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## Page 1 of 5

sometimes greatest challenges can be found at home. Read Homer's THE HOMECOMING from Penguin Classics.

"It's like nothing Homer ever wrote before. THE HOMECOMING is a real departure." --Rosetta Stone, Harvard Department of Classics

Well, now we have the film THE RETURN, which is not actually a third book, but is based on the second half of THE ODYSSEY. It skips all the fantastical parts (the Cyclops, Circe, and so on), and starts when Odysseus is washed up on the shore of Ithaca, looking like a genuine tramp, rather than disguised as one later by Athena. Well, unless you count as fantastical having a dog live to be well over twenty years and immediately recognize Odysseus after he has been gone two decades, especially when the old servants and even his wife don't recognize him (at least until the old nurse sees a familiar scar, and it's not clear when Penelope figures it out). And it skips all the flashbacks, the fictional stories Odysseus makes up to conceal his identity, and the journey of Telemachus.

So what we get are all the truly depressing parts, where we see the suitors being beyond obnoxious, mistreating and killing the few still loyal to Odysseus, and Odysseus going through psychological torment, probably PTSD, and in general all sorts of things making watching this unpleasant. Maybe I've been spoiled by the versions aimed more at a family audience. Certainly those do not have Penelope musing on the evils of war and asking Odysseus (who she's thinks is just a tramp--or does she?) whether he raped, or killed women and children. (As Taras Wolansky pointed out in the 05/30/25 issue of the MT VOID, this seems an anachronistic attitude on her part.)

The film does not have much of what happens after the suitors are killed, e.g., the slave women who "fraternized" with the suitors being killed. This may be because it is not clear that slave women had a whole lot of choice in this matter. And Odysseus tells Penelope he couldn't return because of his PTSD, when in the poem it is due to forces beyond his control. They did sort of keep the bed thing, though.

Released theatrically 06 December 2024.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt19861162/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_return\\_2024](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_return_2024)

PERFECT CREATURE (2006): The whole "vampires in something like a Victorian England setting" reminds me of Kim Newman's "Anno Dracula" stories. There are differences, of course: in PERFECT CREATURES, the vampires and humans co-exist on a (seemingly) equal level, while in "Anno Dracula" there's been what might be called a hostile take-over by the vampires.

It is certainly a different premise than the usual vampire film, even if the mechanics of the plot (vampire kills, people hunt him, etc.) is fairly familiar.

Released at a film festival 30 March 2007; currently available on Hoopla.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0403407/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/perfect\\_creature](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/perfect_creature)

LIFE AFTER PEOPLE (Season 2) (2010): Season 2 of "Life After People" turned out to be available on the History Channel website even though I don't get the History Channel. (Season 3 is still available only to people who \*do\* get the History Channel.) Alas, they used up the best ideas in the original "movie", and then starting looking at less interesting aspects in the first season. Obviously pretty soon they are reduced to either repeating themselves or getting into minutiae. The whole section on the mental institution in Connecticut was pretty useless, along with the story of the deserted Air Force base in North Dakota, the Locust Plague of 1874, the description of the Cheyenne Mountain Complex, and what the climbers on

Mount Everest leave behind. Their favorite line seems to be, "There's one place on earth where it's already happened," said after they describe some post-apocalyptic scenario.

The problem with following up what was intended, I suspect, as a stand-alone movie, is sort of like what happened to NESFA, which produced "The Best of James H. Schmitz", but then had no way to follow up with more of Schmitz's work. "The Second Best of James H. Schmitz"? I don't think so. After that first foray into collections, they decided that they would either produce the complete works (or at least short works) of an author, even if it was multiple volumes, or not do them at all.

Released streaming 05 January 2010.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1433058/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/life\\_after\\_people](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/life_after_people)

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**Life on Mars** (comments by Gregory Frederick):

Looks like the best evidence of past life on Mars has been found by the Perseverance Rover on Mars. Though not conclusive, it will be hard to prove that only nature geologic processes caused the mineral deposits the rover found. A sample return mission would be needed to do more testing but it's still very, very compelling evidence.

<https://www.space.com/astronomy/mars/did-nasas-perseverance-rover-actually-find-evidence-of-life-on-mars-we-need-to-haul-its-samples-home-to-find-out-scientists-say>

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**ALTERNATE GEOMETRIES** edited by Nick Bourbaki (book review by Mark R. Leeper):

[This originally ran in the 04/01/94 issue, but it was too good not to re-publish. -ecl]

Well, Nick Bourbaki is back with another mind-bending alternate world extravaganza. While I enjoyed the first two (ALTERNATE GREEN VEGETABLES and ALTERNATE SHIRT-PACKING MATERIALS), I found this one slightly lacking in imagination. I think that Euclid's Parallel Postulate is pretty much self-evident to even the casual reader. I think that it is one thing to say that someplace else there is kale with roots like a carrot and to follow that idea through, but you can see right on a piece of paper in front of you that the Parallel Postulate is true and it is pretty tough to envision it any other way. Maybe it's the focus. There seems to be a subgenre of science fiction these days that concentrates on knocking the old masters like Euclid, mostly by people not fit to carry Euclid's pencil-box, if he had a pencil box. Some of the ideas here are well thought out, but the authors keep knocking their heads against the difficulty in suspending disbelief. (The claim has been made that this category is aimed at adolescent boys of all ages, without a strong foundation in mathematics, so I'm sure some will say that's why I find it usually dull and often offensive in its glorification of purely abstract mathematics, but there you have it.) Only the alternate world aspect of this anthology made it intriguing to me, and I found that part was often a let-down. Why? Well, let's see.

First, though, let me talk about the \*best\* ideas. "The Land Where All Lines Meet" by Georg Friedrich Bernhard Riemann (and isn't that a mouthful?) is set in a world where every line intercepts every other line. This seems to have the nastiest implications for the transportation industry. Railroad locomotives have to be designed with wheels that are flexible enough to move in and out and travels on any set of tracks are limited by the fact that some place the two rails have to come together and the locomotive tends to fall over because the base is too small. On the other hand human relations turn out to be totally

affected. There is less petty crime and far more violent crime since if a criminal is robbing somebody he is virtually assured that the victim will run into him again. Since all paths eventually meet, the victim has only to wait long enough and he is sure to run into the criminal again. The criminal, knowing this, is more likely to kill his victim or not to bother robbing him in the first place. If killing is the choice the police have only to wait long enough since the killer is totally certain to return to the scene of the crime. There were many good ideas that could have been explored but for reasons not entirely clear, Riemann kept returning to the same concepts.

The other intriguing story was Nick Lobachevsky's "A Life in the Saddle." He tells his story in a world where there are many different parallels to given line through a given point. In this world society has never really had much chance to develop since human relationships are very short. All work that is accomplished is done by people who are constantly in each other's presence since once two people separate, they can never be certain of finding each other again. What little architecture that can be built is extremely shoddy and prone to falling apart since one is never really sure in building a four wall structure if the fourth wall will or will not meet the first. To improve the chances most buildings are built with three walled sides and a fourth that is left open to the elements.

The next best story in the anthology is "Kikuyu and the Gnu Yu Rode In On" by newcomer Mike Resnick. He presents a universe in which all lines in space and time converge in pre-revolutionary Kenya. Resnick tells a good story but one wonders why the universe would choose such an arbitrary point on which to center.

From there the stories fall off rapidly. Patrick Robertson contributes (if that is the word) a story "If I Ran the Circus" in which the whole question of Euclid's fifth postulate because there is only one line in all of space time and it goes straight back to some idealized point in the past.

Will Clinton's story "Random Acts of Kindness, Other People's Money" starts with a similar premise to the Robertson story. Time travelers go back in time to find the idealized point only to discover that it cannot be found. They conclude that the line took too sharp a turn to the right and the travelers could not follow it.

Albrecht Durer adds a touch of artistry with "Affine Mess You've Gotten Me Into" which has a painter enter his own painting and finds himself in a world where one can actually walk to the horizon. In this world any two lines do meet, but only once. If they do not meet any place else they always meet on the horizon as a rendezvous of last resort. The horizon then, in this world, functions as sort of a singles bar for pickup lines which seem to arrive at the horizon in polyester suits and listen to ear-splitting music. Unfortunately, they are doomed to frustration since the horizon affords them little privacy and meeting at the horizon they find they cannot get together anyplace else.

Adam Baum's "The Long Way Round," is set in the world of spherical geometry. A man stopped for suspected drunk driving is told to walk a straight line and suddenly finds himself on a great circle.

The anthology concludes with Rene Descartes' "At Seventh Avenue and 52nd Street." It is set in an alien, dehumanized future. A man complains to his bartender that everyone and everything in the world is being reduced to numbers. When the bartender asks the man if the numbers do not make things easier the man responds "I think not" and instantly disappears. [-mrl]

### **Brother Guy and the New Yorker** (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Well, I solved my paywall problem; I went to the public library and checked out that copy of the magazine. I should have thought of this earlier. [-ecl]

### **This Week's Reading** (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

To go with watching THE RETURN, I read the second half of THE ODYSSEY by Homer (translated by Robert Fitzgerald;

Farrar, Straus and Giroux; ISBN 978-0-374-52574-3).

One line that struck me was, "You know they go in foreign guise, the gods do, looking like strangers, turning up in towns and settlements to keep an eye on manners, good or bad." [Book XVII, Lines 635-638]

This seems like that old song, "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town":

You better watch out  
You better not cry  
Better not pout  
I'm telling you why  
Santa Claus is comin' to town, gather 'round

He's making a list  
And checking it twice;  
He's gonna find out who's naughty and nice  
Santa Claus is comin' to town

He sees you when you're sleeping  
He knows when you're awake  
He knows if you've been bad or good  
So be good for goodness sake!

This of course makes Santa sound like the gods, or more specifically, God. Many religions emphasize that God is always watching, and while He doesn't disguise himself as a human (leaving that one time aside), His angels do.

And all this brings to mind the surveillance of today, with databases, cameras, drones, and every other technique known to provide maximum information.

It makes the Greek gods seem positively amateurish. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Before you kill something make sure you have  
something better to replace it with; something  
better than political opportunist slamming hate  
horseshit in the public park.  
--Charles Bukowski, "Notes of a Dirty Old Man," 1969

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