



# Ha'penny

*Jo Walton*

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In 1949, eight years after the "Peace with Honor" was negotiated between Great Britain and Nazi Germany by the Farthing Set, England has completed its slide into fascist dictatorship. Then a bomb explodes in a London suburb.

The brilliant but politically compromised Inspector Carmichael of Scotland Yard is assigned the case. What he finds leads him to a conspiracy of peers and communists, of staunch King-and- Country patriots and hardened IRA gunmen, to murder Britain's Prime Minister and his new ally, Adolf Hitler.

Against a background of increasing domestic espionage and the suppression of Jews and homosexuals, an ad-hoc band of idealists and conservatives blackmail the one person they need to complete their plot, an actress who lives for her art and holds the key to the Fuhrer's death. From the ha'penny seats in the theatre to the ha'pennies that cover dead men's eyes, the conspiracy and the investigation swirl around one another, spinning beyond anyone's control.

In this brilliant companion to Farthing, Welsh-born World Fantasy Award winner Jo Walton continues her alternate history of an England that could have been, with a novel that is both an homage of the classic detective novels of the thirties and forties, and an allegory of the world we live in today.

## Ha'penny Details

Date : Published October 2nd 2007 by Tor Books

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Author : Jo Walton

Format : Hardcover 319 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Alternate History, Fiction, Mystery, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fantasy, Speculative Fiction

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# From Reader Review Ha'penny for online ebook

## Leseparatist says

I don't read too many thrillers, but this one reminded me of the experience I would have with them as a teen, usually resorting to a thriller after I'd read through my stash and had to borrow books from camp friends. Summer, days before smartphones (or personal computers!), hardly any TV, no ~~work~~ school, reading hundreds of pages a day.

It was a bit more pessimistic than I like my books, but once again, perfectly fitting for 2016, reminding us of the danger of letting excessive fear guide your choices. Fascist Europe looks so very believable in this, and the evil-- so extreme and yet so easy to pretend not to see it (see also, 2016).

I loved the characters and, most importantly, the mood. The book is atmospheric and an ultimate page-turner. I loved the relationships between the sisters; whenever Walton used the sisterhood to introduce retardations, it was captivating for me (maybe due to my own large family; I do have quite a few siblings). I was less convinced by some aspects of the plot (view spoiler) but it wasn't a large issue, merely something that strained my suspension of disbelief briefly.

On to book three.

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## Kim says

I found this second book in Jo Walton's "Small Change" trilogy increasingly difficult to put down. From something which I expected would take me a few days to read, it became a book which I devoured in three sittings - the last half of it in a single sitting.

The first book in the trilogy, *Farthing*, created the world of the novel: a world in which England made peace with Nazi Germany in 1941 and is sliding towards becoming a fascist state in 1949. *Farthing* was written in the style of a Golden Age detective novel. *Ha'penny* is written in the style of a thriller. Both novels are written in alternating first and third person narratives and share characters; in particular a police inspector with a conscience.

This novel suffers from being the second instalment in a trilogy. The world created in *Farthing* is powerful, disturbing and unforgettable. Because already familiar, it is somehow less shocking in this novel. In addition, it is clear that the book is in part a set-up for the final instalment.

Nowever, whatever weaknesses the book may have, there is still plenty to make it a page-turner. And if part of the point was to make the reader eager to read the final instalment, then it was hugely successful. I can't wait to get hold of the third novel in the trilogy, *Half a Crown*.

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## Alan says

I'm afraid I got a little sloppy, back in 2008. I did not write a separate review of *Ha'penny* when I read it the

first time. Instead, I just mentioned it as an aside in my original review of Farthing. But that was an oversight, I'll admit, one that does the central volume of Jo Walton's Small Change trilogy a significant disservice. Ha'penny very much has its own voice, and deserves to be considered on its own.

It is a darker work, this middle third. Ha'penny is set just a few weeks after the end of Farthing, but the national situation has already become much more worrisome, even if most of the English living in the shadow of the Third Reich can still convince themselves that things aren't yet so bad as they are on the Continent. The recent murder of James Thirkie is still a fresh topic, but not one that concerns Viola Lark very much. Despite her direct connection to the Farthing Set through Thirkie—her late sister Olivia was his first wife—Viola is much more involved in her own career as an actress, the career she left her family and changed her name to pursue. Viola's just landed a plum role, as Hamlet (cross-casting is all the rage in 1949 London) and that part will be commanding all of her attention for the next several weeks. So it's devastating news when Lauria Gilmore, who was to have played Hamlet's mother Gertrude, manages to get herself blown up by a terrorist bomb in her very own sitting room.

Inspector Carmichael of Scotland Yard and his able sergeant Royston are put on the case, which quickly takes a turn for the sinister and inexplicable. And Viola turns out to be much more involved in Lauria's fate and the reason for it than she ever wanted to be...

I know why I didn't review Ha'penny on its own the first time. It's not easy to talk about this book, despite its distance from the events of Farthing, without dipping into spoiler territory. Ha'penny begins in darkness, and I don't think it'll be any surprise to mention that it ends with even more darkness. But it's a necessary darkness too, I think, a passage that must be traveled through.

Time to see how things turn out. On to Half a Crown...

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## **Melissa says**

[Don't wait until the second half of Hamlet to blow up Hitler! (hide spoiler)]

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## **Book Riot Community says**

The second book in Jo Walton's Small Change trilogy is even better than the first. An alternate history set in a world where Britain made peace with Germany during World War II, shows how people respond as fascist rule begins to take hold following the events in Farthing. Inspector Peter Carmichael of Scotland Yard finds himself chasing terrorists who, it turns out, were planning to kill Hitler, an objective he sympathizes with. At the same time, the politically apathetic actress Viola Lark is preparing for the role of a lifetime in a gender-flipped Hamlet when she is drawn into the bombing plot. Viola's story appealed to the theatre nerd in me, and Jo Walton does a great job showing how political apathy and a tendency to compromise can lead to disaster. It's also fascinating how the book worked on me as a reader. I'm used to rooting for the detective and against the terrorists, but this book forces you to rethink all usual loyalties. I've started Half a Crown, the final book in the trilogy, and it's just as good so far.

—Teresa Preston

## **Nick Davies says**

Aspects of this I liked quite a lot - the plot was interesting (though somewhat similar to the film 'Inglourious Basterds'), there was a decent building of suspense throughout, and it was sprinkled with delightful little bits of writing, stylish moments where everything clicked and was convincing. These however were mixed in with quite a lot which didn't really work for me. Alternate timelines can work well if convincing, and this mainly succeeded, but there seemed to be a necessity to explain aspects in a slightly simplistic manner - which with a sometimes tedious focus on clothes and music and love (both the main romantic relationships within failed utterly to convince or interest me) the book ended up almost feeling as if it was aimed someplace between an adult and a YA audience. However, I did enjoy it overall, just not completely.

As for the shoe-horning in of random references to the term 'ha'penny' at any semi-opportune moment, which I now learn seems also to be something the author does in the other books of the trilogy, this to me felt very clunky and jarring indeed.

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## **Jamie Collins says**

This is the second book of this trilogy set in an alternate timeline where Britain has made peace with Hitler. This is readable enough, but it's depressing as hell, and has a protagonist I didn't believe in.

This book takes place a couple of weeks after the events in Farthing. We're introduced to another young aristocratic woman who has defied her family - this one has become a theater actress and changed her name. She's plausibly uninterested in politics and more concerned with her upcoming play than in the recent sinister administrative changes.

When her estranged sister asks her to participate in an assassination attempt, the actress answers the dangerous, outrageous proposal with a casual, polite refusal - until she finds herself sexually attracted to the man who will kill her if she doesn't go along with the plot, so she agrees to do it.

I just didn't find any of her actions to be believable at all, and this nearly ruined the book for me.

The other characterizations are mostly well done. The actress and her sisters are obviously based on the eccentric Mitford family, and this is kind of cool, except there's an odd section of exposition that gives a synopsis of the lives of each sister - it feels like awkwardly inserted filler, adding nothing to the story.

I do like Inspector Carmichael and continue to be interested in his predicament: feeling helpless and trapped in a job that he despises, trying to do a little bit of good with what little power he has. I'll read the next book mostly for his story.

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## Nikki says

I didn't like *Ha'penny* as much as *Farthing* -- I didn't devour it in the same way: it wasn't as compulsive a read, and besides, everyone's politics are getting a little bit murky. Viola, the first person POV character, isn't as likeable as Lucy -- she's not as amusing to read about, and her convictions are murky, and she gives in all too easily. It's understandable. Probably most people who read this and criticise her for giving in would give in themselves, hoping to earn a few more weeks of life, or maybe get out of it entirely, but we like to think we wouldn't. I didn't really buy into it, though. The way she described it -- admittedly, supposedly writing after the fact -- was unemotional in a way that just didn't let me connect with her. She'd have been much more interesting and easier to relate to if she was passionate about *something*.

I still love and sympathise with Carmichael, and understand what he does, but I didn't feel as in tune with him as I did in the first book, and really wished that he'd do things differently. I'm hoping that this builds up to a stunning ending in the third book, really.

In terms of the plot, it's a bit more *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (John Buchan) than *Clouds of Witness* (Dorothy Sayers), this time round. I wasn't so fascinated by that aspect of it, this time, though -- much more interested in Carmichael's problems.

The death of one of the characters at the end threw me a *lot*. I hadn't been expecting it, at all, and it didn't seem really necessary. Still, having read the first chapter of *Half A Crown*, I think I see where that's going.

Anyway: still chilling, still worth reading, still hits you where it hurts. Perhaps less so -- I felt a little numb, after the gut-punch end of *Farthing* -- but still, it was there.

Ow.

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## KerryH says

Overall this book is weaker than its prequel. The characters were unconvincing to me, and I just cannot believe that Viola would fall so completely for a guy, charming as he may have been, who kidnaps her and threatens her with violence. Stockholm syndrome notwithstanding. Even though I preferred Viola's voice to that of the female lead in the first in this series, I found her shallow and too easily influenced by others, especially her nasty sisters. I didn't mind that Viola seemed uninterested in the growing fascism and oppression in her country, there would have been many others in the population who were just like her, it was her utter capitulation that I found unbelievable.

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## Sarah says

I tore through this one, and I'm tempted to go straight to the library for the third. This book suffers only a little bit from middleoftrilogyitis, mostly manifest in my desire to find out what happens in the final volume.

The trilogy's apparent structure is clever. This book, like the first one, has a split narrative; also like the first it alternates between a first person protagonist and a third person protagonist. The third person narrator, a Scotland Yard detective named Carmichael, is the same as in the first book, and his section blends

seamlessly with that in *Farthing*. Carmichael is a remarkable character, with complex choices and complex motivations, and I look forward to reading the continuation of his story.

I was momentarily disappointed when the first person section didn't continue where *Farthing* had left off, but Walton managed to create another interesting character to hang this one on. As in that book, the first person character is a young woman who has rebelled against her family. She is less fluttery than Lucy but is still relatively naive politically, and Walton is thus able to use her ignorance and inquisitiveness as an expository tool.

I think this volume lacks a little of the horrific novelty of the first, but it is still a powerful exploration of a world that might have been, and of the choices people make in difficult situations. Many of the themes resonate with today's political climate as well.

\*Side note: in my review of *Farthing*, I mentioned that it was shelved in different sections in different libraries. I have now noticed that in my own branch, *Farthing* is shelved in Mystery, *Ha'Penny* is shelved in Fiction, and the third book is shelved in Science Fiction. I guess this one was not really a mystery in the traditional sense, but it still seems odd to me to break up a series so comprehensively.

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## Bettie? says

Description: *In 1949, eight years after the "Peace with Honor" was negotiated between Great Britain and Nazi Germany by the Farthing Set, England has completed its slide into fascist dictatorship. Then a bomb explodes in a London suburb.*

*The brilliant but politically compromised Inspector Carmichael of Scotland Yard is assigned the case. What he finds leads him to a conspiracy of peers and communists, of staunch King-and-Country patriots and hardened IRA gunmen, to murder Britain's Prime Minister and his new ally, Adolf Hitler.*

*Against a background of increasing domestic espionage and the suppression of Jews and homosexuals, an ad-hoc band of idealists and conservatives blackmail the one person they need to complete their plot, an actress who lives for her art and holds the key to the Fuhrer's death. From the ha'penny seats in the theatre to the ha'pennys that cover dead men's eyes, the conspiracy and the investigation swirl around one another, spinning beyond anyone's control.*

*"When I was a lad," replied the foreman, "young ladies was young ladies. And young gentlemen was young gentleman. If you get my meaning."*

*"What this country wants," said Padgett, "is a 'Itler."*

'Gaudy Night' (1935)

- Dorothy L. Sayers

Opening: **They don't hang people like me. They don't want the embarrassment of a trial, and besides, Pappa is who he is. Like it or not, I'm a Larkin. They don't want the headline "Peer's Daughter Hanged."**

A modern day Halfpenny

A rare picture of the Mitford family together, pictured in 1935

3.5\* *Farthing*

3\* *Ha'penny*

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## **Marijan says**

Ako išta, još bolje, još ozbiljnije, još uvjerljivije od prvog dijela. Jo se stvarno potrudila (re)konstruirati period o kojem piše. Nisam baš siguran za ponašanje glavnog lika, ali hej, nisam žensko.

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## **Maryanne says**

I read the first in this series pre-Trump America and I liked it but wow - reading this series in our current political climate is a whole other experience. A chilling look at how apathy shapes society - but also a really great mystery with a compelling central character.

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## **Margaret says**

I read *Farthing* when it came out and thought it was brilliant. On rereading it, I still think so, and *Ha'penny* is just as good. *Farthing's* plot was a country-house mystery; I would call *Ha'penny* more of a suspense thriller, and full of suspense it is, right up to the explosive ending.

It follows on quite shortly after *Farthing*: Inspector Carmichael has just come off the *Farthing* case and has been assigned to a bombing which killed leading actress Lauria Gilmore. Viola Lark has been chosen to act Hamlet in a gender-switching production of the play, in which Gilmore had also been cast until her untimely death. As Carmichael investigates the bombing and ponders retirement from the police force, Viola is drawn into a plot to kill Hitler at the opening night of the play, along with Prime Minister Mark Normanby, the lead figure in the increasingly fascistic government.

As in *Farthing*, Walton alternates voices chapter by chapter, between Viola's first person and Carmichael's third, and both are equally absorbing; I especially liked the reflections of Viola's mental state in her role as Hamlet, as she wavers about her involvement in the plot and treads the edge of sanity. As England slides further and further into fascism, Walton's alternate history, always convincing, becomes more and more frightening. I can hardly wait until *Half a Crown* to see how she resolves it.

(Also, as someone very interested in the Mitford sisters, I really liked Walton's use of them as a basis for Viola and her sisters. They're not exact analogues by any means, but there are clear parallels. Also also, now I really want to see this production of Hamlet.)

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## Barbara says

After reading Jo Walton's , I was pleased to discover that it was #1 of a trilogy. This sequel is no less disturbing. It is set in a world that *might have been* , a society which has tried to trade freedom for security, but fails at both. One reviewer described this set as *parahistorical* , but while it can be viewed as an historical fantasy, aside from the alternate history and world, it is chilling and unfortunately very real.

I will not dwell on the plot, nor the mystery associated with it, except to state how riveting the story is. Walton has successfully created suspense and tension to the final page. Her character development is convincing and vivid.

The importance of this book, as in the previous setting, lies in the behaviors of the characters and their associated governments. The time period is 1949, purportedly 8 years after a "Peace with Honor" was transacted between Nazi Germany and Great Britain. This uneasy, odious, alliance is a major concern of many, but much of the populace is accepting of the fascist dictatorship, blatant anti-semitism and anti homosexual practises. The erroneous beliefs and the callous, brutal language and actions toward the Jews and homosexuals are shocking, yet all too real.

While reading this tale, which involves a bombing, frequent reference is made to the terrorists who want to destroy society, placing the onus for these actions on Jews and communists. Comparisons to today's attacks are easily viewed and disturbingly convincing to the reader.

Walton has achieved an admirable accomplishment in writing this all too plausible, horrifying thriller. I would possibly reread this series, which is rarely my practice.

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