



The Casualties

Nick Holdstock

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In the vein of *The Leftovers*, a man recounts the final weeks of his neighborhood before the apocalyptic event which only a few of the eccentric residents will survive.

Samuel Clark likes secrets. He wants to know the hidden stories of the bizarre characters on the little streets of Edinburgh, Scotland. He wants to know about a nymphomaniac, a man who lives under a bridge, a girl with a cracked face. He wants to uncover their histories because he has secrets of his own. He believes, as people do, that he is able to change. He believes, as the whole world does, that there is plenty of time to solve his problems. But Samuel Clark and the rest of the world are wrong. Change and tragedy are going to scream into his and everyone's lives. It will be a great transformation, a radical change; and it just might be worth the cost.

Written by a rising literary star whose work has been published in notoriously selective publications such as *n+1* and *The Southern Review*, *The Casualties* is an ambitious debut novel that explores how we see ourselves, our past and our possible futures. It asks the biggest question: How can we be saved?

The Casualties Details

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Author : Nick Holdstock

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From Reader Review The Casualties for online ebook

Liviu says

superb stuff - grabs attention from page 1 and never lets go

adding a little more - I saw this book on Net galley just before going on a 10 day trip and thought that it sounded interesting, but I never expected that it would so grab and absorb me that I would have to finish it before I leave; the blurb is fairly accurate though one thing to be noted is that the novel's structure will be understood only at the end - there are hints of course - and it is one to be really savored with some of the most memorable characters in the novels read by me in recent times

Lori L (She Treads Softly) says

The Casualties by Nick Holdstock is a unique, very highly recommended novel about change.

A major disaster is heading toward the Comely Bank neighborhood of Edinburgh, Scotland. It is referenced obliquely, as if it is common knowledge, because our narrator in The Casualties is telling us about the disaster from the vantage point of sixty years in the future. What he wants to talk about are some of the inhabitants of the neighborhood and tells us their stories. He is looking back and talking about the past, in 2016 and 2017, right before the apocalypse happens and everything changes.

The narrator tells us right away that Samuel Clark, who lives in Comely Bank and runs a charity used book store, is a murderer. Sam likes to collect bits of lives that have been left in the books donated to his shop, things like old letters, photos, airline ticket stubs. He also likes to hear the stories of the people around him. Holdstock introduces us, through Sam, to the denizens Sam is curious about, and those who are obsessed with him. The exceptional people we meet are: Alasdair, the might-be-crazy man who lives under the bridge; Caitlyn, who works in the charity clothes shop next to the bookstore and has a face that develops cracks; Mr. Asham runs a store and longs to belong to the community; Mrs. Maclean taught for over forth years and longs to die; Rita and Sean are two drunks who always hang out together at the park; Toby is an extremely obese young man who craves food constantly so he must be supervised all the time; Sinead is a nymphomaniac who watches Toby but longs for Sam; Trudy is a Filipino prostitute.

It is a narrative with finely drawn characters that are well developed, remarkable, and interesting.

Holdstock presents his story from a unique viewpoint, which sets this pre-apocalypse story apart in a category all on its own. Even while introducing us to these characters and leading us up to the murder Sam is supposed to commit, Holdstock also drops small, vague references to the disaster that will be happening, a disaster that makes all the drama he is telling us about seem inconsequential. But that is the beauty of this novel. The narrator has a point of view from far in the future, a time years after the impending disaster and all the subsequent societal developments about which he hints. He's talking about the past many years ago. The happenings in the Edinburgh neighborhood are trivial in comparison to the bigger picture. We really don't know what the disaster is until we are far along in the story and even then he does not talk about that. He talks about this neighborhood just before the disaster.

And this choice is brilliant.

Holdstock creates a tension right away because we know something much bigger is coming but his narrator

chooses to focus in on Sam and this odd, damaged group of people in this particular little neighborhood. He wants to tell us a story. It is akin to hearing about now what people were doing before boarding the Titanic, or just before the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, or the devastating Tsunami of 2004. A disaster much bigger than any little drama is coming, but the narrator needs to tell us this story, the story about what was happening just before the disaster to these people.

The ending might not suit everyone, but I could appreciate it in the context of the whole novel. This one was a nice surprise.

Disclosure: My Kindle edition was courtesy of Thomas Dunne for review purposes.

Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says

www.melissa413readsalot.blogspot.com

I started out really loving this book, but somewhere along the way I started getting confused with the way the author was writing back and forth with people.

Overall I enjoyed reading about the different characters in the story. There is Sam Clark that owns a bookstore. Alasdair is a homeless man that sleeps under the bridge and yells out cures and random strange things to people. You find out later who he really is. Caitlin works at the charity clothes store next door to Sam's bookstore. She also has issues with her face cracking. She goes to the dermatologist once in the book, but nothing is ever rectified. Toby is a grossly obese boy who's mom has to put locks on all of the cabinets and refrigerator so he won't gorge himself. He seems to have some mental issues and doesn't understand much, just eating. His mom can't take him out for fear he will attack someone with food on them. Mrs. Maclean is a teacher and she just wants to die. Rita and Sean are drunks that hang out on the beach and on their favorite bench. Sinead is a nympho that ends up being Toby's caregiver and for some reason she doesn't get sexually crazy around him, thank God! Trudy is a prostitute that Sam visits from time to time. There is a man that owns the store but his name has gotten away from me, he visits Trudy too, but he's not good to her.

All of these people have strange little stories to tell in the book. There are random people mentioned in the book that are very curious as well.

This book is like a pre-apocalypse book. This story is set in 2016 and supposedly a billion people die in 2017. You have to keep on your toes in the book or you will get lost.

This all happens in a little town in Scotland called Comely Bank.

I love how the author added pictures of people in the book. These pictures come from an old family album Alasdair finds in the garbage. They are old time pictures and I think they are great.

I liked this book well enough because I love to read books about people and their lives, even if it is just fiction. I didn't like getting confused from time to time. Don't let my review take away from your wanting to read it yourself because my confusion may not be yours :)

****I would like to thank NETGALLEY and ST. MARTIN'S PRESS for the opportunity to read an ARC of this book for my honest review.****

Dystopian says

Very well written. I would have given it 4 stars but, as an intelligent fat person, I could not get past the Toby character. Of course a fat person must be either mentally challenged or "stupid." And the whole bit where his body suddenly decides to "balance" itself, and his prior unending appetite disappears -- that's a crock. Don't even get me started on Sinead the nympho using him as a sex deterrent. Nymphomania doesn't present like that as much as fatness does as the author presented it.

Ugh, the more I talk about these things the more I want to take my rating down to 2 stars.

Ophelia says

Glad to have won this ARC from Goodreads' First Reads program! A very well-written novel with intriguing characters!

Luke Thomas says

I had the pleasure of hearing a reading from this novel years ago, at a PEN Event in New York. Since then, Nick Holdstock found a publisher for this manuscript, and I was able to get an advanced copy.

The selection I'd initially heard was sexy, mean, and hinted at apocalyptic events that the author didn't, that night, go into. So I was dying to read the book and find out the larger context of the first scene I'd experienced. I'm happy to say Holdstock delivered.

The novel takes place in Comely Bank, a neighborhood in Edinburgh. Some pretty fucked up things go down in the pasts and presents of the residents of Comely Bank, and Holdstock's talent is in the way he chooses to make some of these feel like manifestations of everyday anxiety, and some feel like they've kicked a hole in the canvas of neighborly society.

The most unique part of this book is the REALLY fucked up, apocalyptic thing that happens in the future of all of these people's lives. Holdstock uses that as a means to transform the narrative into a retrospective on traumas large, small, and incomprehensible.

This book is thrilling in many a sordid, captivating way. But its greatest moments are insights into the degree to which lives change over spaces of time, and due to traumas small and large.

Gerhard says

Review to follow ... Phew, Sam Clark is one of the most unlikeable characters I have encountered recently, in a difficult and obtuse book that challenges the reader's innate empathy.

Jules says

The Casualties is the rare post-apocalyptic novel where life is better after then end. The end being August 2, 2017, the day a shower of meteors struck "North America, Europe, and Australia, and nowhere else (excepting the small fragment that struck poor Socotra, 'The Island of Bliss,' whose people had never attacked or enslaved anyone, and which had such beautiful trees as anything...)."

The world benefited from the unexpected *tabula rasa*, and this is why the real story is what happened before on Comely Bank in Edinburgh, Scotland, back when Samuel Clark, murderer, believed if you studied something enough, learned its history enough, attempted to fix it enough, it would get better. It doesn't. Sometimes you need a fresh start.

What made Comely Bank exceptional was the small pocket of eccentric residents. Samuel was one of them.

Whilst most of its people were wholly of their time—in that they did not believe in God, had small families, took holidays to faraway places, enjoyed electrical consumer goods, believed in things like equality, democracy, and the worth of the individual—there were a few who stood out. This was partly due to the way they looked) their size, their face, the way they walked), but mostly because their ideas went against the grain. They worshipped God, wished for death, or were chaste. They refused to own property.

The nymphomaniac, the man who lived under a bridge, the girl with a cracked face, and many others were worth remembering. People you remember after the world ends deserve to be called exceptional.

The novel is in two parts. In the first part, we meet Samuel and the exceptional people of Comely Bank. Samuel runs a used bookstore/charity shop. He thumbs through the pages of discarded books, looking for history and meaning. Slowly, over years, he finds snippets of history belonging to some of Comely Bank's most eccentric residents. He collects everything he finds in a chest--a Pandora's box of history. He uses what he finds to change the future.

In the second part, we learn the role Samuel plays in his neighbors' death or survival--and it doesn't happen quite like you think it will.

The Casualties is a book that can't be categorized. The narrative is nonlinear. It's a book about the weeks before the end of the world--a world that is better for having lost nearly everything and everyone. The book's uniqueness is what made it so enjoyable. My only problem with the book was the ending, oddly enough. The writing throughout was tight and precise, but the last chapter became increasingly stream-of-consciousness as the past and the present narratives collided. The intent, I imagine, was to finish the book on a crescendo as all the pieces rapidly slid into place. Instead, I was left feeling like one of the casualties, knocked about from page to page and waiting for the end to come.

Jason says

4 Stars

Just plain enjoyable. The Casualties is a pre-apocalyptic novel that through its structure tells the story of a small town and its quirky people. The event that kills more than 2 billion of the planet is not a secret and is spoken of quite a bit by our narrator. I loved this character study that reminded me so much of a Stephen King novel. There are many great people that are unique and their stories were a blast to read. This felt like a truly original piece that sits in a genre that is so over done!!!!

Fun summer read that I highly recommend.

Kelsi H says

Please check out all of my reviews at <http://ultraviolentlit.blogspot.ca!>

Right from the start, we know this isn't just any small Scottish village – something strange has happened in Comely Bank, and it's not just the population of odd characters. Beginning in the prologue, we are told that this is a novel set in the past – in 2016 – and that things are much different now. It was disconcerting to think of next year as the distant past, with almost Dickensian descriptions filled with wonder at the foibles of our ancient society. There is heavy foreshadowing, but the apocalyptic events that took place will not be clear until the end of the novel, and there will be plenty of unexpected incidents leading up to it.

Meanwhile, this could be described as a pre-apocalyptic novel in which we are given a snapshot of the eccentrics of Comely Bank (a suburb of Edinburgh) as their lives intersect before the end of the world as

they know it. The narrator seems to be omniscient, but then occasionally begins to speak in the first person – very disconcerting. At the same time he appears to be archiving the lives of the people around him. His friends and neighbours cover many sins, such as greed, vanity, lust and gluttony. In each chapter, they are seen from a new perspective, giving us a well-rounded view and a reminder that no one is all good or all bad. The narrator spares no one with his exacting descriptions of misdeeds and mistakes.

The writing has a fable-like quality – I wouldn't have been surprised had the novel started with “once upon a time.” The tone of the narrator is distant and ethereal, as he discusses people in regards to their fairy tale qualities. He hovers over events like a ghost, becoming increasingly present in their lives until he finally merges with the “casualties” of his past. All of the residents of Comely Bank are damaged – whether from their own choices or from actions inflicted upon them.

It is not until almost one third through the novel that we are told what actually caused the apocalypse, and even then, it is a throw-away comment. It is not important how the world changed, but what is important is the realization that the world could not continue as it was (or is). The narrator makes some intriguing diversions into philosophy, citing small human problems that are in fact symptomatic of world problems such as climate change and war. (Loc. 1823-1843) He emphasizes that the end of the world will come due to our “lack of will to change.” Like a fetus spontaneously aborted because it is taking too many resources from its mother, our planet has its ways of removing us also.

This was a great, unexpected novel that can be read on so many different levels. Thought-provoking and enjoyable, however you read it.

I received this book for free from Thomas Dunne Books and Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Kate says

I loved the idea of looking back and writing about a pre-apocalypse time about characters on a small street. The beginning started off great with his summary of various people on the street. At some point, I just really stopped caring about most of the people and the last part of the book was confusing with the constant changing POV. The narrator would be writing about Sam but would say I, A LOT. So was he writing about Sam or himself? The book really had potential so I was kind of bummed that it drifted off the way it did.

Horia Ursu says

Mixed feelings about this one. Some great writing here and there, excellent characterisation, but too often it has the tendency to stray off in directions that lead nowhere. A name to remember, still.

Connie says

I have so many great books on my TBR list that it's not often I read books I don't like. However, that doesn't mean I limit myself to well know authors or sure fire proven winners. Some of my best reads were books that no one I knew had read. Glancing at the blup of this book I thought it had real potential.

What can I say....this will probably be my lowest rated book this year. Damn it! I hate it when that happens...when you read a book and you just know it will be the low point of the year. I've spent some time trying to figure out why I disliked it so much. Really, dislike is a strong word. I didn't dislike it so much as I just didn't care for it. It was a very flat read for me. It didn't excite me. It didn't leave me wanting to rush through it to find out how it ends. It didn't have me wanting to slow down and savor every word. Once I bonded with a character they would do something really strange that weirded me out and I couldn't get past it enough to like them or be interested in them. Then there are the characters I just didn't get enough insight to even feign interest in them.

After reading the book and being somewhat disappointed I rushed to read the other reviews to see why they loved it so much. Hmmmmmmmm....nothing to enlighten me there either...Granted, there aren't many out there as the book has yet to be published at this time....but what I saw gave me no insight as to why they rated the book so high....

Alas....I guess that's just how it is sometimes....as really, I can't give much insight to why I didn't enjoy it as much....nothing in it made me passionate to hate it either (I sometimes love books that I hate! Just to know they can get such raw emotions from me is something!)....there just wasn't much inspiration in this novel for me....it was like mushy potatoes....yes, you can eat them....but you neither love them or hate them...they are just something to fill you up until the next great meal comes along....

ARC provided by Netgalley for an honest review

Tudor Ciocarlie says

Dark, haunting and full of great characters, *The Casualties* tells the story of the people living on a little street in Edinburgh, in the final weeks before an apocalyptic event which only a few of them will survive.

Ashley says

If I've got a weakness, it's post-apocalyptic novels. They are my serious Achilles Heel, and I always get swept into the novels. When I saw the blurb for **THE CASUALTIES by Nick Holdstock**, I thought it would be another run of the mill (although always enjoyable)apocalypse set novel. I was pleasantly surprised at this slightly different spin on the genre - instead of reading about humans AFTER the fact, spend the last few years in the lives of residents of a small Scottish town.

RELEASE DATE: August 2015

PUBLISHER: Thomas Dunne Books

DISCLAIMER: Novel sent via NetGallery in exchange for a honest review

SYNOPSIS: *Samuel Clark likes secrets. He wants to know the hidden stories of the bizarre characters on the little streets of Edinburgh, Scotland. He wants to know about a nymphomaniac, a man who lives under a bridge, a girl with a cracked face. He wants to uncover their histories because he has secrets of his own. He believes, as people do, that he is able to change. He believes, as the whole world does, that there is plenty of time to solve his problems. But Samuel Clark and the rest of the world are wrong. Change and tragedy are going to scream into his and everyone's lives. It will be a great transformation, a radical change; and it just*

might be worth the cost.

Written by a rising literary star whose work has been published in notoriously selective publications such as n+1 and The Southern Review, The Casualties is an ambitious debut novel that explores how we see ourselves, our past and our possible futures. It asks the biggest question: How can we be saved?

REVIEW: I don't know if this novel could be classified truly as an apocalyptic novel, as it's ... not. It's about human beings and their lives before the loss of 2 billion people on Earth.

Samuel lives in a quaint Scottish town with a bunch of eccentric people: there's the man who lives under the local town bridge, the two alcoholics who spend their days in the park, the woman with the cracked face, the larger than life man with the mentality of a child, and the Gothic woman who takes care of him ... just to name a few. A year before an apocalyptic event wipes out the major countries of the world (and a few billion people), Samuel provides us with a reflection into the lives of himself and his townsmen and how our past behaviour and actions can change the course of our lives for forever.

It's hard to sum up this novel properly. The novel is not told in a linear narrative, and the perspectives are pretty scattered. We get the point of view of almost nearly everyone in the town (including Samuel), which gives us proper insight into the towns peoples actions and behaviours. The multiple perspectives may sound befuddling, but it actually works in this stories favour: impressions of individuals we get from one point of view tend to change once we get to the point of view of the person in question. Individuals who seem 'unhinged' may be hiding terrible sad secrets. Individuals who play the sympathetic card turn out to be abusers in disguise. It makes for thrilling reads!

What I did like was the 'hinted' to conclusion and the 'hinted' to apocalyptic event that changes the world. Instead of making this center stage and showing how us humans react to said world, we are shown life almost exclusively beforehand. It's only at the end do we get hints at who has survived and who has perished. Sometimes, it's not always who you thought it would be.
