



A THREE-BODY PROBLEM NOVEL

THE REDEMPTION OF TIME

BAOSHU

Translated by KEN LIU

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OF TIME

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NEW YORK

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This book is dedicated to Mr. Liu Cixin.

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

Writing *The Redemption of Time* is one of the most remarkable events of my life.

Like many others, I became a loyal fan of Liu Cixin at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when Liu was just starting to make his mark as a science fiction author. We called ourselves *cítiě* (meaning “magnets,” which is a pun for the Chinese abbreviation of “die-hard fans of Liu Cixin”) and passionately discussed his stories on internet forums. As each of his stories was published, the news spread among us like wildfire and we rushed out to buy the magazine issue. In 2006, when *Science Fiction World* serialized *The Three-Body Problem*, the first book in his magnificent Remembrance of Earth’s Past trilogy (also known as the “Three-Body” trilogy), I devoured each installment and hungered for the next, utterly entranced.

The stand-alone edition of *The Three-Body Problem* was published at the beginning of 2008, and the first sequel, *The Dark Forest*, came out about six months later. Although the books hadn’t yet penetrated mainstream literary conversation, science fiction fans enjoyed the rich imaginative feast presented by these two books. However, after those first two books, I and the other *cítiě* had to resign ourselves to a long wait for the next installment.

Two and a half years later, in November of 2010, the last volume of the trilogy, *Death’s End*, finally went on sale in China. At the time, I was in graduate school in Belgium and could not get my hands on the book. I seriously considered flying back to China just to buy it. In the end, my friend Gao Xiang helped me out by photographing every page of the book and emailing the pictures to me.

I was deeply touched by my friend’s gesture, but it wasn’t until much later that I understood the full significance of the publication of this novel for me. After I finished *Death’s End*, along with fans in China who had bought the book

as soon as it came out, we debated and explored every detail in the book over the internet. But no matter how many posts we wrote, the magnificent, grand arc of the trilogy was at an end, and we felt ourselves drifting away from the story day by day. The melancholy that seized us made me decide to write separate stories for a few of the characters in the trilogy and extend the epic tale a little longer. Two days later, I wrote down a dialogue between Yun Tianming and AA on Planet Blue and posted it on the Web under the title *Three-Body X*. “X” didn’t mean “ten”; rather, it stood for “uncertain.”

This wasn’t the first time I wrote Liu Cixin fanfiction, and I certainly wasn’t the first to do so. But before my tale, most such efforts were written by fans for a small group of other hardcore fans. I had no idea that the context for *Three-Body X* was entirely different. What I wrote was exactly what tens of thousands of readers needed at that moment: more stories from the “Three-Body” universe. Its timely appearance (barely a week after the publication of *Death’s End*) allowed it to receive far more attention than could be justified by its inherent quality, and the praise encouraged me to continue writing, developing, and growing the story line I had in mind until it gradually took on a shape of its own. Three weeks later, before Christmas 2010, I completed my novel.

By then, *Three-Body X* had spread to every corner of the Chinese Web, and received almost as much discussion and attention as *Death’s End* itself. Mr. Yao Haijun, Liu Cixin’s good friend, who is nicknamed “the Chinese Campbell” for his role in developing new writers as the executive editor of *Science Fiction World*, contacted me to ask if he could publish it as a stand-alone book. A few months later, as “Three-Body” fever continued to sweep Chinese SF fandom, more fanfiction appeared. But the brief window of opportunity was gone, and these new works did not receive nearly as much attention as mine. I knew that I was lucky.

When I first posted my story online, I wasn’t thinking much about copyright; of course, once a formal offer of publication came from Mr. Yao, I was faced with a complicated set of issues. But Liu Cixin displayed incredible generosity and kindness toward new writers by giving me permission to publish, and I cannot express the full extent of my deep gratitude. As soon as the book came off the presses, I sent a copy to Liu Cixin. A few years later, after I’d published some original stories and become a regular member of the small circle of Chinese science fiction writers, Liu and I became friends and often met at fandom events. He told me that he enjoyed *Three-Body X*, and indeed, had even

voted for it at Chinese science fiction awards. The book didn't win, but Liu's encouragement and approval were better than winning ten such awards.

The subtitle for the paraquel, "The Redemption of Time," and some other names in the novel have special meanings for fans, though few now probably remember the sources of the allusions. Between 2008 and 2010, while fans impatiently waited for the arrival of the last volume of the trilogy, many speculated on potential directions the plot could take and spread various rumors centered around supposed "leaks" from Liu Cixin's draft-in-progress. Of course, all of these rumors turned out to be hoaxes, and not a single one matched the published book. But even such rumors brought eager fans some joy in imagining the conclusion of Liu Cixin's masterpiece, and so I referenced some keywords from those rumors as a memorial to that innocent time when "Three-Body" was still a relatively obscure playground known to only the most dedicated fans.

To be sure, my paraquel did not receive and could not have received the sort of plaudits that accompanied the "Three-Body" series proper, but it was also true that many readers enjoyed it greatly. I certainly make no claim that *Three-Body X* constitutes a part of the "Three-Body" canon, though it was published by the same publisher as the original trilogy and sold together with Liu Cixin's books. I view it as a dedicated fan's attempt to explain and fill out some of the gaps in the original trilogy, one of countless possible developments of the "Three-Body" universe. Any fans of the trilogy proper could reject it as incompatible with their vision, or could enjoy it without treating it as part of the universe. I think these are all perfectly reasonable responses.

Four years after the publication of *Three-Body X*, China Educational Publications Import & Export Corporation, Ltd., decided to introduce this book to Anglophone readers after the publication of the English edition of the "Three-Body" trilogy. I feel both anxiety and trepidation at this prospect. There certainly have been some notable works of fanfiction in the history of English science fiction, such as the Second Foundation trilogy, by Gregory Benford, Greg Bear, and David Brin, as well as Stephen Baxter's epic *The Time Ships*, a continuation of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. And I haven't even mentioned shared universes like *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek*, which have provided fertile ground for the creativity of many other authors. I don't pretend to claim that my novel is the equal of these successful classics, but there is something that unites all of them: Great works of uncommon genius will call for us to return to their worlds again and again, enticing us to pour our passion and enthusiasm into them so that time

may continue to cycle and progress, beloved characters may return to life, and the universes may continue to evolve and develop, without cease.

—*Baoshu, August 30, 2015*

CALENDAR ERAS

Crisis Era	201X–2208
Deterrence Era	2208–2270
Post-Deterrence Era	2270–2272
Broadcast Era	2272–2332
Bunker Era	2333–2400
Galaxy Era	2273–unknown
Planet Blue Era	2687–2731
Timeline for Preparation of Universe 647	2731–18906416
Timeline for Universe 647	18906416–11245632151
Terminal Era	11245632142– 11245632207
New Universe Timeline	11245632207– ...

Prologue

Terminal Era, Year 1, 0 hours, 0 minutes, 0 seconds, the end of the universe

A long, long time ago, in another galaxy ...

The stars still shone brightly, the galaxy still swirled like a mighty river, and countless life-forms still hid behind each sun, divided by the vastness of space. They concealed themselves in the nooks and crannies of the galaxy, growing, developing, struggling, slaughtering; the rhythms of life and the laments of death filled this obscure galaxy just as they filled every other part of the universe.

However, this ancient and far-flung universe was nearing the end of its own life.

In a sphere with a radius of ten billion light-years, stars were dying at an unimaginable rate, one by one. Civilizations winked out; galaxies dimmed ... and all were returning to the void, as though they had never existed.

The countless lives in this galaxy did not know yet that all their struggles and setbacks, their concealments and slaughters, had lost meaning. Against the greater background of the universe as a whole, a terrifying, unanticipated change was about to take place. Their very existence was about to be reduced to nothingness.

Faint photons from already dead galaxies billions of light-years away had traversed the endless darkness of space to illuminate this out-of-the-way galaxy, like letters without recipients silently recounting bygone legends of the vanished.

One of these beams had originated in a little-noticed nook of the universe once known as “the Milky Way.” It was so faint that the eyes of the vast majority of living beings could not detect it, yet it contained innumerable legends that had once moved heaven and earth, shocked belief and understanding.

Ye Wenjie, Mike Evans, Ding Yi, Frederick Tyler, Zhang Beihai, Bill Hines, Luo Ji, Thomas Wade ...

Red Coast Base, the Earth-Trisolaris Organization, the Wallfacer Project, the Staircase Program, the Swordholders, the Bunker Project ...

The ancient stories remained as vivid as though they had taken place yesterday; the figures of heroes and saints continued to twinkle among the constellations. But knowledge of the tales had faded, and there was no one left to mark their passing. The curtain had fallen and the players had departed from the stage; the audience had scattered to the winds; even the theater had long since fallen into ruin.

Until—

In the endless darkness of space, in a forgotten corner a long way from any star, a ghost appeared out of the void.

Faint gleams of starlight limned a shape vaguely resembling a creature that had once been known as “human.” The ghost knew that for billions of light-years around this spot there were no other beings who would have recognized a human shape. Its world and species had long ago disappeared, leaving no trace behind. That species, which had once created a civilization that had lit up a galaxy, conquered billions of worlds, destroyed countless foes, and enacted magnificent epics, had submerged in the river of history, which had, in turn, melded with the ocean that was time. Now even the ocean of time was about to dry up.

But at the end of the universe, at the moment when time was about to cease its flow, this ghost stubbornly wished to continue writing a story that was already concluded.

Floating in darkness, the ghost extended a limb—let’s call it an arm—and spread out five fingers. A tiny silvery spot of light hung in the palm.

The eyes of the ghost reflected the countless stars as it stared at the silvery dot, as though lost in reminiscence. The bright spot of light drifted up and down like a delicate firefly, so small that it could wink out at any moment, but also, like the singularity before the birth of the universe, embodying all possibilities. The bright dot was a minuscule wormhole connected to the great black hole at the heart of a galaxy, capable of releasing a galaxy’s worth of energy.

After some time—no one knew how long, as there was no one around who cared to measure the passage of time—the ghost issued its order. The bright dot dissolved into a silvery thread extending into the distance like an infinite

timeline. In another moment, the thread unrolled into a white plane. A third dimension appeared as the plane undulated and gained thickness, but the thickness was insignificant compared with the width and breadth: The ghost had unfurled a giant sheet of blank drawing paper, and now floated above it.

The ghost spread its arms and glided. A light breeze followed its movements, and an atmosphere materialized out of nowhere. Beneath it, the sheet of paper seemed to react to the breeze, forming wrinkles and waves. The peaks and valleys soon solidified into mountains, hills, canyons, and plains.

Then came fire and water. As massive explosions erupted everywhere, oxygen and hydrogen, formed out of pure energy, combined into bright flames that coalesced into a sea of fire. New water molecules generated by the reaction fused into droplets, merged into clouds and mists, and then consolidated into torrential rain that fell against the newborn earth. The endless rain flooded the plains, converting them into vast oceans.

The ghost swept over the waters like a gigantic bird and landed on an empty beach. Stretching out its arms—one toward the waves and one toward the hills—it lifted both at once. Brontobytes of data stored inside its body came to life and, absorbing energy from the surroundings, took form; life appeared in water and on land, as though deposited there by a cyclone. Shoals of fish and pods of whales leapt out of the tides to honor their creator; patches of grass and stands of trees erupted from the soil, with beasts and creeping things wandering among them; flocks of birds large and small swept across the sky. The noise and bustle of life filled this new world, and as living things materialized, so did forests, grasslands, lakes, and deserts.

Having completed these tasks, the ghost still felt that the world lacked something important. It gazed thoughtfully into the dark sky until it realized what was missing. With a single finger, it described a circle against the dark velvet empyrean. Then, pulling the hand back, it flicked that finger, and a bright dot shot into the circle in the sky, turning it into a fiery golden orb. The familiar Sun had reappeared, or so it seemed. As sunlight refracted through the atmosphere, the whole world lit up: azure sky, clear and smooth as a mirror; cerulean sea, sparkling and shimmering.

The ghost bathed in the new light, which had long been absent from its existence. Intoxicated, it gently lifted its head.

This is just like that golden age long ago ...

Sunshine gleamed against his skin and hair, filling in the outline of a typical human. It was obvious now—or would have been, if anyone had been around to observe it—that the ghost was no mere spirit, but a person, a “he,” a man from that long-ago world once known as “Earth.”

And this new world, just like the mythical Earth, beckoned to him with a sense of familiarity.

It was a shadow cast at the end of the universe by that ancient planet, long after it had been destroyed along with the innumerable human civilizations that had once inhabited it.

The ghost knew that, compared with the grand universe that had once existed, compared with even just the real Earth, this artificial world was tiny, inauthentic, and insignificant. He had created it anyway, so that the cosmic epic that had already concluded could go on just a bit longer. Even if his addition would not be a true continuation, wasn't it a joy to be immersed in this virtual world for a few more moments, and to experience the dying embers of that imitation Sun, as the universe irresistibly wound down?

“Sunset for the universe,” he muttered.

PART I

The Past Within Time

Planet Blue Era, Year 2, our star, our world

The sky was a misty, dark gray. A familiar afternoon drizzle enveloped the lake in a gentle mist. The grass at the shore dipped and swayed in the breeze, thirstily drinking the sweet raindrops. A toy boat woven from blades of grass drifted over the water, riding farther and farther from the bank on ripples spawned by the rain.

As though it's heading for the world's end ...

Yun Tianming sat on the shore and aimlessly tossed pebbles into the lake, watching the ripples crisscross each other. A woman sat next to him, gazing at him without speaking. The breeze lifted strands of her long hair to brush against his cheeks, the caress arousing his desire.

For a moment, Tianming experienced the illusion of being in another time and another place, as though he had returned to that college outing in the suburbs of Beijing with his classmates, returned to that happy afternoon he had spent by the side of Cheng Xin. But the lemon-colored water, the blue grass, and the varicolored pebbles around him reminded him that this was a different era in a different world, a planet three hundred light-years away and almost seven centuries later.

And a different woman.

*Slanting rain, gentle breeze, no need to return home.**

Tianming didn't know why he'd thought of a line of Classical Chinese poetry, something that his parents, who had admired classical education so much, had forced him to memorize. He could no longer imagine going home. There was no home to return to; he could only endure the cold wind and rain on this alien planet.

What a fool! Tianming castigated himself. *Did I really think I was going to get another chance with Cheng Xin, my beloved, and make toy boats by a lake? Wake up!* The very idea that he might reunite with the woman of his dreams seven centuries later was absurd. The fact that he was now sitting next to a female of the same species was already an incredible miracle.

But a greater miracle had once been within his grasp. After being apart for seven hundred years, he could have seen that woman if only he had gotten here a few hours—even a few minutes—earlier. He could have spent the rest of his life with the woman he had been in love with for seven centuries on the shore of this lake, never again parting from her. The woman who sat next to him now, on the other hand, would have been only his wife’s best friend and married to another man.

Even now, Cheng Xin was not so far from him, at most only a few hundred kilometers away. On clear nights, he could even see her spaceship orbiting this planet slowly. However, though he could admire her from afar, she was forever out of his reach.

He had once given her a star. But now, because of the sudden expansion of the death line, she would never be able to land on this world. She had become his star.

Tianming grimaced and glanced at the sky out of habit. Today, because of the rain and clouds, he could see nothing. But he knew that she was there, above the clouds, perhaps even drifting overhead at that moment ...

Tianming pulled his gaze back and realized that her eyes were still staring at him; he pretended not to notice. A pair of arms, like vines, entwined around his neck. He was readying himself to enjoy this moment of intimacy when the arms’ owner spoke, asking a question that lovers across eons and galaxies and species and sexes had all asked: “Hey, who do you like more, me or her?”

“You, of course!”

“But in what way?” 艾 AA refused to give up. “You have to be specific! I thought Cheng Xin—” But her question was interrupted by a kiss. Numerous similar experiences had taught Tianming the painful lesson that there was no appropriate answer under such circumstances, nor was there any need to speak.

艾 AA gave in to the kiss, and once the kiss had ended, she did not pursue the previous line of questioning. Shyly, she bit Tianming’s earlobe; a moment later, as though unsatisfied, she bit his shoulder, hard.

Tianming screamed and pushed her away. Hallucinations that had long been buried in his memory erupted forth, weighing down his consciousness. He had trouble breathing and could not think. He pressed his head between his hands in pain.

“I was just playing!” Although 艾 AA’s immediate reaction was that he was being dramatic, when she saw the pallor in his face and the tremors that racked

his body she realized that he was terrified, perhaps delirious. She had seen him going through such episodes from time to time. “Tianming, what’s wrong?” she asked with concern.

Tianming stared back at her, confused and frightened, panting heavily. After a long pause, he asked, “You ... are you real?”

“What are you talking about?” Now AA was frightened. She approached him, arms open for an embrace, but Tianming backed away and gazed at her suspiciously, his body crouched defensively. He repeated his question: “Are you a real person or just a hallucination? Is this whole world a trick in my mind?”

AA grasped the seriousness of the situation. Taking a deep breath, she spoke slowly. “*I am* real. Tianming, look at me. I’m standing right here in front of you. Every inch of my skin, every hair on my head—they’re all real. The planet we’re on is absolutely real. This ... this is our world!”

“Our ... world?” Tianming asked.

“Yes! Do you remember that day when we stood here waiting for Cheng Xin and Guan Yifan? We watched as their spaceship entered orbit around Planet Blue. You laughed like a child, holding my hand and telling me that you were going to surprise her, lead her into that marvelous little universe that even you had not seen. And then, all of a sudden, the death line expanded and the sky darkened; there was no more sun, no more stars. When you figured out what had happened, you just stood there like a zombie, not crying, not screaming. I didn’t understand how much you loved her until I saw the depth of your despair.”

“I do remember,” Tianming muttered, but his expression remained far away.

“For three days and three nights, you didn’t drink or eat and barely slept. I kept on telling you that they didn’t die; they were just living in a different frame of reference, and maybe one day you would see each other again. But you didn’t seem to hear me. Finally, on the third night, you cried. At first silently, and then weeping and sobbing, and finally howling and wailing. And I ... I put my arms around you. And I heard you say to me, ‘There are only the two of us on this planet! Only the two of us!’ Do you remember what I said to you next?”

“You said, ‘You are my Adam and I’m your Eve.’” Tianming closed his eyes, remembering.

“I don’t know how I found the words.” 艾 AA bit her lip and blushed. “Anyway ... that was how you and I became a couple. We couldn’t be free of the despair, of course, but on that day at least, we let go and ... it was wonderful.

The next day, you told me, ‘From now on, this is our world.’ Do you remember?”

A smile appeared on Yun Tianming’s face, perhaps without him even realizing it. “Yes, of course.”

“Then how can all of that be unreal?” AA asked.

Smiling encouragingly, she took a step toward Tianming. This time, he did not back away. She picked up his hands and wrapped his arms around herself as she hugged him, pressing her ear against his chest to listen to his heartbeat. Still confused, Tianming looked into the distance, allowing her to cling to him. Gently, she kissed his face, and gradually, hesitantly, Tianming returned her embrace. His gaze warmed and he returned her kiss, which she returned with even more ardor ...

Tianming received the most primitive and most authentic proof of the reality of the universe.

★ ★ ★

The rain had stopped some time ago, and the blue grass swayed in the evening breeze. The light of dusk pierced the clouds and painted a golden edge on the azure hills.

What happened next would have been unimaginable on Earth: The blue trees and shrubs of the forest came to life. They stretched as they woke, turning hundreds of thousands of leaves toward the warmth of the setting sun, absorbing every drop of energy. A few branches, fighting for more light, shoved and jostled against each other, filling the air with a susurrating noise. Dragonfly-like amphibious insects took off from the lake and danced in the air, spreading their four transparent wings to absorb the nutrients released by the blue grass and singing in high-pitched chirps to attract mates. Insects of the opposite sex responded with their own songs, and then, pairs began the complicated mating dance above the lake, enacting the sacred ritual that allowed life to multiply and continue ... all these sounds fused into one composition, Planet Blue’s unique cantata of life.

At the heart of this new black domain, life seemed to go on as before, except for the intrusion of two wanderers from afar. They clung to each other, and they would remain on this world forever. But to this planet that had already existed for billions of years and would continue to exist for billions more, the pair were

nothing—they would disappear in a flash, leaving no trace behind, like the ripples passing over the surface of the lake.

Gazing at the setting sun, Yun Tianming spoke softly. “I’d already thought of this world as a dream. AA, forgive me for my behavior earlier. Even now, I still can’t tell if I’m truly awake. I can no longer tell when a dream starts or when it ends. All of this ... seems to have no end.”

“No end? What do you mean?” asked AA.

“How old are you now?” Tianming asked.

“I can’t remember. At least four hundred,” said AA.

“What if you don’t count the years you were in hibernation?”

“I guess twenty ... thirty something? I really can’t remember,” AA said.

“By the standards of the Deterrence Era, you’re still very young. But do you know how old I am?”

“A smidgen over seven hundred, I’d say. But if you don’t count the years of hibernation I don’t think you’re much older than I am.”

“No.” As he spoke, Yun Tianming’s eyes seemed ancient. “My mind is at least several thousand years old, maybe even tens of thousands.”

艾 AA found this incomprehensible. But instead of asking more questions, she listened.

With a grimace, Tianming explained, “I know it’s hard to believe. Here’s the difference between the two of us: I spent the vast majority of my life in a dream, a dream that lasted tens of thousands of years.

“From the first year of the Crisis Era, from the moment I—no, my brain—was frozen, I began to dream. Endless dreams filled my time as I drifted in the abyss of space. In retrospect, I’m sure much of that was false memory constructed later by my mind, since a brain kept near absolute zero could not possibly generate dreams ... And then, once the Trisolarans captured me, they seized on dreams as their most potent weapon and employed them to stimulate me, to study me ... to use me.”

Tianming kept his voice calm, as though describing a stroll by the lake. But AA shivered. She knew, without needing Tianming to elaborate, that he had elided an unimaginable amount of suffering, pain, and terror.

艾 AA and Yun Tianming had been living together for a year on Planet Blue, since the day of the death line’s expansion.* They depended on each other and supported each other, and during this time, Tianming had suffered similar bouts of delirium multiple times. Tianming had never explained, and AA had never