



■ Peter Church, author of Dark Video, relaxes in his Constantia home.

DARK VIDEO SET IN THE CAPE

Author's thrilling debut

KAREN WATKINS

Sex in a shopping mall restroom, a mini bus flipping spectacularly on its roof, a raunchy table dance in a strip club – Dark Video has all the ingredients to make it a best-selling thriller.

But what is more, the story is set in familiar surroundings, taking readers from Newlands Forest to a dusty Karoo town and the limestone cliffs of Arniston.

While Dark Video was being delivered to bookshops, Constantia author Peter Church, 45, talked to the Tatler about his first published book.

Peter graduated from UCT with honours in computer science. After many years in the industry he stopped working 18 months ago to try his hand at writing. "It's important to take occasional breaks in life and experi-

ment with something completely different," said Peter.

He wrote the book in four months, having had the story idea since university days. Although Peter has no formal training in writing he said he would be lost without "The elements of style", a book by William Strunk and EB White.

He talked of his writing schedule – or lack thereof. "I tend to write visions of pieces of the book," he said, adding that he goes to bed with the characters. He jots down ideas as and when they come to him, such as when driving or in the early hours of morning.

"Writing has made me more observant. I notice things that I never did before, things that normal people don't see, although my wife wouldn't agree," he said with a laugh.

And, said Peter, he goes out to see how people react in places and situations that he wanted to use in his book.

Describing Dark Video, Peter said, "Dark Video is not a crime novel. And it will appeal to men and women."

But his dream is for students to read it, although he hints about an age restriction.

"My objective was to entertain. The characters are wealthy, good-looking, glamorous, living a hedonistic lifestyle. It's pure escapism."

The main character is Alistair Morgan, a student at UCT, someone who has it all – wealth, good looks, charm and the hottest girls on campus. He is the kind of bad boy that women know they shouldn't love and whom men envy. As the fast-paced, raunchy story proceeds, Alistair's privileged lifestyle is turned upside down as he is lured deeper and deeper into the sinister online world, where reality blurs and morals unravel.

"It's a book that charts the descent, act by act, in to a swirling world of amorality, until the way back is lost," said Tim Richman of Struik.

"Think of Stephen King's Apt Pupil, or of Lord of the Flies played out underneath Rhodes Memorial."

Next to Peter's bed is Mike Nicol's Payback and South African, currently living in Australia, Peter Temple's Evil in the Day, which he has just finished.

"If I ever want to read a feel-good book I reach for one of Sue Townsend's Adrian Mole diaries. I can read them over and over again."

In his spare time Peter surfs with his sons Christopher, 16, and Ross, 11. He also runs and walks on the Constantia Greenbelts, watches sport and enjoys a good party with friends. In fact, Peter arranged a book launch at Maverick's for his male friends, while for the women there was a launch at Buitenwerwaching, "because Alistair and I enjoy Constantia Valley wines."

He also enjoys spending time with his daughter Megan, 12, and wife Paula, "despite her saying that she wishes I was back at work".

● Read the first chapter on www.darkvideo.com
Dark Video is published by Two Dogs, an imprint of Struik.

