**Why *Fahrenheit 451* And The Knockout Game Have More In Common Than You Think**

DEC. 2, 2013

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There’s this new, weird, disturbing trend out there called “Knockout”, where someone randomly punches a stranger in the streets, hoping to get a knockout in just one punch. It started out in New Jersey and, thanks to the modern age, has spread like wildfire.

I don’t know what’s more disturbing: the act itself, or the fact that we have all now seen countless surveillance videos of innocent people getting knocked out cold in the streets. Every major news outlet has covered the story at least once. Boxers and MMA fighters have weighed in on it. Videos of the game have been shared online with a scary veracity. People link-baited, speculated, and then scratched their heads as to why the stupid act caught on like it did (all the while preparing their next segment on how it has now turned into a “craze”. More on that at 11).

And now I’m talking about it on the internet, so I’m obviously part of the problem.

But that’s the modern age for you. We live in a time when ideas go viral. We live in a time when the word “viral” has gone viral. Information doesn’t spread anymore: it invades with an intensity that would make the British Empire blush. No matter how inane, sophomoric, or esoteric the concept is, it’s bound to resonate with someone on the internet (and a few will take root for no real rhyme or reason. Remember planking, anyone?)

But I’m not here to rail about the internet like an old man denouncing those darn kids skateboarding on his sidewalk. I see things like Knockout and all I can think about is *Fahrenheit 451*.

Hey, remember that book? Y’know, the one with that Michael Moore sampled for his *Fahrenheit 911* documentary? The book that, in an ironic turn of events, is banned in some schools and public libraries? I know, I know. It’s been in your “to read” pile forever. And once you’re done sharing that Vine video of a man smearing bathtub bubbles on his head and making a funny face, you’ll find the time to pick it up. But you remember the gist of it, right? With the book burning and the censorship and stuff? And, hey, maybe they’ll make a movie about it and you’ll watch that. It’s basically the same thing.

The focus on *Fahrenheit 451* has always been on oppression and censorship. But what people tend to gloss over is the part where a society where everyone is placated and nobody thinks has spawned adolescents that are nothing more than raving gangs of sociopaths. In a world with wall-to-wall television and “digital friends”, teenagers go on joy rides specifically to find someone to kill. In a world without critical thought, introspection, and retrospection, people are run down for sport.

There has been a lot of talk about how “kids these days” aren’t learning empathy (or any valuable social skills). Even without Knockout, there’s something to be said in the advent of online bullying, adolescent suicide, and sick activities all done in an effort to have their own videos “go viral” (that usually involves recording one kid — or a group of kids — viciously beating up another kid). Everyone is quick to blame one factor over another: it’s the internet, it’s the parents, it’s “just the way things are now”. But I’ve yet to hear anyone make a parallel between a weirdly contented and shallow society and the rise of sociopathic behavior.

So we can all sit back and figure out what is to blame for this idiotic and dangerous Knockout “craze”. Or we can turn off our TVs, put down the tablet, and, just for a moment, actually think.