

DINING OUT

STARS ALIGN

Weights and Measures was “meant to be” says chef/owner. **Page G10**



SOCIETY DIARIES

BIG EVENTS

Former President George W. Bush entertains at an exclusive dinner. **Page G14**

BALLET

BARD BARRE

Stanton Welch debuts his take on Shakespeare’s ‘Romeo and Juliet.’ **Page G2**



GRAY MATTERS

Leonard Nimoy’s Mr. Spock was one of the most counterculture figures of the 1960s.

HoustonChronicle.com/GrayMatters

ZEST

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Symphony pops conductor has big plans for final years in Houston.

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Section G ★★

Ishiguro on war, forgetfulness and cowboys

In 1987, Kazuo Ishiguro holed up in his South London home and wrote maniacally — not caring about style or finer plot points, writing freehand as fast as the words and phrases came.

He wrote 12 hours a day, six days a week, for four weeks. And when he finished, he had a first draft of “The Remains of



MAGGIE GALEHOUSE
Bookish

the Day,” a Booker Prize-winning book that brought him international acclaim and became an

Oscar-nominated film.

“The Buried Giant,” Ishiguro’s strange and

haunting new book — his first novel in 10 years — had a longer gestation.

“As much as 15 years back, I wanted to write about society’s remembering and forgetting,” said Ishiguro, 60, on the phone from his home in England. “It was triggered by what happened in the 1990s, when Yugoslavia

Bookish continues on G6

Kazuo Ishiguro

The author will read and discuss his work as a guest of Inprint’s Margaret Root Brown Reading Series.

When: 7:30 p.m. March 23

Where: Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas

Tickets: \$5; inprintheouston.org.



Columbia Pictures

“The Remains of the Day,” based on Ishiguro’s novel, stars Emma Thompson and Anthony Hopkins.

BOOKS

Bookish: 'Giant' crosses genres

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and Rwanda disintegrated into horrific civil wars. In both cases, people who had been living very harmoniously, sometimes next door to each other, turned on each other and massacred each other. So I had a story in my head, but it took me a long time to find a suitable setting."

Setting is a stepping-off point in all of Ishiguro's books. A careful and subtle writer, he lures readers into the realm of plausibility — his 2005 cloning novel "Never Let Me Go" was set in an alternative dystopian 1990s England — and once they're snared, he's free to focus on the more timeless troubles of humanity.

In "The Remains of the Day," Ishiguro considered the personal cost of obsessive professionalism. In "Never Let Me Go," he examined the slow destruction of hope. In "The Buried Giant," he contemplates the pros and cons of collective forgetfulness — in a married couple and in society at large.

The new book is set in late-fifth-century Britain, when settlers were arriving in ships from the North Sea. Several genres are represented, including Arthurian legend (an aged Sir Gawain rides in on his aged horse), fairy tales (dragons and giants) and British history.

"I had it in my mind it was 490 A.D. — a period no one really knows about," Ishiguro said. "It was truly a dark century. The Saxons basically settled the country around this time. And the general consensus is there was some sort of genocide, with new people landing steadily on the coast, coming in from the European mainland."

Despite the historical specifics, Ishiguro's book retreats into a kind of fantastic realism.

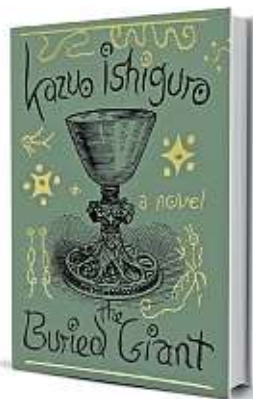
"My settings tend to be metaphorical," said the author, who was born in Japan and moved to England as a boy. "I did have a rule: If it was conceivable that the people of that time could believe certain things existed, those things were allowed to exist. So, no flying saucers."

War is in the air in "The Buried Giant," and something else about the air makes people forgetful. The cast includes a brave knight named Wistan; a young knight named Edwin, bent on avenging his mother's death; Gawain, a solitary knight charged by the late King



Jeff Cottenden

Kazuo Ishiguro



'The Buried Giant'

By Kazuo Ishiguro.
Knopf, 320 pp., \$26.95.

Arthur to slay a she-dragon; and Beatrice and Axl, an elderly couple who have set out on a perilous journey to help them remember their past.

"Many of the same questions we ask about societies apply to relationships," Ishiguro said. "Most have their dark corners.

They've weathered through something, and they've agreed to bury it. But is that right? Does there come a point when a society or a married couple need to remember?"

Ironically, it was Ishiguro's longtime partner, Lorna MacDougall, who read a draft of the book's first 60 pages and returned it with some pointed advice.

"She told me it would not do," said Ishiguro, who's been married to MacDougall since 1986. "She said, 'There's no way. You're going to have to start again from scratch.' It was because of the language, which she felt was too ornate. She thought it was laughable."

It took Ishiguro a bit of time to recover from this critique. He wrote "Nocturnes," his 2009 short story collection. When he went back to "The Buried Giant," he began simplifying the language.

"I started to subtract by tak-

ing out little words here and there, and I rather liked it," he said.

The book's diction does have a stripped-away quality — a spare formality reminiscent of a fairy tale.

Ishiguro said he's grateful for his wife's truth telling.

"She knew me before I was a writer," the author said. "She met me when I was trying to be a musician. Because we've had so many discussions and arguments about books and movies, I know where we tend to disagree and agree. And we agree about language."

MacDougall also has set aside a copy of Larry McMurtry's "Lonesome Dove" for her husband to read.

"There it is in the bedroom," Ishiguro said. "She says it's an utter masterpiece."

In December, Ishiguro wrote an essay for the Guardian explaining how Francis Ford Coppola's film "The Conversation" and Tom Waits' ballad "Ruby's Arms" influenced "The Remains of the Day."

Does "The Buried Giant" have a sound track? Or a film track?

"Those elegaic westerns by Sam Peckinpah," Ishiguro said. "The lone figure on the horse, out of time, his era passed. He's aging, but he still has some martial skill. Gawain owes a lot to those characters."

The samurai stories he grew up with also crept into "The Buried Giant."

"That's the Japanese part of me, I guess," Ishiguro said. "But I like the anti-samurai movies, the anti-militarist movies made after World War II."

And does he ever wonder if "Downton Abbey" — now muddling through the 1920s — will simply crash-land into "The Remains of the Day?" If Mr. Stevens and Miss Kenton, played by Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson in the film, will suddenly find themselves downstairs at Downton, enjoying a cup of tea with Mr. Carson and Mrs. Hughes?

"I've never watched 'Downton Abbey,'" Ishiguro acknowledged. "I'm really bad with television. I can't watch one episode and leave it for a week. If I have to watch a television series, I do it with a box set and I watch it in one day. I'm going to do that with 'Downton Abbey.'"

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