

**CONDITION: An Excellent Lunch wiÃ¾e Learned Bill Janeway!:**



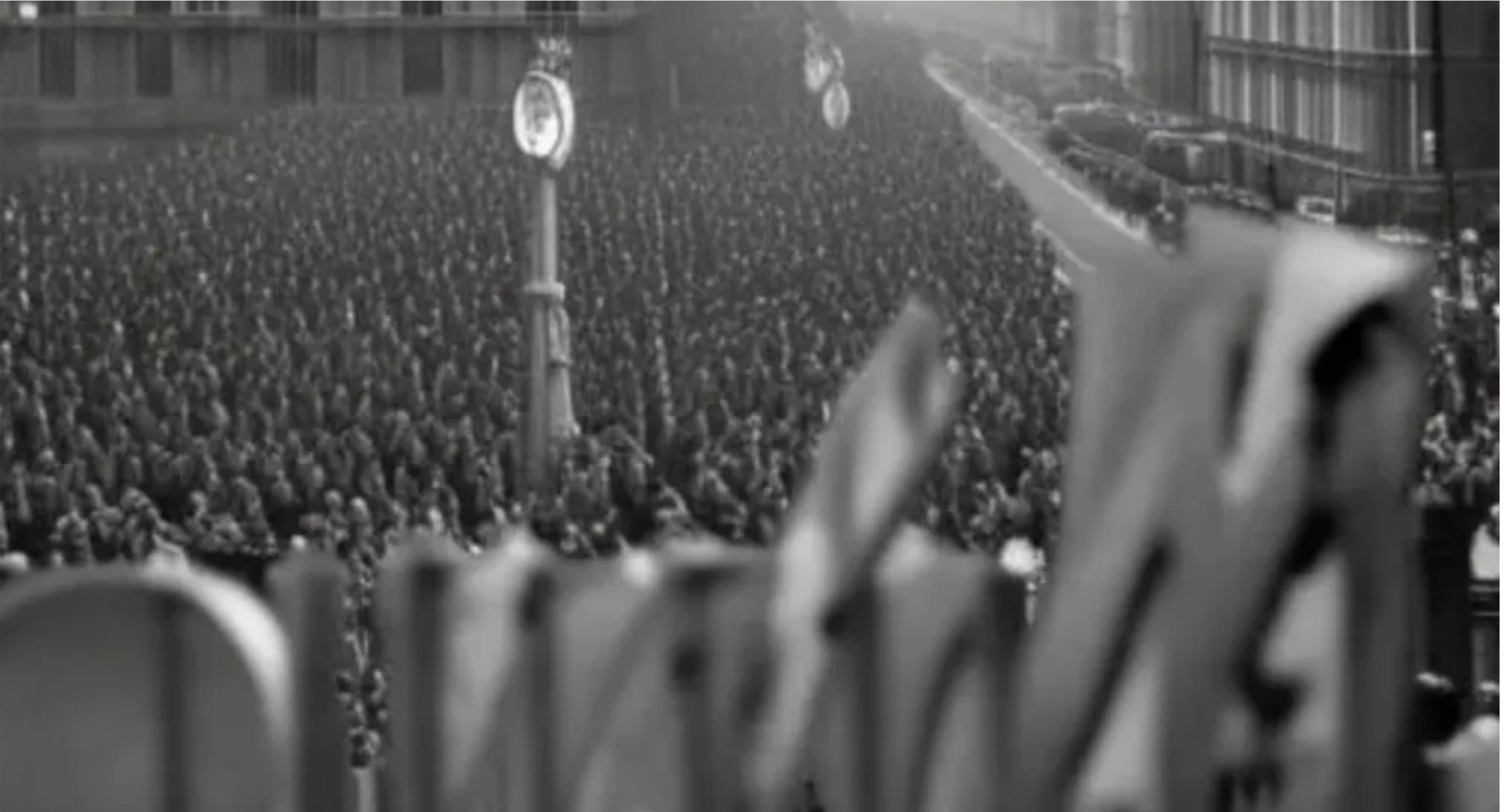
The brilliant Gary Gerstleâ€!. The brilliant Tim Snyderâ€!. His remarkable Ukraine lecturesâ€!. The remarkable *Forging Global Fordismâ€!*. That genius Adam Toozeâ€!. The learned Sven Beckertâ€!. America as a developmental stateâ€!. That genius Alexander Hamiltonâ€!. & many other topics

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**FOCUS: Small People Dealing wiÃ¾e Looming Fascism:**





I volunteered to write an introduction to the reissue of three of my favorite alternate-history novels: Jo Waltonâ€™s â€œSmall Changeâ€□ series:

- [Farthing](#): **Publishers Weekly**: *Starred*: â€œWorld Fantasy Awardâ€“winner Walton (Tooth and Claw) crosses genres without missing a beat with this stunningly powerful alternative history set in 1949â€!
- [Half a Penny](#): **Publishers Weekly**: â€œThis provocative sequel to acclaimed alternate history Farthing (2006) delves deeper into the intrigue and paranoia of 1940s fascist Great Britainâ€!. World Fantasy Awardâ€“winner Walton masterfully illustrates how fear can overwhelm common senseâ€!
- [Half a Crown](#): **Publishers Weekly**: â€œWalton's fine conclusion to her alternative-history trilogyâ€!

Writing an introduction to a set of novels is hard! I want to SPOIL ALL THE THINGS!!!! But that would make people sad.

Hereâ€™s my first draft: Does this work?

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It started when David came into the lawn absolutely furious. We were down at Farthing for one of Mummy's ghastly political squeezes...

Jo Walton's *Farthing* seems to open in our world, in the upper-class English milieu of the mid-1900s. *Farthing* opens as a drawing room romantic comedy. The first voice we hear is that of theâ€”shallow?â€”ingÃ©nue. Hair. Pearls. The "dim... complete nincompoop" antagonist Lady Angela Thirkle. The ingÃ©nue's family's and their circle's belief that her marriage to David is a *mÃ©salliance*.

Then it shifts: at the end of Chapter 1 we realize that all of it has been the ingÃ©nue's explanationâ€”scatter-brained and digressiveâ€”of why her reaction to the murder of Sir James Thirkle was "it well and truly served [Angela] right".

At the start of Chapter 2 enter the detective: Inspector Peter Anthony Carmichael. *Farthing* is now an English police procedural. And it is not our world. It is, rather, an alternate-history novel: We learn that Carmichael was "one of the last to get away from Dunkirk". We learn that it is 1949. We learn that England had "fought Hitler to a standstill". We learn that "Adolf admired England and had no territorial ambitions across the channel". We learn that England and Hitler's Germany are good friends.

And so it shifts again: the ingÃ©nue's marriage to David is a Christian-Jewish marriage. That has suddenly become very fraught. *Farthing* is no longer a police procedural. It is, rather a novel of looming fascist dystopia.

The last of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Four Freedoms is: Freedom from Fearâ€”fear that someone might destroy the pattern of your life and so upend your pursuit of happiness, might imprison you and so take away your personal liberty, might execute you and so take away your life. Whatever other disagreements we might have about how to organize society, perhaps we all could agree that it needed *at a minimum* to provide us with Freedom from Fear: security for our resources, for our persons, and for our lives. Once we recognized that as the foundationâ€”bought into *the liberalism of fear*â€”much could be built that would be solid, and good.

Or, rather it would be solid until it was not.

The Roman Republic was not a creature you wanted as a neighbor, and you really did not want it to come to visit. However, if you yourself were a citizen, and thus within the charmed circle, the Roman Republic secured your liberty: your Freedom from Fear. It had done so ever since King Tarquin the Proud had raped Lucretia Collatini and immediately been forced to flee for his life, or so the story went.

But then in the year -133 Roman land-reformer politician Tiberius Gracchus, with perhaps 200 of his followers, were murdered by a mob led by Tiberius's first cousin Nasica (and probably inspired by his first-cousin and brother-in-law Aemilianus). It was, in part, a family affair.

The historian Plutarch wrote 200 years later:

This is said to have been the first sedition at Rome, since the abolition of royal power, to end in bloodshed and the death of citizens; the rest... were settled by mutual concessions, the nobles yielding from fear of the multitude, and the people out of respect for the senate..."

One overreaction to a political fight had become a mass mob murder. The fall of the Roman Republic had begun. And at the end no one could be free from fear.

After the murderer of Tiberius, land-reformer politicians drew the lesson that they needed bully-boys to keep right-wingers from doing to them what had been done to him. Better than bully-boys would be a loyal legion. *Or three*. Two generations later right-wing military-politician Sulla's loyal legions attacked and seized Rome, establishing his brutal and bloody temporary dictatorship. Three generations later Pompey and Caesar, each with a loyal army, fought it out. Four generations later Octavian won his four-cornered cage match, became the Emperor Augustus, and the Roman Republic was dead.

Thereafter no one was free from fear.

The Emperor could say one morning that he had dreamed that Senator So-and-So had conspired against him, and so had Senator So-and-So executed. Prudence and fear would keep tongues silent. .

The plots of the novels that make up Jo Walton's "Small Change" are of assassinations and murders foiled and not-foiled, of coverings-up and revealings, of people desperately seeking advantage, seeking survival, seeking to somehow resist in a world in which even the possibility of working toward freedom from fear appears to be slipping away. The themes are of how people resist, acquiesce, or enthusiastically embrace the approaching threat of fascist dystopia—and how, sometimes, the same people do all three, sometimes in turn, sometimes all at once.

I love these novels. I commend them to you, and hope you enjoy them at least a quarter as much as I do.

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So does that work as a series reissue introduction? DOES IT MAKE YOU WANT TO RUN OUT AND BUY THEM!?

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## ONE VIDEO: Spiderman: Across the Spiderverse:

The Lord family business prepares to blow your mind once again:

97% liked this movie: Miles Morales embarks on an epic adventure that will transport Brooklyn's full-time, friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man across the Multiverse to join forces with Gwen Stacy and a new team.

Release date: June 2, 2023 (USA)

Directors: [Joaquin Dos Santos](#), [Kemp Powers](#), [Justin Thompson](#)

Screenplay: [Phil Lord](#), [Chris Miller](#), [David Callahan](#)

Music composed by: [Daniel Pemberton](#)

Producers: [Avi Arad](#), [Phil Lord](#), [Amy Pascal](#), [Chris Miller](#), [Christina Steinberg](#)

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## ONE IMAGE: The Armament of Akhilleus:





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## OÃ³er Things Ãžt Went Whizzing byâ€!

### Very Briefly Noted:

- Ethan Mollick: [How to... use AI to teach some of the hardest skills](#): â€˜When errors, inaccuracies, and inconsistencies are actually very usefulâ€™!. You can create assignments, right now, using ChatGPT, that we will help stretch students in new ways...
- Barry Ritholtz: [10 Tuesday AM Reads](#): â€˜Why Muskâ€™s meltdown matters. Muskâ€™s tweet was dangerous, ignorant, and insultingâ€!. Why should we pay attention to a man-child who seems to delight in provoking people who care about democracy, truth, and decency?â€!. See also [How Elon botched his war on bots PLUS](#): Why itâ€™s time to start leaving Twitter behind ([Platformer](#))â€!
- Matthew Cranston: [FTXâ€™s inner circle â€“ including Sam Bankman-Fried â€“ had chat group called â€˜Wirefraudâ€™](#)â€!
- Matt Levine: [How to Do Fraud at a Futures Exchange](#): â€˜Oh Samâ€!
- Max Chafkin: [The FUD Behind the Crypto Collapse](#): â€˜Sam Bankman-Fried and Binanceâ€™s Changpeng Zhao were ostensible partnersâ€!
- Jonathan Last: [The Coup Texts](#): â€˜The Republican politicians who wanted â€œMarshallâ€¢ lawâ€!
- Stephen Witt: [The World-Changing Race to Develop the Quantum Computer](#)â€!

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Friedrich Engels: [Socialism: Utopian and Scientific \(Chpt. 3\)](#): "The production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure". The final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the *philosophy*, but in the *economics* of each particular epoch. The growing perception that existing social institutions are unreasonable and unjust, that reason has become unreason, and right wrong, is only proof that in the modes of production and exchange changes have silently taken place with which the social order, adapted to earlier economic conditions, is no longer in keeping. From this it also follows that the means of getting rid of the incongruities that have been brought to light must also be present, in a more or less developed condition, within the changed modes of production themselves. These means are not to be invented by deduction from fundamental principles, but are to be discovered in the stubborn facts of the existing system of production..."

John Ganz: [What Is Even Happening?](#): "There has been something hallucinatory and psychotic about the past half decade or so: a sense of reality melting and a stomach-churning, vertiginous glimpse into the abyss". Real fascism had Ezra Pound and [Celine](#) as its bards, I guess our second-time-as-farce fascism has Kanye West. Is this just an accident brought on by temporary mental illness, or does this reflect something deeper or more problematic going on in the culture and society? Is this a real thing or a spectacle? Is fascism in our era merely chimerical or a living political reality? My answer is, "Well, Why not both?"

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