

in an author's note in *The Swords of Lankhmar*. Indeed, in some ways they are almost parodies. Leiber made a point in his introductions to most of the books of asserting that Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser were the best swordsmen in all the worlds. In what he called "Induction," at the beginning of the first book, *Swords and Deviltry*, Leiber even claimed that Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser were the two reincarnated halves of a greater hero. This cannot be taken seriously, and the idea was used in only one of the stories ("The Curse of the Smalls and the Stars," one of the latest). Even the name of the world is a joke: It is "Nowhen" backwards, a reference to the famous novel *Erewhon* (1872) by Samuel Butler, but one evidently used only to amuse those in the know. This is not the only such sly inversion; for example, in *The Swords of Lankhmar*, Kokgnab is named as a source of subtle massage techniques. Even the seamy-side attitude of the whole series was in part a reaction to J. R. R. Tolkien's approach to heroic fantasy. Leiber hints at this as well in *The Swords of Lankhmar*.

There is far more to these stories, however, than reaction to traditional fantasy literature. The novelty of the likable antihero probably contributed much to the early popularity of the series. In addition, the strongly developed protagonists gave the reader something easy to identify with. The continued success of these stories, however, does not result from novelty. Leiber's story ideas were original and intriguing. He gave free rein to his imagination in inventing villains, religions, cultures, natural laws, and more. Nehwon sports a truly preposterous mythology and magic (not to mention geography), which add to its charm. Talking skulls and killer jewels are but the tip of the iceberg. Leiber was a good enough writer to make even the most ridiculous notion acceptable. His combination of writing skill, excellent story ideas, a unique and enchanting setting, and good characterization made the Fafhrd

and Gray Mouser series what it is and earned for it a place among the great works of fantasy literature.

Leiber also employed, though sparingly, a trick used by many fantasy writers, that of having his characters discover, or know, scientific principles not known on Earth before the scientific age. For example, in "Stardock," the Mouser intuits why water boils at a lower temperature at high altitudes. Leiber reversed the trick in "Trapped in the Sea of Stars," having Fafhrd guess at cosmological interpretations that would be correct on Earth but are subsequently proved wrong in Nehwon.

There is another reason for the popularity of the Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser stories. Leiber peppered many of them with references to the ordinary world, such as the mysterious interworld traveler Karl Treuherz. "Adept's Gambit" even takes place on Earth, in the eastern Mediterranean of more than two millennia ago. These references to things terrestrial seem incongruous and so disturb the suspension of disbelief, but at the same time they provide personal interest for the reader.

It is interesting that, in so many stories, written over a span of about forty years, there are so few inconsistencies. The most glaring is the unintended sex change Sheelba undergoes in "The Curse of the Smalls and the Stars." In this story he becomes and has ever been a she, yet in all earlier stories featuring Sheelba, he was definitely male.

The role of sex (as opposed to gender) is important in this series, and it looms both larger and more kinky in the later stories. This is probably because the earlier stories were published at a time when sex in fantasy fiction was hardly acceptable, at least to publishers. By the time the later stories were written, many restrictions had been lifted. Leiber received the World Fantasy Award for Life Achievement, in no small part because of his success with the Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser stories.

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

## FAHRENHEIT 451

*A depiction of a futuristic society in which reading is forbidden and books are burned by firemen*

**Author:** Ray Bradbury (1920–2012)

**Genre:** Science fiction—dystopia

**Type of work:** Novel

**Time of work:** An indeterminate time in the future

**Location:** Implicitly an anonymous location in the United States

**First published:** 1953 (expanded version of “The Fireman,” *Galaxy Science Fiction*, 1951)

### THE STORY

It is ironic that in 1953, an asbestos edition of the novel, which describes a terrifying, censorship-obsessed society that burns books, was published. Ironic too is that in the 1980’s, Ray Bradbury found that the publisher had, through the years, silently censored from his original text seventy-five sections of *Fahrenheit 451*. Stories published in the 1953 edition are omitted from most later editions.

*Fahrenheit 451*, which takes its title from the temperature at which paper burns, takes place in a sterile, futuristic society in which firemen burn books because the State has decided that books make people unhappy. Suspected readers are arrested. Instead of reading, people listen to “sea-shells,” tiny radios that fit in the ear, and watch insipid television shows projected on wall-to-wall screens. In school, students play sports and learn nothing. Fast driving is encouraged, and pedestrians are arrested. Indiscriminate drug use, suicide, overpopulation, and war are rampant.

In this world lives Guy Montag, the main character, who smilingly and unquestioningly accepts his job as a fireman. Guy’s wife, Mildred, watches endless hours of television and overdoses on narcotics. Early in the novel, a young neighbor, Clarisse, shocks Guy by asking whether he ever reads the books he burns and whether he is happy. Although she is later killed by a hit-and-run driver, Clarisse is the catalyst through

which Guy begins to evaluate his life and career, and finally the society he supports. Clarisse and Mildred are foils: Clarisse’s thinking and questioning is a threat to the State, whereas Mildred’s zombie-like addiction to television and pills makes her the personification of this society.

Guy’s reeducation continues when he is deeply moved by the selfimmolation of an old woman who chooses to die with her books rather than be separated from them. It is at this point, early in the novel, that Guy secretly takes and reads one of the old woman’s books to satisfy his curiosity.

Captain Beatty, Guy’s supervisor and a master at brainwashing, rewrites history to say that firemen have always set fires and reading has always been forbidden. Beatty explains the State’s philos-

ophy that humans need only entertainment, not the insights, self-reflection, uncertainty, and occasional sadness provided by books. Beatty explains that in order to achieve societal equality and happiness, people should not be given two sides of an issue or books to debate, think about, or question. He insists that because some people dislike certain books, all books should be burned to ensure everyone’s happiness.

Guy’s increasing inner numbness draws him closer to reading books. It also draws him to Faber, a retired professor of English. Faber, a foil to Beatty, explains to Guy that what is contained in books gives life depth and meaning. Books can present a higher quality of information as well as the time to think about and then act on that information.

After Guy reads aloud to Mildred and her friends Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach,” a poem about the erosion of faith, they turn him in to the police for breaking the law. When Beatty and the firemen arrive at the Montags’ house, Guy kills Beatty. He escapes to a remote colony of intellectuals, one of several such groups that live in the woods. Group members have memorized and therefore “become” books. They recite their books, thereby passing on their knowledge to their children, who will await the rebirth of a literate civilization. The novel ends with a quotation from the last chapter of the Bible and the guarded optimism that the antiliterate State will soon self-destruct and a new, cultured society will rise from the ashes.

### ANALYSIS

Fantasy and science fiction are closely intertwined, and *Fahrenheit 451* falls into both genres. No time machine carries the reader into this dark future, but Bradbury takes a seemingly unreal world and makes every element of it real and credible. From the technicians who apathetically pump the stomachs and transfuse the blood of the unhappy many who take daily drug overdoses to the blaring multiwalled televisions, Bradbury’s attention to detail makes this nightmare seem plausible, vivid, and alive.

*Fahrenheit 451* fits clearly into the utopia-dystopia motif that appeared in science fiction throughout the twentieth century. Whereas utopian fiction presents an idyllic world or society, dystopian fiction often portrays the individual’s struggle against the implacable state in an ugly,

depressing world. To illustrate two types of dystopias, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) is a frightening view of a technology-obsessed future, and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) is an appalling picture of an absolute dictatorship's effect on the human psyche. Bradbury's novel is a confluence of these dystopias. The brain-dead media and faster cars of the future (technology) add to the suffocation of individuals in a sterile State in which reading and thinking are outlawed (dictatorship).

*Fahrenheit 451* falls in the middle period of Bradbury's literary career. Such short stories as "The Scythe" (1943) and "The Lake" (1944) belong to Bradbury's early period (1943–1945). These works are in the realm of fantasy and deal with the implications in life of choosing imagination over rationality. The practice in these works of having a hero who intuits some scary reality and tries to change things leads to the character of Guy Mon-

tag in *Fahrenheit 451*, which was written, along with *The Illustrated Man* (1951) and *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), during Bradbury's vintage period (1946–1955). All three books were adapted into screenplays. Science-fiction elements as well as dystopian landscapes enter his work during this time. Products of his later period, beginning in 1957, include *Dandelion Wine* (1957) and *I Sing the Body Electric* (1969). Many of his later works deal with magic, joy, and human eccentricity.

Critics believe that *The Martian Chronicles* is Bradbury's most successful work, exploring the tension between the needs of the individual and those of society. Although some debate whether Bradbury's work belongs to science fiction or fantasy and some consider his work simplistic, others feel strongly that it has been unfairly neglected and underrated and that his diverse and copious literary output is of astonishing quality and variety.

—Howard A. Kerner

## FAIRYLAND

*Bio-hacker Alex Sharkey is co-opted by an amoral child genius named Milena in a plot to subvert the artificial servants of the future, the dolls, into autonomous creatures dubbed fairies, who will remake society and culture to suit their alien ways*

**Author:** Paul J. McAuley (1955– )

**Genre:** Science Fiction—cyberpunk

**Type of Work:** Novel

**Time of Plot:** Mid-twenty-first century

**Location:** Europe

**First Published:** 1995

### THE STORY

Our immediate focus is on an introduction to the hapless Alex Sharkey. Fat, balding, something of a mama's boy, he is hardly your standard, mirror-shaded cyberpunk cliché. Resident in London, a B-list genius, he is content to subsist on profits from minor-league drug designing. The first several chapters find Alex contracting for some work from gangster Billy Rock, then being braced for info by a cop named Howard Perse. But then, in chapter 11, he has the heady misfortune to run into an artificially boosted child prodigy

named Milena. Driven solely by selfish interests, Milena has a plan to transform the "engineered" pseudo-human slaves, called dolls, into something quite different: fairies, in fact, with herself assuming the role of their Titania and Alex her Merlin. (Unlike Richard Calder's long-legged, sexy dolls [see the entry on *Cythera*], McAuley's creations are blue, short, and generally trollish, more utilitarian than decorative.) In chapter 15, Milena reveals her backstory:

*"My sisters and I were treated with neuron growth substance while we were in our host mothers. Increased neuronal connectivity—that's what they gave me, although it was effected by very crude chemical interference. What I've brought along will do the job much more efficiently. Anyway, we were brought up in seclusion, given a hyperconnected education that started before we could crawl, and tested continually. Test after test after test. Most of my sisters suffered spectacular psychoses. They built their own worlds inside their own heads, and re-treated into them. The rest turned out to be no more intelligent than average.*

*I'm the only one left, Alex, and sometimes I think that I'm mad, too. Mad, but functional. What they don't know is that I'm smarter than the company psycholo-*

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