

= City at the End of Time =

City at the End of Time is a 2008 science fiction novel by American writer Greg Bear . It was published in August 2008 by Del Rey in the United States , and Gollancz in the United Kingdom . The story follows three drifters in present @-@ day Seattle who are tormented by strange dreams of the Kalpa , a city one hundred trillion years in the future . The Kalpa is attempting to ward off the Typhon , an inexplicable entity that has consumed the rest of the ancient universe and broken down the laws of physics .

The novel belongs to the Dying Earth subgenre . It is rooted in hard science fiction , but also incorporates several other genres , including fantasy and horror . Bear called it science fiction " stretched to the nth degree " . He said that in the novel he honors those writers who changed the face of science fiction and fantasy , including William Hope Hodgson and Arthur C. Clarke , and pays homage to Hodgson 's 1912 novel , The Night Land , with which City at the End of Time shares a number of plot elements .

The novel received a mixed reception from critics . Some reviewers were impressed by the novel 's scope and grandiosity , while others felt that the characters were underdeveloped and the story was difficult to follow . New Scientist described the first half of the book as " a gripping , original tale " , but complained that in the second half Bear over @-@ complicates the story with " too many ideas , images , mythologies and distractions " . City at the End of Time was nominated for the Locus Award for Best Science Fiction Novel and the John W. Campbell Memorial Award in 2009 .

= = Plot summary = =

City at the End of Time is about the Kalpa , the last city on Earth , one hundred trillion years in the future . The novel 's backstory describes how the aging universe continued expanding and its spacetime fabric weakened . With the galaxies burnt out , humanity dispersed across the cosmos , where they encountered the Typhon , an inexplicable entity that was destroying the decaying universe . It consumed matter and replaced space @-@ time with emptiness and inconsistencies beyond the laws of physics . The resulting Chaos spread rapidly , driving some humans back to ancient Earth with its rekindled sun . In an attempt to fend off the approaching Typhon , leaders of the dying Earth sent for Polybiblios , a human living with the Shen , an ancient alien race . Polybiblios returned to Earth with his adopted daughter , Ishanaxade , a being he had constructed from " fate @-@ logs " of intelligent species collected by the Shen . After the Shen system fell , and the Chaos surrounded Earth , its leaders instructed everybody to convert themselves from primordial (real) matter to noötic (virtual) mass . As each city fell , its inhabitants retreated to the last remaining cities , the Kalpa and Nataraja . Using knowledge he had gleaned from the Shen , Polybiblios built reality generators to protect the Kalpa . Nataraja , which had rebelled against the instruction to convert to noötic matter , was left to fend for itself .

The novel alternates between the Kalpa and present @-@ day Seattle , where three drifters , Ginny , Jack and Daniel are in possession of sum @-@ runners , small stone @-@ like talismans that give them " fate @-@ shifting " abilities , whereby they can jump between fate @-@ lines (world lines in a multiverse) . Ginny and Jack also have disturbing dreams of the Kalpa , and are inexplicably connected to Jebrassy and Taidba , two " breeds " living in the future city . Fate @-@ shifters and their sum @-@ runners are hunted by " collectors " working for the Chalk Princess , an entity controlled by the Typhon from the future . These hunters place adverts in local newspapers inviting " dreamers " to contact them for " help " .

In the future , the Typhon is destroying history and world @-@ lines are being broken , merging the past and the present . With the Chaos closing in on the Kalpa , the inhabitants (all noötic) are unable to venture outside the city walls . Under Ishanaxade 's instructions , they create " breeds " , copies of ancient humans , using primordial matter . They send them in groups into the Chaos to find out if Nataraja still stands , but none return . Ishanaxade herself ventures out , but is not heard from again . As the Typhon starts breaching the Kalpa , the last batch of breeds , including Jebrassy and Taidba , leave the city in search of help . Armed with portable reality generators , they slowly

progress through the unreal landscape in search of the rebel city .

Meanwhile , the Chaos has reached all the way back to the present @-@ day , and an event called the Terminus hits Seattle : the past , present and future collide and world @-@ lines are severed . Ginny , Jack and Daniel , having evaded the hunters , trek across a degenerating Seattle . Protected by their sum @-@ runners , they are drawn to Nataraja , where Ishanaxade is waiting . While still in the Kalpa , Ishanaxade had instructed Polybiblios to create the sum @-@ runners containing " fragmented Babels " , and in the Chaos she had sent them back to the " beginning of time " . The sum @-@ runners were programmed to lead the bearers to Ishanaxade when the expected Terminus occurred . The breeds , programmed to see Ishanaxade as their " mother " , are also drawn to Nataraja , and Jebrassy and Taidba find their counterparts Jack and Ginny in the ruined city . The Kalpa falls to the Chaos , but in Nataraja , the sum @-@ runners and their Babel fragments are united and history is recreated , causing the Typhon , now a failed god , to implode .

= = Background = =

Greg Bear is an award @-@ winning science fiction writer from Seattle . He has won three Nebula Awards , including the 1995 Award for Best Novel for Moving Mars , and two Hugo Awards , including the 1983 Award for Best Novelette for Blood Music . City at the End of Time was his first novel since Quantico , which was first published in 2005 . Bear 's early influences included science fiction authors Robert A. Heinlein , Isaac Asimov and Poul Anderson .

Bear called City at the End of Time his " longest and most ambitious science fiction novel " he has written for a while . He said it is a " significant departure " from any of his previous works , and that it has a future history unlike anything he had tackled before . In an interview with Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine in September 2008 , Bear said that what inspired him to write City at the End of Time was the question , " What if we 're still primitive in our thinking [about physics and cosmology] ? " , and this led to the idea for a story of " a Universe that goes on and on and on , and how reality might have to be changed by that circumstance . "

Bear told Locus magazine in August 2008 that he had found what appears to be a " continuity " in British science fiction : H. G. Wells 's The Time Machine (1895) , Arthur C. Clarke 's The City and the Stars (1956) , and Hodgson 's The House on the Borderland (1908) and The Night Land (1912) , all speculate on the evolution of humankind in the deep future . Bear said that these works , and their author 's imagination , were a big influence on City at the End of Time .

= = Analysis and genre = =

Science fiction critic John Clute said " City at the End of Time is an example of a novel in dialogue with past works of SF . " He said that Bear pays homage to William Hope Hodgson 's 1912 novel , The Night Land , with which City at the End of Time shares a number of plot elements . Both books include characters who dream of cities in the far future (the Kalpa , and the Last Redoubt in The Night Land) which are surrounded by encroaching chaos . The Kalpa also draws on Arthur C. Clarke 's future city , Diaspar in his 1956 novel , The City and the Stars . Influences of other past works on City at the End of Time include H. P. Lovecraft 's novella The Shadow Out of Time (1936) , in which people exchange personalities in dreams across time , and Olaf Stapledon 's Last and First Men (1930) , in which the last of humanity in the deep future mentally contact people from the past . Lovecraft 's The Shadow Out of Time was in turn also influenced by The Night Land , which Lovecraft is said to have thought highly of .

Bear admired Hodgson 's imagination which , in The Night Land , had created the Last Redoubt as a " technological preserve " in the far future to keep out monsters that humanity had previously created , and which had evolved over long periods of time . But Bear 's interpretation of The Night Land is that this future landscape is a " metaphysical place " , and the monsters are " not creatures of this Earth " . For Bear , this explanation broadens the novel 's scope , and opens the door to other interpretations .

Another influence on City at the End of Time are the short stories , " The Universal Library " (1901)

by Kurd Lasswitz and " The Library of Babel " (1941) by Jorge Luis Borges , which science fiction and mystery author Peter Heck believes is intentional . Books feature prominently in the novel in both present @-@ day Seattle and the Kalpa in the future , and Heck sees it as " a metaphor that anyone whose life is built around books ? whether as a writer , reader , or bookseller ? can readily empathize with . "

Clute notes that the Kalpa is not , as the title suggests , the last city ; they believe they are , but the last city is Nataraja , " the city beyond the city at the end of time " . Clute says that the Typhon is " a kind of god and a kind of quasi @-@ animate principle of destruction " that is attempting to destroy the universe because it " cannot tolerate being told " or " observed " . The creation and evolution of the universe is observed and recorded , and the Typhon will not tolerate this telling . In the Kalpa , Polybiblios creates Babel fragments (" Borgesian libraries that do not end ") that , when brought together , will form a " backstory " that retells the history of the universe and overwhelms the Typhon .

City at the End of Time is rooted in hard science fiction , but includes several other genres . SFF World said the novel is similar to Stephen King 's Dark Tower , where " an ultimate destination that defies both space and time are at the heart " of both stories . But whereas King focuses on " fantastical elements " , Bear adopts a " scientific approach " . SFF World described City at the End of Time as " an Epic Science Fiction novel [with] elements of thriller and horror with some downright creepy characters . " Kirkus Reviews called the book an " eschatological fantasy " , and science fiction critic Paul Kincaid says the novel has " plotting and language [that] seem to have been borrowed wholesale from fantasy " . Bear himself said the novel could be fantasy or horror , but called it science fiction " stretched to the nth degree " . City at the End of Time is generally referred to as a " Dying Earth " story , and is categorized under the Dying Earth subgenre .

= = Reception = =

A review in Publishers Weekly described City at the End of Time as a " complex , difficult and beautifully written tale [that] will appeal to sophisticated readers who prefer thorny conundrums to fast @-@ paced action " . A reviewer for the Library Journal said the novel " plung [es] readers into a visceral experience of cosmological theory and the big creation stories of mythology " . A review in New Scientist described the first half of the book as " a gripping , original tale " with the portrayal of the fate @-@ shifters 's talents as " nothing short of brilliant " , but complained that in the second half Bear over @-@ complicates the story with " too many ideas , images , mythologies and distractions " . The reviewer said that a promising story " whips itself up into a virtually incomprehensible final act " . Science fiction critic John Clute described the book as " cosmological [science fiction] without a net " , and complained that Bear rushes through the story too quickly and does not dwell long enough on locations like the Kalpa to make it memorable . He said that the flight to the future of Ginny , Jack and Daniel " gets a touch Frodo @-@ in @-@ Mordor at places " .

Writing in a review in Asimov 's Science Fiction , science fiction and mystery author Peter Heck called City at the End of Time a " big , sweeping , heavily symbolic tale " , and " one of Bear 's most ambitious " . He said that while the story could have focused more on the future city , " in the end , the plotlines come together , and the complexities merge into a satisfying unity " . Speculative fiction writer Simon Petrie writing in Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine was impressed by the book 's " grandiosity to the total synthesis of cosmology and myth " , and Bear 's " ability to encapsulate a universal future history in just the one book " , but found the mix of science , fantasy , horror , mythology and religion a little " incongruous " at times . Petrie also felt that the use of so many " viewpoint characters " results in these characters being underdeveloped , and tends to " [blunt] the pathos as the plot edges towards climax " .

In a review in the online speculative fiction magazine Strange Horizons , Tony Keen was critical of Bear 's novel , saying that the present and future passages " do not mesh terribly well " , and that it is " too long " with " too many ideas " . He complained that the book was difficult to follow and that Bear keeps " moving the goalposts as it suits his narrative " . Keen said that for a science fiction novel , he was surprised at its " lack of consistency " , and called it more a work of fantasy than

science fiction . He said the " revelations " at the end still did not help explain what had happened , but that " by this point , it was for me hard to care " . A review in the Oakland Tribune complained that Bear , who it felt is not strong on " crafting memorable characters " , " struggles " with the novel 's multiple viewpoints . The review added that while he " takes a long time to get there , and arrives with a palpable scent of anticlimax , [Bear] does deliver at the end " , although with not enough to satisfy the reviewer .

Science fiction critic Paul Kincaid had mixed feelings about the novel . In a review at the SF Site webzine he criticized the characterisation saying that he could not always separate the main characters . Kincaid questioned the need for the supernatural entity , the Typhon , which is never developed . He described the " end of time " sequence as " the most powerful science fictional moment in this entire book " , saying that he found it " far more scary , far more gripping , than any supernatural intervention " . Kincaid said that while he found the book " ambitious " and " intellectually satisfying " , " somehow the whole feels less than the sum of its parts " .

In another review at the SF Site , Greg L. Johnson wrote that while *City at the End of Time* provides plenty of " wonder , awe , and a sense of humanity in the face of an implacable universe " , he feels that Bear does not quite succeed with this ambitious story of the fate of reality and the universe at large . Johnson described it as " an immensely complicated story " that unfolds by means of " hints and allusions " . He said that even the book 's ending only hints at what the gathered role players had achieved . Johnson wrote that while Bear 's depictions of events on a grand scale , like the decay of Seattle , are good , his portrayal of the key players against this backdrop is not as strong .

== Awards and nominations ==

== Work cited ==

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