



The Facility

Simon Lelic

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"Who are you? Are you the police? This isn't legal, you know. You can't hold me like this."

In a near-future dystopian Britain, democracy has been undermined. Emboldened by new anti-terrorism laws, police start to “disappear” people from the streets for unspecified crimes. But when unassuming dentist Arthur Priestley is snatched and held prisoner at a top-secret facility, his estranged wife, Julia, and a brave but naive journalist named Tom Clarke embark on a harrowing quest for the truth. Following a trail that leads to the very top of government, they soon find themselves fighting for their lives. Well-crafted, fast-paced, and totally compelling, *The Facility* is a brilliant thriller that resonates eerily with the timbre of our times.

The Facility Details

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Author : Simon Lelic

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From Reader Review The Facility for online ebook

Clay Stafford says

About the first page of the first chapter, I thought, “What the...” Yet, I was riveted.

The story takes place in a growing English police state more concerned with napping terrorists – and innocents that they think are terrorists – than they are in protecting the innocent.

“My husband is not a terrorist, Mr. Clarke. Whatever he’s into, I can assure you it’s not terrorism. He’s a dentist.” That’s no deterrent. All it takes is someone to point the finger.

I found the novel so real, it was frightening. I feel myself in Arthur Priestley’s shoes, a man with no rights and finally no name (just a number) and being at the mercy of the whims of guards and officials who no longer have to even supply a charge. “Who are you? Are you the police? This isn’t legal, you know. You can’t hold me like this.” National Security covers all actions. “We cannot afford to take risks.”

Interestingly enough, the central character (Arthur Priestly) is not a stand-out character. In fact, he’s rather dull. Opposite to what you might think, this makes it even more harrowing. He’s a boring person who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Somewhere as you read, you realize: This guy could be me. Don’t get me wrong. The characters are great, but the story is about what could happen, not about the characters. It is the situation itself that is all wrong.

The novel is full of government pawns and by the time you get to the end of the book, you see them in real time in real life all around you. “No one opposes the act any more because no one can see how it’s being used.” I’m not a conspiracy theorist, but think Guantanamo. This is Guantanamo U.K. “They arrested him under anti-terrorism legislation. How could you possibly have considered that routine?” “But that’s my point! These days it is routine. Or it can be, at least in terms of how information is fed to the press.” And that’s the lynchpin. We trust the press. The press gets information from the government and then makes the case to the people. Can anyone say Nazi? “They leak information because they want us to have it.” And they want what the press gets to be very specific. Think of the wonderful sounding Freedom of Information Act, the product of an open government. Request something sometime. You’ll get a piece of paper, but it will be covered with crossed-out black lines “for National Security.”

Looking at it outside this book and in the last ten years in the U.S., using anti-terrorist, national security laws, the government can arrest anyone at any time. Technically. Not that they do, but technically. Can a health issue become a matter of national security? Maybe. If you need to protect the population. And, if so, then it falls under (in the U.S.) Homeland Security. So, in effect, something that has nothing to do with terrorism (the basis for Homeland Security) now becomes a concern and is able to be off the grid because it now falls under the U.S. Dept of Homeland Security. Then you realize that it doesn’t have to be a health issue. It can be anything! Label it a security issue and no one can ask a single question. “How I can tell how a law is being used when the whole point of that law is to prevent me finding out?” As long as it falls under anti-terrorist, national security laws, the government is not required to make a charge. If you make a charge, you might lose. Solution, use the laws and don’t make a charge. When that happens, ““There is every chance you will remain here until – ” You die.” At the very least, you bide your time. “The usual rules, at this facility, do not apply. There is no board, no oversight committee. There is just me and the rules I set. So you will behave, please, as I instruct you to behave or you will suffer the punishment I choose.”

There is a strong cast of characters, each one supplying a vital function and thematic consciousness. Thankfully, there are those in the press who can't be bought. When you're up against the big machine, "What else do you think you can do?" "Keep digging." There is a Josef Mengele mad doctor who views patients as lab rats rather than humans. And a more homophobic group (intentionally written that way) you've never read. (By the way, I love the improvised baby monitor. I don't know that I would have the nerve to try it, but it is a clever idea.)

As you read, you wonder who, if any, will do the right thing? The thriller then is not about the lives in jeopardy, but of moral backbone, something that can't be legislated. Who will do the right thing? Who will stand up and object? "They're locking up innocent people using laws they said would protect us." This is Orwellian, if I've ever read Orwellian. What makes this scary, though, is that this is not the future as the publisher's publicity department states on the back of the book; this is what could be happening now, maybe not with disease, but with anything else a government would decide would be threatening. It's terrifying. In Hollywood, we would call this "high concept." The plot is so simple, yet overpowering.

"That's one lesson this government has learnt. They've learnt that if they show it, they can't spin it. If they can't spin it, they can't control it. And if they can't control it, the truth will eventually come out: about what they're doing; about why they're doing it in the first place." The only way, then, is to make it appear that it never happened or use the press to spin it.

This is blow your mind away powerful.

From the publisher:

"In a near-future dystopian Britain, democracy has been undermined. Emboldened by new anti-terrorism laws, police start to "disappear" people from the streets for unspecified crimes. But when unassuming dentist Arthur Priestley is snatched and held prisoner at a top-secret facility, his estranged wife, Julia, and a brave but naive journalist named Tom Clarke embark on a harrowing quest for the truth. Following a trail that leads to the very top of government, they soon find themselves fighting for their lives. Well-crafted, fast-paced, and totally compelling, "The Facility" is a brilliant thriller that resonates eerily with the timbre of our times."

The Facility on Killer Nashville
My Other Reviews on Killer Nashville

Katikka says

This dystopia had a massive amount of potential to be fantastic.
The story was great, but the execution didn't (in my humble opinion) quite capture it.

The idea of a brand new lethal virus spreading is not new, but for me it never gets boring. I would have wanted to know more of the virus itself, it's symptoms, progression, possible origin... etc. To make the threat more real.

A sexually transmitted plague didn't quite convince me. Neither did the "scientist".

I would have made it bigger. The epidemic could have been wider (maybe even a pandemic?) and maybe some of the capturers (like the minister involved) could have been infected too. It would have added a nice

twist to the story.

Government running secret facilities for the sick and dying prisoners isn't a brand new idea either, but using these new "national security" laws makes it more of today. Just one facility is just disappointingly playing it down.

I can see the point of this being a story of one innocent man, but why not raise it up to another level?

I liked the MC Tom "the nosy reporter", but I found Julia and her son irrelevant. Surely the plea of help (from a beautiful woman and it could have been a stormy night too) was unnecessary, but all this later involvement wasn't. Or the weird romance. I mean why? Why not just create a grieving wife and a son who miss their husband/father?

In all I did enjoy this book. It didn't scare me senseless or take my breath away, but it was decent entertainment.

Laura Rash says

Quite a different storyline here that kept me interested the whole time. Quite a rev up in the ending & all around entertaining. I'm quite the fan of SL now & am definitely reading all his works.

Raphael Powery says

I'll try to be as vague as possible to avoid any spoilers in this review.

So what can I say about this book exactly? Well there was a lot of potential for something great. Since Lelic was fairly new at writing novels, I gave him two chances. I started off with "The Child Who" which was alright, it was not something particularly amazing but it had some great highlights, some of the parts that made you want to feel tense really did a good job. Now when it comes to "The Facility", I have to say, this is by far the worst dystopian book I have ever read in my entire life and discourages me from reading any more of the author. But before I slam on how awful this book really is, I'd like to go through what the author did well here:

First of all, the opening chapter took you on a nice little trip into feeling that this will be a good dystopian book. He immediately establishes that something is clearly wrong with the order of power in the government and shows how the common man, like in most dystopian books, is suffering from the abuse of authority.

The Facility itself showed a flawed system of policemen who abuse their power in order to get what they want out of the prisoners. The situation of those being oppressed really depict how terrifying it can actually be in a prison with immoral cops working for the law.

Now let me explain why the book is absolutely horrible.

First of all, what annoys me the most is how two dimensional all of the characters are, they appear to be the

plainest people you could ever possibly meet. Sure, some of you may argue that "they are incredibly ordinary so that they may relate to the reader more" but sometimes, being realistic does not enhance the quality of a story or its characters, in this case, it actually made them worse. To be a little more precise with my argument, can you tell me a few things about the main character other than he is a dentist, with no homosexual desires, wrongly convicted, separated from his wife and child and bought a few pornographic movies/magazines online? Well, absolutely nothing because he is plainer than the white shirt in my drawer. We go through the story clocking back and forth from his suffering in the facility to the struggle of his estranged wife trying to find his whereabouts, to the events of the reporter who is trying to seek the truth of the facility. His wife is not so much a contribution to the story but more of a hindrance. Her mere presence in the story drew away from the fact that it was supposed to be a dystopian and made it more about her underlying feelings for the reporter she was seeking help from. Many of you will say how that is not so as she was constantly trying to find the whereabouts of her husband and you're slowly opened up to the world outside the facility when you look away from her husband's suffering but the fact of the matter is that the writer unintentionally or intentionally created this sense of sexual tension between her and the reporter whenever they were together which took up a lot of time, all of it wasted.

Now my second issue with this book lies within the writer's language, dear lord heaven save me from this overdone book. It may be that I am the only one who feels this, maybe not but sometimes it feels as if Lelic is just slamming words in just because he can. It may be that I am suffering from negative recall because it's been a few months since I've read this novel (January) but I distinctly remember this one part in the book where a character had gotten angry and Lelic described it as "he slammed his fist on the table which sent a shock down the mahogany wood through to the papers which caused it to ruffle and rattled the coffee in the cup next to the pile of papers and spill on the floor" dear lord that was awful and cringy. I do not have the exact quote, but for this book I would not dare to pick it up again, waste my time to flip through some papers and find that quote because I never want to read this book ever again. But can you see the problem here? The description is awkwardly overdone and it feels more like an elementary school child's description of a short story they made in class. Calling Lelic's writing style "Kafka meets Orwell" is an insult to the two legendary writers. The front of the book is very misleading, with a literary giant like Mitchell giving it such a good remark to draw you in, you feel inclined to read it.

I could literally go on for hours about how awful this book is, but I will keep it short, because if I do not want to read it, I am sure others who feel the same as I do would not want to read a review about it!

The worst possible thing it could have possibly done was ruin your expectations for a dystopian novel. Dystopian novel? What dystopian novel you say? That is right! There is none! Sure, there is a little breach of human rights when it comes to homosexuality in this book, but that is all, do we see anything else happening? Does the reporter who uncovers the truth of the facility and the government's abuse in power get any form of punishment for threatening to post it online when so many others have been 'silenced' no, if anything, in this backwards book you are more likely to be killed the higher up you are in the government food chain. Would it not make sense to kill off the small-time reporter and not the politician whose death is most likely to be noticed by everyone in society after a few months of his absence? Sure, you all might argue that this little sugary breach of rights makes it a dystopian book but it is not nearly as cooked as the cruelty present in real dystopian books. In dystopian books, everyone is suffering, in this book you have to be gay to really suffer, everyone else is just hushed about the cruelty towards the homosexuals, if anything, this book is more about the distance increasing between the protagonist and his wife as she tries to get closer to him but ends up straying away into the comfort of another man who slowly replaces him. This book does not belong to any genre, which is not a compliment of how unique it is, because it is not.

My rating for this book is a 1.5 or 2/10 because I'm feeling generous. **SAVE YOUR MONEY BECAUSE IT**

IS NOT WORTH THE WASTE OF TIME. Use your money to buy A Clockwork Orange or The Handmaid's Tale if you need a real dystopian.

I cannot stress how terrible this book is, I rushed this review while I was at my summer job so correct me if you feel that my review was too harsh or if I made any errors. My view will never change but I am always open to what others have to say. This review was strictly a comment on the author's ability to write, and not an attack on the character of the author himself. Happy readings to everyone!

Mandy Smith says

Really enjoyed this,the subject was different,and realistic! Scary but could happen. Good writing,good characters,the only reason it took me a while to read was because I am decorating my whole house!

Arthur,a dentist is taken by two men and questioned about his life and sexual habits and beaten. He is drugged and taken by coach to a hospital/prison -the facility. He is not given any information but is treated like a prisoner,he soon finds out his fellow inmates are sick and then they start disappearing.

Arthur's wife who he is separated from contacts a journalist to help track Arthur down. Sinister forces are at work to prevent the public finding out anything and anyone who tries to find out about the facility or speaks about it are in danger.

Most of my reviews this year are four and five star,this is because after so many years reading I know what I like and what I will enjoy,I have a busy life and don't want to waste time reading for the sake of it but read to relax and unwind.

Justin says

Slightly disappointed. That's how I felt by the end of The Facility. I haven't read Lelic's other two novels but this had an intriguing premise and the first third was strong enough to get me hooked. Unfortunately any mystery in the plot quickly evaporates and from then on the rest of the book feels rushed. Interesting characters like Dr. Silk are woefully unexplored and long sections away from the facility itself detract from the most interesting feature of the tale. Still, it was a fairly quick read, an easy one, and enough for me to get onto Lelic again at some point to see what else he's got rattling around in the old brain box.

Rosie says

Disappointed by this book.

Spoilers

I felt like the beginning of 'The Facility' implied that the 'disease' was actually non-existent, so I kept waiting for the big reveal that it was actually manufactured by the government, or that the government had used a made-up illness to arrest subversives, or that it didn't exist at all and the facility was just an excuse to use

human guinea pigs for drugs trials...but it never came. In fact, **nothing** ever came! There seemed no real point to this book, no proper story...Lelic should have chosen whether he wanted to focus on the unknown disease aspect, the clinical trials OR the civil liberties matters. Instead he gave us a half-arsed mash-up of all of them.

Nothing is satisfactorily explained. Why would the government be so secretive about the facility when it turns out to be exactly what they said - somewhere they have quarantined sufferers of a devastating illness while they attempt to find a cure? Presumably you're supposed to accept what Tom says towards the end of the book - that the government had known about the disease for a couple of months longer than they said - but that's just not believable at all. Especially given the lengths the government is supposedly going to to hide the facility, including deliberately injuring, and nearly killing, Tom, Julia and Casper in a car crash. And beating Tom and Arthur. And infecting innocent people for no reason. And assassinating Graves. And why would the sufferers need to be hidden from the public, not to mention swept away without informing their families, at all, given that the disease is sexually transmitted and not airborne?

In my opinion this book would have been far more interesting and would have made more sense had the disease been a manufactured excuse to imprison 'undesirables' and use them as human test subjects for, say, a cure for AIDS or cancer. Or even if the government had accidentally infected people with a new disease through some method.

As it is, the government's ends do not justify its means and it renders this book ridiculous.

Stephen Hayes says

"Kafka meets Orwell in contemporary England" says the blurb on the cover.

Well, not quite, but one can see how they arrive at the comparison. Simon Lelic simply extrapolates some trends in British society and politics into the near future, and the picture he gives is generally quite believable. All it needs is the detention-without-trial legislation that some British politicians desperately wanted, but didn't get.

Franz Kafka and George Orwell wrote about dystopian futures in which there are extreme changes in every aspect of society. Simon Lelic writes about a society that is deceptively normal.

In that respect this book more closely resembles *A Dry White Season* by Andre Brink. For the first 50 pages of *The Facility* I thought it was about a Britain that resembled South Africa c1968, after the passing of the Terrorism Act. It was a Britain transformed into Vorster's South Africa.

After the first 50 pages the plot is slightly different, and there are a few plot holes that make it fall short of Kafka, or Orwell, or Brink, but it is still a pretty good read. And scary, too. This is something that *could* happen, and something that some British politicians are on record as *wanting* to happen.

See, for example, here *Notes from underground*: The swing to fascism in the USA and the UK, when the British media lauded Tony Blair's attempts to turn Britain into Vorter's South Africa as "the moral high ground". And *The Facility* shows how very easily that could happen.

Tony says

33. THE FACILITY. (2011). Simon Lelic. ****.

Billed as a 'thriller,' you will find that this novel depicting a dystopian Britain has a lot to say about the direction in which our society is moving. In America, since the tragedy of 9/11, we have seen the explosive growth of the 'security industry.' In Great Britain, the movement towards increased government control and monitoring of personal activities has almost kept pace. Individual rights are slowly being eroded. In this novel, the government has discovered the presence and spread of a sexually transmitted disease, similar to the AIDS virus, that apparently affects the gay community. The government begins to round up gays from every neighborhood, taking them to a secret and secure facility located near Dartmoor. There, the chosen men and women are tested for the presence of the virus, and kept there in isolation until an effective cure can be developed. One night, when the government agents were making a sweep of a section of the city, they also picked up Arthur Priestley, a dentist who was innocently out picking up a few things from one of the local shops. He was not gay, and did not have the virus. Thrown into a van, he was delivered to the Facility along with fifteen other people – most of them virus free. It didn't matter that they were disease free; they were automatically incarcerated along with infected men and women pending testing. The government had the power to 'kidnap' these people under the new anti-terrorism laws. Their families were not notified nor were their employers told. The location of the facility was also not disclosed. Tom Clarke, a top journalist working for an electronic newspaper group, has heard some rumors of people disappearing, and wanted to follow it up. The trouble was that none of his usual contacts knew anything about what was going on. After careful and intensive digging, Clarke was finally able to learn more about this secret government program. As he tries to gather more information, he learns that the government has learned that a portion of their imprisoned population was disease free – but they chose to keep them under lock and key. A Dr. Silk, a supposed expert on viral infections – especially STDs – was brought into the facility. He proceeds to conducting 'experiments' on the infected people in his purported attempt to learn more. During the course of his experiments, all of his patients died. This called for an additional level of cover-up activity. As the conditions at the facility begin to go downhill, Tom Clarke, along with the ex-wife of our dentist, take a trip to the countryside where the facility is thought to be located. They are followed. There ensues a confrontation between Clarke and the various protectors of the government's anonymous activities that heighten the tension of the plot. As the story moves along, we are exposed to the various forces at work in the government and in the private sector that range the gamut of support for such 'protective programs' by government. Analogies between the British program and the U.S. programs are provided that begin to get the reader thinking seriously about personal freedom. This 'thriller' is much like a collaborative effort between George Orwell and Franz Kafka, and is intelligently presented to the reader. Recommended.

George Ilsley says

Had rather a strange reaction to this short novel. I loved the first chunk of it so much I wanted to read everything Lelic has written. However, by the time I finished *The Facility*, I wasn't so sure. It was unclear if the disease experienced was intended, perhaps, as a mirror of life in a creeping dystopia. I can live with a lot of ambiguity in novels, but here I craved a bit more certainty. Was there really a disease? Why approach it this way, when there are other means (quarantine legislation, for example, has existed for decades). Were the prisoners just experimental animals? I had all these questions and the combination of unanswered questions

and the vividly portrayed near-future society (all too believable, I'm afraid) left me increasingly unsatisfied.

Also ... the "innocent" victim that we follow at the facility, one Arthur Priestley, is not gay. We barely meet any of the other inmates. There are shades here of those who believe a disease like AIDs has "deserving" victims (ie homosexuals and drug users) and "innocent" victims (mostly heterosexuals). Again, I could not determine what Lelic intended here. But the fact is, the sympathetic character who we follow as readers, is someone who does not really "belong" in the facility. Everyone else there is mostly invisible. We are given very little introduction to those characters, and it seemed like we were not supposed to even care about them. Was this the writer's intention, again as a mirror of the larger society?

The result, for me, was feeling greatly unsatisfied by the experience of reading this novel.

Fiona says

Bit of a missed opportunity. Great idea about the rights and wrongs of forced internment using terrorism legislation, and the balancing act between individual freedom and society's need for safety and protection. However the ideas were not sufficiently explored and it descended into a rather boring pursuit scene at one point. The tone was almost jokey at times and the characters weak. Three stars for its central premise, not for execution!

Jayne Charles says

So glad to pick up another book by Simon Lelic, after the frankly brilliant "Rupture". This is a little different, a disturbing look at a Britain in which the police have been given sweeping new powers. I found it elegantly written with a lot of space "around the edges" for the reader to fill in.

Joanne says

Got just over a third of the way through it and had absolutely no interest in the plot or the characters. One star because I wasn't enticed to finish it even after reading so much of it.

Kat says

I'm quite fond of dystopian novels, but I was ready to chuck this book in the bin about half way through. There are too many holes--too much uncertainty. Was the disease intended or not? Either answer requires more explanation than was given, and because it's so ambiguous, the reader is left to deal with a bland, indecisive ending. I'm not often interested in reading books that leave me saying, "Well...that happened." I want more.

I didn't mind parallel storylines, but once the journalist lost the direct connection to the prisoner (his wife), I lost my connection to the story.

Marc Nash says

That difficult second novel... This book can't seem to decide what it wants to be. If it's a dystopian near future Britain, yet there are only 86 people who are inconvenienced. If it's a thriller, there's an awful lot of stopping off to buy sandwiches for lunch and having a drink down the pub. If it's a political novel, it's caught between the 2000's threat of terrorism and a throwback to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980's. Either in its conception it just hasn't been thought through imaginatively enough, or it was all just too rushed. The only thing that gainsays this latter hypothesis, is that the writing is lean and limber throughout. Normally if a novel is undercooked, certain passages do stand out as underwritten and that is not the case here, so I tip my hat to Lelic's ability unfailingly to write a solid sentence. There is one section towards the end, where one of the characters exhibits paranoia believing themselves to be followed, that evidences Lelic's descriptive powers. But these flourishes are few and far between.

Then there is the disease itself. It's sexually transmitted. It gives lesions. So far so AIDS and at the end of the book is an epigram from Randy Shilts' seminal AIDS-era book "And The Band Played On". But the dreary upshot of this is the transmission vectors are held to be sex workers and homosexuals, the tired old implication being only these two groups are sexually over-active enough to court the disease. I thought we'd got past all that prejudicial thinking back in the late 80s. The interrogators and Camp guards are casually homophobic. This whole aspect of the writing is just horrible.

It's curious that when the novel isn't detailing the issues around quarantine and the concentration camp, the life of Britain is very tranquil and bourgeois. Tea and mown lawns and the like. Not much of a dystopia, and the implicit payoff of a lifestyle if one isn't sexually voracious. The domestic detail is banal and would only have a point if it were highlighting by contrast, the increasing struggle of the characters within the Camp as they are stripped of all mundane domesticities. But they aren't.

You can always tell a lot from the characters' names. To some extent there is always a little symbolism behind the choice of name, but here Graves, Clarke, Priestley and Silk all live up to the single dimensionality of their monikers. Graves is the governor of The Facility and has two massive swings of conscience, neither of which rang authentically to me, while his backstory of regret at a failed marriage and an estranged daughter seemed unintegrated for all Lelic's efforts. The investigative journalist just didn't seem all that probing. There was some depth to the wrongly interned man and the friendship he strikes up with his cell mate. But all in all, it just was not enough to redeem this book.
