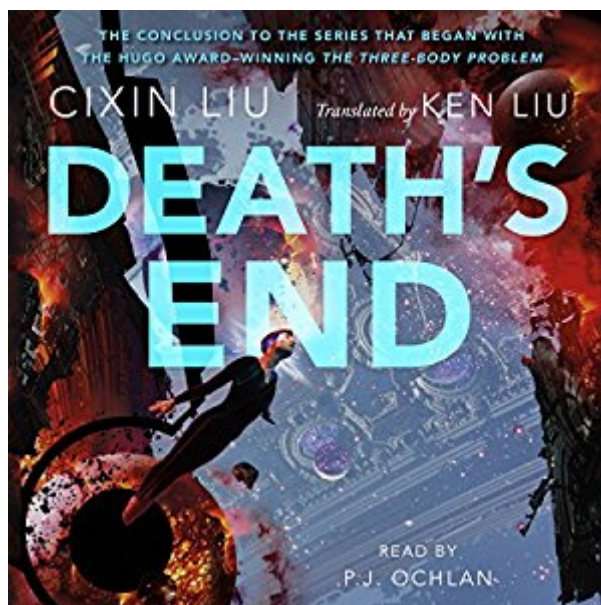


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Death's End



Synopsis

With *The Three-Body Problem*, English-speaking listeners got their first chance to experience the multiple-award-winning and best-selling *Three-Body Trilogy* by China's most beloved science fiction author, Cixin Liu. *Three-Body* was released to great acclaim, including coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. It was also named a finalist for the Nebula Award, making it the first translated novel to be nominated for a major SF award since Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* in 1976. Now this epic trilogy concludes with *Death's End*. Half a century after the Doomsday Battle, the uneasy balance of Dark Forest Deterrence keeps the Trisolaran invaders at bay. Earth enjoys unprecedented prosperity due to the infusion of Trisolaran knowledge. With human science advancing daily and the Trisolarans adopting Earth culture, it seems that the two civilizations will soon be able to coexist peacefully as equals, without the terrible threat of mutually assured annihilation. But the peace has also made humanity complacent. Cheng Xin, an aerospace engineer from the early 21st century, awakens from hibernation in this new age. She brings with her knowledge of a long-forgotten program dating from the beginning of the Trisolar Crisis, and her very presence may upset the delicate balance between two worlds. Will humanity reach for the stars or die in its cradle?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Death's End. The title of the final installment gives away what is coming, but whose death? You need to travel an unimaginably long and jaw-dropping journey to find out

who/what ceased to exist. Mr. Liu Cixin's *Three-Body Problem* or *Three-Body* "Big Liu's *Three-Body*", a fond nickname invented by his fans in China's *Three-Body* now is not only the best sci-fi writer from China, but also one of the best on earth. Remember how far we have come from? The whole story started in around 1960s as China went through a horrible period of political turmoil. When senseless mobs beat a little girl's father to death in public, her faith in humanity was shaken and lost. Her solution was to seek help from species of other planets, thus changing the course of humanity. As a result numerous lives were lost in the ensuing battles and conflicts. But two unlikely heroes came to rescue *Three-Body* and Mr. Luo Ji devised a way to blackmail and diffuse the Trisolarian invasion, and Mr. Zhang Beihai managed to save and plant a human seed far away from the Earth. Did both strategies work? The *Death's End* provides the final answer. The main character of the third book is another woman (Ms. Cheng Xin). She is smart but weak, and the choice she made in this book will be long debated among the *Three-Body* fans. But does it really matter at the end? It appears that, regardless of her choice, the fate of humanity was inevitably sealed. I will say this, that two women, Ye Wenjie in book one and Cheng Xin in book three, pretty much decided the course and the ending (a feminism analysis of *Big Liu* is due). There are so many refreshing gems in the *Death's End* that makes the book irresistible. For example, how to send a communication device to Trisolaris but the device must have minimum amount of weight and can survive long distance of space travel? *Big Liu's* answer was plainly crazy yet sensible. For example, *Big Liu* rebranded himself temporarily and inserted a long and intriguing fairytale, yes, you are reading this correctly, a fairytale about how an evil prince stealing the throne of a kingdom and a princess fighting back. Finally, a stupendous weapon called the "two-dimension note". I don't want to elaborate. Let's just say that if you are still reading my comment here, you are not affected by this weapon (yet). Besides sci-fi and fairytales, *Big Liu* clearly likes to write detective stories, which are dotted throughout this book series. Book one began with a scientist trying to figure out what was wrong with his vision and who was behind all the suicides of other scientists. Book two had a heavy dose of mouse-and-cat game between wallfacers and wallbreakers. Book three involved many experts (scientists, intelligence officers, and professors in literature) trying to decipher the true meaning of the fairytale. These plots will keep you guessing and add extra thrill. Finally, the ending. So much happened while time went by in the final pages. I remember many people complaining about the slow pace of book one. When you reach the end of book three, you will instead suffer whiplashes. I had to turn back and go over many pages again asking what the *F* is going and trying

to make sense of what is happening. Suffice to say that it is a finish that I have never seen it before in any sci-fi literature. Probably the GRANDEST and the MOST INSANE ending of all. Go read it, and start to marvel and tremble.

Plenty has been written about the extraordinary imaginativeness and story-telling prowess of Liu Cixin in this thought-provoking book. Having just finished the trilogy after just over a week of obsessive reading, I'll share a few thoughts as a means of decompressing from this harrowing epic. I read the first two volumes in Chinese and the third in English, mainly because it became too labored an effort to read the transliterated foreign proper nouns and technical words in Chinese (for me, anyway), and I can attest to the quality of the translation and its loyalty to the original. It felt as if I read all three books seamlessly in the same language. Although certain things are inevitably lost in translation, Ken Liu, as an accomplished writer himself, certainly compensated for the loss with innovations of his own. My only complaint has to do with certain word choices. For example, pinnace and dinghy are perhaps neither familiar to most readers nor appropriate terms for astronomic vehicles, and at times certain passages are unnecessarily grandiloquent while at others overly casual when exploring scientific and philosophical concepts. I was especially dismayed that the end of a fairy tale in the story opted for a word-for-word translation instead of "and they lived happily ever after," despite that it's exactly what the source material means, and it was the only moment that I felt like I was reading a translation. It is important to point out that although the three books complete the same story arc in a mostly chronological order, they involve very different scale, scope, and more importantly, themes. Emotionally, each book is fully resolved at the end. In this regard, the first book, though a thorough page turner and winner of the Hugo Award, perhaps has the least depth of the three. One major theme of the first book is certainly the existential crisis that can arise out of either failure to grasp reality or loss of faith in humanity, and the second book inverts that theme to become the humanity's shifting beliefs in reality and faith when faced with a crisis of existence. Death's End, on the other hand, annihilates any notion that we may have of both crisis and existence. Romantic love evolves along with the installments. The Three Body Problem has a cynical notion of love, and the stories of various marriages are marked by betrayal, indifference, and lovelessness. In Dark Forest, love is an ideal that ultimately proves to be an illusion. In Death's End, love is concrete with cosmic consequences, yet at the same times becomes the most elusive and utterly devastating. The narrative structure of Death's End is also different compared to the previous two books. It

doesn't have the air of mystery of The Three Body Problem that is imposed by an unknown entity, or the intentional concealment of Dark Forest that plays smoothly into the Wallfacer Project. Instead, the story unfolds in a straightforward manner, but every decision made has far reaching consequences that you may not see for hundreds of pages, which in turn are foretold by minute details before they are revealed. There is one subtle but brilliant point a third into the book where the Trisolaran emissary sadistically admonishes the forlorn protagonist that the universe is not a fairy tale. It may seem like a mundane cliché by a cartoonish villain, but this point ties together the entire trilogy. The last installment, like the previous two, pays ample homage to other works of science fiction, sometimes covertly. It is interesting, however, that Liu also subverts elements from his prior stories in the trilogy. Similarly, Ball Lightning, of which a weaponized version is mentioned repeatedly in the second book, is an earlier eponymous novel of his. Three short stories come to mind: The Wandering Earth, The Rural Teacher, and a third one that may reveal too much plot by its title alone. The Wandering Earth tells the story of a human society that tries to escape the Sun that is shifting out of main sequence unexpectedly early by making Earth itself into a giant spaceship in order to fly to, ironically, Alpha Centauri, the Trisolaran home world. A specific object that appeared in The Wandering Earth is mentioned twice in Death's End, and becomes a powerful symbol at the very end of the novel. The Rural Teacher also deals with a fertile universe and the destruction of stellar systems, but unlike the Dark Forest, that universe is much more benevolent toward civilizations. Given the limited scope of the first book and the impeded scientific progress in the second, Death's End is the only part of the trilogy to expansively explore frontier scientific ideas. The scientific foundations of the book are mostly solid and airtight, even when it feels dubious as observed by characters. Artistic licenses are only taken when it involves speculations far beyond even the frontiers of our current scientific understanding. However, one problematic aspect has to do with traveling and manipulating objects in four-dimensional space, as the novel implies that distance in 3D space can be shortened by traveling in the fourth dimension, which is incompatible with orthogonality of dimensions in the Euclidean part of space-time, and there is no metric shortening of the lower-dimensional distance by traveling in any direction in the higher-dimensional space. Of course, it is certainly possible that the local geometry of said fictional space is non-Euclidean. The author does a superb job confounding the philosophical center of the books with a very comprehensive treatment of the different beliefs in science, society, politics, religion, gender, human nature, life, etc., both through an interspersed objective omniscient narrator and through the subjective thoughts of opaque characters. Indeed, there is no true villainy in the trilogy, even when we're dealing with genocidal alien

invaders and mundicidal star destroyers. However, there remains a palpable degree of ethnocentrism and, more problematically, androcentrism that belies the author's ambitious big picture of cosmic proportions. Though the male gaze is prevalent in the first and second books, it nonetheless reflects the inner worlds of the male protagonists, if not the author himself, from an exceedingly patriarchal society. Yet what Liu perceives to be the difference between "masculine" and "feminine" values cannot be reconciled even at cosmic scales, despite the author's clear intention to absolve and diminish all sins, aggression and weakness alike, in the grand schemes of the Dark Forest universe. It is disappointing, but forgivable. Many critics think that *Death's End* is the best of the trilogy, including the translator. I disagree. Liu has written three entirely unique books out of the same story, one may even argue that they were written in three different genres, and each succeeds and excels on its own equal footing. Nonetheless, *Death's End* is the grandest, and it will blow your mind.

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