

Interview with author Tygarjas Twyrles Bigstyck

If angels became human, would they be good helpers? Author's new work imagines changes in Eden

By JEAN BARTLETT | THE WEEK OF 2-4-19–2-10-19



(Jean Bartlett photo)

Tygarjas Twyrles Bigstyck at Linda Mar Beach, Pacifica, CA, late January, 2019.

Tygarjas Twyrles Bigstyck has completed his second book. It is titled: "The Chronicles of the Angels of Eden: Volume One: Part One." To uncover his second book, an exploration into his first book is in order.

"Passenger: A Divinely Inspired Comedy in 13 Books" was released in 2010.

"Now I would call 'Passenger,' 13 chapters rather than 13 books," he said. "That way of describing the segments of the book was a little pretentious although I am happy to admit my pretentious nature!"

Sitting for this interview at Soul Grind Coffee Roasters in Pacifica's Pedro Point Shopping Center, Tygarjas explained his thinking on why he called and calls "Passenger," "a divinely inspired comedy."

"I made it a point not to read Dante's 'Divine Comedy' (or any of the poet's works) until after the first draft of 'Passenger' was complete because I didn't want it influencing the story at all. And so it didn't. But before getting 'Passenger' published, I read through Dante's 'Divine Comedy.' From there I understood what, in a classical sense, comedy meant. And what occurred to me is through no desire whatsoever to imitate or mimic Dante, that nonetheless 'Passenger' is, more or less, a divine comedy of sorts. I'm not saying Dante and I are in the same league! But I am saying that in terms of comedy being in the classical sense – a person beginning in kind of a tragic circumstance and ending up in potentially a relatively happy circumstance – 'Passenger' is that. I leave the

ending in 'Passenger' ambiguous. But personally, the way I interpret my own ambiguity, is that the book's passenger is left in a happy place even though the driver calls it hell. To me this is what my version of what a comedy looks like." ("Passenger" is available online and through Florey's Book Co. in Pacifica.)

Tygarjas was born in San Francisco and grew up in Pacifica. He is a graduate of New Orleans's Tulane University. His double major is in English, with an emphasis on creative writing and religious studies. His first book took two years to bring to draft "and six years of dragging my heels and trying to figure out how to get it published and basically letting my brain keep me from getting it done."

The inspiration that eventually led to "Passenger," happened after his freshman year of college, when his religious studies were well underway.

"I had had a particularly powerful LSD trip in which all those teachings flooded my brain at once, along with a couple of other factors that tweaked my mind in just such a way that I felt, in that moment, that I had received this mystical experience in which I had as much of an understanding of the Divine as I could want from my little human perspective. Not long after having that experience, I was having a discussion with a bus driver. This bus driver was telling me about his LSD experiences and how he remembered being high on acid and just wanting to hug everyone. It naturally occurred to me that, oh, that kind-of sounds like heaven. A moment later he was

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telling me – not while he was on acid but just in general – that he did not understand homosexuality and that he kind of felt apprehensive about it. That set in my mind this dichotomy where that kind of sounded like hell to me. To be that worried and that nervous about somebody else's lifestyle when it doesn't directly affect yours at all and you don't need to participate. That conversation with that bus driver set up this dichotomy of heaven and hell and then my brain took that and started concocting an extended metaphor around it whereby I was describing somebody's experience learning how to differentiate between heaven and hell.

"What occurred to me after having this conversation, was the bus driver was confused as to his own potential and kind of remaining in the light of what is. And so the extended metaphor through 'Passenger' ultimately is the confusion thinking that heaven and hell mean one thing, when really it means something a little different – the ability to let go of that 'hell' mentality, the ability to let go of what doesn't really matter in one's personal existence, especially when what one is looking at is otherwise harmless, except for how it holds onto that idea, and heaven then being merely creating circumstances whereby one is focused on what they are really enjoying in life and sharing that with everyone else. I think that right there is the key to what I would consider heaven to be. Not just creating a cool thing for yourself. It is something that contributes to this greater whole where now everybody is enjoying the cool thing that began as: 'I would really like to take this approach to life.' That's why the bus driver's experience of feeling like hugging everyone made such a strong impact on me in terms of, oh, that sounds like heaven. In heaven, we are all just hugging each other."

In Pacifica, California where Tygarjas lives, he works at Safeway Supermarket in the Linda Mar neighborhood. He's worked there for 12 years. He started out as a Food Clerk and is now the Front End Manager. Unrelated, he also serves as Board Vice President of the Pacifica Resource Center. The Pacifica Resource Center's mission is to "support the economic security of Pacifica families and individuals by providing a safety net of food, housing assistance, and other critical services, including coaching, advocacy, information, and referral." Board service is a volunteer position. Tygarjas was formally introduced to the knowledge of the Pacifica Resource Center at a City Council meeting. As he listened, he recognized that this was the organization that had helped several of his friends. And so he began to earnestly advocate for the nonprofit when he came to the microphone during the public comment portion of the bi-monthly meetings. Eventually his passion and knowledge led to an invitation to serve on the Board. Tygarjas attends Pacifica City Council meetings regularly.

"I feel it is important to be active and engaged in my community. It's the best way I can think of to be informed because it is a much more visceral way to engage my brain while I am learning things on the one hand. On the other hand, it affords me the opportunity to actually stand up and say something if it occurs to me in real time that I actually have something to say to Council. I can't do that if I am in front of a television."



Jean Bartlett photo. Tygarjas at work, 2015.

Tygarjas very much believes in learning about the world he is a part of. This is why he has stood before California legislators in the State Capital on several occasions. The last time he went to Sacramento was to take a stand against offshore drilling. He has also appeared before state lawmakers to oppose fracking: "the process of injecting liquid at high pressure into subterranean rocks, boreholes, etc. so as to force open existing fissures and extract oil or gas."

"When I was a kid, my dad challenged a lot of conventional thought that I might be exposed to. Even in terms of school he would challenge the conventions of what school was teaching me. He was of the mind that I should not merely believe the information I was given, not that it was necessarily inaccurate, but certainly at the least it is not a full picture."

The author's family also provided him with early childhood instruction on the legendary American rock band, the Grateful Dead.

"My first Dead show was in 1985, I was 2 years old. Other families have more conventional forms of religion. In terms of organized religion, even though we were Jewish, I'd say I attended Grateful Dead concerts far more often than synagogue."

When asked, Tygarjas ticks off a list of personal faves.

"Sam Philipps is absolutely my favorite songwriter, though the Talking Heads will probably forever be my favorite band. But when it comes to pure lyricism, Sam Philipps is the one...though lately Katie Herzig has been a close second there and Robert Hunter, who wrote the lyrics for most of the Grateful Dead songs, is a favorite on the male side. Books include: 'Tao Teh Ching,' 'Life of Pi,' 'The Time Traveler's Wife,' and 'The Restaurant at the End of the Universe.'"

If a favorite musician is playing within a 100-mile radius of home, Tygarjas will be there. He has also been a fan of poet Robert Blake since he was a kid. That was around the same time, middle school, that he began to be engaged in his own philosophical spiritual studies.

"At some point, somebody introduced me to the idea of 'infinity' which is not only big, but literally indescribably big. But my mind would try to find some sort of example of how to conceptualize it, even though by definition it is beyond concept. So things like that would keep my mind awake at night when I was 11 or 12. I was thinking about space itself and trying to think in terms of looking through infinite space and trying to figure out some sort of imagery I could use to try to get a grasp on it, which is not possible on the one hand to literally think of nothing. Even if you are just in a void, you are perceiving blackness, darkness, that is something. The brain is putting something where there is nothing."

Tygarjas' German-born paternal grandfather was in a concentration camp in the Second World War. That too shaped the author's perspective.

"When you grow up in a family in which your family would not have been created unless somebody survived the Holocaust, that probably colors one's outlook a little bit! While my grandfather spent a short amount of time in other places, he was imprisoned in Buchenwald (near Weimar, Germany) for four years."

All of this is to introduce the author behind, "The Chronicles of the Angels of Eden: Volume One: Part One." Tygarjas opens his "Chronicles" with God and the angels chatting casually just after Earth is created.

"The tag line is, 'these angels get incarnated into human form in order to help humanity and are initially very bad at it.'"

The author explained further.

"The main character, Luciferous, it's a play on words. Luciferous means something very specific and really doesn't have anything to do with the devil – although, it sounds a lot like Lucifer. I urge everyone to grab a dictionary! So I am setting up an expectation in the reader's mind that I can then hopefully challenge in the best ways possible. That is often what my writing is about. Challenging certain conventions that for whatever reasons seem to have seeped into our culture and that strike me as inherently unhelpful, especially if what one's concern is, is getting into the kingdom of heaven.

"I hope my new work challenges people. For those people that are staunch non-believers, I hope it will open them up to a different way of looking at how divinity can be conceived – how it can be thought of and looked at. For those who are true believers in whatever religion is going on with them, I hope it can challenge their belief and open them to a greater possibility than maybe their current belief is allowing. And for anyone in between, I hope it gives them food for thought so that they can get a little closer to what they are thinking the reality of our common situation really is."

The author offered a short version of what he believes that we can all be at this moment in time: "The skeleton key of it all."

"I think kindness, as much as we can cultivate, creates a better moment every time we are able to actively engage in it. If we are meeting that level of kindness as often as possible, I think that that at some point it satisfies any question that there could possibly be."

To read the introduction and first chapter of Tygarjas's new book, "The Chronicles of the Angels of Eden: Volume One: Part One," enter [here](#).



A Bartlett's Biographies Headliner

Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco.