Hip and acclaimed Chicago novelist Ben Tanzer pens a science fiction chiller

"For a novel involving flash mob protests, Martian real estate deals, and robot hand jobs, Orphans is deeply affecting and terribly tender. This is 1984 by way of Tom Perrotta." - Salvatore Pane, author of Last Call in the City of Bridges

In Orphans (170 pages, 5 x 8, $15.95, Paperback, 978-0-87580-695-2, November 2013), Tanzer’s futuristic science fiction novel the metropolis of Chicago has morphed into a place called Baidu, a burned-out shell of its former self. Homeless people have been banned from the central city and have set up makeshift camps along the lakefront. Drone helicopters constantly patrol city streets from above, and hapless people who congregate run the risk of being summarily executed from supersonic machine guns. The recession has devastated the landscape and all menial jobs have been taken over by life-like robots. The lucky few who can find work are scanned, profiled, and even cloned by “the corporation,” a secretive and ominous organization reminiscent of Orwell’s Big Brother.

Tanzer tells a story about drugs, surfing, punk music, lost youth, parenting, sex, and pop culture as vernacular. The main character, Norrin Radd, is married to a trophy wife and has a son he desperately loves. Unable to support his family under growing pressure, he finds a job and is sent off to Planet Mars to act as a celestial real estate agent, selling “property” to wealthy clients who can no longer abide life on troubled Planet Earth, promising them an ethereal future in the cosmos.

Tanzer tells a riveting story that is a conscious intersection of The Martian Chronicles and The Space Merchants with Death of a Salesman and Bartleby the Scrivener. It raises the essential questions of what we are allowed as workers, and expected to be, or do, when work is fraught with desperation.

Ultimately, Orphans is a literary survey of the 21st century male psyche, yet it does so with a newfound twist and contemporary themes. This is a world where the recession is all we know, work is only available to a select group, and this group not only need fear being replaced on the job, but in their homes and beds.

BEN TANZER is a prolific novelist and an Emmy-award winning Public Service Announcement writer. He lives in Chicago. Visit him online at bentanzer.blogspot.com.