

With a 30th-edition special section and contributions from Christine Lagarde ■ Travis Kalanick ■ Muhammadu Buhari Margaret Atwood ■ Narendra Modi ■ Malala Yousafzai ■ Tim Berners-Lee

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The World in 2016



2016 IN BRIEF

The Pirelli calendar, famous for its racy (un-)dress and poses, goes feminist with a woman photographer and models chosen for accomplishment as well as looks



The three-body phenomenon

Yuan Yang

Liu Cixin's sci-fi novel becomes a film and, possibly, a global blockbuster

It starts with the Cultural Revolution in 1967 and finishes with the death of the universe. Liu Cixin's trilogy, known by the title of the first book, "The Three-Body Problem", has swept along readers from Beijing to Boston with its grand narrative. Since its publication in 2008 the trilogy has sold over 2m copies in China, and in 2015 became the first Chinese book to win the Hugo Award for best science-fiction novel. A film adaptation, due out in 2016, is keenly awaited by Chinese fans.

In Liu Cixin's fictional world, scientists from different countries are competing to find alien species. When the Chinese astrophysicists unwittingly make contact with the aggressive Trisolarians, who live on an unstable planet orbiting three suns, they receive a threat from outer space: we are coming to conquer your planet. Since this requires deep-space travel, Earth is given a 400-year period before the Trisolarians arrive. "The trilogy ends with the certain destruction of the universe," says Ken

Yuan Yang: Marjorie Deane intern, The Economist

Liu, who translated two books in the trilogy into English. "Yet it is not a tragedy, but a grand romance."

He believes the book succeeds in part because of the vastness of its possible political interpretations: "You can read it as an indictment of communism, a paean to democracy—or the complete opposite." Whatever the reason, the book now has a "cult following" in India, according to Chiki Sarkar, a publisher there. In America Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, nominated it for the social network's book club and speculated that there could soon be a Hollywood version.

If so, it could become China's first global sci-fi blockbuster. Chinese films in translation have found success difficult in the international market. "Hollywood isn't great at sci-fi epics where the characters aren't white," notes Ken Liu.

At home, the film has every chance of triumphing in the winners-take-all market. In China, 9% of films take 70% of the revenue, a proportion that has been rising. The film adaptation, directed by Zhang Panpan, is expected to sell 50m yuan (\$7.8m) of tickets when it is released in July. Another Liu Cixin book, "The Crazy Alien", will also arrive in cinemas in 2016, directed by the acclaimed Ning Hao, whose first comedy hit, "Crazy Stone" (2006), paved the way for the current generation of Chinese blockbusters.

"I hope the films don't ruin the books," says one Chinese netizen, voicing the concerns of die-hard fans everywhere. "Of course we're getting tickets," adds another. ■

Do you speak 2016?

Robert Lane Greene

Tech, teens and language trends

It is impossible to know what new words will become fashionable in 2016 have not yet been coined. But a few of the trends likely to shape the year are apparent, and they provide hints about the vocabulary that may be in vogue.

Technology is a reliable source of new words. Many of them jump from noun to verb, as "fax", "e-mail", "Google" and "Facebook" did. Whichever social network, say Slack (office-workers) or This (long-form journalism aficionados), becomes a breakout darling can expect its name to become an ordinary verb ("Slack me later"). One to watch is Venmo, which lets people send each other small payments ("Just venmo me").

Some companies fight the "genericide" of their trademarks. Adobe, for example, campaigned to replace "to photoshop" with "to enhance using Adobe® Photoshop® software". But they are powerless to stop it.

Punkt, a Swiss gadget-maker, is soon to release a high-style phone that makes calls

and sends texts, nothing more; should such phones catch on, might their users ironically flaunt their "dumb-phones"? Google has pushed back the release of a phone with modular, upgradable parts (camera, processor, screen) into 2016. Google calls this "Project Ara", but should the phone catch on, "modphone" could be a handy portmanteau.

Word of mouth

Office workers will keep mangling the language with words that shouldn't exist: "millennialisation" might join "ideation" and "learnings" in corporate-speak in 2016. Those in jobs with high legal stakes have learned that e-mail can wind up in court, so some have taken to using "LDL" (let's discuss live) to avoid writing anything potentially damning. Will it spread? Perhaps, but investigators are keen followers of such phrases,



too, and can use them to search for suspicious activity.

Forecasting youth slang is especially hard. In a wired world, words move from cant to cool-kid code to even-your-grandmother-uses-it faster than you can say "wicked". Facebook has confirmed that "LOL" is already in decline.

"Netflix and chill" became known in 2015 for a sexual hookup, but when such things become too widely known, they lose their frisson. These fads often start in subcultures like black-American or gay groups, before making their way to the mainstream: "throwing shade" for a put-down, for example, or "ratchet" for a trashy but arrogant type. So pay attention to those communities for the next big thing—maybe "throwing pillows" for a weak punch—though by the time you've heard of it they may have moved on. ■

Robert Lane Greene: deputy books & arts editor, The Economist, and Johnson columnist on language



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