

★ **Rubik****Elizabeth Tan**

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Rubik is a novel of ghosts—those of memory, technology, relationships, emotion, and bodies—all of them permanently impermanent. Released into these terrains, characters disappear and reappear in strange ways or not at all, the revelation of their journeys “so doubtful ... It is almost heartbreaking that it all works.” Haunting, eerie, engrossing, and completely unexpected, Elizabeth Tan’s *Rubik* is a true original that will shock and surprise.

Rubik begins with the death of Elena Rubik. The novel is an afterlife to her brief presence, a Rube Goldberg machine where “the starting marble will not travel to the very end of the machine; instead it will set off other marbles on meticulously planned journeys.” Spiraling out from this initial impetuous, a series of protagonists drift through the background and foreground of each others’ lives, rarely suspecting their interconnectedness.

In a bravura display of modernity’s paradoxes, *Rubik*’s “Reality and dreams are in the end both stories that we tell ourselves. They are two keys that turn the same lock.” Seemingly distinct categories bleed together—fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, creator and created, individual and collective—as experience is co-constructed and almost pathologically diffuse.

Haunted by a hermeneutic of suspicion, Tan’s interconnections are engineered to the smallest detail. Within this elaborate plot, the narrative world sprawls. Yet, there’s a tension, a kind of expansive shrinking, the macro becoming micro as human scale is entered and lost. The freedom and curse of that loss is the constant threat of disconnection and the endless possibility of reinvention.

Traversing and conflating the various worlds—from anime to advertising, private schools to message boards, art galleries to industry—*Rubik* turns the dictum that “Content dictates form; form dictates content” into a paradox of epistemological proportions. Anxieties about impermanence and obsolescence play out across the panoply of humans and human creations, and the resulting ruptures break containers and content alike.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (May/June 2018)

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