



Darwin's Children

Greg Bear

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Greg Bear's Nebula Award-winning novel, *Darwin's Radio*, painted a chilling portrait of humankind on the threshold of a radical leap in evolution—one that would alter our species forever. Now Bear continues his provocative tale of the human race confronted by an uncertain future, where “survival of the fittest” takes on astonishing and controversial new dimensions.

DARWIN'S CHILDREN

Eleven years have passed since SHEVA, an ancient retrovirus, was discovered in human DNA—a retrovirus that caused mutations in the human genome and heralded the arrival of a new wave of genetically enhanced humans. Now these changed children have reached adolescence . . . and face a world that is outraged about their very existence. For these special youths, possessed of remarkable, advanced traits that mark a major turning point in human development, are also ticking time bombs harboring hosts of viruses that could exterminate the “old” human race.

Fear and hatred of the virus children have made them a persecuted underclass, quarantined by the government in special “schools,” targeted by federally sanctioned bounty hunters, and demonized by hysterical segments of the population. But pockets of resistance have sprung up among those opposed to treating the children like dangerous diseases—and who fear the worst if the government’s draconian measures are carried to their extreme.

Scientists Kaye Lang and Mitch Rafelson are part of this small but determined minority. Once at the forefront of the discovery and study of the SHEVA outbreak, they now live as virtual exiles in the Virginia suburbs with their daughter, Stella—a bright, inquisitive virus child who is quickly maturing, straining to break free of the protective world her parents have built around her, and eager to seek out others of her kind.

But for all their precautions, Kaye, Mitch, and Stella have not slipped below the government’s radar. The agencies fanatically devoted to segregating and controlling the new-breed children monitor their every move—watching and waiting for the opportunity to strike the next blow in their escalating war to preserve “humankind” at any cost.

From the Hardcover edition.

Darwin's Children Details

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From Reader Review Darwin's Children for online ebook

SF_Fangirl says

Very disappointing. Darwin's Radio was clearly an incomplete book which left me hanging, but the conclusion in Darwin's Children was not as satisfying. The book is told in three sections that each jump ahead a few years. The jumps make the story disjointed and leave character's experience's glossed over and unexplained. The second section, the bulk of the book, had Kaye going from one meeting to another spouting scientific/biological jargon that did not help me understand anything. Mitch's anthropological discovery seemed irrelevant and unrelated to the plot. And I did not care for the mysticism that crept in. Kaye's strange experience was unexplained and never related to the main plot. Stella's experiences were most interesting, but they were glossed over and skipped in the jumps forward in time.

Calen says

I enjoyed it simply as a conclusion to Darwin's Radio, but it was an awfully long conclusion concerned mostly with humanity's (or at least American's) inability to deal with change and the incredible ineptitude and corruption of our political system, while abandoning, or at least ceasing to elaborate on, the concepts explored in the first.

It was a little frustrating that several of the main characters' loose ends were never really wrapped up and an unexpected religious element was introduced that didn't really add anything aside from the fear that aliens were involved in an otherwise hard science plot. They weren't, but I was ready to throw the book away in an instant if it went that direction.

Mandy Moody says

Darwin's Children is the sequel to Darwin's Radio. As I've found with most sequels, it wasn't *quite* as good as the original.

It was very, very good - it's just that Darwin's Radio was outstanding.

This story picks up about 10 years after the first. Stella Nova is a pre-teen, gently rebellious as a result of being isolated from other "new children". The book begins with her running away from home. Much of the story is dedicated to her and her counterparts.

Kaye and Christopher Dicken are back, of course, and their storylines deal with the effect these children will have on society and civilization - from health repercussions to how they will build their own societies.

Mitch is digging again, and I found his sections very interesting.

Many of the storylines in Darwin's Children are a little underdeveloped, in my opinion. Normally I'm all for a little mystery - I like it when an author will allow the reader to **think**, rather than spell every last thing out. This time, however, I felt like Bear rushed through a few things. I would have liked to see Mitch's dig, Stella's relationship with Will and the others at the commune and the Mrs. Rhine story played out a bit more. Still, this was an excellent read overall.

Roddy Williams says

'Evolution is no longer just a theory

Stella Nova is one of the 'virus children', a generation of genetically enhanced babies born a dozen years before to mothers infected with the SHEVA virus.

In fact, the children represent the next great evolutionary leap and a new species of human, *Homo sapiens novus*, but this is officially denied. They're gentle, charming and persuasive, possessed of remarkable traits. Nevertheless, they are locked up in special schools, quarantined from society, feared and reviled.

'Survival of the fittest' takes on a new dimension as the children reach puberty. Stella is one of the first find herself attracted to another 'virus child' but the authorities are watching and waiting for the opportunity to strike the next blow in their escalating war to preserve 'humankind' at any cost.'

Blurb from the 2004 HarperCollins paperback edition.

The virus children of Bear's 'Darwin's Radio' are growing up in a terrified world. The children are being rounded up and kept in special schools where they are studied, but not allowed to learn anything which might help them escape.

So far Kaye Lang and Mitch have kept their daughter with them by fleeing from town to town. Stella however is keen to meet others of her kind and escapes. This results in her capture and incarceration in one of the isolated schools.

Bear sequels in the past have not lived up to the quality of the first instalment and sadly, this is the case here. Despite it being a good solid novel and streets ahead of most of the competition it lacks the tightness and pace of the original. It also includes a rather unnecessary exegesis on the part of Kaye who experiences an encounter with what appears to be God. Unfortunately this never really dovetails into the structure at all and lacks relevance.

However it is an exciting examination of Neo-Darwinism and Bear provides an excellent afterword which includes further recommended reading on the subject.

Taking the two books as a whole the work can be seen as a Twenty First Century update on Van Vogt's 'Slan' with echoes of 'The Midwich Cuckoos'. The nature of Bear's homo superior is very interesting. They communicate on various levels; by scent, colour flashing of the marks on their faces and in a strange two-levelled speech by which more than one meaning or message can be conveyed at once. They form bonded 'families' which they call demes and seem to have lost any desire for competitive behaviour, finding co-operation to be a better genetic survival strategy.

In context 'Darwin's Children' is a post-aids retrovirus-aware work of paranoia, set in a declining USA. Sadly, Bear gives us only brief glimpses of how the virus children are treated elsewhere in the world. An Indian taxi-driver, for instance, at one point talks quite happily of his 'Shivite' grand-daughter and of how proud the family are of her.

There is an upbeat ending in which society has grudgingly accepted its children and they live in their own communities. More and more Shivites are being born among the general population in waves every few years.

It's hard to see how Bear could get a third novel from this idea but one suspects that there is another story in there somewhere, waiting to be hatched.

Devin says

For all its trappings as a thriller that keeps the reader turning the pages this is a deeply researched science fiction tale that speculates upon the social upheaval caused by accelerated evolution. This is the sequel to the equally thrilling *Darwin's Radio*, and it is remarkable how fresh that read felt and how easy it was to get re-engaged with these characters after more than ten years reading that prequel. Taken together, the Darwin novels mix together a heady concoction of speculative biology and political intrigue guided along by a core set of likable characters.

Rebecca McNutt says

Darwin's Children was interesting with its deep philosophical questions about what it means to be human, and the author is undoubtedly talented, but I couldn't relate to the characters and I didn't really like the writing style although I liked the book's plot.

Sandi says

This duology (Darwin's Radio and Darwin's Children) is what hard SF should be. It takes some really out-there science, in this case biology and evolution, adds a great story and characters you care about, and makes you really think about what could be. As a Christian who loves science and thinks that Christians who deny all evolutionary theory are off-base, I really appreciated that Bear didn't use his story to declare that there is no God and that people who believe in Him are stupid. Instead, he leaves that up to individual interpretation. With the growth of radical atheism, that seems to be rather daring. I really liked his position that an extreme evolutionary shift doesn't mean that the new species of hominid has to usurp the old one. The two can live together once the older species gets over its initial fear. That was pretty cool.

Judy says

This is the sequel to Greg Bear's 1999 *Darwin's Radio*. It is just as exciting and unique as the first book, if not more. The story opens with Stella, the "virus" daughter of the two scientists from *Darwin's Radio*, who is now eleven years old and living a highly protected life off the grid with her two parents. Though they have given her the best parenting they cannot give her what she wants most at that age: the freedom to move freely in the world and to have friends her own age.

More than a decade after these amazing new children were first being born, the American government still regards them as a dangerous element who could start a plague at any time. Severe legislation, denying these kids any form of human rights, has been put in place. The general public have also been taught to revile and fear what they call the "virus" children. Stella decides to run away and find out about life herself, because her parents have not told her everything and she is intelligent enough to realize this. She is also innocent of how much danger is out there. Her action brings on acute repercussions for all three of them.

The rest of the story tells how they each deal with those repercussions. It is heart stopping and while I hoped

it would work out in the end, I never knew if it would until the end. Greg Bear's ability to make the results of fear, ignorance, government and financial dishonesty as well as the hunger for power completely realistic, keeps the suspense high. He also teaches us a good deal of cutting edge science and approaches the subject of evolution in its most current stage. He even gets into spiritual questions and makes you wonder how you would react if the newest generation really was an advancement over your own.

I recommend reading Darwin's Radio first, if you want to full impact of this volume. Both are great reading.

Bradley says

As a sequel, I wanted the novel to be everything that Darwin's Radio was: horrifying and hopeful, amazing speculation and memorable characters. What I did get was a pretty cool adventure with a whole new race of humanity trying to adjust with the old species, and the ideas and development were quite good. This one felt more like a regular sci-fi, and unfortunately, it felt like a long epilogue.

Taken on it's own, the novel holds up and is fascinating and very enjoyable, memorable characters and a difficult adjustment. As a follow-up to a very high-class novel, I don't think it quite made it. I still enjoyed it, but I had a problem because my expectations were so high. This is a reader problem, not a novel problem. I suppose I wanted to see the novel go in other directions than it went, or try to one-up the pervading horror that was such a palpable mess in the previous novel.

That's neither here nor there. What I do remember was a solid novel that deserves a great rating, even if it doesn't quite match with the one it follows.

Tomislav says

This is the sequel to Greg Bear's award-winning Darwin's Radio. Mitch and Kate have gone underground with their New daughter Stella Nova, and are living a quiet existence in a rural southeastern part of a US descending slowly into fascism. One day Stella can't stand the isolation any longer and goes out for a walk, only to be caught by a bounty hunter, and the chase is on. The story is set in several segments spread out through Stella's teen-age years, and explores the culture invented by the New children. This is still fascinating reading, but without the scientific drama of the original Darwin's Radio.

Jerry Brabenec says

A seamless continuation of the previous novel "Darwin's Radio". Characterization, dialogue, and mood are strong points in these novels. They are NOT space operas. Point of view is important and Greg gives us the individual's perspective, not an omniscient explanation. The science is well researched, wish I'd discovered the "Primer on Biology" and glossary at the back of the book. Another science fiction novel with a recommended reading list.

Humans and post-humans struggle to reach an understanding in the context of the fear that either could be involuntarily breeding contagions that might exterminate the other. Much of the specific plot involves political, scientific, and cultural ramifications of that fear, and tries to answer the question, "What would a

panicked government and societal reaction to a potential pandemic really look like in 21st century America?"

The science in this novel was pretty deep for me, though when I talked about it with my wife and son they both seemed to know something about eukaryotes and ribosomes. Neither was explained in the glossary to my annoyance.

One characteristic of good science fiction is it extrapolates a possible world from current speculative science, then draws logical conclusions about that world that relate back to ours. In this way a whole science fiction novel is just a big metaphor for the world we really inhabit. Greg Bear has created an enormous metaphor here, I haven't even touched on the subplot about paleoanthropology or the principal character who is being visited by God.

The metaphor is really about diversity and tolerance, and is very humane. Matter of fact "Darwin's Children" takes humanity to a new level. But my enjoyment of it boils down to individuals in the end. I care about his characters.

prcardi says

Storyline: 3/5

Characters: 4/5

Writing Style: 3/5

World: 4/5

I didn't really want to read this. I was somewhat ambivalent about the first in the series, Darwin's Radio, and I really thought I'd have been happier if a sequel had not been written. The first ended with adequate closure, and the thought of a follow-up novel was not in the least enticing. But when a sequel is available I have a hard time saying no. So I read, and I was surprised by what I read. This was one of those rare cases where the sequel was as good as - and perhaps better than - the original.

This too shelves in the medical thriller section alongside books such as Michael Crichton's *Andromeda Strain*. The "thriller" component was catchy in that adrenaline-suspense-political-maneuvering way of such books. The "medical" part was fun because it was so very different from the type of hard science I usually read. The descriptions of phenotypes and receptor sites were leagues beyond my competencies, but Bear did a great job blending it into and making it a major part of the story. I'm in no way qualified to determine if any of it was sensible or realistic, but I believed it to be so as I was reading. I also liked that the epidemiology lingo was limited to the scientist characters and did not bleed into the narration and description; another area in which he did a good job balancing between hard science fiction and storytelling.

At about the halfway point I realized I was reading a dystopia and that I was really enjoying it. Dystopias are great, and that evolution kindled a new enthusiasm for me toward the story and the series. This aspect had the additional bonus of alleviating some of the weaknesses of near-future science fiction books. I could recognize the political parties, politicians, and commentators, and I could see how and why Bear thought they would react given the real prospect of a devastating epidemic. But this political critique, this speculation on the present origins of future dystopia, survived the era of the writing. It is timeless in that there will always be conservative and reactionary elements that lash out in fear. The novel as dystopia, however, washed out as the medical thriller proceeded. The heroes were obviously in the right and the fearmongers were obviously backward and selfish. There were no hard choices for the reader - every decision and

alignment was clear-cut with no grey areas to explore or feel uncomfortable with. The path to the end of the novel was a monotonous march to a oneness, togetherness, kumbaya, lets-all-be-friends, progressiveness in which any holdouts are all ignoramus. There's also an odd and incomplete biological-religious substory that runs through all of this but carries with it the same universalist tone. Both of these elements gave the story a slight overdose of predictability.

On the whole, however, Darwin's Children was an unexpectedly pleasant read. The highlight of the book was undoubtedly the Shiva children and the worldbuilding associated with them. I don't think I would read a lot from the medical thriller shelf, and I'm not well-read enough to know if this was original, but Bear presented realistically menacing medical and political possibilities that were fun to navigate in a novel.

reherrma says

In seiner langersehnte Weiterführung von "Das Darwin-Virus" erzählt Greg Bear die Geschichte der SHEVA-Kinder (die durch mutierte Retroviren erzeugten Neuen Kinder; d.h. Kinder eines neuen Menschen-Typs) konsequent weiter; allerdings mit einem großen Unterschied:

War sein Vorgänger noch ein Hard Science Thriller aus der Welt der Biologie allerersten Güte, so ist dieser Nachfolge-Roman Greg Bears in meinen Augen in erster Linie eine Abrechnung mit der amerikanischen Gesellschaft dieser Tage.

Wie bereits bei Michael Moore (Bowling for Columbine) wird in diesem Roman die Politik und Kultur von Angst und Unwissen gesteuert, aus Angst und Unwissenheit sind skrupellose Politiker und Wissenschaftler angesichts der evolutionären Umwälzung (durch Viren gesteuerter Quantensprung in den menschlichen Evolution) bereit, jede barbarische Handlung zu tun, die denkbar ist.

Die Kinder werden in Konzentrationslagern eingekerkert und behandelt wie Vieh, und die Eltern dieser Kinder diskriminiert und verfolgt, die Öffentlichkeit folgt der Propaganda der gewissenlosen Politikern über die gleichgeschalteten Medien wie Schafe, ein Vergleich mit dem Bush-Amerika dieser Zeit ist frappierend.

Ireney Berezniak says

Flat characters, flat story, unappealing premise ... the second book of Greg Bear's "Darwin's Radio" series made me question what it was exactly that I enjoyed in his first book.

Part 1 of "Darwin's Children" was particularly tedious, and I had contemplated abandoning the read altogether. The drudgery of various legal proceedings and political discourses effectively eliminated any interesting character or story development. I persevered, and the novel improved slightly in parts 2 and 3.

Initially, the premise of sudden evolutionary jump instigated by a retrovirus was interesting to me. Perhaps that is the reason that I had enjoyed Darwin's Radio, the first work in the series. However, the result of that sudden evolutionary jump was underwhelming at best, and downright ... disgusting.

Yes, the idea of communication through scents does not appeal to me in the slightest. This communication also involves persuasion, most commonly utilized by the new breed of humans to manipulate others. On one occasion, the art of persuasion involves the crumpling of paper, dabbing the resulting ball in some excretion behind the instigator's ear, and tossing that pheromone bomb near the target, while verbally coercing the aforementioned target to the instigator's point of view. Often, the new humans are described as smelling each

other, or touching the excreting areas of their bodies and smelling their fingers. Hardly an evolutionary jump ... certain humans today are known to stick their hands under their armpits and enjoy the sensory stimuli afforded by their noses afterwards. I certainly hope that our next evolutionary jump does not regress us to this form of communication, where we smell each others butts to say hello or to ask how our day is going.

Theology also finds its way into this novel, particularly towards the second half of the novel, as if thrown in as an afterthought, just before the novel went to the presses. It's awkward, not particularly compelling, and unnecessary.

If I was to judge Bear on this work, I would not credit him with mastery in story telling. While it would be unfair for me to say that this book reads more like a scientific dissertation, rather than a literary work of fiction, it does come close. The enjoyment of this title ultimately rests with personal preferences.

ib.

Thomas says

Wow. Another excellent book by Greg Bear. This guy writes about hard science in a way that keeps the reader engaged and edified, and writes scenes and characters that really resonate. He's helped in this regard by the fact that I just read Darwin's Radio a few weeks ago, and am still very familiar with the characters and situations he's building upon here.

But wow. This book just flows. well though-out, intriguing and beautifully written.
