



Grovel...Most good science fiction is based on an extrapolation of the future, which has a plausible basis in current society. Contraband's basic premise does this quite well, starting with internet video sites like YouTube and looking at how they could, eventually, become a nightmare. In Thomas Behe's dystopian near-future, Contraband is the world's most popular video hosting service. It shows viral videos, made by 'citizen journalists', and pays the makers of the most popular clips. This has led to a market in ever more extreme material, much of it staged and all of it malicious, that is spiralling out of control. The trouble is, the person controlling the service is a total crackpot, operating underground and out of the reach of the authorities. However, there are a number of anomalies in the story that, to our mind, break the concept. With such a near-future dystopia, it would seem only fair to explain the mechanics of the horror a little better. There's no explanation of where the money is coming from - it's surely not advertising on such a demented platform. And where are the police in all of this? You'd think they might have something to say on the matter and be making some kind of effort to shut Contraband down, especially when things start getting really ugly. The other problem with the story is that the dialogue is very dense - the characters often seem to be going off on political rants, which may fit the moral breakdown plot but do little to move the action. We understand the concept of how easily an irresponsible video sharing site could descend into madness and that this would be a bad thing - we don't particularly need the characters to make speeches about it. The other problem (although they're actually closely related) is that the book could have done with a thorough edit. There are a fair number of inexcusable errors, like missing words, that simply shouldn't be there. These detract from the flow of the story even further. The art brings back a bit of the punch to the piece, but the plot deserves more from the writing. It leaves a good idea swamped in obtuse dialogue - a bit more pace and a little more action could have boosted this genuinely interesting concept into a sturdier thriller...