



Critical Judgment

By Michael Palmer

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In the tiny town of Patience, California, newcomer Dr. Abby Dolan has noticed a frightening syndrome among her emergency room patients. It begins with a baffling, seemingly minor set of symptoms, but builds relentlessly until it plunges its victims into insane, murderous rages. As she searches for clues to this deadly mystery, Abby's superiors make it clear her probing is unwelcome.

Soon Abby will learn just how high the cost of the truth may be--and how far someone will go to keep a lethal secret. But she may not find the answer until it's too late to save her patients, her career...her life.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A character in Palmer's latest medical chiller (after *Silent Treatment*) refers to the industrial enclave of Patience, Calif., locked among mountains above San Francisco, as "Faustville." It certainly seems as if the town has made a pact with the devil in order to thrive. Emergency room doctor Abby Dolan has been at Patience Regional Hospital for only a few months when she begins totting up "NIWWs"-her shorthand for patients whose complaints offer her "no idea what's wrong." The hospital and town are literally overshadowed by the manufacturing giant Colstar, a cliff-dwelling international battery-making concern whose security rivals that of the Pentagon. After Abby's fiancé, Josh Wyler, a new Colstar employee, suddenly exhibits alarming manic symptoms and threatens her with violence, Abby begins to wonder if Colstar is exposing its employees to the toxic heavy metal cadmium, a battery component. It doesn't take her long to cross Colstar security chief Lyle Quinn, or to be approached for help by an earnest group known as the Alliance, headed by Abby's handsome ER colleague Lew Alvarez, who also suspects that Colstar's chemicals are harming the town. If the soulless but many-eyed corporation, secret underground labs and evil experiments on unwitting patients are familiar elements to medical suspense fans, Palmer, an M.D. who worked in emergency medicine, renders them, for the most part, gripping and fresh. Scenes of medical terror (particularly one involving a claustrophobic patient who suffers an allergic reaction inside an MRI cylinder) are wrenchingly scary, and the imaginative final twists confirm that Palmer is reaching the top of a demanding craft. Doubleday Book Club main selection; Literary Guild and Mystery Book Club alternates; simultaneous BBD audio; author tour.

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From Library Journal

Abby Dolan, a young, hot-shot emergency room physician, has left the big city environs of San Francisco to follow her fiancé to a small town where he has taken a job with Colstar—the main source of the town's economy. In her work, Abby quickly comes across several patients with vague but troubling symptoms that she believes are caused by environmental poisoning and may be linked to Colstar. Palmer's success in the more gripping *Silent Treatment* (LJ 2/15/95) is not equaled here. Slow pacing, an awkward writing style, and an uninteresting and unbelievable plot make for a dull medical thriller. Still, Palmer's works are popular, and this novel will no doubt receive a lot of hype. —Patricia Altner, *Information Seekers*, Bowie, Md.

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From [Booklist](#)

Emergency room physician Abby Dolan has left a major San Francisco hospital for the well-equipped but isolated regional hospital in Patience, California, over which looms the huge manufacturing company Colstar, for which her husband works. She soon impresses colleagues, nurses, patients, and families with her knowledge, skill, and caring but increasingly worries the hospital administration because of her searching questions about her patients' often unidentifiable problems. Eventually, secret government contracts for chemical warfare are literally unearthed as the cause. Ex-CIA operative Quinn, chief of Colstar plant security, becomes Dolan's special nemesis, but fortunately a grateful patient helps with his archery skills when a dramatic chase pits Abby against Quinn on the wet cliff face below the plant. This yarn may not hearten patients told to have a full-body MRI, but it will delight and intrigue all fans of medical thrillers.

William Beatty

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ruth McMillian:

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