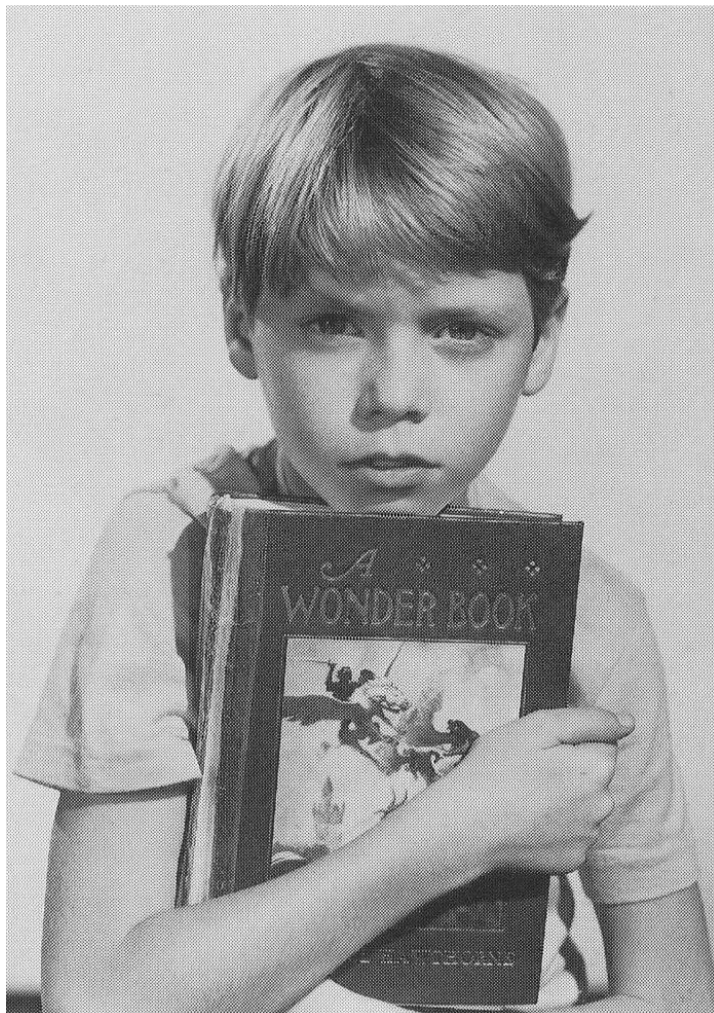


Storm Center

US : 1956 : dir. Daniel Taradash : Columbia / Phoenix : 87 min
 prod: Julian Blaustein : scr: Daniel Taradash & Elick Moll : dir.ph.: Burnett Guffey
[Kevin Coughlin](#)
 Bette Davis; Brian Keith; Kim Hunter; Paul Kelly; Joe Mantell

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 € M ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5779	3	1	1	854	- 7 7 7 7	No	July 2002

“Who *really* set the town aflame?”



*Answer: no town in the world was ever set aflame over the sacking of a librarian. However, 'twas he, naughty Freddie Slater, that torched the town library, and if **that's** not worth a good spanking in anyone's book I'm a Jesuit !*
 Source: Moving Picture Boy

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

“Librarian becomes centre of controversy over censorship and communism. Not even Davis

can uplift clichés. An inauspicious directorial debut by veteran screenwriter Taradash. *1/2”

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A small-town librarian is dismissed when she refuses to remove a Communist book from the shelves. Formula anti-McCarthy melodrama originally designed for Mary Pickford's comeback; not very absorbing and rather dingly produced."

[no listing in "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993",

"Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times review:

"Librarian Bette Davis is fired for refusing to remove a book on Communism from the shelves in this courageous, if over-sentimental, drama, directed by screenwriter Daniel Taradash. *** "

"Drama starring Bette Davis as a librarian who faces opposition from the council when she refuses to take a controversial book off the shelves. *** "

There's a snag in allowing screenwriters to direct their own films – they're usually pretty bad at spotting when the script is dire. What on earth possessed Davis to make this ugly piece of McCarthy-era hand-wringing we can only guess, but her own performance is just about adequate. Only Paul Kelly, as a councilman and long-time friend of Davis, and Brian Keith as an opportunist small-town politician, emerge with any dignity. The film is so over-wrought that in the right frame of mind it might be a hoot, it's certainly anything but "courageous".

The focus of the bru-ha-ha is a book calling itself "The Communist Dream", by a P. Tolskin. Widowed town librarian Alicia Hull (Davis) is summoned to an informal dinner with the council leaders, who first pacify her by agreeing to build the new children's wing to the library she's been agitating for, and then gently ask her to remove the book from her shelves. The local "Women's Committee Against Subversion" have raised a petition against it, and so forth. At first demurring to their wishes, Hull later reconsiders and places the book back in the library.

Apple of her eye is one Freddie Slater (Coughlin), whose enthusiasm for reading verges on the orgiastic. She lends him a fairy tale book to devour at home, but pa Slater is not best pleased at this. The script clumsily contrives an altercation at table over the book, so that father can fulminate to his wife about book-learnin' not being a fit pastime for a boy. "When a man comes home from work he wants a son!" he declares cryptically. Ma Slater plays the piano at home herself, so it's easy to see where the rot set in.

A more formal meeting of the council is convened, and this time Mr Duncan (Keith), who is dating Hull's assistant librarian, goes onto the offensive, raising questions about Hull's former political affiliations with "leftist" lobby groups, some of which subsequently proved to be "a front" for the Communist Party. Shocked at the tenor of the questioning, Hull declares – the formula may be already familiar to you – "I am not a Communist. I never was a Communist. I detest Communism." She points out that "*Mein Kampf*" remained on the library's shelves all through the 1930s and 40s without arousing Nazi sympathies across middle America, that the public had a right to see "The Communist Dream" also, and recognise it for the hideous propaganda tract that it is. When Duncan points out that her judgment has shown to be in error in the past, she responds with an ultimatum that if the book goes, she goes too. In her absence the council agree unanimously on her discharge. "City council dismisses librarian!" shriek the front page headlines next day.

This is all a bit perplexing for young Freddie Slater. When he learns she's been sacked from the library the child is nearly hysterical. At first he remains loyal to his mentor, but doubts are sewn by his father's sour remarks on reading the paper, and aggravated when Duncan later leaks an item about her dubious leftist affiliations. The boy, realising he has been duped all along, conceives a shameful hatred of Mrs Hull, and a resentment of her library. Taunted by

other boys, he declares the library is full of secrets that she would smuggle to her commie friends abroad. "Prove it" they demand, and Freddie sets out to do just that.

See also "**BADKONAK-E SEFID**" and "**BASHU**" - both recent Iranian films, and subject index under **ARAB WORLD / MIDDLE EAST**.