

classic book circle

Political novel written in 1940 continues to be relevant today

Based on Arthur Koestler's experiences as a former communist at a time of great political unrest, outrage and betrayal, "Darkness at Noon" follows one man's ordeal as he crosses the line from beloved to forgotten, persecutor to persecuted. The main character, Nicolas S. Rubashov, is generally acknowledged as many men that Koestler knew at that time; and many he did not. "Darkness at Noon" contains Rubashov's reflections as he waits for certain execution at the hands of a

'Darkness at Noon'

- Author: Arthur Koestler
- Current publisher: Scribner
- Originally published: 1940

government he cultivated and suffered for. It is the story of a world where loyalty can be a flaw and silence is crucial, but deadly. In this place, the leader, No. 1, loves you; and you love No. 1. It is unreal, but it's all chillingly true.

Rubashov, a former official of the people and highly respected member of the old party that took power, is long past his days of heroism. He lives in a meager apartment, alone in a society that has long since passed him

by. Still, there is no peace for him. When soldiers of his own design finally come, Rubashov is forced to think back on his decisions, his discarded loves and losses, and on a lifetime of misplaced loyalty that has not been repaid. He suffers from a rare flaw: the ability to appreciate circumstances from another's eyes. Accused of working against the well-being of the state, he is made to confront old enemies and friends, all of whom work against the inevitable: their own demise. The lack of evidence is not a consideration. Rubashov's outcome is set in stone, and he expects nothing less. Here is where his sauntering ends. "Bravo!" taps a counterrevolutionary prisoner in code. "The wolves devour each other." Koestler's 1940 novel is unanimous-

ly accepted as a historical fiction of the Moscow Trials, a series of pre-ordained purges by Joseph Stalin in the 1930s Soviet Union. Its theme has endured to the present day. As George Orwell's "1984" was a lesson to all who lived through such times, perhaps this is our warning. It is impossible to deny its possibility, its reality — it has already happened. "Darkness at Noon" has taken its well-deserved place among such novels as Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" and Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451." As one generation rises, prideful and self-righteous, another falls, tired and forgotten, into the night. ► Molly O'Callahan attends Yosemite High School in Oakhurst.

commentary

Seniors fight the urge to slack off

My acceptance to college looks a little something like this: "... We realize that academic plans and performance sometimes change. ... Thus, your admission should be viewed as a contract that carries with it your responsibility for completing all courses you indicated on your application as in progress or planned for the senior year. ..."

And of course, this gem: "Maintain at least a 'B' average in your senior course work." Translation: No senioritis. Easy enough. Right? Maybe not. Welcome to Procrastination Nation.

What does it mean to be a senior? Most would probably define this year as paying a lot of money for senior expenses, making college plans, hanging out with friends and, of course, maintaining that grade-point average. That tends to be the hardest part of this graduation deal. Many seniors, including myself, are finding it increasingly hard to focus as the year winds down.

"I see senioritis as the last sprint to the finish line," says Jessica Nagel, a home-schooled senior in Clovis. "You've gone steady and worked hard the whole way, and now the finishing tape is in view. Some people just slow down or even stop because they've done good so far, and don't see the point in going nuts for the last bit."

I know I don't really feel like spending those last two months working on homework. Personally, it took a lot of effort just to sit down and write this editorial. Two days before it was due, by the way, I had to turn down pizza with a friend to finish it.

But I was tired of being tired from putting off homework until 9 or 10 at night. An entire week with only four to six hours of sleep a night was no good, and I was running on that for several weeks in a row, catching up on missed z's during the weekends. All the local Starbucks baristas knew me by name and my favorite coffee drink by heart.

It's easy to convince ourselves that we have time to bring our grades up because we don't get out until June. So we relax, watch TV, play video games, go shopping, meet up with friends — and meanwhile, our assignment pile grows and grows.

"I've seen grades drop [around March]," says Tina Scarborough, an English teacher at Bullard High School. Most of the time they bring them back up, though."

Is it really high school's fault? Are we too overloaded?

For many enterprising students with high ambitions, all the AP classes, sports, and other extracurricular activities can easily take up all their time after school. By the time they reach senior year, not many students are willing to sacrifice having a life for academic success that has already paid off. And yet, all the University of California schools require a 3.0 or better to keep their acceptance, as well as continuing with the courses they originally signed up for — no transferring or dropping at semester. And the CSU system holds Early Assessment Program tests for juniors so that they can have a fair idea of how much they might need to improve their math or English skills.

So as we near the end of our high school careers, we find that there is still so much ahead of us, and much of it relies on our grades. The work never stops and in the end, senioritis is no excuse. But I wouldn't say no to doing a little textbook reading pool-side or grabbing pizza, either.

► Kelly Delaney attends Bullard High School.



kelly delaney

Gay on campus

Networks support acceptance among gay and straight high school students.

By Jenny Rempel
Teen Press Corps

Martell Udell began telling his friends that he was homosexual just over three years ago. Since then he has experienced name-calling and criticism, but he hasn't lost any friends because of his sexuality. As secretary of Edison High School's gay-straight alliance club, the junior feels accepted within his school community. Since the founding of the Gay-Straight Alliance Network in 1998, more than 600 GSA clubs have been created in California. While several local high schools have been reluctant to establish clubs due to opposition, many students feel GSAs have helped to promote tolerance and acceptance. "The GSA is a really positive force on campus — especially when there's a lot of ignorance in the world," Edison junior Michelle Simunovic says. "Although I don't participate in the GSA, I support their efforts to make our campus a more tolerant environment."

Gay-straight alliances are composed of homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual and transgendered individuals who work to educate students about homophobia and to create safer school environments.

After coming out about his sexuality, Martell said he felt relieved and much happier. His participation in the GSA club allowed him to find not only a support group of students, but also a way to encourage discussion of homosexuality.

"We fight to eradicate homophobia in our school and offer support to those who need it," he says.

Along with other members of Edison's club, Martell has attended workshops and conferences which have helped him to increase awareness in Fresno about homosexual youths. The GSA club has spoken with several classes at Edison about discrimination on school campuses and recently attended the Queer Youth Advocacy Day held at the Capitol Building in Sacramento.

Vanessa Vasquez, a junior in McLane High's GSA, focuses on reducing ignorance by informing students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer. Although she is not gay, Vanessa enjoys participating in the club because she believes strongly in tolerance and enjoys the company of her homosexual peers.

The GSA at Hoover High is composed entirely of females and has fewer than 10 regular members; nonetheless, their size does not stop the girls from spreading their message.

"The main purpose was to show that gay people and straight people could get along without being made fun of," says member Charissa Phene, a junior who is heterosexual. "We try to promote that it's all right to be different."

Despite the efforts of GSAs at Hoover and other local high schools, discrimination due to sexual orientation still occurs on many campuses.

In an aggregate report of the California Healthy Kids Survey

from fall 2004 to spring 2006, 9% of high school freshmen in Fresno County reported that they were harassed at least one time because they were gay or lesbian, or because someone thought they were homosexual.

In a spring 2005 Healthy Kids study, 32% of Clovis Unified ninth-grade students reported that they had been harassed due to race, ethnicity, disability, gender or sexual orientation; this compares to 30% of the ninth-graders polled in a similar spring 2006 study of the Fresno Unified School District.

Students at Madera High recently won a lengthy court case with their school district, and a GSA was officially recognized at their school.

Some high schools lack a GSA for various reasons. Clovis East's alliance disbanded after last school year because of a combination of the teacher moderator moving away and a crumbling of student interest.

Buchanan High, also in the Clovis Unified School District, also lacks a GSA. Students Julia Heaton, a sophomore, and Konrad Miller, a junior, perceive that students on campus are simply not interested in creating the club. Julia believes "gay is bad," while Konrad recognizes some opposition on campus.

"I think they're stigmatized, but because they're gay in almost a militant way," he says. "I don't think people are openly bigoted against gays, but just against the way they go about announcing it."

Some schools, such as Bakersfield Christian High, lack a GSA due to religious views and the lack of any openly gay youths.

"I don't think homosexuality is right at all," junior Michael White says. "God calls me to love everyone, so I don't hate the [gay] person, but I'm mad that they delve so deeply in sin."

Hillary Sandoval, a senior at Bakersfield Christian, believes GSAs are "trying to redefine sexuality by presenting homosexuality as a normal occurrence in our human nature when it's really not."

Although Hillary said she does not value her gay friends any less than others, she is not supportive of their actions and choices regarding sexuality.

Some students, while supportive of the alliances, shy away from joining because there are still traditional taunts that come from being associated with gays.

"It's hard for a lot of people [to join] because it doesn't matter if you're gay or straight, you're still going to be stigmatized as queer or a freak," says Taylor Smith, a freshman at Ridgeview High in Bakersfield, who doesn't belong to the school's GSA. "There comes that stigma saying, 'Hey, I may be straight, but I'm in the GSA.' It's like putting a big sticker on your face."

At Sanger High, junior Zach Blocher, who is heterosexual, felt GSA club members were "criticized, made fun of and mocked" after their picture was published in the yearbook last year. "It was a surprise how ignorant our school was — especially to a subset of society that is on the whole kinder than most others."

As an avid supporter of the message of GSAs, Zach believes fundamentalist religious groups are a part of the problem.

"Even the gang-bangers are a lot more open than some of the religious groups, and it's really sad because their religion teaches them to be tolerant," he says. "It's just obscene that they can't even practice what they preach."

"If it was bad to single out the Jews and the blacks, we should have learned by now not to do it to the gays."

► Jenny Rempel attends Edison High School.



JOHN ALVIN/THE FRESNO BEE

movie review

'Hot Fuzz' is true to the humor in 'Shaun of the Dead'

If you missed 2004's "Shaun of the Dead," then you'll want to make a stop by the rental store before or after seeing "Hot Fuzz" in order to receive two hearty helpings of Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright's fresh humor.

After tackling the zombie horror film genre three years ago, the duo have moved on to spoofing the police-action genre. All the well-crafted wit and spot-on line delivery that made "Shaun of the Dead" a cult classic returns in full strength. That's not to say that "Hot Fuzz" is just a rehash of the same cinematic recipe, however — it attains a greatness all its own and doesn't need to be thought of as a throw-together quasi-sequel.

Pegg plays impeccable police officer Nicholas Angel, who is transferred to a quiet country village by his envious

'Hot Fuzz'

- Directed by: Edgar Wright
- Starring: Simon Pegg, Nick Frost, Timothy Dalton
- Rated: R
- See it at: Edwards Fresno Stadium 21, Regal Manchester Stadium 16, Criterion Cinemas 16
- Grade: A

London superiors. Pegg's believable performance has just the right balance between camp and honesty to keep the audience connected to the story and entertained at the same time.

After Angel's arrival, a series of murders occurs that everyone in the village disregards as accidental, despite their humorously gory nature. Nick Frost, also from "Shaun of the Dead," returns as Angel's new partner in the village of Sandford. Frost is given the "childlike sidekick" role again, but still manages to make the part inventive, not overdone.

One role that needs to be mentioned is Timothy Dalton's as villain Simon Skinner. His smarmy portrayal steals every scene he's in — he so subtly that he can't be the killer. Dalton nails the action-movie bad-guy stereotype with constant smirks, a suave presence and an overly heightened diction. Wright and Pegg never take their movie too seriously, allowing room for some hilarious tongue-in-cheek humor.

Something surprising about "Shaun of the Dead" was its level of violence. One would think that a cop movie would have less on-screen gore than a zombie flick, but that preconception gets turned upside down. British comedy films tend to overdo blood splat-

ters and decapitations. For some reason, they find violent deaths to be hilarious. So for the record, "Hot Fuzz" is filled with in-your-face carnage with plenty of shock value. It's not for the faint-hearted.

Director Wright has established a fast-paced style that suits this film's brand of humor well. The jokes, edits and lines are frenzied but never lost. Wright and Pegg make sure to pack in every ounce of comedy they can in two hours, and the result is a wonder to behold.

► Chase Stubblefield attends Buchanan High School.



Simon Pegg is loaded for bear in "Hot Fuzz." ROGUE