

★ **The Circumference of the World****Lavie Tidhar**

Tachyon Publications (Sep 5, 2023)

Softcover \$17.95 (256pp)

978-1-61696-362-0

Black holes, new religions, and powerful stories ensnare orbiting beings with their intrigue and potentiality in Lavie Tidhar's science fiction marvel *The Circumference of the World*.

In the loneliness of his youth, Eugene Hartley looked into the stars and began his story: "Once there was a man who fell into the eye of God." The shadows of his childhood followed him to war in the South Pacific. And he became a famed pulp author—a science fiction dilettante, cashing fat checks and partying with Jack Parsons and Robert Heinlein. Still, he felt watched; he could not forget the eye of God.

In a time far past Hartley's glory days, Delia—a mathematician born on the South Pacific island where Hartley stared into the stars and felt fear, and who shares a name with Hartley's most elusive heroine—discovers that her husband, Levi, is missing. He was obsessed with a Hartley novel, *Lode Stars*, that most people believe doesn't exist; the book is rumored to make those who read it disappear. Thus Delia taps Daniel, a pulp bookseller with selective prosopagnosia, to find Levi. Instead, Daniel encounters a Russian mobster who's also searching for *Lode Stars*.

Told in six parts, the book moves between Hartley's novel fragments, memories, the gossipy letters of science fiction greats, Daniel's bumbling investigation, and Delia's paused tale, generating wonder with each turn. It might involve time travel. It might reveal that the universe is a simulacrum, made up of memories from the ancient past. Or its mysteries might be sleight of hand—because Hartley also began a religion on a lark, with *Lode Stars* as its holy text, and Delia's wouldn't be the first brilliant mind to be fooled.

Inquisitive, daring, and rich with possibilities, *The Circumference of the World* is a speculative masterpiece.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2023)

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