

Science Fiction Book Club
Interview with Greg Bear (July 2020)

Greg Bear science fiction has covered themes of galactic conflict (Forge of God books), artificial universes (The Way series), consciousness and cultural practices (Queen of Angels), and accelerated evolution (Blood Music, Darwin's Radio, and Darwin's Children). His most recent work is the War Dogs trilogy. Bear has written over 50 books.

Kevin Kuhn/Molly Greenspring: When writing for a series such as Halo, Star Trek, or Star Wars, how much control do you have? Are there limits to what direction you can take that universe? Which was the most enjoyable universe to create stories for?

Greg Bear: That's varied from project to project, but I've been lucky to have a fair amount of freedom on most of my projects--and in some cases to have contributed to continuing themes and locales. On STAR WARS, my planet (if I may call it that) Zonama Sekot was used in more than fifteen later novels, which was quite pleasing. On HALO, I was given a lot of freedom to create major aspects of the HALO origin story, which were then utilized by the game designers in HALO 4.

Adam J. Meek: When you think of humanity's future, are you more of an optimist or a pessimist?

GB: I'm more of an optimist, but also a bit of a realist. Nothing in human history is pure and unalloyed happy-making. But we do keep trying--some of us, anyway!

Robert Matthew Knuckles/John Grayshaw: Who are some of the Science Fiction writers you have been friends with over the years? What are some of your favorite memories of those relationships?

GB: I've been friends with many writers over the decades, and proud to know some of them quite well. Poul and Karen Anderson were my in-laws, and Poul is one of my very favorite SF writers. I knew Ray Bradbury for over 45 years, since meeting him when I was a teenager. We became fast friends, and introduced Ray to San Diego Comic-Con, which he attended from 1970 until 2010/ To this day, at conventions and when visiting other cities, we try to get together with the Silverbergs--and it was our privilege to get to know the Heinleins at meetings of Jerry Pournelle's and Larry Niven's Citizens Advisory Council. And of course, Niven and Pournelle were influential in many aspects of my career. It would be tough to name them all in a limited space, but in the SF community, friendships abound! And not just in our respective age groups or support groups. For example, it was a pleasure to get together at various events with writers like Theodore Sturgeon and Jack Williamson. And as supporters of San Diego Comic-Con, we got to meet a fine group of comic artists and filmmakers, including many who shaped my childhood!

Andrew ten Broek/Patrick Manion: What kind of preparations did you do before writing a story set in Asimov's Foundation universe? How did you get involved in that and what was the experience like? What was it like working with your friends Greg Benford and David Brin?

GB: Great fun, of course. Gregory set it up with Janet Asimov, and we took different aspects of the story. I was able to help with the first week or so of Isaac's FOUNDATION.

Annette Thomas: For the (originally presumed) 3 sequel to Eon (Legacy) why did you choose the path you did (a prequel) instead of going down The Way to explore what the Neo Geshels encountered? I STILL would love for you to do a book on that!

GB: ETERNITY was the first follow-on to EON, and did follow that path. LEGACY was exploring some aspects of Biology that I found interesting, and later expanded into both SLANT and DARWIN'S RADIO.

Philip Cowan: In Blood Music, you imagine a collective consciousness as the human population spills into one another. Do you think we are evolving into a collective consciousness?

GB: In a sense, we are already part of a great complex of observation and change. Evolution is a continuing elaboration and alteration of great experiments and changes. In ourselves, the reliance we place not just on our ecosystem but on our internal microcosm is instructional.

Leon Coombs: Are there any of your stories you liked to see being filmed? Either a movie or miniseries?

GB: Quite a few have been in the works with different scriptwriters and producers over the years, including BLOOD MUSIC and THE FORGE OF GOD. Right now, EON is in the early stages of development. I've seen my novels have a somewhat uncharacteristic influence on various big-budget films over the years... but I won't name names!

Anastasia Hilvers: There is a vast difference between the hard sciences you write about in The Way novels and the Darwin novels. Which was the most fun for you and why?

GB: I enjoy exploring it all, and interacting with the many scientists who are actually doing the hard work!

Ryan Dash/Eva Sable: Why did you decide to expand your short story Blood Music into a novel? Do you feel reading the short story is sufficient for appreciating the ideas, or do you recommend reading the novel in lieu of the short? Is there anything in particular that makes the decision to expand a short story into a novel length work?

GB: I had more to say, as it turned out. And the extra turn of the screw, so to speak, helped me expand one of my best short stories into one of my best novels.

Andrzej Wieckowski: Do you read modern sf and if so, what do you feel are the differences between now and when you started out?

GB: I still read SF and Fantasy, but more non-fiction than fiction any more.

Jay Alan Babcock: Do you have any comments on the influence of "Rendezvous with Rama" on your novel "Eon."

GB: I loved RAMA and Clarke in general. RAMA helped me figure out aspects of my orbits and internal physics. To my immense pleasure, Arthur loved EON--once he got past page 75, up until which point hf felt it too much resembled RAMA!

Jeff Minor: Would you consider writing a follow-up to Moving Mars? There is so much potential with Thinkers and that transportation tech.

GB: I agree, but a principal both of science fiction and comedy is: "Leave them wanting more!"

Gusse Farkas: Darwin's Radio and Darwin's Children were great books. Do you think the species homo sapiens sapiens is still evolving?

GB: I wonder! We see no major changes in the last forty thousand years or so, and I'm not even sure Neanderthals are all that different--other than we have chins and they don't. But likely as we change our own environment, we will have to adapt to those changes, and that could lead to physiological changes.

John Grayshaw: Do you have a writing routine that you stick with? And what are some of your hobbies other than writing?

GB: I try to write a little each day, and keep adding to the stack of a manuscript. Other than that, I enjoy reading, building models, and keeping up with this Mad, Mad, Mad world.

John Grayshaw: What are you working on now? And what are your goals for the future?

GB: Next novel is THE UNFINISHED LAND, which could be called a fantasy, but it some aspects is a deeply philosophical examination of the roots of our civilization--in the guide of an adventure tale. It will be out in February, and can be preordered on Amazon now.