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The Paper Menagerie And Other Stories



Synopsis

A publishing event: Best-selling author Ken Liu selects his award-winning science fiction and fantasy tales for a groundbreaking collection - including a brand-new piece exclusive to this volume. With his debut novel, *The Grace of Kings*, taking the literary world by storm, Ken Liu now shares his finest short fiction in *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories*. This mesmerizing collection features all of Ken's award-winning and award-finalist stories, including: "The Man Who Ended History: A Documentary" (finalist for the Hugo, Nebula, and Theodore Sturgeon Awards); "Mono No Aware" (Hugo Award winner); "The Waves" (Nebula Award finalist); "The Bookmaking Habits of Select Species" (Nebula and Sturgeon Award finalist); "All the Flavors" (Nebula award finalist); "The Litigation Master and the Monkey King" (Nebula Award finalist); and the most awarded story in the genre's history, "The Paper Menagerie" (the only story to win the Hugo, Nebula, and World Fantasy Awards). A must-have for every science fiction and fantasy fan, this beautiful book is an anthology to savor.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 15 hours and 41 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Audio

Audible.com Release Date: March 8, 2016

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B019R2ILYS

Best Sellers Rank: #30 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Science Fiction > Anthologies & Short Stories #194 in Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy > Anthologies #222 in Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Science Fiction > Anthologies

Customer Reviews

This author is obviously intelligent and expects his readers to use their noggins, too. I had run into the author only through reading his translation of Cixin Liu's *The Three-Body Problem*. That book was amazing which required Ken Liu to write at a level that moved not only the words but also the feeling of the book from Chinese to English. I am not normally a reader of short stories because the stories are often (too-often for me) widely varying in both quality and

interest. And, I do not read books of short fiction from cover to cover over a few days like novels. They make great reading when I'm between novels. Well, I started this with all that in mind. That plan didn't last long. The pages turned themselves making me (making me!) read and read and read. (This book made me do it!) The quality of the writing is far beyond what I was expecting. The variety is amazing. There is a special skill needed to write short fiction. Each word must be carefully chosen. Each paragraph must move the story forward. Ken Liu knows how to do those things. There is fantasy, there is science fiction, there is even some mystery thrown in, plus there are some that I won't try to slot into any genre or hyphenated-sub-sub-genre. What was impressive was the consistency of the internal logic of each story. I had volume one of his *Grace of Kings* series on my Wish List since it came out. At about page 20 of this book I went ahead and bought it. It will join my TBR pile that already has a couple of hundred books in it "but really close to the top. This is a writer to watch as he heads for the top of his profession, and he will stay there.

With his new book, *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories*, Ken Liu shows that he is capable of vast range. Sure, in some of the stories you see the comic master who orchestrated coups and wondrous escapes in Dara, in others you see a thoughtful, poignant writer, who asks tough questions and leaves you with no certain answers. Many of these stories, such the one that gives the collection its title, *The Paper Menagerie*, have been published, read and loved before, and this book brings them together, to give it what Liu calls "the flavour of a retrospective", a brief look at his career as a short story writer. Indeed, the idea of memory, and memory as a source of conflict and confluence in communication, seems a running theme in many of these narratives, most powerfully in the last story of the collection, *The Man Who Ended History: A Documentary*. Though many stories are indeed stitched around the common theme of memory, recording, and how we retell stories, what I can say about Liu's work is this: it is remarkably wide ranging. From the space-opera-like *The Waves* to *All the Flavors*, the magical-realist novella set in early twentieth century Idaho, Liu presents a vast range of readerly experiences. The stories slip between science fiction and fantasy, and indeed, Liu confesses at the start that he doesn't pay much attention to the distinction between the two genres. He builds worlds that contain elements of both: for instance, in *Good Hunting* (a story that reminded me inexplicably of Gaiman's work) a young demon hunter meets a hulijing, a spirit who tests his ideas of good and bad. As the world changes around them, he adapts to it with the help of science, learning new principles of engineering and physics, while others, most notably his father, struggle to find a new place in this

world without mystery, seemingly without magic. What results is a beautiful blend of the best elements of myth, fantasy and science fiction, the author moving us seamlessly between all three. What I really like about Liu's work is the seeming effortless of his writing, of being able to introduce a whole new section of readers to worlds and mythologies that have remained outside the Western canon for a long time. Rather than explaining painstakingly any references to a non-Western/non-white culture, or consciously building himself up to be a representative of anything, Liu works these elements into his stories and allows readers to either learn more about them from the context, or look them up online if they're really interested. For me personally, this is an extremely welcome and emulation-worthy style.

Coming from a culture (or cultures, I should say) that is not as well-known to readers of epic fantasy as say, medieval England, it's sometimes hard to know when to draw the line between fantasising and exoticising. Liu never makes that mistake. When he narrates martial exploits of soldiers from the many now-Chinese kingdoms, or even talks of the encounters between East and West, whether in the gold-springs of the Midwest or the paddy fields of US-held Taiwan, Liu never seems to consciously present one side as more or less real or normal than the other. The individual is the intersection of multiple spheres of identity, he had said in the same interview, and he bears that out in his writing. His characters, whether they hail to pasts far distant, or futures beyond our imagining, are all composites of multiple cultures, influences, tastes. The stories in this volume moved me, none more so than the last, 'The Man Who Ended History'. I feel it is an especially important story for the time we live in, the sort of conflicts over ownership, nation and culture that rage around us. Again, perhaps because of where I come from, where these questions have gained even more immediacy, I felt drawn to this story more than any other in his collection. Liu uses the structure of a transcribed documentary to tell the story of a man who, with the help of his physicist wife, builds a time machine, that takes people back to the past, literally, and allows them to observe it for themselves. The period he selects is a controversial, horrifying one in Manchu, China during the Second World War. The conflicts the testimonials give rise to, and the old wounds they dredge up, bring the two countries, China and Japan, and belatedly the US, to the brink of another battle, and I can honestly say that the story definitely kept me on the edge of my seat, and made me think a lot about how we deal with the past, who it can be said to belong to, if anyone at all. To sum up, *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories* is a brilliant read. Savour it, sink into Liu's words, and allow yourself to be carried away by a master storyteller. He is definitely one of my favourite fantasy authors working today, and inspires me as few others do.

This is one of those books that is effortless to review and recommend, simply because it is as close to a self-recommending volume as you are ever going to find. The last SF short story collection that I can recall as being as strong as this one was Connie Willis's a couple of years ago, which is saying a lot, since I personally regard her as the finest living SF writer, and on the short list of the finest SF short story writers ever. Liu is not quite in Willis's league as a writer, at least not yet, mainly because she has, in addition to a string of stunning short stories, also written some of the most unforgettable SF novels of recent years. I will acknowledge that she has her detractors, mainly from those who insist that SF means hard SF. I will even cede that she may be more weird fiction than SF, since while many of her most famous novels involve time travel, no attempt is made to ground it in science. Let me just say that I regard SF writers as those who write for SF audiences, broadly conceived. There is no question that even if you prefer hard SF (which I don't), both Willis and Liu write for a SF audience. Several of the stories in this story are simply brilliant. The title story swept the major SF awards for short stories, all the more remarkable because it is not terribly long, and too many stories that manage that kind of success tend to be more in the way of novellas than short stories. He manages in 15 pages to achieve an emotional density usually reserved for longer works. I had previously read several of the stories in the collection, but most of them were new to me. What impresses me most is the quality going from one story to another. In fact, most of the stories I had read previously - like a couple from *The Apocalypse Triptych* edited by John Joseph Adams and Hugh Howey - while good are not nearly as good as the stories included here. I knew "Mono no aware" from its having won a Hugo and "The Man Who Ended History: A Documentary" from having been nominated for one. And I know a couple from annual Best of short story collections. But I liked some, like "All the Flavors" more than nearly anything else I had read of his, while "Simulacrum" stands comparison with the many other works to use that word in either its single or plural forms in their titles. I enjoyed the first story in the volume, "The Bookmaking Habits of Select Species," in part because it reminded me so much of the kind of thing that Borges was so extraordinary at. I have not yet read Liu's first novel, the well-reviewed *The Grace of Kings*, mainly because it has sounded to me from reviews to be pretty close to straight fantasy. I can't confess to being much of a fan of fantasy novels as a rule. I may make an exception in this case, but what I really look forward to is seeing Liu write a SF novel. He has actually won a Hugo for a SF novel, but as translator. Ken Liu translated *The Third Body Problem* by Cixin Liu, which became the first translated novel to ever win the Award. I have been intentionally putting off reading this. Like a lot of people, I prefer to binge read series, and the third novel of which this was the first in a trilogy (Ken

Liu has translated the third novel, which is scheduled for publication later this year; the second novel *The Dark Forest* was translated by Joel Martinsen). One of my reading goals for 2016 is to read both the trilogy and some of the short stories by Cixin Liu, who is the most celebrated Chinese SF writer ever. Meanwhile, I await Ken Liu's first SF novel. The stories in this collection cement his status as one of the finest SF writers in the world today. He is, by the way, not a full time SF writer. In his day job he is a successful attorney. I hope that all of his recent successes in SF encourage him to put away his law books and write full time.

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