

Humanity: Choosing to be Controlled

“August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains” and “The Pedestrian” are two science fiction stories written by Ray Bradbury in the early 1950s that provide a dystopian look at the future. The author is an American science fiction writer who wrote about how technology could play into the lives of humanity in his distant future. “August 2026” details the technology that exists after humans go extinct through nuclear war, and “The Pedestrian” details a society where technology is addictive to the point where people will not go outside. When Bradbury was writing these stories, nuclear weaponry had just been used in Hiroshima and television was increasingly popular, and he takes this into account for “August 2026” and “The Pedestrian” respectively. Although “August 2026” displays that humans had some control in their own demise, “The Pedestrian” more effectively displays that humans control their own unfortunate fate with the help of technology.

“August 2026” describes the world after a nuclear war, and while humans and technology had some control over their untimely death, most technologies and humans did not contribute to the downfall of humankind. Conflict has always been a part of life, and with new technology comes new ways to prove a point. Leaders of countries chose to use nuclear weaponry in “August 2026,” with devastating effects. While the story does not tell the reader outright that there had been a nuclear war, Bradbury includes multiple references to the war using his experiences with Hiroshima. For example, he describes a family whose “...images burned on wood in one titanic instant” (1). They did not expect the bomb to occur, as they were playing outside, passing a ball, when the girl had her “hands raised to catch a ball which

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never came down” (1). These images relate to Hiroshima because similar images were seen there. The impact of the blast placed ash on the walls of buildings, leaving a shadow of a person if they got in the way of the ash. He also describes the “ruined city [giving] off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles” (1). It is unclear how this war started, but a lot of innocent people died unexpectedly in this war. It is safe to assume most of the public did not want to die in a nuclear war, and there exists another, less damaging way to prove their point; but the people who possessed the nuclear bombs chose to use them anyway. In contrast to the nuclear warfare, most people saw technology as beneficial. It wasn’t the “small cleaning animals” or “memory tapes [gliding] under electric eyes” (1) reminding people to go to work that contributed to the downfall of society. Most humans used this type of technology in ways that benefitted them. Humans did not choose to end their race with nuclear bombs, they tried to choose to live happily with technology but could not make that choice.

“The Pedestrian” describes a society where humans let themselves succumb to the negative effects of technology by choosing to stay inside rather than benefit themselves. Humans rely on technology, although they do not like to think that way, and “The Pedestrian” details what could happen if humans allow this to get out of hand. In “The Pedestrian,” no one is outside walking around except for the protagonist Mr. Mead. Everyone is inside, using their technology. Mr. Mead sees the houses people live in and compares them to “...tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people [sit] like the dead” (6) mindlessly watching television. While this might seem like a radical point of view, the fact that no one is outside does make them seem like dead people, who do not get any activity. They do not stay inside because they have no choice, they stay inside because they want to. If they did not have a choice, then a lot more

people would go against it besides Mr. Mead. The fact that everyone is choosing to live an indoor lifestyle shows that humans, except for Mr. Mead, are allowing technology to remove their proper judgement and uniqueness. He does not “have a viewing screen in [his] house to see with,” (6) and he seems to be the only human with life left in him, as he is the only one taking time off from technology. The fact that he can resist technology implies that others in this timeline can as well, however they choose to seal their fate by staying inside. Humans are allowing technology to remove what makes humans who they are, causing their own downfall.

“The Pedestrian” did a better job of detailing the downfall of humans, which was their choice, by detailing humanity’s involvement. While “August 2026” does show technology contributed to the demise of humanity, Bradbury’s showcasing of helpful technology suggests that technology was not an extension of human choice. The technology that most people used benefited humans directly. For example, in the event of a fire, the house tries to protect humans, with “water rats [squeaking] from the walls, [pistoling] their water, and [running] for more” (3). Since this technology was aimed to help humans live their lives, and people perished despite trying to choose to prosper, “August 2026” does not properly show that humans choose their own fate, assisted by technology. “The Pedestrian,” people are not opposed to their fate. Bradbury shows this in the story by highlighting people’s reliance on technology, even if the technology does not benefit them. The only technology described in “The Pedestrian” is the “viewing screens”, which don’t benefit people physically and only distract them with things such as “... a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue? A comedian falling off the stage?” (5). These things might be necessary to keep people entertained, but none of them help humans make their lives easier. All these things don’t benefit humans directly, taking their

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attention away from what really matters. Despite this, humans still chose to stay inside, thus choosing to hurt themselves. Overall, "The Pedestrian" does a better job of showing that humans control their own fate by detailing that humans directly chose to allow their demise to continue, as opposed to "August 2026" which shows that people didn't choose their demise.

"August 2026" displays that humans had some control in their own demise, but "The Pedestrian" more effectively displays that humans control their own unfortunate fate with the help of technology. Both stories show technology has its downsides, with one story directly killing all of humanity and the other seemingly enslaving them. While these scenarios seem far-fetched, a nuclear war is possible with the technology humans have, and we do spend a lot of time on technology nowadays. Both stories show the dangers of allowing technology to spiral out of control, which means humans must control their own fate once again to ensure that this spiral does not happen.