

## Solomon the Peacemaker

**Hunter Welles**

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*Strong writing transforms terrorists and freedom fighters into complex, believable characters in this powerful dystopian nightmare.*

In this amazing novel, Hunter Welles blurs the line between social science fiction (in its dystopian form) and cyberpunk. From a global government whose interpretation of nonviolence defines the word “Orwellian” to the mysterious and legally all-powerful AI and its human host, Welles balances aspects from each subgenre to build a familiar yet terrifying vision of the not-to-distant future. As with any good story, the details are shown through the actions of the characters.

*Solomon the Peacemaker* opens with Vincent Alan Chell explaining the series of events that led to his wife’s suicide. Vincent believes stories need to be told in the right way, and that means a story must unfold organically. Nothing major happens right away: a series of small discussions, minor personal events, an argument about global politics. But in the harsh light of retrospection, even the most mundane occurrences take on an air of ominous foreshadowing.

For Vincent and his wife, Yael, the big things in life are freedom and autonomy in a world where all major decisions are made by a single AI, the Peacemaker, living inside a human host. Vincent and Yael discover and join a resistance movement after visiting a small church, and, whether or not the group succeeds in destroying the Peacemaker, Vincent’s life becomes irrevocably changed.

Despite having an AI as the titular character, *Solomon the Peacemaker* is ultimately about people and ideas rather than technology and gadgets. Welles builds his world sparingly, like a stage with enough room to let his characters grow and just enough detail to not lose his readers.

What makes *Solomon the Peacemaker* stand out against the ranks of good science fiction is Welles’s narrative choice. A short note before Vincent’s interrogation explains that, for legal reasons, comments by the interrogators have been stricken from the record. With a lesser writer, the novel could have read like a second-person narrative that forces readers into the untenable position of having to believe they are somebody they are not. When reading *Solomon the Peacemaker*, however, it’s easy to believe that the author wrote not only the words on the page but the words that have been redacted as well. With a magician’s sense of timing and well-placed breaks, Welles transforms the blank spaces of Vincent’s interrogators into strong characters whose silent interruptions speaks volumes.

JOSEPH THOMPSON (Spring 2014)

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