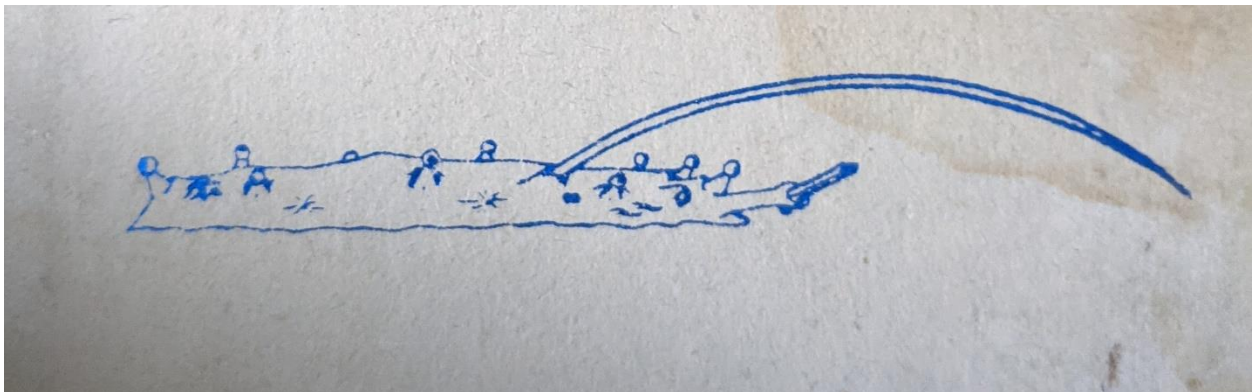


Science Fiction Book Club
Interview with Eve L. Forward (April 2021)

Eve Laurel Forward is an author and television screenwriter. She is the daughter of American physicist and science fiction author Robert L. Forward.

Rupert Giles: I'm just about to reread *Dragons Egg*. Did he ever draw any sketches of what the inhabitants looked like? I know what I see in my head but, always wonder how close I am.

Hi! Yes! He did some sketches-- there's one on the cover of the hardcover, under the dust jacket; I'll enclose a pic from my copy. He also painted some of the cheela and the plants in uv-reactive paint, so that it would glow 'hot' under a blacklight. I don't know what happened to those pictures... And he did a clay sculpture of a cheela, with a bent bamboo skewer as a lance and another bit of wood as a sword. I remember these from my childhood but I've no idea what became of them. I know he didn't much like the picture of the cheela on the cover of *Starquake* because you can see the cheelas tread over the edge of the flow-slow and it should not be sticking out like that, the gravity should have pulled it down.



John DeLaughter: Forward is noted not just for his own work but for acting as a science advisor to other science fiction authors, such as the aid he gave Niven on *The Integral Trees*. Which non-family author was his favorite to work with? Why? (Non-family included to prevent starting spats between all of his kin that he wrote with!)

I'm not sure who his favorite was, but he did mention Niven and Pournelle a lot!

Jamie Smith: What did Forward consider his greatest scientific contribution to mankind? His bar telescope now resides in the Smithsonian. But he made many other contributions at JPL, and through the Forward Foundation.

I'll send his autobiography in which he discussed his life's work; he did so many things it's difficult to select just one.

Damo Mac Choiligh: As someone whose life was almost entirely taken up with physics, did Robert Forward have a positive view of humanity and its relationship to science and technology? Would he be disappointed by the current prominence of anti-scientific attitudes or would he have regarded this as a blip?

I think he'd be very disappointed with the anti-science trend now. He was a great believer in the potential of humanity, but often felt we fell short of what we should be doing.

Damo Mac Choiligh: In particular, would he have expected humanity to have progressed further into space by now?

I think he would have; I think he'd have expected us to have landed on Mars by now, or at least back to the moon. He'd be very pleased that there does seem to be some motion headed that way now.

John Grayshaw: What made him write novels? Was he a storyteller at heart?

John Grayshaw: Did he talk about what it was like to be a scientist who also wrote novels? What as the relationship between the two fields?

I'm going to combine these two; I always got the impression that he loved science and his research first, and writing was more of a way for him to play around further with those ideas; he could let his imagination take him where current tech and budgets couldn't, and visit fantastic places like neutron stars, where he could delve into speculation while still keeping his work scientific. I think he also enjoyed writing as a way to bring his ideas to a larger audience, and to share his delight and wonder at the subjects of his work.

John Grayshaw: As a physicist your father researched many futuristic topics such as space tethers and space fountains, solar sails (including Starwisp), antimatter propulsion, and other spacecraft propulsion technologies, as well as more esoteric possibilities such as time travel and negative matter. He was issued a patent for the statite, and contributed to a concept to drain the Van Allen Belts....Did he ever talk about how practical or impractical he thought some of these things were and/or how soon he thought any of them might be a reality?

I recall him saying that there were things we just didn't have the technology to do yet, such as working with antimatter; he felt that it could be done, but there was no particular interest in the rest of the world in doing so. I think that's partly why he jumped into actually making space tethers-- here, finally, was something he could actually BUILD, and there was an actual need for it in the world right now, so there was a chance of getting funding and getting the things actually into space.

John Grayshaw: Did your dad tell you stories? What were they about? Did he read books with you? Which were his favorites?

He read me books when I was too young to read, myself; 'we' read the Frog And Toad books, the Little Bear books, that sort of thing. He did voices for the characters and enthusiastically told the story-- he was especially good at doing deep growly voices, like for Papa Bear. He and my mother both encouraged us kids to start reading on our own, and as soon as I could, I was one of those "stay up late with a flashlight under the covers, reading" kids. Mostly at bedtime he would play the ukelele and sing; he had a great warm voice and he would sing songs like "The Chivalrous Shark" and "The Green Grass Grew All Around"; and lullabies, etc.

John Grayshaw: What was it like when you were growing up, was your dad talking about gravitational wave detection at the dinner table?

Not usually, not that I can recall. Honestly with myself and my two sisters (Rob had left home for college by the time I was aware of things) he probably couldn't get a word in edgewise. We would sometimes ask him to explain things he was working on, and he'd do his best, but usually it went way over my head as a kid. Dinner was really more time for us to be a family; we'd talk about what we'd done that day, things we planned to do in the future, and how our lives were going in general. He wouldn't bring his work to the table.

John Grayshaw: What are some of your fondest memories of your father and what are some of the funniest memories?

Fondest memories, other than the stories and songs, are of when he actually did have something he could teach me that I could grasp-- I recall laying out on our lawn at night, both of us, and him pointing out the constellations and telling me what their names were, or the time he borrowed a small laser from somewhere (back when such things were still mostly science fiction) and got all us kids in the neighborhood to set up a mirror relay to bounce the beam around the block, or when he set up a small telescope to show us the Moon and some planets. He also adored fireworks; the louder and flashier the better, and while they were pretty restricted when I was a kid, he'd buy whatever he could find locally and also take us to the big displays. Even up to his illness, he'd spend a lot on fireworks every year (There's a lot more good ones available here in Washington) and enjoyed lighting them himself.

John Grayshaw: Did your father have favorites of his works?

I think he always had a fondness for the Dragons Egg books; he often re-read his own work and enjoyed it very much. He used to joke about 'reading his favorite author' when doing so.

John Grayshaw: When did you first read your father's writing?

I don't remember exactly—probably around 2nd or 3rd grade? I do remember the first one of his I read was Dragon's Egg, and I was very interested in the parts about the cheela, and tended to skim over the parts with the humans.

John Grayshaw: What are your personal favorites of your father's works? And why?

The Dragon's Egg books, for sure, although I also liked Rocheworld. I liked that the cheela were very egalitarian; the females were at least the equals of the males and often actually bigger and stronger. I thought Swift-Killer was an awesome heroine, and I was really intrigued with the way that cheela lived so much 'faster' than we did, and that they went from primitive to advanced in just a short time.

John Grayshaw: Your mom and sister (Martha and Julie) both co-authored two Rocheworld novels with your father. What was that process like? Who wrote what?

I was out of the house at that point, so I don't really remember. He asked if I would be interested in writing one with him as well, but I felt that I really couldn't have done him justice.

John Grayshaw: What science fiction authors did your dad enjoy reading?

Himself, mostly, but he also subscribed to Analog and Locus and a couple of other scifi magazines, and would read them. We had books around by Heinlein, Clarke, Asimov; he definitely preferred hard science fiction.

John Grayshaw: Who within the writing profession did he consider his closest friends? Any stories about those relationships?

He did have some-- I'm blanking on the names, but he'd spend a lot of time on the phone chatting to them, or trading letters-- and emails, once that was a thing.

John Grayshaw: Did you go with your father to science fiction conventions? Any memories of these?

Oh yes! From a very young age he was taking me along to cons; the earliest one I remember was LA Con II in 1984-- blurred but happy memories of people in costumes, neat displays of films to come, and there was a mermaid swimming around in the pool and she lost a scale and I dived down and got it and brought it back to her. I loved going to cons; partly it was fun to see all the neat things and partly it was doing something with my Daddy, especially since I felt so proud because he was ALSO a science fiction person!

John Grayshaw: Do you know of any future adaptations of your father's works in TV or movies?

We occasionally get people calling or writing to inquire about doing so-- my brother handles all of that now, and as far as I know, we've had some people interested but no one's actually committed to doing anything yet.

Eva Sable: Other than writing and thinking deep scientific thoughts, what did your dad do for fun?

He painted in oils, neat blended abstract things that were actually science-related; a comet curling in towards the sun, a rocket taking off into a blue sky, a view through a plane's contrail. He liked doing projects like building tree forts or wiring small electronics, and he had a car, a Datsun 280ZX, that he cherished and fussed over.

John Grayshaw: Did your father have a writing routine he stuck to?

I don't recall that he had a routine; when he was working away at his desk, it was hard to tell if he was writing or drafting science projects. He did keep meticulous notes of how he spent his time, and as I recall he plugged away at writing steadily until it was done.

John Grayshaw: What is your father's legacy?

There's a lot, I think. Probably in my own lifetime, the thing that will see the most attention is the space tethers, and more and more I think they'll be very useful, especially if people keep cluttering up the orbit with cars and other daft "projects". I do hope that in the future, when antimatter and solar sails etc start to become viable reality, that someone will mention him as a 'founding father' of space travel; that he helped show what could be possible, if we allowed our imaginations to lead us into a reality of new horizons.