* In 1949 George Orwell published 1984, a cautionary tale about a fantastically horrid dystopian society. The book explores a not so distant future where technological advancement has already led to global nuclear war and the preexisting states have given way to a new power structure.
* The story takes place in a new country called Oceania in the city Air Strip One (London) and is narrated by Winston Smith who is a member of the lower tier of the ruling party.
* Due to technological advances in surveillance Winston and every other member of the party is under constant watch by “telescreens” small devices that serve the dual purpose of continuously playing party propaganda and watching all citizens nearly everywhere they go.
* Every surface in Oceania is plastered with the face of Big Brother the omniscient leader of the party with the underlying caption “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU”.
* The party is in absolute control of the society even venturing so far as to drastically alter it’s language and history.
* Presently, (a time that Winston approximates to be 1984 although it is impossible to know because of the Party’s alterations) the Party is implementing a language of their own invention (NewSpeak) in an attempt to render political rebellion impossible by reducing the language to a state in which it can only convey meanings that align with the party’s will.
* In this dystopia, even having thoughts against the party is illegal, dubbed “thought crime” if someone so much as makes a facial expression that betrays their beliefs in the proximity of a telescreens they would disappear shortly and be erased from all recorded history. From an early age, party members are indoctrinated with the principles of INGSOC (war is peace)(freedom is slavery)(ignorance is strength). The government of Oceana claims to have always been at war with Eurasia and allied with Eastasia however Winston believes that he recalls a time when the opposite was true.
* Winston expresses extreme resent for the mechanism by which the party forbids free thought, sexual desire and generally any expression of individual personality. He works for The Ministry of Truth and is tasked with fabricating publications and records to fit the party’s present needs.
* While at work he exchanges a glance with a High-ranking member of the party named O’Brien and begins to believe that he may be a member of a fabled secret society opposed to the party called “The Brotherhood” but decides that a glance is not conclusive enough to risk communication. He also notices a young woman staring at him who he suspects is a spy investigating him for thought crime. Eventually the woman who he noticed staring at him covertly slipped him a note proclaiming “I love you”. When they are finally able to communicate undetected, he learns that her name is Julia and they carefully orchestrate a secret affair. Winston is nearly certain that they will be arrested and tortured and yet continues the affair because it allowed him to be alive in ways he had never imagined.
* Not long after, Winston receives word that O’Brian would like to speak with him. O’Brian reveals to Winston and Julia that he is a member of the Brotherhood and provides Winston with the manifesto of the Brotherhood (a book written by Emanuel Goldstein(the brotherhood’s founder) that exposes the system the Party uses to control the masses and outlines a strategy to slowly facilitate a revolution).
* Not long after their indoctrination into the brotherhood, Winston and Julia are arrested and taken to a place called the Ministry of Love. Deep in the bowls of the Ministry of Love Winston spends moths undergoing intense torture and brainwashing.
* Orwell wrote books like 1984 and Animal Farm to warn western society of the menace of totalitarian government. His fear was inspired by the governments of Russia and Spain that would happily sacrifice the common people’s livelihoods to sustain their power. He was especially concerned with the ability of technology to let a small minority servile and manipulate the majority. The title of the book 1984 proves further Orwell’s motives, as it is clear that it was intended to suggest to the people of 1949 that such a future was possible in their lifetimes.
* Orwell sets about proving his point by exploring different methodologies such a dystopian government could employ to hold onto power indefinitely(some of these techniques were inspired by existing totalitarian regimes).
* The party Orwell conceived of employed oversaturated psychological messaging both on the subconscious and overt level. They unhinged familial bonds by brainwashing kids to become spies so dedicated to the cause that they would sell out their own parents to the party. They taught young girls to suppress their sexual urges and treat sex merely as a procreative duty to the party. The resulting frustration was to be channeled into ferocious displays of animosity towards the Party’s enemies. Any individual that displayed an inkling of defiance was to be “reeducated” through systematic torture only to be executed once they accepted the party. Through this institutionalized conditioning the minds of the party’s victims were subject to their twisted reality to such an extant that they could be made to believe full heartedly that 2+2=5.
* While the threat of technology was ever present Orwell also wished to warn people of the power of societal constructs, most importantly language. He emphasized that language is of central importance to human thought because it structures and limits ideas. In an attempt to show the loss of culture and humanity that results when a people are stripped of their language and heritage. He demonstrates the power language has over people through concepts such as “doublethink” which is the ability to hold two contradictory ideas in one’s mind at the same time. It is in this fashion that he chose the names of the party ministries. The ministry of plenty was responsible for ensuring economic shortage, the ministry of peace was responsible for waging war, the ministry of truth for propagating lies and the ministry of love for torture and punishment.
* The book allows for readers to relate the dystopian society to real world governments by describing the gritty urban decay in London as an obvious visual reference to the Soviet Union . Both governments were able to peruse the cutting edge of military and surveillance technology and yet failed to provide basic necessities for their citizens.
* Winston lives in a world where legitimate optimism is impossible and so in an act of doublethink, lacking real hope, he allows himself false hope, fully aware of what he was doing. It is through the immense effort and sacrifice that Winston pours into achieving personal freedom and his ultimate failure despite the reader having reason to believe that there is hope that Orwell really drives home the devastating control of totalitarian government.

AVENGERS CLIP

While we may sit comfortably at our desks watching a video about a fictional story of a future already come to pass we may feel safe from the dangers Orwell is trying to warn us of. The premise of this book seems unrealistic at a glance but in reality the story Orwell told has already happened and is currently happening. The government of Soviet Russia formed an information state in which it was not uncommon for family members to report each other to the KGB simply for expressing rhetoric that did not favor the party, particularly any criticism of Joseph Stalin, was punishable by years in a forced labor camp or even death. The quote “They greeted prisoners with a roll call based on cases. "So-and-so! Article 58-1a, twenty five years." The chief of the convoy guard was curious: "What did you get it for?" "For nothing at all." "You're lying. *The sentence for nothing at all is ten years.*” in the famous work Archipelago gulag by famed Russian writer Solzhenitsyn appears to be a joke but in actuality it was the reality of the situation. Currently, North Korea has established such a prolific personality cult that in the documentary “Inside North Korea” a secret camera recording revealed that upon being cured of cataracts by a foreign aid doctor a peasant proclaimed her gratitude towards Kim Jung Un for restoring her sight.

Before we right off the possibility of such a travesty in our homeland it may beget us to examine the relationship or better yet lack thereof between what the people want and what our Congress does. All the people at the tope need from us is to watch more television, read fewer books and keep our eyes closed for about a decade and we could easily find ourselves in Winston Smith’s shoes.

The best ways to combat a dystopian outcome such as the one portrayed in 1984 is to keep our eyes open. We must question everything, read and research anything and most of all not succumb to the fear that people in high places will spread hoping to makes us trade our liberty for security. Luckily we have better tools to liberate ourselves than Winston did. For all the danger technology poses to our society it also affords us a great deal of protection in the communication and interconnection that we must use to spread ideals of equality and tolerance and compassion. It is armed with these tools and principles that we may combat on an individual level the incremental corruption of our values that some will inevitably try to achieve.