

Book Review:

Fahrenheit 451 By Ray Bradbury

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Fahrenheit 451 begins in the future in a large American city on the East Coast. The futuristic world described here is chilling; it is a future where every type of book, save inexpensive comics, are burned by "firemen." One such fireman is Guy Montag, who is tall and dark-haired like most firemen. One thing sets him apart from his colleagues, though: he secretly loves books.

One night while Montag is walking home from a day's work, he meets a young, bright girl named Clarisse McClellan. She is idealistic and hates the social structure of the times. She says that firemen once put out fires started accidentally instead of starting them. Montag thinks this to be nonsense, for the Chief told him firemen have always been fire-starters.

Clarisse goes on to tell him about her uncle, who remembers the past and has a sharp intellect. She tells Montag that her family stays up all night talking about a variety of different subjects. He finds this to be extremely odd. Why would anyone want to stay up and talk?

Montag decides that the girl is eccentric because hardly anyone except for firemen walk down the street at any time. He goes home to his wife Mildred, a woman who has very little to do except to take part in interactive TV shows. She has three walls of the living room equipped with such walls. She thinks that a fourth wall would be great, while Montag refuses because he thinks it is useless and expensive.

The next day, Montag finds Clarisse waiting at the bus stop. He asks her if she goes to school. She says she doesn't because she's been labeled anti-social by her teachers. They talk for a while, and he eventually goes to work. When he gets to work, an alarm is sounded, so the two firemen go to destroy the house of books.

Before they burn the house down, Montag takes two books. When the owner of the house refuses to leave, a fireman burns her along with the house and its books. Montag feels sorry for the old lady, and he becomes depressed.

The next day he calls in sick. His commander, Captain Beatty, comes by and talks to him. Montag is lying in bed with a book behind his pillow. Mildred feels the book and asks what it is, causing Capt. Beatty to become alarmed. Then he tells Montag that it's permissible for a fireman to take a book home once in a while, as long as he burns it within 24 hours. Beatty also freely admits that he has read many books.

Mildred later tells Montag that Clarisse and her family have been murdered for their supposedly anti-social beliefs. Montag feels a wave of sadness and hopelessness because of the horrible government.

Later in the day Montag goes to the house of a man whom he had met earlier in a park. This man, Professor Faber, has several volumes in his possession. Faber was forced to retire because there were no students at the universities and colleges. At first Faber hesitates to let Montag in, but then he lets the man come inside. Montag has a Bible in his possession, and he lets Faber see it. Faber says there are only a few left in the country.

Faber gives Montag a miniature earpiece that acts as a walkie-talkie, which they will use to communicate. Montag goes back to work, where he talks to Capt. Beatty, who tells him that books are burned because they contradict each other and make people displeased. Since worldwide happiness is a goal of the government, books are destroyed. Then, an alarm is sounded, and Montag is surprised to learn that his own home will be

burned. Beatty tells Montag to burn the residence himself. Through the earpieces, Faber tells Montag to refuse to do so. Then Beatty sees the earpiece and destroys it. Capt. Beatty explains that Mildred called in the alarm. Beatty says that Montag will have to be destroyed. Instead, Montag sets the flame thrower on the Captain and his fellow firemen. He also destroys the firemen's equipment.

The Police send a Mechanical Hound, a dog-like device with a lethal injection, after Montag. It is set to find him by his chemical makeup. It eventually reaches Montag, and he destroys it also. He flees the city because he is now a wanted fugitive.

When he crosses the river on the outskirts of town, he knows that he is safe. In the surrounding forests, he meets a group of former professors who have memorized books. They explain that there are hundreds of people who have done so across the country. Montag is invited to join the group. He finds safety and refuge in the woods because Police never venture into these woodlands.

They have a small television, and Montag watches as an innocent bystander is arrested instead of Montag. One of the other men says that the Police want to capture someone, so they take anyone, regardless of guilt or innocence. Also, they take only the strange pedestrians. This way, they can get rid of these misfits in the social system.

After the men watch this report, a flight of enemy bombers thuds past the group of men and flies onward to the city. They drop several bombs and fly away. The city is destroyed. Montag thinks briefly of Mildred and then of Faber, who is safely on his way to St. Louis via bus. He had told Montag about seeing a retired printer there so that they could print underground newsletters. Montag realizes that he should stay with his group of newly found friends and continue his silent battle against society.

The theme of this story must be that censorship gets out of hand if used incorrectly. It should be used to keep certain materials away from minors, but adults should have access to a variety of materials. In Montag's world, a predominately totalitarian government has used censorship as a means to destroy anything they do not agree with.

I enjoyed this book because it shows how censorship could eventually get out of control. If censorship is applied to every little thing people find offensive, then this story's prophecies may take place. I learned that despite government intervention, people will stand for their beliefs and go to great lengths, like memorizing books, to keep what's right from perishing. The author most likely intended to show how censorship and government control can get to be uncontrollable, similar to the stories of 1984 and Brave New World. Bradbury mentions in the introduction that many publishers refused to publish this tale of censorship. Most people do not want to offend people, but I feel all types of literature should be accessible to the public.