

The Uncomfortablists

Synopsis

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Synopsis

The Uncomfortablists

This is told in the first person, from the point of view of Ebenezer (Ben), a disaffected teenager. His country has been under Uncomfortablist rule all his life. As we progress through the novel he slowly comes to articulate the source of his frustration and fury with his family and community: the Uncomfortablists have become comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Chapter 1

Ben is in conflict with his ma, who is an orthodox Uncomfortablist and embarrasses and annoys Ben constantly. On the school bus he meets May, a bright but vulnerable girl. At school Ben's friend Roy is killed when he attempts a massacre. This focuses Ben's disillusionment. Roy's dad, Zeb, arrives at the scene of the massacre with his vigilante group just after Roy is killed.

Chapter 2

May and Ben's relationship deepens. Ben meets Roy's dad, Zeb, before the funeral. He is a troubled and inarticulate man. After the funeral Roy's father Zeb becomes attached to Ben.

Chapter 3

Ben is having trouble at school. He is angry and depressed. His teacher, Gomez, tries to help him. Secretary Garner and the

Uncomfortablism party make a show of giving him a medal for his part in stopping the massacre.

Chapter 4

Zeb invites Ben to come to vigilante meetings. He starts taking Ben and his mum on outings. Ben's mother seems to be acquiescing in all of this. Ben assumes Zeb is making a move on his Ma.

At the vigilante meeting Ben learns that the group targets pedophiles.

Interlude: Letter to Gomez - Ben writes letters to Gomez that are revealing in what they attempt to conceal.

Chapter 5

Ben and Ma join May's family for Thanksgiving. It's a complex family interaction but Ben is enjoying it. May's stepfather shows up unexpectedly and ruins the gathering. He abuses everyone and hits May. Ben suspects there is more abuse going on.

Interlude: Letter from Gomez, letter to Gomez

Chapter 6

Ben comes to appreciate the attention from Zeb. In his inarticulate way, Zeb is mentoring Ben and fathering him. Zeb takes Ben camping. Ben experiences a moment of uncomplicated happiness on the mountain. He tells Zeb about May's stepfather.

Interlude: Letter from Gomez, letter to Gomez

Chapter 7

May is not happy with the relationship Ben has formed with Zeb. They argue about it.

Zeb proposes marriage to Ben. It's perfectly legal to marry a minor of the same gender, indeed to marry anyone or anything, but Ben is still very surprised and not at all pleased. He now has to find some way of letting Zeb down gently without exciting Zeb to the sociopathic extremes Ben believes are close to the surface.

May's stepfather is killed. Ben is sure Zeb is involved. May's family is thrown into chaos. May breaks it off with Ben.

Interlude: Letter from Gomez, letter to Gomez

Chapter 8

During his expeditions with the vigilante group Ben realizes Zeb is planning to act out some terrible revenge against the system to expiate his guilt over his son. He suspects the funding for the vigilante group comes from revolutionary corporations and that Zeb is being used.

Interlude: Letter from Gomez, letter to Gomez

Chapter 9

Ben tries to stop Zeb but is himself arrested.

Interlude: Letter from Gomez - Ben derives some comfort from composing a letter to Gomez even though he cannot send it.

Chapter 10

Zeb harnesses his vigilante forces to rescue Ben but is killed. I think Ben probably kills him, or at the very least shoots him in the foot.

Chapter 11

Secretary Garner and the Uncomfortablists try Ben. Ben defends himself by telling his accusers that they are hypocrites, only willing to pursue Uncomfortablism where it suits them, unwilling to accept dissent. To his dismay, they accept his defense and acquit him, smugly congratulating themselves on their willingness to accept him as further proof of their commitment to the Uncomfortablist dogma.

Chapter 12

Ben manages to explain himself to May. There is some hope of improvement. Ben realizes the Uncomfortablists, although infuriating, are not completely crazy.

The structure is episodic, with each episode focusing on some aspects of Uncomfortablism. The infodumps are handled with excerpts from history lessons at Ebenezer's school, media moments, and through Ebenezer's anguished internal dialogue.

Uncomfortablism arises from the ashes of a world destroyed by consumerism, environmental catastrophe and anti-terrorist measures. As the resources over which they are fighting disappear, the Left and the Right spin so long and hard on the centreline that they disappear

finally up their respective sphincters. The Environmental movement in harnessing guilt and preaching a gospel of holier-than-thou self-deprivation has at last become indistinguishable from a fundamentalist religious sect. This is the seed of Uncomfortablism.

Moral and intellectual direction has been eroded in the general confusion and when at last the Uncomfortablists take power, their agenda is contradictory, ineffectual and pointless, serving only the purpose of keeping people thoroughly uncomfortable.

Below is the Uncomfortablism Agenda, which was revealed to me about 18 months ago.

Uncomfortablism - The Agenda

While other parties conceal their intentions for fear of electoral disapproval, we make no secret of our policies. It is not our job to be popular. At the core of our agenda is the tenet that a policy, whether or not it makes any sense or does any good, must make people uncomfortable.

Abortion

We will sidestep the entire debate, devoting resources instead to a massive reduction in the frequency of unwanted pregnancies. From the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal it emerged that oral sex made a great many people uncomfortable. We will mount a cross-media promotion of oral sex and masturbation: Give Yourself A Hand, Use Your Head.

Underaged Drinking

See above. There is a limit to the number of things you can have in your mouth at the same time.

The Obesity Epidemic

See above.

God

The separation of church and state is an ideal to which people comfortably subscribe without examining whether it is attained. We will launch a merged state religion, with at its head the only universally respected religious figure, Santa Claus; at his right

hand, the Easter Bunny, symbol of fertility; at his left, the virgin Barbie, goddess of elective surgery. All rites, convictions and practices, however oppressive, archaic or contradictory, will be embraced and vigorously defended. The church will be evangelistic, highly profitable and eventually universal. There will be entertaining ceremonies, colorful frocks and funky music. Its motto: "People can believe anything".

Gays

We will widen the scope of the marriage contract to embrace all relationships. Not only may any person marry any other person, regardless of age or gender, but other barriers such as species, biological status, and absence of concrete existence will be lifted. A woman may marry her job, a man may marry his car, a child may marry her guinea pig, and a bigot may marry his prejudices.

Guns

Guns will be compulsory. All citizens will learn from kindergarten age to correctly maintain and operate a wide range of firearms. High noon contests will dominate the sporting arena. Make my day.

Law and Order

See above. Unchecked vigilantism will work hand in hand with a corrupt and decadent police force to maintain the status quo.

Drugs

We will just say yes. All drugs, however pointless, dangerous and destructive, will be legalized, and regulated with the same delicacy, sensitivity and responsibility as are alcohol and tobacco today.

Health

The sickie will end: sick leave will be renamed health leave. Hospital waiting lists will be halved, and the number of hospital beds doubled, in both cases by simply chopping them in two. All pubs and clubs will be required to display in large letters on their doors the words "Fuck off". Fast food outlets will be required to place at their entrances and exits a maze of gymnastic equipment, judged so that the calories consumed in eating and exercising are equal. Watching sport without participating will incur a hefty fine. Smokers will be required to wear an airtight helmet. Office managers will lead all workers in calisthenics or community singing four times daily.

Education

We will encourage children to think. We will tell them what we know of the truth. We will honor idle curiosity. This will make everyone uncomfortable. We will assist universities by funding a great many ill-considered studies into matters of doubtful importance.

Foreign Policy

Other countries are a rich source of unease. We will let them go about their business unmolested. We will draw attention to their practice of doing things differently and not caring what we think about it.

The Environment

Parking will be illegal. Only self-composting pit toilets will be permitted. Showerheads will be blocked. Toxic plumes will be returned to sender. A costly research project will examine the viability of supplying all energy needs with methane captured by cunningly designed underwear.

The Economy

We will instigate a variable random regulatory regime that keeps them guessing. No one will become comfortable with the loopholes long enough to scam them. Consumerism will be discredited by a wide range of practices and promotions. For each advertisement for a product or service, the advertiser will be required to fund a campaign of equal penetration explaining why you're better off without it. Party members will wear shabby clothing and be transported in poorly maintained, inexpensive vehicles. Ostentation will be ridiculed.

Taxation

Against.

The Arts

All art is propaganda. All art is pornography. The more the merrier.

Spam

Death to spammers.

Immigration

All immigrants will be required to arrive in leaky boats. This will test the mettle and resolve of prospective citizens, prepare them for the uncomfortable life ahead, select for Olympic swimming skills, and provide a welcome shot in the arm for the struggling leaky boat sector.