

REVIEW OF AXIOMATIC

He hated her. ...she hadn't punished him, she hadn't even forbidden him to do it again—she had simply stated her opinion. The only trouble was, as an ordinary ten-year-old child, he didn't understand half the phrases she'd used, and he didn't have a hope of properly assessing her argument, let alone rebutting it. By talking over his head, she might just as well have proclaimed with the voice of authority: you are stupid and greedy and wrong—and it frustrated him almost to tears that she'd achieved this effect while remaining so calm and reasonable. [- *from the story "Eugene"*]

The wormhole makes tangible the most basic truths of existence. You cannot see the future . You cannot change the past. All of life consists of running into darkness. [- *from the story "Into Darkness"*]

This Greg Egan collection belongs up there with Ted Chiang's works in the pantheon of best thought-experiment-based science fiction. The fascinating—and in some cases deeply troubling—ideas explored here include:

- How might one try to influence outcomes across the multiverse if “[t]he number of parallel worlds is uncountably infinite”?
- What would happen if a way of communicating information backward in time became broadly available? (Egan's answer: people would lie, a lot)
- The lengths to which an obsession with recreating art in life could take someone... especially when the art in question contains human-animal hybrids
- The dilemmas we might face if we had the ability to directly alter our own brains to make us deeply believe anything we chose to
- How might you live if you had no permanent body of your own, but woke up in a different person's body (and life) each day?
- If a brain injury caused you to perceive everything as though you were looking down on your body from above, rather than out from your own eyes, would it change your way of thinking? Would you become less selfish?
- Would you pay a ransom to save an unauthorized digital copy of your lover's mind from being tortured? What if it was not a copy made from the original person, but rather reconstructed from a copy of *your* mind's perceptions of the person?

- A disturbing concept Egan calls a “cutie”: a human baby/toddler that’s been genetically modified to never grow up and to die young, with an intelligence level more akin to a pet
- What if a religious fundamentalist tried to create a virus to enforce their moral beliefs on everyone?
- Some others mentioned in passing:
 - artificially changing white people’s skin to black to protect against the hole in the ozone layer
 - the danger of a system where “each taxpayer could specify the precise allocation of his or her income tax between government departments”