



Todas las cosmicómicas

Italo Calvino , Ángel Sánchez-Gijón (Translator)

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«Muchos críticos han definido estos cuentos míos como un nuevo tipo de ficción científica. Ahora bien, yo no tengo nada en contra de la science-fiction, de la que soy –como todos– un apasionado y divertido lector, pero me parece que los cuentos de ficción científica están construidos con un método completamente diferente del de los míos. La primera diferencia, observada por varios críticos, es que la sciencefiction trata del futuro, mientras que cada uno de mis cuentos se remonta a un pasado remoto, como si remedara un “mito de los orígenes”. Pero no sólo eso [...] Yo quisiera servirme del dato científico como de una carga propulsora para salir de los hábitos de la imaginación y vivir incluso lo cotidiano en los confines más extremos de nuestra experiencia; en cambio me parece que la ficción científica tiende a acercar lo que está lejos, lo que es difícil de imaginar, y que tiende a darle una dimensión realista.» Italo Calvino En este libro se reúnen, por primera vez, en un solo volumen, todas las cosmicómicas, relatos en los que Calvino, a partir de 1964, asumió el divertido deber de aligerar y hacer visibles los arduos conceptos de la ciencia contemporánea, llegando a crear un género más próximo a los mitos cosmogónicos que a la ciencia-ficción.

Todas las cosmicómicas Details

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From Reader Review Todas las cosmicómicas for online ebook

jeremy says

collecting all of calvino's *cosmicomics* writings, *the complete cosmicomics* features 34 stories spanning some twenty years (or rather, billions, really). included are the dozen tales that make up 1965's *cosmicomics*, the eleven in 1967's *t zero* (published in the uk as *time and the hunter*), four from the posthumous *numbers in the dark*, and seven stories not previously rendered into english. never released in the united states, *the complete cosmicomics* is four hundred pages of rich, imaginative fiction on the grandest scale. these interrelated tales of universal origin and galactic wonder are some of the italian master's most playful and creative works. qfwfq is one of calvino's finest characters, a narrator as enigmatic and expansive as the settings themselves.

this edition is perhaps best suited for those already familiar with the *cosmicomics* tales; for readers seeking to round out their reading with the heretofore unpublished stories. calvino's fiction is potent yet deceptively simple, and part of the joy of his work resides in the ample charm and brilliance he so effortlessly manages to fit into his otherwise slim affairs. *cosmicomics*, *t zero*, and the others may thusly be more enjoyable if read in the standalone editions in which they were originally released.

in this world where every object was instantly thrown away and substituted with another new and perfect replacement, at the slightest sign of breakage or ageing, at the first dent or stain, there was just one false note, one shadow: the moon. it wandered through the sky, naked, corroded and grey, more and more alien to the world down here, a hangover from a way of being that was now incongruous.

Megan Baxter says

I'm trying to find just the right word to describe these stories. Science fables isn't quite right - there isn't a moral at the end of each one. I'm torn between science myths and science legends. I think I'm leaning towards myths, in the sense of "stories that tell how something came to be." Let's go with that.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the recent changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

Disclaimer :: Everything that follows is a lie. The book was received by me direct from the publisher for no charge, via that goodreads first reads giveaway.

What was greatest here was the opportunity to reread the original set of Calvino's cosmicomics collected as

Cosmicomics. These little things are simply gems, some of the best fabulist writing you'll ever come across. Frankly, I prefer them to what Coover does with the fabulation.

All told, this recent publication of *The Complete Cosmicomics* collects 34 pieces, including eight trans'd into English for the first time.

The best of the additional stories are the Qfwfq stories, especially those toward the end, "Shells and Time", "World Memory", "Nothing and Not Much", and "Implosion". Although "World Memory" isn't technically a Qfwfq story, but you get the feeling that the writers of that one *Futurama* episode had this story in mind.

Something didn't quite catch in the *Priscilla* triptych, "Mitosis", "Meiosis", and "Death".

Those from *t zero* are perhaps only for those fascinated by Zeno and/or the mathematico-logico OULIPO kind of thing. And frankly I'm not quite clear how they qualify as cosmicomics.

In other word, the cosmological stories suit me much better than the biologically or the mathematically oriented stories.

There is this thing where these cosmicomics (this is its own genre, within 'fabulism') are what science fiction would be were science fiction a kind of fiction about science, rather than the junk it tends to be. I mean, really about science.

And what is spectacular here, isn't so much that these pieces are *about* this or that scientific (or faux scientific) thesis or hypothesis or discovery, but the way they place subjectivity in an impossible position, place consciousness precisely there where consciousness is impossible to sustain. And thereby demonstrates the alienated experience that is inevitable within a scientific world view which simply cannot deal with the trauma of subjectivity. Or, these stories are more true than the god=perspective practicing scientists are forced to assume.

In other words, better to read these stories with Kant, Schelling, Heidegger, etc in mind than with the latest issue of whatever periodical of theoretical physics you prefer.

Also, if you want to know what 'postmodern' fiction is, you'll need at least the original set of cosmicomics.

Lovely.

oh and since everyone loves Hamlet, I want to provide for you Calvino's riff from "Implosion" on that soliloquy ::

"To explode or to implode, that is the question: whether 'tis nobler in the mind to expand one's energies in space without restraint, or to crush them into a dense inner concentration and, by ingesting, cherish them. To steal away, to vanish; no more; to hold within oneself every gleam, every ray, deny oneself every vent, suffocating in the depths of the soul the conflicts that so idly trouble it, give them their quietus; to hide oneself, to obliterate oneself: perchance to reawaken elsewhere, changed."

Asl? Can says

Okudu?um en yarat?c? metinlerden birisi oldu san?r?m. Bir öykü kitab? ama her öykünün anlat?c?s? ayn?. O da evrenin ba??ndan-hatta daha evren bile yokken- günümüze kadar her ko?ulu ya?am?? Qfwfg adl? bir arkada?. Her öykü bilimsel bir al?nt?yla ba?l?yor ve Qfwfg de o dönemde geçen bir an?s?n? anlat?yor bize. Evren yava? yava? olu?ur, güne? bir so?uyup bir ?s?n?rken Qfwfg de ayr?l?k ac?lar? ve yeni ko?ullara adapte olmaktadır s?k?nt?lar?n? anlat?yor bize.

E?lenceli bir kitap. Yine de ?talo Calvino okurken hep biraz tetikte olmak laz?m çünkü en basit cümlelerden bile beklenmedik alt anlamlar ç?kabiliyor.

Bi de ek not: Kitap bütün kozmokomik öykülerin bir derlemesi oldu?u için yar?dan sonra tekrar eden öyküler var. O yüzden belli bi yerden sonra s?k?lmaya ba?layabilirsiniz okurken ama sabredin derim çünkü en sevdi?im öykülerden biri olan Ay K?zlar? kitab?n son yar?s?ndayd?.

Sookie says

Cosmicomics was a joy to read. Qfwfq, the universe's know it all experiences every bit of the universe and journals the experiences. There is tragedy in the story if the last dinosaur, certain degree of naughty cosmic joke when Qfwfq and a friend bet on making newer and prettier galaxies, romanticism as the families leap to the moon when the earth was very young and the Moon was very near, pragmatism while Qfwfq becomes a small sea creature and the infinite possibilities the universe offers in a tiny fraction of time.

Cosmicomics has to be experienced and every experience is unique.

Amanda says

I really didn't get on with Calvino's writing style in this collection. I found the stories read more as essays or philosophical musings than narratives. I found the stories often confusing and over-elaborate. The treatment of female characters really bothered me in this collection. The main character was overly concerned with possessing, in some way or another, the women in the story, a theme repeated far too often. This is, however, prompt many good discussion between myself and Victoria from A Hermit's Progress. At the end of the day, though this makes me hesitant to pick up anything else by Calvino in the future.

Junta says

A collection of short stories I like for its creativity. I should probably take more time with my short story collections since you're bound to appreciate them more that way, letting the ideas from each story seep into your subconscious over a course of weeks, if not months.

Calvino's 34 stories each focus on some entity or event through the history of the Universe, often from the very beginning . I especially liked the first collection in the compilation, *Cosmicomics*. I had some friends

ask about the book I was reading in these couple of weeks, and I'd enthusiastically tell them of stories about when the Moon used to pass by so close to the Earth that one could climb up onto it on a ladder; when there was no colour in the world, so you were never sure if your lover was still with you, she was the same, uniform grey as all of the surroundings; a young reptile being ashamed of introducing his uncle, still living underwater and rejecting life on land, to his girlfriend; being the last dinosaur on Earth, but being recognised by everyone as just a big and ugly member of the new species; receiving a message ('I SAW YOU') from a hundred million light years away that they saw you doing something embarrassing, and thinking of which message to send back (which takes another hundred million years)...

I think I would have gotten into it more if I was more interested in science and space, but I'd be happy to have my future children read these stories when they're young - maybe they'll become more interested in the physical universe than I am. I still remember so many of the stories well, Calvino is an admirable storyteller.

As written in the introduction, the subject matter of the stories can be divided into

1. The Moon
2. The Sun, stars and galaxies
3. The Earth
4. Evolution and time.

The main impressions I take away from the collection are what love, identity and life philosophies were like throughout history (not as humans but in the various preceding stages of evolution from a single cell), and the stories prompted me to look up many things about the universe which I didn't know about. One of my favourite lines was the explanation of the Big Bang - (view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)]

3.5 stars. Suns. And Galaxies.

August 11, 2015

MJ Nicholls says

Penguin Classics rounded up the entire output from Italo Calvino's *Cosmicomics* series in 2009 and collected them into this impressive and expensive hardback book, *The Complete Cosmicomics*.

The edition I read contains all the stories from the original *Cosmicomics*, *Time & the Hunter*, *World Memory & Other Cosmicomic Stories*, and *Cosmicomics Old & New* collections, plus one rewritten marvel, *The Other Eurydice*.

I made the mistake of devouring these stories in one quick glut and probably didn't read them in the manner the author intended – slowly over a period of months, letting each mysterious and complex tale seep into my subconscious.

Frankly, I found these astrophysical fables rather repetitive and tedious, and I lost interest as it shifted into the more pessimistic fare. I'm not entirely well-versed in Calvino's oeuvre, so for now I'm going to assume I'm wrong and that these stories are genius for reasons I am incapable of understanding.

More open-minded readers will find the scientific detail fascinating and will appreciate the wit, charm and humour in some of these incredibly clever stories. For some reason, most of these had no effect on me. It was rather like going to visit the Louvre and falling asleep among the Picassos. Who can explain the science of art?

Still – this is a gorgeously packaged edition and a must-have for Calvino supporters.

Cinzia DuBois says

Take this book, and Moby Dick, and lay them in my arms as I lie in my casket. Then cremate me. It is only in ashes that we shall finally be one, forever and for eternity, and return to the universe the way we entered; as atoms and particles and my how beautiful we shall be.

Algernon says

Climb up on the Moon? Of course we did. All you had to do was row out to it in a boat and, when you were underneath, prop a ladder against her and scramble up.

This is what happens when you let a poet loose in a library full of science books: he will turn everything on its head and take you sailing across the galactic plane watching suns coalesce from the primordial dust, he will hold a conversation across light years with neighboring galaxies, he will dance around a multicolored, sparkling crystal gardeen, play marbles with hydrogen atoms along the curvature of space and chase skirts down gravity wells, running on parallel lines that must somehow meet in the future of desire.

Now, you will ask me what in the world we went up on the Moon for; I'll explain it to you. We went to collect the milk, with a big spoon and a bucket. Moon milk was very thick, like a kind of cream cheese.

'Joyful and energetic' is how I would describe best this collection of strange and improbable stories, just like the newly spawned monocellular entity in **Mitosis**, ready to reach out of itself and go exploring the universe. The narrator in most of the stories is Qfwfq - an intelligent, self-aware entity that witnessed everything at first hand: the Big Bang, the Moon growing out of the Earth's core like a mushroom, the first spiral shell of a mollusk and the disappearance of dinosaurs, the death of the Universe from entropy and its rebirth in the explosion of a giant black hole. (*To explode or to implode - said Qfwfq - that is the question: whether 'tis nobler in the mind to expand one's energies in space without restraint, or to crush them into a dense inner concentration and, by ingesting, cherish them.*) In his own recollections, witnessing this universe journey in time is all a bit like growing up in one of those noisy extended Italian families, with weird uncles and cousins everywhere, with unruly offsprings vying for attention and embarrassing oneself at every step:

There was also a cleaning woman - 'maintenance staff' she was called - only one, for the whole universe, since there was so little room. To tell the truth, she had nothing to do all day long, not even dusting - inside one point not even a grain of dust can enter - so she spent all her time gossiping and complaining. (from

All At One Point)

Started at the peak of the race to the Moon between 1963 and 1968, it is not surprising that space and planetary science are the favorite subjects of the tales. Later stories get more into time relativity, semiotics and genetics. Considered from the point of view of science-fiction, the major difference and obstacle in such categorizing Calvino comes from his focus on the distant past and on abstract concepts instead of on the future of humanity.

The major themes I've identified in this book assembling over two decades of Calvino returning to the adventures of Qfwfq :

- The Moon (The Distance to the Moon, The Mushroom Moon, The Soft Moon)
- The Stars (The Light Years, At Daybreak, Games without End)
- The Earth (Without Colours, Crystals, The Meteorites, The Stone Sky)
- Evolution (The Aquatic Uncle, Dinosaurs, The Spiral, The Origin of Birds)
- Genetics (Mitosis, Meiosis, Death from the Priscilla sequence, Blood Sea)
- Time, mathematics and logic (t zero, The Night Driver, The Count of Monte Cristo, The Chase)

Science is not the only inspiration for the author. Every tale introduces a mythical element, a literary reference, a love triangle, an experimental approach to link the real with the fanciful, the esoteric, the subconscious. The author will often set up to muddle things up and subvert the expectations of the reader, provoking him to look at the past of our world from a slanted perspective: *I've used expressions that have the disadvantage of creating confusion with what is different nowadays while they have the advantage of bringing to light what is common between the two times.* .

World Memory looks at what defines humanity and what is worth preserving for posterity. It also gives a key to decoding the style used in all these cosmic comedies: *A mass of coldly objective and incontrovertible information would run the risk of presenting a far from truthful picture, of falsifying what is most specific in any situation. Suppose we received from another planet a message made up of pure facts, facts of such clarity as to be merely obvious: we wouldn't pay attention, we would hardly even notice; only a message containing something unexpected, something doubtful and partially indecipherable, would break through the threshold of our consciousness and demand to be received and interpreted.*

If I have a complaint about the collection, and I do as witnessed by my lower rating, it is that Calvino tends to get too enamored of this deliberate obfuscation of facts, sliding into navel gazing. His logical edifices look like fragile houses of cards ready to tumble at a closer inspection from a more rigorous reader. This is apparent especially in later stories, as the first set of twelve went down without a hitch, but the later ones needed a lot more effort and concentration on my part to follow through. Here's an example where the Chateau d'If becomes an Escher etching, an absurd labyrinth from which there is no escape, a Looney Tunes cartoon, a mad game of Portal:

The walls and the vaults have been pierced in every direction by the Abbe's pick, but his itineraries continue to wind around themselves like a ball of yarn, and he constantly goes through my cell as he follows, each time, a different course. He has long since lost his sense of orientation: Faria no longer recognizes the cardinal points, indeed he cannot recognize even the zenith and the nadir. At times I hear scratching at the ceiling; a rain of plaster falls on me; a breach opens; Faria head appears, upside down. Upside down for me, not for him: he crawls out of his tunnel, he walks head down, while nothing about his person is ruffled, not his white hair, nor his beard green with mold, nor the tatters of sackcloth that cover his emaciated loins. He walks across the ceiling and the walls like a fly, he sinks his pick into a certain spot, a hole opens; he disappears.

All this flight of fancy used to illustrate what? I'm still musing about it, which is not a bad thing in itself, but might turn off a casual reader.

I'm trying to close, but I realize I've forgotten to introduce the recurrent theme of love as an expression of desire for knowledge, for reaching out of the inner self, as the moving factor behind celestial mechanics and behind evolution of living cells (*The tension towards the outside, the elsewhere, the otherwise, which is what is then called a state of desire.* . from **Mitosis**). The move from asexual to sexual reproduction is seen as a process of alienation, of separating what was once whole and letting the halves of the sphere search for each other through eternity (Plato?) : *Void, separation and waiting, that's what we are.* from **Meiosis** .

As a road opener, Calvino's influence can be detected in the writers that came after him, in the effort to renew and experiment with the literary form, in breaking the rules and searching for new forms of expression. To my joy, one of these parallels is to a Romanian poet from my own hometown: Nichita Stanescu, and I look forward to re-reading his poems from this new angle. In **Ode to Man** I see a direct link to Calvino's **Stone Sky** :

Din punctul de vedere-al pietrelor,
soarele-i o piatr? c?z?toare,
oamenii-s o lin? ap?sare...
Sunt mi?care-adaugat? la mi?care
?i lumina ce-o z?re?ti, din soare! (sorry for lack of translation)

vs

A stone sky rotated above our heads, one more limpid than yours, but criss-crossed, like yours, by clouds at those points where gatherings of chrome and magnesium collected. Winged shadows rise up in flight: the internal skies have their own birds, accretions of light rock describing spirals, scudding upwards until they disappear from sight. There are sudden changes of weather when bursts of leaden rain shower down, or when we have a hail of zinc crystals, there is nowhere else to escape except to slip inside the porous holes of a spongy rock. At times the darkness is split by a fiery zigzag: not a lightning bolt, but incandescent metal slithering down a vein in the earth.

I'll finish with a quote **Solar Storm** , where Qfwfq falls in love with a being of pure energy, an incarnated Aurora Borealis that echoes in part Frankenstein by Mary Shelley : *Soon all the televisions in the area will start working again, the images of detergents and beautiful girls will occupy the screen again, these gangs of persecutors will disperse, everyone will go back to their ration of daily rationality.*

Me too, I'll go back to my 9-to-5 job and say goodbye for now to Qfwfq and his playful universe.

Jim says

Why, oh why can't I read in six different languages?

I've been a fan of Calvino for many years and have just finished the Cosmicomics for the first time. I read them one per evening and let them sink in slowly. There is a lot here to absorb and meditate on, and I would definitely suggest reading each of the stories separately, as they were written. One of my favorites in the collection is 'The Count of Monte Cristo'. An excellent brain twister!

I have one criticism/concern, and it is about the translation. The Cosmicomics are written in complex language/logic and I'm wondering if they work as well in English as they do in Italian. Is something lost in translation? Or maybe not lost, but somehow changed? I'm not criticizing the translator's work, so much as saying that maybe these particular stories need to be read in their original form. I guess I won't know until I learn to read Italian - maybe next lifetime...

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

REVIEW:

Otherwise Whimsical Science

Most of the stories in this comprehensive collection start with a scientific quote and extrapolate its scientific premise into the universe of abstract reality and fiction.

The narrator - Qfwfq - is variously a dinosaur, a mollusc or a camel, sometimes possibly just a unicellular organism, a cell (*"there was a cell, and the cell was me, and that was that...[even if it had a sense of spiritual fullness, the awareness that this cell was me, this sense of fullness...of being]"*), or a consciousness that was around to witness the Big Bang and is still living or existent.

Sometimes, it's hard to differentiate the narrator from the author himself (or an American surrogate for the author) - he lives in Italy and takes a weekend trip across the Lodi plain in his Volkswagen with his Italian girlfriend, Zylphia, and two friends, or he lives in New Jersey, telephones his girlfriend, Vug, visits Staten Island with her, catches the train, and eats some oysters for dinner. Not that the difference matters, for they have *"a vital element in common"*.

The science is cosmological, biological or palaeontological as anything. Only it's been run through a comic (strip) processor from which it emerges like a cartoon (complete with cartoon or naive physics):

"Now these stories can be told better with strip drawings than with a story composed of sentences one after the other...I like telling things in cartoon form, but I would have to alternate the action frames with idea frames..."

Calvino's achievement is to make science imaginative and whimsical, if sometimes naively entertaining. Conversely, he makes literature that is somehow scientific. No one input is prioritised over the other. Science becomes a springboard for the imagination. The two are *"swimming and chasing each other in play."* It's a *"risky manoeuvre"*, but it works. On the other hand, as Calvino says, *"if you don't like this story, you can think up another one..."*

States of Desire

Once the consciousness becomes aware of itself, it also becomes aware of the other (and otherness). Calvino describes this in terms of time (of which there is plenty):

"Time passes, and I, more and more pleased with being in it and with being me, am also more

and more pleased that there is time, and that I am in time, or rather that time passes and I pass time and time passes me, or rather I am pleased to be contained in time, to be the content of time, or the container, in short, to mark by being me the passing of time.

"Now you must admit this begins to arouse a sense of expectation, a happy and hopeful waiting, a happy youthful impatience, and also an anxiety, a youthful excited anxiety also basically painful, a painful unbearable tension and impatience.

"...there was me, in that point and in that moment - right? - and then there was an outside which seemed to me a void I might occupy in another moment or point, in a series of other points or moments, in short a potential projection of me where, however, I wasn't present, and therefore a void which was actually the world and the future, but I didn't know that yet...

"I had this contentment because outside of me there was this void that wasn't me, which perhaps could become me because 'me' was the only word I knew, the only word I could have declined, a void that could become me, however, wasn't me at that moment and basically never would be: it was the discovery of something else that wasn't yet something but anyhow wasn't me, or rather wasn't me at that moment and in that point and therefore was something else, and this discovery aroused an exhilarating enthusiasm in me, no, a torment, a dizzying torture, the dizziness of a void which represented everything possible, the complement of that fullness that was for me all, and there I was brimming over with love for this elsewhere, this other time, this otherwise, silent and void.

"...the tension towards the outside, the elsewhere, the otherwise...is what is called a state of desire...I must tell you that my state of desire tended simply towards an elsewhere, another time, an otherwise that might contain something (or, let's say, the world) or contain only me, or me in relation to something (or to the world) or something (the world) without me any more."

This Discontinuous and Perpetual Life

"Cosmicomics" is, in the end, a metaphysics that emerges inexorably from the physics of the "*discontinuous and perpetual life*" of the cosmos. It maps a "*circuit of vital information that runs from the nucleic acids to writing*."

VERSE:

**[Prompted by the Words
of Italo Calvino]**

Lunar Milk

We flew to the moon
To collect some milk
With a tin bucket
And a silver spoon.

Boating on the Moon

On the moon, I love to go boating
Where ev'ry shiny fish is floating.

Ode to Mrs Vhd Vhd

I'd like to tell you what I'd do
If we could just fly to the moon
I'd like to spend all month on you.

Pin Cushion

If you have a pin,
You'll need somewhere to pin it.
Maybe a cushion
Or an outside with an inside in it.

The Most Absolute Bottom [In the Words of Italo Calvino]

I went down into the void,
To the most absolute bottom
Conceivable,
And once there I saw that
The extreme limit must have been
Much, much further below,
Very remote,
And I went on falling,
To reach it.

Hammocks in Space [In the Words of Italo Calvino]

There were certain
Soft cavities
Hollowed in space,
As welcoming
As hammocks,
Where I could lie
Joined with Ursula H'x,
The two of us
Swaying together,
Biting each other in turn
Along all our persons.

Music of the Spheres

I'd like to spend
All year
In the interior

Of a sphere.

Eyes Implicit in My Being Here [In the Words of Italo Calvino]

Framed by far-sighted lenses
I feel on me the far-sighted eyes
Of a zoologist, trying to frame me
In the eye of a Rolleiflex.

Blood - Sea

Back then our blood was in fact the sea,
Our present inside was outside,
And our outside in.

The Future of the Two of Us

What now leads the two of us
To seek each other isn't
An impulse towards the afterwards:
It's the final action of the past
That is fulfilled through us.

SOUNDTRACK:

(view spoiler)

Stuart says

The Complete Cosmicomics: Cosmic Tales of the Universe's Origins

Originally posted at Fantasy Literature

Along with his brilliant **Invisible Cities** (1972 in Italian, 1974 in English), one of Italo Calvino's most enduring creations was his series of whimsical and erudite stories inspired by the origins of the universe and scientific principles, labeled **Cosmicomics** (1965 in Italian, 1968 in English). They are narrated by a mysterious being called Qfwfq, who tells of the Big Bang and the time before that when the universe was a single point without space or dimensions. Qfwfq has a refreshingly frank and humorous attitude towards such momentous moments as the birth of our universe, the origins of life, the extinction of the dinosaurs, the first animals to crawl onto land, the early days of the Moon, etc.

If you seek out these stories, you will find that the most recent edition includes much more than the original 12 stories. Now, for the same price you can buy in print or e-book all 34 collected Cosmicomics stories, published as **The Complete Cosmicomics (2009)**. This comprises the original **Cosmicomics (1965)**, **t-zero** (1967, also published in English as **Time and the Hunter**), and **World Memory and Other Cosmicomic Stories** (a collection never published in a single English volume, with eight new stories, seven of which are translated into English for the first time for the 2009 collection).

It's an overused expression, but these stories truly defy easy description. Calvino believed that modern fiction was not addressing the most important new developments in cosmology and science in the context of the mid-1960s and amid the space race between the US and Soviet Union. So he took it upon himself to address these topics with a literary approach, and on top of that add a whimsical tone to otherwise obtuse concepts like the Big Bang and dimensionless space.

He also added a romantic element to these stories, as his protagonist Qfwfq is often pining after an elusive female companion, pursuing her across lunar landscapes, deep in the primordial earth, or in the farthest corners of the universe. So the big distinction with science fiction is that Calvino is fascinated with our origins, and at the same time uses the lens of literature to inform his comic tales. I will split my review into three parts to do justice to each section.

Cosmicomics (5 stars)

These are probably Calvino's most accessible and enjoyable stories, and the first US edition translated by William Weaver won the National Book Award for a Translation in 1969. The first story in particular, "The Distance to the Moon", combines all the elements I've described in a delightful tale of the early days when the Moon was much closer to the Earth, and the poignant love story that enfolds around it. It's tells the story of Qfwfq, Captain Vhd Vhd, his wife, and Qfwfq's deaf cousin, who took little boats on the ocean to harvest the milk of the Moon using a ladder, big spoons, and buckets. The distance between the Earth and Moon is so short that a tall ladder is enough to get there, and gravity reverses midway so you are drawn to the Moon past a certain point, and appear to be hanging upside down from the Earth perspective. Calvino's descriptions of this bizarre and fantastic situation are wonderful:

In reality, from the top of the ladder, standing erect on the last rung, you could just touch the Moon if you held your arms up. I would cling first with one hand, then with both, and immediately I would feel ladder and boat drifting away from below me, and the motion of the Moon would tear me from the Earth's attraction. Yes, the Moon was so strong that she pulled you up; you realized this the moment you passed from one to the other: you had to swing up abruptly, with a kind of somersault, grabbing the scales, throwing your legs over your head, until your feet were on the Moon's surface. Seen from the Earth, you looked as if you were hanging there with your head down, but for you, it was the normal position, and the only odd thing was that when you raised your eyes you saw the sea above you, glistening, with the boat and the others upside down,

hanging like a bunch of grapes from the vine.

There they harvest the milk of the Moon, which is a truly unique and somewhat stomach-churning concoction:

Moon-milk was very thick, like a kind of cream cheese. It formed in the crevices between one scale and the next, through the fermentation of various bodies and substances of terrestrial origin which had flown up from the prairies and forests and lakes, as the Moon sailed over them. It was composed chiefly of vegetal juices, tadpoles, bitumen, lentils, honey, starch crystals, sturgeon eggs, molds, pollens, gelatinous matter, worms, resins, pepper, mineral salts, combustion residue.

There develops a strange love triangle between Qfwfq, the Captain's wife, and Qfwfq's deaf cousin whose only passion is harvesting the Moon's milk and exploring its scaly and alien terrain. I was surprisingly moved by the ending of this story, as I had initially expected Calvino's story not to be centered on human relationships. This story is creative, literate, whimsical, and magical, and if you are interested in this collection I think it will win you over.

The remaining 11 stories are of equally high quality and charm, and explore a wide range of concepts and themes. Taken as whole, they are an amazing achievement and unique in the annals of fantastic literature.

Time and the Hunter (2 stars)

This set of stories is a very different creature indeed. It consists of three parts, “More of Qfwfq”, “Priscilla”, and “t zero”. These stories are far more experimental, formalistic, complex, mathematical, and frequently impossible to follow. In many ways they bear little resemblance to the stories from Cosmicomics, so in reviewing them I gave them a 3 star rating. I will separately review each part.

“More of Qfwfq”

This part consists of four stories, “The Soft Moon”, “The Origin of the Birds”, “Crystals”, and “Blood, Sea”. These stories ostensibly are narrated by Qfwfq, but his presence is fairly limited, and the stories often occupy modern environments, but still exploring Calvino's themes of the romantic pursuit of the Moon, the evolution of birds shown via cartoon strip, the elements that make up the Earth juxtaposed onto New York, and the story of how life in the oceans made its way into our bodies via blood cells. It's a much more cerebral literary experimental, and much of the playfulness is gone, but it does represent Calvino's tireless drive to reinvent literary conventions to tackle modern themes.

“Priscilla”

This is a set of three linked stories, “Mitosis”, “Meiosis”, and “Death”, and I found these stories almost impossible to read or understand, as this passage will show:

So I am speaking then of the initial phase of a love story which afterwards is probably repeated in an interminable multiplication of initial phases just like the first and identified with the first, a multiplication or rather a squaring, an exponential growth of stories which is always tantamount to the first story, but it isn't as if I were so very sure of all this, I assume it as you can also assume it. I'm referring to an initial phase that precedes the other initial phases, a first phase which must surely have existed, because it's logical to expect it to exist, and also because I remember it very well, and when I say it's the first I don't in the least mean first in the absolute sense, that's what you'd like me to mean but I don't; I mean first in the sense that

we can consider any of these identical initial phases the first, and the one I refer to is the one I remember, the one I remember as first in the sense that before it I don't remember anything. And as for the first in the absolute sense, your guess is as good as mine, I'm not interested.

My mind was reeling after pages of this type of exposition. It just went on and on, without any conceivable storyline. It's very much a literary experiment, but for me these stories had no appeal.

“t zero”

This is the set of four stories that really go off the deep end of mathematical experimental literature, and I challenge anyone other than a theoretical mathematician with an advanced literature degree out there to make any sense of the stories at all. It was so completely impenetrable that I just skimmed through the pages until they became a blur. You're welcome to give them a try, but don't say I didn't warn you. Again, a sample may help to illustrate what I mean:

I find myself in a random space-time intermediary point of a phase of the universe; after hundreds of millions of billions of seconds here the arrow and the lion and I and the bush have found ourselves as we now find ourselves, and this second will be promptly swallowed up and buried in the series of the hundreds of millions of billions of seconds that continues, independently of the outcome, a second from now, of the convergent or divergent flight of the lion and of the arrow; then at a certain point the course will reverse its direction, the universe will repeat its vicissitude backwards, from the effects the causes will punctually arise... it will be forgotten in the dispersal of billions of combinations of neurons within the lobes of brains, so that no one will know he's living in reversed time just as I myself am not now sure in which direction the time I move in is moving, and if the then I'm waiting for has not in reality already happened just a second ago, bearing with it my salvation or my death.

World Memory and Other Cosmicomic Stories (4 stars)

These stories represent a welcome return to the tales of the world's early days, narrated by Qfwfq in his inimitable style. After the incomprehensible mess of “t zero”, it was nice to read more of the fables of how the moon formed from the sea, waves of land thrusting themselves up from the primordial seas, carrying various odd characters on their crests (“The Mushroom Moon”), a very haunting story of the decrepit old Moon and its encounter with a modern-world junkyard and the efforts of an army of young women in an ultra-modern ultra-consumerist New York to save the Moon (“The Daughters of the Moon”). Here is a memorable image:

We crossed one of the bridges that link Manhattan to the mainland. Now we were going along a multi-lane highway, with other cars alongside us, and I kept my eyes fixed on the road ahead, fearing the laughter and crude comments that the sight of the two of us was no doubt prompting in the cars on either side. But when a saloon car overtook us, I nearly went off the road in surprise: crouched on its roof was a girl with her hair spread out in the wind. For a second I thought my passenger was leaping from one fast-moving car to another, but all I had to do was turn my eyes round ever so slightly to see that Diana's knees were still there at the same height as my nose. And it was not just her body that glowed before my eyes: I saw girls everywhere, stretched out in the strangest of poses, clinging to the radiators, doors, mudguards of the speeding cars—their golden or dark hair was the only thing that contrast with the pale or dark gleam of their skin. One of these mysterious female passengers was positioned on every car, all stretching forwards, urging the drivers to follow the Moon.

He also includes “The Stone Sky”, an inversion of the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, in which two

being dwell within the Earth's core, but the female named Rdix has this irresistible urge to explore the upper layers near the crust where ephemeral beings (like humans) dwell. Calvino's imagery here is again unique and refreshing - he delights in inverting our conventional perspectives and examining non-human perspectives:

Border areas, passages between one earthly layer and another, gave her a mild vertigo. We knew that the Earth is made up of superimposed roofs, like the skins of an enormous onion, and that every roof leads you to a roof higher up, and all of them together prefigure the final roof, the point where the Earth ceases to be Earth, where all the inside is left on this side, and beyond there is only the outside. For you this border of the Earth is identified with the Earth itself; you think the sphere is the surface that wraps it, and not its total volume; you have always lived in that flat, flat dimension and you don't even imagine that one can live elsewhere and in a different way. For us at that time, this border was something we knew existed, but we didn't think we could see it without leaving the Earth, a prospect which seemed to us not so much frightful as absurd.

That was where everything was flung out in eruptions and bituminous spurts and smoke-holes, everything that the Earth expelled from its innards: gases, liquid mixtures, volatile elements, base matter, all types of waste. It was the world in negative, something that we could not picture even in our minds, the abstract idea of it was enough to give us a shiver of disgust, no, of anxiety; or rather a stunned sensation, a kind of—as I said—vertigo (yes, that's it, our reactions were more complex than you might think, especially Rdix's), into which their crept an element of fascination, a kind of attraction to the void, to anything double-faced or absolute.

Pavle says

Jedna od onih knjiga za pusto ostrvo, jer sa svake njene stranice se mogu iscediti ?itavi romani.

Tehni?ki, ova zbirka se sastoji iz tri zbirke, pa je ?itanje u kontinuitetu pomalo naporno: originalnih Cosmicomics-a, zbirke Time and the Hunter (?iji su delovi redom „More of Qfwfq“ kao dodatak Kosmikomiksima, „Priscila“ kao život i smrt jedne ?elije, i da, ta?no je toliko opi?eno koliko i zvu?i, i kona?no „t zero“, što su malkice dosadne matemati?ke pri?e, potpuno nepovezane sa ostalim zbirkama), i kona?no zbirke World Memory, koja je zapravo samo drugi tom Kosmikomiksa.

Kalvino, na svoj tipi?no zabavan na?in, igra se sa svemirom i svime onim što ga ?ini: tematski obradjuje postanak, evoluciju, mesec, vreme... i razne druge kosmi?ke teme. Nijedan pri?a nije ista, (izuzev divnog pripoveda?a/konstante-medju-varijablama Qfwfq-a koji je ?as dinosaurus, ?as ?elija pa odmah zatim ?ovek iz Nju Džerzija, a ?as sardina u singularitetu velikog praska), Kalvino pleše sa narativama koje svakoj pri?i daju novi, jedinstveni život. Medjutim, uprkos izuzetnoj širini tema koje obradjuje, sve ih spaja jedan motiv – ljubav. Kalvinu je voleti isto što i disati, postojati. Ljubav je uzrok svega. I to bi možda bilo pateti?no u rukama nekog manjeg pisca, ali šta re?i za Kalvina, kome je razlog (inicijator) za veliki prasak prosta re?enica jedne senzualne Italijanke (zapravo bestelesnog diskutabilno postoje?eg entiteta): **„Boys, the tagliatelle I would make for you!“**.

I bum, evo nas.

Nick Craske says

Reading this was one of the most rewarding reading experiences I've ever had. Enchanting, fantastical and enlightening. A beautiful book with beautiful wordplay and language. Each story takes a scientific "fact" (though sometimes a falsehood by today's understanding), and builds an imaginative story around it. An always extant being called Qfwfq narrates all of the stories save two, each of which is a memory of an event in the history of the universe.
