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The Apothecary

Marshall Chamberlain

The Grace Publishing Group

428 Childers St. #24550, Pensacola, FL 32534

ISBN: 978-0692447963

www.gracepublishing.org www.marshallchamberlain.com

There are thrillers and then there are 'techno-thrillers'. *The Apothecary* is the latter, even though the word conjures up the image of old magic and old potions. Readers with an interest in science gone awry are the audience of techno-thrillers, which often rely on scientific disasters or the injection of political power struggles into the scientific process or discovery - and this is where *The Apothecary* gets really interesting.

In its world, a stressed project director of a top-secret nanotechnology experiment vanishes, along with test products that can affect human behavior. When murders begin to occur, all pointing to the vanished scientist and his secret government project, that's when the 'thriller' part enters, blending healthy doses of murder mystery, high-level thinking, and pending disaster.

The process is complicated: no doubt about it. *The Apothecary's* plot offers many satisfying twists and turns that will leave more casual mystery readers in the dust, but will delight those who enjoy a cat-and-mouse game between an elusive and dangerous adversary and a political process that can't control its own experiments.

An emotionally disturbed scientist, with the clever savvy of a predator, pairs with demented insights that lend meaning and understanding to his twisted character motivations (something too often left out of techno-thrillers): "*Fantasies often overwhelmed his attention, sometimes for several minutes at a time. A reoccurring and distracting picture would form in his mind...of a knight bringing greater good to mankind, a savior for the addictions of the weak, accompanied by a feeling of virtuosity.*"

Street deals and drugs, fiascos and undercover labs, subterfuge, break-ins, high technology, and a story line that rises to the top of the political food chain to involve the President of the United

States: these are all hallmark precursors of simmering catastrophe that work on many levels (psychological suspense paired with mystery, intrigue, and political confrontation) to immerse readers in a gripping thriller read that's satisfyingly hard to put down.