



## Strength of Stones

*Greg Bear*

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In a theocratic world far into the future, cities control their own movements and organization. Constantly moving, growing and decaying, taking care of every need their inhabitants might think of, the cities have decided that humans are no longer a necessary part of their architecture, casting them out to wander in the wilderness and eke out a meager subsistence. To the exiled humans, the cities represent a paradisiacal Eden, a reminder of all they cannot attain due to their sinful and unworthy natures. But things are beginning to change. People are no longer willing to allow the cities to keep them out, choosing instead to force an entry and plunder at will. The cities are starting to crumble and die because they have no purpose or reason to continue living without citizens. One woman, called mad by some and wise by others, is the only human allowed to inhabit a city. From her lonely and precarious position at the heart of one of the greatest cities ever, she must decide the fate of the relationship between human society and the ancient strongholds of knowledge, while making one last desperate attempt to save the living cities.

## Strength of Stones Details

Date : Published October 1st 2002 by iBooks (first published 1981)

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Author : Greg Bear

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## From Reader Review Strength of Stones for online ebook

### **Sarah says**

I was forewarned by the friend who recommended it to me that it was a strange book...but I just had to read it anyways. I figured "Hey, at least it's short, so if it's awful, I won't have wasted too much time!"

Exactly as the 2 star rating...it was ok. I felt like it had much more promise and failed to follow through on it. The concept is original and I was intrigued by it, but in practice it wasn't what I expected it to be, although I'm not really sure what I had expected from sentient cities. Maybe something more like Anne McCafferey's The Ship Who Sang?

The characters were by turns flat and intriguing. The Chasers' dialect was extremely hard to read and I'm glad there wasn't a whole lot of Chaser dialogue in it, otherwise I would probably have given up on it.

I didn't quite "get" the ending either...I mean, I got that there was supposed to be some sort of light or hope at the end but it wasn't explained very well and to me, it felt rushed or like something had been left out.

I've never read any Greg Bear before so perhaps I need to try my hand at some of his other work and then return to this with a different perspective.

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### **Alex says**

This triad of linked novellas by Greg Bear is another example of the wonderful \*strangeness\* that I think it the most important aspect of his work. For someone who seems as a writer of hard SF I find that he is far more interested in the technological uncanny.

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### **Larry says**

Hmmm not the best Bear book. I found the religious aspect confusing and upon reaching the end I was left feeling not quite sure what happened! The big problem with this book is there's no main central character. The book is in 3 parts, 3 large chapters and after the first 'chapter' (54 pages) I got to know the main character only to find in the next part (set 10 years later) there's a new main character. Then later the original character returns but the focus has changed. Most books are about one person-not so with this book!

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### **Hank says**

I've got to give this one 5 stars for being one of the most MIND-BLOWING visions of the future from Greg Bear that I've ever read. Don't be put off by the date it was written. It's still a mind-blowing Greg Bear classic!!

Some of the characters are hard to understand, a bit difficult to figure out. That is the typical difficulty with

any Greg Bear book. He is a capable author, but when it comes to visualizing crazy futuristic IDEAS, he is absolutely extraordinary!

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### **Jonathan S. Harbour says**

Gave up at the 3\4 mark. Incoherent plot, boring characters, pointless words filling space. I tried to hang on to the end but the entire 2nd half was forced. Very dull narrative with nothing happening.

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### **Rob Markley says**

Early Bear book. Still learning the craft of scifi

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### **Caroline Eising says**

Phew, after a few of the other books this year, it was good to finally read something that flowed well. Although it touches on a number of very confusing concepts, and for such a short book describes two very different cultures (a highly advanced human culture and the more primitive human society derived from it when it fell) without becoming unreadable or too confusing. There were still a lot of concepts left unexplained, but that didn't compromise the story - it just left some mysteries to think about.

I enjoyed the story. It packed a lot in a very small space, but still allowed me to feel for the characters involved.

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### **Aura says**

Strength of Stone is like Greg Bear light. It's not as complex or engaging as I've found his other books to be but this by no means means makes it either simple or boring. The premise is interesting and there are some really great characters.

The protagonist isn't so much any one person though as it is the human drive, especially for survival. Through the course of the book the author vividly communicates loss on a grand scale, enduring human folly, the inexorable passage of time and the loneliness inspired by a future humanity that resembles nothing we currently know or understand. It worked for me even when I found the subject to be disturbing or unpleasant.

I recommend it but be prepared for a book that takes the harder, grittier road.

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### **Tomislav says**

This early Greg Bear novel is actually a fix-up of three novellas. "Mandala" was published in 1978 and substantially modified here. "Resurrection" was published alone in 1981. And "The Revenant" was first published only in this 1981 novel. Because of the cover blurb, I thought it might be an exploration of

theocracy, but that is not much what it is about.

A thousand years ago, God-Does-Battle was settled by human exiles from Earth, following Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths, who hired Robert Kahn to design self-maintaining cities for them to inhabit. His designs used highly advanced technology but somewhat misguided sociology. After only the first century of settlement, all humans were exiled from the cities, and they barely survived. The society which developed over the centuries leading up to the setting of the story treats the cities as mysterious and magical manifestations of the religions of their poorly remembered forebears. Humans are sinners who have been banished from a real and visible heaven. In this world then, we have three stories of some people and machines who try to understand the nature of their reality.

I found the events of the plot to be somewhat random, never being sure what rational or magical actions the cities, parts-of-cities, simulacrum, and artificial mimics were capable of. There are numerous references to actual religious names or artifacts - but either I am not familiar enough with the mythology to see how they relate to one another, beyond a simple cultural devolution in the future setting - or Bear was merely cherry-picking. In the end, this is a message about advanced technology that has run in a different direction than was originally intended.

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### **Jordanel says**

Great concept, as far as these migrating self sustained cities go. But the story and characters in this had very little personality. Everything that happened to every person seemed fundamentally inconsequential. And their reactions to things were flat. I didn't feel anything for any of these people because they barely reacted to anything.

I don't know what the chasers said in this entire book. No idea what they were talking about at any point. Their language is basically just really garbled english. For no apparent reason they devolved to speaking a shitty version of english. I don't understand how this would happen with a nomadic people who trade regularly with every town they pass.

Maybe It's a simple matter of me not understanding. I just didn't enjoy this.

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### **Kent says**

On a recent vacation with my wife, between the long flight and a few extra readings, I flew through this book. It was the third or fourth time I've read it, and I enjoyed it as much as the first time- maybe even more. Although the book is flawed, I have always loved the idea behind this story. Despite the gaping holes in the narrative, the concept and characters are interesting enough for me to enjoy each repeated reading.

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### **Roddy Williams says**

'They were built to hold the hopes of Mankind. They exposed only his folly...

In the deserts of God-Does-Battle the Cities stand alone, as beleaguered as the aspirations of Mankind. Those

still alive are silent, like stars in a dying universe they await dust and decay. Yet within the living plasm of their fragmented structures an ancient programme works still, implanted by the human creators they cast out a thousand years ago. Before long, it is clear, some of the Cities will fight extinction. And many of them will do battle in a quite unexpected way...'.

Blurb from 1988 VGSF paperback edition

Bear's early work shows much of the promise he was later to show in more accomplished work, and certainly in some of the themes.

Religion is a thread which runs through much of Bear's work either as a minor theme or right upfront as in 'Strength of Stones'

The planet God-Does-Battle was set up as a world where fundamentalist members of various faiths could exist apart from the sinners of the rest of the galaxy. Pearson, the founder, commissioned architect Robert Khan to design 'living' cities in which the colonists could pursue their individual religious callings. Khan, it appears, designed too well and the cities, sentient and programmed with the religious rules of their inhabitants, came to the conclusion that all their inhabitants were sinners and exiled them to the cruel surface of the world.

A thousand years or so later, the cities, which are capable of breaking themselves apart and moving, have become unstable and are breaking down. Chasers – nomadic groups which follow the cities – cannibalise what they can of weaker cities while they are in motion.

The novel comprises of three sections, set in three different time periods although Jeshua and Thinner, who are cyborg mimics created by the city Mandala to observe human society, appear in the opening and closing sections.

From a modern perspective it seems a little naive that fundamentalist Muslims and Jews would choose to share the same planet with each other, let alone the Baptists, Gnostics and whatever else. However, it is a measure of Bear's strength as a writer that he makes this rather far-fetched notion seem perfectly plausible. It would appear that two sections of the novel were published separately as short stories and certainly the 1988 version has been revised.

It does, sadly, have the disjointed feel of a fix-up.

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## Matthew says

Pros: The description and premise of "living" mechanical cities is superbly written

Cons: The book is choppy and seems hurried at parts, and the religious aspects of the world are often poorly described

It is a world of spectacular "living" cities built an age ago in an effort to provide comfort and security to all on a wayward planet. However, the cities themselves are crumbling. Why are they decaying? Bear takes the reader on a fascinating journey through a world seeped in religion and veiled in mystery. Bear is a science-fiction giant, but at the heart of his brilliant premise lie two major flaws. One: the book is supposed to represent three of Earth's greatest religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) but the description of these religions is lacking. Judaism is barely even mentioned. The reader only gets a glimpse at the surface of this culture. How have these religions changed or remained the same? How have they affected the people of this new world? Bear does not go into many specifics, and if one does not have much background in these religions, then he or she may be easily confused. The other problem with this book is that it is divided into three parts, any of which could have been made into a book of its own. As it is the story is fairly dysfunctional. It follows multiple characters in a short amount of time. I would recommend this book to Bear

fans, but if one wants a more satisfying visage of religion intertwined with science-fiction then I would recommend C.S. Lewis, Orson Scott Card, or Frank Herbert.

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### **Ian says**

I docked a star from my rating on this one because of spelling/proofreading errors. Yes, I know some of the text was in devolved English. There were quite a few errors in standard English sections that a good proofreader should have caught.

The plot was interesting and kept me wondering where it was going. The ending left a number of threads outstanding so I wonder about a equal or another book expanding on other events in the universe.

Other then the above issues, this was a fun read with some new angles on planetary colonization/religion that was fun to read through.

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### **Bron says**

Mmm, I've read this before in paperback quite a long time ago. This time in kindle format, I found it a bit disjointed, the viewpoint changes from one character to another without anything to give you a clue there's a transition. This may be down to the kindle formatting rather than the author though! It's based on an intriguing notion that different religious groups remove themselves from the secular life that has overtaken most of humanity by buying their own planet. Unfortunately the sentient cities they build to live in decide that humans don't live by their own religion's rules and evict them. The story deals with some of the consequences, partly from the point of view of the humans and partly from the viewpoint of sentient city parts. It's quite complex, sketching out how different communities might evolve stranded on a world that's very harsh outside the cities. Towards the end a simulacrum of the city designer appears and you get the hint that there has been another plan being pursued beneath it all!

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