick and the other folks helping with the investigation is the best part of the book--I like the tentative alliances he makes with the Baltimore cop and the doctor at St. Raphael's, and the joking relationship he has with his researcher at the CDC works well. At times the avalanche of ex-girlfriends seems a bit overdone, but it smooths out nicely.

I initially picked this audio book up because it's narrated by my favorite performer of audio books, Scott Brick. Brick does an admirable job here, expressing McCormick's disgust for the dubious medical decisions of the villains. I wasn't as impressed, this time around, by Brick's tonal distinctions between the male and female characters -- I had a couple confused moments where I was unclear about who was speaking. Otherwise, a great recording.

Oma says

Loved this medical thriller novel. The writing was great...so witty. The main character, Dr Nate McCormick, bantered so much...with himself and the other characters that I found myself chuckling during situations that shouldn't have been funny. The storyline was fascinating and quick moving with science, medical, and action throughout the book.

I quickly ordered the next book about Dr McCormick written in 2007. I'm sad to see that there are no more books by the author after that year.

Ellen says

A mysterious illness has appeared in several women living in group homes for the moderately mentally impaired and as the disease continues to ravage the women's bodies the doctors in the Baltimore hospital in which they have been admitted realize they have a deadly communicable biological threat on their hands. Immediately the women are placed in isolation and Dr. Nate McCormick from the CDC is called in to investigate. Nate comes upon some alarming facts that show the disease is spread by sexual contact and that somehow these women have been involved with the same man over a short period of time. Trying to find the source of the disease leads Nate to San Francisco where his mentor, Dr. Tobel, is still doing research at the medical school Nate once attended. As Nate asks questions of people thought to be involved with the elusive carrier of the disease some of the witnesses are murdered and as Nate gets closer to the truth his own life is in grave danger. He realizes that Dr. Tobel knows much more than she is admitting and that her research may have gone to areas too horrible to contemplate. Nate teams up with a former love, Dr. Brooke Michaels, and the two of them relentlessly pursue the killers as the Baltimore patients begin to die.

I enjoyed this mystery/thriller for the most part; it was certainly suspenseful and interesting. The biology and science were way over my head, unfortunately, so that took away from the story somewhat for me. Nate was not always an entirely likeable character but he was certainly dedicated and determined to get at the truth. The author certainly has medical expertise and it shines through. There was one particular scene in the book that was so medically graphic that if I could have read it with my eyes closed I would have! If you like medical mysteries you will probably like this one.
