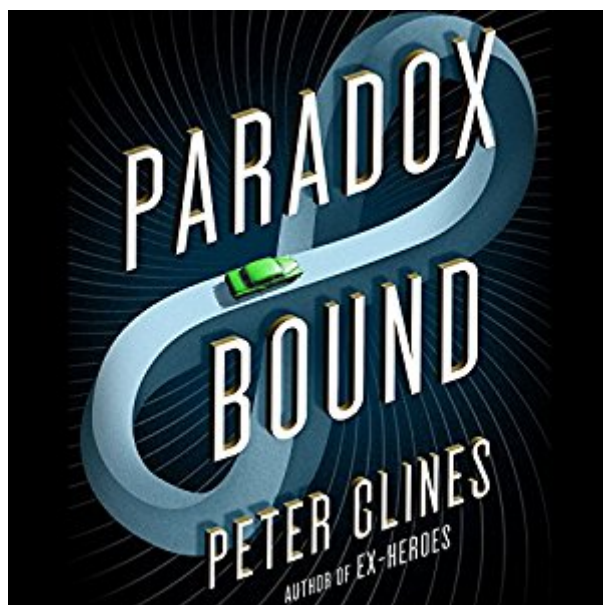


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Paradox Bound: A Novel



Synopsis

Nothing ever changes in Sanders. The town's still got a video store, for God's sake. So why doesn't Eli Teague want to leave? Not that he'd ever admit it, but maybe he's been waiting - waiting for the traveler to come back. The one who's roared into his life twice before, pausing just long enough to drop tantalizing clues before disappearing in a cloud of gunfire and a squeal of tires. The one who's a walking anachronism, with her tricorne hat, flintlock rifle, and steampunked Model A Ford. The one who's being pursued by...something. So when the mysterious traveler finally reappears, Eli's determined that this time, he's going to get some answers. But his hunt soon yields far more than he bargained for, plunging him headlong into a dizzying world full of competing factions and figures straight out of legend. To make sense of the mystery at its heart, he must embark on a breakneck chase across the country and through two centuries of history - with nothing less than America's past, present, and future at stake.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a good book with major problems with pacing. It starts really strong with plenty of mystery/action/intrigue but then the middle 40% or 50% is a fairly dull foggy trail of unresolved questions. Happily the action/adventure roars back with an ending that is very satisfying. I wish I could say the character development is great but it is also very uneven. The lead characters are not particularly deep but they are sympathetic and the villains are vile. The supporting characters who have a few moments of fame seem like props rather than people. This is a hard book to rate because the good is very good but the dull is ... well ... dull. It does have memorable moments and I

am glad that I slogged through the middle to enjoy the end.

Author Peter Clines had something of a minor hit with his novel *The Fold*. Many of the reviews of that work noted that it held together well for two-thirds of its length before collapsing at the finish line. *Paradox Bound* is Clines's latest work, and it suffers from the opposite problem: it takes two-thirds of its length before it actually delivers anything worthwhile. The question is whether readers will slog through 240 pages before the book gets (mildly) interesting. This piece of time-travel, quasi-steampunk, (nationalistic) romance and quest is a story about America: American history, American heroes, American citizens, American small towns, and American ideals. It's about the soul of a nation. It's about people looking to make a life and something great out of it, no matter when they were born or where. Unfortunately, it's also the story of what happens when an author gets possessed by an idea yet can't bring all the elements together to make a novel worth reading. Tellingly, in the afterword, Clines confesses this book took a long time to write, and both his agent and editor kept pressing him forward into it. They shouldn't have. A young boy meets an anachronistic traveler driving a Ford Model A with a not-at-all-old technology powering it. He meets the traveler a few times over the course of his youth. He notices the boyish traveler isn't so boyish because she doesn't wear a bra and yet probably should, which is obvious to the teenaged boy on their next encounter. So much for subtlety. Turns out, the traveler is looking for something. A massive something, but which has inexplicably gone missing. Why the traveler is so desperate to find this missing thing to the point of dying for the quest never truly coalesces in a satisfying way in the narrative, but then suspension of disbelief runs so high in this novel, asking legit questions will make the whole work up and vanish like dew at noon. Eventually, the boy becomes a man, and the boyish woman stays herself, and they partner up for the quest, for its danger, for the cross-country travelogue, for meeting some historical/mythical characters, and for a scant-little sexual tension, because life and death and bralessness. So *Paradox Bound* is a quest that meanders and meanders and meanders, both in narrative and locale, and asks for more and more suspension of disbelief, and along the way, you almost get to know the two protagonists, almost get to understand their foes, almost think you understand how they all travel through history, and almost get a feel for what the author is trying to do. And yet it all never gets beyond almost. Readers never get a real feel for characterization. The heroes aren't compelling; they just are. People pop in and out, and there's no depth to any of them other than names and some loose connections. The bad guys don't make a lot of sense, and because they don't, the author keeps explaining why they do. The heart of the novel is a quest-like race, but it feels like it's just one set-piece after another that add up to nothing

more than book length padding. Again, it takes almost 240 pages before the author gets to anything interesting. The ending, for anyone still paying attention, is telegraphed and inevitable. And the final confrontation will remind some of us of that painful, original _Star Trek_ episode "The Omega Glory," wherein Kirk pontificates about "the greatest of holies" to the Khoms and the Yangs. In the end, the real quest in _Paradox Bound_ is to find a better way to make all of these ideas work. Words abound in this novel, but they don't add up to much. Sadly for readers, as long as he spent writing it, Clines should have spent more. And his editor and agent needed to do far more than just rah-rah him onward. Some books are so riveting, you can't put 'em down. This one is so tedious, I found it hard to pick up. Skip.

Time travel is a familiar device in science fiction and fantasy stories (and cinema). Most everything you can imagine has been done. This one's at least somewhat different. It's not as conceptually interesting as some, but it does offer a novel approach to looking at the relationship between time travel and history. A young boy from a small town becomes fascinated by a beautiful but unusual woman whom he meets as she is passing through on a search for some kind of treasure. When he realizes she's being followed, he tries to catch up with her and warn her. Before long he is caught up in her search and is in the same danger that she was. It turns out that her search takes her through the history of America and the unlikely object of her search is nothing less than the American Dream. Without giving too much away I'll just say that the mechanisms of time travel in this story are unique, and they're tied up with a vision of the history of America. It's an interesting twist, and the novel is an enjoyable read. It's easy to follow, and while the overall plot is fairly generic it has enough twists to keep the reader guessing. It does turn out, in the end, that much of their search had been a wild goose chase. Still, it all comes to a satisfying conclusion. A fun quick read.

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