

Joe Hill stokes the imagination in 'Fireman'

Some people want to watch the world burn. Joe Hill just writes about it.

The apocalypse comes not via zombies but by an outbreak of spontaneous combustion in Hill's superbly crackling

BOOK REVIEW BRIAN TRUITT

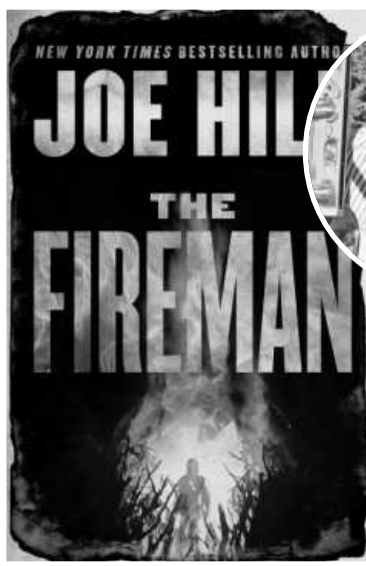
"How are we supposed to live our lives when every day is September 11?" asks the central heroine, Harper Grayson, who's obsessed with Mary Poppins.

A highly contagious spore called Dragonscale infects millions beginning in big cities and then moving to smaller haunts

such as her New Hampshire town. Those with the disease burst into flames — or give off roiling smoke for an air of deadly unpredictability — and the resulting wildfires cause widespread destruction to the landscape.

Harper learns she has caught it around the time she learns she's pregnant. Instead of doing the best for his wife and child-to-be, her husband, Jakob, goes off the reservation and joins one of the local Cremation Crews, wandering mobs murdering those with Dragonscale so it won't infect anyone else.

Following a vicious attack by her crazy spouse, Harper finds a new family in a pocket of infected folks holed up a nearby summer camp. She becomes close to a pair of children and the Fireman, a quirky English fella who can control fire in superhuman ways.



SHANE LEONARD Joe Hill spins an apocalyptic tale.

just as harmful as it is outside.

Hill, whose famous father is Stephen King, creates a pandemic that's dangerous but also undoubtedly beautiful. The infected sport black and gold marks

that weave together on skin like ornate tattoos, and if the Dragonscale doesn't kill them first, they can commune with each other in a hippie-ish harmonious state called "the Bright."

Music plays an unusually important role. One Dire Straits track in particular is the key to the Fireman living up to his nickname, and former MTV VJ Martha Quinn may be, to borrow a Bangles tune, the eternal flame of salvation for the sick. Not to

mention A Spoonful of Sugar, which might as well be the novel's official theme song.

Fahrenheit 451, The Road and even The Stand all seem to be likely influences, though Hill channels J.K. Rowling in how he crafts an immersive world where you can smell the ash and feel the burn.

At more than 750 pages, The Fireman is massive enough that you feel as if you could put out an actual fire with it. Some wandering plot tangents aside, Hill keeps you invested in the characters' survival up to the very last page and never lets up with the potential for doom at every turn.

He has built an impressive bibliography thus far with Heart-Shaped Box, Horns and NOS4A2, and the highly imaginative The Fireman is similarly deserving of a warm reception.

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PUZZLES

CROSSWORD: BY Elizabeth C. Gorski. ENDING ON A SOUR NOTE. ACROSS: 1 Took a gander at 5 Take place 10 Westernmost 14 Aleutian 17 Picnic ruiner 18 "I have no idea" 19 Resort spot 20 Sticky situation 23 Supplies with a crew 24 "Network" director Sidney 28 Go for a spin 31 Regarding, on a memo 34 "Fuel" singer DiFranco 35 Sea of ___ (Don River outflow) 36 Job interview topic 38 Tiny criticism 39 Makes money hand over fist 42 One of the Gershwins 43 In recent days 44 Passport datum 45 It's the limit, in a saying 46 ACLU part (Abbr.) 47 Rand McNally book 48 Knuckleheads 50 "Brave" singer Barelles 52 Gillette offering 59 "Heidi" setting 62 Leslie of "Gigi" 63 Fancy fundraiser 64 Bread with falafel 65 Shannon Airport's county 66 Nobel Prize subj. 67 "Buy It Now" site 68 Carnival setups 69 Partner of new dentists

CROSSWORD grid and answers. Wednesday's Answer: INCA SHAM UDALL MOAT TAUT SOCIO CITE YOURSOURCES ODS ULNA RAE LEAFLET ATTEMPT DATA GRE IDOL SIGHT DISTANCE YAOMAGNESIA ANTI RED SLOB PEANUTS WENTAPE HDL MILA GEE SITEDEVELOPMENT AWARE ALMA RAIL GOMER STAN ERTE

WORD ROUNDUP: By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek. Find and Circle: Five European capitals Five rodents Academy Awards: Best _____ in "Bridge of Spies" Bus ____

QUICKCROSS: By John Wilmes. (Blind [?] palm) Actor Roberts Pub amount El _____, Texas Actor Johnny Operatic melody Pie pans Outer: Prefix

SUDOKU: Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).

UP & DOWN WORDS: By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt. 1. LAST 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. UP

SUDOKU FUSION: Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).

TXTPERT: Across: 1. 6222263 4. 927729 7. 5462 8. 526/252 Down: 2. 237546 3. 272745-2 5. 3252/ 6. 6885

Today's theme: Capital cities. 1 a 2 abc 3 def 4 ghi 5 jkl 6 mno 7 p qrs 8 tuv 9 wxyz

DON'T QUOTE ME: Author E.B. White thinks about our relationship with cars. Rearrange the words to complete the quote. CAR ELSE EVERYTHING GET LIFE SOMEWHERE THERE AND YOU _____ IN A _____

WIGGLES 3D GAMES: Wednesday's Answer: "Laugh and the world laughs with you, snore and you sleep alone." - Anthony Burgess