



The Forge of God

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On September 28th, a geologist working in Death valley finds a mysterious new cinder cone in very well-mapped area.

On October 1st, the government of Australia announces the discovery of an enormous granite mountain. Like the cinder cone, it wasn't there six months ago....

Something is happening to Planet Earth, and the truth is too terrifying to consider....

The Forge of God Details

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Author : Greg Bear

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From Reader Review The Forge of God for online ebook

Benjamin Kahn says

Some interesting ideas in this book, but more threads left hanging than anything. Not particularly well-written - awkward, unbelievable dialogue, ham-handed attempts to create characters, uninteresting and unsympathetic characters ... Just not very well done.

The concepts that we are introduced to at the beginning are never developed. We never learn why the planet-eaters pick earth to destroy when there are lots of unoccupied planets around, why they create beings that interact with humans and then just drop the interaction or why they oppose humans being saved. There's a lot of talk about a war between the planet-eaters and the aliens that are trying to save humanity, but it all takes place out of sight of the story. Instead, we spend lots of time listening to hand-wringing about how the President's not going to do anything, and listening to Bear display his knowledge of Yosemite by name-checking ever feature of the park. A waste of time.

Bear would have been better off having his characters at least try to fight the invaders or find ways to resist them instead of blithely going about their visit. Instead, we follow a bunch of uninteresting characters around for almost 500 pages, doing very little. Badly written, poorly plotted with weak characters, this is a bad book.

I just noticed after I read this review that the book was nominated for several major scifi awards. All I can say is that it must have been a bad year.

Dave Peterschmidt says

Having read and enjoyed several other Bear books, I had high hopes for this one. Sadly, Forge of God is perhaps the only book I've ever read that has literally nothing to redeem it. I cannot figure out why Bear bothered to write this story. It seemed to have nothing to say, no commentary to impart, and no excitement to bring, while at the same time depicting a human race that, faced with ultimate destruction, fails to attempt even the smallest action in their own defense. Humanity is depicted as sheep being herded to slaughter with only the merest hint of retaliation being given. The plot line is nothing but a simple linear march to the earth's destruction. Humanity learns of the threat, does absolutely nothing during the middle 2/3 of the book, following which the earth is blown to bits. Given the lack of big picture response, you'd think perhaps Bear wanted to explore the end of the world scenario on a personal level. However, the characterizations are, at best, shallow. We never come to care enough about any of the characters to develop an emotional connection, much less feel anything when they die or get any insight into the human condition. In short, this is one big, empty book that goes nowhere except exactly the place we are told it's going very early on.

Bear simply appears to have mailed it in when he wrote this one. Take a pass on this one and look into some of his other work instead.

Chelsea says

Wow. Not one of Greg Bear's finest, I would say. Although the last third does try to make up for the plodding two thirds.

Like most sci-fi written in the past talking about "the future" that is now our past, it has a few stumbling blocks where he didn't get it quite right. *Forge of God* was written in 1986, the cold war was still on with no end in sight, computers were just starting to reveal their usefulness as personal computing platforms and modern data storage techniques were coming to light.

Set in 1996, he gets a surprising number of things right: personal computers small enough to carry around to hotels and airplanes, optical storage media as a standard, and flat-panel screens. On the other hand, there are a couple references to the Soviet Union and Marxists as adversaries to the U.S. that are kinda grimace-worthy.

True to Bear fashion, however, the awkwardness of the future come and gone is pretty easily overlooked, as he focuses mainly on the people, not the tech, and the ways that their lives and character are changed over the course of the novel.

Basic premise: two alien "bogeys" are discovered on earth. The occupants of one, landed in Australia, say they bring enlightenment for all of humanity, and start teaching those who'll listen about advanced physics etc. The second craft, landed in Nevada, ejects a dying alien who lives long enough to claim that "the planet-eaters" have come to destroy Earth and there's nothing that anyone can do about it. (There's also a third, but we never really find out about it because the Evil Soviets are hiding it.)

So what happens? A group of scientists are wrapped up trying to figure out what's going on and who to believe, a group of government officials are trying to decide how much and what to tell the rest of the world and eventually the planet is destroyed in prose at times so moving and evocative that I don't recommend reading it alone in an empty apartment like I did. I put the book down and picked up my cat so I could hold in my arms a breathing, fuzzy reminder that the planet does in fact still exist.

So where does it go wrong? Well, there's a story line about a dying scientist, the point of which I'm still trying to understand. As a friend to one of the main, and most developed, characters, it could have been a great vessel for exploring the fragility of human life and the upcoming confrontation he'll have with his own mortality, but instead it just kinda peters out.

As I mentioned earlier, it starts out kinda plodding and slow. It falls victim to the Heroes Phenomenon - there are a lot of characters, we don't know why they're in the story and we're not terribly inclined to pay attention to them. Eventually, like Heroes, it does all come together and make sense, but I was left wondering if there isn't a better way to get there.

Also, like the last Harry Potter, I really could have done without the epilogue. The story itself sets up enough information as to what's going to happen "afterward" that we really don't need to be propelled a couple hundred years into the future to have it spelled out to us. Not to mention, it was probably the lamest part of the book.

I would say that his later works are definitely better than this, although I can see the promise here for those. I rate this book so high because of the end really the meat of the story. Perhaps it would have worked better as

a short story, truncating the beginning and focusing in on the main events as they happened.

Apatt says

Greg Bear is one of the more popular science fiction authors that I have been neglecting. I have only read his best-known book *Eon* prior to this one. Perhaps that is just as well as I have quite a few more to look forward to. I like sci-fi books set in “the present day” (in this case 1996), they tend to be immediately relatable. They also tend to be about First Contact, the meeting of mankind and extraterrestrials.

““Do you have a name?” the President asked.

“Not in your language. My name is chemical and goes before me among my own kind.””

Ah, I love such alien weirdness. *The Forge of God* seems to be all about First Contact during the first half of the book until some unexpected turns of event divert the storyline into an apocalyptic territory.

A crashed alien spaceship disguised as a volcanic cinder cone is found in the desert near the town of Shoshone, USA, at the crash site some geologists find an alien in very poor health. Around the same time another faux-cinder cone is found in an Australian desert, no alien found but some robots make contact instead. The alien in the US bears a message of doom, the robots in Australia bring glad tidings for mankind. WTF? Soon the human characters discover something “off” about the alien and the robots and things escalate quickly.

The plot of *The Forge of God* is very intriguing and I had no idea where the story will go. I love the way science is woven into the fabric of the story rather than simply dumped as blocks of info. Biology, geology, physics and astronomy expositions are cleverly used to make the story much more believable (as advantage sci-fi has over fantasy for me). The mystery of who or what the alien and robots are and what their agenda is fascinating.

Greg Bear makes more effort than most sci-fi authors to develop his characters. However, for sci-fi this can be a double-edged sword. Sometimes the epic sci-fi storyline dwarfs the characters and the readers become more interested in the events in the story than the struggles of the characters. It is not enough for characters to be believable and realistic, they also need to be *interesting*, to stand out in a sci-fi epic. I think this is the single flaw of this book, Bear spends a lot of time developing characters, and they do seem like real people, but, unfortunately, not interesting people. It also does not help that there are too many “point of view” characters and most of them remain flat in spite of the author’s valiant efforts. Arthur C. Clarke never bothered much with characterization, he played to his strength of plotting and storytelling and the style works very well for him.

The above-mentioned gripe aside, *The Forge of God* is a tremendously good read. The ending really is a humdinger, I wish I can tell you something about it without spoiling the book horribly. OK, I’m going to put something behind this spoiler tagged paragraph:

(view spoiler).

On the whole, Bear tells a very gripping and wondrous narrative and even gets a few digs in at religious fanatics and politicians. In spite of some superfluous characterization—which does not detract much from the book—I highly recommend this (Hugo and Nebula nominated) book.

Bryan says

Aliens launch a covert attack on Earth with no motive ever provided. Humans are defenseless and are unable to provide even token resistance. Earth is destroyed. These are not spoilers because there's really nothing worth spoiling. This book manages to take the opening few scenes of "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" and drag it out over 400+ pages, without the humour or the Vogon poetry. Overall, a tiresome and forgettable read.

Libby Chester says

The difference between a 4 star book and a 5 star book is vast, definitely more than the span of one star. Bear.....bears comparisons with Stephen King in his ability to draw huge inferences in character from descriptive narrative passages, the actions of his characters, and interior and exterior dialogs, as well as relationships between characters. For this reader, they share a knack for initiating caring about what's happening to the characters and the magical gift of crafting a new world that's as believable as anything that can be touched, seen, or heard in the world that we witness everyday. Bear's gift of creating these believable, easy to care about characters draws the reader into this extraordinary plot where the Earth is seemingly doomed. What does he offer any more than any other apocalyptic version of Earth's demise? Well, the characters themselves make the journey worthwhile, and while some may make an argument for nihilism or meaninglessness out of our characters' adventures, I find my way into meaning. I love the descriptive passages about Arthur Gorden's friend, Harry and the wonderful bond of friendship between these two scientists. Harry's letter to Arthur embracing James's Lovelock's theory of Gaia give their own special 'meaning' to existence, and to what's happening in this novel. While not having read a great deal about Lovelock's theory, I understand that it's under a lot of criticism by modern day scientists. Lovelock's theory, however, fits in very well with the plot that unfolds from the mind of Greg Bear. Bear brings a lot of hard science into the novel to support his created world, thereby adding more elements of believability. The settings are absolutely fantastic. Written in 1987 before everyone had a cell phone glued to their fingers, communications in the novel appears specialized and laborious, not the instantaneous institution that it has come to be today. This is well represented in the novel and makes Bear's telepathic 'network' with aliens seem almost prophetic. There are moments of tedium in the novel, but for me, also moments of exhilaration in reading such a well crafted work. At the outset, I could never have guessed how the plot would unfold, and all the way to its ending, I knew that like King, Bear could not be trusted to bring my favorite characters through the mayhem. The ending was deeply believable and as a result of that believability, reaching toward some kind of spiritual meaning that other readers may be able to define more than myself.

Shane Moore says

In short, this book is a boring apocalypse.

I wish that I had read this book 15 years ago. Back then I had lower standards. It does a good job of presenting some compelling scientific ideas, like self-replicating space probes and the concept that the earth can be thought of as an organism which will might eventually be spread by humans acting as a sort of seed or spore. Another point in its favor is that this book is at least as scientifically plausible as any other Science-

Fiction I've read in the last decade.

However, I didn't much enjoy the book's actual writing. The pace was slow, the action indirect, and the characters dull. The way the author speculated technology would develop (with desktop computers but no cell phones) is occasionally distracting, but quaint. Worst of all the women in this story were emotionally-hyperactive but otherwise flat inert accessories. Even women who were supposed to be brilliant scholars or influential career politicians did nothing except in relation to men. In the author's defense, the men were equally tired cliches.

Ron says

Excellent story. First contact with a twist. The reader was/is warned because this is a "prequel" that's it's a 473 set up for another book: Anvil of Stars. Though since The Forge of God was published first, it isn't really a prequel. Sigh.

Despite writing in 1987, Bear fails to anticipate the break up of the Soviet Union just three years later. Think back: how many of us would have? He did a better job of predicting laptop computers, though he missed the speed with which cell phones replaced pay phones.

Continuity problem: one character boards an "ark" near Cleveland, then suddenly appears among the passengers of the ark from San Francisco.

Quibble: The inciting incident is the disappearance of Europa. Nearly as much water could have been obtained from the asteroid Ceres, closer at hand.

Good, hard SF. Almost textbook dry in places, but balanced by lots of personal interactions and human interest.

Point for pondering: In our breathless search for extraterrestrial life, we forget that if only one out of a hundred alien cultures is set on destroying all the others, guess which one's most likely to respond to our signals?

Sara Reeves says

[To start with, I can think of no logic for a civilization to develop an autonomous, planet-destroying machine that serves no purpose. It's not a weapon. It only creates more autonomous, planet-destroying machines from the rubble of the destroyed planets. What exactly is the purpose? Then, if you are creating an autonomous, planet-des

Stephen says

4.0 to 4.5 stars. Excellent, gripping story.

Nominee: Hugo Award for Best Science Fiction Novel (1988)

Nominee: Nebula Award for Best Science Fiction Novel (1988)

Nominee: Locus Award for Best Science Fiction Novel (1988)

Mia says

A really great concept marred by heavy-handed yet poorly detailed plotting. For a world-wide crisis, one gets only momentary high-level glimpses of how most of the world is taking it; the conceptualization of politics and diplomacy (and government) is pretty simplistic, and for all the talk of characters' intelligence, none of them seem that bright (which may actually be the point.) The most distracting thing for me was noticing how, no matter how often they were referred to as intelligent and competent, there was not one woman in the entire book who acted independently, or whose inner thoughts were exposed, or who served any other purpose than to comfort, support, distract, or sleep with the male characters (except possibly the president's wife.) It's the sort of thing I accept as part of older SF, but seems less excusable in more recent decades.

Sara says

With its pacing and readability, *The Forge of God* reminded me of a Michael Crichton novel - the kind of science fiction story where scientific plausibility reigns and the narrative structure keeps you reading. This is a good novel. I enjoyed the heck out of it. Reading this book, however, incited musings on the various incarnations of science fiction, its characteristics and purposes. Musings follow.

The *Forge of God* was recommended to me by the kind of reader who dismisses Ray Bradbury and Phillip K. Dick because the science in their stories ranges from unconvincing to non-existent. This reader would not consider Vonnegut a science fiction writer. I suppose, if pressed, he'd call these authors fantasy writers. Basically, this fellow has no use for your so-called science fiction unless the "science" determines the "fiction". Now, I appreciate the heck out of a science-heavy science fiction story. I value plausibility, to an extent, and my brain definitely revels in some technical scientific information - about physics, astronomy, geology - bring it on! But the science fiction that makes my mind bend does not necessarily possess this characteristic.

I have a special and abiding affection for science fiction that lets the science work in service of the story instead of making the story revolve around the science. Authors like Bradbury, Dick and Vonnegut do not spend loads of time trying to convince their readers of the scientific plausibility of the worlds they've created. I suppose they assume their genre allows for this kind of suspension of disbelief. Science does not comprise the soul of these author's novels anyway - it is merely the precondition of the action. It is the agar in the petri dish, not the culture that develops on it. The preoccupation of this kind of author's story comes principally in human interaction and the examination of what it means to be human, especially when human limits and capabilities are challenged. Science fiction premises present wonderful observation grounds for this kind of question because, so often, they involve artificial intelligence, alien intelligence, or human beings in non-terrestrial environments. For my taste, what authors like Bradbury and Dick lack in scientific rigor, they more than make up for in the keenness of their psychological insights into human behavior and the depth of their ontological inquiries regarding humans.

Which brings me back to Greg Bear. His story is neat, as in tidy and as in cool. It's clever, built like a page-turner (short chapters, frequently-shifting points of view), and especially fine are the chapters where his

scientific-minded characters dissect the central quandaries of the novel. But (slight spoiler follows), once the protagonists figure out the situation and the earth is pretty much doomed, I kept waiting for the ponderings on human behavior, worth, and ability. This book has all the scientific agar - aliens, artificial intelligence, impending destruction of the primary human habitat - but it grew very little by way of psychological culture. There are lots of references to narrowly-controlled panic, lots of discussion of how Bear's characters really just hope they're having sex when the sh*& hits the fan, and some retreat into nature to say goodbye to the mother about to be destroyed. And that's it. Once the science is explored, once military responses to the invaders fail, there's very little to bring the characters of this novel out of the superficiality in which they were drawn. Science certainly can't do it.

Rose says

All I kept thinking while reading this was that it felt like an Arthur C Clarke story. You know, complicated science, great concept, crappy two-dimensional characters. I didn't like or dislike one character. They were there only to showcase the idea and the science.

Geologists happen across a large "rock" structure in Death Valley that wasn't there before. While investigating, they discover an alien. It can speak English (having learned it from our radio waves in space) and it says it is a hitchhiker with another entity that will destroy Earth. Meanwhile, a similar thing is happening in Australia but the message is one of peace. The more humans investigate and learn, the more the situation gets out of control. It's much more complicated than this but I don't want to give anything away.

I wasn't a big fan of the writing style, but then again I'm not a fan of Clarke's either. The story could also shed about 10% of the filler and be much better. If you like ACC, you'll probably like this as well.

Chris Westin says

I was really disappointed by this. I had picked it up because I had really liked other Greg Bear novels: "Eon," "Eternity," and "Legacy." So I was expecting something fantastical on the same scale as those are.

Instead, it was a dull romp through 1980s paranoid Earth. Pages and pages of the government trying to keep extraterrestrial contacts secret from the populace.

There was one very annoying literary device used throughout. The novel is told from a 3rd person omniscient viewpoint. And every time a major character appears to have figured something important out, just as it would be revealed, we switch to another character for several pages. Seems like desperation to keep the reader interested.

This reminded me a lot of Arthur C. Clarke's Rama books: no contact with the aliens, just observations of their technology. No supraluminal travel, so everything takes ages. No explanation of what the aliens (possibly up to three factions, but it was never clear) are really up to.

I'm amazed I made it all the way through. I kept hoping something interesting would be revealed, but it was not to be.

Kane says

I've mentioned in my review of Stephen Baxter's *Manifold: Time* that I really enjoy the Fermi paradox and its potential solutions. *The Forge of God* explores one potential solution and also dovetails nicely with Stephen Hawking's recent warning not to talk to aliens, although it doesn't really add anything new to the concept.

The Amazon description here suffices: "The disappearance of one of Jupiter's moons, the appearance of "little green men" in Australia and the American Southwest, and the sudden presence of unidentifiable objects on a collision course inside the Earth's core add up to the inescapable conclusion that the Earth has been invaded by an enemy it cannot fight."

There are no memorable characters but the story is fun and engaging, if a bit plodding at time. It was good enough for me to have bought the sequel, *Anvil of the Stars*. I'm a fan of invasion/berserker novels so I was more than likely going to forgive a few literary sins here. One thing that bothered me was Bear's decision to only really explore the reaction of a small group of characters to the potential destruction of Earth. We never really got a larger view of how countries and leaders dealt with the calamity. This can be an interesting way to examine the end of days, like in *Earth Abides*, but in *Forge of God* it just annoyed me.

I hope that one day I read a Fermi-type novel that has a unique and tasty solution that will really get me thinking. This wasn't it, but I still enjoyed *Forge*.
