

The Future is Here Community Comment, June 20, 2012: Mike Goldsby

I have fond childhood memories of going to the library and checking out the science fiction of writers like Jules Vernes, Issac Asimov and Ray Bradbury.

These writings sparked my imagination, gave me escape from some of my childhood realities and made me think about the future implications of our actions today.

Ray Bradbury died last week, at the age of 91. His novels and short stories were more about people than science fiction. Even though much of his work was done in the 50's, it stayed timeless. He described that science and technology will advance but a number of human emotions will remain, expressed through the new scientific advances. These changes will help people reach their dreams or face their nightmares.

He thought outer space and inner space were the same thing. He claimed he didn't predict the future. He tried to prevent the future.

Fahrenheit 451 described a future where books were banned and destroyed. In 1953, he tried to warn us that some institutions are so threatened by ideas that they will take dramatic steps to destroy those ideas. Recent example: the Vatican just denounced the writings of Catholic Nun and Theologian Sister Margaret Farley for her discussion of Christian Sexual Ethics.

In ***The Illustrated Man***, one of the short stories is titled ***The Veldt***. Bradbury wrote it about a futuristic home that took care of every person's needs and surrounded them in visual entertainment. He intended it as a warning about his concerns that the television could destroy the American family. He lived long enough to see his fears get played out with cell phones, smart phones, laptops, you name it.

We are living with things right now that are every bit as weird as science fiction and we are still figuring them out. Drone strikes: flying deadly robots controlled from miles away taking out specific enemies. It is great when they take out a specific enemy without loss of our troops. But sometimes they miss and take out the innocent. Countries like Pakistan hate them. I wish Pakistan would condemn roadside bombs and suicide bombers with the same enthusiasm. How do drone strikes affect the hearts-and-minds approach, of trying to win over the local populace through troops on the ground?

The US has put our space program on hold but private enterprise is making great strides. The privately owned Dragon spacecraft recently transported half a ton of provisions to the International Space Station and then returned safely to earth, under budget and ahead of schedule. Since corporations now have personhood, the same rights as individuals, do we really want them to own fleets of rockets or lay claim to the moon or other planets? Could a corporation try to rename a planet?

There are so many more changes going on now that we won't understand until later. But hopefully we will have visionary poets, like Ray Bradbury, to light our way. We will probably not pay attention, but it is nice to know someone tried to warn us.

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment