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The Last Cigarette

Jason Waldrop
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In Paul Weber's world of no particular place or time, cigarettes are illegal, but they aren't the only thing missing. Waldrop's novel is a catastrophic account of the future political state given certain conditions. While the conditions appear to be normal, they produce a world in The Last Cigarette that appears to be science fiction.

Paul Weber is in the center of a period that is seemingly serene and uneventful. Although his father died of lung cancer, Weber's feelings about the criminalization of cigarettes are complex and surprising. Consciousness and experience are continually manipulated by the agents and others who work for the State. Their goal is to create and maintain a more humane humanity. The burden of nearly all decision, beyond whether or not to smoke, has been taken over by the State. Even memories are a controlled substance. Weber gives accounts of his life to a doctor who attempts to reconstruct them for more acceptability. He realizes along the way that his memory and his life are becoming as muddled and unclear as the new humanity. Weber's life is just as involuntary as the rest of his fellow man, though there is little resemblance between them, until he finds a surprising ally in a State worker named Lynn and his life changes.

Waldrop depicts what can happen to the mind when it is no longer able to think or choose for itself. He tells a thousand stories within a story and each is relevant and succinct. The world he writes about is more faceted than what its creators try to convey. This world, however, lacks true meaning to only a few. He shows that what many men view as freedom, few truly understand as a prison. The novel is abstract but simple in its purpose. It is a powerful portrait of a future that is inevitable when people give up their freedom through seemingly good intentions. The Last Cigarette gives answers to questions that tragically are scarcely asked and asks questions of its own.
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