

DEATH'S END

Cixin Liu

Translated by Ken Liu



THE DARK FOREST

Cixin Liu

Translated by Joel Martinsen



THE THREE-BODY PROBLEM

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

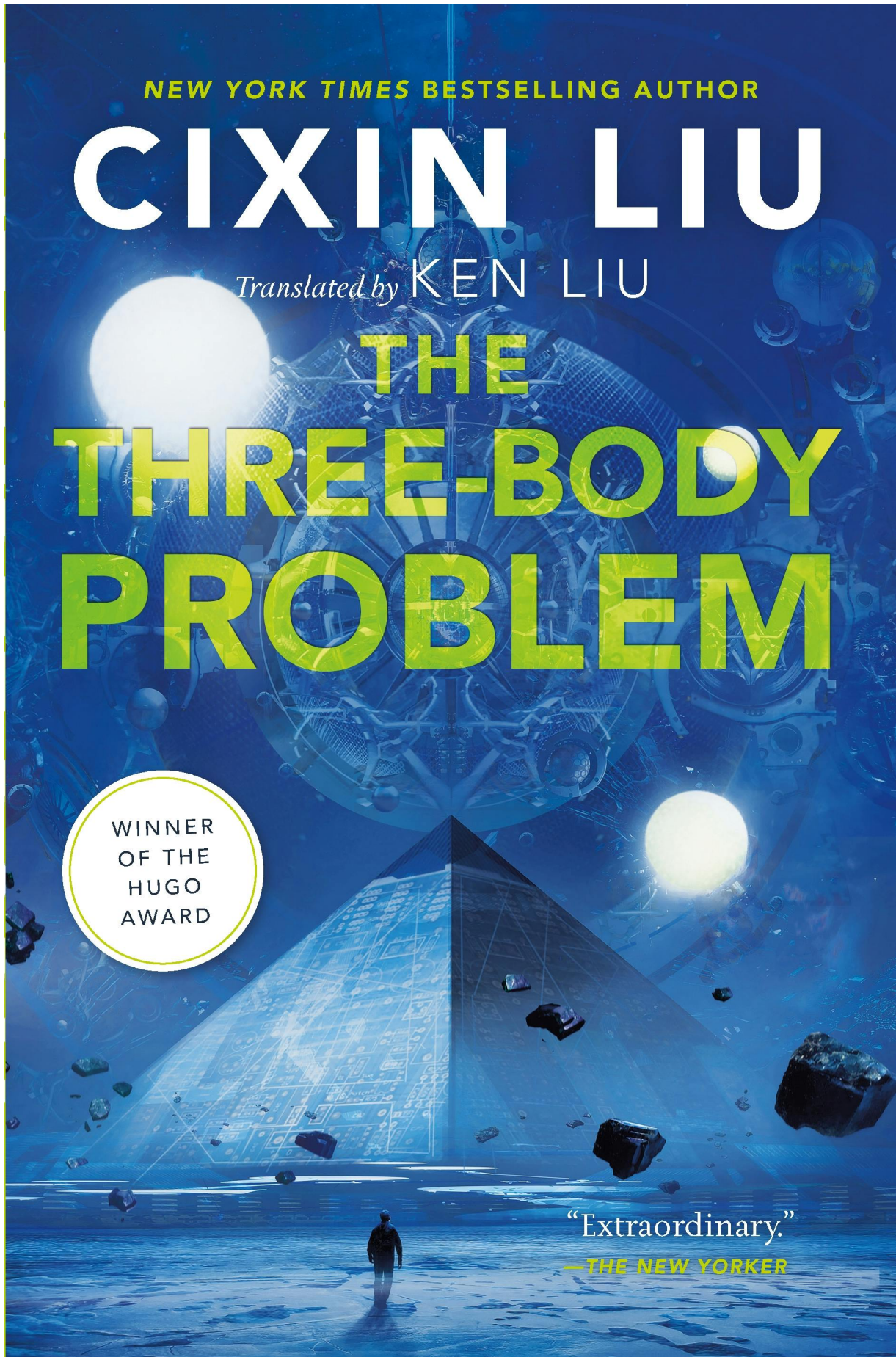
CIXIN LIU

Translated by KEN LIU

THE
THREE-BODY
PROBLEM

WINNER
OF THE
HUGO
AWARD

"Extraordinary."
—THE NEW YORKER





A Tom Doherty Associates Book
New York

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

Chinese names are written with surname first.

The Ye Family

Ye Zhetai Physicist, professor at Tsinghua University

Shao Lin Physicist, Ye Zhetai's wife

Ye Wenjie Astrophysicist, daughter of Ye Zhetai

Ye Wenxue Ye Wenjie's sister, a Red Guard

Red Coast Base

Lei
Zhicheng Political commissar at Red Coast Base

Yang
Weining Chief engineer at Red Coast Base, once a student of Ye
Zhetai

The Present

Yang Dong String theorist and daughter of Ye Wenjie and Yang
Weining

Ding Yi Theoretical physicist, Yang Dong's boyfriend

Wang Miao Nanomaterials researcher

Shi Qiang Police detective, nicknamed Da Shi

Chang Weisi Major-general of the People's Liberation Army

Shen Yufei Japanese physicist and member of the Frontiers of Science

Wei Cheng Math prodigy and recluse, Shen Yufei's husband

Pan Han Biologist, friend/acquaintance of Shen Yufei and Wei Cheng, and member of the Frontiers of Science

Sha
Ruishan Astronomer, one of Ye Wenjie's students

Mike Evans Scion of an oil magnate

Colonel
Stanton U.S. Marine Corps, commander of Operation Guzheng

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Author's Postscript for the American Edition

Translator's Postscript

About the Author

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PART I

SILENT SPRING

The Madness Years

China, 1967

The Red Union had been attacking the headquarters of the April Twenty-eighth Brigade for two days. Their red flags fluttered restlessly around the brigade building like flames yearning for firewood.

The Red Union commander was anxious, though not because of the defenders he faced. The more than two hundred Red Guards of the April Twenty-eighth Brigade were mere greenhorns compared with the veteran Red Guards of the Red Union, which was formed at the start of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in early 1966. The Red Union had been tempered by the tumultuous experience of revolutionary tours around the country and seeing Chairman Mao in the great rallies in Tiananmen Square.

But the commander *was* afraid of the dozen or so iron stoves inside the building, filled with explosives and connected to each other by electric detonators. He couldn't see them, but he could feel their presence like iron sensing the pull of a nearby magnet. If a defender flipped the switch, revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries alike would all die in one giant ball of fire.

And the young Red Guards of the April Twenty-eighth Brigade were indeed capable of such madness. Compared with the weathered men and women of the first generation of Red Guards, the new rebels were a pack of wolves on hot coals, crazier than crazy.

The slender figure of a beautiful young girl emerged at the top of the building, waving the giant red banner of the April Twenty-eighth Brigade. Her appearance was greeted immediately by a cacophony of gunshots. The weapons attacking her were a diverse mix: antiques such as American carbines, Czech-style machine guns, Japanese Type-38 rifles; newer weapons such as standard-issue People's Liberation Army rifles and submachine guns, stolen from the PLA after the publication of the "August Editorial"¹; and even a few Chinese *dadao* swords and spears. Together, they formed a condensed version of modern history.

Numerous members of the April Twenty-eighth Brigade had engaged in similar displays before. They'd stand on top of the building, wave a flag, shout slogans through megaphones, and scatter flyers at the attackers below. Every time, the courageous man or woman had been able to retreat safely from the hailstorm of bullets and earn glory for their valor.

The new girl clearly thought she'd be just as lucky. She waved the battle banner as though brandishing her burning youth, trusting that the enemy would be burnt to ashes in the revolutionary flames, imagining that an ideal world would be born tomorrow from the ardor and zeal coursing through her blood.... She was intoxicated by her brilliant, crimson dream until a bullet pierced her chest.

Her fifteen-year-old body was so soft that the bullet hardly slowed down as it passed through it and whistled in the air behind her. The young Red Guard tumbled down along with her flag, her light form descending even more slowly than the piece of red fabric, like a little bird unwilling to leave the sky.

The Red Union warriors shouted in joy. A few rushed to the foot of the building, tore away the battle banner of the April Twenty-eighth Brigade,

and seized the slender, lifeless body. They raised their trophy overhead and flaunted it for a while before tossing it toward the top of the metal gate of the compound.

Most of the gate's metal bars, capped with sharp tips, had been pulled down at the beginning of the factional civil wars to be used as spears, but two still remained. As their sharp tips caught the girl, life seemed to return momentarily to her body.

The Red Guards backed up some distance and began to use the impaled body for target practice. For her, the dense storm of bullets was now no different from a gentle rain, as she could no longer feel anything. From time to time, her vinelike arms jerked across her body softly, as though she were flicking off drops of rain.

And then half of her young head was blown away, and only a single, beautiful eye remained to stare at the blue sky of 1967. There was no pain in that gaze, only solidified devotion and yearning.

And yet, compared to some others, she was fortunate. At least she died in the throes of passionately sacrificing herself for an ideal.

* * *

Battles like this one raged across Beijing like a multitude of CPUs working in parallel, their combined output, the Cultural Revolution. A flood of madness drowned the city and seeped into every nook and cranny.

At the edge of the city, on the exercise grounds of Tsinghua University, a mass "struggle session" attended by thousands had been going on for nearly two hours. This was a public rally intended to humiliate and break down the

enemies of the revolution through verbal and physical abuse until they confessed to their crimes before the crowd.

As the revolutionaries had splintered into numerous factions, opposing forces everywhere engaged in complex maneuvers and contests. Within the university, intense conflicts erupted between the Red Guards, the Cultural Revolution Working Group, the Workers' Propaganda Team, and the Military Propaganda Team. And each faction divided into new rebel groups from time to time, each based on different backgrounds and agendas, leading to even more ruthless fighting.

But for *this* mass struggle session, the victims were the reactionary bourgeois academic authorities. These were the enemies of every faction, and they had no choice but to endure cruel attacks from every side.

Compared to other “Monsters and Demons,”² reactionary academic authorities were special: During the earliest struggle sessions, they had been both arrogant and stubborn. That was also the stage in which they had died in the largest numbers. Over a period of forty days, in Beijing alone, more than seventeen hundred victims of struggle sessions were beaten to death. Many others picked an easier path to avoid the madness: Lao She, Wu Han, Jian Bozan, Fu Lei, Zhao Jiuzhang, Yi Qun, Wen Jie, Hai Mo, and other once-respected intellectuals had all chosen to end their lives.³

Those who survived that initial period gradually became numb as the ruthless struggle sessions continued. The protective mental shell helped them avoid total breakdown. They often seemed to be half asleep during the sessions and would only startle awake when someone screamed in their faces to make them mechanically recite their confessions, already repeated countless times.

Then, some of them entered a third stage. The constant, unceasing struggle sessions injected vivid political images into their consciousness like mercury, until their minds, erected upon knowledge and rationality, collapsed under the assault. They began to really believe that they were guilty, to see how they had harmed the great cause of the revolution. They cried, and their repentance was far deeper and more sincere than that of those Monsters and Demons who were not intellectuals.

For the Red Guards, heaping abuse upon victims in those two latter mental stages was utterly boring. Only those Monsters and Demons who were still in the initial stage could give their overstimulated brains the thrill they craved, like the red cape of the matador. But such desirable victims had grown scarce. In Tsinghua there was probably only one left. Because he was so rare, he was reserved for the very end of the struggle session.

Ye Zhetai had survived the Cultural Revolution so far, but he remained in the first mental stage. He refused to repent, to kill himself, or to become numb. When this physics professor walked onto the stage in front of the crowd, his expression clearly said: *Let the cross I bear be even heavier.*

The Red Guards did indeed have him carry a burden, but it wasn't a cross. Other victims wore tall hats made from bamboo frames, but his was welded from thick steel bars. And the plaque he wore around his neck wasn't wooden, like the others, but an iron door taken from a laboratory oven. His name was written on the door in striking black characters, and two red diagonals were drawn across them in a large X.

Twice the number of Red Guards used for other victims escorted Ye onto the stage: two men and four women. The two young men strode with confidence and purpose, the very image of mature Bolshevik youths. They were both fourth-year students⁴ majoring in theoretical physics, and Ye was

their professor. The women, really girls, were much younger, second-year students from the junior high school attached to the university.⁵ Dressed in military uniforms and equipped with bandoliers, they exuded youthful vigor and surrounded Ye Zhetai like four green flames.

His appearance excited the crowd. The shouting of slogans, which had slackened a bit, now picked up with renewed force and drowned out everything else like a resurgent tide.

After waiting patiently for the noise to subside, one of the male Red Guards turned to the victim. “Ye Zhetai, you are an expert in mechanics. You should see how strong the great unified force you’re resisting is. To remain so stubborn will lead only to your death! Today, we will continue the agenda from the last time. There’s no need to waste words. Answer the following question without your typical deceit: Between the years of 1962 and 1965, did you not decide on your own to add relativity to the intro physics course?”

“Relativity is part of the fundamental theories of physics,” Ye answered. “How can a basic survey course not teach it?”

“You lie!” a female Red Guard by his side shouted. “Einstein is a reactionary academic authority. He would serve any master who dangled money in front of him. He even went to the American Imperialists and helped them build the atom bomb! To develop a revolutionary science, we must overthrow the black banner of capitalism represented by the theory of relativity!”

Ye remained silent. Enduring the pain brought by the heavy iron hat and the iron plaque hanging from his neck, he had no energy to answer questions that were not worth answering. Behind him, one of his students also frowned. The girl who had spoken was the most intelligent of the four female