

Missing Signal

Seb Doubinsky

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In *Missing Signal*, Seb Doubinsky's sly science-fiction romp, a counterintelligence agent named Terrence Kovacs is tasked with spreading false UFO claims.

The strategy is designed to keep hostile governments perpetually preoccupied. Since Terrence's counterparts in enemy city-states are up to the same thing, Terrence's job involves identifying and neutralizing opposing disinformation. Terrence lives under fifty-seven false identities, some of whom have become celebrities in the ufology world.

Using disguises, acting flair, and phony blog personas, Terrence fills each role so convincingly that he's all but lost track of his true identity. His favorite word for his job, the stories he creates, and the stories he debunks is "bullshit." It's a never-ending chase down rabbit holes until he meets beautiful, seductive Vita, whose claims of alien origins he cannot disprove.

The story is told in terse chapters barely a page long. Though written in the third person, the viewpoint is always—and only—Terrence's. Initially, Terrence's wide-ranging ruminations seem like mental fluff mixed with the paranoia of an overworked mid-level employee, but the skillfully written snippets keep the pages turning and eventually resolve into a larger picture.

Terrence's view of the world is profoundly melancholy, muffled by yearning for the 1960s and 1970s. There's no sense of a present time or a more recent era. Even Vita's alien claims take on the feel of a 1960s science fiction movie: she purports to be an emissary sent to warn Earth of an alien takeover, a message sweetened by sex and hallucinogenic drugs.

As Terrence's seemingly inconsequential musings take on heft, the story becomes allegorical, reflecting contemporary real-world feelings of isolation and mistrust, issues like fake news, and fears that false personae created for internet consumption have become more relevant than the lives behind them.

Beneath the entertaining wrapper of science fiction, *Missing Signal* is a masterfully written work, both provocative and rewarding.

SUSAN WAGGONER (July/August 2018)

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