



## Illegal Alien

*Robert J. Sawyer*

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## **Illegal Alien** Robert J. Sawyer

The highly-praised author of "Starplex, End of an Era," and "Foreigner" presents a thrilling new story, a skillful blend of the great wonders of the universe and the harsh realities of life on earth. When a disabled starship enters our atmosphere, fear is quickly replaced with awe-and the incredibly intelligent members of the Tosok race are welcomed with open arms. But the growing spirit of trust and cooperation is shattered when a popular human scientist is found dead. The U.S. government provides a leading civil rights lawyer to defend the accused alien. And an unprecedented trial centers around not only one lost life, but the very essence of justice itself.

## **Illegal Alien Details**

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Author : Robert J. Sawyer

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## From Reader Review Illegal Alien for online ebook

### Leila P says

I had pretty mixed feeling for this book. On the one hand, I always enjoy first contact stories and also murder mysteries. But on the other hand, I really don't like courtroom drama (especially American courtroom drama)... and two thirds of this novel took place in the court room! Nevertheless, I liked the ending, so it was worth reading through.

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### Matt says

More courtroom drama than sci-fi. Was an enjoyable read, with somewhat predictable outcomes. Sawyer managed to avoid his typical shortfall and actually ended the book satisfactorily without going into existential debate or unbelievable futures.

One of the better novels of RJS that I have read. On par with Triggers and the WWW series.

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### Marrella says

Mankind makes first contact with an alien civilization when a space ship is stranded in our solar system. The Tosoks come from Alpha Centauri, which is about four light-years away. One of the eight astronauts was killed in a tragic accident when he tried to repair the damage the ship sustained crossing the Kuiper Belt, an asteroid belt on the outer rim of the solar system. The other seven Tosoks are received on Earth with open arms. It looks like they have to spend two years on our planet until the parts they need for a lift off can be made. The strangers are a big media event and nobody thinks to ask them why they came here in the first place. Everybody just assumes that they are scientists wanting to make contact with other civilizations. A close friendship forms between Cletus Calhoun, the host of a popular scientific TV program, and Hask, one of the Tosoks. When Calhoun is found murdered in his quarters and Hask is the main suspect, the public is shocked.

ILLEGAL ALIEN is a well-done mixture of science fiction and mystery. The idea of an alien defendant in a courtroom on Earth is intriguing and quite new. There's no Grisham-style dynamic young lawyer who wants to kick off his career with a spectacular case. The lawyer for the defense is a not quite young African American who seems predestined to defend a member of a very special ethnic minority. Sawyer doesn't bore the readers with endless trial preparation, but lets the bigger part of the story take place in the courtroom and describes the investigations that shed more and more light on the nature and origin of the Tosoks.

The description of the Alpha Centauri system is vivid, and in the end you are convinced that even a technically much more advanced civilization doesn't have to be all that different from humanity. The beliefs of the Tosoks were shattered when they discovered evolution and realized that they were not created in the image of their omnipotent god. Without moralizing Sawyer holds up a mirror and shows us what grotesque shape religion as a universal phenomenon can take. ILLEGAL ALIEN is probably no eternal masterpiece, but a fun read and one of my favorite books by this author.

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## Glenn says

Fascinating.

This book was shades of Orson Scott Card, just sans the thinly veiled preachy undertone. So the better parts of OSC's work.

This was primarily mystery/legal drama with SciFi flavour. As seems to be common thus far, Sawyer is an incurable idealist. Though since I was raised with one of my parents being a Trekkie, there's definitely an appeal here.

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## Debbie says

Illegal Alien was an entertaining mix – Matlock meets the Twilight Zone. Earth has been visited by aliens – the Tosoks – and a murder is committed that all the evidence points to one of the alien visitors. This is a much legal thriller as it is science fiction. There isn't a lot of depth to the story, but it is a light, entertaining read. Not one of my favorites by Robert J. Sawyer, but still worth a read.

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## Emily says

I've read other books by Sawyer and would have to say this is my least favourite so far. Not that it's terrible, but maybe it's a little dated now (being over 20 years old), both in reference to technology and also in general treatment of alien communications. After my joy of watching "Arrival" and the sophisticated explanations of the difficulties of communication between species so very different, I found the utterly simplistic way that alien communication is dealt with in this novel to be jarringly unbelievable. Also, it's less pure science fiction and more of an American courtroom drama; and while I enjoy the former, I tend to avoid the latter so the last half of the book definitely dragged on a bit. So, massive suspension of disbelief required at many points in the book, and while the premise was entertaining and probably a bit more original 20 years ago, the effort didn't really pay off for me. Not terrible, and if you like courtroom dramas you'll probably like it more than I did, but definitely not one of Sawyer's best.

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## Fred Hughes says

Robert J Sawyer always tells a well constructed story line, with believable characters, and a sense of cheekiness.

This story is no different; when some stranded aliens are accused of murdering a human scientist. It's a who dunnit with what appears to be an obvious killer but is he ?

Great read

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## **James Mourgos says**

I really liked “Illegal Alien.” It was written at the time of the O.J. Simpson murder trial and Sawyer cannot resist mentioning it throughout the book. This is fine, as it allows the author some flexibility of plot and pacing: an old lawyer who has won his share of cases, Mr. Dale Rice, a black man who knew Martin Luther King, Jr. and at 70+ years young gets the chance of a century – to defend an alien accused of the murder of Calhoun, a PBS news/astronomer who was the first to step aboard an alien vessel, make friends with the creatures and introduce them to society.

Plots: It is interesting how Sawyer uses the alien as a complete zero in looking at the American justice system. The author admits (on other forums) to have thoroughly researched our system of justice and in many ways it does come up wanting. The shifting of gears between defense and prosecution, the calling up of witnesses, jury selection, and so on is interesting.

Themes: Racism plays some part; also reliability, trust, deception and a stick-to-itiveness runs the gamut of the novel.

The only thing I did not like about the novel was its apparent criticism of those who love UFOs, Star Trek and other geek elements. Minor point.

Bottom Line: Creative, a bit dated, and fascinating look from a Canadian (alien?) perspective of our sometimes wild and crazy justice system. Recommended for lovers to *To Kill a Mockingbird* and whoever sat through the entire broadcast of the O.J. Simpson trials.

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## **KB says**

While reading the initial chapters of this book, my impression was of the author indulging his personal fascination with the sensationalism that accompanies high-profile American criminal cases (specifically the O.J. Simpson murder-trial circus), due to the story being constructed as a legal thriller à la John Grisham, though with a science fiction variation. But that first impression faded as the story progressed and developed into a complex intriguing mystery. The one element of this book that I disliked was the author's transcription of a character's spoken Appalachian accent, which leapt off the page obtrusively and inauthentically. Otherwise, however, the book was highly engaging and difficult to put down.

The numerous plot twists which unraveled were genuinely surprising. Without spoiling anything, I can assert that the book's conclusion is exceptionally satisfying. It may even be my favorite ending to any book that I have read.

The very fine works of Robert Sawyer have yet to disappoint or bore me. I am glad that I picked up this novel, and I definitely recommend it to fans of science fiction/courtroom drama/mystery.

## Scott Jann says

The aliens and alien technology portrayed in this book were no disappointment, compared to Sawyer's other books. The book was the story of the trial of an alien who is arrested for committing murder. While I wish the story had more aliens and their technology in it, the legal proceedings in the LA court system were well written and made me reflect a lot on human civil rights.

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## Ben Babcock says

In *Illegal Alien*, Robert J. Sawyer manages to convince me that aliens from Alpha Centauri have come to Earth and need our help repairing their spaceship. He fails to convince me that the California District Attorney could try one of those aliens for first degree murder.

Sawyer recognizes the improbability of such an event, because he doesn't even try to justify it. The president mumbles something about the federal government not being able to interfere with the case because the state has jurisdiction and it's an election year. Yeah, because staying ahead in those polls is way more important than diplomatic relations with an alien species. And no one else so much as lifts a finger to try to stop this insanity. Speaking of which, Sawyer briefly digresses into the amorality of the Tosok, who believe in a female God who predestines all events, proving that Hask is insane by human legal standards. Not that it matters: Sawyer is determined to wring a trial from this Tosok, because that is where the story lies.

OK, so let's set aside the fact that trying an alien in a human court of law is silly. It's the story Sawyer has given us, and we have to work with that. To be fair, once one gets past this premise, the whole concept is intriguing. How exactly does one go about arguing the guilt or defending the innocence of an alien being? It's more than that though. Although *Illegal Alien* is, at times, very pedestrian in its tone, Sawyer manages to use his contrived courtroom drama to explore more than just the legal issues. He disguises his exposition as testimony, just as parents hide vegetables in the mashed potatoes, and suddenly readers find themselves learning about alien biology, technology, and philosophy even as they wonder if Hask will be acquitted—and whether he wants to go free.

Let me be clear: the writing in this book is bad. The characters are flat, even stereotypical at times, and prone to that mode of generalization that passes for narration in a Sawyer novel. By this I mean, every thought that passes through a character's mind happens to be fundamental reflection on something integral to the plot. For example, take a thought running through the mind of Dale Rice, Hask's lawyer:

Still, there weren't many times when it was an actual advantage to be African-American. He was used to the screwups in restaurants. Waitresses bringing him the wrong meal—mixing up his order with that of the only other black person in the entire place. White people constantly confused him with other black men, men who, except for their skin color, looked nothing like him, and were often decades younger.

But the one time it perhaps was to his advantage to be big and black was when he wanted to go for late-night walks.

Now, I'm not black, so I'm not going to pretend to know whether this characterization is accurate. I suspect, as with all anecdotes, it's true for some and false for many others. Regardless, my point is that Sawyer

handles the whole issue of race about as deftly as clog dancers dance in cement shoes. Still not convinced? The detective in charge of the murder investigation is Jesus Perez—and that's pronounced *Hay-soos*, he is quick to remind us *every single time* he appears.

When it comes to enthusiasm for cutting-edge developments in science, Sawyer is among the best writers out there. His near-future science fiction is thought-provoking, when it comes to the science parts, but his characters consistently fail to impress me. And his dialogue does not fare much better. Unfortunately, *Illegal Alien* is mostly dialogue, because the middle of the book consists of little more than dialogue-laden courtroom scenes broken up by interstitial moments of tension during recess. Maybe those more amenable to legal thrillers might tolerate such a high degree of dialogue; it certainly works for movies. But the sheer amount of time spent exchanging words in that courtroom, witnessing every single instance that Dale says, "Objection!" . . . rather than make me turn the page because of tension and interest, I turned it so I could finish the book faster.

OK, so let's set aside the incredible premise and the bad writing. What have we left . . . oh yes, the aliens. Sawyer uses the courtroom as a theatre to tell us all about the Tosoks. Despite their taboos about discussing internal biology (comparable to our taboos on having sex in front of other people), we learn about the Tosoks' internal organs. We learn how they shed their skin, how they reproduce, how they count their familial relations. There are myriad ways Sawyer could have chosen to expound on these subjects; he chose the courtroom, and that decision works well. Although the legal question alone is intriguing, combined with Sawyer's sneaky world-building, it almost makes *Illegal Alien* downright compelling. (Almost.)

It is hard to believe that the same author who wrote this also wrote *WWW:Wake* . I guess now that I've read this, that, and the Neanderthal Parallax series, I've seen examples of Sawyer at his best, worst, and middling. Unless there is something about this book's description that makes you salivate and throb in all the right places, this isn't the Sawyer novel I'd pimp to you.

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## Lyn says

If the extremity appendage covering garment does not fit, you must acquit.

Writing a first contact book only a few years after the OJ Simpson trial, author Robert J. Sawyer blends elements of a legal thriller with a pretty cool SciFi story for overall good effect. Not just a speculative fiction allegory for the "trial of the century" Sawyer makes clear reference to the earlier trial and one of the characters, civil rights defense attorney Dale Rice, had been considered for Simpson's "dream team" according to the backstory.

A spaceship comes down and the aliens, the Tosoks, need their vessel repaired. In exchange for help, they agree to share their advanced technology with us backwater hicks. Speaking of hicks, one of the central characters is actually a Tennessee Kid from my neck of the woods who is a popular Carl Sagan type TV scientist who acts as an ambassador and friend to the small alien group of about seven.

When a human is found brutally murdered, under circumstances that implicates one of the aliens, Los Angeles' finest puts the cuffs on our favorite Martian and the legal "trial of the millennium" is on.

What Sawyer does very well is create for the aliens a civilization for them that is sufficiently . . . alien . . . to make the kind of misunderstandings and cultural differences with our own fun to watch. I was reminded of

other alien race books like *The Mote in God's Eye*, *Speaker for the Dead*, *Embassytown*, and Sawyer's own *Calculating God*.

Where this falls flat is that it is two thirds legal thriller and one third SF and a none too subtle vehicle for Sawyer to explore legal and moral themes.

Still a good SF story and I'll read more from him, though I don't think this is his best work.

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## Sergio Frosini says

Un classico dei gialli, il *legal thriller* che fa pensare subito a Perry Mason; solo che questo è in salsa fantascientifica e ben strutturato, con la classica tensione delle prove a carico dell'imputato che si accumulano senza pietà, con un colpo di scena finale e tutti i *parafernalia* del genere .

Con un bel paragrafo che smonta l'idiozia tanto cara agli arteriocattolici antievoluzionisti sull'occhio umano "troppo complesso per essere frutto dell'evoluzione". Anzi. L'occhio è la migliore prova dell'evoluzione al lavoro.

Per tacere del simpatico capitoletto nel quale ci si chiede, in caso di condanna, come fare a sopprimere un alieno del quale non si conosce la fisiologia, e dove si intravede l'ipocrisia della pena di morte "che non deve far soffrire"

Non a caso l'autore è canadese, e **NON** statunitense. Certe cose i *born in the USA* difficilmente le comprendono.

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## La\_mariane says

My thoughts :

This novel is clearly sci-fi : first contact with aliens, can you get something more obviously sci-fi? And yet, it is more an exploration (and a critique) of the US justice system. The outsider points of view helps, because the lawyer has to explain everything to his alien client, Hask. It shows the unfair aspects of the justice system, even if, in the end, Sawyer's message is not entirely pessimistic : we finally learn the truth about Clete's death. I really liked this aspect of the book : the idea that there is more than meets the eye in a particular situation, that you have to ask questions and look for the truth (even if lawyers and the DA are not concerned by the truth, more by strategies, jury choices, ...).

The end of the novel is honestly not the best : I felt like the author used an *alien ex machina* to tie his plot, but then, the real point of the plot is the trial, not the sci-fi aspect, so I can forgive it.

This novel also introduces an important theme, even if it's not original : religion, science and how people can live with those two "forces". More specifically, the theory of evolution has a large part in the later developments of the plot, and Sawyer clearly take a side : he shows how ridiculous it is for people to believe religious arguments/ideas when there are facts that contradict them. For the record, I totally agree with Sawyer : anyone who argues against the theory of evolution because it's not what the Bible teaches us need a serious reality check.

Verdict?

*Illegal Alien* is a good novel, but don't read it thinking you'll find adventures and traditional sci-fi themes. It explores US society and points out what could be improved in the Justice system. I found the trial engrossing, and the three main characters (the lawyer Rice, Frank Nobile who is the White House

representant among the aliens, and Hask) quite well developed. The other characters were fonctions in the storyline. I think this book is a good read for somone who is looking for an unusual sci-fi novel, or for someone who is discovering the genre but doesn't want to read a space-opera or a post-apocaliptic dystopia.

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### **Snotnose says**

Funny story. When I got divorced I stored a few boxes of books in dad's garage. Dad died, I'm now moving those boxes into my apartment. My car died on the freeway last Sunday. Called a tow truck, had a 90 minute wait. Dug through a box o' books in the back seat and found this gem.

I'm liking it. I can see how it's going to end (I'm betting the Aliens are The Bad Guys), but it's a fun read.

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