



Dark Integers and Other Stories

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A brand new short story collection by one of science fiction's modern masters. This five tale, 80,000 word book includes Luminous, Riding the Crocodile, Dark Integers. Glory, and Oceanic.

Dark Integers and Other Stories Details

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From Reader Review Dark Integers and Other Stories for online ebook

Andrewcharles420 says

Five novellas:

'Luminous' -- This story is about an academic searching for incompatible mathematics based on the idea that the physical world defines the mathematical axioms underlying it and that different regions in spacetime may have different rules.

'Riding the Crocodile' -- A couple in a post-scarcity galactic civilization wants to communicate with the guarded, uncommunicative civilization at the center of the galaxy.

'Dark Integers' -- A second story in the broken universal mathematics universe, here the researchers have established communication with intelligent beings on "the other side" of the mathematical divided, and are trying to prevent each other from crossing/changing the mathematical boundaries.

'Glory' -- A second story from the post-scarcity galactic civilization, here a couple scholars are sent to a barbarian planet to help them discover some archeological treasures their culture is in the process of... overlooking.

'Oceanic' -- A boy's terrifying religious experience (nearly drowning) shapes his perception of life thereafter and perhaps uniquely qualifies him to explain his culture/religion/species's post-human history.

The author has a deep understanding and appreciation for mathematics, and it adds a surprisingly spooky element to many of the stories, because the suggestions seem so plausible and able to mesh into my own (perhaps limited) mathematical knowledge and understanding.

Oceanic was by far the most strange story, incorporating clever ideas about bioengineering, perception, and religion, as well as an interesting culture and odd reproductive scheme--the penis changes partners after intercourse, changing the owners' gender until their next sexual encounter (and homosexual interests would have to lose or gain a 'bridge' to procreate). I wonder what drug experiences influenced the author's description of the hallucinogen in this story... if I had to guess, I would say DMT. This world could have many more interesting stories in it!

I would be interested in reading more from any of these universes, and will therefore likely keep an eye out for this author in the future! Recommended for math (and hard science) liking science fiction readers.

Raja99 says

Why I read this book: I was thinking of reading Greg Egan's *Incandescence*, but decided to read this first because two of the stories are set in the same universe.

This collection includes an introduction (the first I recall seeing in an Egan book), three novelettes, and two novellas. While the first story, "Luminous", had previously appeared in an English-language Egan collection, the other four haven't, as far as I can tell.

This is an incredible book. While I can grumble about some minor infelicities, this book has more amazing--and disturbing--Hard SF ideas than most authors generate in a decade.

If I were to give letter grades to these stories for some bizarre reason, here they are:

"Luminous" - A+ . Our 3.5-year-old has just discovered simple arithmetic using his fingers; he can add two cardinal numbers in the range 0-5 inclusive (and if the sum stays below 10, he can add more). But what if mathematics only worked for small enough numbers?

I found the ideas in this story heady, fascinating, and ultimately disturbing, because my-friend-the-mathematician sees nothing terribly implausible about them. I've read this story at least twice before (after all, it *was* the title story of *Luminous*) and enjoyed it more each time.

"Riding the Crocodile" - B+ (by Egan's standards; A by anyone else's) . An amazing view of post-Singularity humans operating on galactic spacial (and temporal scales). I've quibbled about this story in the past because its ending seemed unsatisfactory to me, and the post-Singular humans seemed far too similar to us. This time through, the ending is still not very satisfactory, but I could see hints that the characters aren't as similar to us as they might appear on the surface.

"Dark Integers" - B+/A- . A sequel to "Luminous" that didn't (quite) add enough new ideas, and which was marred by a major plot point that seemed unmotivated.

"Glory" - A+ . My favorite story in the book. It doesn't start well; the first three pages are spent detailing the characters' method of travel. While I'm a big fan of diamond-hard SF--the method is mind-boggling and sounds like it could not possibly be bettered, given our current views of physics--even I found it tough sledding.

But once the characters arrive at their destination, the story becomes a lot more interesting. I see hints of Richard Dawkins, and the story almost reads like something Ursula K. Le Guin would have done. Assuming, of course, that Le Guin was as interested in diamond-hard SF as her Hainish pieces.

"Oceanic" - A- . An amazing story about love, sex, and religion among people who aren't human--but may be descended from humans. Winner of the Hugo award.

(Finished 2008-09-14 20:09EDT.)

Andreas says

Greg Egan is known for **hard** SF stories and this collection is no exception. The main topic is *mathematics*. I enjoyed "Luminous" and its sequel "Dark Integers", both play with an interesting concept. "Oceanic" is the highlight and it's good to have it here in print again. The other 4 stories didn't convince me. They are well written but I didn't care for the characters and their fate.

Nathan P. says

(I am reviewing the title story here, as I have not yet read the rest).

Great sequel-ette to Luminous. Satisfying ending, accurate (and mind blowing, quite frankly) science. Not

disappointed.

DaughterDaDa says

Not particularly creative or engaging.

Louis says

This is a book of 5 short stories. The reader should be warned that Greg Egan writes very much in the realm of “hard” science fiction. If science fiction was a pool, he’s in the deep end.

I find in reading his books that sometimes I actually don’t even care about the stories as much as the ideas he so easily tosses about and uses to tell his tales.

Two of the stories (one is a sequel to the first) play around with some interesting ideas of mathematics. In finding a flaw in mathematics a different “world” is discovered following it’s own physical rules.

Two other stories are placed in the same far future universe. The first is a story of trying to communicate with the race(s) that inhabit the center of the galaxy by the races that reside outside the core. The second has very advanced representatives making contact with a “primitive” race that lives on a world that used to be ruled by a race that had lived for 3 million years and the discoveries made there and its impact.

Lastly, and I think I liked this story best. It’s a story of a planet of colonist from a long lost Earth. The mythology of their arrival has become scripture that is the basis for their religion.

It’s all nicely laid out and self-supporting in that world. The story focuses on a young boy and his life as he grows up and how events in his life and his later life as a researcher slowly allows him to see through the stories of this religion and cast off the superstitions he grew up with. It’s a nicely told tale.

Overall I’ve always enjoyed Greg Egan’s work and the workout he gives my imagination.

Jean-Michel Smith says

Fans of Greg Egan will enjoy this thought-provoking collection of short stories. Two stories, "Luminous" (which appeared in a Greg Egan anthology of the same name) and its sequel "Dark Integers" tell a harrowing story of intrigue, danger, and conflict between two numerical "regions" of our universe, each defined by a mutually exclusive system of mathematics. Both systems work within their realm (and range of numbers), but fundamentally contradict each other. What’s more, if one system advances, it does so at the expense of the other. Imagine what would happen to architecture, engineering, science and technology if the basic rules of arithmetic were suddenly invalid because an alien set of theorems advanced into our "region." Financial markets would crash as basic equations failed, along with computers and air planes. Now imagine intelligences, on both sides of the "barrier", keenly aware of this threat, suspicious and fearful of each other...

The other works in this collection are equally excellent. Two stories are set in a far distant future (circa 1

million years from now) where two post-singularity, galaxy-spanning civilizations who know virtually nothing of one another coexist and occasionally collide. Another, "Oceanic", is an intriguing tale all its own, set in a plausible, not-too-distant future...

A wonderful mix of original, intriguing ideas, and well executed. A great read!

John says

These are five inventive short stories by Egan. His work doesn't always hit, but there is not a dud in this collection.

Steve says

Excellent collection of five stories by Greg Egan. "Luminous" and "Dark Integers" are about the discovery and communication with a parallel universe with different rules of mathematics. "Riding the Crocodile" and "Glory" are set in the Amalgam, a far-future galaxy-spanning civilization. "Oceanic" is a story of religion and faith on a long-isolated colony world. My favorites of the stories were "Dark Integers" and "Riding the Crocodile", but all the stories are worth reading.

scherzo? says

Greg Egan plays with ideas that can turbo-charge the reader's mind. His characters are engaging and his plots keep the pages turning. With more world-building or better endings, his books would be perfect.

Luminous and *Dark Integers* challenge current ideas about mathematics.

First line of *L*: "I woke, diesorientated, unsure why."

First line of *DI*: "Good morning, Bruno. How is the weather there in Sparseland?"

Riding the Crocodile spins a tale around themes of death, extended life, meaningful living, curiosity, courage, relationships, cooperation and more.

First line: "In their ten-thousand, three hundred and ninth year of marriage, Leila and Jasim began contemplating death."

Glory is set in the same cooperative Amalgam universe as *RTC* and contrasts "Spreaders" with "Seekers." This ending was the most disappointing in that it hinged a key decision on a questionable assumption while squandering an ingenuous sacrifice.

First line: "An ingot of metallic hydrogen gleamed in the starlight, a narrow cylinder half a meter long with a mass of about a kilogram."

Oceanic's main theme questions religion while a second theme imagines intercourse (view spoiler) genders. More world-building here than the other stories, but another disappointing ending.

1999 Hugo Award for Best Novella, Locus Award and Asimov's Readers Award

First line: *"The swell was gently lifting and lowering the boat."*

Noah M. says

First Story. "Luminous."

I found this story to be OK, but not great. The idea involves the basics of mathematics being invalidated due to certain remote regions of formulation having been corrupted in the quantum craziness of the early universe...or something. Mainly the characters sit in front of a computer and talk about this, which is interesting enough, but it wasn't a truly engaging premise for me.

Second, "Riding the Crocodile"

This is an excellent story. Nominated for Hugo award. Did it win? I'm not sure. It probably should have. This story takes place in the terrifyingly distant future (more than a million years from now). Humans live as software and live in an interstellar community called the Amalgam. This coalition of worlds/species inhabits the outer ring of our galaxy, while the mysterious Aloof live in the galactic core. The Aloof are inaccessible by any known means. They turn back all visitors and reject all contact.

This is about a married couple attempting to make contact before they choose to die. The time scales involved are mind boggling, and Egan insists on a relativistic universe where it takes a thousand years to travel between stars. Of course, software sentience doesn't care about time the same way we do. This was an awesome story, and is set in the same world as two of his novels and another story in this collection.

Third, "Dark Integers"

This is the direct sequel to "Luminous." I liked it more. The mathematics (and the threat they represented to our reality) were more clearly expressed in this story. There was actually something at stake, rather than just a vague sense of being intellectually threatened.

Fourth, "Glory"

Set in the same universe as "Riding the Crocodile." This follows Joan, a xenomathematician, on a quest to uncover ancient mathematics by a 3,000,000 year old culture. The problem is that the planet where this culture lived is currently home to a sentient offshoot of their evolutionary tree who are at a somewhat similar level of technological/social development as we are.

The fact that their planet was once home to a 3,000,000 year old culture has numbed them to the idea of extraterrestrial contact, so that isn't an issue in and of itself; the warring nations on the planet, and each nations desire to use their interstellar visitor to gain a terrestrial advantage, however, is.

The opening to "Glory" is an astonishing feat of hard, hard science fiction. I've never read anything quite like it. The first two pages of the story take place on a subatomic scale...it's really something.

Fifth, "Oceanic"

I didn't think I'd like this story, but I was horribly wrong. It's the least sci-fi of the bunch. A civilization distantly descended from ancient colonists from earth. The people here have been genetically modified in various ways by their ancestors who they revere as "angels." A whole religion surrounds the idea that angels live on earth.

The narrator is indoctrinated into a fundamentalist sect known as the "drowners." They weight themselves

underwater and proceed to almost drown and discover the divine love of their deity Beatrice. As the narrator comes of age he discovers sex (which is a strange and disturbing hermaphroditic affair that I still don't quite understand), and slowly sheds more and more of his religious convictions until the only thing important to his faith is the love of Beatrice inside him.

This can't last, and in college it is discovered that the religious ecstasy he experienced as a child is the result of a mild hallucinogen secreted by a particular variety of microorganism that is present in all the world's oceans.

Really it's a simple story of growing out of religious faith, but it was well told and the narrator was one of the more well drawn characters that Greg Egan has created so far. I still don't understand the sexual anatomy of these people...really confusing.

Jeff says

This is the good Egan. There are only a few, longer stories in this collection, but they're all good. *Luminous* and its sequel *Dark Integers* almost make a novel, and another story is a clear prequel to *Incandescence*. His brief intro makes it clear that the views of the protagonists are in fact his. When I reread his other stuff I'll keep that in mind.

Phil Scovis says

Greg Egan has a reputation for writing the hardest of the hard science fiction. So when a story is called "Dark Integers", you can be assured that it will be a serious thriller involving advanced mathematics.

(Actual line from "Luminous": "In spite of everything, I still wasn't ready to put a bullet in anyone's brain for the sake of defending the axioms of number theory.")

The main idea goes beyond the controversial notion that mathematics is an empirical science; mathematics can actually be changed, affecting our reality, and threatening all of existence. Again, this is not a bit of magic, but is explained by the author as a plausible possibility.

In "Riding the Crocodile", we get some back-story of the first contacts with the inscrutable "Aloof" which appear in earlier novels by Egan. This story and "Glory" both describe the mechanics of interstellar travel, and use Egan's recurring theme of consciousness as software. And a little acorporeal sex too.

"Oceanic" is a more down-to-planet study of the struggle between religious faith and scientific doubt, in the mind of the individual.

Karel Baloun says

Hard science with uniquely precise phrasing, yet so brilliantly imaginative. Immensely impressive.

Riding the crocodile and glory, were among the best short stories I've read. Amazing that hard science

imagination was this far along in 2005 and I want to read much more about the amalgam universe.

Oceanic deserves the Hugo, a devastatingly original take on religious faith vs. biological science.

i didn't buy the key premise of mathematical weapons in Luminous, but do appreciate it's originality enough to suspend further criticism.

Susanne says

3.5 stars
