



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 & 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 & 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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