

THE VAGRANT BY PETER NEWMAN



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Review

★★★★★ 'For fans of classic science-fiction literature, this is a must-read.' – SciFi Now

★★★★ 'Come visit this brilliantly imaginative land of winged swords and broken solar cells.' – SFX

'The Vagrant is a joy to read: an original and engrossing world, a strong story and a protagonist who is intensely charismatic despite – or because of – his silence. Newman's debut is written with confidence, flair and imagination, bringing his dark world to marvellously macabre life'

Adrian Tchaikovsky, Author of Shadows of the Apt series

'A stunning and ambitious debut novel set in a unique and imaginative world where the only hope rests on the capacity of human beings to love' Melinda M. Snodgrass

About the Author

Peter Newman lives in Somerset with his wife and son. Growing up in and around London, Peter studied Drama and Education at the Central School of Speech and Drama, going on to work as a secondary school drama teacher. He now works as a trainer and Firewalking Instructor. He sometimes pretends to be a butler for the Tea and Jeopardy podcast, which he co-writes, and which has been shortlisted for a Hugo Award.

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The Vagrant is his name. He has no other.

Years have passed since humanity's destruction emerged from the Breach.

Friendless and alone he walks across a desolate, war-torn landscape.

As each day passes the world tumbles further into depravity, bent and twisted by the new order, corrupted by the Usurper, the enemy, and his infernal horde.

His purpose is to reach the Shining City, last bastion of the human race, and deliver the only weapon that may make a difference in the ongoing war.

What little hope remains is dying. Abandoned by its leader, The Seven, and its heroes, The Seraph Knights, the last defences of a once great civilisation are crumbling into dust.

But the Shining City is far away and the world is a very dangerous place.

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Most helpful customer reviews

46 of 52 people found the following review helpful.

Actions Speak Louder than Words

By TOMunro

I bought this book at a book signing in the UK and am re-posting my review of it from the amazon.co.uk site here.

I note that the price tag on the e-book has put people off and I have no brief to bat for Harper Collins, on that. It does seem a bit steep. But I did enjoy the book and, seeing that a couple of reviews seem to be comments just on the price, I thought I'd add one that was based on having read the book.

At the Grim Gathering, Peter gave a short summary of his book "A one parent family in a post-demonic apocalypse." Look closely at the exquisite cover and you will see the key elements in this tale. A ragged man with a sword in one hand and a baby in the other walking a street of ruined buildings above a title set out in neon lights. Before the first page is turned, the book is challenging expectations.

I did not find it so plot driven as Starborn was. There is a story line, and a back-story line. By the end the latter has converged pleasingly on the former to explain all things that need explaining. But it is the spare writing, and the exoticness of the world building that carried me along.

In some ways it reminded me of the Gunslinger by Stephen King and its iconic mental image of an enigmatic hero on an unexplained journey through a blasted land. This is a world not so much stalked as comprehensively mugged by disaster on an epic scale. On a long walk the protagonist acquires a staggering variety of both allies and enemies.

However, it is more complete and self-contained than the first instalment of the Dark Tower series. At the Grim Gathering, the author said he always had a beginning and an end in mind and a misty patch inbetween where pretty much anything could happen. That overarching certainty guides the Vagrant's footsteps and reassures the reader that there is purpose in the present and resolution in the future.

The world building is broad and imaginative, in that not just one but two worlds are conjured up before the reader. There is the world that was. A world destroyed, the advanced civilisation where ships sailed in the sky and tanks like armoured trains went to war with demons, where knights still wielded swords in harmony and the mysterious power of the Seven, with their great champion Gamma, stood ready and on ceaseless and unchanging watch against invasion from the Breach.

Then there is the world that is. A world infested with entities which enslave the humans from without and within. Creatures of chaos flood north across a now benighted continent. Their power is constrained only by infighting between their factions and the necessity of finding ways to shield themselves from the toxic environment where they have won victory. These demons are unlike any others, creatures of essence and desire, rather than corporeal entities. More an infection than an invasion, they corrupt as much as conquer. A taint stains the land and its people.

My other reference point is a 1981 film Mad Max 2, the (original) road warrior. There is that atmospheric

journey through a shattered civilisation in which little islands of humanity strive to eke out some shadow of their former existence. Broken technology is cannibalised by desperate people as the Vagrant travels North past a barren landscape of twisted plastic and metal on a mission both personal and professional.

The people have been crushed by defeat and by taint. Things that were, or could have been human, have been corrupted beyond recognition. But still sparks of humanity and honour reside in the unlikeliest of places and can be kindled anew in a world where there is hope for all, and tears for those that fall.

The story is told in the present tense, even the backstory flashbacks. It is an approach still unusual to my old eyes. However, I saw it done to great effect in "The Girl With All The Gifts," and here - as there - the present tense narrative lends an edgy uncertainty as we follow our hero through a tale augmented with a variety of minor points of view (including a goat's uncomplicated eye).

The writing is unobtrusively good. Like Mark Lawrence's writing, Peter Newman's avoids battering you with purple prose, or savouring its cleverness in convoluted gymnastics of vocabulary. But open a page at random and you will find lines that make you nod in appreciation. "mist leaking in wheezy clouds" "Busy clots of people move about"

The final departure from convention, or perhaps the first is in the protagonist's voice. For Newman has determined that for the Vagrant, actions must perforce, speak louder than words.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

enjoyed the journey a great deal

By Sneaky Burrito

This book was just my style. I hate excessive explanation and description and background information, and far too often, fantasy is clogged with these. But here, you're thrown into the middle of events. Things are mentioned in asides about a taint, limb grafts, etc., and at first you're just along for the ride, but enough of these details emerge over time to paint a more complete picture of this book's society. I have heard Mr. Newman's prose compared to Glen Cook's, and I think if you like Glen Cook's writing, you will enjoy this book.

The atmosphere is bleak and the main character, the Vagrant, matches it. He has a singular purpose -- journeying with a baby to a city that has not fallen to the rot and corruption known in the rest of the world. He allows people to join him on his journey, but they don't always make it very far. When they betray him, become dangerous to him and/or the baby, are not strong enough to go on, or cannot be saved without sacrificing himself, he kills them or allows them to be killed. He is absolutely not trusting when it comes to the baby's welfare.

At the first instance of a relatively innocent person dying, I was taken aback. But just because the Vagrant allowed this to happen, doesn't mean it is easy for him. And, as the book goes on, we learn some of what led him to be this way (through a series of flashbacks). Further, there is a kind of honor in at least some of his actions that you come to appreciate as you approach the end of the book.

One thing that I have not mentioned yet is that the Vagrant is mute. You might think that this would make for an uninteresting book, but quite the opposite is true. When he is traveling with the baby, there is no need for speech. However, the Vagrant's actions speak loudly both in his interactions with the baby and with others. And he does acquire a mouthpiece of sorts as the book goes on. The book still moves along, even without much dialogue, or with one-sided dialogue from other characters.

I was not as happy with the ending -- it seemed anticlimactic after the journey leading up to it. I hesitate to say more because to do so would be to drop some pretty major spoilers. There was also one aspect of the main character I am still puzzled by, but seeing as the world outside of the Vagrant's destination is still pretty messed up, there is definitely room for sequels where perhaps the reason for that aspect will be revealed.

I won't say this type of book hasn't been done before. I can think of a half dozen parallels off the top of my head. But the particular combination of details here kept my interest, I thought the pacing was appropriate, and I liked the terse prose. (I also loved the goat...) I will definitely read more from Peter Newman.

11 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

A great tale of a lone knight, a baby, and a goat

By D. Schwent

A sword-wielding mute, a baby, and a goat cross a post-apocalyptic landscape, heading for the Shining City. But will they reach their destination before the demonic horde on their trail overtakes them?

After reading about this book on Chuck Wendig's blog, I couldn't wait to dig in. However, at the time, Harper Voyager wanted \$20 for the e-book. Since everyone knows that's a steaming pile, I held off until I found a new hardcover and I'm quite pleased with my treeware purchase.

The story of the last of the Seraph Knights is quite good, though on the surface doesn't look all that original. At first glance, it reminded me of Jay Posey's *Three* and Peter Brett's *The Warded Man*, with heavy doses of *The Gunslinger*. However, *The Vagrant* kicked me in the junk.

The way the story unfolds is masterful. You don't notice how much of the text in a lot of novels is dialogue until you come across a book where the three lead characters don't speak. As a result, it seemed like I wasn't making any progress in the book a lot of the time. The reading experience was a rewarding one, though.

Peter Newman's writing was superb and having to infer the Vagrant's nature and motives from his actions elevated the reading experience quite a bit. I never thought I'd get this attached to a nameless baby and a goat. The worldbuilding was interesting, mostly through the dialogue of the characters around the Vagrant and his gang. There were some infodumps in the form of flashbacks but they were easily digestible.

I don't really have anything bad to say about this book. It's a more difficult read than most fantasy books out there but it's also more rewarding. Four out of five stars.

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