

Book Review

'Twisted: My Dreadlock Chronicles'

by Bert Ashe

Bolden / An Agate Imprint
Paperback, \$15.00
252 pages
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By Kam Williams
For *The Skanner News*

"After leading a far too conventional life for nearly 40 years, Bert Ashe began the long, arduous and uncertain process of growing dreadlocks in an attempt to step out of American convention. As his hair takes on a life of its own and gets 'twisted,' Ashe chronicles the reactions of his family, friends, strangers and colleagues—and his own frustration and bewilderment at his locked hair.

"[This book] explores black hair, in all its untamed glory, from a man's point-of-view. With humor and exacting self-reflection, Ashe uses his own experience not only to explain the history of dreadlocks, but also to unpack the complicated issues of identity, politics, gender

and culture in America."
-- Excerpted from the book jacket

Bert Ashe was coming of age in the Seventies around the same time dreadlocks first became popular in the U.S. However, it wasn't until about a quarter-century later, in March of 1998, that he finally decided to give the Rastafarian hairstyle a go.

But, by then, Bert was a happily-married family man raising a couple of impressionable young kids. Furthermore, his wife, Valerie, hailed from a military family, so she was understandably a little worried when he started "letting it grow out."

"Does it have to look so scruffy?" she inquired, contemplating the mushrooming of an unkempt, matted mess atop her hubby's head.

Bert also had to be concerned with how the new 'do would be received by his neighbors and col-

leagues. After all, not only did he reside in suburban Virginia but he was also a straitlaced professor of English at the University of Richmond. Thus, he wondered whether his sporting dreadlocks might be misread by some as a counter-cultural statement, despite his otherwise orthodox appearance.

Bert's intriguing experiment in coiffures is the subject of the very entertaining *Twisted: My Dreadlock Chronicles*. Written in a delightful, stream-of-consciousness style reminiscent of the Beat Era of the 1950s, this surreal opus is essentially an introspective memoir rife with intimate reflections, offbeat asides (ala a Letterman-inspired Top 10 List), plus personal anecdotes in which you really get to know a lot about the author's eclectic background which ranged from pee wee football to indie movies to mosh pit punk music.

Oh yeah, and dreadlocks, too!

Film Review: 'Spy'

Melissa McCarthy Stars as CIA Analyst-Turned-Spy in Fish-Out-of-Water Comedy



A kitchen fight erupts in the movie 'Spy' with McCarthy and Nargis Fakhri

By Kam Williams
For *The Skanner News*

For the past three years, Susan Cooper (Melissa McCarthy) has been stuck sitting behind a desk as an analyst at CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia. In that capacity, she's been providing technical support from afar to Bradley Fine (Jude Law), a veteran spy who has successfully handled a series of dangerous missions over the course of a decorated career. Serving as his eyes and ears via hidden cameras and listening devices, the 40 year-old spinster's been quite content to live vicariously through her dashing colleague, especially given the big crush she has on him.

Everything changes the day he's murdered while attempting to secure a suitcase bomb about to fall into the wrong hands. Susan subsequently pressures her reluctant boss (Allison Janney)

to be allowed to replace her late partner in the search for the assassin as well as the rogue nuclear device.

Elaine is understandably reluctant, since this would be the plump pencil pusher's very first field assignment. Nonetheless, she

She blows her matronly tourist cover by coming to the assistance of a fellow agent (Jason Statham) unaware that he's in imminent peril. Between the loose-lipped loudmouth's need for attention and her appetite whetted for more action,

It has its moments, yet one tires of the tendency to rely on Melissa to generate laughs by way of her trademark trash-talk

grudgingly gives Susan a new identity ("Carol Jenkins"), before issuing strict orders about keeping a low profile and about observing but never confronting any of the bad guys she encounters overseas.

Needless to say, the rules of engagement are out the window just as soon as Susan's plane lands in Paris.

there's little hope of getting the subtle surveillance genie back in the bottle.

Thus unfolds *Spy*, the latest collaboration between Melissa McCarthy and writer/director Paul Feig. This film pales in comparison to either *Bridesmaids* (2011) or *The Heat* (2013), perhaps because, here, Melissa has been asked to carry the comedy load alone. In *Bridesmaids*, she shared those duties with a talented ensemble; in *The Heat*, her pairing with Sandra Bullock worked to perfection.

By contrast, this picture definitely has its moments, yet one tires of the tendency to rely on Melissa to generate laughs by way of her trademark trash-talk. Those vulgar comments were funny when delivered as unexpected asides in *Bridesmaids*. Now, they sort of fall flat when exposed as the only material a one-trick pony might have to offer.

A Melissa McCarthy vehicle recommended for fans with a big appetite for her crude, expletive-laced brand of humor.

★★ Good

Rated R for sexuality, brief nudity, violence and pervasive profanity

In English, French, Italian and German with subtitles

120 minutes

20th Century Fox

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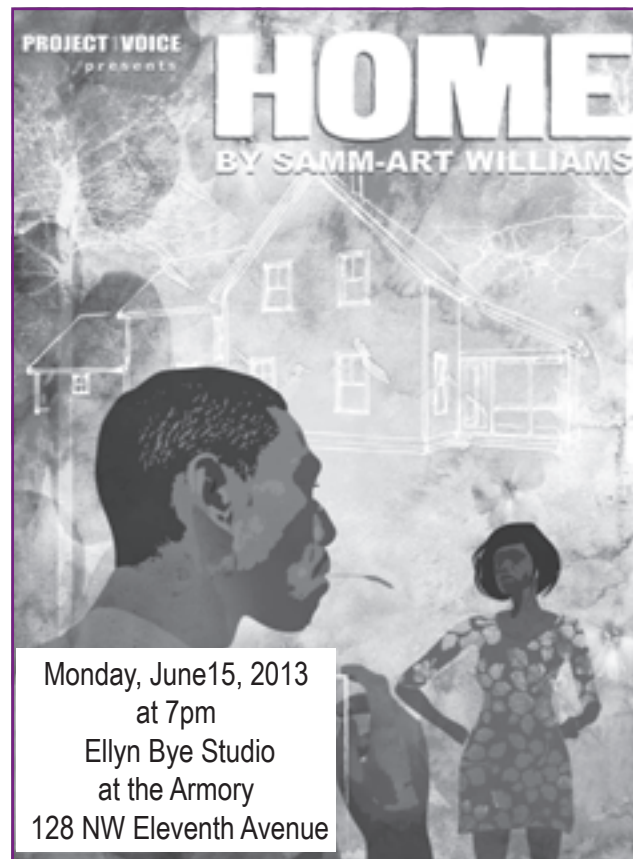
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