

Appalling, yet compelling

BOOK REVIEW

Dark Video
Peter Church
Umuzi

THIS is a difficult book to review mainly because I almost stopped reading it twice. After I pressed on past the two graphic rape and humiliation of women scenes that appalled me, the book became compelling.

Peter Church's first novel is about a group of students at the University of Cape Town who delve into the darker side of the human psyche. The main protagonist is Alistair, a golden boy from a wealthy family who can have any girl or any career he wants.

He meets Devon, an uber-intelligent computer geek who lives in a ramshackle digs. Sharing the house with Devon is Richard, another computer genius, and Johnny, an immoral rigger-bugger.

This unlikely group makes films for Carlos, a shady character in the United States who runs a highly secret company called Dark Video.

Carlos's very exclusive client base requires films with a difference. Porn is not enough for these rich and jaded customers. They want the real thing. The novel opens with the students filming the abject humiliation of a girl running through Newlands Forest.

The inevitable happens and some of the students become addicted to the rush of making films of real abuses of people. And there's always one person who goes too far.

The scenes of brutality are written with the explicitness of hardcore porn. It's uncomfortable to read such scenes and many people will read the book for those scenes alone. Church justifies his explicitness by making Alistair the moral one who becomes uncomfortable with the extremes the group is headed towards.

The final denouement was morally satisfying but I'm not sure I want to recommend a book in which women are so graphically abused.

Janet van Eeden

