



Portraits of the Dead

John Nicholl

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Emma didn't know how long he hid in the large Victorian wardrobe to the side of her single bed. She didn't know how long he peered between the two heavy oak doors, and watched, as she slowly drifted into fitful sleep. She didn't know what time he pushed the doors open and crept towards her in the darkness of the night.

Detective Inspector Gravel finds himself faced with a difficult case when a local nineteen-year-old university student is abducted and imprisoned by a sadistic serial killer, who has already tortured and killed at least five young women.

Can Gravel find the girl and stop the murderer?

He will learn that the greater the evil, the deadlier the game...

Portraits of the Dead Details

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Author : John Nicholl

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From Reader Review Portraits of the Dead for online ebook

Brenda says

Having read and enjoyed the author's two other books, I accepted his offer of this book in exchange for an honest review.

I did not enjoy this book. The writing in the beginning felt amateurish to me with too much irrelevant detail. I also felt that there was overuse of adjectives to describe things. I didn't connect with Emma at all. Her initial actions after waking up in the room weren't what I would have expected. I found myself skipping ahead and skimming, and I correctly guessed who the abductor was.

sue says

What attracted me to this authors first book when I came in contact with him via a group on Facebook was first the cover. I am a sucker for a good cover especially that relates to what is inside the book. Then the blurb, then his background in real life.

Just look closely at this cover. Never ignore the front cover from this author. It tells a story.

I saw that White is the Coldest colour was his debut book. To have such a high regard for presentation was great to see. We are human and we 'eat' with our eyes, hence, I was hungry to read it.

From then, he has gone on to write the secound book in that series.

This book however is a stand alone, it does have a small mention to one of the main characters in his first book. But nothing major.

Based around the city of Cardiff in Wales was good. I remember getting my first parking ticket there!! I love Cardiff and surrounding areas.

Portraits of the dead is a book that you need to set aside time for. Once you start reading it then you are hooked. The author has a very professional way as only recognized by top best sellers to have the ability to sustain a readers hunger for more. Top crime and psychological crime best sellers that you may know and love to read have a 'signature' its like a personality that shines. Its like an antique that you recognize belongs to a certain type of creator and this is something that John Nicholls has. His signature [or way of writing] comes through in his first book, and now it comes through in this one. I LOVE it.

What I love in his books so far is the ability to bring to a person the inside workings of an evil mind, a corrupt and distorted mind. It makes you wonder. These type of perpetrators have a conscience, but its a conscience that only they can excuse. Maybe others can excuse it too. Who knows.

We see this within the realms of each book that this author writes.

This takes a different kind of subject matter into a depth that you, the reader will find fascinating.

To put yourself in the shoes of the victim in this will relay how a person can gain some strength when undergoing duress.

I am aware not to give too much away, but the author has written this in such a way that you get a shock. A really wake up call to a twist that is so profound. An unexpectedness you would feel your mouth dropping to the floor and you having to lean down and pick it up again.

NO SPOILERS

There one character that is mentioned stood out to me. This was apart from the two main ones and the Detective.

Let me know when you have read it, who you think I mean.

There are not heaps and heaps of characters to get your confused and a reader trying to keep up, no, not in this authors books. The simplicity that this author makes it this way makes it even more paramount in your head because you feel the characters, you get to know them, you get to imagine them inside your minds eye. They take on forms of a human shape as you read.

I feel honored to read for this author. I am no expert, I am 'just a reader who loves a good story' and its not difficult to give this book 5. I would give it much more.

He has written three books now and each one different but with his 'stamp' on it.

I can certainly see how he draws on his life experience and career he had. Although all of his books are fiction, they could be true.

This is an author within my top 4 that I so look forward to grabbing his next book hot off the press. I drop everything and read it because I know I am going to be well entertained, I am going to have my mind so solid in the story that nothing else matters until its finished.

This is also an author that I can remember where I was when I asked to read his very first book. I remember his first book, his secound book and now I will remember this one. They are 'stand out from the crowd' books for sure.

If you've not read any of John Nicholl's books yet, may I encourage you to read this one which will be out soon.

I hear he is writing his 4th book, and I for one, cannot wait.

Everything comes to those who wait and the waiting is well worth it.

My thanks to the author for my copy, I will always be your cyber stalker [in a nice way]

Christine says

Thank you, Mr. Nicoll, for sending me an advanced copy of your book in exchange for an unbiased review.

Holy Cow, John Nicoll, you outdid yourself with this one—your best yet!! This is a goodie, folks.

This story starts out with a Creepy (yes, creepy with a capital C) prologue where a young woman (Emma) has been abducted by someone who has done this before. This someone is an absolute sicko. Mr. Nicoll, in my estimate, is the master of creating the most vile, most deranged f***k possible. We learn the identity of this baddie fairly early on, but that is not the point of the book. In prose way better than that seen in the average thriller we are privy to the thoughts of most of the major players, including the evil one, delivered in a sort of “need to know at this point” narrative. There are no alternating chapters and no time jumps back and forth from past to present, which is nice for a change. We get DCI Gareth “Grav” Gravel and DS Clive Rankin back from previous books to work the case; I really liked both of these guys. Grav is weary and old school, but still has some steam in his game. Clive is younger and is doing most of the brainwork and legwork. Taking the journey with Clive and Grav in their efforts to break the case, following along with Emma in her efforts to save herself, and the fascinating maneuvering of the malevolent one are what drive this tale.

The cherry on the top of this little winner is the last 12% of the story. My rating went from 4 stars to 4 1/2 stars to 5 big stars over the 30 minutes it took me to read this terrific finale! All I could think was, “Wait! You can’t do that! Whaaaaaat????? Are you kidding me?? This isn’t how thrillers go!” Get the picture?

This novel is very well written and perfectly paced. It is a fast read.

I highly recommend *Portraits of the Dead*, a most entertaining novel, to every thriller lover out there. From someone who always reads in order, I can say this one can truly be read as a stand-alone. As for you, Mr. Nicoll, I challenge you to beat this one. It won’t be easy.

Lou says

This was an outstanding read. I haven't read either of Nicholl's previous two books featuring down-to-earth, take no prisoners DI Gareth Gravel but plan to now as this was such a fabulous book. I hope the others prove to be as compelling - I have been assured by friends that they are! Also, a quick sentence about the cover art - wow, it's creepy and fits the synopsis perfectly.

From beginning to end 'Portraits of the Dead' held my interest and if you, like me, find disturbing, creepy and sadistic serial killer thrillers a joy to behold then give this one a go! I can't see how you could be disappointed. I found the pace to be impeccable the whole way through and there was plenty action too. DI Gravel is put on the case of an abducted girl and knowing that the killer has murdered five times before, he is in a race against the clock to save Emma from the same fate.

Nicholl's characterisation is great and you easily feel a connection to each character. There are also a few key twists including at the end which I didn't predict. Nicholl knows how to captivate you and pull you into the story from the first pages. His books are definitely not for the feint-hearted!

I have no hesitation in recommending this book especially for those who enjoy police procedurals and stories that centre around a serial killer. Impactful, deliciously dark and very sinister, this book is a winner and deserves the full five-stars.

Many thanks to Bloodhound Books for an ARC. I was not required to post a review and all thoughts and opinions expressed are my own.

Helga says

3.5

We don't see the monster behind the mask.

19 year old Emma is kidnapped and held like a slave in an impenetrable room. Her captor calls her Venus and she has to call him master and do as he likes. She is at the mercy of a ruthless killer who is watching her every move.

The investigations intensify when the bodies of 5 missing women are found in the woods. Is Emma going to be the 6th victim or is she going to see the daylight once again?

I have mixed feelings about this book. It started with a bang, but then slowed down and I didn't like the ending one bit! It was rushed and nothing was resolved.

The investigators were drinking, chatting and joking more than investigating.

There were so many irrelevant conversations between the characters.

The abrupt change of the points of views in consecutive paragraphs was confusing.

The identity of the killer was pointlessly revealed almost at the beginning. If the reader soon learns who the culprit is and the victim is securely imprisoned, with no chance of escape, then why use a mask?

There were so many reasons the investigators could have suspected the murderer, but for some reason they chose to ignore them.

The killer was shown to be very intelligent and thorough but was making blunder after blunder and acting recklessly throughout the book.

Who was the anonymous caller about the bodies?

Initially I was sure this is going to be a 5 star read. Then it became 4 and at the end I am sorry to say 3.5.

Thanks to John Nicholl, Bloodhound books and NetGalley for providing me with a copy.

Maxine (Booklover Catlady) says

I have read this book for a second time and loved it still! John Nicholl has excelled again! In fact, this is my **favourite book** by him so far and I have really enjoyed all of them. I think John's writing just gets better and better and this book had me riveted all through the night until the very last word. Whether you have read John's previous great books or not, it doesn't matter - you will want this one on your to-read list!

The book is set in Wales, around the beautiful city of Cardiff that I have had the pleasure to visit and **without giving too much away the book gives us a thrilling, chilling plot of a serial killer with unhealthy needs and fetishes, twisted and damaged with a fixation on young woman who all have his signature "look".** As with all great serial killer books I loved the fact that John lets us get into the mind and life of the killer as well as in the mind and world of his current abductee and "plaything". She is **NOT** a fortunate young woman.

The pace is great, you are right into the meaty good stuff from page one and it doesn't stop from there. No boring bits here people! The book has the added elements of us viewing the story from the police perspective as their hunt for the killer is well underway in South Wales. There are plenty of characters to both love and hate in this novel, all well developed and not overly-complex to connect with and picture. You might as well be watching a great movie or TV drama, it's clear, dramatic and exciting fiction.

It would be a spoiler but there is one character that I particularly felt was well-written and very cleverly done in this book. I wonder if you can guess who I mean when you get around to reading it. The character is central to the entire plot so I can't share, sorry to tease! I really just loved the plot overall and whilst I guessed a few things reasonably early in the book (the killer's real identity was one of them) I was not expecting THAT ENDING. It was excellent, really exciting and somewhat left me speechless.

The book is not overly graphic for those of you who might be afraid to enjoy it that are squeamish, it's emotionally charged and I have to say there is *one particular scene where I felt John really did go to the "dark side" with the imagery and the writing and I cringed and nearly turned my head*. I am pretty thick-skinned with dark fiction, gory crime, horror books so that says a lot. I must admit I would like to see something in future from John with more of that extreme end of things, I think that would really float my boat (sick I know!).

The story is compelling and lovers of both crime fiction and psychological thrillers will enjoy this book as it's a mixed blend in my opinion. **It's a winner in my book and straight into my long list for my Top Reads of 2018 which I announce at the end of the year. Five huge stars from me and I predict this book will be very popular, if not THE most popular of all of John's great books to date.** He is an author that just keeps giving the public what they want and I can't wait for the next book.

I felt very blessed to be able to read an advance copy of this book pre-publication thanks to John Nicholl, many thanks.

Thanks for reading my review! For more of my book reviews, plenty of awesome books to win, author interviews and features come over to join me for book fun at: <https://www.facebook.com/BookloverCat...>

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Finally to enquire about my book publicity services: <http://goo.gl/forms/eVwa2HFKnK>

Dash fan says

5? A Must Read! Got under My Skin!

Portraits of the Dead is a creepy, dark, sadistic psychological crime thriller. The Book Cover was enough to creep the hell out of me.

I'm a big fan of John Nicholls so when I was given the opportunity to read this one I jumped at the chance.

Right from the start I was hooked.

When a stranger comes out of your closet during the night and beats you up, abducts you, then watches your every move via cameras I was completely and utterly freaked out!

He refers to Emily as Venus Six.

She is his 6th young women he takes great pleasure in telling her by displaying their pictures round her sound proofed prison!

What has happened to the others?

He demands she calls him Master!

Who is this crazy sadistic torturer?

Why has he picked Emily?

Detective Inspector Gareth Gravel, or Grav is the DI investigating the cases. But can he find Emily before it's too late?

I was so drawn into this chilling, very dark thriller I was reading till the early hours desperate to know what would happen next.

John has this way of making you feel uncomfortable but you just can't help needing to keep reading. Just by looking at the Cover I knew it was going to be dark and it was bloomin brilliant.

If you enjoy dark, sadistic serial killing psychological thrillers that literally get under your skin, then you definitely need to read Portraits of the Dead.

Thank you to Bloodhound books for this copy which I reviewed honestly and voluntarily.

My Review is also on my Blog Website:-

<https://dashfan81.blogspot.com/2018/0...>

sue says

Lo que me atrajo del primer libro de este autor cuando me puse en contacto con él a través de un grupo en Facebook fue primero la portada. Soy un fanático de una buena portada, especialmente la relacionada con lo que está dentro del libro. Luego, la propaganda, luego su experiencia en la vida real. Solo mira de cerca esta portada. Nunca ignore la portada de este autor. Cuenta una historia. Vi que White es el color más frío fue su libro debut. Tener un gran respeto por la presentación fue genial de ver. Somos humanos y 'comemos' con nuestros ojos, por lo tanto, tenía hambre de leerlo. A partir de entonces, ha continuado escribiendo el segundo libro de esa serie. Sin embargo, este libro es independiente, tiene una pequeña mención a uno de los personajes principales de su primer libro. Pero nada importante. En torno a la ciudad de Cardiff en Gales fue bueno. ¡Recuerdo haber conseguido mi primer ticket de estacionamiento allí! Me encanta Cardiff y sus alrededores. Retratos de muertos es un libro para el que debes reservar un tiempo. Una vez que comienzas a

leerlo, estás enganchado. El autor tiene una forma muy profesional, ya que solo es reconocida por los mejores vendedores para tener la capacidad de mantener el hambre de un lector por más. Los mejores vendedores de crimen y crimen psicológico que usted puede conocer y amar leer tienen una 'firma' que es como una personalidad que brilla. Es como una antigüedad que reconoce que pertenece a un cierto tipo de creador y esto es algo que John Nicholls tiene. Su firma [o forma de escribir] aparece en su primer libro, y ahora aparece en este. Lo amo. Lo que amo en sus libros hasta ahora es la capacidad de llevar a una persona el funcionamiento interno de una mente malvada, una mente corrupta y distorsionada. Te hace preguntarte. Este tipo de perpetradores tienen una conciencia, pero es una conciencia que solo ellos pueden excusar. Quizás otros también puedan disculparlo. Quién sabe. Vemos esto dentro de los reinos de cada libro que este autor escribe. Esto lleva un tipo de tema diferente a una profundidad que usted, el lector encontrará fascinante. Ponerse en la piel de la víctima en este relatará cómo una persona puede ganar algo de fortaleza cuando se somete a coacción. Soy consciente de no dar demasiado, pero el autor ha escrito esto de tal manera que te sorprende. Una verdadera llamada de atención a un giro que es tan profundo. Lo inesperado es que sienta que su boca cae al suelo y que tiene que inclinarse hacia abajo y volver a levantarla. **SIN AGUAFIESTAS** Ahí se destacó un personaje que se menciona. Esto fue aparte de los dos principales y el Detective. Déjame saber cuándo lo has leído, a quién crees que me refiero. No hay montones y montones de personajes para confundirse y un lector tratando de mantenerse al día, no, no en los libros de este autor. La simplicidad que este autor hace de esta manera lo hace aún más importante en tu cabeza porque sientes los personajes, los conoces, te los imaginas dentro del ojo de tu mente. Adoptan formas humanas a medida que lees. Me siento honrado de leer para este autor. No soy un experto, solo soy un lector que ama una buena historia y no es difícil dar este libro. Le daría mucho más. Él ha escrito tres libros ahora y cada uno diferente pero con su 'sello' en él. Ciertamente puedo ver cómo se basa en su experiencia de vida y carrera que tuvo. Aunque todos sus libros son ficción, podrían ser ciertos. Este es un autor dentro de mi top 4 que espero ansioso de obtener su próximo libro de la prensa. Dejo todo y lo leo porque sé que voy a estar bien entretenido, voy a tener mi mente tan sólida en la historia que nada más importa hasta que esté terminada. También es un autor que puedo recordar dónde estaba cuando le pedí que leyera su primer libro. Recuerdo su primer libro, su segundo libro y ahora voy a recordar este. Definitivamente son libros que sobresalen de la multitud. Si aún no ha leído ninguno de los libros de John Nicholl, le recomiendo que lea este que saldrá pronto. Escuché que está escribiendo su cuarto libro, y por mi parte, no puedo esperar. Todo viene a los que esperan y la espera bien vale la pena. Mi agradecimiento al autor por mi copia, siempre seré su acosador cibernético [de una manera agradable]

Chelsea Humphrey says

Find all my reviews on my blog: <https://thesuspenseisthrillingme.com>

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4 STARS

Emma didn't know how long he hid, silent and unmoving, in the large Victorian wardrobe to the side of her single bed. She didn't know how long he peered, salivating and drooling, between the two heavy dark oak doors, and watched, mesmerised, as she slowly drifted into fitful sleep. She didn't know what time he pushed

the doors open and crept towards her in the drab grey darkness of the night.

Detective Inspector Gravel finds himself floundering when a local nineteen-year-old university student is abducted and imprisoned by a sadistic serial killer, who has already tortured and killed at least five young women.

The greater the evil, the more deadly the game... How far would you go to save your life?

As a parent, I'm immensely glad I have many years before sending my daughters off to college. After reading this, I found an all-consuming terror that must fill the hearts of adults with mostly grown children, especially girls. I've decided to simply place a brick on each of their heads and keep them from growing up (that works right?!). Whatever the case, this book did a fine job of instilling the terror that it was meant to in this mama right here. If you are looking for a fast paced thriller that falls on the darker side of the spectrum, look no further.

The story is tense from the beginning, as we get a glimpse into the horror that Emma experiences once she wakes up to realize she's been kidnapped and held hostage. We have no idea what is to come at this point, only that she is not this monster's first victim and she is in for a whole heap of nightmares galore. The entire book is dark, disturbing, and heavy; clearly not for every reader, but if you enjoy this type of read it's worthy of adding to your ever growing TBR list. Other reviews have touched on this, but you could also shelve this under "Police Procedural-Crime Fiction", although its not heavy on this style. Personally, I would have enjoyed seeing a bit more from the detective's side, but we do get a nice insight on the relationship between Emma and her captor.

The reason this was a 4 STAR for me was that I did figure out who the villain was before the "unveiling", but I know a great number of people who were shocked by the twist and I think most people will be. The author did a fantastic job of setting up the reveal and clearly put in a great deal of effort to make his story a gripping and compulsive read. This is my first read by John Nicholl, but I am looking forward to checking out his two previous novels. Again, highly recommended for lovers of dark fiction with a fast pace. This was a fantastic read where I didn't have to think or become too involved but was able to be fully entertained. I'm very excited to see what he puts out next and will be keeping my eyes peeled!

*** I received my copy from the author in exchange for a fair and honest review. Thank you John Nicholl!**

(Bern) Mom to 2 Posh Lil Divas says

An intense & dark psychological thriller that will make you shudder.

Portraits of the Dead by John Nicholl starts off exceptionally creepy with 19 year old college student Emma Jones being abducted by a sadistic serial killer who awaited his perfect opportunity, hidden silent and unmoving in her wardrobe. I swear the scene was right out of my worst nightmares! What a way to hook you in!

Emma awakens naked, bruised and bloody, finding herself in a windowless room adorned with portraits of

girls who look just like her and no way out. Emma finds herself at the mercy of her captor who thinks of her as his plaything. Unfortunately the "Master's" games are brutal, horrific and sadistic. I rather enjoyed the scenes between Emma and her depraved captor. Emma was described as an intelligent, hard-working girl and that was definitely apparent during her interactions with the Master. Although she was forced to degrade herself for his enjoyment time and time again, she was always thinking, trying to earn his trust to stay alive and ultimately find a way out.

DI Gareth Gravel and DS Clive Rankin are investigating Emma's disappearance and quickly begin to tie her case to the killing of five young women whose bodies are discovered scattered in the woods. Will they find Emma in time before she becomes number 6?

Honestly, I did figure out fairly quickly who the "Master" was and was ready to give the book 3 stars for various reasons. First, the relationship with the mother was twisted and creepy but I just didn't fully buy into it. Secondly, DS Clive Rankin - what the??? I can't say more without spoilers but that threw me and I was upset with how it ended.

So where did the 4 star rating come from? ***The ENDING!*** It totally changed my mind. It was not what I was expecting and it was such a GOOD surprise. I found myself cheering and feeling quite satisfied in that crazy "You Go Girl!" way.

Matt says

Returning with another psychological thriller, John Nicholl stuns readers with this novel, whose content and dramatic build-up offer something for everyone. Emma Jones is a quiet and down to earth university student whose assault and kidnapping goes off without a hitch for a masked intruder. In a haze, Emma can barely piece together the events that see her locked in a soundproof room, her captor relishing the power he has over her as she cowers in the corner. Forced to degrade herself and offer false platitudes to a man who demands complete respect, Emma can only hope that this nightmare will end before too long. She soon discovers that she is the sixth such captive, the other five having met their untimely demise at the hands of this sicko. Detective Inspector Gareth Gravel is asked to investigate Emma's disappearance when her parents refuse to believe she has simply gone off the grid. Skeptical but determined to follow his superiors, Gravel completes a preliminary investigation by interviewing some of those who knew Emma best. Calling upon Detective Sergeant Clive Rankin to assist, Gravel begins to unravel the last hours of Emma's life on the outside, though he cannot help but wonder if this is just teenage rebellion. When a body dump is discovered just outside of a Welsh town, Gravel and Rankin become convinced Emma's disappearance is more than a game; certainly not a simple kidnapping. All the women whose decomposing bodies are found have similar characteristics to Emma, though her body is not among those scattered in the woods. Gravel tasks Rankin to begin probing around, hoping that Emma can be saved before it is too late. Strategic canvassing leads Rankin to the home of an elderly woman who offers what she feels is a potentially useful lead, though her age and memory are a little spotty. Following up on this, their best lead, Rankin and Gravel work as the killer ups the ante and pushes Emma to her limits. As panic sets in, the authorities inch closer in their investigation though remain clueless as to the perpetrator. Weighing the advantages to keeping Emma with him against the need to destroy all evidence before he is found out, the killer must make a choice that could seal Emma's fate forever. Gravel and Rankin may have the backing of the Welsh authorities, but some killers can elude even the most determined detectives. Nicholl offers a captivating story whose action resonates long after the final sentence completes this chilling tale.

Having read and thoroughly enjoyed Nicholl's previous novels, I was not disappointed with his latest offering. Nicholl is able to use his characters not only to tell a story, but their individual characteristics help pull the reader deeper into the narrative and offer wonderful contrasts throughout. Set in Wales, the story takes on a much different setting than the rough and tumble streets of New York, Washington, London, or even Oslo. This setting and the attention to detail that Nicholl brings to the story offered a unique experience for me, which sets it apart from a number of the books in the genre I have read to date. Even though the killer's identity was revealed halfway through, this did not detract from the story, as the ultimate game of cat and mouse ensued. The reader might have tried pushing Gravel and Rankin in one direction or yelled as the omnipotent narrative offered all the clues to solve the case, but this only added to the complexity of the novel. When all is said and done, the final half dozen chapters pull the story into a whirlwind of action and emotion as Nicholl seeks to offer twists and turns that enrich the story's dark aspects. Brilliantly executed and thoroughly entertaining, Nicholl uses some of the key aspects of his previous two novels while building this standalone novel to capture a whole new collection of fans.

Kudos, Mr. Nicholl for tapping into the darkest sides of the psychological thriller genre while also pushing the limits in order to get your point across. This is sure to be a great success and should pave the way for more writing of a similar vein.

Like/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:
<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

Sue says

PORTRAITS OF THE DEAD by John Nicholl, is a serial killer thriller that will chill you to the bone. I would have to say that after reading his previous two novels, ("White Is The Coldest Colour", his debut dark psychological thriller, and "When Evil Calls Your Name") this novel in my opinion is his best! I was so fortunate to receive an ARC of Portraits Of The Dead from the author. He has written three books now...all different but each on dealing with different issues, drawing on his experience as a police officer and child protection social worker. The setting for the novel is in rural West Wales where he lives.

When she awoke from a brutal attack, nineteen year old Emma thought she had just had a bad nightmare...but she soon realized she wasn't in familiar surroundings. No light, naked on a bed, confined to a small room-a "concrete box" and pain and blood around her mouth and nose. Where was she? What was going on? Should she SCREAM!

"There were no windows, not a single one, just four walls covered from floor to ceiling with garnish red-and-gold flock wallpaper, adorned with large black-and -white portraits of individual girls of about her age in various stages of undress, and a second door in the rear wall to the side of the bed, made of clear, polished and smear-free glass, through which she could see a white porcelain toilet."

And then she saw a video camera in the corner of the room, pointing at her bed!

And then a voice..."Welcome to your new home, my lovely. I hope you find the accommodation satisfactory." He would call her Venus 6 and she must respect him and refer to him as "master".

DI Gareth Gravel and DS Clive Rankin are assigned to investigate Emma's disappearance, a local nineteen-year-old university student who was abducted and imprisoned by a sadistic serial killer, who has already

tortured and killed five young women.

“We’ve got five bodies, all female, all of a similar height, all blonde, all minus their toes and fingers. The pathologist says it looks as if they were cut off whilst the girls were alive.”

Grav’s team must find this sick serial killer, by investigating every possible angle and motive.

This book is so well written, creepy and full of tension but not gory. I could not put this book down. The about half way through the book there is a major reveal ... one I never saw coming. The ending was another major twist...a cliff hanger! Now I can’t wait for book four!

I encourage everyone to read all three of his books, and you will see that he is one talented author. I expect great things of John Nicholl and I can’t wait to read his next novel. I will read anything by this author. He is that good!

Gary says

I was not aware of author John Nicholl prior to reading this book but was intrigued by the book description. To be honest I follow that many book series that the last thing I really wanted was to add another one. But after enjoying this opening novel to the DI Gravel series I have already read another and looking for more. I really enjoyed this book and I took to both the characters and the writing style of the author.

The lead character Detective Inspector Gravel is investigating the abduction and imprisonment of a local nineteen-year-old university student Emma Jones. She is taken by a sadistic serial killer, who has already tortured and killed at least five young women.

This is quite a dark subject and some might find it a little disturbing, but I found the book very well written and was left eager to read more books not only in this series but by the author himself. John Nicholl is an ex police officer, child protection social worker and lecturer and it is clear from his writing that he has experience and in-depth knowledge of his subject.

I am now aware of author John Nicholl and plan to read more of his books.

I would like to thank Net Galley and Bloodhound books for supplying a copy of this novel in exchange for an honest review.

Jean says

Creepy. C-R-E-E-P-Y. John Nicholl’s newest novel, *Portraits of the Dead*, features a twisted psychopath who truly made me shudder. Written in much the same style as his psychological thriller, *White Is the Coldest Colour*, this book features a miscreant who preys upon pretty young blond women.

When Emma awakens in total darkness, she is aware of her nakedness. Bruises. A bed not her own. A blinding bright light pierces the blackness and a man’s voice addresses her, calling her “Venus.” Venus – the goddess of love, beauty, sex, victory, and desire. He says she is Venus Number Six. What does this predator

want from her?

Portraits of the Dead is a cleverly and carefully crafted psychological thriller. I suppose it could also be considered a police procedural, although the detectives take a back seat to Emma and her captor. DI Gareth Gravel and DS Clive Rankin investigate, but really, it is Emma who steals the show. She shows why she is a stellar science student at the university with her rational thinking skills and calm demeanor. But can she outlast and outwit the masked man who demands to be called "Master"? Or will he be looking for Venus Number Seven?

As in his debut novel, Mr. Nicholl proves that he can create tension, as this book turned out to be incredibly hard to put down. The ending caught me totally off guard. I was STUNNED. I still haven't decided if I liked the finale, but it is what it is, and I give him credit for writing it the way he did. You'll have to read the book and make up your own mind.

I wish to thank Mr. John Nicholl for providing me with a copy of his book in exchange for my unbiased, honest review.

4 stars

Deanna says

My reviews can also be seen at: <https://deesradreadsandreviews.wordpress.com>

This is the second book that I've read by John Nicholl. I really enjoyed his first novel, "White is the Coldest Colour". The subject matter was difficult to read about but I felt like it was an important book that helped reinforce how careful we should be about who we trust, especially when it comes to those who are interacting with our children. The author previously worked in law enforcement and as a social worker so some of the book was based on things he had experienced in his career.

I haven't yet read the second book in the series. But when I came across "Portraits of the Dead", I thought it sounded like another good read involving a different kind of predator.

The book opens in 1998 in West Wales. Nineteen year old, Emma Jones awakens to what she hopes is an illusion. But the man coming towards her is not a figment of her imagination but a real life monster. A sadistic murderer who has already killed at least 5 other women. When she wakes again, she's not sure where she is, but she's badly beaten and terrified. She searches the windowless room, trying to find a way out. On the walls are large black and white portraits of barely dressed girls....and they all look like her.

She notices a video camera in the corner of the room. It's aimed right at her. Just as she wonders who's watching her she's jarred by a loud voice that fills the room...

"Welcome to your new home, my lovely. I hope you find the accommodation satisfactory."

The voice tells her he will refer to her as Venus Six. When she tries to correct him, to tell him her real name, he plunges the room into darkness playing a loud tape of women screaming. When he finally stops the tape he tells her again that her name is Venus and that Emma no longer exists. He tells her that she will pay a heavy price if she does not obey his every command. Emma decides her best course of action is to obey him and hope that she can find a way to escape. But this monster has so much more in store for his Venus and he has no intention of letting her go.

At first Detective Inspector Gravel isn't all that concerned when Anne Jones comes to his office to report that her nineteen-year-old daughter, Emma is missing. DI Gravel assumes that her daughter is probably with friends, sleeping after a night of partying. Mrs. Jones tells him that Emma is very dependable and that she has missed the deadline for an important essay due that morning. She would never jeopardize her future by missing that deadline. Something must have happened to her.

DI Gravel assures her that he will look into what has happened her daughter. But how long can Emma survive this madman's torture and depravity. Will she be able to hang on long enough to be rescued or to escape? Or will her captor tire of her and dispose of her before she gets that chance?

This was a compelling and VERY intense read. I did have a bit of a hard time with some of the dark and disturbing descriptions, but I could not stop reading. I had to know what was going to happen to Emma. The characters were well developed, especially Emma and her captor. I also liked the fact that DI Gravel and DS Clive Rankin were back from the previous novels. The story was gripping and suspenseful, though I found some parts dragged on a bit. I realize we sometimes have to suspend disbelief when reading fiction, but there were a few things that just didn't sit right with me.

All of that said, I did enjoy this novel, and I REALLY liked how it wrapped up. Normally I'm not a fan of cliff-hangers but I have to say I especially liked the twist at the end I honestly did not see that ending coming.

I am definitely looking forward to reading more from John Nicholl
