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Chinese sci-fi masterpiece gains huge fan base overseas

By YANG YANG

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The mind-bending new Netflix series *3 Body Problem*, an attempt to adapt Liu Cixin's epic novel *The Three-Body Problem* for Western audiences, has earned a new wave of overseas cheers for the Chinese author's science fiction masterpiece.

The English translation of the book, which earned Liu the Hugo Award for Best Novel in 2015, became the No 1 best-seller in Amazon's literary fiction section and rose to the 11th spot on the list of general best-sellers on Wednesday.

The Three-Body Problem is the first book in Liu's *San-Ti* trilogy, and is followed by *The Dark Forest* and *Death's End*.

Chen Feng, rights manager at China Education Publications Import & Export Co, the international agent for the trilogy, said this is the book's best performance ever on Amazon, and a record for Chinese literature.

The Japanese version of *The Three-Body Problem* topped the charts on Amazon Japan, while Liu's works dominated half of the Kindle e-book sales chart for Chinese litera-

ture, according to Chinese magazine Science Fiction World, which first ran the trilogy before it was published as books in 2008 and 2010.

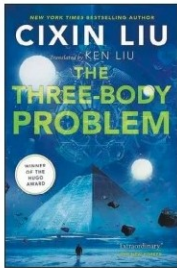
After the first season of *3 Body Problem* started streaming on Netflix last week, it sparked intense discussions in countries including Japan, the United States, France and Germany, where the book has gained a huge fan base.

Hideo Kojima, a renowned Japanese game developer, recommended Liu's novel on social media after watching the Netflix series, along with the highly acclaimed Chinese TV drama based on the book. The domestic adaptation is rated 8.7 out of 10 by more than 457,000 viewers on Douban, a major review aggregator in China.

The Chinese TV drama was first released in China in January 2023. It also premiered on the NBC Universal streaming platform Peacock in the US on Feb 10, which was the first day of the Year of the Dragon.

Before that launch, the domestic series was already available on international streaming platforms, including Amazon, with its distribution extending worldwide.

On March 21, Netflix released all



Cover of the English version of *The Three-Body Problem*

eight episodes of the first season on its streaming platforms, which reach audiences in more than 190 countries and regions.

According to reports, the series was produced with a total investment of about \$160 million, with an average budget of \$20 million per episode, making it one of the most

expensive single-episode investments in the history of Netflix.

The novel introduces an expansive narrative that intertwines physics, astrophysics and extraterrestrial life with human history and philosophy.

The story focuses on scientists discovering an alien civilization on Alpha Centauri, endangered by its unstable orbit around three suns, which is causing severe environmental chaos, known as the "three-body problem".

The narrative explores the implications of the first contact with an alien civilization, including the social, political and technological changes that follow.

"Notably, (the novel) does not rely on many of the traditional tropes you would expect from an alien sci-fi, to invoke fear and awe, but rather comes with an entire new arsenal of imagination to remind us that we are very fragile and insignificant within the universe," said a reader, who goes by the online name Gemlarin and has given Amazon's highest rating to the book.

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Book: Trilogy praised for novel ideas, cultural elements

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The English version of the novel, translated by Ken Liu, was published in 2014, making Liu Cixin's work accessible to a broader audience base and allowing it to earn further international acclaim. It has garnered a group of celebrity fans including former US president Barack Obama.

The book, which became the first Asian novel to win the Hugo Award, has been praised for its innovative ideas and complex scientific concepts, as well as its unique blend of

hard science fiction with Chinese historical and cultural elements.

As of June 2023, the trilogy, translated into 35 foreign languages, had sold about 4 million copies worldwide, setting a record for overseas sales of contemporary Chinese literature, according to Science Fiction World.

Apart from this trilogy, other major works by Liu Cixin have been translated into a number of languages, including novels such as *Ball Lightning* and *The Supremacy Era*, and the short story collections *To Hold Up the Sky* and *The Wandering Earth*.