



[Apocrypha](#) by Peter Clayfield

Reviewed by [John Hutchinson](#) February 2012

A recent local addition to the North West's literary scene is a novel, **Apocrypha**, by local author, Peter Clayfield, if novel is the right description, for this is a disturbing and rather violent fantasy. In fact, it reads like a graphic novel or a novelised version of a computer game.

Apocrypha is really a science fiction novel and a thriller combined, set in the future after a catastrophic nuclear war has devastated the earth. Its central character, Damon Carter-Brown, is a young scientist who has discovered time travel whilst researching in America. Everything is going for him at the start of the novel. He is shown convincing a Senator to invest public money

into his research, is recently married to the delectable Val and a future teeming with success awaits him.

However, there is a shadow cast over the opening scenes of this book played out in the Mid-20th Century in the shape of Varkas, a fellow research scientist on the same project, brilliant but evil, serving a jail sentence for embezzling funds who escapes by murdering his guard and then plots vengeance on his former boss Damon.

The novel is full of scenes and language of violence and death and sex so that it feels like acting out a computer game in which the excitement drives the reader on, and the body count becomes incidental. This is the nub of whether the book reaches beyond mere entertainment into something more profound and searching.

Varkas returns to Damon's apartment, and brutally sexually assaults and murders Val, Damon's wife. Varkas then revisits the old workshop, finds that the time machine is now in a working condition and decides that his only escape is the future using the untried time machine. Damon and Quintino, Val's brother, set off in hot pursuit knowing they have bought a one-way time ticket to the future as the time machine will not be able to return them to the present.

All three are plunged into a world which has regressed into primitive survival with its bands of "salters", "fixers", "planters" and "prospectors" in an American landscape which is populated by mutants and "normal" human beings and all trappings of civilisation have been abandoned.

This is best read as a graphic novel – rapidly, skimming over some of the detail, not dwelling on the fate of various characters dispatched along the surface narrative of the novel but indulging the swift pace of events as they hit the reader.

There is a promise of redemption as the tale reaches its gory end, Varkas, the evil murderer

whose predatory instincts have enabled him to survive in this brutal and horrific world, reinvents himself as brother Joseph, the leader of a religious cult which takes off in the cities this brave old world as the novel is always trying to find some religious purpose beyond the awfulness of its bestial vision.

The restoration of electricity in the states where its use has been abandoned is an obvious symbol of a return to civilization which will control the marauding bands of Sunsail pirates, Rastafarian Bob Marley worshippers and sweetness and light will reign.

It does not convince – the overall taste left in the mouth from this novel is a nasty visceral taste of blood, horror and sex. One looks for character development, for some light beneath this tangle of darkness and there is nothing there.

Damon becomes completely obsessed with vengeance to the exclusion of everything else like a suicide bomber. Yet the struggle between Damon and Varkas presents an intriguing outcome in the attempt to gain redemption the reader can discover for themselves.

There is no redemption ultimately but death and the darkness and violence charted in the novel offer no consolation in the end. It is a nightmare scenario without hope, not the skull beneath the skin but the skull stripped of all its flesh.

Peter Clayfield is from Manchester, England. He has also lived in India, Canada and South Africa. Recently retired, his varied work career included spells as an electrician, soldier, publicity manager, marketing manager, freelance journalist, copywriter, magazine editor and publisher, café owner, pub landlord and sports club owner. Click on [Apocrypha](#) to purchase online from Strategic Book Group or on this

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