



★ **Spirits Abroad**

Zen Cho

Small Beer Press (Aug 10, 2021)

Softcover \$17.00 (352pp)

978-1-61873-187-6

Ghosts, dragons, and darker creatures populate the short stories of Zen Cho's captivating collection *Spirits Abroad*.

In this book: spirits are everywhere. Some are friendly enough, while some go to horrific extremes to get what they want. Ignoring them is not an option: even nonbelievers must watch their steps, lest they run afoul of malicious or just plain cranky spirits. Even spirits who seem helpful may ask a terrible price. At the end of the day, everyone must decide for themselves how to confront supernatural entities and inner demons alike—before someone else makes the decision for them.

Spirits Abroad contains a mix of differing tones and moods. Some of the stories deal with darker themes, like “The Fish Bowl,” in which academic and family pressures push a young student to take self-destructive measures. Others are fun, like the hilarious “Prudence and the Dragon,” about a lonely dragon who tries to seduce the most clueless and unromantic woman in London. Still others are heartwarming, including “Rising Lion—The Lion Bows,” about a lion dance troupe and the young ghost they were hired to destroy.

Most of the stories feature independent-minded women who either have magic of their own or know someone who does. Their determination often serves them well...but not always. Along the way, they learn about self-acceptance, lost love, or new opportunities. Not all of the lessons are happy ones, and some come too late to do lead characters any good. All of the stories have something important to say, and they say it in the most enthralling, devastating, and uplifting ways.

Featuring imaginative scenarios infused with Malaysian folklore, *Spirits Abroad* is a short story collection about the interaction between the human world and the supernatural one.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (July / August 2021)

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