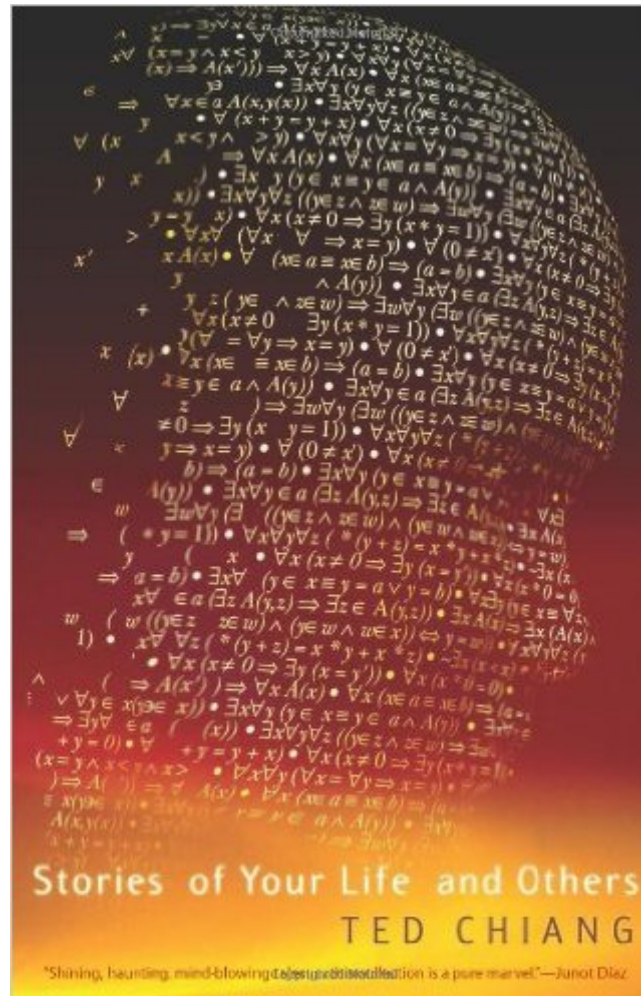


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Stories Of Your Life And Others



Synopsis

Soon to be a major motion picture starring Amy Adams. This new edition of Ted Chiang's masterful first collection, *Stories of Your Life and Others*, includes his first eight published stories plus the author's story notes and a cover that the author commissioned himself. Combining the precision and scientific curiosity of Kim Stanley Robinson with Lorrie Moore's cool, clear love of language and narrative intricacy, this award-winning collection offers readers the dual delights of the very, very strange and the heartbreakingly familiar. *Stories of Your Life and Others* presents characters who must confront sudden change; the inevitable rise of automatons or the appearance of aliens; while striving to maintain some sense of normalcy. In the amazing and much-lauded title story, a grieving mother copes with divorce and the death of her daughter by drawing on her knowledge of alien languages and non-linear memory recollection. A clever pastiche of news reports and interviews chronicles a college's initiative to "turn off" the human ability to recognize beauty in "Liking What You See: A Documentary." With sharp intelligence and humor, Chiang examines what it means to be alive in a world marked by uncertainty and constant change, and also by beauty and wonder. Ted Chiang is one of the most celebrated science fiction authors writing today and is the author of numerous short stories, including most recently "Exhalation," which won the Hugo, British Science Fiction, and Locus awards. He lives near Seattle.

Book Information

Paperback: 281 pages

Publisher: Small Beer Press; Second Printing edition (October 26, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1931520720

ISBN-13: 978-1931520720

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (238 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #219,828 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #52 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Short Stories & Anthologies > Short Stories](#) #172 in [Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Science Fiction > Short Stories](#) #497 in [Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Science Fiction > Anthologies](#)

Customer Reviews

As I say in my [Home Page](#) I'm a sci-fi fan, nevertheless Ted Chiang was unknown to me. This year

I've started to attend a seminar on "Creative Writing & Sci-Fi" and this author was introduced to us. I'm delighted! "Stories of Your Life and Others" (2002) is a wonderful collection of short stories of such quality I haven't seen since Sturgeon, Cordwainer Smith or Octavia Butler. Engaging, intelligent, well researched, creative, puzzling amongst many other adjectives may be attributed to this book! I'll detail each story with comment & evaluation. "Tower of Babylon" (1990) Nebula Award winner is a kind of Sumerian-sci-fi! The construction of the famed Tower is in its way nearing completion and miners from Elam and Egypt are convoked to penetrate Heaven's Dome. The story chronicles their lengthy ascent giving way to unexpected results. 5 stars. "Understand" (1991) have some points in common with Daniel Keyes' "Flowers for Algernon" (1959 and 1966) versions; nevertheless enhanced human intelligence is boarded from a very different point, confronting selfish and altruistic positions. IMHO this is one of the best of the volume. 5 stars plus. "Division by Zero" (1991) with a deep mathematical basement, it is an interesting tale, just a little too complex for my taste. 4 stars. "Story of Your Life" (1998) is an incredible good story about deciphering alien communications. Not a new theme in sci-fi but extraordinarily solved by Chiang, earned for his author Nebula Award and T. Sturgeon Memorial Award. 5 stars plus. "Seventy-Two Letters" (2000) aka "Vanishing Acts", Sidewise Award winner is a story situated in an alternative Victorian era, populated with golems and the power of written names. 4 stars.

I gave up a decade ago on trying to keep up with the science fiction magazines, so I only recently became aware of Ted Chiang's wide range of ideas and considerable proficiency at communicating them. There are eight stories in this anthology; all of them are at least good and several are excellent. Perhaps the best is the title piece, "Story of Your Life," which is also the only one I had previously read. It's about simultaneity vs. sequentiality and free will vs. predestination, with a strong taste of the sort of notions regarding time that Vonnegut originally made use of in *Slaughterhouse Five*. "Tower of Babylon" is sort of Babylonian science fiction, about the building of a mud-brick tower that takes four months to ascend and which reaches all the way to the vaults of heaven. An intriguing yarn, though the ending is a little weak. "Understand" is an interesting kind of riff on "Flowers for Algernon," but with the implications very much updated. "Division by Zero" is about the effect on a woman mathematician who discovers (and proves) that the basic principals of math are quite arbitrary and inconsistent. While it's a good psychological portrait, and also vividly presents some (to me) novel ideas, the math and the character development really have nothing to do with each other. "Seventy-Two Letters" is set in an alternate Victorian London in which nomenclature, the act of bestowing names on things, has become an experimental science. There's a certain

Bruce Sterling flavor here, but it's really not at all derivative. "The Evolution of Human Science" is a short-short that originally appeared in NATURE. I'm not sure I got the point of it, frankly, though it has a rather neat twisty ending.

Ted Chiang's *Stories of Your Life and Others* collects all his fiction to date, including one new story. It is an excellent collection. I reread the earlier stories for the first time in a long time -- I was particularly impressed on rereading by "Tower of Babylon", which posits a cosmology in which a Tower of Babel could actually be successfully built. I admit I didn't quite get "Division by Zero", about a woman mathematician driven to despair when she proves that arithmetic is inconsistent. "Understand" is a nice, dark, story about a man who becomes a superman when he undergoes an experimental brain treatment -- and what happens when he finds another superman. Of the later stories, "Story of Your Life" remains my favorite, both very very moving and mind-blowing as well, told in second person successfully (and for good reason). It accomplishes the rare feat of combining an interesting bit of SFnal speculation (concerning aliens who perceive time differently than we do), worth a story on its own merits, with a moving human story (about a woman and her daughter, who dies young), and using the SF ideas to really drive home the human themes. While at the same time maintaining interest as pure SF. I'm fond of saying that there are two types of SF: stories about the science, and stories which use the science to be about people. This is both types in one. "Seventy-Two Letters" has a great central idea, and it does some nice things working out the implications, but the story itself is resolved with too much actiony hugger-mugger. "Hell is the Absence of God" again has a neat central conceit, and is uncompromising in working it out -- but I admit I was confused by the ending. His Nature short-short is a nice speculation on the future of science in a "post-human" world.

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