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The year is 1796, and a trading ship arrives in the vibrant trading town of Newburyport, Massachusetts. But it's a ghost ship--her entire crew has been decimated by a virulent fever which sweeps through the harbor town, and Newburyport's residents start to fall ill and die with alarming haste. Something has to be done to stop the virus from spreading further. When physician Giles Wiggins places the port under quarantine, he earns the ire of his shipbuilder half-brother, the wealthy and powerful Enoch Sumner, and their eccentric mother, Miranda. Defiantly, Giles sets up a pest-house, where the afflicted might be cared for and separated from the rest of the populace in an attempt to contain the epidemic.

As the seaport descends into panic, religious fervor, and mob rule, bizarre occurrences ensue: the harbormaster's family falls victim to the fever, except for his son, Leander Hatch, who is taken in at the Sumner mansion and a young woman, Marie Montpelier, is fished out of the Merrimac River barely clinging to life, causing Giles and Enoch who is convinced she's the expatriate daughter of the French king to vie for her attentions--all while medical supplies are pillaged by a black marketer from Boston. As the epidemic grows, fear, greed, and unhinged obsession threaten the Sumner family and the future of Newburyport itself.

Quarantine Details

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From Reader Review Quarantine for online ebook

Leah Angstman says

This is a decent look at 1796 and quarantines, but it's pretty sedate. A lot of it is passive, where you only hear about what happens after it happens. I prefer my writing to be far more active, to preserve the element of danger, suspense, action. I wasn't bored with this by any means, but I also wasn't swept away. Has quite a few historical clichés, as well.

And it's not the author's fault, but I'll tell you if you get the audiobook: The reader says the protagonist Giles' name like "guiles" with a hard G instead of "jiles" with a soft G, and it drove me NUTS throughout the ENTIRE book. Ye be warned if you get the audiobook. So, read it in paper and skip the audiobook, unless you can tolerate this mispronunciation better than I can.

Wayne McCoy says

A historical medical thriller that I really wanted to like more. In 1796, a ship arrives in Newburyport with sick crew members. It is immediately put under quarantine, but some soldiers escape to land causing the plague to spread to the town.

The main characters include a young boy who sees his entire family become ill, a surgeon who see the effects of the plague first hand as he attempts to tend the victims, and a rich family with internal conflicts. Some of the main characters were interesting, others were buffoonish and seemed drawn from a night time soap opera.

There are conflicts with doctors as they discuss the cause of this plague and how to cure it (sweat it with hot bricks? Cut the patients so they bleed the infection out?), a group of greedy townsfolk devise a plan to take advantage of the situation, and romantic interests are formed. There is also a chase at sea, and family feuds.

It's all somewhat interesting, but for me, it lacked a feeling of authenticity. I don't know if it was the dialogue or some of the crazy over the top antics of some of the people in the town, but it didn't ring true for me.

Karen Kasper says

Very good book.

Sarah says

i have better books to read. this one is just way too slow and not interesting enough to hold my attention at the moment.

wally says

finished this one this early evening, 6 p.m., 18 Jul 17, a rainy Tuesday though we did get some work done today. storms.

read this one, not because it is historical fiction (is it?), but because i've enjoyed Smolens's other stories, this one numbers 6 i think, that i've read. read one review...or glanced at it, truth be told. said something about "historical inaccuracies." nothing more. just that. the literary equivalent of a clanging cymbal. if we hold our story-tellers to the axiom, *show us, don't tell us* then those who read and those who write about what they have had read should also be subject to the same demand.

are there historical inaccuracies? i've no idea. and the reviewer didn't enlighten us, nor was there any bafflement involved...though this story is both enlightening and baffling, and that's all i ask of stories i read. good read, good story...and as far as accuracies go...didn't i hear someone say that "witness testimony" is suspect? yeah. this is a story, one worth a read. the description says what it is about. the rest is journey.

Henk-Jan van der Klis says

In 1796, a trading ship arrives in Newburyport, Massachusetts. The captain's missing, crewmembers struck by a virulent fever. Vomiting and diarrhea create more victims in Newburyport. Upon inspection of the ship, doctor Giles Wiggins places the ship and port under quarantine and tries to find the source for the virus. His half-brother Enoch Sumner, owner of the ship and their mother Miranda aren't pleased at all with the situation. Horses for Thomas Jefferson need to stay on the ship, commerce falls silent and more and more victims are brought to a pest-house, some die others set fires to escape misery.

The harbormaster's family falls victim to the fever, except for his son, Leander Hatch, who is taken in at the Sumner mansion. He turns out to be a rebel. A beautiful French woman named Marie Montpelier is rescued out of the Merrimack River, causing both Giles and Enoch fall in love. A man from Boston stockpiles medical supplies and charges a high price.

The novel or historical thriller if you want takes you along the dark circumstance in the harbour, where love and hope ultimately prevail, but death, dishonour and broken families are the sacrifices at the Revolutionary War-era Atlantic coast. The author of *Quarantine*, John Smolens' work on the book began 40 years ago, when he moved to a federalist house built in the 1790s in Newburyport. In the years that followed he came to know every inch of the house and the rich history of this harbour.

The novel isn't an easy to read and put away book. *Quarantine* contains a lot of historic and maritime details, plus a set of interwoven personages. Only at the end, in a lengthy Epilogue, some clues are found. Characters could be worked out better, both at the vessel as in town. I found it hard sometimes to mention exactly where in the storyline I was. Continue reading without worrying is the best solution there.

Barbara Burd says

I'm a fan of historical fiction especially in this time period--late 1790s. A mysterious plague had struck a ship outside Newburyport and the sickness quickly ran rampant through the town. Tragedy brings out the best in some of the townspeople and the worst in others. The very dysfunctional Sumner family is at the center of the epidemic, some members responsible for spreading the sickness, some seeking to profit from it, and some trying to help the victims. The most sympathetic character is Leander Hatch, a young boy who loses his

family but manages to rise above the tragedy. The strength in Smolens' writing is his knowledge of the area and the historical accuracy of the culture of the town. The period is carefully researched. The author is especially effective in his descriptions of medical practice and the treatment of sickness at the time. The characters are diverse and believable. The plot moves smoothly. Overall, the book is a good read.

Mary says

Quarantine by John Smolens is an excellent historical novel set in post American Revolutionary war Newburyport, MA. Smolens has written a vivid depiction of life in Newburyport, a port town of 8,000 just north of Boston. He make you feel that you are there during the dangerous days of a quarantine caused by the arrival of a infected ship which brings death and disease to almost every family in the town. I lived the quarantine through the characters of Dr. Giles Morgan and his half brother Enoch Summers, the owner of the infected vessel. And we meet the townspeople first as they go about their everyday life of clamming, fishing, or working in the town's shops, then we see their lives changing when most of the town's families bring loved ones to the pest house.

It is at times a very intense novel, almost breathless at times when the illness caused by the ship is at it's worse, and almost at a standstill when the author shows the reader how massive illness has changed the town forever. And the author's research into this period in coastal Massachusetts shows in his story, making me want to know more about this period. Smolens made me care about his characters, the sign of a good novelist. Quarantine is one novel I can recommend to readers of historical fiction.

Carol says

Though I thought I would really like this, I just couldn't get into it. I've read other books, fiction and non-fiction about ship or city quarantines that were far more compelling. This being said, I always wonder if it's just me and perhaps I should give it a second go at another time. I found myself re-reading passages, losing the character voices and decided to just give it up for the moment. I was disappointed in the book and a bit frustrated with myself.

Lisa Eirene says

Read half of it. Wanted to like it but just didn't.

Tesa says

I really wanted to like this book, but honestly couldn't wait to finish it. My recommendation, save your time and read something else.

Maxine says

In 1796, a ship, the *Miranda*, was refused docking in Newburyport, Mass. and was placed in quarantine by the local surgeon because of an epidemic on board. Unfortunately, some of the ship's passengers and crew managed to evade the quarantine and reach the town. The plague quickly spread, leaving the town devastated.

I had mixed feelings about this novel. I enjoyed the parts involving the epidemic: the different points of view of the doctors, including the surgeon who gained his skills on a battlefield, the depiction of the epidemic, the religious fervour it engendered, the construction of the pest house, and the attitudes of the people as the death toll mounted.

On the other hand, I found some of the back story both annoying, uninteresting, and unnecessary. This was especially true of the ship's owner and his mother as well as the French girl who may or may not have been French aristocracy. The bit about the apothecaries all being robbed of needed medicines and then having them offered back at exorbitant prices was less than believable. These parts of the story strained my willing suspension of disbelief and did nothing to move the story along.

Still, if you push all the unnecessary debris aside, there's a very interesting story here about people's attitudes to disease in colonial America. Mr Smolens is clearly a talented writer. I hope he revisits this story someday leaving out the parts that only served to bog it down like the shipowner's dissolution and give us a story which tells us more about how epidemics shaped the New World.

Alisha-Dear Constant Reader says

Quarantine by John Smolens is set in Newportbury, Massachusetts in June of 1779 on the eve of a Malaria outbreak. The fever sweeps through the small fishing town both literally and figuratively.

Dr. Giles Wiggins and Leander Hatch bravely risk their own lives as they strive to see their families, neighbors, and town through the summer of 1779.

The plot behind **Quarantine** is both interesting and rich in detail.

The trouble lies with Wiggins's mother, *Miranda*, whose namesake ship is quarantined under a yellow flag and as the distinct honor of bringing the town to its knees. Smolens keenly weaves the real *Miranda* with her yellow flagged counterpart. *Miranda* only leaves death in her wake.

Sitting at *Miranda*'s right hand is her sleazy grandson, Samuel who has recently dethroned his less sleazy father, Enoch. Samuel bribed his way off the *Miranda* and once ashore, commences to scam and swindle.

The deck appears stacked against the good doctor Wiggins, who just so happens to be *Miranda*'s youngest son and Enoch's half brother. Giles super power seems to be intuition. Like the fever, Giles understands his mother better than any other character.

In a discussion with his mother, Giles describes Miranda thusly:

"Mother, you can be hot and cold, ruthlessly arbitrary, much like this..."

Involuntarily she stepped back from his cot. "Like this fever? Perhaps, you have a better chance of understanding this disease than your own mother."

As if things weren't bad enough in the town of Newportbury, we have crazy Christians to deal with, corrupt law men, and mob mentality to boot.

The novel suffers from some slow pacing in the middle of the book, but readers can look forward to a swift pace as the novel makes its way towards to finish lines.

ARC provided by Pegasus in association with Netgalley.com

Judith says

What happens when a viral epidemic strikes a seaport in Massachusetts.....1796? the social, political, and economic aspects...

some characters are "Dickensian", in that they are caricatures...but the story doesn't suffer for their existence (perish the phony "French" though)

Very atmospheric....i could almost smell the salt-tinged sea air.....and the smudge pots from the Pest House

Sometimes too much "nobility" in these savages (I mean, the constables rip off the apothecaries, and then try to sell the much needed drugs back, to the doctors...through a Third party...Sounds downright Contemporary to me)

In no way an Earth Shaker..this is a good story, well told. The Authors' Note at the end gives the book's provenance...and that's a good story as well

*****this review could change/improve*****

this was a Net Galley

Amelia says

I don't understand how this book got published. Here are some of the problems: the writing is stilted, the characters are superficial, unlikable caricatures, Smolens mistakes crassness for gritiness in his clumsy descriptions of fever symptoms, and, worst of all, there are historical inaccuracies too numerous to mention. If one wants to write historical fiction, one needs to be willing to do research, especially considering some of the masters who are currently writing in this genre. I would not recommend this book to anyone, and in fact would advise against it.

