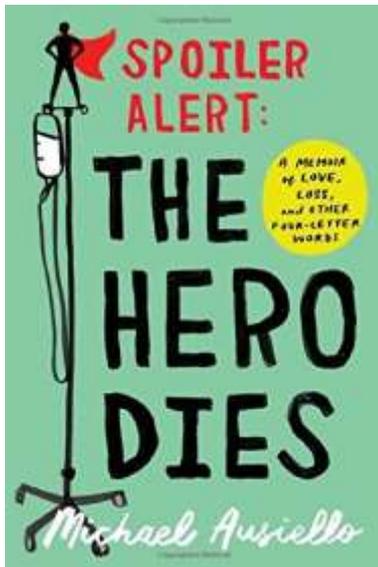


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BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



Spoiler alert: the hero dies. A memoir of love, loss and other four-letter words (2018)

Ausiello M.

New York: Atria Books, 2018.

320pp.

ISBN 9781501134968.

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In this book, the author, Michael Ausiello, writes an account of his husband's diagnosis, treatment and death from an aggressive neuroendocrine cancer. He has a warm and engaging writing style, and the reader is quickly drawn in to his life. The book records the men's first meeting, their developing relationship, their difficulties – that include infidelity, lies and general differences – and the fun that they have, living a hedonistic lifestyle. There is an amusing account of just before Kit 'comes out' to his mother. Michael must pretend that he is a casual friend popping round and hide the evidence of a gay relationship just before Kit's mother enters the room.

When Kit is diagnosed with neuroendocrine cancer, after a tumour is discovered in his rectum (and some associated nodules in his lungs and liver), treatment begins. The couple submit to the treatment, and do not make any lifestyle changes. Sadly, chemotherapy is unsuccessful, and although there is some improvement after radiotherapy, they are left in no doubt from the start of treatment that Kit only has about a year to live. They make the most of this year, going to some special places, although Kit's condition deteriorates quickly. Going to the toilet takes four hours, a process that one can only imagine. Despite this, the author maintains a positive and witty stance, and there is often laughter to be had in places where you would least imagine finding it. The last weeks of Kit's life are described in detail – the bedsores, his pain control, cognitive problems and colostomy surgery. This makes for very sad reading. It must be stressed that people with this condition have unique and often more positive experiences than those described in this book. After Kit's death, Michael describes dealing with the body, alongside a healthcare worker, removing clothes, colostomy bag, catheter and so on. He even manages to put Kit's shoes on the wrong feet – always a glimmer of humour at the time of despair. And later, there is the scattering of Kit's ashes in a river, along with the wedding rings.

I like the wittiness and the character of the author. He is very frank about their relationship, which contains infidelity, lies, passion and laughter. He is a very talented writer. He shows his devotion to his boyfriend (who later becomes his husband), never stinting on the chores that his caring role brings. He skips about, timewise, but it is always clear what is happening and how it fits in with the current situation he is focussing on. But people from the UK need to be aware of the differences between the UK and USA healthcare systems.

There is nothing I really dislike about this book. It is very sad, but the devotion shown to Kit by his husband is very moving, and the book is memorable for positive reasons, as well as the tragedy of Kit's illness and death. However, I would keep it away from anyone with a diagnosis of cancer of any sort. It describes the worst scenarios associated with cancer – as a fatal condition. The chemotherapy does not work at all and pain control becomes a major issue and is largely unsuccessful. Kit spends four excruciating hours going to the toilet – each time - he cannot sit down, and his painful death is described in detail. I worry about anyone with cancer reading I and thinking that this is what happens if you have a diagnosis of cancer.

**Former health professional working with people with head and neck cancer.
Friend. Former carer (66-75) (June 2019)**



The attractive cover of this book draws the reader in, but I found the whole thing difficult to read because of the style of writing. I could not finish it because I disliked the style of writing so much – it is too American and not my cup of tea. I do not, it would appear, do humour very well.

Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (August 2018)

Further information

Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

We're here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we're right there with you.

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

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