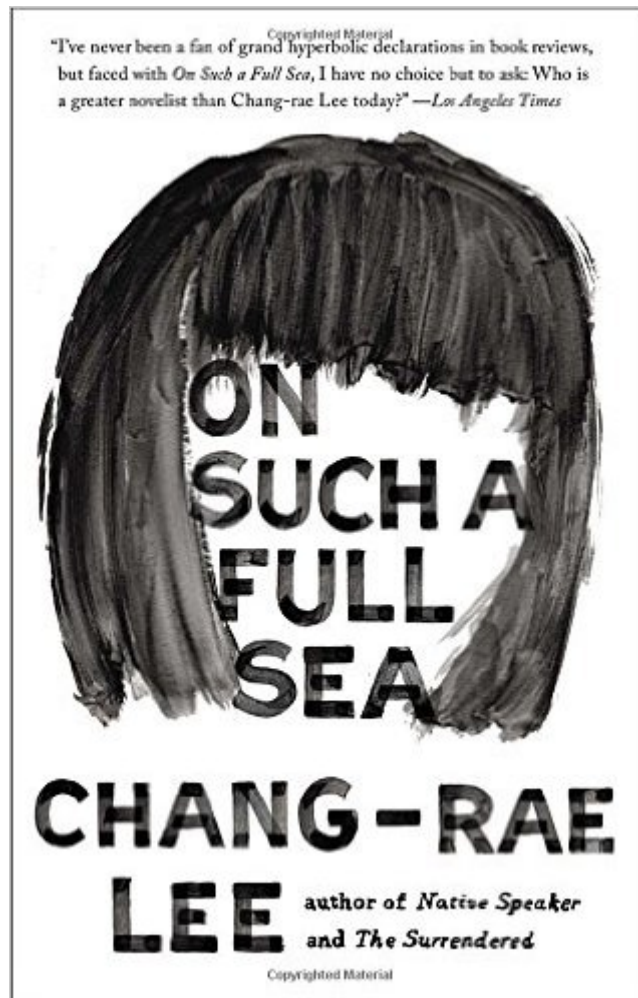


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On Such A Full Sea: A Novel



Synopsis

“Watching a talented writer take a risk is one of the pleasures of devoted reading, and *On Such a Full Sea* provides all that and more. . . . With *On Such a Full Sea*, [Chang-rae Lee] has found a new way to explore his old preoccupation: the oft-told tale of the desperate, betraying, lonely human heart.” —Andrew Sean Greer, *The New York Times Book Review* “I’ve never been a fan of grand hyperbolic declarations in book reviews, but faced with *On Such a Full Sea*, I have no choice but to ask: Who is a greater novelist than Chang-rae Lee today?” —Porochista Khakpour, *The Los Angeles Times* From the beloved award-winning author of *Native Speaker* and *The Surrendered*, a highly provocative, deeply affecting story of one woman’s legendary quest in a shocking, future America. *On Such a Full Sea* takes Chang-rae Lee’s elegance of prose, his masterly storytelling, and his long-standing interests in identity, culture, work, and love, and lifts them to a new plane. Stepping from the realistic and historical territories of his previous work, Lee brings us into a world created from scratch. Against a vividly imagined future America, Lee tells a stunning, surprising, and riveting story that will change the way readers think about the world they live in. In a future, long-declining America, society is strictly stratified by class. Long-abandoned urban neighborhoods have been repurposed as highwalled, self-contained labor colonies. And the members of the labor class — descendants of those brought over en masse many years earlier from environmentally ruined provincial China — find purpose and identity in their work to provide pristine produce and fish to the small, elite, satellite charter villages that ring the labor settlement. In this world lives Fan, a female fish-tank diver, who leaves her home in the B-Mor settlement (once known as Baltimore), when the man she loves mysteriously disappears. Fan’s journey to find him takes her out of the safety of B-Mor, through the anarchic Open Counties, where crime is rampant with scant governmental oversight, and to a faraway charter village, in a quest that will soon become legend to those she left behind.

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Customer Reviews

I've been a fan of Chang-rae Lee ever since reading his first book, *Native Speaker*. So even though speculative fiction isn't really my thing, I wanted to read *On Such a Full Sea*, simply because of who wrote it. In this book, Lee has detailed a grim, dystopian future, clearly drawing on the major issues of our day--pollution, income inequality, disease, lack of opportunity and more. The world he has created is rigidly stratified, with the wealthy Charters at the top--those who have all the opportunities and wealth, those in self-contained labor settlements, formerly major U.S. cities, whose purpose is to provide the Charters with food, and those who must fend for themselves in the counties. The heroine, Fan, is from one of the labor settlements, B-Mor, which it quickly becomes apparent was once Baltimore. The labor settlements are populated by the descendants of the "originals," who were brought over from China. There is almost no upward mobility for anyone except the Charters; however, once in a while someone from the settlements, who does exceptionally well on tests, will be plucked away and placed in a Charter community, as Fan's brother had been many years earlier. Fan, at 16, is an exceptionally good diver, able to hold her breath longer than anyone and responsible for cleaning the fish tanks that produce seafood for the Charters. She's in love with Reg, who works in the greenhouses. In Lee's futuristic world, cancer (C-illness) is ubiquitous--everyone develops it at some point--except Reg, who for reasons unknown, seems to be impervious. One day, he disappears, and Fan does the unthinkable--she leaves B-Mor in search of him. The rest of the book is an account of her adventures, with people in the counties and the Charters.

Imagine us. We are sitting on a dying earth, but our contentedness precludes us from acknowledging it. We work near tirelessly, day in and out, for the course of our lives to remain steady, static. We live communally, but barely speak with each other. Our own corner of the world is all we know and all we're encouraged to understand. Save for the rarest cases --- fiery, untouchable brilliance, or the unexplained interest of a nebulous governing power --- we have no social mobility. And above all, we do not question our state of affairs, save in idle commentary. For what would be the use? This is a glimpse of the world of Chang-rae Lee's *ON SUCH A FULL SEA*, a novel set in a future dystopia that seems, at first, a great departure for him. Yet, although

Lee here takes his first crack at speculative fiction, he still preoccupies himself with those themes that have served him so well for so long --- hope, will, betrayal, knowledge, regret --- in a setting reflecting our own, only eerily, near-apocalyptically stretched. The novel's narrator is a collective one: an ever-shifting group of unnamed inhabitants of a fishing labor settlement called B-Mor (once Baltimore), founded by emigrants from New China, who left to escape the pollution destroying their countryside. B-Mors are members of the second-tier of a rigid, three-tier class system that stretches worldwide. Although the dwellers of such settlements are lower than the powerful, ambitious residents of the wealthy Charter villages, they remain safer and better off than the denizens of the vastly numerous surrounding counties. The B-Mors tell, reflectively, the story of Fan, a gifted 16-year-old fish-tank diver whose world is shattered instantly when her lover, Reg, disappears one afternoon without a trace.

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