



The Flicker Men

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A quantum physicist shocks the world with a startling experiment, igniting a struggle between science and theology, free will and fate, and antagonizing forces not known to exist.

Eric Argus is a washout. His prodigious early work clouded his reputation and strained his sanity. But an old friend gives him another chance, an opportunity to step back into the light.

With three months to produce new research, Eric replicates the paradoxical double-slit experiment to see for himself the mysterious dual nature of light and matter. A simple but unprecedented inference blooms into a staggering discovery about human consciousness and the structure of the universe.

His findings are celebrated and condemned in equal measure. But no one can predict where the truth will lead. And as Eric seeks to understand the unfolding revelations, he must evade shadowy pursuers who believe he knows entirely too much already.

The Flicker Men Details

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Author : Ted Kosmatka

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From Reader Review The Flicker Men for online ebook

Jef Powers says

I found Ted Kosmatka's stories a few years back: Prophet of Bones, The Games, and N-Word (along with a slew of other ingenious short stories tucked about in the better SF magazines). Someone whose opinion I had come to appreciate in such matters told me: "You got to read this Kasmatka guy. He writes like a boss." They were correct. When I got wind of Ted Kasmatka's latest, The Flicker Men, I finagled a way to get my hands on a pre-published copy. That's how much I wanted to read it. I had an idea it might be good. I didn't know it was going to be this good.

One early review suggests The Flicker Men is akin to Stephen King and Stephen Hawking writing a book together. I cannot stress enough how this claim is not an exaggeration. Imagine King and Hawking spending a year together pounding out the best science fiction thriller in their power. Imagine too that the keen and lively spirit of another Stephen, noted evolutionary biologist, Stephen Jay Gould was in the room with them, cheerfully offering his own insights. (Steven Pinker and Steven Weinberg also spent several weekends with them to discuss mathematics, psychology, and religion but not necessarily in that order).

The Flicker Men is first-rate, sit on the edge of your beach chair entertainment. Even if you sit back in your beach chair it's good--especially if you sit back. It's brilliant. It is also spun with golden threads of scientific probabilities. So well written, The Flicker Men brings all these impressive scientific notions into the purview of those who've never even read an Arthur C. Clarke novel. Even my cousin who once told me Sci-Fi was for teenagers who couldn't get a date is going to like this story. If one reads ten pages into The Flicker Men, others will have to assume their household chores until they've finish it. It's that kind of good.

Remember the Double-split quantum mechanics experiment that physicist Brian Greene is always explaining on the Discovery Channel, well, Mr. Kasmatka has finally put some literary wings on the thing. As it turns out there's more to that experiment than anyone could have imagined (except for, of course, Ted Kosmatka).

The only thing I disliked about this book was that it wasn't 500 pages longer. I hope Ted Kosmatka makes so much money with this novel he can buy a big old three-story Victorian mansion somewhere in the middle of some magnificent, quiet nowhere and write morning, noon, and night.

Not buying and reading The Flicker Men would be like failing to see the Rolling Stones if they just happen to be playing on your own back deck on a cool starry evening.

Johnny says

Sometimes, "hard" science fiction doesn't seem worth the effort to me. Sometimes, it seems like the author is using exposition to explain intricate systems to the reader without being concerned about the pacing of the plot. I don't like thrillers such as Tom Clancy's post-*Patriot Games* in which it seems to me that there is more attention paid to specification sheets than to human insights. Yet, *The Flicker Men* caught my attention for multiple reasons and I am glad it did.

First, I am fascinated by the implications of quantum theory and the plot of *The Flicker Men* turns on this idea. Second, I was using my understanding of quantum theory to hypothesize far-future inventions in my

Traveller role-playing game and, my notes described a “flickering man” before I ever discovered this novel (We don’t treat them exactly the same, but it’s an interesting coincidence.). Third, the protagonist’s struggle has, for me and at least one of the characters in the novel, a theological debate between determinism and “free will.” That’s something I feel strongly about—especially regarding the latter which I hold true. Fourth, the protagonist’s experience unfolds a lot like one of the *noir* thrillers from Hard Case Crime. Except for the science, I would almost think it comparable to a *Quarry* novel by Max Allen Collins or one of Westlake’s darker novels. In short, *The Flicker Men* grabbed me and wouldn’t let me loose—even though my schedule precluded me from reading it straight through (I would have if I could have.).

A lot of the elements in the story build from the Feynman-slit (or Young-slit) experiment, using a thermionic gun to shoot a photon stream through at two slits. The result on a monitor would be a wave-form interrupted such that an interference pattern of overlapping waves appears (p. 38). Yet, if one puts a detector at the two slits, one measures two distinct streams of phosphorescent particles. There is no interference when measuring like this (p. 39). From one reading, there is. In the real world, and before the fictional events in this novel, Feynman said of this experiment, “It has in it the heart of quantum mechanics. In truth, it contains only a mystery.” (quoted on p. 44)

Now, things become more interesting when the protagonist, Eric Argus, makes a breakthrough in his experiment. The resulting research paper garners the interest of a prominent religious evangelist. The evangelist believes he can use the research as a way to prove the existence of the human soul. While the results appear to confirm said existence, the results also reveal a frightening phenomenon. It is the latter revelation that puts Argus in a precarious position with those who are angry that the latter results were revealed. The evangelist becomes disillusioned: “Can anything in this world be truly relied upon? Even atoms are an evanescent haze—emptiness stacked upon emptiness which we have somehow willed ourselves to believe in.” (p. 126) As Argus interrogates him further and points out that his discouragement is costing his reputation, the evangelist responds, “Even fame, it seems, follows the rules of quantum mechanics. The eye of the public changes what it observes.” (p. 127)

Eventually, Argus discovers that there are those afraid of the world’s *eberaxi*, later defined as “errant axis” on p. 240. As quantum mechanics recognizes both the reality of the wave and the particles, Argus discovers an incongruity in the universe. “Free will in a determinant universe. Because the math was dead serious. It was only in us that it failed. The mystery wasn’t those who *couldn’t* collapse the waves [by their observations of Argus’ experiment]. The mystery was those who could [collapse the waves via observation.]”

To make a long story short, Argus has not just grasped, but proved the theoretical physics of “Gabriel’s horn” (aka “Torricelli’s trumpet”), the idea of a Matryoshka (aka Russian dolls) universe (p. 244). Eventually, Argus has to put the pieces together of why some can conceive of this and others cannot. And, it is a most dangerous game. Without a spoiler, let me just say that Ted Kosmatka foreshadows the conclusion perfectly. But I won’t tell you why it’s perfect, just that it’s brilliant. Indeed, I felt like *The Flicker Men* was brilliant through and through. I think it rivals my favorite hard science-fiction in the late James P. Hogan’s work.

Britta says

This almost felt like two books. The first half was immensely enjoyable and interesting (so much so that I

was willing to ignore how thinly drawn some characters were, with the notable exception of Satvik, and how weird the style was at times with the short staccato sentences). I loved the science and the idea behind the story, and I was expecting to see the consequences of the findings in the first half unfurl.

But all of a sudden I was reading a completely different book. The vague, shadowy bad guys (yawn), the chase and escape scenes (that I ended up skimming over), the hero surviving seemingly impossible odds, the mystifying mumbo jumbo that was disguised as scientific talk but made no sense whatsoever. Add to that some more characters that were so flimsy, they barely registered on the page. (Pretty much all female characters in this book kind of make you wonder "Why was she there now? Is there a point to her?" Or in one case "Wait? They had sex now? I thought she was just kind of there? Did they ever talk? Well, he did mention she was beautiful, I guess".)

I also have only a very vague idea what happened at the end but to be honest, by that time I just didn't care anymore.

Mind you, if you like reading the type of action thriller the second half contains, you will enjoy it a lot more than me (it's just a personal thing that I often find these things boring to read), and the other reviews here a largely positive, but if you read the beginning and are hooked by the concept, don't expect any further exploration of the scientific and global impact.

Jeffrey Keeten says

”After a while, quantum mechanics starts to affect your worldview.”

‘What does this mean?’

‘The more research I did, the less I believed.’

‘In quantum mechanics?’

‘No,’ I said. ‘In the world.’”

Eric Argus is one of those brilliant minds that burn bright and then burn out. He is crippled with thoughts of depression. He usually is two-fisting it, but not in the way that most of us think of it. He has a bottle of Jack Daniels in one hand and his father's pistol in the other. Which one he lifts to his face is something that has to be determined every time he wants to take a drink or eat a bullet.

His father killed himself with that same pistol.

His mother lost the hard edges of her mind. She is adrift in a space of her own making but is still trying to make sense of the universe she is slowly leaving. *”Most of the universe is missing,” she says. ‘Scientists know this, so they invented dark matter, but dark matter is a cheat.’ And now I see anger rising up in her, genuine outrage in those hazel eyes.*

...

I reach for her hand across the table.

‘Dark matter is just a way to equal your equal signs,’ she says. ‘A hack. A fix.’ She leans forward. ‘Black magic.’

'Mom, I miss you.'"

Even burnouts have to make a living. When a good friend offers him a position with a research company on a trial basis, he takes the extended hand with shaking fingers. They want him for his old research, but he knows he can't go back there. It is nothing but a black tar pit for his mind to wallow in. He decides what he wants to do is replicate Richard Feynman's paradoxical double-slit experiment.

Ted Kosmatka explains this in such a way that I can almost grasp the concept.

In replication, Argus finds out something, something that will shake the very foundations of science and theology.

He finds the soul.

Revolutionary enough, but he also discovers something else that shouldn't even be possible.

(view spoiler)

In the midst of the ensuing chaos, he meets a blind woman who studies sounds. "*There's a Mozart concerto hidden in every burst of static.*" He learns of The Flicker Men, people who are trying to slow things down, hold back change, keep science like his from ever being known.

His research broke the world.

The science is brilliant and somewhat overwhelming, but I found that if I took a few deep breaths, which at least temporarily sent more oxygen to my brain, I could start to piece together, not the math, but the implications of the math. If you read this book, you will have to stop reading from time to time just to let your brain ponder the probabilities. In many ways, what Argus discovers is more frightening than a zombie apocalypse or a rampaging virus or Donald Trump as President of the United States.

I was looking for a scientific thriller, and Ted Kosmatka delivered exactly what I was looking for. The science is probable. The twists and turns kept me slightly off balance. And who doesn't love a good shadowy organization that controls our lives more than our own government.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Kate says

Such an exciting and compelling SF thriller! But while I'd award the first half five stars, I'd have to give the second three stars. My enjoyment in the novel never floundered but I would have appreciated it even more if the science hadn't flown completely over my head. I understood the gist of it - and loved the premise - but during the second half there were sections when I didn't have a clue what was going on. Quantum physics, especially when it goes awry, isn't the easiest of subjects for a lay reader. Also, there were some fascinating leads in the first half which weren't chased during the second, turning it into a different kind of novel

altogether. Nevertheless, very hard to put down.

Vladimir Ivanov says

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Traci says

[And . . . okay, so the Flicker Men kidnap Satvik, hold him for two weeks, then grab Eric---who was far easier to find, yet gets grabbed second, but I digress---then kill off Satvik, but not Eric, even though they want E

Faith says

Eric Argus is a morose, suicidal alcoholic with a gun in one hand and a liquor bottle in the other, both literally and metaphorically. He is a discredited physicist with a history of instability. An old friend gives him the opportunity to get back into research. Most of the scientific explanations in this book were way over my head, but the bottom line is that Eric appears to have discovered a phenomenon with light waves that occurs only when observed by human beings. It doesn't occur if unobserved, or if observed by other species.

Some attribute this unique quality of human beings to consciousness while others believe it is evidence of the existence of a human soul. An evangelist wants to use Eric's device to test when consciousness begins in fetuses. There are lots of philosophical implications of this discovery that could have been explored in this book, but the author went in a different, less interesting route.

At about the two thirds point the book introduced the flicker men and a mysterious sphere, after which the

book ceased to make any sense at all to me. The book really went off the rails here. I don't think the author had the guts to deal with the possible ramifications of Eric's experiment in the real world, so he invented some fantasy creatures and took the book in a direction that did not interest me.

I never comment on the state of ARCs in my reviews because I know they are subject to correction, but this one was in egregious shape, maybe not coincidentally also starting at the two thirds point. They seemed to stop editing the ARC that I received from that point to the end. Maybe the editor couldn't stand to read any more of the incoherent story. The first part of the book was pretty interesting, but I certainly didn't enjoy the end.

I received a free copy of this book from the publisher.

Book Riot Community says

A quantum physicist is given a second chance at brilliance, but it just might cost him his life, in this whip-fast sci-fi thriller! Eric Argus has washed out personally and professionally when an old friend gives him a job in a research lab. But when Eric discovers old equipment that was used to search for the human soul and decides to test it for himself, he opens a can of worms that the world may not be ready for. Now he and his colleagues are in a whole lot of danger, and unless Eric can answer the great mysteries brought about by the experiment's implications, it could be the end for everyone. I love a great sci-fi thriller, and this one is top notch!

Tune in to our weekly new books podcast, All The Books: <http://bookriot.com/category/all-the-...>

Carlos says

This book was very fast paced, honestly I think you could finish this one in one day. The premise of the book is very promising and up to certain point, the book delivers it. What i liked; the science, the premise that our main character had discovered something he shouldn't have and now he has to fight for his life against "supernatural"forces, The idea behind the plot that science is key to open our understanding of the world but that at the same time we are not yet ready to understand all of what we encounter. What i didn't like; The ending , it felt too pedestrian after the build up towards it , the fact that the author didn't spend a lot of time explaining the world it had created, instead dumping it all on the reader in just a couple of pages. Irregardless ; I liked this book a lot because of its plot and the mixture of science with adventure was a hit for me.

Chip says

WTF did I just read? I've seen elsewhere commentary that this book is a mashup of Stephen King and Stephen Hawking, which sounds about right. (And, I'll independently add that those two names only differ by the addition of three letters, "haw", to one name ... fittingly strange.) Maybe throw in a little Neal Stephenson. STEPHENson. Oh my god.

I enjoyed it, appreciated the originality of the concepts, thought the writing was better than adequate, found the end less than fully conclusionary, and afterwards thought (in addition to WTF did I just read) ok do I want to read another book by this author - yes or no. Unless there's a third option maybe.

Joan says

Eric Argus, an accomplished scientist now an alcoholic on the verge of suicide, receives a second chance at resurrecting his career in the form of four months of probationary employment at Hansen Research. Any line of investigation is acceptable as long as the researcher's project has scientific merit; after several weeks of indecision, Eric stumbles across an electron gun and a detector and decides to recreate Feynman's double slit wave-particle experiment. He wants to see what Feynman saw, to experience for himself the dual nature of light and matter.

When he discovers that only human beings can collapse the wave function in the experiment, things rapidly escalate into this being hailed as "proof" of the existence of the human soul. But an accidental discovery that not all humans can collapse the wave function turns Eric's world upside down, putting him in dire jeopardy as sinister forces wield their power, seeking to destroy his friends, his work, and his life.

Brilliant writing makes this riveting science fiction thriller impossible to put down. Believable characters and situations keep the pages turning and the suspenseful plot has more than enough science to satisfy. Filled with unexpected twists and turns, tension mounts as the story races its way to an ending that will leave readers deliberating the tantalizing possibilities.

Highly recommended.

FanFiAddict says

Every once in a while, you come across a novel that makes your brain want to explode. *The Flicker Men* is one of those novels. There is so a lot of sciencing going on, but the story is so much deeper than quantum physics and theories with life altering outcomes. But, I will say, I did have to put the book down a few times in order to perform some research of my own (not saying you have to do that, but I always like to learn about what I'm reading.)

Ted has written a well paced story here. Yes, most of the science will probably be over your head, but it does not detract from the plot and Kosmatka does a great job explaining what the meatheads don't understand. The book is full of suspense and action and the characters are vividly described. There are plenty of plot twists and head scratchers to keep even the minimally science-y people intrigued, but this is definitely a story you have never seen before and is well worth your time.

Lori says

A quantum physics thriller. the first half is easy to follow, the second becomes a bit of a mind fuck which is fine by me but I wish the final resolutions had been clearer, I really have questions about the ending, which

was supposed to be clearer.

Jacqie says

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

The Flicker Men starts with a great premise. A physicist, somewhat wrecked by his past research (which has made him doubt the nature of reality) recreates an experiment which shows that light changes from wave to particle depending on how it is observed. This is interesting enough in itself, but then he thinks about testing what exactly constitutes an observer. Do animals have the self-awareness to count?

I don't want to say much more about this part of the plot, but it gave me some chills and made me think about just how alone we could be in our self-awareness. It also made me wonder if anything like this idea has actually been tested.

The science was interesting and plausible. It's actually one of the more scientific science fiction books I've read recently, and I quite enjoyed that aspect.

My problems with the book didn't begin until more than half-way through. Suspicious figures are watching, people have gone missing, and sinister organizations are taking an interest in the research. Great! We can have a thriller along with our science fiction. But then my pet peeves came cropping up. Our hero gets strung along for almost 50 pages with mysterious people giving him cryptic warnings and telling him that he's got to wait for the right person to come along to the right place to tell him the thing he's got to know, even though everyone involved seems to also know this mysterious thing. Once the person who can give him the information comes along, everything is still very vague. By this point, it's pretty obvious that some supernatural elements are in play, but our hero's allies are maddeningly vague. In answer to the question: "Who are these people?" we get the answer "they go by many names... but those who have seen them in action call them the flicker men." It has taken 200 pages of this 300 page book for the title to even be referenced. And that's all the detail we get!

At this point I quit in disgust. The book began with a fascinating scientific inquiry and an original take on physics that combined the spiritual with the scientific, but then it got all mystical and went right off the rails. I would rather have stuck with the science- frankly, it was scarier.
