



The Bradbury Report

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It is 2071. A cloning program provides spare organs for the healthcare system. An unlikely candidate for adventure, Ray is a man in his sixties, who gets a call out of the blue from ex-girlfriend Anna. Now a political activist, she asks for his help to hide an escaped clone. The escapee is none other than his own clone.

The Bradbury Report Details

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From Reader Review The Bradbury Report for online ebook

Aaron says

While it's true you can never tell a book by its cover, you can ascertain the premise of some books by their title. Right away, you know the Bradbury Report is going to be science fiction. Clones used for personal harvesting? A concept to close for comfort.

United States has become a rogue nation where cloning is not only condoned but required for any kind of health care benefits to be affordable. It is regulated and highly secretive. The book follows around three main individuals; Ray (not his real name but more on that later), an older male with a bad heart who is visited by his former college friend, "Anna", a member of a group opposed to cloning. She informs Ray that a clone has "escaped" from the Clearances (formerly North and South Dakota). In fact, it is Ray's clone that has escaped. The book follows Anna, Ray and his clone (named Alan) as they travel throughout Canada on the run from an American government. It follows the trials and teaching that Ray and Anna provided for Alan so that he can learn about life outside of the Clearances.

The book is written from Ray's point of view because his task is to write about his feelings and experience regarding meeting his clone. This sometimes makes the story feel disjointed with timelines jumping all over the place. However, the timelines are not important because Polansky is really looking at giving us a glimpse of the human condition. It is a sad and ultimately unfulfillable story but it can be because life sometimes is. The ending throw me for a loop at first but made sense when held in context with the rest of the story. Overall, a very good story.

Tez says

When someone needs a new organ, he can obtain one from his clone - or any clone. The copies live in the Clearances, deliberately separated from their originals, and never the two shall meet. But one of the copies has escaped, and anti-cloning protestor Anna recognises him. Thus sixty-something-year-old widower Ray meets his twenty-something-year-old clone.

The anti-cloning group plans for Ray to write a report about life with his copy, Alan. Anna and Ray become Alan's teachers, caretakers, and family, meant to groom him for becoming an anti-cloning spokesperson.

The framing device is pseudonymous "Ray's" report. On page 2 he states, "I have never had a sense of humour," which immediately makes it difficult for readers to *want* to connect with him. His specialty is teaching mathematics, so he admits he's not much of a writer. That could explain why Steven Polansky's publishers let him keep infodump - and naming characters Anna and Ann, both mentioned in the same sentence - under the guise of being true to Ray's character or whatever, but it doesn't work. I came close to quitting this on more than one occasion.

My favourite TV shows are boundary-pushing animated comedies, thus The Bradbury Report is an unexpected delight that may well suit fans of *South Park* and the works of Seth MacFarlane - you'll understand why. But it's also heart-breaking, particularly when echolalia-ridden Alan is told of how and why he came into existence.

The Bradbury Report has a sci-fi heart in a literary body. The subject matter is fascinating, but often presented in a way that didn't immediately connect with this genre-preferring reader. This is similar to my experience with Liz Jensen's The Rapture - the structure often made me lose interest, but when the story's good, it's very bloody good.

The Bradbury Report is a slow novel, almost seeming like vignettes rather than a cohesive whole, and Mr. Polansky has won awards for a short-story collection. But The Bradbury Report creates a strange but unforgettable reading experience. A paperback edition is due out later this year - you'd be wise to give it a crack.

Ginny Erisman says

Dystopian sci-fi book about the ethics of cloning; interesting.

Sheryl says

I started this book with eager hopes, having read that it is the new '1984' or 'Brave New World.' It was a force of will to get past the first 50-100 pages, but eventually the story drew me in.

The story is meant to be a 'report' by a man in his late 60's, who goes by the alias of 'Ray Bradbury.' Set in the year 2071 in the United States, most aspects of life seem familiar, except that Americans can choose to have a clone made of themselves for spare parts. Ray had a clone made when he was in his 40's, and we know from the start that the book is the story of the time he spent with his clone. He doesn't meet this young man, called Alan, until page 177.

The first half of the book sets up the story. We learn about Ray's college friendship with a woman named Anna, and about her recent role in helping Alan withdraw from the drugs given to clones to make them docile.

When Anna appears on Ray's doorstep after over 40 years, she shocks him with the news that his clone has escaped, and she wants Ray to help her flee to Canada with the clone.

To me the most interesting parts of the book were the parts with Alan. He is a blank slate, and has to be taught everything. How to eat, how to talk, how to behave. He is loyal to Anna, and begrudgingly gets to know Ray. The second half of the book takes them on a dangerous, but sometimes heartwarming and funny journey across Canada and to their destinies.

Brett says

I did not finish this. I was willing to overlook the appalling naivete displayed by the author of economics. I was willing to overlook the sheer implausibility of the premise, as there may have been time to explain.

I was less willing to overlook the complete lack of believability in the setting. This is 2071 -- except that you would think it was the early 2000s. If this book had been written in 1980 I might have been more tolerant.

People don't even read the newspaper today! Cell phones, brief mentions of the web... I think worse pollution is all there is to distinguish technology from 10 years ago. Jobs are the same, vehicles are the same, the web is there but all but unused.

But I kept at it for a while. I only gave up due to the immense tedium. Did someone tell Polansky he had to hit a certain number of words? Here is a sample of what nearly the whole book is like (at least as far as I got). It was people having a conversation where they always repeat what the other person says, then confirm. Tedious and maddening.

"Did you know him?"

"No, I did not know him."

"So you didn't know him."

"No, I did not know him."

Life is too short to waste on this rubbish.

Aside: The reader for this audio version did a good job--he fit the narrator of the story well. It's not his fault the book is crap.

Robin Ferguson says

Innovative speculative fiction. I enjoyed the easy pace, like talking to an old friend...what would you do if?... So, if you liked Brave New World or The Handmaid's Tale you will like this.

Amber Marshall says

I give up. The detailed description of the shit in the clone's pants did me in. 3 disks in but I don't care how it ends; I'm returning it. More detailed review later.

[LATER] I had a few problems with this book, one of them not having to do with the novel itself but with the audiobook, which was narrated by the worst reader I've yet heard on these things. I've seen other reviewers posit that the narrator was merely playing the part of the dull, humorless, monotone and completely bland narrator of the novel, but the stilted way he read, like a slow student being asked to read aloud in class, gives me doubts. There are ways to read "monotone" and "dull" without making things sound so choppy.

The novel gets off to a super slow start; it reads less like any sort of "report" and more like a memoir. That would be fine if I wanted a memoir, but even for a memoir it felt false because it supposedly takes place in the future, and it felt exactly like a setting from the past. When our elderly narrator tells us of his college days, they don't even sound like MY college days, and tracing his age back from the late 2000s would put his college days after mine. I'm not saying every futuristic novel has to be chockablock with sci-fi nonsense (everyone drinking Space Coffee and taking transporters to the holo-feelies or whatever) but damn. It could've been reckoning back to the 1960s or something. He doesn't even mention stuff that exists TODAY. And this was published in 2010!

There are other small things:

-Why the hell (except to maybe show this character's lack of imagination) would you give one woman the pseudonym "Anna" and another one the pseudonym "Ann"?

-People take FOREVER to get to the point. This is not suspense. THIS IS NOT SUSPENSE. There was one point where Anna said, "I'll get to the point" and I said aloud, "PLEASE DO."

-Maybe the fundamental flaw is that the MC is so goddamn boring and unlikable that I just don't care about him. There's really nothing to get into.

-The whole "clones for parts" is, all right, one of the classic sci-fi "what ifs" but personally I can't even entertain it as much of a possibility given that 1. Human cloning is already illegal in the U.S. and 2. They've already demonstrated that it's possible to just grow organs, either on a cleansed framework of animal organs populated with adult stem cells or 3D printed, so the possibility is driven even further from the realm of possibility.

-And, as I noted above, once they got to the in-depth description of a guy having shat his pants (no one would write that level of detail in a diary entry, no one) I was like, "NOPE!" and shut it off.

All in all it's a slow, plodding, boring, mis-cast and mis-set sci-fi with no real sci that I can see (doesn't help that no one knows the mechanics of cloning or much about it at all, and the story doesn't hook me enough to make me want to stick around and find out - honestly I don't even trust it would eventually tell me).

Sarah Rigg says

This is Polansky's very first book, and his writing style is so minimal and straightforward that you don't realize how powerful it is until a passage or a scene sneaks up on you. I ended up really impressed by this book. My husband and I found it remarkable and remember scenes and quotes from it many years later.

Mark McKenna says

ATTN: Thar be spoilers here!

"The Bradbury Report" is a speculative novel in the form of a thought experiment.

What would happen if cloning became legal in the US and several western states were evacuated and turned into "The Clearances," a land set aside for clones who are being raised as spare parts for Americans who can afford them?

The year is 2071. As "The Bradbury Report" opens there are almost 250 million clones held in a setting reminiscent of "Area 51."

After a clone escapes and is found by an anti-cloning group, one of the members recognizes him as a former lover from her college days. At the request of the group she contacts the man (the book's narrator, who uses the alias "Ray Bradbury") who is now 67, and dying of heart disease.

Soon the anti-clone activist, Anne Pearson, "Ray Bradbury" and the clone whom they name "Alan" embark on a trek across Canada. The point is to avoid the authorities (who are closing in) while Bradbury writes a report to demonstrate to the world the evils of cloning. This book is the result.

I was compelled by Steven Polansky's skill as a writer to finish this book, but it was somewhat of a slog at times. The tone (the narrator's voice, really) is depressive and lacks affect, making it hard for Polansky to generate excitement in the reader. This gray tone also makes the revelations -- which skillfully lead the reader onward -- feel underplayed, almost to the point of being anticlimatic.

On the plus side, Polansky has flashes of a wonderful self-deprecating wit. In one place someone compares his writing style to "a bad Czech translation." He also has a very delicate touch in phraseology -- his own unique style . . . I'm trying to think of another writer like him, perhaps Umberto Eco.

I won't give away any more of the plot, but I will recommend "The Bradbury Report" to a Portland reader -- someone who's willing to spend time with a book of ideas, and doesn't mind a few days of gray skies.

Rebecca says

Things I liked:

It was true to character. The "report" is written in first person and he stays true to his self described lack of creativity. Yes, it was tedious at times, but a socially awkward man such as Ray would have sounded like that.

The narrator was great.

Didn't like:

Lack of answers. Very few of the things I wanted to know were asked or addressed.

Sexual content. Could have done without it and it didn't fit into the book. That was probably the only thing I found inconsistent, so I wondered if it was added to the book so it would have sexual content. Nope, did not like it and would not recommend the book based on this alone.

The jumping around in time was a little hard to follow. Perhaps if I'd read it rather than listened to it it wouldn't have confused me so much. I did like all the additional info, but having it come non-chronologically was complicated for me.

A little bit of offensive potty mouth.

I would have expected the future to be a little more.... advanced. If we have clones, would we also have more cooler technology?

Overall:

Not a bad book. If the sexual content was gone, I would have given it more stars. The rest I could have lived with. Well, I'd have liked to know more about the clone, but at least he made it believable as to why we don't learn more. But I would no recommend this to my friends.

Sheri says

This was a fun read. I have several complaints with the details, but overall it was well done. The narrator "Ray Bradbury" had a very clear and consistent voice. He reminded me at times of Mersault from Camus' *The Stranger*; once again I'm finding slightly autistic, very literal voices appealing (and the fact that Anna hated Sundays I did take as a throwback to *The Stranger*). This book also (for obvious reasons) reminded me of Kashiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. The premise is the same (farming clones to use as spare parts), but Haversham is a humane place where the clones (while kept separate) are still treated fairly and raised as privileged children, while the Clearances are clearly inhumane (although we don't ever get any real answers about what happens in there, everything is always conjecture).

For the details, I found a few things to be annoyingly inconsistent:

First, they are supposed to be living in 2071, yet \$60K is a large amount of money. In 2012, \$60K is a moderate salary and could be expected to last a little over a year for a family of 3. I know that they are provided with a place to live and given a small stipend from the organization, but other than that all expenses must be paid out of pocket...yet at the end of 13 months there is still a lot of money left. This just seemed too unbelievable, especially given inflation.

Second, Anna is simultaneously unaware of the details of her organization and terrified of the organization. They are originally described as a smallish group, not very organized (they only know one or two others in the group), and one in which her husband was a founding member. However, someone is powerful enough to find all these safe houses and move the three of them; the Tall Man is involved at every step (so certainly he knows more than just 3 other members). Her description of them did not feel consistent with either her fear or their ability to make things happen.

Third, when Alan first comes to Anna and is in withdrawal, I found all the poop unnecessary. He is not eating (at least at first) and would not have all this waste. I think Polansky was trying to see Anna as surrogate mother cleaning up and getting acclimated to her baby. I did not find this necessary, she is cleaning up vomit (which was believable) and his urine...the poo felt over the top.

Fourth, Ray goes to great lengths to talk about how religion is no longer part of society (I loved the Bush as Pretender comment) and to state that churches are now mostly museums and public civic centers. So, why then does Anna go to church every week? Shouldn't he have commented on her oddly religious state? I think Polansky just was cheaply trying to appeal to both sides by having an atheist and a believer come together...just annoying, though to me.

Fifth, I did not think that (again projecting into the future) Anna and Ray would be so opposed to porn. Nor did I think that Ray would be so asexual. Even now in 2012, young people are pretty accepting of sexual needs and desires. Anna seems like too much of a prude for someone born in 2004ish.

Sixth, they were conflicting about Ray/Alan's appearance. Clearly Alan was better looking than Ray at the same age (and now of course since Ray is old), but frequently they say that Alan is beautiful and yet all agree that Ray was rather awkward looking. Despite the differences in height and weight and general carriage (which do vary occasionally in identical twins), there is an inconsistency here.

Finally, I realize that the idea behind the library scene is to lend credence to the idea that in the Clearances the clones slept in stacks. BUT WHAT ABOUT EBOOKS? I would imagine in 60 years that there would not be libraries in this sense.

Polansky makes several attempts to engage the reader in a moral discussion of the cloning process. From the beginning, Ray notes "the very terms we use 'original,' 'copy' were designed to be flattering to the former, dismissive to the latter...we are guilty, individually and collectively, of a staggering narcissism." I agree that the concept of cloning on a mass scale (especially one that results in these large scale factory-farm-like living conditions) is heinous, but I'm not sure that it needs to have an existential component.

I also liked the realism in that once in control, the activist group does not necessarily treat Alan any better than the government has been treating him.

As a complete aside, I found the genderized comment "A mother is only as happy as her saddest child" to be unbelievably offensive. It implies that women are so dependent upon their children as to not have any other life without them, while simultaneously implying that men are not as concerned with their children's happiness.

Fun summer read. I didn't take any of it too seriously and was not really engaged on an existential level. I know Polansky tried, but it didn't feel compelling to me as a discussion about human rights. I also didn't think he was very accurate in his dealing with the future. I think it would have been better if it was only 20-30 years in the future (rather than 60) and he had tried a bit harder to be realistic about changes. Overall, it was a light, fun book.

Bondama says

This book had one of the best premises I've come across in a long time. Set in the future, everyone in America has a clone (for replacement parts, apparently) One clone escapes their "farm" and it turns out that this clone is the protagonist's own.--- Sadly, the writer has to have the dullest style I've come across in a long time as well -- I just couldn't finish this book.

This is being written about a month after the above. Finding myself with nothing to read and being snowed in, I returned to "The Bradbury Report" and finished it. I must remember, even if a book doesn't immediately engage, neither do some people. There are treasures out there, and the reason (I think) that the author uses such dispassionate prose is because the moral questions in this book are tremendously important.

If one gets to know his own clone (as happens in the book)-What happens if your heart gives out? What does the clone think of his own worth when it is revealed to him who (and what) he is.

This is a heavy, but wonderfully thoughtful book. I haven't devoted much time to the moral questions of human cloning -- it seems to be so much science fiction at this point. The truth of the matter is, at this moment in time, the actual cloning of a human being is quite possible, even if only in theory as yet. The science is here: do we use it?

Is one's own life so very, dreadfully important that we have the moral permission to create a human being for "spare parts", as it were? When Alan, the clone in question, is told about being a clone and why he has been born, he is devastated, losing all sense of self. "I am a bag of parts to be used when they are needed."

Brian says

Vast swaths of narrative summary, with a dearth of actual scenes. It picks up in the last hundred pages, but it never lives up to it's (wildly implausible, unscientific) science fiction premise, which is unrealistic enough to be a literary conceit. Contrived, and the narrator is a real stinker, too. Poor company on a long, dull voyage.

Sooz says

I understand if there are readers who don't like this book. I am actually surprised I like it as well as I do.

firstly -while considered sci-fi- the book has little of the genre about it. yes there are clones, but the story's focus is the human aspect rather than the scientific. coming from the issue in this way, there is no action and -some might argue- not a lot of plot.

secondly there is a plethora of detail included in the first person singular narrative. that type of story is problematic in that, an individual's reaction to it, is even more subjective than other types of prose.

for some reason I really like the narrator and the description, but I get why some would find it boring.

what The Bradbury Project does have that is inherent in the sci fi genre is the exploration of the topic a look at the ethical questions of cloning as a practice and the moral obligations of the creator.

i'm about 3/4's of the way done and looking forward to the conclusion.

Shane Knysh says

The Bradbury Report

Over the last few nights I have listened to this (audio) book twice. I started it because I like Ray Bradbury and I had terrible insomnia. When I started it it was not the book I was looking for but I decided to stick it out for a hour. Maybe it would put me to sleep. It did not put me to sleep. It may have made the insomnia worse as I fell not into sleep but into the story.

After the rough start I am glad I continued the story. The story is not just good, it's great. Without spoiling the ending it is impressive and a kick in the gut in the best possible way.

Do yourself a favor and read or listen to this book.
