



Academic Exercises

K. J. Parker

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Academic Exercises is the first collection of shorter work by master novelist K.J Parker, and it is a stunner. Weighing in at over 500 pages, this generous volume gathers together thirteen highly distinctive stories, essays, and novellas, including the recent World Fantasy Award-winner, “Let Maps to Others”. The result is a significant publishing event, a book that belongs on the shelf of every serious reader of imaginative fiction. The collection opens with the World Fantasy Award-winning “A Small Price to Pay for Birdsong,” a story of music and murder set against a complex mentor/pupil relationship, and closes with the superb novella “Blue and Gold,” which features what may be the most beguiling opening lines in recent memory. In between, Parker has assembled a treasure house of narrative pleasures. In “A Rich, Full Week,” an itinerant “wizard” undergoes a transformative encounter with a member of the “restless dead.” “Purple and Black,” the longest story in the book, is an epistolary tale about a man who inherits the most hazardous position imaginable: Emperor. “Amor Vincit Omnia” recounts a confrontation with a mass murderer who may have mastered an impossible form of magic.

Rounding out the volume—and enriching it enormously—are three fascinating and illuminating essays that bear direct relevance to Parker’s unique brand of fiction: “On Sieges,” “Cutting Edge Technology,” and “Rich Men’s Skins.”

Taken singly, each of these thirteen pieces is a lovingly crafted gem. Together, they constitute a major and enduring achievement. Rich, varied, and constantly absorbing, Academic Exercises is, without a doubt, the fantasy collection of the year.

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