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Talking ‘Exhalation’

Ted Chiang’s “Exhalation: Stories” has been described as a collection “that will make you think, grapple with big questions and feel more human,” and as the “best kind of science fiction.”

As the current UCSB Reads selection, the book for months has been the subject of myriad events on campus. Now, in the final offering of Reads’ 16th season, Chiang himself will appear at 7:30 p.m. Tues., May 10 at Campbell Hall. The event is free but advance registration via the UCSB Arts & Lectures portal is required. (Masking and proof of full vaccination and booster are required to attend in person.)

Moderated by Melody Jue of the English department, the program will begin with a presentation by Chiang, followed by conversation, audience Q&A, and a book signing.

“UC Santa Barbara Library is excited to welcome science fiction author Ted Chiang to campus for our first in-person UCSB Reads author talk in two years and after months of engaging discussions and events around the themes in his collection, ‘Exhalation: Stories,” said Alex Regan, events and exhibitions librarian. “UCSB students and others reading the book, which depicts humans grappling with technology, have been inspired to create paintings, write their own science fiction stories and participate in conversations about free will, quantum mechanics and our relationship with robots.”

From January through May, the library has sponsored talks, panels, film screenings, book clubs and more centered on “Exhalation,” which some faculty members incorporated into their winter or spring courses. UCSB Reads is an annual program of the UCSB Library that brings the campus and Santa Barbara communities together to read a common book that explores compelling issues of our time.

“Exhalation” is a collection of nine science-fiction short stories written in spare, yet dramatic prose that address essential questions about human life, including free will, fate, bioethics, time travel, virtual reality, cyborgs and artificial intelligence.

Blending speculative fiction with philosophy to imagine morally complex worlds the book is rife with characters and dilemmas that, in the words of Joyce Carol Oates, “linger in the memory the way riddles may linger — teasing, tormenting, illuminating, thrilling.”

Chiang has won more than two dozen prizes for his work, including four Hugo, four Nebula and four Locus awards, and has been featured in The Best American Short Stories. The Oscar-nominated film “Arrival” was based on a novella by Chiang called “Story of Your Life.”

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