



L.A. Mental

Neil McMahon

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“As much a mind game as it is thriller, a scientific puzzle buried in a murder mystery, all set against the surreal world of Hollywood filmmaking. . . . I can’t wait for the next book!”—James Rollins

Acclaimed mystery writer Neil McMahon, coauthor of the James Patterson thriller *Toys*, delivers a fast-paced psychological thriller from the heart of a city gone insane: America’s myth-making capital, Los Angeles, has become a bedlam of murder, drugs, conspiracy, and obsession, and only one man has the power to put things right. Fans of science-tinged suspense from authors like Patrick Lee, William Gibson, and Greg Bear, will thrill for *L.A. Mental*’s taught, high-stakes story of one man’s accidental immersion in an underworld he never knew existed—one which will require every last reserve of his intelligence, ruthlessness, and cunning to escape.

L.A. Mental Details

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Author : Neil McMahon

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From Reader Review L.A. Mental for online ebook

Nicole says

I found the pretext very interesting with the breaking headlines of famous and high power people going crazy and either killing themselves or losing it all together. Once the story began about Nick, and Tom I found I was lost at points. Overall the story line was good and had an interesting twist on what scientists and our government could do if they really wanted to !

Lisa Hura says

The world is going crazy around Tom Crandall in Neil McMahon's L.A. Mental. His brother, Nick, calls him in a paranoid frenzy, probably drug-induced. When Tom finds him, Nick literally jumps off a cliff. His sister, Erica, has been receiving threats. His brother Paul is involved in a film project with a charismatic figure that he follows with a cult-like intensity. And those are the only strange things happening — all over Los Angeles, people are going on destructive rampages for no discernible reason. Is there a connection?

The story gets better — and stranger. The film project looks very much like a cult. The project's leader, Gunnar Kelso, is a former physicist, a brilliant scientist whose ideas may have gone off the deep end. Now he has a posse of Beautiful People — actors, writers, producers and the wealthy elite — huddled around him, turning over their cash and following his instructions, all in a bid for power. Kelso promises that his organization, Parallax Productions, can lead its members to immense personal power.

Basically, imagine Scientology is real, and not a hoax dreamed up by a sci-fi writer. You've got some similar concepts — pneuma and Gatekeepers and other crazy stuff — along with the promise of great power, tremendous secrecy and the requirement to hand over a lot of money. They also tend to go after the people who decline their invitation to sign up for the craziness, and that's the position Tom finds himself in. Strange things begin to happen and Tom has to ask himself: is this a scam or is it real?

There's evidence pointing in both directions and the great fun of the book is the way it wavers back and forth. First, we get a tidbit that clearly says it's a scam; next, something completely inexplicable happens. It's a good mystery, lots of turns and twists, and plenty of moments where you think you know where it's going, but you're wrong. It's not particularly scary, but there's plenty of action and lots and lots of questions. This was a fun read that would make a very interesting movie.

My one big criticism is the ending. There's a bit too much cloak and dagger and then a rather abrupt full stop. There's a bit of a teaser for a sequel, but it didn't leave me panting after the next book.

This is Neil McMahon's first thriller — and it's a pretty good one. He's the author of six mystery novels and four fantasy novels (under a pseudonym).

Jacqui says

Neil McMahon's latest novel, LA Mental (Harper 2011), blurs the line between thriller and sci-fi with a fast-

paced storyline, an everyman sort of main character, and amoral bad guys who right up to the last sentence, appear to be unstoppable. When you've finished, the plot will haunt you, so realistic is its potential, and every once in a while a newspaper story will make you ask if fiction has become reality.

The story's hero, psychologist Dr. Tom Crandall, is dragged into a web of futuristic mind control in his effort to save his brother Nick from self-described 'worms' in his brain. When he tracks backward to see what happened to his offbeat-but-sane brother, he is infected with the same 'disease' and his family is threatened. As he digs deeper, he finds a genius 'scientist' who is experimenting with technology that can silently put any and everyone on the planet under his control. Crandall is not a detective, so his efforts are bumbling band-aids at best, reacting to events rather than controlling circumstances, but with a courage and tenacity readers can't fail to respect.

McMahon does a deft job of weaving background into each early scene so we get to know the characters--to like Tom, wonder about his brother Nick's morals and respect his mother's strength in the face of her failed progeny. McMahon falls into some novice writing mistakes (too many adverbs, telling action as narrative rather than in scene), that are tolerable in good books like this one. By mid-book, I could no longer ignore the sci-fi overtones. I found these also in Tess Gerritson's most recent book, so maybe it's a new trend in thrillers. Just as it seemed to be too much, he pulled smartly back to a reality I understood. The ending, though, I didn't find satisfying. Tom survives, though still at the mercy of the mind control menace, as does his family. He saves his girlfriend from death, though not an innocent bystander and he is unsuccessful in stopping the bad guys from infecting the world, as they do in the Epilogue. If you're looking for that super-human hero, flawed but valiant, who saves the world at the price of his own well-being, this is not that story.

I have a confession: The character of Tom Crandall leaves me mildly unsettled. He tells us early and too often how much he hates the wealth and privilege that nurtured his childhood. We see how his siblings came to depend upon the money umbilical cord, even as Tom rejects it--he won't work in the family businesses, he drives a beater, he walks away from his professional training as a psychiatrist in favor of teaching at a community college. I doubt that McMahon intended the political overtones that are impossible to miss in this era of anti-capitalist sentiment. He is not known for political novels. Still, those who favor that sentiment will enjoy its cameo appearance in this book.

Overall, if you like edgy fast-paced thrillers that force you to think about futuristic danger and keep you on the edge of your chair throughout, you'll want to read *LA Mental*.

Paul Pessolano says

“*L.A. Mental*” by Neil McMahon, published by Harper.

Category – Mystery/Thriller

“There. Are. Worms. Eating My Brain.”

The good news is that this is a good book, the bad news is that it will not be out until October.

“*L.A. Mental*” may be a mystery/thriller but it will also appeal to those who like a scientific or science fiction twist with their mystery.

The Los Angeles Times has been reporting some weird stuff going on, “Bizarre Rampage Leaves Judge in Critical Condition”, “Accused Celeb Heiress in Pool Accident”, and “CalTech Tragedy Saddens, Disturbs.” Taken individually these may mean nothing but put them together and you may have a conspiracy.

Tom Crandall comes from a wealthy, established California family. He is a psychologist and has shunned his family’s status and money. His brother, Nick, calls him one night and asks for his help. Nick informs Tom that worms are eating his brains just before he jumps off a cliff. Tom finds an unusual white substance in Nick’s car and has it analyzed.

Tom becomes involved with a company, Parallax, who is backing a movie being made on the Crandall property. There seems to be more than a movie being made when he discovers that a tractor trailer has been buried beneath the movie set. Gunnar Kelso who is charge of the movie set is also a Swedish scientist that may have discovered a mind changing substance.

The substance is “nano-particles” and when these are breathed into the body they are stored in the brain and it may be possible to manipulate a person by using these nano-particles.

Although the book does come to an end, McMahon leaves it wide open for a sequel.

A very interesting concept that may or may not have some basis in the scientific world, but is definitely open to science fiction.

Mike Harper says

I barely finished this, and wish I hadn't.

Meag McKeron says

Per my review at <http://baltimorereads.wordpress.com/2...>

Back in the day I used to love reading anything by “The Queen of Suspense,” Mary Higgins Clark; I wouldn’t move for hours as I got sucked into her fast-paced, thrilling mysteries and loved trying to guess the endings (though I was rarely successful). I essentially overdosed on thrillers and had to take a break for a few years, until I recently decided to pick up Neil McMahon’s new book (published 9/27/11) L.A. Mental: A Thriller. I was in search of everything that a thriller should be – a quick read that would have me frantically turning the pages and telling myself, “Just one more chapter!” until the book was magically finished. Unfortunately, L.A. Mental did not meet any of these expectations.

L.A. Mental is mystery meets sci-fi meets Hollywood meets a dozen other things that I could barely keep track of. It seemed as though the plot could have been cut into three or four different novels, each of which could have been beefed up and made into far more exciting and focused stories. The book’s central character, Dr. Thomas Crandall, is thrust into a world of fear and confusion when his brother, Nick, calls him one night in desperate need of help. This culminates in a peculiar and dangerous encounter in which Crandall notices Nick is acting strange. Some sleuthing for answers takes him to the set of a movie that is being shot on the

land of the Crandall family's Los Angeles mountain lodge, where Crandall encounters the peculiar scientist/director Gunnar Kelso, the seductive Cynthia Trask, movie-star beauty Lisa DiFurio, and other members of the cult-like company Parallax. Before long, Crandall is caught up in Parallax and its mysterious ways and must race to figure out who is behind the strange things that are happening before his family and friends, in addition to himself, are hurt or killed.

Add in paternity tests, sex tapes, nanoparticles, "Gatekeepers," mind-reading, and a slew of other details, and you have yourself a book that is simply drowning in too many plotlines. McMahon leans heavily on explaining every little detail instead of letting readers figure things out on their own, which is frustrating for anyone who has read enough James Patterson or watched enough Law & Order to understand how thrillers work and what can be expected. Often times it seems that McMahon is over-explaining things for himself in addition to his readers, just to make sure he is keeping everything straight. The characters are hard to connect with because of the very "telling" method of writing that McMahon uses, and a lot of the dialogue and description comes off as contrived. In the moments when a "surprise" villain was unveiled, I was hardly surprised at all as the character's real motives were easy to spot pages beforehand.

McMahon is an experienced mystery writer who even worked together with James Patterson on the thriller Toys, so he has obviously proven himself in the literary world. There were spurts of the book that were very well written and compelling, but they were very short-lived and rare. For a reader willing to give the thriller genre of books a chance, or for anyone who lives for suspenseful reads, L.A. Mental might not be the book to pick off the shelves.

cheryl says

L.A. Mental was provided to me by the lovely folks at Harper and I will confess at the outset that I'm not usually a huge thriller girl. This is important because I do always want to give my reviews context...reading for Harper encourages me to step out of my box, but that is sometimes reflected in my opinion.

This is an interesting mix between the detective/thriller genre and a bit of sci-fi. Tom Crandall gets caught up in drama when one brother takes a fall after going a bit nutty, another brother becomes deeply involved in a movie project headed by a cult-ish leader, and a sister is threatened by the nutty-going brother. The movie producer character has all sorts of theories and seems to be playing out mind control theses on his followers and his detractors. There's a beautiful love interest and several sketchy potential villains in the mix, along with family money and secrets that make the Crandall clan a target.

I'm rounding down to 3 from a preferred 3.5 stars. It just didn't compel me. It read fast and easy and it did hold my interest okay, but I never got emotionally involved which I need. The characters were a bit too simply drawn for my tastes. The author definitely leaves room for a sequel but I don't feel any need to seek it out. However, I do think that my genre bias is at play and would guess a thriller fan might round up to 4. To use an overused (including by me) phrase, "it is what it is" and that just isn't my style.

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wally says

first from mcmahon for me, just finished, three stars i liked it kindle library loaner. thought the "bad" forces could have used a bit more explanation, more telling, as it stands, they're still somewhat of a mystery. in that the story succeeded, a mystery, somewhat low-key, but mystery to the end.

Randy says

I was somewhat disappointed in this one. L. A. MENTAL(nice little pun there) starts out with a slam bang, sails smoothly along(giving me great hope), but has a rather limp ending.

Tom Randall is a clinical psychologist that teaches at a small college. He comes from one of the wealthiest families in Los Angeles and is the oldest of four siblings. One is a perpetual drug addict, little sister seems a Paris Hilton clone, and the other brother runs the family business. They all seem estranged.

Late one night, Tom gets a phone call from the drug addict begging for help. Tom goes to help him, finding him on a cliff above the old family home. Attacked, the pair wrestle around and the brother goes over the low cliff into the surf below. Tom has to rescue him. He's not in great shape.

Trying to make sense of it, Tom goes to his brother's home just in time to catch a motorcyclist racing from behind the cottage. He finds the house tore up, someone looking for something. They couldn't have found it because the wreckage was all through the house. Tom starts his own search(he knows his brother a little better likely than the intruder) and finds somethings in an old cupboard that the brother had claimed. Worthless, it had one thing Tom and his brother had found when they were kids. Secret compartments.

Inside them he finds a stash of coke and two envelopes. The first was stuffed with hundreds, fifteen thousand dollars of them. Really strange because his brother ran through his monthly allowance almost as fast as he got it, then spent the rest of the month bumming.

The second envelope had three sets of DNA paternity results. No names but paternity was 99.99%. Of the three, two had the same father.

What was all this about?

As he continues to investigate, his sister gives him a DVD apparently filmed by her druggie brother showcasing a little carnal action. And not with her soon to be husband.

That's the beginning and a cult-like film company renting Tom's lodge, some stuff at the end hinting at some sort of fantasy. Most unsatisfying ending as mentioned. Rather short for today's thrillers(300 pages), the ending could have used a little more fleshing out.

Not a bad book, but it could have been better with a little more work.

Keith says

Although there are some plot twists and turns that border on the down-right silly, this thriller about a California psychologist thrown into the midst of an analyst's bad dream is still a fun read. Weaving together what appears to be a cult, a Hollywood movie, and a dysfunctional but well-heeled family make for a fascinating story line that moves along quickly, as we accompany Dr. Crandall through his world of futuristic science and criminal intent. His analytic cynicism make his character not only almost believable but even occasionally funny.

Debbi Mack says

Psychologist Tom Crandall's world starts to crumble when his brother, Neil, a druggie and the black sheep of his wealthy family, claims worms are eating his brain. Neil suddenly goes berzerk and attacks Tom, then hurls himself off a cliff into the Pacific. Tom rescues him, but Neil ends up fighting to stay alive. Oddly, the attack is one of many seemingly random similar incidents around L.A. However, what bothers Tom is the phone call Neil got right before he went nuts. Tom starts an investigation, which leads to a film production his brother Paul is financing. The film production company is Parallax Productions and they're using one the Crandalls' mountain properties as their set location.

Tom decides to visit the set. There he meets the lovely Lisa, star of the film *The Velvet Glove*, an epic tale that takes place in a setting that bears a creepy resemblance to a human brain when viewed from above. It's during his inquiries on the set that Tom learns that Parallax Productions is more than just a film production company. In fact, the CEO and founder Cynthia Trask is in league with a scientist Gunnar Kelso, who's experimenting with nanoparticles and has intriguing theories about beings greater than ourselves called Gatekeepers, who control our fates by manipulating an energy force called pneuma.

Read the entire review at <http://thebookgrrl.blogspot.com/2012/...>

Alyce Rocco says

Had a feeling I had already read, *L. A. Mental*, by Neil McMahon; I see that I rated it, thus was correct. Do not know when I previously read it, thus just gave the publication year as my second read date.

Previously I rated it "I Really Liked It." Today I would simply say, "I liked it," or 3 Stars. The only reason I come up with as to why I once "really liked" it and now was not overly impressed, is that when it was a first read, the sci-fi ideas were new to me back then. Lodged in my subconscious mind, the ideas were not foreign to me, or, not as exciting.

Interesting discourse on cognitive dissonance on pages 159-160. "...demagogues, power brokers, and con artists" "...if there are no real enemies, they are created with scapegoats common and dirty tactics, blamed on them which actually are used by the blamers themselves. Disagreements and even questioning are not tolerated, education is disparaged or forbidden, accurate information suppressed or distorted..."

"...nothing can get them to give up the belief; on the contrary, the more blatantly false and damaging it gets, the more doggedly they'll hang on." "...people will fight ferociously..." "rather than admit they've been

chumps, they become bigger ones."

This reminded me of our U.S. of A. con-artist president and his followers, or the cult leader and those he leads.

Gloria Feit says

Is there something in the air in LA? [Other than the usual, that is.] For something is suddenly causing unusual, and unusually aggressive, behavior, much of it lethal. Neil McMahon's new novel starts with three LA Times headlines, each a month apart: "Bizarre Rampage Leaves Judge in Critical Condition;" "Accused Celeb Heiress in Pool Accident;" and "CalTech Tragedy Saddens, Disturbs," this last after a graduate student runs onto a freeway and is struck by more than one vehicle and killed. It appears that nearly 40 such incidents had been reported over the past year, with many more not having made the papers or other media. But when psychologist Tom Crandall's brother jumps from a Malibu cliff, although he survives the fall, things obviously become much more personal; Tom has to try to find out what is going on.

A faculty adjunct at a two-year community college, Tom is one of four siblings, all in their thirties, from a prominent and wealthy family, one that could be described as dysfunctional at best. He soon discovers that another brother, Paul, is financing a movie being made by a brilliant, albeit bizarre, Swedish physicist. That film is described as "a curious blend of elements, some traditional but modernized, and given a gloss of science that walked the edge of science fiction." That same description could be applied to this novel. Paul has rented out a family property for the making of the film, and when Tom visits the scene he, as the reader, is unprepared for what he finds there.

Full disclosure here: otherworldly, or even semi-otherworldly, doings are generally outside my comfort zone, my suspension of disbelief too greatly taxed thereby. And my mental abilities [no pun on the title intended] do not stretch to the worlds of physics, astrophysics, nanotechnology, or even science fiction. Admittedly I expected the plot triggers here to be off-putting. But I hasten to add that they were not, and I found myself intrigued, and challenged, by what the author has done here. It is an interesting, at times fascinating, and suspense-filled, tale, and one I recommend.

PopcornReads says

Living in Southern California means being accustomed to movies finding yet another way to destroy Los Angeles and seeing all kinds of novels written about our fair or not so fair city. Given how stressful this city can be for its inhabitants, I was intrigued when I saw the title for bestselling author Neil McMahon's newest psychological thriller, L.A. Mental. There are lots of things that could cause Angelenos to go mental, not least of which is their commute every day. Neil McMahon has taken a lot of the elements intrinsic to LA and woven them together into an exciting, smart new take on the psychological thriller that will keep you on the edge of your seat! Read the rest of my review at <http://popcornreads.com/?p=1929>

LORI CASWELL says

To psychologist Tom Crandall it seems Los Angeles is going insane. A distinguished judge goes on a rampage and destroys his own home, a brilliant grad student from CalTech is killed while driving his car wildly through traffic, his own brother, Nick, calls him distressed claiming “his brain is being devoured by worms”.

Sadly as Tom tries to help his brother he can't stop him from throwing himself off a cliff into the Pacific ocean. Tom rescues him only to learn Nick doesn't remember a thing.

The Crandalls are a very wealthy family. Tom seeming to be the most normal, Nick has been involved in some shady dealings, their sister Erica has her own problems and younger brother Paul is the business man of the family and is in charge of the family fortune.

As Tom starts to investigate secrets come out and all the insanity seems to lead to a film company Parallax Productions and its director, a former physicist named Gunnar Kelso. Tom delves right into the middle of things to find some answers and what he discovers is absolutely mind boggling.

Dollycas's Thoughts

I knew this author from his previous work with James Patterson on the book TOYS so I knew he came up with some pretty out there ideas, but it did not prepare me for this.

I wouldn't actually call it a thriller, it is more of a psychological study of madness. However, it is just as entertaining, but must be read carefully to capture every nuance in this mind bending story. There are some really technical concepts that take away some of the drama by being too scientific. There are also some confusing elements as to setting and why certain people were affected and others not, but it is fiction, science fiction. Sometimes you need to just let go of reality and let the story take you on a journey. I was waiting for a real “aha moment” and that doesn't happen.

Like Patterson's quote says on the cover it is “a very cool concept”, but if you pick this book thinking you are going to be reading a true thriller you will be disappointed. If you like sci-fi or futuristic type fiction this book is perfect for you. It is filled with the stuff that you spend nights dreaming about. It is also a book that will leave you contemplating just how much is really fiction. How much of this technology is already out there and can it be used for good and evil. McMahon has now shown me twice that he has quite an imagination, a sometimes scary imagination. What worries me is the actual research he did to come up with this “very cool concept” and how much is true and how much is imagined.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from Harper. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. Receiving a complimentary copy in no way reflected my review of this book. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 : “Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising.”
