



Pilgrimage to Hell

James Axler

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On a crisp January day, a Presidential inauguration day, a one-megaton blast ripped through the Soviet embassy in Washington, D.C. Subsequent explosions around the globe changed the face and the shape of the earth forever. Out of the ruins emerged Deathlands, a world that conspired against survival. In the blasted heart of the new America, a group of men and women plan desperately to escape the eerie wastes and mutated life forms of their nuclear hell. Three warriors the tough, intelligent Ryan Cawdor, an enigmatic beauty called Krysty Wroth, and the armorer J. B. Dix set out on a harrowing journey to find a rumored enclave high in the mountains. Their aim: to unlock the secrets of prewar scientific experiments that could hold the answer to survival in the Deathlands of the future.

Pilgrimage to Hell Details

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Author : James Axler

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From Reader Review Pilgrimage to Hell for online ebook

Oliver Clarke says

This is far from perfect, but there's a lot to like about it and I have to say it exceeded my expectations. It's the first of a long series of novels set in a post apocalyptic America and started in the 1980s. That sentence probably tells you a lot of what you need to know and the book delivers the extreme violence and despair you'd expect, but there's an inventiveness and playfulness to the storytelling that lifts it enough to make it a fun and satisfying read.

Jason King says

Very similar story to the previous book (Encounter), so much so that it was easy to feel like parts were recycled.

Fantasy Literature says

Pilgrimage to Hell is the first book in the long running Deathlands series. There are 100 volumes of Deathlands, written by 12 different authors under the house name James Axler. Pilgrimage to Hell was started by Christopher Lowder under the pen name Jack Adrian, but Lowder became ill and Laurence James stepped in to finish it under the penname James Axler. Pilgrimage to Hell is the one that started it all, and I've waited a long time to be able to read it.

Life as we know it was obliterated in a nuclear apocalypse in 2001. Pilgrimage to Hell takes place several generations after the nukes destroyed civilization. Ryan Cowdar and Krysty Wroth are the protagonists, though there is an array of supporting characters... [Read More](#): <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/reviews/pilgrimage-to-hell/>

Robert says

I listen to a lot of audiobooks whilst at work to pass the time and i come across the Deathlands series by chance. I have read 88 of these buggers now via the Graphic Audio versions. Unlike your usual audiobooks Graphic Audio are fully casted with sound effects etc.

Being a fan of Apocalyptic novels i picked up Deathlands without realizing there are almost 100 of the buggers. Since there are so many of them i don't see the point in writing reviews for them all.

Deathlands set almost 100 years after nuclear apocalypse you are introduced to a set general anticipated scenarios from post apocalypse situations - Traders, Survivors, Cannibals, Mutations, Cold hearts and general bad guys with insane lusts for power. Groups come together to form "Ville's" the only form of civilization and these villes are controlled for most part by ruthless insane barons, who always have 'sec men' to protect the ville. Some villes are welcoming but most usually end up with the group of survivors blasting their way out. Some of the books can be really cheesy, but because the characters grown on my right at the

start i am happy to overlook the cheese factor of some of the later novels. But then some of the later novels are as good as the first few.

What i like about these deathlands books the most is the technology that is hidden away for 100 years untouched by only a select number of characters. The group of survivors having rescued an old man that appears to know much about the past with his help come across a "Redoubt" In this redoubt they find a matter trans gateway that transfers matter across the country to various other underground redoubts.

Sometimes these redoubts are built into the side of mountains, or in the desert. Often these redoubts house a selection of weaponry, ammunition, food supplies and sometimes dark technology that hints at the dark past of what was the cause of the nuclear apocalypse. Outlanders - A sequel to the Deathlands series focuses deeper into the technology and the cause of the end of the world, a series that is also worth checking out

Jim says

This has been recommended to me several times, but I didn't think it was my cup of tea. I happened to stumble on this abridged audio version at my library, so I thought I'd give it a try.

I think I read this or one of the books years ago, but I'm not sure. I get it confused with Jerry Ahern's Survivalist series (Total War) & possibly some others from the 70s. These are guy action porn that seemed to litter the landscape, so were handy to read when nothing else was at hand. I never cared for them much, though.

Like the Executioner series (Mac Bolan) they rely on a strong, driven protagonist who kills all the bad guys with lots of different weapons. One of the most irritating habits of the writing is to describe just the gun in great detail (.45 caliber Heckler & Koch HK45 with a blah blah blah & a this that & the other thing plus a so & so scope with x, y, & z) almost every time it is mentioned & then use the damn thing like a club. They also seem to have an endless supply of good-guy bullets plus plenty of other lethal devices until they should walk bowlegged.

Anyway, this book was pretty good as an abridged audio. I got the gist of the story without being too turned off. The plot was fairly stupid & showed up more since it wasn't hidden by the detail, but it was kind of fun & had some interesting points. For instance, the women are strong & well done. There were a lot of cool toys, nasty bad guys, & heroic good guys/girls. Some even died. While traditional races were equal, all muties were bad... well, almost. There is a slightly interesting twist there that will be exploited in later books I assume. It was also pretty gritty, which I like.

I can't recommend this series. I prefer the Destroyer series which made fun of the Executioner, James Bond, Doc Savage, & other such books plus the politics of the day. The Horse Clan series is set in a post apocalyptic world created by nuclear war like this series & far more interesting to me.

uh8myzen says

I have to say that I am torn about this book, because while enjoyed the story and the idea, I would be lying if I tried to say it wasn't cheesy as hell. But I like post-apocalyptic novels, and if I'm being honest, I'll likely read at least a few of the others in the series simply because of my love for said subject matter. However, if it were about anything else (and I read books from all genres) I would never have finished it. If you don't like

action or post-apocalyptic stories, you may have a hard time with it. Sort of a B movie of books, and my fourth star is there to reflect my interest in the subject matter, not the quality of the writing. Basically, if you like the subject matter or action with a ton of gun fighting and plenty of carnage, you just might get a kick out of this, but if you're looking for good writing or depth of any kind, this is definitely not for you.

_ says

Overall, a mediocre plus read. Slow starting to me. Opening scene and characters felt cliched, probably because it's been so many years since the book was written. Unfortunately, I knew what was going to happen the whole time, it was just a matter of getting there. The bit of mystery that stayed unresolved and kept being hinted at, was the only thing that kept me interested. I was surprised by the ending though. It made the possibilities for the continued story seem more worthy of my time to find out about. I will probably read the next one to see how the series evolves. I like a good series, and there are tons of books in this one, so I'm not ready to write it off just yet.

Ana Mardoll says

Deathlands 1: Pilgrimage to Hell / 0373625014

I'm a fan of the Deathlands series, although I can't quite put my finger on why. They're pretty much gun-'n'-torture fantasies that take place in an apocalyptic America where might makes right and men are real men and women are real women and death is always lying just around the corner. Not the sort of thing I usually eat up, but the setup is so fascinating that I can't quite look away -- each book is a very careful variation on the same themes and it's delightful to see what the bevy of authors who write these books will come up with next. (I've heard them described as popcorn -- no nutritional value whatsoever, but you can't stop eating! Er, reading!)

I recently decided to re-read my Deathlands novels, so I've been going through in order. "Pilgrimage to Hell" is the first book in the series, and... it could be better. The first 30 novels of the series are credited to Laurence James as the author, except for this one who is co-credited with Jack Adrian, and I think Adrian's writing style differs strongly from the clean sharp prose that characterizes James' novels in the series. "Pilgrimage to Hell" seems to be written with a very limited budget for periods; every sentence seems to stretch on for miles until you arrive gasping at the end, trying to suss out what the author is trying to convey. The prologue is especially guilty of this: I'm sure the intricate details of how the Cold War ruined the entire planet was very fascinating at one time, but whew, it comes across as a bit of overkill now.

Unfortunately, if you're going to get the world-building setup and character backstories, you'll have to read "Pilgrimage to Hell" before moving on to the better-paced novels in the series, so I do recommend it for new fans, but with the understanding that the series definitely picks up after this first book. So let's talk about the content.

"Pilgrimage to Hell" is a rather good series starter, plot-wise. We're introduced to the concept of Deathlands (an apocalyptic America) and the main characters who will define the series as a whole: the Trader, an older man who has made a name for himself as a traveling merchant; Ryan Cawdor, a one-eyed security officer who leads the Trader's convoys; J.B. Dix, an unassuming man with an intense love for guns and laconic wit;

Krysty Wroth, a red-haired mutant with supernatural strength; and Doc Tanner, an old-fashioned gentleman who belongs to a time before the apocalypse. A series of well-timed coincidences and betrayals throw the group together and they leave the safety of the convoy in order to explore the entirety of Deathlands, searching for a place of peace where they can live happily and safe all their days.

If Deathlands books had movie ratings, they would all be rated R or higher, and "Pilgrimage to Hell" is no exception. This book contains discussions of rape, sexual sadism, bestiality, violence, slavery, torture, and lots and lots of guns and death. Pretty much every possible Trigger Warning is contained in this book alone, and while normally I would find all this darkness overwhelming in a book, there's still somehow a lightness of tone over everything that makes it easier to read -- maybe because we know that nothing will ever truly phase the main characters.

If you're interested in reading the Deathlands series, I almost recommend starting with Book 2 in the series, "Red Holocaust", and working back to this one if you like that one enough to keep going. If you don't like "Red Holocaust", you won't like "Pilgrimage to Hell", but if you **do** like "Red Holocaust", you'll want to come back and pick up the pieces you missed.

~ Ana Mardoll

Cherie says

My ratings system is as follows. One star is GOOD. The book is entertaining, easy to read and you don't want to stop reading because something about the book is compelling you not to. Two stars is GREAT! This time the story is not only entertaining, but highly creative, unique, easy to read and hard to put down. Three stars is EXCELLENT. Here the book has all aspects of one and two stars, but now the book is thought and emotionally provoking. Four is AWESOME. This is the read that is not only creative, original and emotionally and utterly captivating, but you are overwhelmed at how talented and skilled the author is in telling you their story. Literary brilliance. Five is PHENOMENAL. This is the book that has all the components of the previous four ratings but leaves that lasting impression. It's the book that changes dramatically your point of view and your interpretation of experiences you or others around you endure.

Jason says

My brother Scott bought a few Deathlands novels that I remember while growing up. By the time I was a teenager only one, "Ice and Fire" was still around. I read it and liked it, and a lot of the characters and concepts stuck with me over the years, but it was only recently I decided to try and get into the "trucker series" (these books and audiotapes seem to always be for sale at truck stops).

SUMMARY

One hundred years after a devastating nuclear war, what is left of the United States is known as the "Deathlands". Scattered human populations (usually called "baronies") struggle to survive amidst mutant humans and animals, cannibals, renegades, and a lethal environment.

Ryan Cawdor is the second-in-command to Trader, a powerful nomad who has prospered (and brought a

degree of stability) by discovering ancient caches of weapons, ammunition, fuel, and vehicles. On a fateful delivery trip to a petty dictatorship called Mocsin (somewhere in what was Montana), Ryan meets a beautiful woman named Krysty Wroth and learns that a great secret, one that will change the course of his life, is to be found in a forbidden zone known only as "the Darks".

OVERALL: 3 out of 5

I was surprised at how much I enjoyed this book. I recently tried to read an old Mack Bolan book (usually sold alongside torrid romances on supermarket racks around the country) and I had to put it down.

"Deathlands" succeeds by introducing interesting characters in an interesting environment. That's enough to keep things going even when the story is disjointed.

Ryan Cawdor is also an interesting protagonist. He has some qualities of the anti-hero, but he is also brave, capable, gallant, and willing to sacrifice himself for those he cares for (even though he talks and thinks a good talk about being a self-preserving survivor). In this first book the reader gets to see nearly every side of him, including a particularly harrowing scene in which he is held down to watch the brutal torture of a person he has only recently met. Ryan does not handle it stoically, but is reduced to screaming through a gag to indicate his willingness to cooperate. This is not cowardice or weakness, but a true nobility of spirit that makes Ryan stand out against most of the so-called "heroes" in many action novels.

RATINGS BY CATEGORY

CHARACTERS: 4 out of 5

All of the characters stand out in their ways. Ryan Cawdor is at once both gallant and a survivor, a man with a mysterious past and yet making no real attempt to conceal it among friends. Trader is a grizzled veteran of the Deathlands, intelligent and experienced yet uneducated, and with plenty of baggage after a long and danger-filled life.

If the heroes are established, the villains take a backseat. A pleasant mythos is built up around the warlord of Mocsin, Jordan Teague, but the real villain is his security chief, Cort Strasser. Unfortunately, any other villains are just mindless thugs (and are generally described as such).

PACE: 3 out of 5

This book moves at a good speed, but the problem is that the story is somewhat disjointed.

STORY: 3 out of 5

I like the story in this book, but it is quite disjointed. Many questions are provided to which there are no answers (those come in later books). The "climax" seems to occur about 3/4 of the way in, the ending feels meandering, and the scope of the final discovery feels stunted.

Survival and death in a post-apocalyptic environment is nearly always fun though, and these books (starting with this one) really continues and builds upon the concepts that began with the "Mad Max" movies and later evolved into the "Fallout" video games.

DIALOGUE: 2 out of 5

Most of the dialogue is well enough and clear, but the various post-apocalyptic curses are laughable.

Characters growl out things like "Burn it down" or "I couldn't give a nuke"; everything is oriented to the world-changing event of a hundred years ago. I think better and more natural profanities could be invented though.

As much as I like Ryan Cawdor, he switches between a casual lingo with incomplete words and sentences to a proper English gentleman who never uses contractions.

STYLE/TECHNICAL: 3 out of 5

I think this book was well written, but the disjointed factors are almost as apparent in the technical execution as they are in the story. It's not obvious at first that "Jack Adrian" is two different writers, but I can see where their writing styles differed and each pursued plots and characters they preferred.

Joe Stamber says

This was my first audio book with sound affects to accompany the narrative, and I wasn't sure what to make of it at first. The violent PA setting is ideal for this sort of treatment, with gunshots, explosions, shouting, screaming and the rest. However, I was pleased to be on the motorway and out of earshot when I hit a sex scene... The "Graphic Audio" treatment means that Pilgrimage to Hell comes across as more of a play than a narration, and overall I liked it.

As other reviewers have mentioned, the style is pretty cheesy, with square jawed men (and women, to be fair) toting their impressive weapons as the descendants of the apocalypse survivors battle it out for supremacy 100 years after the earth changing events. Like an old B movie with a low budget and dodgy acting, it's difficult not to enjoy this slice of cheddar.

Of course, there are a few gripes otherwise Pilgrimage to Hell wouldn't be trudging off with only a 3 star rating. When there are no relevant sound effects to blast out, sometimes terrible music is played instead. This almost drowns out the narrative and is unnecessary and annoying. I realise that there are around a 100 sequels, but the ending sucked. And I know it comes with the territory, but the endless supply of Get Out of Jail Free cards is a bit too convenient at times. With all this in mind, Pilgrimage to Hell earns its 3 stars and I'm sure I'll be trying a few of the sequels.

Nick says

One of the reasons I rate this book so highly is because I was expecting so little from it, and it is very rare that I have been so completely surprised.

On one level, it contained all of the elements I would expect from a post-nuclear-holocaust-survivalist-novel, lots of focus on gun models (which mean nothing to me), scaly flesh-eating mutants, slowly awakening psionic powers in the more "acceptable" mutants, bands of killers roaming the badlands, baronies run by cruel, insane gang leaders, all the tropes of the genre. This is pretty much what I expected.

What I didn't expect was a well crafted, tightly plotted action adventure taking place in a fully realised post apocalyptic world. I didn't expect the author to be able to portray such a believable set of characters, who somehow retain a glimmer of nobility underneath the vicious, dog-eat-dog attitude they have had to learn simply to survive.

What I most of all didn't expect was to finish this book, which ends on a cliff-hanger with the main driver for the next hundred books already in place, immediately thinking - pass me the next one, that was incredible!

This book is, in my opinion, a shining example of why pulp should never be written off as pap.

Crowinator says

My dad is a fan of this classic 80s pulp science fiction series about life after worldwide nuclear apocalypse (think if Matthew Broderick did not succeed in preventing global thermonuclear war at the end of *War Games*) and he gave me the first two books to read. It's a lot of fun if you go into with the right expectations, and by that I mean, no expectations of quality writing but lots of gore and explosions and weaponry and devastated landscapes and mutated creatures and a series of hard-bitten testosterone-fueled men who are either outright villains or antiheroes just trying to survive. They could all be played by Arnold Schwarzenegger as Dutch and Sly Stallone as Rambo. Oh, and one hot outrageously sexualized chick who can hold her own with the menfolk but still, of course, is repeatedly threatened with sexual violence throughout the course of the book. I won't even get started on the role of women in this story.

OK, let's be honest: these are not good novels. Even in the 80s, they were not good novels. Still, there was something nostalgic about reading this for me, because it reminded me of all the time I spent in the 80s and early 90s reading RPG-related novels and all the other serialized novels, like the *Thieves World* stories and another shared-world series (that I can't remember the title of) that involved magical races returning in this technology-heavy future, so there were elves who could hack computers with chips in their brains and so on. (If any of you reading this know what I'm talking about, tell me!) And there are some really cool, creative details to the world-building and mutations that no amount of bad, melodramatic purple prose can mask, and despite myself there were a couple of times where I really wanted to know what was going to happen, especially since it ended in exactly the right place. I would never seek out and read the 100+ novels in this series (many hard to find these days), but I'll skim through the start of the second just to see what happens to Ryan and Krysty (yes, I know, I know).

Justin says

This is the first book in a long running series called Deathlands. The series is written by several authors writing under the pen name James Axler. This is the one that started it all, and I've waited a long time to be able to read it. I enjoy a good literary art piece as much as the next book nerd, but sometimes the old gray matter needs a break...well here it is. I've been looking for a good action Mad Max esque post-apocalyptic book for quite some time. A literary masterpiece this most certainly isn't. It is exactly as one would expect it to be. Life as we know it was obliterated in a nuclear apocalypse in 2001. Pilgrimage is several generations after the nuke. Ryan Cowdar and Krysty Wroth are the main protagonists with an array of supporting characters. Ryan is a mysterious bad ass with an eye patch, Krysty is a tall big boobed combat trained red headed beauty. Together with their team of warrior merchants they take on the ruthless baron of a "Plague

Pit" town. There is lots of bloody action, over the top characters, with a bawdy and macabre humor tossed in. If there were a template to be made for "Books for Dudes" this would be the mold to start with. The men are manly, the women are beautiful. Sex is brief and very "Dude-centric". It was the first time I'd seen the word "pumping" used to describe the act of intercourse. Mutants (Muties) and Cannibals (Cannies) are the common foe in the Deathlands. This book is awesome for the very same reasons Chuck Norris, Rambo, and demolition derby's are awesome.

John Davies says

I bought this book when it originally came out, and sold it some time later along with the other volumes I had up to then. Now, I regret selling them, as this was an interesting take on a post-apocalyptic world.

A friend recently gave me a whole load of ebooks, and much to my surprise, these books are in there, so I look forward to re-reading them at my leisure, and seeing what happened after I stopped buying them. Someone told me the series lasted for over 30 volumes, with a spinoff series as well.

The hero is an ex-soldier in a post apocalyptic world who stumbles upon a secret base of some kind. He and his companions explore and they step through a "gate" and discover they have travelled 100s of kilometres from where they were.

Now they set out to try and discover the secret of the "gates" and how to control them.
