

Racy, dark thriller a page turner

BITTER PILL by Peter Church. (Mercury):
Reviewed by Samantha Smith

USING social media to distribute illegal pornography and other nefarious material is not a new phenomenon. This edgy thriller brings the scourge to life in terrifyingly realistic detail – all on our doorstep in the Mother City of Cape Town.

South African author Peter Church is making a name for himself as a successful novelist and the dark and racy *Bitter Pill* is a worthy follow-up to his debut, *Dark Video*.

The book's main character is Robbie Cullen, a popular, clean-cut student at UCT and the son of Eastern Cape dairy farmers.

When he comes to the aid of the beautiful and mysterious Fallon at a city nightclub, he unwittingly gets embroiled in a sordid international ring of criminals who use unscrupulous barmen to ply young women – most of them students – with the date rape drug Rohypnol.

The incapacitated victims are then delivered to rich and powerful men in Cape Town, who rape them before dumping them back near the place they were abducted from.

Because Rohypnol leaves the system so quickly and the women have no actual recollection of what happened to them – just a strong suspicion they have been violated – there's little police can do.

At the head of this criminal ring is Carlos de Palma, the founder of Dark Video, which supplies

(for a hefty price) its elite, international group of depraved, thrill-seeking members with any kind of online video footage they want, including footage of drugged-up young women being raped.

De Palma's immense wealth and freedom rely entirely on a fortress of cutting-edge IT security that keeps his identity, and that of his perverted clients, secret.

One such client is wealthy and somewhat demented Cape Town businessman Julian Lynch, whose obsession with a young student threatens to expose De Palma's lucrative enterprise.

As an increasingly paranoid De Palma begins putting pressure on his operatives in a bid to protect his interests and eliminate his competitors, Cullen is thrust into a life or death situation in which he doesn't know who to trust or turn to.

Bitter Pill is a topical tale that highlights the very real dangers young women face in today's society.

But more to the point, Church – a former IT expert – has produced a page-turner with maximum readability that will have you hooked until the last page.

