



The Status Civilization

Robert Sheckley

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Will Barrent had no memory of his crime . . . but he found himself shipped across space to a brutal prison-planet. On Omega, his only chance to advance himself -- and stay alive -- is to commit an endless series of violent crimes. The average inmate's life expectancy from time of arrival is three years. Can Barrett survive, escape, and return to Earth to clear his name?

The Status Civilization Details

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Author : Robert Sheckley

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From Reader Review The Status Civilization for online ebook

Scott says

This is not a book that will rock your world. You won't be harassing your friends to read it, or spamming recommendations for it here on Goodreads. You aren't going to wistfully stare at its cover a year from now, remembering the great times you had together.

But that's OK.

The Status Civilization is not a SF aficionado must-read, but it's a fairly enjoyable romp through an interesting world. The story is pretty straightforward. No alternate viewpoints, unreliable narrators, or odd time/perspective shifts. This is meat-and-two-veg, steak-and-eggs SF, solid, inoffensive, and fine for what it is.

Will Barrent, a convicted murderer, awakens on a starship with no memory of his life or crimes. The starship is soon revealed to be a prisoner transport and he is abandoned on the prison world of Omega, home to a twisted society run by deported criminals. This is no *Escape From Absalom* or *Lord of the Flies* style scenario though, the prisoner society on Omega is an interesting hodge-podge of ancient societies and dystopic ideas, with a brutal ranking system, regular 'hunts' of lower ranking citizens, a Roman-style colosseum and a culture that enshrines criminality as the highest legal and religious good. Barrent, while very successful in this criminal milieu, is no killer at heart and comes to doubt that he is the murderer the system says he is. These doubts lead him to begin exploring his missing memories and testing the limits of Omegan society, with some violent results.

The Status Civilization was written in 1960, and occasionally the book's age peeks through, a wrinkle here, a saggy bit there (computers in the future being programmed via punch cards was a LOL moment) but for the most part it's pretty spry for its age, leading the reader on a pacy dash through the twisted world of Omega and beyond. Perhaps in part due to its brevity the story sometimes relies on implausible coincidences to flog itself along, and gave me the impression that Sheckley was racing to try and fit his many interesting ideas into the narrative. Despite all this (and a not entirely satisfying conclusion) it's an enjoyable read and the book flows from one action-packed encounter to the next.

Not every book has to be a catalyst for deep reflection, or an award winner, or a pillar of its genre. *The Status Civilization* is light, entertaining, and short - just the thing for an easy read in between two meatier works.

2.5 stars.

Melki says

This book was an online freebie - <http://www.readbookonline.net/title/3....> I planned to read a chapter each day as I perused the comics, news, and celebrity gossip - BUT it turned out to be a real page-turner (or mouse-clicker...or whatever you want to call an involving story read online...)

I ended up sitting in my uncomfortable computer chair, back aching, long past the time I should have been doing something else.

A man is sentenced to a prison planet for a murder he cannot remember committing. The prison turns out to be a strange village comprised of criminals. There is a bizarre set of rules and regulations, and it turns out to be quite easy to violate a law when you don't know of its existence. Punishment varies from having limbs amputated to being hunted by townsfolk and robots. Or, if you're lucky, there's also a chance to be tossed into an arena to fight hideous beasts. Yippee!

Is it any wonder life expectancy is three years?

I'm sure die hard science fiction fans would find this dated and derivative, but I'm practically a sci-fi virgin, so I was fairly enthralled. 3.5 stars - a fun, quick read.

Jim says

Sheckley is an under rated SF author with some great ideas, although he reminds me of PKD with his odd sense of humor that I just don't get sometimes. This was one such, but the point was far better done than PKD generally manages. A really interesting idea, a prison planet where everyone has their memory wiped & then they're dumped there. They live in an anarchist society full of hidden laws that are deadly to break, unless done so successfully. If so, status increases. But our hero wants to get back to Earth & takes horrendous chances doing so. What he finds there is even more disturbing.

It's quite a disturbing look at the future that follows some trends that are even more in evidence today than when he wrote this in 1960.

Another freebie from LibriVox that can be downloaded here:

<https://librivox.org/the-status-civil...>

Fellini says

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Norv says

I have clearly read this book before, I wonder how many years ago since I didn't remember almost anything of the twists and discoveries the author has reserved for the reader.

It's a light and short reading (around 100 pages), available at project Gutenberg, proof read by volunteers around the world.

Well worth reading if you're a fan of science-fiction, even though the themes have been done and overdone since then: Sheckley has been, to my knowledge, a source of inspiration by its exploration of such themes: life in a penal colony, utopia turned into a dystopia, brainwashing, robotic civilization.

Lala M?mm?dova says

"?eklid?n n? oxuyum?" m?sl?h?tin? ilk veril?n cavab. B?y?ndim :) Adam? yormur, dili rahatd?r, tez oxunur. Mü?lifl? tan?? deyilsinizs?, m?n d? siz? bu kitabdan ba?lama?? tövsiyy? edir?m.

Olga Kowalska (WielkiBuk) says

WOW. This book is simply so real, that almost terrifying! It was written in 1960 and it seems more probable today than ever. The funny thing is, that in Polish its title may be translated as "The Evil Planet" and in my opinion it is even more accurate than the original title - it fits better, feels stronger.

I just hope Robert Sheckley's vision will remain a dystopia, a bad dream, a nightmare that will never come true.

Zaskakuj?ce, jak czasami ksi??ki napisane wiele lat temu, szczególnie gatunku science fiction, budz? si? do ?ycia, a opisane w nich fabu?y staj? si? prawd?. "Planeta z?a" napisana w 1960 roku ma dzisiaj wi?ksze znaczenie ni? kiedykolwiek wcze?niej. I to przera?a, kiedy pomy?limy, ?e przysz?o?? z wizji Sheckleya jest bli?ej ni? kiedykolwiek. Oby jego dystopijna wizja pozosta?a jedynie nieziszczonym koszmarem.

Marts (Thinker) says

I enjoyed this, liked the methods used by the protagonist to always get out of those situations despite what his 'advisors' always said.

In the tale Will Barrent suddenly awakes on this 'space ship', apparently his memory has been temporarily erased. He is told that he committed a murder and has been shipped off to the prison planet Omega. Here crimes dominate.

Well back on Earth, there have been drastic change, for one the planet is now close to utopia, with all based on trust.....

Barrent must prove that he is innocent.....

Cass says

Two vastly different social structures (on two different planets) were packed into this novella.

The first was a prison planet in which inmates had created a world that worshipped evil and status was driven up by authorized kills.

The second was a cold conforming world in which order reigned.

I found both worlds incredibly fascinating. As with so many dystopian worlds I was left with many unanswered questions and a few confusions.

Despite this I found the concepts fresh and I enjoyed the ideas.

ETA: Just upgrade it to 4 stars. I originally gave it 3 stars but it has stuck around in my head...

Vderevlean says

3.75

Un roman peste care timpul a curs bine. Omega e o Australie a viitorului, planetă întărită pentru criminali, devianții, opozanții sau orice răufătorii ai-ai putea imagina. Celor trimițăi acolo li se șterge memoria și sunt înștiințați prada noilor reguli. Omega e un spațiu al terorii, bine ierarhizat dar condus după regulile celui mai puternic. Moartea pândește la orice colă.

Prizonierul 402 o va afla pe propria piele și chiar dacă supraviețuiește planetei închisoare, întoarcerea pe Pământ deține cele mai rele temeri. Pământul e o utopie perfectă, pacificată, urmată de comuniști, însă o tiranie psihanalitică pândește pe fiecare cetățean. Roboțiile conduc totul, iar oamenii sunt doar observatori, păpuși care păstrează vechile funcții sociale pe post de decor. Cruda și violenta Omega e mult mai deosebită mult doritul Pământ.

Sheckley scrie un roman bun, tributar războiului rece și teoriilor fataliste din acei ani. Însă un roman care aduce a Philip K. Dick, de pildă. și care încă își păstrează misterul și ideile originale.

Apatt says

“It was a society which, in the final analysis, stressed individual endeavor. It was a society in which the lawbreaker was king; a society in which crimes were not only condoned but were admired and even rewarded; a society in which deviation from the rules was judged solely on its degree of success. And this resulted in the paradox of a criminal society with absolute laws which were meant to be broken.”

In *The Status Civilization* Robert Sheckley turns the idea of society and morality on its head in his world-building for the planet Omega. This is something Sheckley does very well, usually in a humorous manner. In fact Robert Sheckley has long been my favorite sci-fi humorist, alongside Douglas Adams. However, Sheckley's output tends to be (often brilliantly funny) short stories and *The Status Civilization* is one of his few novels. If you have never read Robert Sheckley before, I have very good news, many of his short stories, including this very novel being reviewed, are in the public domain, available for download as e-books (and some as audiobooks). Please refer to the links in the “notes” section after the review (TL;DR fans can just skip to the links).

The Status Civilization is mostly set on the planet Omega where mind-wiped criminals are exiled by the government of Earth (yes, just the one government) to fend for themselves on a habitable planet that Earth wants nothing to do with, just to use as a dumping ground for undesirables. Though the criminals have no memory of their crimes, by their lack of moral fibre they cannot help but revert to their criminal ways. However, in a world exclusively populated by criminals, a crime is not a crime. Will Barrent has no memory of his crime but he is told that he is guilty of murder. This surprises him because, although murder is condoned and rampant on Omega, he feels averse to the idea of killing anyone. Surviving in the Omegan

society is going to be very difficult.

Omega is not a dystopia and, in spite of being run by criminals, it is not lawless. They just have some very odd laws and code of conduct. In fact, an Omegan psychiatrist recommends that Will Barrent seeks immediate treatment in a sanitarium for the “criminally non-murderous”. While *The Status Civilization* is less humorous than a typical Robert Sheckley narrative it is still sharply satirical and made me laugh several times. There is also an old-school sci-fi adventure aspect to this book as Barrent finds himself being hunted for sport and even put into a sort of gladiatorial combat against killer robots and monsters.

At a mere 132 pages *The Status Civilization* moves at a brisk pace, Sheckley somehow manages to squeeze in plenty of plot and world building even within the modest page count. Characterization does fall by the wayside a little as Will Barrent generally just drives the narrative along with his adventures, and while the writing is very good, the dialogue tends to be rather stiff, reminding me of Philip K. Dick’s handling of dialogues a little. The Omegan society, with its weird laws, also seems rather unfeasible. None of these things matters as the novel is an entertaining fast-paced read with room for thoughtful satire and reflection. Highly recommended (especially as you can read it for free). Now I have to get back to reading the rest of the The Robert Sheckley Megapack.

Notes:

- Download *The Status Civilization* free e-book here, at Project Gutenberg
- Free audiobook version at Librivox.
- I read *The Status Civilization* as part of the The Robert Sheckley Megapack which I will review soon. BTW, this Megapack is not free, it's a cheapo Amazon e-book for Kindle (USD 0.99).
- Loads of free Sheckley free e-books.

Quotes:

“At one time he must have had specific memories of birds, trees, friends, family, status, a wife perhaps. Now he could only theorize about them. Once he had been able to say, this is like, or, that reminds me of. Now nothing reminded him of anything, and things were only like themselves.”

“Evil is that force within us which inspires men to acts of strength and endurance. The worship of Evil is essentially the worship of oneself, and therefore the only true worship. The self which one worships is the ideal social being; the man content in his niche in society, yet ready to grasp any opportunity for advancement; the man who meets death with dignity, who kills without the demeaning vice of pity. Evil is cruel, since it is a true reflection of the uncaring and insensate universe. Evil is eternal and unchanging, although it comes to us in the many forms of protean life.”

“One might well ask,” Uncle Ingemar droned on, “if Evil is the highest attainment of the nature of man, why then did The Black One allow any Good to exist in the universe? The problem of Good has bothered the unenlightened for ages. I will now answer it for you.”

Jayanth says

Wow, I did not expect it to be this good! The story was captivating right from the start. I'm a sucker for Kafkaesque plots. I thought the story was suspenseful all through, throwing in weird stuff frequently to spike my interest in the story. The author's version of a futuristic Earth and the reasons behind why it evolved so is fascinating and disturbing. The title of the book hints at this.

The protagonist wakes up on a starship that's on its way to planet Omega where criminals of Earth are deported to. He does not remember his crime and neither his memories. There is no government in Omega, its entire population were/are criminals.

I loved how the story progressed. The sci-fi and futuristic ideas are incredible and by the end, they are tied up neatly that provided an immense satisfaction.

Gregg Margarite, the narrator of the audiobook I listened to on LibriVox, did a great job.

Jamie says

3.5 stars. This is a great, short classic from one of the early SF masters, highly reminiscent of Philip K Dick's early work, in both style and substance, sans the mind altering drugs. The story also has elements that brought Jack Williamson's The Humanoids and Robert Silverberg's Hawksbill Station to mind as well. It's hard to say too much without getting into spoilers, but this reads like a thriller, with the protagonist seeking to uncover clues about his forgotten past, and ultimately unmask a deep rooted conspiracy. The story revolves around themes of conformity and stagnation, and of course, being sci-fi, happens in the future, on an alien planet.

?Misericordia? ~ The Serendipity Aegis ~ ?????? ✨*♥♥ says

Q:

It was quite obvious that poisoning played a large part in the daily life of Omega. (c)

Karin says

I initially went with 2 stars, to leave room at the bottom, but I'm going to go with my heart and give the 1 star thumbs down. Ugh. I don't even have the energy to give this one a thorough dissection. The main character is bland and treated by the narrator as some sort of genius for managing to perform basic critical thinking tasks. Maybe he's a cousin to the protagonist in Dorsai!. The parts of the worldbuilding that you aren't rolling your eyes at are....wait...there aren't any. Skip this one.
