

FAHRENHEIT 451

The temperature at which book paper catches fire and burns

by

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DIRECTED BY MEL GIBSON

Revised Third Draft

DARKNESS.

We are in outer space. No atmosphere, no life - just a billion stars in a velvet void. All around us is the howl of the cosmic wind. A planet - awesome, majestic - emerges from the bottom of frame. The light of a distant sun catches it. This is earth rise.

The whole world seems to be ocean but then - coming closer - we see an area of land, perfectly square. The Wall - a towering concrete dike encloses it, keeping out the water. Super the title.

Unytud Stayt uv Amerika

Closer we go, closer - there are towering buildings, grids of freeways, the snaking tubes of vacuum trains, huddled masses of houses, video billboards fifty stories high.

A narrow causeway runs out from The Wall, across the water. At the end is a granite pyramid. Strange symbols and a Latin motto are etched into the stone. The apex of the pyramid hovers above the rest of it, completely unattached. Set into the apex is a huge, unblinking eye. This is Top of the Mountain - the Government sees everything, knows everything. Super the title:

**April 21, 2035
4.15pm, Mundy**

The camera keeps tightening - down into the sterile canyons of the city - to a huge public plaza: empty, harsh, desolate. A series of fountains play to themselves.

The plaza is ringed by German Expressionist buildings: The Department of Peace, The Chamber of Industry, The Secretariat-General. Biggest of all is a stone building with a pair of helmets and the figures "451" etched into the facade. This is the Fire Department.

We push in on a window -

INT. FIREHOUSE. DAY.

About thirty school-kids - neatly dressed, clean-scrubbed - file through a set of doors into a huge room. Their teacher - a heavy-set, kindly woman - closes the door behind them. We go to black. Peter Gabriel's music starts. Out of darkness -

001 10-97 07:18P

301 10-97 17:01

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FIREMEN

explode onto the screen. Volleys of flame shoot towards us, smoke swirls, a beam crashes down - we are in the middle of a burning building.

The firemen wear half-face helmets and fire-resistant space suits: large white tanks on their backs, digital read-outs on their forearms monitoring temperature, oxygen and deadly gases, hi-tech glasses that allow them to see through fire and smoke. Only part of their face and hair is exposed - slicked down with fire resistant gel.

They fight through the smoke and flame - all of them are hard-bodied, heroic. The Right Stuff. On the front and back of their suits they wear numbers and names, more like superstar athletes than firemen. One man steps forward - he's in his late 30's, handsome in a rugged and careworn way. This is Guy Montag - the squad leader, the quarter-back.

He pulls a steel, short-barreled mortar tube out of his equipment belt. He slots a charge into the breech and fires from the hip Bam! The charge blasts a gaping hole in the concrete wall. Montag leads his squad into -

INT. WAREHOUSE:

A huge wooden-beamed warehouse, roaring with flames, filled with smoke. In slow motion the firemen somersault through the swirling smoke, rappel down blazing walls, fly through showering embers. We pull back to reveal -

INT. AUDITORIUM DAY

The firemen are an image on a giant Imax screen. It wraps round the walls and across the ceiling. Every crack and sizzle of the fire is carried in surround-sound. The thirty school-kids lean back in their chairs, watching in rapt attention.

ON THE SCREEN

The firemen walk out of the building towards their fire engine. It looks like a battle-truck - as big as a semi with an armored cabin riding on 12-foot high all-terrain tires. Hydraulic ladders, coils of aluminum hose and high-pressure pumps are fitted to the superstructure.

Montag leads them closer and closer. They are beaded with sweat, smeared with grime, key-lit by flames from the left, looking almost religious in their grandeur. They take off their helmets and for the first time we clearly see their faces. We push in on Montag -

MONTAG

Remember boys and girls, "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance".

Montag turns and leads his squad down a water-slicked road. Hundreds of other firemen emerge from the darkness and march with them, into the future. It's so well orchestrated, it looks like it could be from one of the rallies at Nuremberg. A man's resonant voice -

NARRATOR (O.S.)

There are over 400,000 firemen in the United State. Every day they risk injury and death to make the world just a little bit safer. They need your help. Support your local fire department. Remember, only you can prevent subversion.

INT AUDITORIUM.

The lights come up. A Fire Department guide stands at-ease, hands behind his back, at the front of the auditorium. He's in his 20's, six foot-four, dressed in blue fatigues and combat boots. He's a real PR man - Mr Friendly - with a fake smile and a phony laugh.

GUIDE

In another couple of hours you kids will undergo your Confirmitzvah. Can anyone tell me what that means?

A forest of eager hands shoot up. The teacher, smiling, points at a tow-haired boy -

JOE-FRANK

Adulthood in the state, fireman.

GUIDE

Call me Jim - I'm not just a fireman. I'm your friend. But that's right - it means you're on the way to being a good citizen.

(he smiles)

What else - anyone... anyone?

A pretty young girl at the front speaks up -

MELANIE

It's when you say goodbye to your parents.

GUIDE

That's it - the next time you see them, it might be to arrest them.

(he laughs)

No offense, kids.

Most of the kids laugh back.

MELANIE

Will it hurt, Jim - saying goodbye, I mean?

GUIDE

I won't lie - you'll be homesick for a while. It's not easy being at fire school. But after a few weeks at camp you'll never look back. And that's a promise.

The kids are reassured. He turns and leads them through the door -

GUIDE

Remember - this is a working fire station. Nobody gets in the way - okay.

INT. FIREHOUSE. CENTRAL HALL. DAY.

The guide leads the school class across a glass bridge - the heart of the fire station is longer than an aircraft hangar and even higher. Dozens of floors, suspended from the roof, project into an atrium. It bustles with uniformed firefighters, the constant hum of electronic information, the endless repetition of commands on huge video-boards.

Electronic fire poles, spinning fast, connect the floors. Firefighters grab hold of them and perch on three-inch footholds, riding them up and down. They give the place an air of constant urgency.

INT. CONTROL ROOM. DUSK.

The kids crowd around, peering through a glass wall eight inches thick. Inside is a huge electronic map of the city and banks of nitrogen-cooled super-computers.

This is the heart of the fire station - walls of display screens monitor suburban streets, endless stacks of digital processors churn through mountains of information. Dispatch officers - black pants, black shirts and shields with gold phoenixes - handle hundreds of calls. The Guide taps on the glass window and points at the huge, vault-like door.

GUIDE

Nothing can get through here. It's everything proof... it's atomic bomb proof! This is the control room. Ten million megabytes of information swept up, processed and stored every second. Random access to over seven million files in less than twenty seconds. Response time to an alarm anywhere stands at 4 minutes 20 seconds. I'm sure you won't mind me telling you - for the third year in a row, that makes Engine Company 38 the fastest in the country.

The Teacher claps, the kids join in. As they watch, a man SWINGING A GOLF CLUB emerges from behind a rack of processors. He's in his early 50's, his hair the color of charcoal, his face sunburnt by a thousand real and ten thousand imaginary fires. He wears the black shirt and the red salamander of a Captain. He calls orders to the dispatch officers but the glass is too thick for us to hear.

GUIDE

That's Captain Beauty. He's the head man at the head station. If anyone's going to the Top of the Mountain, he is. It's time you go; used to it - ready, kids? Salute.

All the kids, very serious, salute the captain. He sees them through the glass and snaps them one back. You'd think he was General Patton.

He hooks a high back chair with his golf club and spins it round. He settles down in front of the command console and looks at the huge electronic map of the city... his city to him. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

INT. ELEVATOR. DUSK.

The tour group file into a large, industrial-style elevator. The guide stands in front of the control panel -

GUIDE

Underground - level four, please.

A small screen on the control panel instantly displays the guide's rank, number, security status and a host of other details. It's reading a smart card he wears pinned to his chest. The elevator sighs to a stop at its destination.

ELEVATOR

Level four, Jim. Always a pleasure to see you. I hope the class of '42 enjoys its visit.

The doors open. The group files out into -

INT. UNDERGROUND VAULT.

A huge underground hasament. On either side are massive steel tanks connected by a maze of pipes and valves. White-coated technicians move between them, checking valves and digital meters. The kids pass overhead, along a steel gantry -

GUIDE

They say an army marches on its stomach.
The Fire Department runs on fuel and here it is - five hundred thousand gallons of it.

(he laughs)

Put that cigarette out, Joe-Frank.

They go through a set of doors -

INT. BASEMENT CELLS.

The kids crowd into some sort of command post: stainless steel walls, armored glass observation windows, a security desk manned by officers, a bank of hi-tech street-sweeper shotguns on the wall. The kids look around - a little scared.

GUIDE

Years ago, before the word "intellectual" became the swear word it deserves to be, people said the Fire Department was opposed to ideas. That's not true - it's the *people* that have the ideas we don't like. We see 'em all here -

Steel doors on either side slide back, revealing rows of prison cells. The guide leads the way between them: a young guy and his girlfriend, old men, a woman that looks like a housewife, a bookish-looking man, a mother and father and their two young children...

GUIDE

(pointing them out)

Liberals... non-conformists... writers - you can always tell the writers, they're the weedy-looking ones.

The guide stops. Kids stare through the bars at the family - the father, thin and bruised, tries to shield his children from the peering crowd.

GUIDE

Do the crime, you do the time. The judge gives 'em a choice - death or life as a lobo. Personally, I'd take the incinerator any day. Anyone know what a lobo is?

An unctuous kid shoots his hand up. The Teacher nods at him -

RANDY

Subversives who've had lobotomies.

GUIDE

Chemical lobotomies. Back in the dark ages lobotomies used to be surgical. But it's all chemical now. Pump the drugs into them for two days and let it eat away the cells of the frontal brain lobes. No surgeons, no anesthetic, no recovery time. Total cost - two hundred dollars. That's progress for you. Anyone heard about the lobo firing squad? They stand in a circle.

JOE-FRANK

Hey, Jim - how does a lobo call his dog?

GUIDE

I haven't heard that one.

Joe-Frank puts his fingers in his mouth like he's whistling -

JOE-FRANK

Woof. . woof.

INT. ANTISEPTIC ROOM.

Brilliant surgical lights illuminate a white-tiled room. Racks of stainless steel equipment line one wall. Blue smocked attendants wheel in two inmates - a man and a woman, almost naked. Both of them are strapped to gurneys.

The attendants park the gurneys next to the wall of equipment. The two prisoners - terrified - try to struggle. Rubber balls fastened into their mouths prevent them from screaming. The attendants take long needles and insert them into the patient's forearms.

Attached to the needles are lengths of clear plastic tube that disappear into the machines. It looks like an execution by lethal injection. And in a way it is. We crane up -

INT. GLASS BOOTH.

The kids are gathered around two nurses sitting at a console, controlling the procedure

TEACHER

And lobotomies - they always work, Jim?

GUIDE

Ninety-eight per cent, ma'am. A hormone in the thyroid sometimes offers resistance but a second course takes care of that. Like the nurses say - some people like their vegetables well-cooked.

One of the nurses throws a switch. The kids stare down at the victims -

INT. ANTISEPTIC ROOM

The man and woman watch as the chemical cocktail enters the plastic catheter and flows towards their veins. They turn and look at one another - a last moment of logical thought, of feeling, of being. The chemicals hit their blood stream. They both jerk and convulse -

INT. GLASS BOOTH.

The kids watch. Randy shrugs -

RANDY

Big deal. It's better on the virtual games -
at least you see people splatter.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT. DAY

The kids walk across a steel bridge that connects two floors of the fire station. Beneath them is a state-of-the-art basketball court. At the moment it's been converted into a training facility - the doors are closed, the seating moved right back.

The tour group stops and looks down - amazed. A bizarre creature runs down the court. It's made from a carbon-fiber metal that fits it like a molten skin. It shimmers and gleams in the bright light, moving effortlessly on its eight legs. Its metal tongue lolls from its mouth but it makes no sound - just the soft hum of a 120 servo-motors and the beep of a dozen micro-processors. This is The Mechanical Hound.

Two men stand in the middle of the court. One of them is in his 40's, nervous, dressed in a white lab coat. His name is Herman Rand. The other is a young fireman - tall, good-looking, straight out of fire school: Jinx Bradley. Herman is teaching him how to operate the remote control - a hand-held, totally computerized device. Jinx makes the Hound stop and roll over, playing dead. The kids laugh -

GUIDE

Don't be fooled, kids - it can do a lot more than tricks. Years ago people talked about the stealth bomber and the space shuttle. Now it's going to be The Hound. You're real lucky - nobody, no civilians, have even seen it yet.

Herman takes the remote control back and works it expertly. The electrical filaments in The Hound's nose twitch, its metal tongue darts in and out, "tasting" the air, its glittering eyes - a thousand micro-facets of red neon - scan back and forth.

In one blur of a movement. The Hound rises to its feet and flies the length of the court. It spins on a dime, goes straight up the pole that supports the net and sits on top of the backboard. Herman smiles. The kids gape

INT. MUSTER ROOM. DAY.

Firemen in fatigues and boots, waiting for an alarm, play cards or lounge in front of the interactive wall. It has scores of screens with everything "live": rock groups from warehouse "traves", the Coppertone stripper revue, divorce hearings from the People's Court, reality shows from casualty rooms.

A cleaner moves among them, pushing his broom. He's about 45 - buzz-cut hair, perfectly pressed uniform, a fireman's equipment belt around his waist. In this case it holds Windex, a squeegee, garbage bags. This is Earl - once a great fireman, until he took a wrong turn. He was sent for re-education and came back a simpleton. We rack focus -

On the far side, a man stands alone, silent, unheeded of the noise. It's Guy Montag. He looks out through a plate glass window, what the Marines call a thousand yard stare -

MONTAG'S POV

There's nothing moving. Just the huge desolate plaza. Floating above it is a news blimp - a hundred feet long, full of hot air, powered by two rotor-blades. It's a floating broadcast station, relaying programs to millions of homes. Huge quartz-matrix screens on its side show exactly what it's broadcasting.

Right now, it's a live report from the White House press room. Standing behind the podium is an impressive man in his early 60's. Six-foot-four, silver hair, he looks like Gary Cooper: President Plimpton. In the bottom corner is a man doing a sign language translation. We hold on the President. There's something unsettling about him - it's as if he's too perfect, too manicured to be real. Maybe he's just an electronic image.

REVERSE ANGLE

We look back - the tiny figure of Montag is silhouetted in the window, troubled, staring into the distance, the only sign of life.

INT. MUSTER ROOM. DAY.

Captain Beatty, still carrying his golf club, appears at Montag's side.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What's wrong, Montag... you okay?

MONTAG

I was just thinking...

Beatty lowers the golf club, instantly alert.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What were you thinking?

Montag turns and looks at him, changing his mind. He shrugs and tries to smile -

MONTAG

Nothing.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Oh, come on, Montag! This is the Captain you're talking to. You think I don't know when something's gnawing one of my guys, especially when it's my main man, the Department's el-supremo-fucking-quarter-back, somebody I've worked with for *fifteen years*! Do you need to see the doctor?"

Montag shakes his head - no. He turns and looks back at the news blimp -

MONTAG

I was just thinking... President Plimpton's very well spoken... he's real sure of what he's saying, isn't he?... it's like, he's almost son of perfect.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

That's why he's President, Montag. A fine man, Mr Plimpton. Inspiring. Stable. *Handsome*. Not only that, he's got the full support of the Top of the Mountain.

MONTAG

(tentative)

And we voted for him, didn't we? That's how he got there, I mean.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Of course we did! This is a democracy, isn't it? Ninety-eight per cent of us pulled the lever for President Plimpton.

MONTAG

We did? That many - that's a landslide!

CAPTAIN BEATTY

It's a credit to the people, that's for sure.

He points up at the news blimp -

PRESIDENT PLIMPTON

My fellow Americans, truth and integrity will stand forever more as the watchwords of our great nation. Now, more than ever, as we go forward into the future, we must take up the burden of our responsibilities. I have spoken before of destiny. I am sure I will speak to you of it again. In conclusion, let me just say, a nation is only as strong as it's people. Good night and bless you.

Beatty smiles, nodding his head -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

You can't argue with that, can you? Wise, that's President Plimpton. The guy in the seat, the man at the wheel. A leader.

MONTAG

Well, yeah...I guess I must have voted for him, too.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Hell, you didn't vote for *him*, did you?

ON THE BLIMP

Plimpton's image is replaced by a shot of a balding man in glasses. He is about four-feet-six tall with deep set eyes. Perspiration beads his upper lip. He sort of whines.

A logo flashes at the bottom of the screen: "Equal time... equal time."

WOODROW

I would like to take this opportunity of
thanking you for the chance to -

INT. FIREHOUSE. DAY.

Beatty turns away in disgust.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Woodrow - what sort of name's that?
A cold sore? It sounds like something you'd
put on hemorrhoids. Nobody voted for him.

MONTAG

If 98 per cent pulled the lever for President
Plimpton, I guess two per cent did.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Lobos or subversives. There's always going
to be someone who gets a kick out of not
being civically pure.

MONTAG

So it's Plimpton - I must have voted for him.
President Plimpton.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

He's our man.

MONTAG

Thanks, Captain. I'm glad you cleared
that up.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

(real fatherly)

That's what I'm here for. I'm the shoulder,
I'm the ear, Montag. I am for all my guys.
You got anything on your mind, you talk
to me. C'mon! I want to see the old Montag
back -

He raises both fists and drops his head, into sparring mode. He lets loose with a straight right. Montag covers up and jabs back.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

That's it... that's the way. That's what I want to see.

Beatty fires one through the defenses, whacking Montag's cheek. He laughs and puts his arm around Montag's shoulder, hugging him. He's always got to win. Still smiling, he walks off.

Montag turns and looks at the blimp. The smile vanishes - he's still troubled, really troubled.

INT. CENTRAL HALL. DAY.

Screech! A bell in the ceiling kicks two hundred times. Firemen grab their equipment, run fast across the central hall and head for the poles. It's an alarm - the poles now spin at an astonishing rate.

The group of kids crowd onto a balcony. They cheer and holler as they see Montag sprint across the room. He jumps! His boot lands on the foothold and he grabs the pole. He goes through a square hole in the floor.

It's a helluva ride down, he spins through ten stories: administration, files, cell-blocks, recreation, cafeteria, a beauty parlor for the women. This place is huge. Montag keeps plunging down, out of sight.

EXT. COURTYARD DUSK.

Two huge garage doors rise up - a pair of the fire engines that look like battle-trucks roar out. Their 12-foot-high all terrain tires smoke as the drivers pour on the power.

Jinx and Herman stand on a platform on the back of the first truck. Jinx works the remote commander - The Hound bursts out of a door and bounds across the courtyard.

One leap... and then another - The Hound sails between Jinx and Herman. Flanges shoot out from its paws. Whack! It clamps onto the back of the truck. Its body spins on its four legs and it drops down into a sitting position - the faithful Hound at its post, traveling with its masters. It wags its metal tail. Jinx opens an access door and steps into the truck.

INT. FIRE TRUCK. DUSK.

The inside of the engine is full of equipment, lockers, conduits, pipes and valves. The only windows are narrow slits. Firefighters move back and forth, stripping down to their underwear, stepping into their space suits and equipment belts. Jars of fire-resistant gel are handed round - they rub it into their faces and slick back their hair.

Montag sees Jinx getting changed at the far end -

MONTAG

Who's the new guy?

A wise guy in his 40's - a day's stubble, dragging on a smokeless cigarette - looks in the direction Montag is pointing. This is Rico

RICO

He seems okay... a techno-freak, though.
Beatty's told him to look after The Hound.
We're going to buy him a pooper-scooper.
(he yells)

Hey Jinx! Jinx Bradley - get your ass
down here.

The young guy starts to make his way towards them.

MONTAG

Jinx? What sort of name's Jinx?

RICO

He's 20-years-old, handsome as shit.
his father's some wheel at Top of the
Mountain and he topped every class
at fire school. What do you think we
should call him - "Lucky"?

Bradley arrives.

RICO

Jinx I want you to meet someone - Guy
Montag.

JINX

(putting out his hand)

Yeah... sure... I know the face. Everyone does. It's an honor. Officer Montag... a real honor.

One of the other firemen turns. This is Stoneman - a rippling, hatchet-faced man, ten years younger than Montag. He's handsome in a Nazi sort way, an arrogant sunovabitch. He's jealous of Montag and his lip curls in a sneer at Jinx's hero-worship. He listens -

MONTAG

(shaking hands)

Forget it... the "Officer" thing, too.

JINX

No, I mean it. Every year they show visuals of your stuff at fire school. That thing with... what was that family's name - Faber. Each freshman class, the Chief makes a speech - "this is what being a fireman is all about", he says.

MONTAG

Yeah, well, that was a long time ago.

JINX

You were twenty - your first year out of fire school. Just like me. You've been an inspiration to a lot of people

MONTAG

Welcome to 38, Jinx.

Stoneman interrupts - he's taken an instant dislike to Jinx.

STONEMAN

Rico says your old man's somebody at Top of the Mountain. I guess that helps when you want a posting to head office. What's it like up there. butt-fluff?

JINX

Butt-fluff?

Stoneman reaches out and strokes his massive paw down Jinx's jaw -

STONEMAN

When you gonna start shaving, kid - next year, maybe.

Jinx pushes his hand away.

JINX

I don't know what it's like at Top of the Mountain. I never even met my father. He just sent the child support. Mom and the Government did the rest.

Beatty, moving down the line, has overheard the conversation. He speaks quietly -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

I know - I've been inside. Once. Just a taste. you understand.

Other firefighters turn and look - surprised, very impressed.

RICO

What's it like?

Beatty turns and looks through a window - the fire engines are on a road running along the top of The Wall. The water stretches into the distance. Jutting through it - a crumbling church spire, the upper branches of dead trees, the top floor of a drowned building. The Pyramid sits in the sea at the end of the causeway. The apex with the eye hangs above it. It seems to be looking straight at them.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Time without end... even the air tastes sweeter there. People'd say that sounds like the power of love. Let me tell you, that's nothing compared to the love of power -

He has to turn away because of the emotion welling up in him from just that taste.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Once you've been there, you don't forget it. And the desire.. the desire to taste it again can almost break a man's heart.

He forces himself to master his emotions. He looks up at the firefighters but nobody's watching him - they're all staring out the window at the pyramid, lost in their own thoughts, their own ambition. Beatty smiles and shrugs, snapping out of it. He moves down the line, continuing to check his team.

RICO

The Captain's headed there, that's for sure. You, too. Montag. Oh, come on - we've all known it since Fire School. Heater Hamlyn - remember Heater? - he always said 'Montag's got the juice. He's going all the way.'

(quietly)

Listen - we've known each other a long time, we've always gotten on well - you could put a word in for me.

MONTAG

If I ever get there, Rico, I promise - I'll mention you.

RICO

Thanks. I'm a lucky guy... but, hey, aren't we all? We're firemen and we're loaded for bear - let's enjoy it, that's what I say!

A buzzer sounds. The firemen step to the sides of the truck. Overhead lockers open up. Metal cylinders - like oxygen tanks - are lowered down and automatically clipped onto the firefighters' backs. The tanks have hoses connected to them - the firefighters coil them and grab the heavy silver nozzle at the end. The fire engines brake hard -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Here we go!

EXT. THE OLD TOWN. NIGHT.

It's an ancient part of the city - a wealthy area once but now dead trees point accusing fingers at the sky. Three news blimps motor into position overhead. A crowd - alerted by a news flash - run through the streets. They converge on a flaking three-story house, a couple of centuries old if it's a day. Strangely, there's no sign of fire or smoke.

The two fire engines smash through the front fence and screech to a halt in the yard. Hydraulic legs drop down from their bellies and plant themselves in the flower beds.

The legs extend - the engines rise off the ground. The massive wheels turn slowly in mid air. The engines stop - thirty feet off the ground, totally dominating the house. The sides of the engines drop down. Platforms shoot out, bridges extend, panels rise up - each engine has become a total fire-fighting platform. The firemen stand in the belly of the beast, real quiet, looking out at the house -

RICO

So peaceful to look at, you'd never
imagine there was anything going on
inside, would you?

The crowd in the street watch in silence. A steel club rockets out from one of the engines, and punches a hole in the roof of the house. The crowd go wild, screaming - it's on! Hydraulic rams shoot out, battering holes in the walls of the house at every level.

INT. FIRE ENGINE NIGHT.

The firemen rise up like athletes in the blocks. They watch the house being penetrated. Beauty is at their shoulder -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Remember - this isn't just a public service
It's entertainment! Now go team! Go, go!

Montag, Rico Bradley and Stoneman are the first out - like footballers out of the tunnel. The crowd roars even louder as they emerge. Right behind is Black - a white woman, hair pulled back, the body of a gladiator - then the rest of the squad.

Montag grabs hold of two steel beams that extend from the truck. Boy, is he an athlete! He uses them like parallel bars, swinging towards the house - hand-over-hand, throwing his legs up, doing a half-somersault and at the last minute catching hold of an extended ladder. The crowd holler and scream

ON THE BLIMP.

The image of two massive heads floats overhead. They sit at a desk, both holding microphones. These are the Commentators. They look uncannily like Frank Gifford and Marv Albert.

MARV

That looks like Guy Montag, Frank!

FRANK

It certainly is, Marv. What a surprise! I wouldn't have thought Captain Hearty would use him on a small fixture like this.

MARV

It's early prime, Frank - we're going live to over twenty million homes. If you don't use Montag then, when would you?

EXT. OLD HOUSE. NIGHT.

The other firemen, like trapeze artists, swarm through the smashed walls of the house. A TV news crew - perched on the side of the house - are picking-up close-ups. They focus on Jinx Bradley, swinging through the air, dangling from the bottom of a mobile ladder -

FRANK (O.S.)

We haven't seen him before. That's Chris Bradley, Marv, newly drafted from the Fire School. People down there tell me he may well be a new Iron Man.

MARV (O.S.)

Certainly no sign of nerves tonight. Look at that, will you?!

Jinx throws himself off the ladder - he sails through the air. Crash! Feet first he goes through the glass of an attic window.

EXT. FIRE TRUCKS. NIGHT.

Another news crew circle the fire trucks. They run straight into a crowd backing away, scared. The Reporter, a woman, pushes through - she and her cameraman come face to face with The Hound. Herman, using the remote commander, is taking it for a prowl

The Reporter's never seen anything like it. She grabs her cameraman - get shooting!

ON THE BLIMP

The Hound is huge - moving, circling, in all its mechanical glory.

MARV (O.S.)

We've heard about it, we've talked about it - and there it is! Live on Five - first with the burst. What a bonus, Frank.

FRANK (O.S.)

On the spot while it's hot! Four years and two billion credos in the making. That must be one of the Jet Propulsion Lab's scientists, taking it out on a road-test. It'd better do more than pee on fire hydrants at that sort of money. First impressions, Marv?

MARV (O.S.)

Hard to say at this distance, Frank. It's bigger than I expected and it certainly moves well. It'll be fast, I'm sure of that, but I just wonder how aggressive it'll be.

EXT. FIRE TRUCKS. NIGHT.

The Hound skirts one of the fire engines and lies down, its head stretched out on its paws perfectly still, asleep but not asleep, alive but not living.

A stray dog wanders out of the crowd. It stops at The Hound and sniffs its carbon-fiber body. Satisfied, it pisses on The Hound's back.

The Hound spins - an eight-inch hollow steel needle shoots out from its nose. Ssswhack! The needle hits the dog in the neck. An arcing bolt of electricity passes through the dog - its fur smokes, its legs shoot out, blood spurts from its mouth. It hits the ground, dead.

FRANK (O.S.)

Whua! I think you just got your answer, Marv.

People in the crowd stare. Some back away, others cheer and laugh. The Hound, registering the sound, wags its tail. We crane up from it -

EXT. TOP OF FIRE ENGINE. NIGHT.

Beatty stands on a platform on top of the driver's cab - golf iron in his hand, a ball on a makeshift tee. Crack! The ball rockets straight towards a second-floor window -

INT. OLD HOUSE. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Rico and Montag are turning out drawers, upending the bed, searching the room. Crash! The golf ball smashes through the glass, skims Rico's head and buries itself in the wall

RICO

Jesus Christ! That fucking Beatty's going to kill someone with that thing!

CAPTAIN BEATTY

(through headset)

What was that Rico? I couldn't quite hear.

RICO

I was just saying good shot, Captain. If that was your four iron, I'd say you've added at least ten yards to it.

The other firemen laugh through their headsets.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

A five iron, Rico.

RICO

Even better, sir. Tre-fucking-mendous, in my opinion

He rips open a closet and uses an ax to smash the wood at the back, revealing an old-style personal computer and a shelves of CD-ROM's. He flicks through a handful -

RICO

Look at this shit will you? "Collected Works of Shakespeare", a book by some guy called Hemingway, "The Poet's Almanac", for Chrissakes. What's wrong with people. Don't they know the fucking law?

He tosses them aside and turns to Montag -

RICO

Well, come on - what are you waiting for? You know what they say - Jesus is coming, look busy!

He pulls the trigger - a tongue of flame shoots out of the heavy silver nozzle. The backpacks are kerosene-fueled flame-throwers. A volley of flame hits the computer and the CD-ROM's. A couple of hundreds years of human endeavor turn to molten plastic

Montag turns and kicks a door -

INT. OLD HOUSE. STAIRWELL. NIGHT.

An Old Woman - tall and gracious once - is trying to run, terrified, down the back stairs. This is the owner of the house. She almost gets hit by the door as it splinters off its hinges. She and Montag look at one another.

Her first instinct is to flee but she realizes it's no use. Her eyes fix on a nothingness and her tongue moves in her mouth as if she's trying to remember something. It comes to her -

OLD WOMAN

"Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, as I trust shall never be put out."

It means nothing to Montag. He looks at her face, close to tears, and speaks quietly -

MONTAG

Where's the rest of 'em?

OLD WOMAN

You know where they are or you wouldn't be here.

Montag keys in a command to a small computer screen molded around his forearm -

MONTAG

The complaint card says 'Have reason to suspect attic, number 11, Elm, Old Town, E.B.'

OLD WOMAN

E.B. - that would be Edith Blake, my neighbor.

MONTAG
(into headset)

Suspect in custody. Captain. She confirms
the attic.

CAPTAIN BEATTY (O.S.)
(through headset)

I've got you on the Tracker, Montag.
Hold her there.

EXT. TOP OF FIRE ENGINE. NIGHT.

Tight on a hand-held video screen - the Tracker - which shows an image of the house and
the position of all Beatty's men. Pull back to reveal Beatty, on top of the fire engine,
watching the screen. He speaks into a mic -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

You're in the attic, Bradley - can you
see 'em?

JINX

(through headset)

Not yet, Captain but we've got a wall
that's not shown on the blueprint.

INT. OLD HOUSE. STAIRWELL. NIGHT.

From the attic above, the sound of hydraulic hammers smashing through brick and
masonry. The Old Woman staggers - as if every blow of the hammer is hitting her.

Montag looks at the walls - faded photos line the stairs: children, grown and gone; the old
woman, in her 30's, standing arm in arm with a man. Behind them are beautiful buildings
of some great institution. Beatty appears at Montag's shoulder -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Harvard, Montag - back in the days
before it became the School for
Nuclear Engineering. According to the
file the old girl's husband used to be
a professor there... wanker.

Crash! Montag and Beatty look up - half the ceiling falls down, revealing Bradley and other firemen in the attic. Books... thousands of books... rain down. They hit the handrails, fall down the stairwell, land on the steps. Beatty's face screws up in disgust. He looks at the old woman.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Well, you've been living in a regular Tower of Babel here, haven't you, grandma?

(into mic)

Stoneman, Black, Rico - I need men here.

Jinx drops out of the attic, does a somersault and lands on the stairs. Other firemen emerge out of doors and into the stairwell. Click... click... click. They open the valves on their backpacks. Flames pour out.

Through whirling clouds of smoke and fumes, we see the names on the jackets: Faulkner, Longfellow, Melville, Fitzgerald. Pages curl and burn, bindings flare and crumple, words and thoughts perish. Up go Tolstoy, Salinger, Keats...

INT. OLD HOUSE. LANDING. NIGHT.

The Old Woman backs away, up to a half-landing. Piles of books burn all around her. The smell of kerosene is almost overwhelming. Partly obscured by smoke, she sees a black-bound volume. She cries out - it's the most precious one of all. She grabs it.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Drop the book, grandma!

The Old Woman shakes her head. She holds the book closer to her chest.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

You know the law! Where's your sense? None of these books agree with each other. You've been listening to a million voices shouting different ideas. No wonder you're confused. You've lost touch with reality - the people in these books never even lived. Come on - drop it!

Still the Old Woman shakes her head.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Don't screw with us, lady. I'm giving you one last warning -

The Old Woman doesn't move. Beatty turns to Montag -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

She's yours, Montag - do it.

Montag doesn't move. He stares at Beatty

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What, are you deaf or something?

The other firemen look at Montag - what's wrong with him? Montag steps forward and aims the silver nozzle at the Old Woman. She stands her ground, still clutching the book, trembling. Montag looks at her face, trying to will her to drop the book. She looks straight back at him. He raises the nozzle so that the barrel is pointing at her face. Still she doesn't waver. Montag pulls the trigger. Click...click. Nothing happens.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What the fuck are you -?!

Before he can finish Stoneman steps forward, valve on, trigger firing. A blast of flame touches the Old Woman's legs, her hands. She writhes and dances, screaming, but still she won't drop the black bound book.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

That's what I like, Stoneman! A man fast on the draw. Go on - really give it to her!

Stoneman opens up the valve. Whoosh! The Old Woman erupts in a pillar of flame. She spins round, dropping the book, thrashing at herself. The heat sets up its own little tornado - smoke and fumes whirl all around her.

The Old Woman drops to the floor, dead. Stoneman turns off his flame-thrower. He's high with excitement, the rush of it. He looks at Montag -

STONEMAN

You're slowing down, old man - too many endorsements, I guess. You want to be careful - there's younger guys right on your ass.

MONTAG

Fuck off. Stoneman

Stoneman laughs - he likes needling Montag. He and the other firemen head off, squirting flames on the rest of the books as they go.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What happened, Montag?

MONTAG

I don't know - a misfire.

Beatty reaches out, takes the nozzle and hits the trigger. The flame-thrower blasts fire and smoke, startling Beatty - he really didn't expect it to work.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

It's working fine now.

Montag shrugs. Beatty looks at him for a moment - then bursts out laughing.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Don't look so serious - what else could it be? Get Technical to check it out. Tell Ben you'll give him a kerosene enema if it happens again. That ought to liven up his hole.

Beatty laughs again. Montag smiles back. Beatty talks orders into his headset and heads off. Montag is left alone with the body of the woman. He looks down at her - life and thoughts and dreams turned to ash. Flames keep burning through the black bound book. The wind, whistling through the roof, catches page after page and whirls them away.

One of them slaps against Montag's fire-proof pants. He picks it up. The paper is water thin, like onion skin - the book is The Bible. Montag, glancing round to make sure nobody is watching, starts to read. Someone has underlined some of the words:

"He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

We push in on Montag's face. A voice behind startles him -

VOICE (O.S.)

Through here! Quick - they want a shot of the perp as a tag.

A news crew comes through a door. Montag drops his hand, hiding the page.

REPORTER

Officer Montag - shit, this is great!
(into his headset)

I've got a money shot.

(to Montag)

If you could just give the old bag
another bit of heat, that'd be perfect.

The cameraman hits Montag with a sun-gun. There's nothing Montag can do - he clicks his flame-thrower and hits the remnants of The Bible with a blast of flame. The light from the sun-gun surrounds him, turning the smoke into moonbeams of light -

REPORTER

Damn! Is that a heroic shot or what?!

ON THE BLIMP

A woman in her 50's is being interviewed. She looks huge, hovering above the house. A caption at the bottom -

Edith Blake, neighbor

She keeps adjusting her hair, smiling at the camera - this is her 15 seconds.

MRS BLAKE

I heard her talking to my granddaughter.
"Once upon a time," she said. I knew it
wasn't civically pure, so I called the 1-800
number immediately.

The image of Mrs Blake disappears, to be replaced by -

MARV

And this just in, Frank - we're getting reports
of a large number of photographs concerning
children in the house. I don't want to go into
too much detail -

FRANK

Of course not - this is a family show.

MARV

But apparently this was a nasty, filthy old woman. I'm sure we haven't heard the last of it - neighbors will feel free to talk now the threat has been removed.

FRANK

That's usually the way - unfortunately sometimes that's too late. We all have to be careful. We've said it a thousand times before, Marv, and I'm sure we'll say it again - "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance."

MARV

I can't argue with that, Frank - nobody can.

FXT. HOUSE. STREET. NIGHT.

The firefighters - smeared with soot and kerosene - gather up their equipment, stowing the plattforms and ladders. Hiss - the sound of air brakes. Montag turns -

A bus pulls to a stop. One side lifts up - men and women in gray boiler suits shuffle out like robots. All of them have numbers stenciled on their foreheads, their eyes dead, their expressions completely blank: a team of people who've been lobotomized. Lobos.

They take shovels and move towards the half-gutted house, ready to clean up the mess.

MARV (O.S.)

I don't know if I asked you, Frank - have you seen the new ladder designed for lobos? It's got a stop sign on the top.

ON THE BLIMP

Marv and Frank are still at their desk, laughing.

FRANK

Anyway, it's good night from us - until next time. We now return you to the Sky Room of the Hotel Lux for a full hour of "It Could be You..."

EXT. OLD HOUSE. NIGHT.

The crowd drifts away, the fire engines start up and head down the street, the news blimps gather altitude and float away. All that's left is the broken-down old house and the lobos - both of them laid to ruins in their own way.

INT. FIRE ENGINE. NIGHT.

The firemen are on their way back to the station, most everyone smoking, joking and talking. A few of them are half naked, washing off the reek and stain of kerosene. Stoneman rips open a beer -

STONEMAN

Hot work, barbecuing people. Did you hear her, though - she didn't say a fucking word, not even when I first kissed her with the flame. Maybe she was a mute - hey, anyone think of that?

He laughs and lifts his beer.

MONTAG

(quietly)

Master Ridley

People stop and turn. Beatty looks at him - the thing about President Plimpton, the trigger on his flame-thrower and now he's talking about Master Ridley?

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What?

MONTAG

That's what she said when she first saw me. She said something about Master Ridley...

STONEMAN

(laughing)

So, she wasn't a mute, then - she was still fucking crazy! Did you see the way she held onto that book. Ha, ha! They're all crazy - who do they think they are? The arrogance of these readers - dying for a fucking book.

MONTAG

Shut up. Stoneman. I'm trying to tell you something. "Play the man." she said. "Master Ridley... something... something... a torch in England... something... "

CAPTAIN BEATTY

"Play the man, Master Ridley: we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

MONTAG

(startled)

That's it - that's exactly what she said.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

A man named Latimer said that to a boy called Nicholas Ridley as they were about to be burnt alive for heresy at Oxford in England on October 16, 1555.

Some of the firefighters shuffle their feet - uncomfortable, not even sure they should be listening to stuff that must have come from a book.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

I'm full of bits and pieces. Most fire captains have to be. Sometimes I surprise myself.

JINX

What's heresy?

CAPTAIN BEATTY

It's like not being civically pure.

JINX

So they burnt 'em - even back then?

CAPTAIN BEATTY

'Course they did. Not the Fire Department, though - that came later. Sometimes it was just a mob. They weren't as civilized as we are now.

Beatty turns and looks at Montag

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Funny you should remember what she said,
Montag - the ravings of an old woman. I
wonder what else is rattling around in that
head of yours?

MONTAG

Nothing. It just seemed strange, that's all.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

I guess it must have. But hey, no harm, no foul.
What are we worrying about? Helluva night
wasn't it? Get us one of those beers, will ya?

Everyone relaxes. Montag goes to the cooler. Beatty doesn't take his eyes off of him.

EXT. SUBWAY. NIGHT

A vacuum train hurtles silently through a narrow, sinuous tunnel. Its headlight illuminates
a neon graphic of a guy with a shovel; men are working on the track ahead.

INT. TRAIN. NIGHT.

Montag sits in an antiseptic commuter carriage. Above him is an advertisement featuring
himself - he's holding a new laser shaver, rubbing his jaw; clean image, smooth shave.

Over the windows, run an endless stream of video images: advertisements for singles
cruises, casinos, lawyers, cosmetic surgery. In the news panel, screaming jets destroy
buildings in some faraway place but it's impossible to tell whether it's real or not

NEWSREADER (O.S.)

The Secretary of Peace has authorized a
further escalation in the arms budget.
Safety and harmony at any price, he told a
cheering group of industrial leaders -

Montag looks down the carriage, past the rows of feet of the other commuters. All the
shoes are pretty much the same - dark, sensible, comfortable. He stops - a pair of strange
blue sneakers.

We tilt up to the face of a 16-year-old girl. She's slender and pale, beautiful in an unusual way. She seems perched on the brink of womanhood... a kind of gentle hunger in her eyes that touches everything with a tireless curiosity. Her name is Clarisse.

The Newsreader's words are lost in the hiss of the slowing train. The interior is bathed in light. Through the windows - massive lights, scaffolds, arc-welders and men in goggles. They are welding part of the track.

The train jolts. Clarisse's back-pack slides off the seat. Things fall out - make-up, a wallet... the corner of a book! Montag stares at it. Clarisse - urgent - bends and scoops it up. She shoves it back in the bag and looks up - the fireman is looking straight at her.

The color drains from her face, sweat breaks out on her palms, her heart pounds - so loud she barely hears the woman's voice:

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Thank you for choosing to travel Fastrack.
We are now entering the planned
community of Ten Thousand Oaks.

Frightened... barely able to move... she gets to her feet and heads for the door. Montag stands and follows her.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET. NIGHT.

A tiled escalator deposits Clarisse in Ten Thousand Oaks. There's not a tree in sight - just streets of identical new houses. They run out into the ravaged country. Giant bulldozers stand in what once were fields, ready to tear the earth apart for even more houses.

Clarisse walks fast down the deserted street. She hears Montag's boots behind, loud in the still night air, coming closer. Any minute now... she waits for the hand to fall on her shoulder. She turns a corner.

A man in a driveway - pasty complexion, pants a few inches too short, belt fighting to contain his belly - is wheeling out his garbage. His name is Garfield Snubz - a neighbor. Moving behind the garbage pails, he can't take his eyes off Clarisse. His hand goes down to his crotch and he starts to rub himself.

Montag comes round the corner. Snubz straightens himself up and raises a hand in greeting to the fireman. Montag ignores him.

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Montag gains on the girl, looking at her back - the shoulders rigid with tension, her arms clutching the back-pack to her chest. Even if he hadn't seen it, he'd know - he can smell the fear.

Suddenly she swings left and turns up the path that leads to her house, trying not to run. She braces herself for the order to halt, the sound of boots pounding after her...

Montag stops at the path. He hears a key turn in a lock, the front door close behind her. He sniffs the air - it's something he hasn't smelled in a long time.

MONTAG

Baking...

He looks at the house. In a window, the corner of a curtain twitches. Either her - or her family - are watching him.

He turns and keeps walking down the sidewalk. We hold on him in longshot, moving through the pools of light cast by the streetlights. He turns up a path - into his own house

INT. MONTAG'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Montag closes the front door behind him. He picks up the phone - there's no dialing, it's all voice-activated, fully automated.

MONTAG

Priority. 1-800-Inform.

Montag's a fireman - he knows his duty. The call connects. A voice at the other end -

OFFICER (O.S.)

Head office Montag - is that you? That's what I'm showing on my screen.

MONTAG

I want to report...

He's looking out the window - he sees the lights burning in Clarisse's house. His voice trails off -

OFFICER (O.S.)

What is it, Montag?

MONTAG

I want to repo -

He can't get the words out. He turns away from the window, swallowing a breath, trying to calm himself. He tries again but no words will come.

OFFICER (O.S.)

You okay, Montag?! You sound like you're gagging.

Montag, anguished, is fighting himself. The guy on the phone is right - it's like he can't breathe. Then he shudders - he's crossing a bridge. He blurts into the phone -

MONTAG

I... I want to know what shift I'm on tomorrow... I'm sorry... I don't know why I asked for you... I'm tired. I was thinking - I don't know what I was thinking.

OFFICER (O.S.)

(friendly)

What shift? I'll pull it up, 7 pm, Montag. You want my advice, buddy? Take a sleep lozenge. Sounds like you need it.

MONTAG

Yeah... thanks... yeah, I think I will.

He hangs up - sweating. He turns and looks out again at the house across the way. What's happening to him? We hold on his face.

INT. MONTAG'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

A blackened room. A woman lies alone in one of the two king-sized air-beds. She is on her back, eyes closed, completely motionless. She must have been pretty once but the late nights and the booze are taking their toll. This is Mildred, Montag's wife. If we listen closely we can hear the sound of gentle waves rolling up a beach. It's coming from her dream pillow. A beam of light falls across her as the door opens.

Montag closes it behind him. He moves to her side and brushes his lips across her forehead so as not to wake her. God, she's cold. He starts to undress. Crack! Something crunches underfoot. He bends down and picks it up. Suddenly he's moving fast -

He hits the light switch. The room bursts into view: a pile of unwashed clothes, a vanity laden with lotions and perfumes, a stand holding three of Mildred's wigs. Two empty plastic pill bottles, caps off, lie on the floor.

Montag looks at Mildred - she hasn't moved. He turns fast towards the phone, yelling

MONTAG

Emergency!

CALM VOICE (O.S.)

What type of emergency, Officer Montag?

EXT. MONTAG'S DRIVEWAY. NIGHT

A turbine powered truck - the sort of vehicle a plumber might use is parked in the drive. Orange hazard lights flash on its roof.

INT. MONTAG'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Two hi-tech machines - used and battered - have been wheeled in next to Mildred's bed. Two men in overalls, both dragging on smokeless cigarettes, stand next to them.

The Operator wears a special optical helmet covering his eyes. A tube extends from one machine, into Mildred's mouth and down into her stomach. A micro-camera on the end allows the Operator to look at the inside of her stomach on a monitor. The tube makes a sucking sound - it's vacuuming out all the foulness lying there.

The other machine is connected by a clear plastic tube to the carotid artery on her neck. It is pumping the blood out of her body and replacing it with new blood and serum.

OPERATOR

You've gotta clean 'em out both ways,
that's the secret. It's no use getting the
stomach if you don't replace the blood.
Leave that stuff in the blood and it hits
the brain like a mallet. Whack... whack..
whack! and the brain just gives up.

MONTAG

Are you done yet?

OPERATOR

Yeah, we're done.

He takes off the optical helmet and his assistant starts to pack up the machines. The Operator holds out an electronic clipboard to Montag -

OPERATOR

You've just been charged two hundred credos. Sign here please.

MONTAG

Why don't you tell me if she's going to be all right first?

OPERATOR

Sure, she's gonna be all right. We've got all the mean stuff in the bag right there. Like I said, you take out the old and put in the new. No problem

Montag signs the clipboard, authorizing the payment.

MONTAG

Neither of you is an MD. Why didn't they send a doctor from Emergency?"

OPERATOR

Shit, we get a couple of hundred of these a night. You don't need an MD, a case like this. All you need is a couple of plumbers. They can clean up the problem in half an hour.

The Operator's assistant motions towards the door - he wants to go.

OPERATOR

Look - we've gotta go. Monday nights is our biggest night. You can bet that ten blocks from here someone else just jumped off the top of a pillbox. Call if you need us again. Keep her quiet. We've got a sedative in her. She'll wake up hungry as hell. So long.

They wheel their machines through the door. Montag turns and sits beside Mildred. He takes her cold hand in his. He sits looking at her then he speaks, almost whispering -

MONTAG

Mildred?

She lies on her back, unmoving, her skin like alabaster.

MONTAG

I'm scared. Millie... I don't think I know anything any more.

She says nothing, dead to the world. Sadly Montag gets up and flicks off the lumps

EXT. TEN THOUSAND OAKS. NIGHT.

The moon has gone. A bitter wind has sprung up from the east. It whistles across the raw fields, driving a fine mist of dust and dirt through the streets of Ten Thousand Oaks. A garbage can goes howling down the road like tumble-weed. A child's shirt flies past and is whirled away into the night

INT. MONTAG'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

A french door is open. The exterior shutters are closed but one of them is loose on its hinge. It moves back and forth in the wind - bang... bang... bang.

Mildred is still way gone on the sedative. Montag lies on the other bed, asleep. We tighten in on his face. His face is jerking, reacting to the slap of the shutter. The wind grows stronger, the shutter hits louder. Bang... bang... bang! Montag's face jerks harder. We push in closer and closer on his eyes -

EXT. OLD DUPLEX NIGHT. (FLASHBACK).

Montag's eyes are open. We pull back to reveal he is much younger - it's almost twenty years earlier. He is dressed in the full fireman's regalia - white slicker, helmet, and flame-thrower. Number 42 is on his chest and back - the same number he wears to this day. Bang... bang! He uses a hand-held hydraulic ram to batter down a reinforced front door.

He stands on the front porch of a two-family home, the fire-truck in the street behind, guys up on the platforms starting to tear their way through the roof.

INT. DUPLEX. KID'S ROOM. (FLASHBACK)

Ham! A door flies open as Montag bursts into a young boy's bedroom: a baseball mitt... posters on the wall... jeans and sneakers... books on a desk.

Whoosh! Montag blasts the books with his flame-thrower. He hears a sound from under the bed - he turns and pours a torrent of flame into the space. Shriek! A cry goes up - a young boy's anguished scream - but Montag barely registers it. He's already moving on -

INT. DUPLEX. LIVING ROOM. (FLASHBACK)

Montag moves fast through the room. A news-crew - a cameraman and a sound guy - are behind him, filming his every movement, taking it to live to a million other living rooms. Krr-ash! One of the fire engine's steel rams smashes through the wall from outside, just missing Montag's back, almost killing him. He pays it no attention.

Smash! Another steel ram blasts through in front of him. Books spill out from a secret cupboard. Montag turns them to ashes without even stopping.

INT. DUPLEX. CORRIDOR. (FLASHBACK)

Montag, trailed by the news-crew comes out of the burning wreckage of a baby's room. A man, clutching something in his arms, runs down a crashing, plaster-filled corridor.

MONTAG

Stop! Drop the books. Drop 'em!

The man keeps running. Montag fires a great hungry tongue of flame. It hits the man's back, disintegrating his shirt and bubbling his flesh. He screams and pitches forward - dropping what he's carrying. But it's not books - it's his daughter.

She's aged about five - terrified. She gets to her feet and runs helter skelter into the falling debris of the corridor. The news cameraman and the sound guy look at one another. Wow! This is great footage. The burnt man lying on the floor reaches out, screaming -

MAN

My children..!

The ceiling crashes down - beams and plaster and bricks. The little girl is lost in it - dead or buried. Her father tries to go to her but he can't get up, he's too badly burnt. He sobs, trying to drag himself forward..

He turns towards us. The news-crew come in for a big close-up. The man looks at Montag - fear and hatred in his eyes. He's in his 40's. fine features, the face of a decent man. In another world, he might have been somebody.

MONTAG (O.S.)
(screaming)

Faber!

INT. MONTAG'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Montag sits up in bed, eyes wide, drenched in sweat from the nightmare memory. Bang... bang... bang. The shutter keeps slapping on its hinge. He gets up and pushes it open. He needs air... to look at the world... to know it was just a memory. He steps out into -

EXT. MONTAG'S YARD. NIGHT.

The cold wind stings Montag's flesh. Clarisse stands in the yard, wide-eyed, frightened the strain has been unbearable. She looks at Montag -

CLARISSE
When are they coming?

MONTAG
Who?

CLARISSE
The firemen... what you saw on the train.

MONTAG
(lying, exhausted)
I didn't see anything.

Clarisse stares at him - she can hardly believe it. Montag shakes his head, confirming it. We hold on them a beat then she turns and goes. Montag watches her -

MONTAG
I... I wanted to ask you - I hear music
sometimes, coming from your house.

CLARISSE

My grandfather plays Brahms, late at night,
when he thinks nobody can hear.

Again she turns to go.

MONTAG

I don't know your name.

CLARISSE

Clarisse.

MONTAG

How old are you, Clarisse?

CLARISSE

Sixteen.

He nods his head, trying to remember what sixteen was like but there's nothing there. He was at fire school - all his life seems to have been about burning. He can't think of anything else to say. She leaves.

Montag turns and sits on a wall. The wind has dropped and the stars reappear. From across the yard, gently, carried on the breeze, he hears music. Brahms. The lights are on in her house... life restored. Montag can't say why, but for the first time in a long time he feels good about something.

EXT. THE SCOTTISH MOORS. SUNSET.

A castle stands in the distance. The setting sun turns the heather into swathes of pink and purple. A black stallion and a white mare toss their manes and paw the ground. Their riders - a man and a woman - stand on a hillside locked in a passionate embrace.

The woman's face is hidden from us - she has her head tilted right back, offering her white throat to the man's wet and hungry kisses. He's handsome, powerful - dark eyes and long hair. His fingers curl around the top of her white blouse. He rips it from neck to waist. Her full, firm breasts spill out.

The woman's fingers twist the man's hair. She pushes his head down. As he sinks lower, he drags her skin and petticoats down with him. She stands on the moor in the flimsiest of underpants with her lover kneeling in front of her.

WOMAN

(husky)

Give me your tongue, Dario

He looks up at her. For the first time we see the woman's face. It's Mildred.

INT. MONTAG'S. VIRTUAL REALITY ROOM. MORNING.

She sits in a large room empty, except for two big easy chairs standing in the center. Mildred sits in one - sophisticated sensors on her forehead and wrists. A wireless remote harnesses them to a large computer and control unit set in one wall. Virtual reality.

Mildred hasn't showered yet - she's dressed in a stained dressing gown with a plate of toast and coffee next to her. Montag stands in the doorway, looking in at her. It's the next morning and he's just got up.

As he watches, Mildred writhes back and forth in the chair, breathing hard and fast, arching her back and opening her knees.

EXT. THE SCOTTISH MOORS. SUNSET.

Mildred is on her back, naked, in the heather. Dario's perfect, suntanned body is on top of her. He tosses away the ripped remnants of her underpants.

MILDRED

Now... I want it now.

She closes her eyes, waiting for it. The anticipation is almost too much for her to bear. Bzzzz! The whole screen goes to white static.

INT. MONTAG'S. VIRTUAL REALITY ROOM.

Mildred, cursing, sits bolt upright in the chair. She pulls off the sensors. She turns and sees Montag standing next to the control unit - he's turned it off.

MILDRED

Why'd you go and do that for?

She reaches for the coffee cup but the abrupt change from virtual reality to real life is disorienting. She misses the cup. It takes her three attempts before she gets hold of it.

MONTAG

What were you watching?

MILDRED

(lying)

It's one of those new interactive soaps - you know, where you get to play one of the characters. It's called Dallas Hospital. How long were you there?

MONTAG

A couple of minutes. What were they doing - operating on you?

She lets it pass.

MILDRED

God, I'm *hungry*. Why am I so hungry?

She takes a piece of the toast and dips it in the stewed coffee. She starts to eat it.

MONTAG

Last night...

MILDRED

I didn't sleep well. I can't figure why I'm so hungry.

MONTAG

Last night - don't you remember?

MILDRED

Did we have a party or something? I feel like I've got a hangover. I've got to eat something. Who was here?

She gets up and walks through a doorway. Montag follows -

INT. MONTAG'S HOUSE. KITCHEN. MORNING.

Mildred starts to pick through the dirty dishes and a pile of take-out cartons.

MONTAG

Just a couple of guys.

MILDRED

That's what I thought. I hope I didn't do anything foolish. I didn't, did I?

She finds a couple of cold slices of pizza on a dirty plate and starts to eat them..

MONTAG

No. You took all the sleep lozenges in your bottle last night... a couple of bottles, really.

She stops what she's doing and turns and looks at him -

MILDRED

I wouldn't do a thing like that.

MONTAG

Maybe you took two and forgot and took some more and were so dopey you didn't know where you were and kept right on until you had thirty or forty in you.

MILDRED

Why would I do a stupid thing like that? I wouldn't... not in a million years. No way.

MONTAG

(giving up)

Sure... all right, if you say so.

MILDRED

That's what the lady said. Anyway -

She picks up clothes lying on the floor and starts to pile them into the washing cabinet. Montag jumps forward, makes a grab and retrieves his pants. He fumbles in the pocket.

MILDRED

What is it - a phone number? You're not cheating on me are you, Montag?

She tries to wrest it away from him. He pushes her back and now we see what it is: the singed, onion-skin page from The Bible. "He that increaseth wisdom..."

MONTAG

It's a page from a book. I found it on a burn last night and I forgot to get rid of it. I just want to make sure it's done properly - I'll go burn it now.

Mildred has completely lost interest. She turns back to the washing -

MILDRED

Yeah, whatever. I've gotta hurry. A new drama comes on the circuit in ten minutes and I haven't learned my lines. I sent in some coupons from the lottery and they faxed me my part yesterday. They write it with one part missing and when the time comes everyone turns to me and I say the lines. It's a new idea. Exciting, huh?

No reply. Mildred turns - Montag's not there. She calls after him -

MILDRED

I was talking, you know.

She rummages around and finds the faxed copy of her script.

MILDRED

(rehearsing)

She did what? Melanie is my sister. No sister would do *that*. She knows that I love Brad.

INT. ATTIC. MORNING

Montag stands on a bench, unsnapping a heating vent from high on the wall. As he removes the grill, sunlight spills into the cavity behind.

It is filled with singed paperbacks, half-burned pages, parts of hardbacks - Montag's a secret reader. He smooths out the onion skin page and lays it on top of his precious cache. He fits the grill back in place.

INT. FIREHOUSE. LOCKER ROOM. DUSK.

The shifts are changing over - the team that worked day are leaving; Montag and the others are stripping down, getting ready for work. Super the title:

April 22. Toosdy. 7.04pm

Men and women share the same locker room - stripped down to their underwear, we see what great physical shape they're in. Coiled muscles, washboard stomachs, roped thighs.

Jinx sits on a bench, getting changed for a game of handball. Earl - his broom over his shoulder like a samurai sword - moves along the lockers, wiping them down. He knows from experience to avoid Stoneman but the big guy is fast - he feints with the left, darts with the right, spins round the confused Earl and plucks the squeegee out of its holster.

Other firemen cheer. Earl makes a grab for it but Stoneman, a former quarter-back, pedals backwards and throws a long ball to Black. Earl chases but Black dummies and flicks a pass to Rico.

Earl, frustrated, yells and whimpers. Firefighters gather round - but not Montag. He sits quiet, alone, outside of it. Beatty watches him.

Rico throws a high ball - Stoneman leaps half-way to the roof and takes an intercept. He hits the floor and somersaults, straight over Earl's outstretched hands. The crowd cheers. The cleaner howls. Stoneman backhands the squeegee to Jinx still sitting on the bench.

Jinx takes the pass cleanly. Stoneman calls for the return but Jinx ignores him. Other firemen yell. Earl dashes towards the young fireman, waiting to be fooled at the last minute. Instead, Jinx hands the squeegee back to him.

Stoneman and the others jeer, pissed off. Earl looks at Jinx for a moment, noting him, then he slips the squeegee back in its holster and goes back to work. Jinx takes a glove and ball out of the locker and turns to Montag -

JINX
You wanna game?

MONTAG
I'll pass.

He indicates Earl -

MONTAG

You met Earl? He was a fireman once, you know - one of the best.

Jinx turns and looks at the cleaner, shocked -

JINX

But they don't turn firemen into lobos.

MONTAG

That's one of the perks of the job - firemen can't be loboed. They just get re-educated. Hell, it's not nearly as bad - you can tie your own shoe-laces, sometimes the guys even let you ride on the truck.

JINX

What did he do?

CAPTAIN BEATTY (O.S.)

He got sneaky, he got clever.

Montag and Jinx turn - Beatty is standing at the soda machine.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Earl was our quarterback but he took a wrong turn - he stole books and started to read. Naturally it confused him, fucked him right up. It was Montag who saw it - he was the one who rang the alarm. He saved Earl's ass - mine, too. I hadn't seen it... "the price of liberty" and all that stuff. That's when I knew Montag was the man - eh, Montag?

He puts his arm around Montag's shoulder, real warm, relishing the memory of that triumph years ago.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

It took six months in a re-education camp to straighten old Earl out. It was weird when he came back but we got used to it. Now I like having him around - he's a warning to all of us.

Beatty looks at Montag. He indicates the hand-ball -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Not playing. Montag? What's wrong - off
your feed?

MONTAG

A bit tired, that's all.

Montag gets to his feet, clips on his equipment belt and heads towards the door.

INT. FIREHOUSE. HANDBALL COURT. NIGHT.

Wham! A ball hits the wall and rockets off. Jinx flies across to hit it - he's on the court alone, practicing. He's good. Too good - the ball goes flying past his outstretched hand.

Ka-bam! A hand appears out of nowhere and catches the ball. Jinx turns - it's Earl, his broom abandoned in the corridor.

Jinx looks at him for a beat then takes the ball. They look at one another. Jinx serves. Earl reaches low and hits it - it's a diamond-cutter! Jinx has to scramble to return it. Earl's all over it - wham! The next shot, too...he's flying all over the court. Jinx throws everything he's got at it, but Earl wins the point.

Jinx looks at him - Earl just stares back. Jinx loosens up - okay, now it's really on! He hits it hard - Earl misses completely. Jinx, perplexed, turns. He realizes - Earl's heard the sound of approaching voices. He walks off the court and starts sweeping as Stoneman and Black come round the corner.

STONEMAN

What are you doing, butt-fluff - practicing?

JINX

I was playing Earl.

Stoneman laughs.

STONEMAN

Yeah, right. It's all Earl can do to play with himself - that's his version of handball.

He and Black limber up, taking over the court.

JINX

Earl's good - I figure he could take you.

Stoneman stops warming up and looks at him hard.

STONEMAN

I don't know if you're a fuckin' idiot or if you're serious.

JINX

I'm tellin' ya... he's got a wicked forehand.

Stoneman looks at Jinx - he seems to be for real. Earl stands in the corner, shuffling his feet.

STONEMAN

Hey, Earl - you wanna play?

Earl shakes his head - nope. Stoneman grabs his broom and tosses it aside.

STONEMAN

Come on, Earl - here's your chance. Don't you want to take me?

He pushes Earl onto the court. The cleaner just stands there, scared of Stoneman, half vacant. Stoneman offers him the ball. Earl stares at it -

STONEMAN

Okay, Earl - I get it. You want me to serve.

He steps back and hits it like a rocket. The ball ricochets off the wall, straight at Earl's head. He makes a feeble, flapping stroke with his hand and misses. Black kills herself laughing. Stoneman picks up the ball and serves again - Earl does even worse.

Stoneman pushes him off the court and turns to Jinx -

STONEMAN

Very funny. A real practical joker, butt-fluff. I guess I got my answer - a fuckin' idiot.

He and Black start to play. Jinx looks at Earl. The cleaner stares at his feet, embarrassed - he didn't want to share the secret with anyone else, especially not Stoneman. Jinx smiles at Earl kindly. He puts the ball in Earl's pocket - giving it to him - and turns and goes.

EXT. TEN THOUSAND OAKS STREET. NIGHT.

A field of stars overhead, a harvest moon hangs low in the sky. Montag walks down the deserted street, heading home. He slows in front of Clarisse's house - the lights are on. shapes move back and forth in front of the window, a peal of laughter makes him stop. He stares at the life inside -

CLARISSE (O.S.)

My grandfather said years ago firemen used to put out fires instead of starting them. Have you ever heard that?

Montag looks up - Clarisse is right above him, sitting on the branch of a tree, leaning against the trunk, her feet almost touching Montag's head.

MONTAG

That's ridiculous. Houses have always been fire-proofed - who'd need anyone to put out fires? What are you doing up there?

CLARISSE

I like looking at the stars.

(she swings down from the tree)

Other times I walk for hours, just thinking. Ever since I was a kid I've liked the quiet times. At school they think I'm crazy 'cos I don't go to the jet races and the fun parks. Out there, the billboards are 200 feet long. They have to be - everything happens so fast they have to stretch the message. Sometimes I think I must have come unstuck in time, you know what I mean?

MONTAG

Did your grandfather tell you that, too?

CLARISSE

(smiling)

You'd like him, you really would.

She starts to lead him towards the house. Montag hesitates but another burst of laughter pushes him over the edge. He follows her up the path -

INT. CLARISSE'S HOUSE LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

A family is gathered in front of the fire. A woman in her late 30's, Clarisse's mother, keeps a watchful eye on a baby crawling at her feet. Clarisse's brother and sister (6 and 12) sit nearby. They listen to their father swapping jokes and yarns with their grandfather.

The door opens - Clarisse enters with a fireman. The family stare - frightened - but they try to cover it. Montag is equally uncomfortable - he's never seen a family like this. He looks at the flames - for the first time he thinks of people using fire for warmth, for companionship, to keep the darkness at bay. Something older than time stirs inside him.

CLARISSE

This is the fireman I told you about.

Nobody says anything. A long beat. Montag doesn't know where to look. Clarisse's mother gets to her feet, and comes towards him, smiling -

MRS MCLELLAN

I'm Mrs McLellan... Clarisse's mother.
Sit down... please.

She guides Montag to a seat near the fire and offers him coffee and home-baked cookies.

MR MCLELLAN

I was just telling them about a friend of mine - Harry Warburg. Harry went to the barber yesterday, but Harry's only got three hairs - right here. on top of his head. He tells the barber he wants a haircut with a part on the left. So the barber...

It's a good joke and Mr McLellan tells it well but Montag's not listening - he's looking at the baby crawling on the floor. The child picks up a cookie and smears it over his mouth. He smiles up at Montag, totally innocent, eyes like saucers. He and Montag stare at one another... the man and the child... the promise and the reality ...

MR MCLELLAN

By now, of course, Harry's only got one hair left. He turns to the barber and says "Dammit - so just leave it messy, will you?"

Everyone laughs. They turn to see Montag's reaction. They stare at him - nobody knows what to do. He's looking at the baby and crying. We hold on his face.

EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK. NIGHT

Fire department helicopters - stainless steel hulls, saw-tooth rotors, cockpits lit to look like skulls - circle an old apartment house. Searchlights mounted on their skids turn night into day. People in the adjoining buildings crowd onto their balconies, looking down at a ground floor apartment. Marv and Frank's news blimp hovers overhead -

FRANK

It's not just books, I'm afraid, Marv. I'm told they've found a cache of firearms in the basement, even though they were outlawed over 30 years ago!

MARV

Books and guns? Who is this guy? A terrorist by the sound of it. A regular Che Guerara.

FRANK

(nodding his head wisely)
Could be, Marv, could be.

INT. APARTMENT. NIGHT.

The place is on fire. The owner of the apartment is in his 20's - glasses, pudgy, neatly-cut hair. He stands against the wall, breathing hard, scared. Stoneman and Rico guard him - he's under arrest.

Montag and other firemen have smashed through walls, revealing secret places containing old-style PC's, racks of disc drives and shelves of software dating back to the dark ages. Walls of concentrated fire hit the shelves and racks of equipment. Computer screens explode in plumes of green gas. Beatty, wielding his golf club, turns to the owner.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Bill, is it? You don't mind if I call you Bill, do you? You scared, Bill? Don't worry - anybody would be. But listen, we all make mistakes. You look like a reasonable guy, I'm pretty sure we can work this out. You'll have to co-operate, though. Take your pants off, will you?

BILL

W-w-what?

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Jesus, Bill - you haven't had a dump in 'em have you? Trust me - if we do this right, everything's gonna be fine. Now just do as I say, will you? Come on - the pants.

Bill leans close to Beatty and says something we don't hear. Beatty laughs.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Fluorescent?! That's great!

Bill smiles nervously, encouraged by Beatty's good humor. He drops his trousers and steps out of them. Underneath, he's wearing boxer shorts with a glo-in-the-dark design: little devils, skull and crossbones, snorting bulls.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Underneath, you're a pretty wild guy, huh? Now put your thumb in your mouth. Come on - that's right. You've got your jacket on and we've found your briefcase. Good. What I want you to do is walk down the street towards the train - perfectly normal - just as if you're going to work. It's like a joke, see? You got it - perfectly normal.

BILL

(thumb in his mouth)

What do I do at the train?

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What do you think, Bill? Buy a ticket and go somewhere. Okay, let's go.

He pushes Bill towards the front door of the apartment - then stops him:

CAPTAIN BEATTY

One more thing, Bill - is that a nose hair you've got there?

He reaches out and pulls an errant hair out of Bill's nose.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Brings tears to your eyes. eh? Let this be a lesson, Bill - make sure you keep your nose clean. Ha! Ha!

He shoves Bill through the door.

EXT. APARTMENT. NIGHT.

Bill - overweight -steps into the street in his fluorescent underpants, thumb in his mouth, briefcase in hand. Marv and Frank turn and look at one another, speechless for a moment. People in the crowd laugh - others join in, catcalling and whistling.

Bill heads for work, trying to ignore the crowd in the street and the people on the balconies yelling down.

MARV (O.S.)

(recovering)

Not the sort of half-time show we're used to, Frank. I hope he doesn't start singing. Maybe he's on his way to the beach.

FRANK (O.S.)

I hope not. Look at the size of him. Somebody grab a harpoon!

INT. APARTMENT. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Flames roar through the apartment's kitchen. The Hound sits in front of the blaze, wagging its tail. Jinx holds the remote commander. He watches Beatty kneel down in front of The Hound. A tiny metal compartment on the back of its head slides open -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

According to the pin-heads at the lab, it isn't just a dog - it's a bloodhound. This thing reads DNA. It reads sweat, blood, tears, hair, fingernails, skin, anything. We haven't got any blood - yet. But we do have a hair.

He puts the tiny hair into a glass sleeve in the compartment. It slides back into The Hound's head. Its red kaleidoscope eyes sparkle and dance as it processes the information. Beatty get to his feet -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Okay - you're on Bradley.

JINX

I'm on?

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Turn it loose. Top of the Mountain told me they want to see The Hound on display. They said to make an example of someone. What's this idiot's name?

(he looks at the incident sheet)

Bill Gates the Fourth. It looks like Mr Gates has found his place in history. Go on then - do it.

JINX

Put him in custody you mean?

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Shit, Bradley! Put him in custody? Give me that thing! How do you work it?

He grabs the remote commander and starts working the controls, any controls. The Hound responds. It's like a Swiss Army knife: panels open up, a mechanical arm with a buzz saw shoots out, a winch emerges from its head, flanges fly out from its paws, a high pressure drill curls out from its tail. Suddenly The Hound spins round - the buzz saw nearly cuts Jinx in half -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Whoops! Wrong button.

EXT. APARTMENT. NIGHT.

Smash! The Hound - legs tucked up under its body, an armored shell protecting its head - blasts through the front wall of the apartment into the street. The crowd go crazy. Gates turns and looks - he sees The Hound.

INT. APARTMENT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Montag, attracted by the roar of the crowd, crosses a smoldering bedroom and swings through a window into the street -

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

The Hound flies down the road, straight at Gates. The plump man is running - panting and sweating. Beatty steps out of the front door of the apartment, Jinx at his side.

The Hound is nothing but speed and trajectory. It snarls, a rasping electronic sizzle deep in its throat. It's almost on Gates.

Beatty, smiling, tweaks a knob - The Hound leaps, straight over Gates's head! It turns in mid-air, lands and comes straight at him from the other direction. The crowd roars. Gates turns and runs even faster back the way he came.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Shit, this is *fun*!

One leap... two... and The Hound is right behind Gates - his fat legs pumping, sweat staining his underpants, his briefcase long ago discarded. The Hound's steel teeth snap at his heels.

ON THE BLIMP

Marv and Frank are staring down at the circus below - the crowd screaming and laughing, the Fire department helicopters flooding the street with light, Gates close to exhaustion.

MARV

This Hound's no puppy - more like a motorized pit bull. Fantastic! Nobody could escape that. Frank.

FRANK

Especially not fat boy. But it makes you think, doesn't it - another couple of Hounds and maybe the Fire Department is superfluous.

EXT. THE STREET. NIGHT.

Beatty, in the middle of the street, looks up at them -

FRANK (O.S.)
Just kidding, Captain.

It's only fear that's keeping Gates going. He runs past Beatty. The Captain calls to him -

CAPTAIN BEATTY
You're going to miss your train, Bill - turn
around. Faster! Come on - a big final
effort.

Beatty works the control. The Hound darts round Gates and - to the delight of the crowd -
drives him back down the street even faster. Gates looks like he's going to explode. The
crowd stomp and chant in unison, urging The Hound on.

CAPTAIN BEATTY
How do you put this thing on "automatic"?

JINX
You hit the "full system button", sir

Beatty hits it. A shudder passes through The Hound's carbon fiber body, streamlining it.

THE HOUND'S POV

The Hound sees everything, senses everything. Through its eyes the world is a sea of
brilliant colors - white for heat sensing, green for night vision, infra-red for motion.
Endless information scrolls through in front of it in a heads up display. A target gnd
appears, superimposed square on Gates's back -

EXT. THE STREET. NIGHT.

The Hound is a whispering blur of motion. It flies through the air like a missile. Gates is
stumbling, running, almost falling. He turns and looks over his shoulder - just in time to
see the monster in full, spectacular flight. He screams -

The Hound hits him in the small of the back, sending him to the ground, locking on to
him, straddling him like it's raping him.

Ka-chunk! Metal brackets shoot out from The Hound's body and lock around Gates's wrists and ankles. Whak! An bracket pins him by the throat - he's held completely rigid.

The eight-inch hollow steel needle shoots out from The Hound's nose. Bam...bam...bam! It nails Gates repeatedly in the skull. One last terrible scream, cut short as the arcing bolts of electricity pass through him. Blood spurts, his skin smokes and bursts to flame -

Montag turns away. We hold on his face. He walks off, unnoticed by anyone. Other firemen are staring - they've never seen anything like it. Even the crowd - so loud and raucous a moment before - fall silent.

ON THE BLIMP

Marv and Frank are shocked.

FRANK

Frightening.... absolutely frightening...

MARV

That's the point, isn't it, Frank? It's enough to frighten anyone.

EXT. PLAYGROUND. NIGHT.

Montag finds a quiet spot - a derelict playground sandwiched between apartment blocks. He sits on a wall - his back to the street and the terror it held - alone with his thoughts.

Behind him, the crowd starts to disperse. The firemen begin stowing their equipment. A large team of lobos shuffle towards the apartment, ready to clean-up.

We push in on Montag's back and hold. He gets that feeling, that shiver in the spine that someone is watching him. Suddenly he turns -

A lobo looks away. He's in his late 50's, silver-haired, fine-featured - he might have been somebody once. His eyes go dead, his head slumps, his shoulders sag - the perfect lobo. He melts into the group.

Montag rises. He pushes through the crowd of lobos, searching for the man who seemed to be staring at him. All the lobos are dressed the same, all shuffling forward, all heedless of the fireman. Montag pushes them aside. He sees the man -

The lobo is shuffling into the shadows. Montag comes towards him. The lobo is terrified but hiding it. Montag grabs his shoulder. The man stops.

MONTAG

You were staring at me...lobos don't stare at anyone, they barely even think.

The lobo keeps looking down, eyes fixed on the ground.

MONTAG

Who are you?

The lobo shakes his head, he doesn't understand. Montag puts his hand under the man's chin and lifts it up. We recognize him. So does Montag - he reacts, like he's been struck. He has to be sure - he grabs the man's shoulder, half turning him, pulling the boiler suit aside to expose his back. The skin is covered in old scar tissue from some terrible burn.

MONTAG

Faber.

The lobo keeps his eyes to the ground but he clenches his teeth in anger -

FABER

That's right. Torch a man's children, I guess you never forget his face. Go on! Do it, Montag - call your friends. Fuck a man's brain, why not? Maybe they'll get it right this time. A second dose doesn't cost much, does it? Go on - what are you waiting for?

Montag shocked, stares at him - he's not brain dead.

CAPTAIN BEATTY (O.S.)

Montag - what are you doing?

Montag turns - Beatty, on top of the fire truck with his pitching wedge, is looking at him.

MONTAG

Nothing.

Reeling, he turns and heads back towards the fire trucks. Faber breathes a sigh, letting out the fear. He picks up his shovel and shuffles off.

EXT. FIRE TRUCK. NIGHT.

Rico packs equipment into a locker at back of the engine. Montag comes up beside him. Rico is firing up a cigarette -

MONTAG

Give me one, Rico.

RICO

You don't smoke.

MONTAG

Just give me one!

INT. FIRE TRUCK. NIGHT.

The truck is on its way back to the firehouse, the firemen relaxing, washing up, watching themselves on the replay of the night's burn. Montag sits at the back, quiet. Beatty makes his way down the vehicle - he sees Montag dragging on the cigarette.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

You don't smoke, Montag.

MONTAG

I do sometimes.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

You're a quiet one - I never knew that.

He sits down and lights his pipe.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

You see that thing with The Hound? Bill Gates and his fluorescent boxers! That was something, huh?

MONTAG

It sure was.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

How's everything at Ten Thousand Oaks?

MONTAG

Fine.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

You should bring Millie round - we could get together for dinner. Or maybe just you and I should hit the town. We could get ourselves some virtual sex. The technology's amazing now. You can even choose the size of your schlonger. You wonder what sort of guy would choose "small", don't you? Some sort of deviate. Maybe I should have the Department look into that. You can tell me if you're going to get a sheep.

MONTAG

A sheep?

CAPTAIN BEATTY

That lawn of yours - for pity's sake, mow it, will you? "Tidy man, tidy mind." isn't that what those guys in Administration are always saying?

MONTAG

(laughing)

The lawn... a sheep in Ten Thousand Oaks. That's pretty funny.

Beatty slaps him on the back, stretches his legs out and closes his eyes - perfectly content.

EXT. MONTAG'S HOUSE. DAY.

Four antennas rise out of the ground at the corners of Montag's front lawn. A laser beam, like a scythe, sweeps across and trims the lawn. Two seconds. Super the title:

April 23. Wensdy. 9.46am

MONTAG (O.S.)

It doesn't take much to mow the lawn, Millie. It's just a button. At least it keeps everyone off our back.

INT. MONTAG'S KITCHEN. MORNING.

Montag stands in the kitchen in a t-shirt and jeans. Mildred is dressed to kill - she's done her hair and make-up and chosen a top that exposes her cleavage. Strangely, the effect is more sad than provocative. She is thawing out an instant McFeast breakfast -

MILDRED

I said I was sorry.

Montag, not up to an argument, turns and goes into -

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY.

He slumps in a chair Mildred comes in, chewing on her McFeast. She tries to be friendly.

MILDRED

You should take it easy. Have a sleep lozenge - it's your day off.

MONTAG

(not meaning it)

Yeah, maybe I will.

MILDRED

Anyway, what's Beatty doing driving around looking at lawns? Hasn't he got anything better to do? You're not in trouble, are you Montag?

MONTAG

I don't know if I'm in trouble... I guess I am - a different sort of trouble, Millie. We burned an old woman the other night, we burned another couple of thousand books.

MILDRED

So?

MONTAG

We burned copies of writers called Dante and Swift and Melville... great men for all I know.

MILDRED

I've never heard of them. Who were they - Europeans? I don't know why you're getting upset. The woman should never have had the books - she knew what she was letting herself in for.

MONTAG

I know... I know that, Millie. But I'm not sure I believe it anymore... I don't know what I believe. It's gotten big on me... this thing, God it's gotten big on me. I don't know why but I feel like I'm putting on weight. One minute I'm frightened, the next I feel like there's a fever tearing through me. I'm heading right for the cliff, Millie, and I'm not sure I want to go over, but if I am - God I want to piece it together and figure it out. I'm so damned unhappy. I'm so mad, Millie, I've got to do *something*.

She looks at him and smiles.

MILDRED

Poor Montag - I know what this is about. I know what you need - all you've got to do is ask.

She puts down the McFeast, lifts her breasts out of her top and kneels down in front of him. She reaches for his crotch and tries to undo the zip. He takes her hand away and slides down on the floor next to her -

MONTAG

Listen to me - I was trying to think of this at work yesterday. When did we meet, Millie. And *where*?

She looks at him - what does he mean?

MILDRED

Meet for what?

MONTAG

You and me... the first time... originally,
I mean. Where was it?

MILDRED

Why, you idiot, it was at...
(her voice trails off, she starts to think)
It was at... it's been so long, I guess.

MONTAG

Sixteen years. Millie, that's all, only
sixteen years!

MILDRED

Okay - don't get excited. I'm trying to
think.
(a beat - then she gives a little laugh)
Isn't that funny? How funny not to
remember where you met your husband.

She laughs and looks at Montag. He stands up. She follows suit.

MILDRED

Anyway, it doesn't matter. We're happy,
that's the important thing, isn't it?

Montag walks out of the room. She smiles again to herself -

MILDRED

What about that? Fancy not remembering?

She picks up her McFeast and pushes open a door with the toe of one of her high-heeled
pumps. She goes through it.

EXT. TOWERING MOUNTAINS. DAY.

A sun-tanned, smiling man - so perfect, empty, he could be animatronic - walks down a
ramp between the Swiss Alps. It morphs into a spectacular shopping mall.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Welcome to World Home Shopping!

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY ROOM. TWILIGHT.

Wall panels in the entertainment room have been opened, revealing three huge liquid crystal tv screens. They sweep around Mildred in a semi-circle. She sits in the chair, surrounded by the remnants of the McFeast, empty food cartons and soda bottles.

It's later the same day and she's been in front of the interactive tv for hours. The sun-tanned man - the Host - seems to walk around her, larger than life.

THE HOST

And a very special welcome to you...

There is a milli-second of a pause and the sound quality changes minutely. A keen observer would see the pixels around the Host's mouth alter and change as an unseen computer somewhere inserts the right words and movements -

THE HOST

Millie Montag!

The Host is looking straight at her. She beams back at the screen. The poor woman - this is why she got dressed-up.

THE HOST

Our first offer tonight is from Princeton Mint.
It's number one in a series of porcelain
figures of famous serial killers.

Mildred's hand clicks on an interactive key-pad. She buys it.

INT. ATTIC. TWILIGHT

The heating vent is open, small piles of precious books stand on a table. Montag has been reading... reading. He looks up and rubs his hand across his tired eyes. His glance falls once again on the singed page from The Bible. "He that increaseth wisdom..." A blue and orange light washes across his face. He goes to the window -

MONTAG'S POV

Fire engines - lights flashing, steel sides dropping - draw up in front of Clarisse's house. Floodlights on their roof illuminate the entire place. He stares as the hydraulic rams come out. Smash! They tear into the house.

Neighbors emerge from the neat little boxes of Ten Thousand Oaks. They run towards the house to watch. News blimps glide into position, ready to catch the action.

INT. MONTAG'S. VIRTUAL REALITY ROOM. NIGHT.

Mildred turns at the sounds of running feet. Through the doorway, she sees Montag racing down the hall.

MILDRED

What are you doing?! Don't you want to go shopping? There's a new mall on channel 98.

He doesn't stop. Mildred shrugs and turns back to the TV.

EXT. FIRE ENGINE. NIGHT.

Montag sprints across the street and reaches a hatch on the side of one of the fire engines. Sweating, out of breath, he waits impatiently as the sensor on the door reads his Fire Department smart card. Sswhish! The hatch slides open, revealing a compartment with racks of protective clothing and helmets. Montag starts to change. He looks up -

ON THE BLIMP

Garfield Snubz, the neighbor with the dirty habit, is being interviewed. He's smoking a pipe, acting like some community leader -

SNUBZ

The first thing was the smell of baking. What's wrong with store-bought cookies, I thought? Then late at night I'd hear sort of strange music, like a cat being tortured or something. I made the call as soon as I was sure. Frankly, I had to hurry - I really wanted the green stamp bonus. I was worried the fireman Montag might beat me to it but I guess I was just more on the ball than he was.

We tilt down from Snubz's massive self-satisfied smile to -

EXT. TOP OF FIRE ENGINE. NIGHT.

Firemen, dangling from ladders and holding onto telescopic arms fly towards the house. A golf ball sits on the platform on top of the engine. Beatty has his pitching wedge.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

(hushed tone)

A difficult shot here at the fourteenth at
Ten Thousand Oaks. Into the stiff
northerly breeze, thirty yards to the hole,
Beatty will have to sink this for birdie.
Can he do it?

He sets himself up for the shot when he sees a fireman, dressed in a space suit, appear round the side of the engine. It's Montag.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

(he yells to the other firemen)

What about this guy, huh?! It's his day
off but he can't stay away. That's what
I like - *enthusiasm!* Go Montag, go!
Burn 'em to ashes, then burn the ashes,
isn't that what we say?

Beatty whacks the golf ball. Montag swings himself onto the engine, runs and jumps. He sails through the air and grabs a metal arm swooping through frame. It propels him to -

EXT. CLARISSE'S HOUSE. ROOF. NIGHT.

Smash! Montag's steel-capped boot's blast through a skylight.

INT. LIVING ROOM/HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Pandemonium. Crashing plaster, splintering wood, smoke and flame. A violin lies smashed on the floor. Clarisse's mother, carrying the baby, tries to shepherd her two younger, screaming, children towards the back of the house.

Mr McLellan comes flying down the stairs, swings one of the kids into his arms and leads them forward. A wall in front of them smashes apart! A fireman, backlit, steps through the smoke and dust - he looks like a vision from space hell. He fires a shot with his flame-thrower, driving them back against a wall, cornering them.

INT. BASEMENT. NIGHT.

The basement - a sequence of low rooms - is filled with smoke and clouds of plaster dust. Fire rips through joists and bearers supporting the floor above. Clarisse - scared, gasping - runs towards a door. Crash! Beams fall down, barely missing her, blocking her path.

INT. BATHROOM. NIGHT.

Crack! A door shatters into a hundred pieces. Montag comes through shoulder first, into a bathroom. It's empty. He keeps going, through another door and down a corridor - he has to find Clarisse before anyone else.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Floodlights from the engines outside illuminate the room. Books have spilled out from a secret cache and lie scattered on the floor - "The Life of Brahms", "Mozart - The Last Requiem." Clarisse's grandfather - not yet arrested by the firemen - hauls the heavy stove aside. We don't know why, but he uses a hammer to smash open pipes and conduits coming out of the wall.

INT. STAIRS/BASEMENT. NIGHT.

Montag, moving fast, comes down the back stairs and through a door. He looks down into the basement, full of smoke and curling flame. He flicks on a shoulder-mounted high intensity light and lowers his goggles.

MONTAG'S POV

The room - electronically cleared of smoke and dust, illuminated by the beam of light - springs into sharp relief: piles of junk, walls sweating water, pools of dark shadow. He moves forward -

INT. BASEMENT. NIGHT.

Through a low arch, fire hits cans of paint and cleaning fluids. They explode. A stifled scream! Montag turns. Through his goggles we see Clarisse splattered with flame, her clothes starting to burn.

Montag runs, tearing through flame and smoke. He reaches her - clothes burning, in pain, whirling around, thrashing at her scorching flesh. Whoomph! Her shirt erupts in flame.

Montag wraps his arms around her, falling to the ground with her. He holds her tight, rolling with her, using his body and the fireproof suit, to smother the flames. They roll through the arch, into an area that's not yet burning.

Clarisse's arms and back are burnt but she's still conscious. Montag lifts his helmet to look at her - for the first time she sees his face. She screams at him, punching at him, trying to gouge his eyes -

CLARISSE

You told them... it was you... you told them!

MONTAG

No! It wasn't me!

She's in so much pain, so much anguish for her family, she fights like a woman possessed. Montag tries to hold her but she's kicking and biting, oblivious to her own wounds. There's so little time - Montag clenches his fist and punches her hard on the jaw. She goes down, knocked out.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Tight on one of the kitchen pipes, broken off at the wall. Despite the noise and confusion, we hear something hissing out of it. We pull back to reveal Black and Stoneman burst into the kitchen. They see the grandfather, armed with a wrench -

STONEMAN

Drop it!

He raises his flame-thrower, threatening. Black doesn't stop - she continues the search, disappearing through a door that leads into the basement. The grandfather picks up a pile of his beloved books -

GRANDFATHER

I've been waiting for you. You think you're going to take my mind? No! Do it, fireman!

He starts to walk forward.

STONEMAN

Stop - you heard me!

The grandfather takes another step. He smiles.

INT. BASEMENT STAIRS. NIGHT.

Black comes down the stairs. Her shoulder-mounted light blasts through the darkness. It catches Montag in its beam. He's carrying Clarisse, looking for someone to hide her. He nims and looks at Black.

MONTAG

(trying to cover)

I found her in the rubble - I was taking her out.

BLACK

No... that's not what it looks like. No!

Black, not taking her eyes off Montag, gropes for the headset to contact Beatty. Montag, holding the silver nozzle of his flame-thrower in one hand, slips his other hand towards the ignition. Black sees -

BLACK

Leave it! I'll burn you, Montag - I swear!

She finds the headset and raises it towards her mouth -

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Stoneman stares straight at the grandfather.

STONEMAN

Last time - stop there, asshole!

GRANDFATHER

I told you - you'll have to do it.

He keeps walking. Stoneman, looking forward to this, raises the nozzle. Rico comes through the door - he sees the digital read-out on Stoneman's forearm flashing red.

RICO

No. Stoneman! It's gas -

Too late - Stoneman has hit the ignition. Now it's the grandfather's turn to smile. Stoneman's flame-thrower ignites the gas spewing from the pipe. The room explodes.

INT. BASEMENT STAIRS. NIGHT.

Black has the headset at her mouth -

BLACK

Captain..?

A wall of flame and flying debris hits her in the back, hurling her forward, straight into the wall. Crack! Her head snaps back into an impossible angle - she's dead. Montag dives, throwing Clarisse to the ground, covering her.

EXT. CLARISSE'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

The exploding gas smashes out the side of the house. Beatty stares at it. The crowd roar and cheer at the spectacle. The news blimps capture it from every angle.

INT. BASEMENT. NIGHT.

Overhead - the sound of flames and firemen smashing walls, tackling the blaze. Montag carries Clarisse deeper into the basement. His shoulder light hits a disused freezer.

He opens the lid and puts her in. He takes the oxygen tank off his back, lays it beside her and slips the respirator over her face. At least she'll be able to breathe. He closes the lid.

EXT. REAR OF HOUSE. NIGHT.

The house is burning down to its brick bones. The bodies of the grandfather, Black, Clarisse's father, the baby boy - killed in the fire - are laid out on the lawn. Medics are tending to Stoneman and Rico - burned but saved by their space suits.

The rest of the fire crew - subdued, shaken - are packing their equipment. Montag is kneeling down by himself, one eye on the ruins of the house, the other clamping down and sealing off utility pipes and cables.

He sees what he is looking for: a group of lobos coming round the side of the house. Montag looks down the line - he sees Faber at the back. They head towards him.

As Faber passes, Montag gets up - his back to the other firemen, face hidden from view.

MONTAG

There's a girl still alive. She's hidden in the basement. Get her out.

Faber keeps his shoulders slumped, his eyes staring at the ground.

FABER

What?! A change of heart, fireman?!

MONTAG

You want her to die? That's what happens if anyone else finds her.

Faber, a mountain of hate to climb, looks at him. Beatty comes round the side of the house. Montag has his back to him -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Montag! Have you sealed those valves yet?

(he sees Faber)

What are you doing - fucking this guy or what? Couldn't you get a better looking one?

Montag puts his tools away. Faber shuffles off.

MONTAG

Just finished, Captain.

Beatty looks from Montag to Faber - he can't put his finger on it, but there was something not right about it. Troubled, he turns and walks away.

INT. MONTAG'S ATTIC/ BATHROOM. NIGHT.

Montag whirls through the rooms, grabbing stuff out of closets, opening drawers, emptying cupboards. He's gathering medical supplies together - bandages, IV solutions, gauze dressings, a Fire Department first aid kit. He keeps glancing out the window -

The firemen and spectators have gone. He sees Faber push a rubbish skip out of the remains of the house. He looks at Montag's house then turns away. Montag knows what it means. He sweeps the medical supplies into a sport bag, grabs his jacket and heads out.

EXT. DESOLATION ROW. NIGHT.

Trash lies in the gutters, fires burn in oil drums, an elevated section of the vacuum train passes overhead. In its shadow, rows of dilapidated, rambling old houses have been turned into hovels for the underclass. This is where the lobos live.

Hollow-eyed men watch as Montag makes his way towards a partly-derelict house. A fire went through it years ago and its windows and front doors are boarded up.

Montag turns and walks down a path, towards a back door. We hold on his boot - the first of a flight of wooden steps sags under his weight.

INT. FABER'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

The step is a home-made pressure device. It sets off an alarm in the house - a low-key jangling like an alarm clock. Faber looks through a crack that lets him see who's coming. He turns out the lights, kills the flame under a coffee pot and goes for the door.

EXT./INT. FABER'S DOOR. NIGHT.

The door squeals on its hinge as Montag pushes it open. He steps inside - tattered wall-paper, pools of deep gloom, a distant faucet - drip, drip, drip. He comes deeper into the darkness - a few pieces of junkyard furniture, the ancient stove in the corner, a draught hitting a piece of metal. Tap...tap...tap.

He takes another step. Smash! The face of a shovel hits him in the face, knocking him down. Blood pours down his cheek -

FABER

That's for my daughter!

Faber looms above Montag, wielding the shovel. Wham! He hits him again! And again -

FABER

That's for my son, that's for the children who never had a chance to grow up!

He raises the shovel up high. Down it comes! Like a sword straight at the fireman's skull Montag kicks out, sweeping Faber's legs away. He falls.

Montag leaps on him. Faber's hands grab the fireman's throat, trying to choke him. They roll across the floor, punching, clawing and tearing at one another. Bam! Montag's fist blasts into Faber's nose, breaking it. Faber lets go, fighting to stay conscious. Montag hurls the shovel away.

The two men sit on the floor, spent, looking at one another. Blood keeps dripping to the floor. Faber is crying -

FABER

I don't even know where their bodies are...

There's nothing Montag can say. From the next room, the sound of a cry. Clarisse.

INT. FABER'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Clarisse lies in a bed, feverish, her wounds roughly bandaged by Faber. Montag - one eye puffy and half closed from Faber's attack - leans over her. Gently, he starts to take off her bandages. She opens her eyes - and sees a fireman. She screams and starts to struggle. hallucinating -

CLARISSE'S VISION

She's back in the inferno, struggling with firemen, the music of Brahms punctuated by the crash of masonry and the pounding of hydraulic rams. Clarisse screams -

INT. FABER'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Montag tries to hold her, calm her, but he can't do it alone. He looks to Faber, asking him with his eyes. The older man, grim-faced, steps forward. They work together, holding her, removing the bandages, trying to clean the burns. Montag takes a needle gun out of the first aid kit and fills it with morphine. Faber holds her arm steady -

CLARISSE'S VISION

Clarisse sees the needle - her mother and brothers are strapped to gurneys in a white, antiseptic room. Attendants insert long needles into the patients' forearms -

INT. FABER'S BEDROOM NIGHT.

Montag and Faber see tears roll down Clarisse's cheeks but from what pain, they don't know. The morphine starts to calm her. The two men let go. A beat while they relax - then Montag washes blood off his wounded face and picks up his jacket to go.

FABER

What are you doing? You're just going to leave her here? I can't look after her!

MONTAG

And I can?

FABER

You don't have a plan?! You think saving her was the hard part - now you just walk away?! Why didn't you just leave her there to burn? Sure, I'll care for her, love her, try to mend her, but you've made it a hundred times worse for both of us. What the fuck were you thinking?!

MONTAG

Nothing... I wasn't thinking anything. She was a kid, I wanted to save her. I thought that was something you'd understand.

FABER

What do you do now - go back to work?

Faber looks at him and realizes - he's right.

FABER

Whoa! I see... you're sitting on the fence. You're so far stuck in the middle, you've got a picket up your ass. You don't know what to do, do you? You're dead, Montag. You're fucked. A piece of shit like you finds a conscience and what does he do with it? Puts it away for another day. That's bravery for you. Have I ever told you how much I admire you, Montag? Wow!

Montag wheels on him. For a moment we think he's going to hit him -

FABER

Go ahead. I'm the only person not lying to you, you prick. that makes me the best friend you've got - and I hate your guts. Get off the fence. go out there. Montag, grab it with all your strength. Now that'd take real courage! That'd take some balls.

Montag looks at him, troubled, breathing hard. He says nothing -

FABER

What's wrong - cat got your tongue? You don't know which way to turn. huh? Out of the frying pan and into the fire. Either way it looks like you're doomed. I almost feel sorry for you. Welcome to the world, Montag. What is it - still got nothing to say?

Montag, reeling, heads for the door.

FABER

Goodnight, Montag. You didn't tell us - are we going to see you again?

Montag says nothing. He goes through the door and into the night.

EXT. THOUSAND OAKS. MORNING.

Dawn is breaking, streaking the eastern sky with purple and gold. Super the title:

April 24. Thersdy. 5.46am

The early morning light softens the rawness of Ten Thousand Oaks. At any other time a man might feel good to be alive. Montag - carrying the sport bag, the wound on his face cleaned and dressed as best he can - walks past the burned-out shell of Clarisse's house.

INT. MONTAG'S. HALL/LIVING ROOM. MORNING.

He steps into the darkened hallway - worn out, in pain, he takes off his coat.

MILDRED (O.S.)

Where have you been?! I had a surprise - I had everything planned.

She comes out of the bedroom. She's dressed in a negligee that exposes most of her breasts and a pair of t-back underpants little bigger than dental floss. A moment later another woman appears in the doorway behind her - similarly dressed, even trashier. Montag's never seen her before in his life. Oh, God...

MONTAG

I walked... I rode the train - I didn't think I'd sleep. I had a lot on my mind.

As she comes closer, she sees his face -

MILDRED

Shit - what happened to your face?

MONTAG

An accident... I felt dizzy, I thought I was going to throw-up - I fell.

The other woman goes into the bedroom to change - this obviously isn't going to happen.

MILDRED

You've never been sick a day in your life. What's going on?! I want to know!

MONTAG

Nothing's going on. I told you - an accident.

He turns and goes through a door -

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAWN.

He has to sit down - he's climbing a wall of worry, his eye's throbbing like a bitch and it seems like he hasn't slept for days. Mildred follows him in -

MILDRED

It's no good sitting there. Captain Beatty's been calling - you're on early shift. He wants to know where you are.

MONTAG

What did you tell him?

MILDRED

I said you were on your way.

MONTAG

Call him back, will you? Tell him I was feeling sick - I had to come home again.

MILDRED

Why are you lying? What is this, Montag?! It's not more of that weird stuff about the old woman, is it? You don't really expect me to call him do you?

MONTAG

Yes, I do!

MILDRED

Don't shout!

Montag puts his head in his hands, breathing deep, trying to calm his reeling head.

MONTAG

I'm sorry. I can't call him... I can't tell him I'm sick.

MILDRED

Why? Because you're not and you think he'll hear it in your voice, that's why, isn't it?

MONTAG

Yes! Goddammit - yes. Now just do it will you?!

But Mildred's looking past him, out the window.

MILDRED

You've really got something to worry about now. A Phoenix vehicle has just driven up. A man in a black shirt with an orange snake stitched on the sleeve is coming up the walk.

MONTAG
(without even turning)
Captain Beatty.

Mildred leaves to open the door. Already we hear the entry speaker - softly, softly:

SPEAKER (O.S.)
Mrs Montag, Mrs Montag, someone here...

INT. HALLWAY. MORNING.

Captain Beatty, hat in hand, follows Mildred down the corridor. She hasn't had time to pull anything on - he runs an admiring eye over her bare butt, clearly visible through her negligee. She stops at the doorway, playing the hostess -

MILDRED
Coffee, Captain?

CAPTAIN BEATTY
Do bears shit in the woods? Are there
Calithumpians at Top of the Mountain?

MILDRED
(laughing)
How do you take it?

CAPTAIN BEATTY
Strong and straight.
(he pauses, smiling back)
Is that how you like it, Millie - strong and
straight?

She touches her hair. Her voice is a little husky -

MILDRED
I've got no objection. Of course, white
and sweet's good, too.

She looks knowingly at Beatty. He laughs. She turns and heads down the corridor. She wiggles it as she goes. Beatty steps through, into -

INT. LIVING ROOM. MORNING.

Montag hasn't moved - he looks up at Beatty standing on the threshold.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Damned fine woman. Mildred. Sexy. I guess if I had a wife like that, I'd be tired all the time, too.

He walks in and settles himself in the most comfortable chair. He lights his pipe -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

I thought you were on your way. I guess you got delayed. What the fuck have you done to your face?

MONTAG

I was just going to call - I thought I was going to throw-up at the train station. I passed out in the wash-room. I guess I hit my head on the basin.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

You look pale but it's funny, Montag - you never get sick, not in the fifteen years I've known you.

MONTAG

I've felt it coming on for a few days now.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

I've been watching you - no, it's been longer than that. Weeks, I'd say.

Montag looks at him - what does he mean? How much does he really know? The door opens - Mildred, carrying a large coffee tray, enters. Beatty gets up to help her.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

(to Mildred)

Montag was just telling me about his health.

Mildred, fussing with the coffee, tries to be helpful -

MILDRED

He's been off-color for a while now. I told him this morning to call in sick, but you know him - No, they need me. As it turns out, he can't even make it to the train station. He gets nauseous and passes out -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

In the street?

MILDRED

On the drive-way, right out there.

She looks up - silence. Did she say something? Beatty and Montag are just looking at each other. The contradiction lies between them like a turd on the floor -

MONTAG

(quietly)

Millie's just trying to cover for me. I couldn't make it to work... I was riding the train most of the night. I tripped and fell because I was so damned tired - I've had a lot on my mind lately.

Beatty nods - he guessed it was something like that.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

This is serious, Montag. You understand - there are a number of offenses here.

Montag looks at him - Beatty likes the idea he's caught Montag in a lie, it puts the guy in a corner. Mildred, worried, hands Beatty his coffee. He puts his hand on her thigh. He traces his fingers up and down, squeezing her bare flesh. Mildred doesn't know how to react so she just stands there.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

But listen - every fireman, sooner or later, hits this. He asks questions, he has doubts, he may even go out on a job and see the perps as *people*. An old woman, a young girl - you know how it is. But all the man needs is a little understanding. That's part of my job.

Mildred, feeling more comfortable with Beatty feeling her up in front of her husband, nods her head wisely.

MILDRED

That's right. Part of the job.

Montag looks at his boss's hand toying with his wife. It's about power, he knows that but he doesn't care... he just doesn't care any more.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

And say that fireman, not really realizing the danger in ideas and thoughts, got an itch to see what all the fuss is about. What if, accidentally, not really intending anything, he takes a book or two home with him?

Montag feels his stomach turn.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

And just assume he had come top of his class and made a name for himself and become, well, a *hero*. Say people had their eye on him for a long time and they were saying he'd make Captain one day and after that it was just a matter of time before he got invited to the Top of the Mountain? A natural error, they'd say. Curiosity. Nobody gets over-anxious or mad. We let the fireman keep the book 24 hours. If he hasn't burned it by then, we simply come and burn it for him. Call it a shamnesty, eh? A Samuel Clemency.

He laughs. Mildred who has no idea what it means, laughs even louder. Montag whispers.

MONTAG

Of course.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

So, Montag, are you coming home? Will you take a later shift today? We'll see you then, will we?

MONTAG

(shutting his eyes)

I'll be in later, I suppose... yes... I will.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Good.

He turns and gets to his feet. Mildred accompanies him out the door. Montag shakes - the anxiety loosening its grip, his mouth like sandpaper. He leans forward and vomits

From out in the hall, Beatty laughs at something - deep and guttural. Montag wipes his mouth with tissue and sits there, trying to master himself.

The door opens and Mildred returns. Her lipstick is smudged as if she's been kissing him... or God knows what. She looks at Montag, really angry -

MILDRED

You've risked everything! For what? Books!
You're lucky Harry's such a decent man -
he's bending over to help you. I've given you
the best years of my life and now you go and
do something like this. It makes you think,
Montag - a woman can only take so much!

Montag doesn't say a word. He gets up, besieged: Clarisse... Mildred... books... Beatty...
Faber. Mildred watches him - he goes through the door and closes it gently behind him.

INT. BREAKFAST ROOM. MORNING.

He stands in the middle of the room and zens out - perfectly still, eyes closed, trying to
calm his breathing. He's looking for a moment of peace, of clarity. Gradually his heart
and breathing slow. He opens his eyes - the early morning light pours through the tall
windows. The whole of the world seems to be waiting for him.

INT. MONTAG'S ATTIC. DAY.

Montag's cache of about 80 half-burned books sit in their hiding place. He takes out two
of them and puts them in his sport bag.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Mildred has been crying. She sits at the kitchen table, still in her lingerie, make-up smeared. The door opens. She looks up - Montag's shaved, hair neatly parted, his day uniform perfectly pressed, shoes polished to a brilliant shine. He looks like a new man -

MONTAG

I was wrong, Millie. I've thought about what Captain Beatty said - all those words just confuse you. It's like a fever and when it gets hold of you, you can't see anything straight. No wonder the Government wanted them burned!

MILDRED

They're looking out for us.

MONTAG

That's right! Captain Beatty, too. You were right - he is a decent man. Now this is over we should try and spend more time with him, listen to him more.

MILDRED

We should! Everything's fine again, isn't it?

MONTAG

Yes - everything's fine. Goodbye, Millie.

He says the last words too softly, looks at her a moment too long for it to be natural. But the significance of it is lost on her. She keeps smiling. He turns and goes out the door.

EXT. PUBLIC PLAZA. DUSK.

Montag - dwarfed by the expressionist buildings - crosses the desolate plaza. Huge shadows criss-cross his path - he looks like a man in the middle of a machine.

INT. FIRE STATION. MUSTER ROOM. DUSK.

Everything's normal: Beatty's playing cards with a few of the guys; others are sprawled out in front of the interactive. Several turn and look as Montag enters.

Beatty keeps playing, making out as if he hasn't been waiting. Montag stops next to him. Beatty doesn't say a word. He gets to his feet and leads Montag towards the control room.

INT. FIRE STATION. CONTROL ROOM. DUSK

They step through the massive, vault-like door. Beatty calls to the despatch officers -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Get a coffee, will ya? I need a little privacy.

The officers move out. Beatty closes the door behind them. He puts out his hand for a gift. Montag opens the sport bag and takes out the two books. Beatty glances at them -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

"Mein Kampf"? Shit Montag, no wonder you were fixing your mind.

He tosses it in a trash-can. He looks at the second book -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Jackie Collins - now you're talking!
(he opens it at random and reads)
"Her fingers clawed deep into his flesh as he rode her, rode her hard, deep into sensual oblivion."

The book follows Mein Kampf into the trash can. Beatty pours liquor from a hip flask onto them and touches his lighter to it. The books burn -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Good, the crisis is past, the sheep returns to the fold. We're all sheep who have strayed at times. Truth is truth to the end of reckoning, we've cried. They are never alone that are accompanied by noble thoughts, we've shouted to ourselves. Sit in for a hand of poker? No? Welcome home, Montag.

Beatty opens the door and leads Montag out.

INT. FIRE STATION. BASEMENT. NIGHT.

Montag - dressed in his overalls, equipment belt around his waist - walks down a deserted underground corridor. A sensor on a pair of doors reads the smart card on his chest.

Montag enters a plant room - air conditioning pumps, stand-by generators, electrical grids. He disappears into the shadows.

INT. DRY RISER. NIGHT.

Montag climbs a ladder up a narrow shaft. There's barely enough room for his body - he's in a dry riser - the shaft that carries electricity and other utilities through the building. He pulls the cover off an air-conditioning duct and swings himself into the frigid air.

INT. AIR CONDITIONING DUCT. NIGHT.

Montag crawls along the duct. Carefully he makes his way over a vent in the floor. We look through - he's right above the control room: Beatty's vacant chair, despatch officers, racks of digital processors, ten million megabytes of information swept up every second.

Montag unclips one of several metal canisters he's carrying on his belt and attaches it to the wall of the duct. We can't tell what the canisters are but Montag codes a series of numbers into a hand-held remote - it looks like some sort of detonating device.

As he crawls past us we hold on the duct - we see he's already placed a dozen of the canisters along the duct.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

An industrial-style kitchen somewhere deep in the fire station. The place is empty, dark. One of the panels on the ceiling moves and is pulled aside. Montag's legs swing through and he drops onto a bench. He replaces the panel and jumps to the floor.

A sound behind him. He freezes. He looks straight ahead at a window. Reflected in the glass is a fireman. Montag's hand slides towards the bolt gun he wears in his equipment belt. Explosively-powered, it can fire a eight-inch flanged steel bolt 400 yards.

In the glass, he sees the fireman's hand go towards his own equipment belt. A shoot-out. Montag draws! He spins on his heel, whirling -

The other guy's faster - he's already got his weapon out. Montag's gun rises, finger on the trigger - then he realizes! It's Earl - his weapon is a bottle of Windex. A stream of liquid hits Montag in the face. The cleaner smiles -

EARL

(real slow)

You're dead, pardner.

Montag lowers his weapon, swallowing hard. He picks up Earl's broom, puts his arm around him and leads him out.

INT. FILE ROOM. NIGHT.

The file room is in the basement - a huge, double height room with endless, fully-automated cabinets of computer discs. The Government knows everything, sees everything, keeps everything.

The whole room is in constant motion. The grid of polished steel cabinets are on tracks - they glide back and forth, automatically finding and feeding discs into computer drives. It looks like a ballet choreographed by the technological state.

A few firemen move about - clerks, researchers, technicians. Montag is at one of the desks in the back corner, secluded. Raw surveillance footage of the burn at Clarisse's house - captured from all different angles - plays on the three screens in front of him.

He watches intently - then stops one of the machines. The footage shows Clarisse coming home on the night of the burn. Montag keys in a series of commands - the footage vanishes. He's removing all trace of Clarisse from the burn.

As he moves through the next section of footage, we crane up - a man approaches through the dancing filing cabinets. Jinx Bradley. Two rows of cabinets glide apart, revealing Montag in his secluded corner. Jinx smiles and comes towards him -

JINX

Hey, Montag - what are you doing here?

Montag's hands freeze on the keyboard, then he keeps going, acting normal.

MONTAG

Just looking at stuff before it goes through to the auditors and filing.

Jinx looks over his shoulder.

JINX

Shit, Montag - you want to be careful -
somehow you've got yourself into "delete".

He laughs and keyboards in a command, changing the mode. Montag has no choice - he keeps moving through the footage. Jinx chatters away, remembering the burn, but Montag barely hears him - he just wants him to go.

JINX

Hey, stop. Go back, will you?

Jinx leans across and - far more technically dexterous than Montag - winds the footage back and stops it on an exact frame. It shows Clarisse's house with eight glowing red dots scattered through it -

JINX

That's weird. Look at that, will ya - it's the infra-red shot of the house just before we arrived. It shows seven hot spots. But we only found six perps, didn't we? The mother and two kids we arrested and three relations who ended up in body bags.

MONTAG

So? They probably had a dog or something.

JINX

(really interested now)

No, you know that - the technology's so good now it can differentiate. It's a person, definitely.

Montag moves in his seat - swear to God, he'll kill him if he has to. Jinx thinks he and Montag are really onto something - he leans forward, taking command of the keyboard, excited. He whips through the footage and stops -

JINX

That's the footage eight minutes into the assault. There's the thermal overlay. See - there's a perp in the basement. I bet that's the one we never accounted for. You were in the basement, weren't you, Montag?

He turns - innocent. Montag is staring straight at him. Jinx feels a chill pass through him.

JINX

(faltering)

What happened?

MONTAG

What do you think happened?

Jinx is really scared now.

JINX

I don't want to say what I think - I might be right.

MONTAG

Whatever happens, just remember one thing, Jinx - they lie.

Jinx starts to back away - frightened, confused. Shreek - behind him! He nearly jumps out of his skin. It's the alarm, summoning the firefighters to a call.

JINX

I don't want to know about this... any of it...
I just don't.

Montag nods his head - that's fine. Jinx turns and goes.

EXT. COURTYARD. NIGHT.

The garage doors fly up. All the fire-trucks, more than we've ever seen, roar out - this must be some alarm. As the first truck passes, we see The Hound on its platform at the back, red eyes glowing in the dark. The trucks roar through the gates.

INT. FIRE TRUCK. NIGHT.

The overhead lights cast their sickly glow. The firefighters grab equipment and line up beneath the lockers. The kerosene tanks start to come down. Beatty walks down the line. He stops in front of Montag, checking the valves and nozzle of his flame-thrower.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

It's a big one, Montag - one of the biggest of our careers. We don't want another equipment failure, do we?

MONTAG

No, sir.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

There's a lot of burning, but I'm going to let you have most of it. You're my main man, aren't you? Just think of all those books - soft and dirty like a woman's pussy. You look hot, Montag. Not sweating are you? I'd hate to think you were coming down with another fever.

MONTAG

I'm fine.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Two minutes to location. Here we go to keep the world happy. Are we hungry?!

MONTAG/OTHERS

Yes, sir!

EXT. SKY. NIGHT.

The Fire Department's death-head helicopters swarm past. Beneath them, dozens of fire trucks - lights flashing, drawn from stations throughout the city - converge on one street.

INT. FIRE TRUCK. NIGHT.

The truck screeches to a halt. It jerks as it rises up on its hydraulic legs. The sides drop down, panels rise up, doors open. The firemen stream out onto the platforms - all except Montag. He just stands, staring.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Something the matter, Montag?

MONTAG

There's been a mistake... it's my house.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

We don't make mistakes, you know that.
Take a look at the 1-800 report -

He hands Montag his hand held Tracker. On the screen is a copy of the videophone image of a woman calling in the alarm. It's Mildred.

MILDRED

After he left, I went up into the attic, Harry -
just to make sure. I found the books in a
heating vent -

Montag, betrayed, just stares at Beatty.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

It's a shame about this, Montag - Millie gave
great head, too. Remember Wednesday
nights - you used to fill in for me? Well, I
sure filled in for you.

He bursts out laughing. Montag, sort of dazed, steps onto the platform.

EXT. FIRE TRUCK. PLATFORM. NIGHT.

A hundred search lights hit him. Fire trucks line the road, the crews gathered on the
platforms - the whole department has been gathered to witness his disgrace.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Your house, your clean-up, Montag. Go
and burn your books and when you're
finished, you're under arrest. I've already
called the Department of Purification - it
looks like Earl's gonna have a buddy.
Don't fight over the Windex.

Beatty pushes him towards a flight of steps that lead from the truck into his front yard.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Oh, before you go -

He reaches out and plucks a hair from Montag's head -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Insurance. Just to keep you honest -

Slowly Montag goes down the steps. He looks around - with the lights on him, the helicopters and news blimp overhead, the crowd screaming below, he could be an entrant in a game show.

Giant images of him - 50 feet high - play on the screen on the sides of the news blimp. He comes off the steps and walks a gauntlet of people, spitting at him and hurling abuse. Montag sees one man in the forefront, his face beet-red with anger. Garfield Snubz.

The sight of him brings Montag back to reality. He opens the valve of the flame-thrower and hits the ignition. Flame blasts out the end of the nozzle and hits Snubz in the chest! He screams. Montag keeps blasting, roasting him. The crowd beside him turn and run.

Montag looks around for another target. The Hound appears, growling deep in its metal belly, driving Montag towards the house. Montag looks up - Beatty stands on the platform, controlling it.

ON THE BLIMP

Marv and Frank look down at Snubz writhing on the ground. Members of the crowd are circling him, beating on him, trying to put out the flames.

MARV

That's Garfield Snubz, isn't it Frank - the head of Neighborhood Watch?

FRANK

'Fraid so, Marv. In the blink of an eye he's gone from watch-dog to hot-dog.

MARV

Montag's only making it worse for himself. Where did he go bad, Frank? That's what a lot of people must be asking tonight.

FRANK

I think we can help there. If we go back to a burn just a few days ago -

Their faces are replaced by footage of the assault on the old woman's house. We see Montag swinging across the two steel beams, using them like parallel bars, doing a half-somersault and catching hold of a ladder. The image freezes.

MARV

(lying)

We noticed it then. I don't know if viewers recall it, but at the time we both said his heart didn't seem to be in it.

FRANK

We certainly did. And more news just to hand - the Department of Education has been looking through its records and there's now a real doubt Montag even *went* to fire school.

MARV

Unbelievable. What are you saying, Frank? Aren't the Fire Department, supposed to check a person's qualifications?

FRANK

It seems Montag's real talent might be forgery, not fire-fighting, Marv. In other words, he may not be a fireman at all.

EXT. FIRE TRUCK. NIGHT.

Jinx - on the fire-fighting platform - stares up at them, shocked. He knows that's not true - he saw the videos, he heard the instructors. What are they lying for? Troubled, he turns and looks - Montag goes through the front door of the house.

INT. MONTAG'S. HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Lights from the fire-trucks and news blimp blast through the windows. The Hound, outside, watches through a set of French doors. It casts a huge, weird, shadow on the walls. Montag opens a door -

INT. MONTAG'S KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Mildred is dressed up - make-up and jewelry on. She darts around the kitchen, grabbing anything of value, stuffing it into hold-alls - she's getting out. She turns and sees Montag

MONTAG

Why did you do it, Millie?

MILDRED

Why did I do it? You were the one with the books. You think they wouldn't have worked it out? Say they would have come round before I called them! That would have made me a co-... a co... whatever.

MONTAG

We were married, Millie...

MILDRED

I'm still young. I've got my looks. If I get my boobs done again, I'm not a bad piece of ass. You think I want to spend five years in a re-education program? These are the best years of our lives. Montag.

She pushes past him and opens a cupboard - it's full of useless stuff from World Home Shopping. She starts to pack it -

MONTAG

It was the Great Western Mall.

MILDRED

What was?

MONTAG

Where we met. I remembered today.

MILDRED

We were kids then. I'm glad I can't remember. Who'd want to remember meeting a crazy man?

MONTAG

We should have had children. Things would have been different... or at least we should have been more careful. Seven abortions - that must have done *something* to us, Milie

MILDRED

We couldn't afford kids. Thank God now we didn't have 'em! Haven't you got work to do?

Carrying the hold-alls, looking for more stuff to take, she goes through the door. Montag hits the trigger on his flame-thrower - why just torch the books? He hits his kitchen cupboards first - frying a shelf-full of ornaments from World Home Shopping. Smash! They swell up and explode. He smiles - despite everything, that felt good!

EXT. FIRE TRUCK. NIGHT.

Beatty watches smoke and flames erupt from windows at the side of the house. He turns to Rico and Black, singed and scarred from the burn at Clarisse's house -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What's he doing - she said the books were in the attic.

(realizing)

Ho, God! He's going to burn the house, he's torching his whole damn house!

ON THE BLIMP**MARV**

If anyone doubts he's lost his mind, they should look at this. What are we watching, Frank - is this a suicide?

FRANK

That'd certainly be an interesting move. Frankly, I'm worried though - a fireman going crazy on national television, that may not be suitable for some of our younger viewers. Parents might like to think about that.

MARV

I see what you're saying. A good point. Frank -
a very good point.

EXT. MONTAG'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

The front door opens. Mildred, carrying her bags, steps out. She walks down the path, shielding her eyes, dazzled by the lights. A news-crowd steps in front of her.

She smiles a dazzling smile and adjusts her hair. At last - she's going to be on TV! The reporter puts a microphone in front of her face -

REPORTER

How does it feel - your husband's under
arrest and he's burning down your home.
You must be devastated -

MILDRED

This is the greatest day of my life - I'm on
TV!

INT. MONTAG'S VIRTUAL REALITY ROOM.

Montag enters the virtual reality room. Fire drips from the end of his flame-thrower. The kitchen and the hall behind him are burning furiously.

The three huge liquid crystal tv screens are still playing. Each one shows a different program - World Home Shopping, Dallas Hospital... and Mildred. Montag stares at the image of his wife. Underneath is a caption -

Wife of Crazy 'Fireman'

She is still being interviewed, the smile never faltering. Montag hits the host of World Home Shopping with a blast of flame. His head dissolves in a mess of plastic as that part of the screen explodes. Dallas Hospital follows suit then the flames leap to the image of Mildred. She fractures into a thousand pieces - the whole room goes up in flames.

INT. MONTAG'S BEDROOM.

Montag rips open the drawer of a table. Scores of bottles of sleep lozenges spill out.

He hurls them with a terrible ferocity then turns his attention to his and Mildred's beds. He sprays them both with an arcing bolt of flame. They burst into fire. He moves on to the closets - destroying everything of his former life, purifying himself.

EXT. MONTAG'S HOUSE.

The house is blazing, every room spewing flames. Crash! Part of the roof caves in. The firemen watch from their vantage points on the truck. Beatty talks to his men -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

That's a fine piece of work - learn a lesson from it. See how he's turning the fire in on itself, using the flame to feed more flame. Shit it must be warm in there.

THE HOUND'S POV

It patrols the outside of the house. The burning building is a swirling vortex of color - the green for night vision and infra-red for motion are being overwhelmed by waves of white from the heat sensors. There's so much heat, it's as if The Hound is losing its sight. Information flies through in its heads-up display -

Temperature - 1,760°
Co2 - 276,459ppm

Oxygen - 9%
Water Vapor - Nil

INT. MONTAG'S LAUNDRY.

Montag - blast shield down on his helmet, protected by his fireproof suit - moves through a whirlwind of flame, forty feet from The Hound. He watches it - it's in a courtyard at the back of the house, eyes glittering, head spinning to and fro, trying to keep track of him. Montag moves through the forest of flames, circling round, trying to lose himself.

EXT. MONTAG'S COURTYARD.

The Hound shifts back and forth on its eight legs - whimpering, anxious - every sense alert. Cans of paints and solvent in the laundry explode - the fire grows even more intense. The Hound can't see anything in the blinding light -

EXT. FIRE ENGINE. PLATFORM. NIGHT.

An alarm sounds on the remote commander. Beatty glances down at it. He sees the report from The Hound:

Target Unsighted

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What's wrong with it? What's he mean - unsighted! Get in there you fucking mongrel.

Beatty starts hitting buttons on the remote.

EXT. COURTYARD/LAUNDRY. NIGHT.

The Hound can't see Montag but it moves forward - the fire hits its body, turning it into the most beautiful cobalt blue, but not hindering it - the animal was made for fire.

INT. MONTAG'S. LAUNDRY/GARAGE. NIGHT.

The whole of the laundry and now the garage is a curling mass of flame, protecting Montag from The Hound's sparkling eyes.

EXT. TOP OF FIRE ENGINE. NIGHT.

Beatty looks at the remote - - it's still reporting "target unsighted". He realizes -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

He's blinded The Hound... that's what he's done... whoa, he's blinded The Hound! Goddamn, that's clever! No wonder he was pushing the heat so high. Only a fireman would think of that.

Beatty pulls down the mic attached to his helmet, clicks it open and speaks to Montag.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

That was clever with the flame, Montag. A pity about the DNA, though - nothing you can do about that, is there? Skitch him! Skitch him you stupid fucking dog!

Beatty hits the full system button.

INT./EXT. GARAGE. NIGHT.

Montag runs, sprinting hard like the great athlete he is - he hurls himself forward. Smash - shoulder first through a shuttered window at the back of the garage, into the fresh air. He rolls across the ground, lands on his feet and races across the yard -

EXT. FIRE TRUCK. NIGHT.

From the platform of the fire truck, Beatty looks across the roof of the house and sees Montag - ripping off his fuel tank, lightening the load - sprinting for the back fence.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Well...well. We've got a runner. A running man! Now this is *interesting*.

EXT. REAR OF HOUSE. NIGHT.

The Hound bursts through the window frame. Its legs shoot out - it hits the ground running, its eight legs throw it forward like a bullet, straight after Montag.

MARV (O.S.)

Get your popcorn! This Montag's something, isn't he?! Even when he's a dead man running, he still gives the best show in town.

In one flying movement, Montag vaults the back fence, somersaults and lands in an ally behind the houses.

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE. NIGHT.

The firemen scramble up ladders and run for the ally, trying to get a better view. Members of the crowd - young guys holding beers - clamber over fences. They want to see this! The news blimp lays on the power and swings through the air, trying to bring its cameras to bear -

EXT. ALLEY. NIGHT

The alley at the back of the houses is crowded with vehicles - people who came to watch the action. Montag - running - has drawn and loaded his explosive bolt gun. People scatter, yelling, trying to get out of the way of the crazed fireman. Dead ahead, a woman screams! But not at Montag - The Hound is flying down the alley behind him. It'll kill anything that gets in its way -

THE HOUND'S POV

A bewildering array of data scrolls through on its heads up display, a kaleidoscope of colors flash through as it constantly scans its surroundings. The one thing that always stays dead center is the red dot in the middle of its target grid: Montag.

EXT. ALLEY. NIGHT.

Montag jags left - across a vacant lot. It's scattered with construction materials. The Hound is close behind, gaining. Straight ahead is a chain wire fence - it looks like Montag's trapped! The other side of the fence are half a dozen fire engines, temporarily deserted by their crews -

The Hound bounds closer . closer. Montag grabs a length of steel scaffolding pipe - we think it's to defend himself, but it's not. The Hound is so close it can almost taste him. Its needle darts out, dripping -

Montag jams the steel pole into the ground - it's a pole vault! He soars over the top of the fence and flies through the air -

MARV (O.S.)

Wow! We've said it before, forget steroids and amphetamines. If you really want to enhance performance - try fear. Look at that!

EXT. TOP OF FIRE ENGINE. NIGHT.

Montag lands on top of one of the deserted fire engines. The Hound soars over the fence and clamps on the side of the truck. It scrambles up onto the roof.

Montag leaps from the top of one fire truck to the next - like a sheep-dog darting over the back of its charges.

ON THE BLIMP

The news blimp looms overhead, keeping pace with the chase. The screens on its side carry the action live - Montag jumping from vehicle to vehicle, The Hound following. The chase zooms back to occupy one half of the matrix screen. The other half shows a reporter in front of a laser visual store.

MARV

What have you got, Gary?

The reporter puts his microphone in front of a man's face -

STORE ASSISTANT

Sure, I knew Montag. He was always borrowing old war movies. He was a fascist -

A FEMALE NEIGHBOR stands in front of her house -

NEIGHBOR

He was a liberal - anyone could tell.

A DOCTOR sits in his office -

DOCTOR

I treated Montag occasionally - frankly. I thought he was gay.

A FITNESS INSTRUCTOR wears a tank top and a pair of tight shorts -

INSTRUCTOR

Homophobic - definitely homophobic.

The last of the "witnesses" disappears -

MARV

There was certainly a lot of truth in what those people had to say, don't you think, Frank?

FRANK

If you want to hear the real story, just ask the man-in-the-street. You heard it here first - live on Five.

The image of the chase zooms out and dominates the screen -

EXT. TOP OF FIRE ENGINE. NIGHT.

The Hound is gaining - it's only one truck behind. Montag runs and jumps - he grabs hold of a ladder attached to the roof of the next truck. He kicks his legs out - smash! He goes through the side window of the driver's cabin -

INT. FIRE ENGINE. FRONT CABIN. NIGHT.

Montag lands in the driver's seat. The sensor on the dash reads the smart card on his chest. He's Fire Department authorized - the engine roars. Montag throws it into drive -

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

The tires smoke as the fire engine lays rubber. The Hound bounds along the top of a truck and sees Montag roaring away. It jumps! It flies through the air.

Wham! It lands on the road, just behind the fire truck. The massive vehicle flies down the road - faster, faster. The Hound hits it stride, in hot pursuit -

EXT. TOP OF BEATTY'S TRUCK. NIGHT.

Beatty stands on top of his fire truck, hair flying in the wind, clutching the vehicle's communications mast with one hand, the other wielding his putter. The truck slaloms through people and vehicles in Montag's street, trying to catch The Hound and the runaway vehicle. He whacks the driver's door with his golf club -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

We're not going shopping. Bremmer.
Give it some *heat*, man!

The truck blasts forward as the driver accelerates even harder. Beatty is thrown backwards, only his grip on the mast saving him -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Whoa... whoah!

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

The news blimp - carrying the action live on its screens - powers along overhead. Marv and Frank, small faces in the gondola slung beneath it, stare down at the action below - Montag's fire truck ramps over the curb and cuts into an adjoining road.

INT. DRIVER'S CABIN. NIGHT.

Montag, wrestling the wheel, looks across at the train embankment. We push in on his face - he's seen or heard something. He glances in the side mirror - The Hound's metal head fills the frame. "Beware - objects in this mirror may be closer than they appear."

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

The Hound's legs whirl - it hurls itself forward. It jumps - onto the back of the truck!

INT. DRIVER'S CABIN. NIGHT.

The truck hurtles straight into a t-intersection - straight ahead a wall! Montag hauls down on the steering wheel - the truck, wheels screaming, slides into a left-hand turn. Montag looks in the mirror - The Hound scuttles along the side of the truck like a cockroach.

He swings the wheel - throwing the side of the truck at a light pole, trying to scrape The Hound off. It sees what's coming - it jumps onto the roof of the cabin. The truck side-swipes the light pole, snapping it in a shower of sparks.

Smash! Montag looks up - The Hound is on the roof, using its head like a battering ram. Smash! Part of the metal roof rips open. The Hound's red glittering eyes stare down through the crack at Montag. Another couple of blows and it'll be through -

Montag spins the wheel - steering straight at the wall of a building. He accelerates.

Smash! The Hound opens up the sardine can even further. It pulls its head back for one final assault. Montag grabs the handle and cracks the door open.

The truck hurtles straight at the wall. The Hound drives its head and shoulders through the hole in the roof, wedging itself there. Juice drips from the needle. It takes aim at Montag's forehead. Montag throws the door open - and jumps!

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

Montag hits the dirt verge and rolls down the train embankment. Ka-smash! The fire engine hits the wall, smashing through it in a spectacular shower of masonry, grinding to a halt in a pile of rubble and twisted metal.

Montag keeps rolling, hits the gravel with his feet, tumbles again and lands upright. One leg bleeding, his overalls ripped, equipment belt battered, he forces himself to run. He hurdles a row of power conduits and runs alongside the rail track. He looks back -

MONTAG'S POV

Now we realize what he saw earlier - a vacuum train bears down on him, going in the same direction. He runs faster -

EXT. FIRE ENGINE WRECK. NIGHT.

Out of the smoking, mangled mess of the fire truck and the building - The Hound appears! Part of its metal carcass is gouged open, revealing its electrical innards, and one paw is a bit wonky - but it hasn't slowed it down. It flies after Montag

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

Beatty's fire truck screeches to a halt. Beatty, on the roof, looks down the embankment - Montag is sprinting alongside the track, the train roaring past him. The Hound is closing the gap on Montag fast - the fireman doesn't seem to have a chance. The news blimp looms over the rail track. Marv and Frank's huge heads hover above Montag -

EXT. TRAIN LINE. NIGHT.

Train carriages fly past - passengers are at the windows, staring at Montag racing alongside. The Hound bounds along behind him, gaining on him with every pace. The last carriage roars past -

The Hound leaps towards him - it's going to take him in the back. Closer it flies...

Bam! Montag fires the bolt gun - straight at the back of the train. The metal bolt, trailing a line of high-tensile steel, buries itself in the back of the carriage.

Montag clips the gun to his belt - he's tethered to the train. He hits a trigger - a rewind device. He's yanked off his feet as it hauls in the steel line. He flies straight at the back of the train - literally out of the jaws of death.

He bunches his knees up - the soles of his boots hit the glass window at the back of the carriage. Smash! He goes through - he's on board the train.

The Hound jumps and lands on the track. Ka-chunk! An under-carriage appears out of a panel on its belly. It clamps onto the rail. The Hound is now a tiny bullet train - it flies down the rail.

EXT. FIRE ENGINE. NIGHT.

Beatty stands on top of the truck - staring, motionless, awe-struck. First the train - then The Hound - disappear into a tunnel.

Beatty looks up at the news blimp: rotors roaring, it's turning - they're the only ones that can follow the train.

INT. TRAIN. NIGHT.

Passengers are screaming, getting to their feet, dropping things, running through doors that connect to the next carriage. Behind them is Montag - his overalls ripped, half-crazed with exhaustion, the bolt gun in his hand. He moves fast through the carriage, heading towards the front of the train. He looks over his shoulder -

The Hound smashes through the broken window at the back. It lands in the carriage! Passengers unable to get away huddle in their seats or hit the floor. The Hound ignores them, bounding towards Montag.

He's running, yelling at people to get down, pushing them aside. He grabs hold of an overhead pole and swings his boots full force - smashing through a door and heading into the next carriage.

People scream! A couple of kids think it's great. They point, hollering at their mom - all around the carriage are Montag's shaver ads. The Hound crashes through the doors behind him, gaining fast.

Montag looks out the window - the train is out of the tunnel and is racing over a bridge. Just ahead - right next to the track is a high-rise under construction. Montag forces open one of the sliding doors on the side of the carriage. The Hound is pounding closer -

Montag stands in the open doorway, the rush of wind tearing at his hair. He aims the bolt gun high at the steel girders of the half-finished building... The Hound leaps over an abandoned baby stroller... Montag shoots.

The bolt blasts into the girder. The steel line springs taut. Montag grabs it and jumps!

EXT. TRAIN. NIGHT.

Tarzan! He swings in a great arc from the side of the speeding train towards the side of the building. Whack! He plants his boots on a girder. He looks across - the train races away. A side window explodes - The Hound launches into mid-air, following him.

EXT. SIDE OF BUILDING. NIGHT.

Slam! The Hound hits a vertical granite panel - the flanges shoot out from its paws. It sticks there. Like a fly, it scurries across the side of the building towards Montag.

The fireman fires his bolt gun - it locks into a metal girder three stories up the side of the building. He hits the re-wind - whoosh! He flies up the side of the building. He grabs hold of a beam and digs the bolt out. Bam! He fires again and soars up another thirty feet.

The Hound has made it to a narrow beam. It bounds along it and soars. Its flanges lock onto another beam and it jumps again - up another two half-completed stories.

EXT. BUILDING. STEEL BEAM. NIGHT.

The street is a hundred dizzying feet below. Montag looks up - four more stories and he'll be on the roof. On top is a construction crane. The blimp appears around the side of it.

The cameras on its superstructure swing around, finding Montag. They zoom in - Montag sees himself, forty feet high on the matrix screen. For a moment he barely recognizes himself, that's how ruined and haggard he looks -

FRANK (O.S.)

Channel 5 has found him! Montag's at Carmine and Broadway now. The Hound and the media have got the fugitive cornered. The Fire Department can't miss him - he thinks he's Spiderman!

The blimp circles, moving in for a huge close-up. Even if Montag can dodge The Hound, he'll never get away from the blimp. The Hound scampers up a vertical pillar directly below Montag. The fireman fires the bolt gun again and flies up to -

EXT. TOP OF BUILDING. NIGHT.

Montag lands on a beam at the top of the building. He jumps from beam to beam across the top of the building. One mis-step and its twenty stories to the ground below.

The blimp hovers just above him, so close it's almost touching the crane's long jib, its rotors kicking up a massive gale. Montag battles into the teeth of it, battered by the wind, leaping from beam to beam, frightened to even look it's so far down.

The Hound's metal head appears over the edge of the building. It leaps after him - its computerized eyes measuring every gap, its metal paws never missing a beat.

ON THE BLIMP

Montag is in full hi-definition detail - twenty feet in front, The Hound right behind and gaining at every step.

EXT. TOP OF BUILDING. NIGHT.

Montag jags left, buying himself a few precious yards. The blimp hovers just above him. He spins along a cross-beam, silhouetted against the massive image of himself. The Hound leaps closer.

Montag fires the gun - straight up at the crane's jib. The wind from the blimp's rotors spins a hook dangling by a long length of cable from the end of it but the rest of the jib is held immobile, tethered under enormous tension by a steel hawser that stretches from the jib to the crane's peak.

Montag hits the rewind - he soars up and scrambles onto the crane's jib. The Hound turns and clambers fast up the tower of the crane -

EXT. CRANE. NIGHT.

Montag stands on the crane, jutting out over the street far, far below. The blimp hangs almost beside him, turning on its axis to bring its cameras to bear.

The Hound, climbing the tower, has almost reached the jib. If Montag goes that way, he's dead for sure. He moves along the jib towards the end.

The Hound leaps onto the jib and flies along it, straight at Montag - he's at the end of the road. One leap, that's all and The Hound will pin him. Montag jumps - off the jib! Two hundred feet above the ground, he falls... somersaulting... reaching out his hands.

He grabs hold of the hook! His hands hold - he dangles there. The Hound perches on the end of the jib and looks down - Montag hauls himself up to stand on the hook. The Hound can't climb down the steel cable. Montag seems safe - for a moment.

Ka-thunk! A panel on The Hound's chest opens up. The winch shoots out and wraps around the cable. Whirr! Its starts to wind the cable up, dragging the hook and Montag closer to the needle.

EXT. ON THE HOOK.

Montag rises up. The blimp hangs in mid-air, almost next to The Hound. Marv and Frank, in the gondola beneath the blimp, look down at Montag swaying up towards his death. The giant image of the fireman plays on the matrix screen directly above them.

Montag stares at the blimp... The Hound... the jib of the crane. We push in on him - he's concentrating, calculating. He aims the bolt gun carefully at what looks like The Hound -

ON THE BLIMP

Marv and Frank stare straight down at Montag -

MARV

He's going to shoot The Hound. That's desperation. Frank. A bolt gun against The Hound - it won't even dent it, not unless Montag's got a nuclear warhead. Ha! Ha!

But Frank's barely listening - he's leaning forward in his seat, perplexed, looking from Montag to The Hound to the peak of the crane.

FRANK

No... I don't think so, Marv... I think he's...
(realizing)
Holy shit, Marv!

EXT. ON THE HOOK. NIGHT.

Montag sights down the barrel of the bolt gun. We rack focus. Frank's right - it's not The Hound, it's the steel hawser just above its head.

Montag fires. The gun blasts. The bolt, trailing a jet of smoke and flame, flies towards the hawser. We travel with it - The Hound's eyes swivel and look as the bolt passes.

Bullseye! The bolt smashes into the hawser. Marv and Frank look on, frozen in horror. The steel hawser separates, the two ends flailing like stock-whips. The jib of the crane, no longer tethered under enormous pressure, spins round like a top -

Montag, on the hook, wraps his arms around the cable. Duck and cover -

EXT. CRANE. NIGHT.

The jib of the crane flies straight at the side of the blimp. The cameras on the superstructure capture it all. The matrix screen shows the jib of the crane hurtling closer, closer to the side of the blimp. This is weird - the reality is about to hit the image. A first in the history of the blimp - snuff television.

The Hound - perched on the end of the flying jib - has given up reeling in Montag. It's turning from side to side, trying to compute what's going on. It looks - the gondola on the bottom of the blimp is coming straight at it. It growls. It's only feet away -

Marv and Frank stare at The Hound. The Hound stares at Marv and Frank. Smash! The Hound smashes into the glass windows of the gondola, hurling it from its perch -

EXT. ON THE HOOK. NIGHT.

Montag, crouching on the hook, sees The Hound go plummeting past. Down, down, to the ground below! He looks up - one end of the flailing hawser hits the blimp's main rotor. Sparks fly! The hawser wraps around the blimp's rotors.

INT. BLIMP GONDOLA. NIGHT.

The blimp lurches. Marv and Frank are hurled to the floor. They look up - the blimp is falling. The jib of the crane smashes through the screen and rips the blimp's fuselage.

The helium inside ignites. A wall of flame hits Marv and Frank.

EXT. ON THE HOOK. NIGHT.

Montag, hunkered down, stares - the blimp explodes. Like the Hindenburg it holds its fiery shape for a moment then it dissolves into a billion falling, burning fragments.

Montag shields himself - thank God for a fireman's protective suit. The flaming debris crashes down, engulfing him, filling the screen, hiding him from view.

EXT. THE CRANE. NIGHT - LATER.

Ten minutes have passed. The hook swings in the wind, small fragments of the blimp are stuck to it, still burning. There's no sign of Montag.

We pull back - down to street level. Pieces of the blimp are scattered over a wide area, spitting fire and smoke. Beatty's truck, several other fire engines and a Fire Department helicopter have converged on the site. More reinforcements arrive by the minute.

EXT. SIDE OF BUILDING. NIGHT.

Firemen are scattering, taking cover. An eddy of smoke clears and we see why - The Hound is still alive: its chest ripped open, four of its eight legs broken and its head spinning like Linda Blair's. Circuit boards are smashed or damaged and it's gone rabid - drooling machine oil from its mouth, leaping and trying to maul anyone that comes close.

Through the swirling smoke, the bucket of a cherry picker lowers into frame. Herman, the technician, stands in the bucket with the remote commander.

He aims it at The Hound. The Hound jumps at the bucket, ripping into it with its metal jaws. Herman - fast - enters a series of instructions into the remote. The Hound's movements become spastic, its head stops spinning, the light in its glittering eyes dims. It sinks to its knees, and topples over - a rhino shot with an electronic tranquilizer.

Herman scrambles out of the bucket. Other technicians emerge from behind cover and surround The Hound. They pull out electric wrenches, rivet-poppers and laser probes. Like a crack triage unit, they open up its chest and start to work on the damage.

INT. HI-RISE. NIGHT.

The bodies of Marv and Frank, charred but still recognizable, are laid out on the ground. The steel frame of the half-constructed building towers above us.

The whole building site is criss-crossed by light - dozens of firemen are moving through it, searching for Montag or his body, illuminating the area with their hi-intensity shoulder-mounted spotlights.

Stoneman, cautious, moves past a stack of concrete blocks, through a grid of steel girders, out of sight of his comrades. He stops and listens: in the gloom, a sound - a scuffling - from inside a small work shed.

He raises the nozzle of his flame-thrower and rests his finger on the ignition. Silently he reaches out and takes hold of the door handle. He wrenches it open -

Something flies at his face, shrieking! He ducks, opening up with the flame-thrower. An arc of flame pierces the gloom. Stoneman reels back, then realizes - it's just a couple of pigeons trapped in the shed. He catches his breath, talk about jittery, and turns. He looks. We push in on his face. He keeps staring -

STONEMAN

(into mic)

Captain Beatty! Captain Beatty - he's alive!

INT. CONSTRUCTION ELEVATOR. NIGHT.

A fireman's protective suit with its number on the back lies discarded in the corner of a construction elevator. Montag must have used the elevator to ride down from the roof.

Beatty, Stoneman, Rico, Jinx and other firemen stand and stare at it. Beatty hooks the suit with his golf club and looks at one of the legs - it's covered in a lot of rich red blood.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

That's arterial blood - he's badly injured.

Dying if we're lucky.

Agitated, troubled - his career's in the balance - he looks around the building site.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Where's that fucking dog when I need it?!

He sees Herman and the triage team guiding a motorized trolley towards a helicopter. Lying on the trolley is The Hound -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

How long?!

HERMAN

We've got at least twelve processors down,
eight servo-motors -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Are you fucking listening to me or what?!
How long?!

HERMAN

Two hours - maybe less.

Beatty wipes the spittle and sweat away from his mouth. He swallows -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Two hours... two hours...

RICO (O.S.)

Cap'n -

Beatty turns - Rico is holding the bloodied suit. In his other hand is the singed page from
The Bible. Everyone draws back from it, as if it might contain some deadly virus.

RICO

I found it in the back pocket.

Beatty takes it from him and looks at it. He sees the underlined words.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

"He that increaseth wisdom, increaseth
sorrow" - ain't that the truth? Oh, he's a
long way gone, this one. I've never seen a
man this far gone before. Not even Earl.
Books at home, aphorisms in his head,
words in his pocket. He was never
coming back into the fold -

He stops as a thought strikes him. He stares across the building site - the helicopter taking
off and blasting him with dust - but he doesn't even notice. He turns and looks at his men.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

(softly)

So why did he bring two books back?

STONEMAN

What was that, Captain?

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Why the fuck did he come back to the firehouse?! It wasn't because he enjoyed our company. What was he doing between arriving and the time we left for his house? Did anyone see him?

He looks around at his men - nobody says anything.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Stoneman? What about you Rico? You were sucking up to him. Bradley?

Jinx, intimidated. shakes his head - lying. Beatty walks back and forth, thinking -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Why... he must have had a reason... he wanted to come back -
(realizing)

Holy shit!

He turns to the fire truck, yelling at the driver, starting to run -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Bremmer! Start the fucking engine!

The screaming sound of a siren bridges over -

EXT. THE WALL. NIGHT.

The fire truck roars along the road that runs on top of The Wall. Suddenly it slows. Beatty, holding an electronic bull-horn, clambers out of the passenger's door and swings himself onto the roof. He faces the Top of the Mountain. The Eye at the apex of the pyramid turns and looks at him.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

(into bull-horn)

Leave it with me. He's not going to be a problem. I'm your man! I'll put it right!

The Eye stares at him, unblinking, relentless. It's enough to scare anyone, even Beatty.

EXT. FIRE HOUSE. NIGHT.

Hundreds of people scramble out of the fire house - some clutching files, others caught in the middle of showering or changing and only half-dressed. Firemen herd the employees onto buses, getting them out of the area. The place is being evacuated.

INT. FIRE STATION. NIGHT.

The fire poles spin silently. The shriek of a siren keeps echoing through the building -

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Evacuate now. This is not a drill. Leave the building. Evacuate immediately. I repeat - this is not a drill.

INT. FIRE HOUSE. CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

Beatty, clutching a computer log and a golf club - his no. 1 wood - steps out of an elevator and moves fast down an underground corridor. Stoneman, Rico, Bradley and other firemen follow in his wake. Beatty approaches a set of doors -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

According to the access log, he went through here at 9.54.

The sensor on the doors reads the smart card on Beatty's chest. The doors slide open -

INT. PLANT ROOM. NIGHT.

Beatty moves past the air-conditioning pumps, generators and electrical grids. He turns a corner - the panel into the riser shaft has been unscrewed and left against the wall.

INT. RISER SHAFT. NIGHT.

An explosion of activity - firemen scramble up the narrow shaft, searching. They tear at conduits, rip out inspection panels, smash through ducting.

Stoneman follows a cable that looks like a detonator cord. His shoulder-mounted light blasts along the narrow duct. He yanks on the cable - metal canisters connected to it rip free from the wall.

INT. CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

Beatty turns one of the canisters over in his hand -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Charges for one of the short-barreled mortars. He was going for the control room. Where the hell did he go next?

He looks down at the log. We push in and hold on Jinx - the kid's nervous.

INT. FILE ROOM. NIGHT.

The endless, fully-automated cabinets of computer discs are silent on their tracks - the building has been evacuated and for once no-one's calling for information. Beatty, consulting the log, walks through the cabinets towards the desk secluded in the corner -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

He logged on at 10.27. Sixteen minutes he was down here -

(he looks closely at the log)

But, whoa! He wasn't alone. Apparently there was someone else down here. You were in the room for twelve minutes. weren't you, Bradley?

He turns to Jinx. The others stare at him. Jinx is no good at lying - he pauses, sweating, trying to think of what to do. The anger drops away from Beatty - one of his guys is in trouble. His voice is kind and reasonable -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

It's okay, son. Take your time. I know... you're worried about lying to your Captain. But let it go - you're young, you're new, we all make mistakes. Putting 'em right, that's the important thing.

(cont.)

CAPTAIN BEATTY (cont.)

Remember your fireman's oath, that's what I tell my guys when they get confused. "Truth and honor in word and deed. Always obey the command of a superior officer." Now I'm asking you - did you speak to him, son?

JINX

Yes, sir.

ON COMPUTER SCREENS

Footage of the burn at Clarisse's house shuttles through on the three screens. Beatty is working the elaborate controls, calling up different footage, manipulating the thermal overlays, trying to piece together what happened -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

He's cunning but he's not a magician. How the hell did he get her out of there?

Jinx and the other firemen watch. Suddenly Beatty stops the footage. He stares at it - a wide shot of the aftermath of the burn. He keys in a series of commands - the footage zooms towards us as the computer tightens in. Beatty lifts the audio. He hears himself -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

(filtered)

Montag! Have you sealed those valves yet?
What are you doing, fucking this guy or what?

Beatty freezes the image - Montag and Faber stand side-by-side. He rock and rolls the image back and forth. He realizes what he couldn't put his finger on before -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

He was talking to a lobo! That's what he was doing - he was talking to a fucking lobo!

Everybody looks shocked - a lobo talking? Beatty turns to Jinx -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Well, a real can of worms, isn't it? What else happened down here, son?

JINX

Nothing, Cap'n. Like I said - the alarm went.

Beatty looks at him - relentless, searching. Jinx meets his gaze - he's telling the truth. Beatty relaxes.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

I believe you, son. Now I want you to kneel down in front of these men, I want you to ask for forgiveness. Understand? This is the way we do it at 38, isn't it, men?

They nod their heads - sure. Then again, they'd nod their heads at anything Beatty said. Jinx gets down on his knees. If this is what it takes...

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Lower your head. I just want you to speak in your own words, from the heart. People don't understand that about me, Bradley - but that's what I really value - spirituality.

Jinx bows his head and shuts his eyes, like he's praying. He thinks of the best way to explain his love for the Fire Department, his confusion over Montag, his growing sense of disillusion but if he only had time he's sure he'd understand -

Beatty's No1 wood flies through frame. The head of it smashes into Jinx's temple -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Fore!

Jinx topples to the ground, half unconscious. The other firemen step back - even they're shocked. Beatty leaps forward, smashing the driver into Jinx's head again and again -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

You pile of pigeon shit! I'll teach you to lie to your Captain! (whack) You come in wet behind the ears (whack) and think you can pull one over me! (whack) I'll show you -

Jinx's hands and arms are mashed to blood as he tries protect his head. Beatty whales in with his combat boots, kicking him in the ribs and groin, beside himself with fury -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Lower than a dog's turd, greasier than a mechanic's fart - take it! Go on, take it!

He's kicking and wielding the golf club at the same time. Blood runs across the tiled floor. Rico and Bremmer step forward and take hold of Beatty's arms, restraining him. Beatty comes back to his senses. He shrugs his jacket back into shape -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Thanks, men - you know how I can't stand a liar. Throw that piece of crap into a cell. He'll be lucky if the Tribunal doesn't turn him into a lamp-shade.

Stoneman and another fireman step forward, grab Jinx under the shoulders and drag him off like a carcass.

EXT. LOVE CANAL. NIGHT

Montag - exhausted, dressed in his firemen's overalls, blood oozing from a tourniqueted wound on his leg - stumbles through the slime at the edge of a canal. Maybe it was a river once but now it's full of chemical slicks and garbage. It's a safe place - so toxic it's deserted. He moves as fast as he can, heading somewhere. He scrambles up the bank, past the perimeter fence of a refinery and over a rise -

Laid out below is Desolation Row, the place where the lobos live. Montag is looking for shelter the only place he can: Faber's. But already he's too late - the lights from a dozen fire engines wash across the buildings, Fire Department helicopters appear overhead, falling like the first flakes of snow in the long winter to come.

Montag forces himself forward - into the shadow of the overpass that carries the vacuum train. The sound of a whistle splits the night -

EXT. DESOLATION ROW. NIGHT.

Beatty, standing on top of his fire truck, lowers the whistle. It's a signal, summoning the lobos to work. They emerge from their hovels and line up in rows, waiting for the buses.

Beatty swings down from the fire truck and walks along the lines, looking at their faces, trying to identify the man Montag was talking to.

Faber - shoulders slumped, eyes downcast, feet shuffling - feels Beatty coming closer. The Captain stops and looks. Faber barely breathes. Beatty lifts his chin and looks square at him. There's no sign of life in Faber's eyes. Beatty stares deep in them, then drops Faber's chin and moves on.

Faber relaxes. Beatty gets to the end of the line then gives two short blasts on the whistle: stand down. The lobos start to move back to their hovels.

EXT. OVERPASS. NIGHT.

Montag, watching from the shadows, is in anguish. He knows what Beatty is doing -

MONTAG
(to himself)

No. Faber - no! He's recognized you.

EXT. TOP OF FIRE ENGINE. NIGHT.

Beatty stands on the platform, watching exactly what hovel Faber enters.

INT. FABER'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

He closes the door behind him and goes into the bedroom. Clarisse lies in the bed - the drugs have been helping, she's conscious, stronger looking. Faber kneels beside her. Tenderly he checks her dressings -

FABER

I don't know what they want, but it's
okay. Come here -

He starts to feed her. The sound of a low-key jangling - Faber's home-made warning device! He goes to the crack in the wall and looks out. He reels back, panicking. Smash! A steel ram comes through the wall. Krack! A metal claw rips open the roof -

EXT. FABER'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Firemen and their trucks have the building completely surrounded. Men line the roofs of the trucks, keeping watch - if Montag's in there, they're not taking any chances this time. Beatty and other firemen walk through a gaping hole in the wall -

INT. FABER'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Backlit, the firemen enter the house. Clarisse looks through the doorway and sees them. She tries to drag herself out of bed to run but it's no good - she's not strong enough. Faber backs away but there's nowhere to go - other firemen come crashing through. Beatty stops in front of him. Faber meets his gaze - there's no use now in acting like a lobo.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

I thought it was you when I saw the tape. It's been a long time. Mr Faber. Where is he?

FABER

(smiling)

So, he got off the fence, huh? Go fuck yourself.

Beatty's boot flashes out, smashing into Faber's groin. He buckles to his knees.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

I'll ask you again - where is he?

All Faber can do is shake his head.

EXT. OVERPASS. NIGHT.

Montag watches as Faber - beaten and bloodied - and Clarisse are half dragged, half carried out of the house. Sickened, he turns and leans against a concrete pylon, trying to calm himself, trying to think what to do.

Voices make him turn - the firemen are fanning out, going house-to-house, searching for him. Faber and Clarisse are loaded into a cell - more like a cage - set into the side of the fire truck. Beatty slams the door shut and keys in a command, electronically locking it. They're both doomed.

Montag turns to camera. His jaw is set, a grim determination in his eyes - he knows what to do. He bends and lashes a splint to his wounded leg - it'll make it easier to walk. He checks his ammunition, pulls out his bolt gun and slams in a cartridge. As the search moves closer, he turns and moves fast down a hill. He vanishes into the shadows.

EXT. REAR OF FIRE STATION. NIGHT.

A low angle on the courtyard at the rear of the fire house.

The massive building rises up into the night. The helicopter that brought Herman and The Hound back to the station sits on its pad. A leg steps into frame - splinted, the overalls caked with blood.

Stoneman and Rico - left to supervise the evacuated building - are checking the perimeter. They turn - Montag's right arm hangs at his side. In his hand is the bolt gun.

STONEMAN

Nice touch with the mortars, Montag. You must be pissed they didn't kill us.

He and Rico start to separate. They both unfasten their bolt guns.

MONTAG

In your case Stoneman, sure.

The three gunslingers stand alone in the courtyard, sizing each other up, waiting. Stoneman smiles -

STONEMAN

I told you - you've gotten old, Montag. Fat with those endorsements. *Slow*, I'd say - we've all seen it, haven't we Rico?

MONTAG

So why don't you try me?

A beat. Stoneman raises his gun fast! But nobody's ever drawn quicker than Montag. Bam! He fires while Stoneman is still trying to aim. Rico is still lifting his weapon -

Whack! The bolt hits Stoneman in the middle of his forehead and crashes through his skull. Montag hits rewind. Stoneman, still clutching his gun, flies towards him. Rico fires straight at Montag's head - except Stoneman gets in the way. Wham! Stoneman gets a second bolt in the back of his skull. He's double dead.

Rico struggles to reload. Montag plucks the gun out of Stoneman's hand, twirls it and fires fast at Rico. The bolt blasts into his chest. He crumples - dead.

INT. FIREHOUSE. CELLS. NIGHT.

The command post in the prison is deserted. Montag has come through the steel door and is running down the passageway, using an electronic key to unlock banks of cells.

The intellectuals, the non-conformists, the writers spill out. Some of them stare at the battered fireman - he's an unlikely liberator - but others don't wait for an explanation: they sprint for the doors and grab keys to open other cells.

We hold on one of the cells. A man stumbles out - one eye swollen, his head matted with blood, his left arm bandaged with strips torn from his uniform. It's Jinx. He and Montag see each other -

MONTAG

What happened?

JINX

Beatty.

(he tries to smile)

He mistook my head for the fairway. You were right, Montag - they lie. I'm sorry - I told him about the file room.

Montag nods - he figured as much.

JINX

They found your bombs, too. Pity.

Jinx stumbles - he's dizzy, a ripping pain down his arm. Montag grabs him -

MONTAG

Go! Beatty'll be back soon.

JINX

What about you?

MONTAG

He's got Faber and the girl. I thought I'd prepare a little surprise for him.

JINX

A surprise? I like surprises.

INT. UNDERGROUND VAULT. NIGHT.

Fuel pours out of the huge underground tanks and floods the floor. Jinx is twisting wheels and opening valves.

Montag uses the bolt gun to fasten a flame-thrower to the wall, the nozzle pointing down at the growing lake of fuel. The flame-thrower is hissing gas, just waiting for a flame to ignite it. Montag slips his digital watch over the end of the nozzle. Wires run from the battery at the back of it to an electronic cigarette lighter: it's a makeshift ignition device.

The watch shows 6mins 40secs - and counting down. Montag yells to Jinx -

MONTAG

Come on!

They both scramble up onto a catwalk and run for the exits.

EXT. FIRE STATION. NIGHT.

A fire truck swings round the corner and into the courtyard at back of the fire station. The driver sees Earl and screeches to a halt. The janitor is loading the bodies of Stoneman and Rico onto a cart. Beatty swings out of the truck and walks up to him -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What the fuck are you doing?

EARL

Just cleaning up, Captain.

Beatty stares at the bodies of his men. Breathing hard, fighting to control his fury, he looks around - where is he? Swishh! A set of doors open. Beatty spins - it's Herman. He stares at the bodies, shocked, then turns to Beatty -

HERMAN

Bremmer called in - he said you were on your way. We're done.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What are you waiting for? Turn it loose!

Herman works the remote commander - The Hound appears out of the shadows behind him. It bears the scars of its recent repairs - crushed panels, a riveted head, a twisted paw. If anything, they make it look more vicious.

The other firemen watch The Hound dart into the courtyard. It's head swivels, sensing the air. It turns and leaps across the courtyard - into the fire station through another set of doors. Beatty turns to his men -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

He's here! Call off the search - get those
other units down here! He's in the building!

Several men run for the truck's communications console. The others follow Beatty into the station house. Faber and Clarisse are left in the cell built into the side of the truck, forgotten. Faber has his arm around Clarisse - he'll protect her up until the end.

INT. FIRE STATION. RAMP. NIGHT.

Montag and Jinx run up a ramp that leads out of the basement. They burst through doors, into a long corridor. At the far end, a set of glass doors and, beyond it, the world outside.

INT. CENTRAL HALL. NIGHT.

Beatty, on the pole, spins up through four floors. He jumps off, runs and turns the handle that opens the door into -

INT. CONTROL ROOM. NIGHT.

Beatty, working like a man possessed, keys in his authorization and activates the command console. He throws a lever - an alarm starts to scream.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Be aware! Be aware! The building is now
in defense status! Be aware...

INT. CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

Montag and Jinx, racing for the door, hear it -

MONTAG

Beatty!

He and Jinx run faster. The doors are just ahead. Steel shutters slide down, sealing the doors! The shutters, designed to protect the building against attack, are unbreachable.

Montag and Jinx jag left - up a twirling pole, across an office and towards a plate glass window looking out on the plaza -

INT. UNDERGROUND VAULT. NIGHT

Torrents of fuel continue to flood into the basement. The watch on the makeshift ignition reads 4mins 38secs -

INT. OFFICE. NIGHT.

Montag and Jinx are almost at the window. Another few steps and they'll be able to jump, smashing through. Too late! A shutter crashes down and locks.

EXT. FIRE HOUSE. NIGHT.

Steel shutters on every window and door clamp into place. Beatty has sealed the entire building, tight as a drum.

INT. LOCKER ROOM. NIGHT.

Montag and Jinx sprint for an emergency exit. Maybe there's still time. Earl steps out of a passageway. He looks at Jinx and holds up the handball -

EARL

Want a game?

Smash! The Hound comes through the masonry wall behind Montag and Jinx.

JINX

Not now, Earl

In a shower of dust and bricks The Hound hits the floor and flies after Montag. He runs hard left, yelling -

MONTAG

Get the remote - stop the fucking thing!
I'll try and open the doors!

The Hound, not programmed for Jinx, flies past him and Earl. Jinx turns right and bursts through a set of doors.

INT. MUSTER ROOM. NIGHT.

Montag is in mid-air, diving. His hands reach out and grab one of the spinning poles. It whirls him upwards, through two floors. The Hound's eight paws clamp onto an adjoining pole. It scuttles up it as it spins, going even faster -

INT. UNDERGROUND VAULT.

Fuel laps against the bottom of the flame-thrower. The timer shows 3mins 24secs -

INT. CENTRAL HALL.

The Hound bounds across the tiled floor. It's got Montag dead in its sights. Straight ahead of him is the Control Room. The Hound bounds closer. Montag drives himself harder. The door is open. He throws himself through -

INT. CONTROL ROOM.

Montag catches hold of the edge of the door and slams it shut - wham! The Hound hits the door with the full force of its body. Somehow Montag keeps it closed. He spins the handle, sealing the vault-like door.

He turns and slumps against it, catching his breath, safe for a moment. Smash! The Hound's paws clamp onto the eight-inch thick glass wall. The steel ram shoots out from its forehead. It starts to batter the glass. The glass splinters and cracks.

Montag drags himself forward, towards the command console - somebody has left it powered up, thank God. Suddenly the high-backed captain's chair swings round - Beatty's in it, holding his golf club. He smiles at Montag -

CAPTAIN BEATTY

You look well, Montag - for a dead man.
What a fool! Give a man a few printed words and he thinks he's the Lord of all Creation. Look where they got you, in slime up to your lip. All I've got to do is stir it with my little finger and you're dead -

He sees Montag look at the lever on the console.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Oh, you want the doors open? Sure, no trouble.

Beatty pulls the lever back. On the tv monitors, the door and window shutters rise up.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Another forty seconds and The Hound'll be in here. Don't you get it, Montag? You're a dead man walking.

Montag turns and looks at the glass - The Hound is almost through. There's no way out this time. Montag looks at Beatty. At last there's a sense of peace to him -

MONTAG

You're right, but I had three days of life... I know what it's like be free... nobody can take that away from me. I was alive, Cap'n. Men like us, the ones who were taught to love the crack and smell of flame, to see things blackened and purified, that's what we really burn - we burn ourselves. Maybe I am going to drown, but at least I was swimming for shore. Me today, but there'll be others tomorrow - one day one of us is going to make it.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Pretty words, well spoken, too. I'd like to bat it back and forth with you - unfortunately you've got an appointment. Say goodbye, Montag.

Montag looks - The Hound is only seconds away. Montag puts his hand in his pocket. He takes out a small pen-knife and flicks it open. The blade is about an inch long. Beatty looks at it and laughs.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

What are you going to do - scratch me to death?

Montag keeps looking at him. They're so close they could touch. Montag raises his left hand and exposes the wrist. He jabs the knife into the flesh and opens the vein.

CAPTAIN BEATTY

Suicide? Oh, come on - Montag! Take it like a fireman! Do it doggie-style

Montag clamps his thumb onto the vein to stop the blood spurting. Beatty looks at him, perplexed. Crash! The Hound comes flying through in a shower of glass. Montag pulls his thumb away and sprays blood over Beatty's face and throat!

The Hound reads it, changing course. Beatty screams! The Hound hits Beatty, pinning him to the console. The steel needle shoots out from its nose -

It nails Beatty - bang! bang! In the throat, in the cheek, in the skull! Bolts of electricity rip through Beatty's body. There's a hiss like a mouthful of spit hitting a red-hot stove. Flames course up his legs. He's a shrieking blaze, a sprawling, liquefying mannequin, all writhing pain as he falls

Montag doesn't wait. He flies out the room, bleeding wrist clamped to his mouth, hauling the door shut behind him, anything to try and slow The Hound.

INT. CENTRAL HALL. NIGHT.

Montag races across the hall, heading for the spinning poles.

INT. CONTROL ROOM.

The Hound is still nailing Beatty's body. Suddenly it lifts its head, confused -

HOUND'S POV

The room is a matrix of brilliant colors. In the heads-up display is a mass of data on the dead man. One line flashes:

Blood type - no match.

INT. CONTROL ROOM.

The Hound turns and looks in the direction of the fleeing Montag. It growls - a sizzling, electronic sound deep in its throat. It turns and leaps for the door -

INT. CENTRAL HALL. NIGHT.

Montag forces himself into overdrive. He doesn't bother grabbing the spinning pole - there's a faster way down. He jumps through the hole, falling down, past floor after floor.

INT. GROUND FLOOR. NIGHT

He's still a hell of an athlete - at the last minute, he grabs the spinning pole and throws his legs out, slowing his fall. He lands on the floor and runs for a corridor.

The Hound's face appears above, looking down. It plunges after Montag, free falling. Down .. down... eyes glittering. It lands - its eight legs telescope up, cushioning its fall.

INT. FIRE STATION. LAB.

Herman, clutching the remote commander, backs away from Jinx. The fireman has grabbed an equipment belt on his way and has it slung like a bandoleer over his shoulder. He slots a charge into the breach of a bolt gun and aims at Herman's head -

JINX

I'll kill you, I swear it. Hand it over!

Herman, terrified, shakes his head - no. He keeps backing away. Jinx cocks the weapon. Herman has backed up against a wall. He stares down the barrel of the gun -

JINX

Give it to me!

Herman throws the commander - straight at an industrial garbage chute set into the wall. It hits the lip and balances there - half in, half out. Jinx dives for it. Herman tries to stop him. Crash! Jinx punches him on the jaw, knocking him out. He lunges for the remote - it tips and slides down the chute!

INT. UNDERGROUND VAULT.

The toxic fumes from the cascading fuel trigger an alarm. Warning lights flash, a siren sounds but it's really only a back-beat for disaster: the read out on the watch shows 2mins 08secs... 2mins 07secs...

INT. CORRIDOR.

Montag flies down a corridor towards a swing door. The Hound is behind, closing fast -

INT. LAB/CHUTE.

Jinx has a fireman's rappelling line tied around his ankle. The other end is looped around a pillar. He dives forward - down the chute.

He cannons head-first down the tube - a water-slide without water - bouncing off the sides, gathering speed, out of control. The line streams out behind him. The chute kicks over a bump - then plunges straight down two stories. Jinx, yelling, takes the fall -

Snap! The rappelling line springs taut, almost ripping his leg out of its socket. He hangs in the chute, upside down, eight feet short of the floor. He looks down - in the garbage at the bottom is the remote commander. He stretches his hand out - he can't reach it.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT.

Montag bursts through the doors - into the basketball court. He races across it, towards an emergency exit on the far side. The Hound comes through the doors behind him, ripping them off their hinges. It leaps towards Montag -

He reaches the exit and hits the bar that opens them. They don't budge. He tries again - the door is locked! The Hound is almost on him. He feints left but darts right, turning -

But The Hound is too fast. Ka-chunk! The metal brackets shoot out from The Hound's body and clamp him to the wall. Face to face with the monster, he looks straight into its glittering red eyes. He sees the liquid dripping from its swollen needle.

INT. GARBAGE CHUTE.

Jinx reaches into the bandoleer, pulls out a utility knife and slashes the rappelling line. He falls - bam! and hits the floor. Groggy, he reaches for the remote -

THE HOUND'S POV

The Hound's target grid aims straight between Montag's eyes. It's heads-up data is replaced by a single word: **Terminate**

INT. BASKETBALL COURT.

Montag - pinned, helpless - watches the executioner's needle drawback. He braces himself. It fires out - and stops. He stares at it - millimeters away from his flesh. Ka-chunk! The metal brackets spring open and retract. Montag slumps. The Hound settles back on its haunches, waiting, obedient. Montag looks past him, up to the steel bridge -

A door bursts open - Jinx enters, holding the remote, looking like he's been swimming through garbage. He has. The two men look at one another - and grateful to each other for still being alive.

MONTAG

How long?

Jinx looks at his watch -

INT. UNDERGROUND VAULT.

The watch on the ignition device counts down, only seconds now - 57... 56...

INT. WIDE CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

Jinx and Montag run as fast as they can - stumbling, faltering, each grabbing the other. The Hound, tamed by the remote, bounds along at their heels. They race towards a set of glass doors. The steel shutter is up - on the other side is the clear night air.

JINX

Where are we going?

MONTAG

The fire truck.

JINX

And then?

MONTAG

Over the wall.

Jinx stops in his tracks - what? Montag grabs him, dragging him forward -

JINX

The wall? There's nothing out there.

MONTAG

Yes, there is - there's hope.

He hits the glass doors with his shoulder, throwing them open. He drags Jinx through after him. The Hound follows behind.

EXT. FIRE STATION. COURTYARD. NIGHT.

Faber and Clarisse crouch in the fire truck cell. Faber holds her, expecting the worst. They turn - it's Montag! And another fireman, followed by The Hound, running like the Devil's on their ass. Montag is yelling at them -

MONTAG

Get down.... down!

Faber throws Clarisse against the back wall and shields her with his body. Montag, on the run, fires a charge at the cell door. He blows it off its hinges. He turns to Jinx -

MONTAG

Get 'em on board! Start working on The Hound.

Jinx goes to Faber and Clarisse. Montag races for the driver's cabin.

INT. UNDERGROUND VAULT.

The watch keeps counting - 38secs... 37...

EXT. COURTYARD. NIGHT.

The fire truck's engine roars. Montag is in the driver's seat - he throws it into gear. The tires squeal as it flies towards the courtyard gates.

Jinx, Faber and Clarisse cling to the platform at the back. The Hound runs behind then leaps up to join them. Jinx is concentrating, re-programming The Hound like fury.

Montag glances in the rear-view mirror. He stands on the brakes - the truck screeches.

Jinx turns and looks - Montag is leaning out of the driver's door, pointing: Earl stands at a plate glass window on the second floor, waving goodbye to them.

INT. UNDERGROUND VAULT.

The seconds tick off - 24...23...

EXT. FIRE TRUCK. NIGHT.

Montag wraps his arms around a short ladder jutting out of a canister on the roof of the truck. He yells to Jinx -

MONTAG

Now!

INT. TRUCK. DRIVER'S CABIN.

Jinx pulls a lever and presses a button -

EXT. FIRE TRUCK. NIGHT.

Bam! The ladder explodes, telescoping out of the canister. It goes from four feet to fifty feet in a micro-second. Montag clings to the end of it, rocketing straight at the plate glass.

INT. FIRE HOUSE.

Smash! Montag blasts through the glass, narrowly missing Earl. The janitor starts to sweep up the broken glass. Montag, still groggy from the impact, grabs his arm -

MONTAG

Later, Earl, later.

He hauls him onto the ladder and waves a signal to Faber. Faber yells to Jinx. Whoosh! The ladder starts to retract.

EXT. COURTYARD. NIGHT.

Jinx isn't waiting for anything. He throws the truck into gear and hits the accelerator.

With Montag and Earl still clinging to the end of the retracting ladder, the fire truck side-swipes a steel gate, kisses the opposite wall and flies round a curve, out of sight.

EXT. MUNICIPAL PLAZA. NIGHT.

Three fire engines - answering Beatty's call for reinforcements - screech to a halt in front of the fire station. Men spill out and swarm into the building.

INT. UNDERGROUND VAULT.

Ignition - if it works - is only moments away. 12secs... 11...

EXT. REAR OF FIRE HOUSE. NIGHT.

A Fire Department helicopter, also answering the summons, lands in the courtyard. Other fire engines roar in. The men look at the blasted-off cell door lying on the ground, the shattered glass. They grab weapons and head inside -

INT. UNDERGROUND CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

Two firemen - armed, cautious - make their way towards the fuel vault. The sensors on their forearms start to flash. One of the firemen looks down at it -

FIREMAN

Fuel? Where's that coming from?

INT. UNDERGROUND VAULT.

The watch shows 1sec .. zero. The watch alarm sounds. We hold on the battery at the back. A charge goes to the electronic cigarette lighter - a flame pops up. It works! The flame lights the flame-thrower. Whoosh! An arc of fire shoots out, hitting the lake of fuel. The vault explodes -

INT. UNDERGROUND CORRIDOR.

The two firemen see a wall of fire and debris coming straight at them. They barely have time to scream. It engulfs them -

EXT. FIRE STATION. NIGHT.

The whole fire house lifts off the ground! The explosion takes fire engines, helicopters and men with it.

INT. FIRE HOUSE. CENTRAL HALL.

The central atrium is filled with firemen. A whirling tornado of flame picks them up and rockets them skywards, into oblivion. Floor after floor impacts on each other, disintegrating.

EXT. FIRE STATION. NIGHT.

The fire house shatters into a million pieces.

EXT. ROAD. NIGHT.

The blast from the explosion washes over Montag - he's off the ladder, scrambling along the side of the fire truck towards the driver's door. Earl stands on the platform at the back of the racing engine staring, wide-eyed, at a growing fire-ball.

INT. DRIVER'S CABIN. NIGHT.

Montag swings through the window and takes over the wheel from Jinx -

MONTAG
Keep working on The Hound.

Jinx heads back into the truck.

EXT. SKY. NIGHT.

The fireball rises up higher, right in front of the Eye. We look down - other fire engines, heading towards Municipal Plaza change course. Sirens screaming, they chase the single fire truck heading for The Wall.

INT. DRIVER'S CABIN. NIGHT.

Montag steers the truck onto the cement parapet on top of The Wall. He hits the brakes -

EXT. THE WALL. NIGHT.

Jinx orders The Hound off the back of the truck - he helps Clarisse, Faber and Earl onto its back. Montag runs round the side of the truck, carrying a swag of equipment belts and other equipment. He throws them on board The Hound -

MONTAG

(to Jinx)

Is this going to work?

JINX

I hope so.

Montag looks along The Wall - other fire engines have hit the parapet road and are racing towards them.

MONTAG

Hit it!

They climb on The Hound's back. Jinx enters commands into the remote -

THE HOUND'S POV

Thousands of lines of data fly through. It's eyes scan back and forth - in brilliant colors. The Wall, the fire engines racing closer, the endless water. The data keeps whirling past.

EXT. THE WALL. NIGHT.

Montag looks at the fire trucks coming nearer... nearer. Another few seconds and it'll be too late. He turns to Jinx -

MONTAG

Try it again!

Jinx lifts the remote, about to try re-programming it. Suddenly The Hound rises up on its legs. It bounds four quick paces across the parapet wall - and jumps!

EXT. MID-AIR NIGHT.

The Hound sails through the air, down towards the water.

EXT. THE WALL. NIGHT.

The fire trucks skid to a stop. The firemen spill out, running to the edge of The Wall, looking down. Splash! The Hound glides into a landing.

EXT. ON THE HOUND. NIGHT.

Montag, Jinx, Faber, Clarisse and Earl cling to the strange craft. It starts to power across the water, away from The Wall.

Montag looks back - the firemen are lining The Wall, some crouching, aiming bolt guns. A red dot - a laser sight - hits the metal body of The Hound. The red dot rises up until it stops square on Faber's back - that's where the bolt will hit!

Montag screams a warning. Faber turns, confused. Montag hears the sharp crack of the weapon. The red dot doesn't waver - Montag throws himself forward, between the bolt and Faber, covering Faber with his body.

The red dot is on Montag's shoulder. Smash! The bolt, trailing its thin wire, slams through his flesh and into the bone. Montag screams!

The fireman on The Wall hits rewind - Montag is jerked to the back of The Hound. Faber, Clarisse and Jinx try to grab him. Too late! They can't hold him - he's pulled into the water, being hauled back towards The Wall. Faber screams at Jinx -

FABER

Turn it round! Turn around!

EXT. IN THE WATER. NIGHT.

Montag is in the water, his shoulder a cauldron of pain, being dragged backwards. He looks back at The Hound - it's slowing as Jinx works the remote -

MONTAG

No! Keep going!

EXT. ON THE HOUND. NIGHT.

Bam! Bam! Two more bolts hit the metal skin, just missing them. Jinx looks up at The Wall - more firemen are starting to fire. Montag is still yelling at them - keep going!

Jinx hits the remote commander, powering up The Hound. It moves forward, gathering speed. Jinx, Faber, Clarisse and Earl stare back at their friend - alone in the water, struggling. They keep looking at him -

EXT. IN THE WATER. NIGHT.

Montag is being hauled closer and closer to The Wall but he doesn't take his eyes off the four of them on The Hound. They move out of range of the weapons, getting smaller, heading into the distance. Montag starts to cheer - a single, uplifting voice in the darkness. He hits The Wall. The firemen lower hooks, snaring his clothes to drag him up.

EXT. FIRE STATION. EARLY MORNING.

Construction cranes tower over Municipal Plaza. Teams of workmen move back and forth - a new fire station is almost finished: Engine Company 38 is rising out of the ruins. Almost a year has passed - super the title:

March 24, 2036
6.14am. Frydy

INT. FIRE STATION. EARLY MORNING.

The building is already being used by the Fire Department - clerks, researchers and firemen move through the central hall, dodging workmen and contractors. We don't recognize any of them - all the old Company 38 men are dead or gone.

On the far side of Level One - in long shot, his back to us - is a janitor wiping down the lockers. He's got buzz-cut hair, a perfectly-pressed fireman's uniform, an equipment belt around his waist. It holds Windex, a squeegee, garbage bags...

A fireman passing a window glances out. Suddenly he stops and yells -

FIREMAN
Captain. Captain!

EXT. FIRE STATION. EARLY MORNING.

Men on cranes stop their work - they stare down. Construction workers forget their tools and move forward -

INT. FIRE STATION. WINDOWS.

Firemen and workers crowd the windows, staring out, nervous. They turn towards the front door -

Now we see what they're looking at. Coming into the building is The Hound. It's more battered and repaired, like it's been through the wars, and it sports several new attachments but it's got the same old growl - the low electronic sizzle deep in its throat. Everyone - firemen, clerks and contractors - backs away.

The Hound moves across the central hall, the crowd folding back before it, giving it room. Only one person hasn't moved - the janitor. He's still got his back to us, polishing the lockers. The Hound is heading towards him -

INT. FIRE STATION. LOCKERS.

The janitor turns - it's Montag. They sent him away for re-education and this is all that's left. He starts polishing harder, trying to ignore what's going on.

The Hound stops next to him. Montag doesn't look at it. It nudges him - then again Montag turns - he sees the whole place crowded, watching him. The Hound pushes him, making him walk. Montag slots his squeegee and Windex into his equipment belt. The Hound, loping at his side, guides him towards the doors.

Everyone watches. The Hound's eyes scan back and forth - searching, assessing, prying. Anybody tries anything - it will kill them. Montag shuffles on, up to the doors -

EXT. FIRE STATION. EARLY MORNING.

The construction workers peer down from their vantage points. The windows of the fire station are crowded. They see The Hound and Montag come out of the building.

The Hound stops. An articulated jib shoots out from its side. It locks around Montag's waist and swings him onto its back. Holding him there, it takes one leap... two... and is flying across the plaza, towards The Wall.

EXT. REAR OF FIRE STATION. EARLY MORNING.

Three fire engines roar out of the garages, heading off in pursuit.

EXT. THE WALL. EARLY MORNING.

The Hound races up a ramp and onto the parapet on top of The Wall. Dead ahead, a man waits for them. He's dressed in military-style overalls, hair slicked back, a line of stubble on his chin. He's fully recovered from his wounds - he looks great. It's Jinx.

The Hound stops in front of him. He smiles, eager to see his old friend -

JINX

Montag!

There's no reply. Jinx walks round to face him. Now he realizes what they did. Montag stares back - simple, decent - but no sign he recognizes Jinx. The two men look at one another, then Jinx puts his arms around him. Whatever else has happened, he knows this man and he knows what he did. He blinks back tears and swings himself on board.

Jinx looks along the parapet - fire trucks have are roaring towards them. Jinx operates the remote commander. The Hound turns and leaps off The Wall, towards the water.

The fire trucks stop. Men run to the edge of The Wall. The sun is rising, flooding the water with streaks of gold. The men look out at The Hound and its two passengers heading across the water. Nobody raises a weapon. We hold on their faces - somebody came back... there is something out there. We pull away from them, higher and higher -

EXT. OUTER SPACE.

The light of a distant sun catches an awesome, majestic planet. Earth. In the middle of the ocean is a perfectly square area of land. And as we rise higher, the earth slowly turns on its axis, as it has since time immemorial.

The light of the sun sweeps across it and we see another land, a different country. Montag was right - there is hope.

THE END