

The Last of the Firefighters

Ed Daniels

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Universal struggles of balancing family and work put this futuristic novel of firefighting technology into context.

Many of us feel gratitude for the technological gains made in our lifetime. But with these advances come drawbacks; many jobs have disappeared due to the mechanization of the industrialized world. In *The Last of the Firefighters*, former volunteer firefighter Ed Daniels chronicles the life and times of firefighter Johnny Stasso from his first experience with fire in 2018 to his death. Daniels deftly mixes the futuristic and the timeless in a story that entertains while informing.

Johnny struggles to adjust to the changes in his beloved vocation: accurate hose nozzles that no longer require human adjustment to water pressure, robots that save lives, and advanced smoke-detection systems that steadily decrease the number of emergency calls by stopping fires before they start. In this near future where virtual-reality glasses are as popular as cell phones and cars drive themselves, Johnny still copes with how to balance work and family and how to smooth out bumps in married life.

Daniels's passion for and knowledge about firefighting history, regulations, and current technologies and practices shine through in his lucid prose, allowing neophytes to easily enter this world. The advances suggested for firefighting technology seem like plausible, logical offshoots of what currently exists. If anything, the book sometimes gets caught up in abbreviations and blow-by-blow descriptions of the use of every piece of equipment, so the plot lags occasionally.

Any slow spots in the plot are overcome by the likability of the protagonist. Johnny exhibits both strengths and weaknesses: ready to jump into action at work; loyal to his best friend, colleagues, and girlfriend (and eventual wife) Nina. He is, however, a workaholic. "I was the off-duty-firefighter soccer mom [when I wasn't working]...Nina was also demanding more attention from me, things like date nights...and talking a lot...I felt betrayed, but I knew the kids needed us, so I did what I had to do to get Nina back. Still, all of that daddy stuff and acting like a dedicated husband took it out of me," he says after Nina cheats on him. Nina's character isn't developed much beyond the stereotypical smart-and-sexy trope, although Daniels deserves kudos for treating an interracial marriage with nonchalance—Nina is African-American. The three children, however, exist only as names. An occasional Stasso family scene would make these characters seem more real.

Johnny finds himself in an uncomfortable situation of internal conflict: "My mistress, the fire department, was twisting a knife into my belly. It had become a strange technological twilight zone for me, denying me the excitement and adventure that had attracted me in the first place." Daniels succinctly taps into the dismay and fear one feels when what was once beloved and familiar becomes unrecognizable.

The author also excels at creating suspense whenever Johnny must rescue someone in danger. One gains a greater appreciation for the perilous duties of a firefighter after reading this book, knowing that Johnny and others like him "are all heroes—or have been or will be." Those interested in firefighting will appreciate this book the most, as will sci-fi

aficionados.

JILL ALLEN (July 21, 2014)

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