



## The Infinity Concerto

*Greg Bear*

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There is a song you dare not sing - a melody that you dare not play, a concerto that you dare not hear: It is called a Song of Power. It is a gateway to another world - a gate that will lock behind you as you pass, barring you from the Earth forever. Resist at all cost. For it is a world of great danger and great beauty - and it is not good to be human in the Realm of the Sidhe.

## The Infinity Concerto Details

Date : Published April 1st 2014 by Open Road Media Sci-Fi & Fantasy (first published 1984)

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Author : Greg Bear

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## From Reader Review The Infinity Concerto for online ebook

### Amy says

One of my favorite books ever. Brilliant.

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### Allison says

I quit at 29%. If this wasn't a book club read, I would have stopped a lot sooner. It's too dark for me. The main character is too isolated, the world too hostile. It's all grayscale in my mind. Faerie shouldn't be ugly and colorless and full of death and despair, even when dangerous to humans. There should at least be an alien beauty to it. But this was all ugliness and hardship.

I was forcing myself to continue reading (because - book club), but I was getting depressed even when I wasn't reading it (NOT good, and completely against all the reasons why I read), so I moved onto something else and really haven't looked back since.

Not for me.

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### Matthew Brown says

Before a lengthy exposition, here is the short and sweet version:

Haunting. A dark parallel of growing up, exploded into a unyielding nightmare.

A fairly short read that will question your security. Worth it.

I will say right away: I had far more fun reading this book than any novel from Mr. Bear I've read before. I admire his writing and ideas, but I sometimes found myself struggling through tedious exposition in *Forge of Gods* and the *Eon* series. Here, within the *Infinity Concerto's* "Realm", I felt far more satiated. The book was much shorter, an appropriate length feeling neither rushed nor drawn.

The beginning feels a bit slow, but once the pace is set it was easy turning page after page. The "Realm" is well constructed, a loose reality of fluid theories as opposed to the strict laws of our own world. This is not a paradise, however. The "Realm" is torn, a cluttered mess of idealists, purists, common idiots and blind zealots. Not so different from our own home, the "Realm" is filled with darkness both within and without. This is a story of hardship, of impossible odds and a dark ugliness; beset on all sides by temptations of apathy, egotism, power and nihilism. This book will not make you feel good about yourself, you will rarely smile. If you're looking for sunshine and butterflies, you'd best turn away now. I only advise that you finish what you begin. That said, I value the realizations and awakenings approaching the end over the finale itself. A good journey needs a good destination, but the path taken speaks far louder than the silence at its end.

One last bit of business. It was difficult to approach this book; Having read a few works from Greg Bear already I had too many unhealthy expectations as I began, wholeheartedly wanting science fiction from a book that is dripping with fantasy. Hold out though, read through and you may pick up one some ideas that feel more familiar far in our future among the strings and quarks than amidst the magic and faerie.

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## Gloria says

I don't know why I took so long to read this book, but it was fantastic. I love the fact that I didn't know what would happen next. I was unexpected, I think that sums it up for me. Now I have to look for the next one :( Keeping my fingers crossed.

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## Fastesthamster says

An entertaining re-read of a childhood favourite. So I'm probably a little biased.

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## Johan Duinkerken says

This was a re-read for me, even if the previous read must have been something like 30 years ago... Reading it in 2014, I still remembered parts of the story from 30 years ago. It was quite an influential read for me :-)

Recommended!

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## tENTATIVELY, cONVENIENCE says

review of

Greg Bear's The Infinity Concerto

by tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE - June 3, 2017

This is the 18th bk I've read by Bear & I admit that I didn't particularly expect to be surprised by him but, Lo & Behold!, I was. This is not only a Fantasy bk instead of the usual Hard Science Fiction it's a dagnabbit-all-to-heck'n'tarnation excellent one!

Fantasy writers often write epics, usually in the form of trilogies. The Infinity Concerto is so epic it's practically a trilogy all by its lonesome. Instead, it's part of a diptych. The 2nd part's called The Serpent Mage, I haven't read that one yet.

I read on the back cover "and it is not good to be human in the Realm of the Sidhe" & that was exciting enuf b/c, thx to having done a piece inspired by Yeats (sortof) called "The Only Jealousy of Cascando McKenna" (<https://youtu.be/1YQI5IBEA0A?t=29m24s>), I knew that the Sidhe are part of Irish mythology & that it's pronounced "she" (or something close to that).

""The Shee sound like they—" Michael began, but Savarin interrupted.

""Pronounce it correctly. It's spelled S-I-D-H-E, from the ancient Gaelic—or rather, the ancient Gaels heard hem calling themselves by that name. They pronounce it as a cross between 'Shee' and 'Sthee.'" - p 35

THEN, on p 1: "He rolled out of bed, kicking a book of Yeats' poems across the floor with one bare foot.": a sort of foreshadowing that's only recognizable as such if you understand that Yeats referred to the aforesaid

myths. This led to my feeling like a Mr. Smartypants b/c not only did I immediately get it, I'd already done a piece about it. n'at

The world must be full of children who thrill to secret adventures in alternate universes entered thru strange passages. I was certainly one of them. To this day, I love secret doorways behind bkshelves & the like.

"It was a silly decision. The world was sane; such opportunities didn't present themselves. he withdrew the paper and read it for the hundredth time:

""Use the key to enter the front door. Do not linger. Pass through the house, through the back door and through the side gate to the front door of the neighboring house on the left, as you face the houses. The door to that house will be open. Enter. *Do not stop to look at anything.* Surely, quickly, make your way to the back of the house, through the back door again, and across the rear yard to the wrought-iron gate. Go through the gate and turn to your left. The alley behind the house will take you past many gates on both sides. Enter the sixth gate on your left."" - p 3

I'm hooked. Those instructions had been given to him by an old man friend of his known as Arno Waltiri who had been a film music composer:

"Two months before, on a hot, airless August day, Waltiri had taken Michael up to the attic to look through papers and memorabilia. Michael had exulted over letters from Clark Gable, correspondence with Max Steiner and Erich Wolfgang Korngold, a manuscript copy of a Stravinsky oratorio." - p 7

I found the reference to Korngold particularly engaging - not b/c I like his music that much but just b/c I even know who he is & b/c he was one of the composers condemned by the Nazis as "degenerate" who was lucky enuf to escape to the US. To quote from the liner notes of a CD entitled "The Music Survives! Degenerate Music":

"Another pre-war progressive was Ernst Krenek. His opera *Jonny spielt auf*, more than any other, embodied the concept of 'Entartete Musik'. An offensive half-ape, half-Negro playing a saxophone and with the star of David on the lapel of his tuxedo, named Jonny, became the logo for music they didn't like. The opera was an enormous hit all over Europe and was the first to confront audiences with sights and sounds familiar through the modern world around them: cars, whistles, jazz bands, sirens, electric bells — with the final jubilant chorus suddenly interrupted by an air raid siren: a frightening premonition, making its place at the end of our sampler all too appropriate.

"*Jonny spielt auf* was used to launch the 'Entartete Musik' series alongside another, contrasting, opera — Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Das Wunder der Heliane*. Both operas were premiered in 1927, though Korngold's father, Vienna's most important critic, tried to collaborate with the National Socialists to prevent Jonny detracting from *Heliane*'s success. Korngold's opera took music to levels of expressiveness not even reached by Strauss or Puccini. The aria 'Ich ging zu ihm' is one of the more reflective moments in this work. During his exile in Hollywood, Korngold created a cinematic style which would shape the future of film music, as can be heard in the excerpt from his soundtrack *Between Two Worlds*.

"The irony of the *Jonny vs Heliane* 'fight' is that the progressive, subversive *Jonny* was written by the monarchist, Roman Catholic Krenek, whereas the author of *Heliane* — a whirlpool of noble Germanic sentiment — was the Jewish Korngold. Both composers were Viennese of Czech extraction, roughly the same age, established in Berlin and exiled in Southern California where they died, probably having never met one another."

As such, the reference to Korngold in The Infinity Concerto, while completely casual & one-time-only had a similar poignant foreshadowing resonance as did the reference to Yeats. Waltiri is a fictional composer but

Bear adds the extra nice touch of providing an appendix of "*The Film Scores of Arno Waltiri (Highlights)*" on p 342 that includes Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey, James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Rudyard Kipling's The Man Who Would Be King, & Henry Roth's Call It Sleep.

I found this list to be tantalizing. Roth's story of a Jewish immigrant family in NYC has never been made into a film as far as I know. Perhaps Bear's hinting that he'd like to see it be. Austen's Northanger Abbey is Austen's parody of Gothic novels & has been made into TV versions by both the BBC & PBS but is that good enuf? Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was a bk made w/ photographer Walker Evans & documented the lives of impoverished tenant farmers during the Depression. As far as I know that hasn't been made into a movie either. Another hint from Bear? Kipling's The Man Who Would Be King was made into a movie by the great director John Huston in 1975 starring Sean Connery - that was 9 yrs before this bk was published so it seems reasonable to assume that Bear knew about it since the movie wd've been a high profile release. As such, it seems to be an anomaly in the 4 choices I picked as a sampling.

""I submit to you, perhaps Waltiri knew the answer to an age-old question, namely. 'What song did the sirens sing?'"

"Michael closed the book. 'It's not all nonsense,' Waltiri said, returning it to the shelf. 'That is roughly what happened. And then, months later, twenty people disappear. The only thing they have in common is, they were in the audience for our music.'" - p 11

I'm hooked even more. Waltiri dies.

""Two days later, a tiny brown sparrow flew into Arno's study, where the library is now. It sat on the piano and plucked at pieces of sheet music. Arno had once made a joke about a bird being a spirit inside an animal body. I tried to shoo it out the window, but it wouldn't go. It perched on the music stand and stayed there for an hour, twisting its head to stare at me. Then it flew away." She began to cry. "I would dearly love for Arno to visit me now and then, even as a sparrow. He is such a fine man."" - p 13

So he goes.

"Walking straight in the darkness was difficult. He brushed against a wall with his shoulder. The touch set off an unexpected *bong*, as if he were inside a giant bell." - p 13

Into another world.

"He left Clarkham's house. A flagstone path curved around the outside of the side gate. When he had gone through the front door there had been no moon, but now a sullen green orb rose over the silhouettes of the houses on the opposite side of the street. It didn't cast much light. (And yet, the moonlight through the French doors had been bright. . . .) The streetlights were also strangely dim, and yellowish-green in color." - p 14

""Why the alarm?" Michael asked.

"Risky tossed her lank hair and spat in a corner. "The riding of the noble Sidhe against the race of man," she said, her voice thick with sarcasm. She appraised Michael with a cool eye. "You're new," she said." - p 26

As a fantasy writer, Bear distinguishes himself by referring to few or none of the standard template character types. Contrast that to James P. Blaylock's The Elfin Ship (& my review thereof):

"In addition to the afore-mentioned standard fare of elves n'at there're also trolls:

""The two trolls waiting on the riverside, however, were anything but laughable. As Jonathan stood watching the trolls which were watching him, the one atop the roots reached down in among them. came up with a tone, and began to gnaw at it." - p 44

"Apparently the secrets of strong teeth are known to trolls. They must not use US dentists. & then there's that "evil creeping over the land"" - <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4...>

Instead we have things like animated mannikins:

"He assumed a stance before the mannikin, imitating Coom and feeling foolish—

"And it promptly swing up its stick and knocked his to the ground. The mannikin vibrated gleefully, twisted on its stake and became limp again." - p 73

As if all this weren't excellent enuf, Bear goes into another favorite territory of mine: language:

"["]I'd say the resemblances between Sidhe and human languages are strong, but the syntax and methods of understanding are quite different. For example, the Sidhe use a meta-language . . . a language of contexts. And Cascar is like a hundred languages thrown together. They never run out of words that mean the same thing, or very nearly. I can't speak it well. I can sometimes make myself understood, but . . ."

""I understood it for a time," Michael said. "During the *Kaeli*. One of the Crane Women touched my head, and I understood everything they said."

""And what was that like?"

"Michael thought back, "Like listening to music. Each word seemed to be the equivalent of a note. Notes are always the same in music, but place them next to each other and they sound different . . . or lengthen the notes, shorten them. Use the same word in a different context, and it means something else . . . sounds different."" - pp 141-142

"["]There is a section in 'Hudibras' by Samuel Butler—if I can remember . . ." He screwed up his face in concentration and peered at the ceiling, "But when he pleased to shew't, his speech/ In loftiness of sound was rich;

"A Baylonish dialect  
Which learned pedants much affect;  
It was a party coloured dress  
Of patch'd and py-ball'd languages;  
'Twas (Irish) cut on Greek and Latin  
Like fustian heretofore on sattin.  
It had an odd promiscuous tone,  
As if h' had talk'd three parts in one;["]" - p 143

Wch is quite similar to language as I envision it.

Bear throws in another spinner:

""Human sex is dangerous here."

""Why?"

"Such things are closely regulated. We do not want children. The Sidhe and Breeds can have young—we cannot."

"Michael just looked at him.

"The people who have been here longest, and the Breeds, say it is because there are no seedling souls in the Realm. A human child is born empty. A Sidhe or Breed child is expected to be that way, and already has an internal . . . how would we say . . . compensation. But human children are vessels waiting to be filled. They are filled by creatures from the Blasted Plain—Adonna's own aborted children, some say." He set his lips and waved off further inquiry. "Talk about it is considered obscene. No more." - p 144

A sample child:

"Ishmael," Helena said, kneeling on the walkway. The pit was as deep as it was wide, and the walls were made of slick, hard tile. The figure was naked and the pit was bare except for three bowls, receptacles for food, water and waste, all arranged neatly against one wall.

"Yes."

"Michael's eyes had adjusted well enough that he could make out the details of Ismael's face. It was small, round, disproportionate to such a tall body. The hands were large and hung from arms which began thin at the shoulders and widened to grotesque forearms and wrists.

"We have some questions to ask," Helena said.

"I'm not otherwise occupied."

"Has he been here since he was born?" Michael whispered.

"Almost," Helena said. "He was one of the first that we know of. He's been here since the War."

"Time passes," Ishmael said. "Questions." He sat down leaning against the tiles and stretching his pale legs out on the floor.

"Who are you?"

"A sideshow for the guilty. A product of lust. Something so evil it must be evilly confined through all its endless life. An abortion walking. Victim." - p 177

Oi! That's rough.

"["]I can't love you, not like I should. Today you've seen why."

"I have?"

"The Yard. To love you properly, I'd want to give myself to you completely . . . and I can't." She searched his face and reached out to touch his cheek. "Don't you see? They've taken love away from us here. We might make a mistake, a slip. I couldn't stand the thought of having a Child." - p 182

& I thought I had problems.

Michael finds himself in a world where a new god is revered.

"I'm an atheist," Michael said. "I don't believe there's a God on Earth."

"Do you believe Adonna exists?"

"That took him aback. He hadn't really questioned the idea. This was a fantasy world, however grim, so of course gods could exist here. Earth was real, practical; no gods there. "I've never met him." Michael said.

"It," Eleuth corrected. "Adonna boasts of no gender.["]" - pp 159-160

Interesting theological question, eh? If a god exists in an imaginary world is it imaginary? Or something like that. Then there's always love & confusion:

"["]Why are you confused?"

"I told you," he said.

"Not really. You don't love me? That confuses you?"

"He said nothing, but finally nodded. "I like you. I'm grateful . . ."

"Euleuth smiled. "Does it matter, your not loving me?"

"It doesn't feel right, making love and not reciprocating everything. Feeling everything."

"Yet for all time, Sidhe males have not loved their *geen*. And we have survived. It is the way."

"Her resignation didn't help at all. It twisted the perverse knot a little tighter, however, and the only way he could see to forestall the discussion was to kiss her. Soon they were making love and his confusion intensified everything, made everything worse . . . and better." - p 161

Michael gets his training:

"Spart schooled Michael on how to throw a shadow while asleep, and how to sleep like the dead, his heart barely beating, while at the same time his mind was alert. He controlled his breath until he seemed not to breathe at all. He explored his inner thoughts, paring them down to the ones most essential to his exercises." - p 184

That all seemed worthwhile so I decided to try doing the same. Every time I threw my shadow in my sleep I fell out of bed. Every time I slept like the dead I actually died (don't ask me how I came back). Every time I controlled my breath I farted too much. I guess I just don't have it in me.

Michael's life never has a dull moment.

"He half-ran, half-stumbled crab-wise, trying to find the center of impulse again. But he had no clear way to throw another shadow. The guardian, dress flapping and pressing back against her distorted frame, had risen a foot or so above the path and was accelerating toward him like a piece of fabric on a spinning clothesline. She pitched head-forward in her flight until the hat pointed directly at him and the dress fanned out, a deadly trailing blossom." - p 203

"For a moment, the dim lighting and the folds of her skin had concealed the fact that she was unclothed. She sat naked and still in the large chair. Michael was convinced she waited for him to come close enough to reach out and grab. But nothing moved. She didn't even appear to breath. Was she dead?"

"He reached out to touch her shoulder. His finger curled back involuntarily into his palm and he forced it to straighten.

"The skin gave way beneath his finger, first an inch, then two. Repelled, unable to stop, he continued pressing. She hissed faintly and her head folded in like a collapsing soufflé. Her arm and chest began to collapse and she fell into a pile of white translucent folds, sliding from the chair to the floor." - p 205

Have you ever had a day like that? It's horrible visiting yr old mom. About the best that you can hope for is that some Sidhe will smear some paste on yr forehead while you sleep.

"The paste had evaporated. The visions swirled and Michael opened his eyes slowly. He had never dreamed in the Realm, and he didn't believe what he had seen was actually a dream. It had a certain quality, a stamp, which indicated he had once again had a message from Death's Radio . . . this time, without the use of words." - p 226

Bear's vision of reaaaaallllly Old School War is practically appealing after the nightmares of the 20th century.

""It was not entirely a bad thing, that war. Nobody died . . . not forever. We were like young gods then and injuries of combat, while distressing, were remediable. But gradually we learned the desperate arts of tact, and lying, and deceit, of gamesmanship and honour. Then we learned distrust and our magic grew stronger. The war became earnest. Enemies found it necessary to either be polite or to attempt to destroy each other. There was no middle ground." - 234

""No swords, no baubles. Those are all human misunderstandings of magic, human preoccupation with technology. Magic lies purely in the mind. The Sidhe are among the most dishonorable, unreliable creatures on all the faces of Creation, but they have one thing—concentration. What they want, they focus on completely."" - p 299

That cd be dangerous if you happen to be walking at the time in an earthquake zone or something. Then again, Sidhe are more or less immortal so why worry?

All in all, this was great. Bear's at least as good a fantasy writer as he is a hard science SF one & that's a pleasant surprise. Also, what the heck, he acknowledges doing linguistics research wch puts him in a category similar to Tolkein. Wdn't fault him for that!

"please refer to a marvelous book by Robert A. Stewart Macalister, *The Secret Languages of Ireland*, first published in 1937 by the Cambridge University Press. It's still in print from Armoriga Book Company/Philo Press. A good university or public library should also have it. Lovers of languae—or dabblers, such as myself—will find it fascinating." - p 341

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## **Michele says**

The title, summary, and about the first third of this book intrigued me very much, which made me all the more disappointed when it all went flat. Bear incorporates some excellent fantasy elements -- Lamia, the Crane Women, humans confined to a sort of ghetto in the realm of the Sidhe, the mystical power of music -- but he never seems to effectively meld the components into a coherent whole.

The most obvious example is music: the title has the word "concerto" in it, Michael's translation into the

Realm is instigated by a composer, nearly all of the humans in the Realm are there because they experienced a mystical response to music (either playing or listening), no musical instruments are allowed in the Sidhe realm and it's mentioned more than once that the Sidhe dislike human music, etc. But in the end, all of that is completely irrelevant. Music plays no part whatsoever in the central conflict of the book, either in its unfolding or resolution. That was a major "WTF?" for me.

Another example of apparently important but ultimately unincorporated story elements is Eleuth: (view spoiler) Many of the other characters such as Nikolai, Lin Piao, Savarin, the Sidhe horse, even Lamia suffer from this same lack of integration into the plot. As a reader, if I spend time getting invested in characters -- learning not only their names but little things about them -- I expect that investment to be returned somehow. The ROI on 95% of the characters in this book is about zero.

It wasn't just characters that floated about unattached. Since the main character is initially completely at a loss about what's going on, so is the reader. This is not a problem if the main character slowly begins to piece together the puzzle, carrying the reader with him or her. That didn't happen here, at least not for me. The back-story about Mages battling each other and turning each other into Earth(?) animals was intriguing but I had a lot of trouble following how it was connected to the Michael's story, what with the muddle of humans, Sidhe, gods and Mages who are, or pretend to be, each other, or something else. There also seemed to be a lot of extraneous information that wasn't integrated into the story (interstellar Sidhe travel, for example, and the weird brass cylinder floating in the Maelstrom).

This is at bottom a quest tale, which by definition means that the main character undertakes a journey, with a goal, and he changes along the way. Here again, Michael's journey and growth seemed to be largely unconnected to the climax of the story. His goal was never clear even to himself; his training consists of a lot of running, learning to generate heat so he doesn't need a fire, and throwing shadows to distract attackers. The "power" he uses at the end to defeat the Isomage is (view spoiler).

As a minor nit, I totally stopped caring about Biri when it's revealed that (view spoiler). Maybe it's Bear's shorthand for demonstrating that the Sidhe are irredeemable bastards, but I think there are more sensible ways to demonstrate it. Besides, it doesn't really jibe with their other characteristics, such as nature magic and becoming trees after death.

This is a lot to say about a book that I didn't much like, but I think it's because it had so much potential and it vexes me that the potential was unrealized. (By comparison, Andre Norton's Dread Companion is a similar story about a human being translated to the Faerie Realm, but it does a much better job (maybe because it doesn't try so hard). I re-read that one on a regular basis.)

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## **Theo says**

### **Re read**

Read this year's back and decided to read again. Enjoyed every bit enhanced by being older with a different worldview to filter it through.

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## **Rob Markley says**

I find it interesting that Greg Bear the best speculative hard science writer of them all - that he cut his teeth

writing fantasy. In this he really shows how to create a tale of depth and imagination and that he can really write. In perhaps some of the later scifi the writing is not always quite a great. If he had gone on with the genre (although I'm glad he moved on) I think this and sequel would have been foundational in the fantasy genre - like a Lord of the Rings although not to that extent of course - such are the ideas that Bear brings to this story.

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### **Bella Baer says**

This is a book with a twisty plot. If you are willing to carry your imagination with you into the profound introspective journey lived by the protagonist, then you are in for a great read. I love this book and it is a re-read from my adolescent years.

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### **Renee says**

I'm conflicted.

It was definitely worth reading — by the last third.

There are a lot of seemingly unrelated threads to hang onto through the story, with no real indications that they will come together to make a complete tapestry until that last third, and even then there are some threads that really didn't get woven in, just tied off, for fringe.

But somehow I truly liked it. It's not the typical fantasy tale with good and evil clearly defined, it's a realistic, fatalistic fantasy and the words flow together beautifully, and abrasively at times, when the story calls for it. It creates thoughts and sends them on different roads.

I'll read it again, and will find a copy of the sequel as well.

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### **Michael says**

#### **Great work**

The book takes a long time to get going, or so it seems. The thing is that the long almost drudgery is necessary I think to get where it needs to go. It takes a long time because it needs to. But some things could be better. The fact that something is being set up is clear but as the end approaches a great deal seem to come to light that is not as well prepared as I would like. Michael the protagonist was only 16, but his wisdom and insight into other people's character is not sufficiently developed in the story. In fact we are led to believe that he's just a kid right up until the ending when we suddenly see a far more sophisticated person. It's not quite believable to me and I can't help but wonder if the next book reveals him as something more than we have yet seen. But I will read that next book very soon because I'm pretty well hooked.

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## **Katy says**

"The Infinity Concerto" - Book One in the Songs of Earth and Power omnibus - is multi-layered and textured. I believe it will likely take me several readings to find all the meanings that are embedded in this story. The basic storyline revolves around Michael Perrin, a thoughtful young man who wants to be a poet. He befriends a composer named Arno Waltiri, who it is said wrote a concerto called The Infinity Concerto that was so unusual that it not only drove its listeners mad but also that many of those listeners disappeared. Waltiri claims that the concerto was primarily inspired by a man called David Clarkham, who subsequently disappeared; Arno gives Michael a key and a piece of paper with directions to follow, that should lead him to Clarkham. Waltiri dies soon thereafter. Despite warnings from Waltiri's wife Golda that Waltiri repented of his choice to give these to him, Michael decides to go ahead and follow the directions - and ends up somewhere . . . that is not Earth anymore. Forced to learn to survive, Michael has to grow up and grow strong very quickly - but is he just a pawn in some hidden power struggle? Or is he something else altogether?

Some sections of this part of the text seemed rather slow moving, but everything was necessary for the plot. Because the plot is so intricate, at times ponderous prose is necessary to bring about all the necessary information. All-in-all, I found book one quite enjoyable.

Hopefully the bits of plot I outlined above don't spoil the book for anyone - I could hardly outline less without being so vague about the basic plot of the book as to be basically providing you with a meaningless synopsis; however, there is so much more to this book than the above. Greg Bear weaves throughout this story a fascinating new mythos about the creation and evolution, de-evolution and re-evolution of man and the universe that I found to be quite astonishing in its depth and breadth. He weaves in references to several world religions and ties them in to his mythos, showing how the original truth was "twisted" over the years to conform to what would best serve those in power. It's a really interesting device and I enjoyed the way it was woven in throughout the story. You may also look at vegetarianism in a whole new light.

There was only one thing about the story that bothered me and I'm not sure if it was because I misinterpreted what I was reading or if it is because of some sort of misogyny on the part of the author. It is mentioned several times throughout the course of the book that "magic is carried by the woman." However, not one single mage shown is a woman. If women carry the magic, why aren't there any female mages? Or, as I said, perhaps I am misinterpreting it, and by "carry" they mean like a recessive gene - they carry the magic, but cannot use it.

Those who are fans of epic fantasy, magical realism, stories of the Sidhe (especially of the darker natures thereof) or simply well-crafted alternate realities, please do not miss this one.

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## **Kerry says**

This is a book that I've always remembered with great affection from when I read it on its original release in the 1980s. It's been on my "to reread" list for a long time now and this year is when I finally picked it up and started reading it again.

Firstly, there was an awful lot I didn't remember, so it was fun rediscovering that. However, I also struggled with the first half of the book, which was much slower, darker, and more relentless than I thought it was. I think a lot of that is simply that books started slower back then. It also didn't help that I got mentally stuck when Michael met a certain character that I thought was going to betray him terribly and I didn't want to read that. (Yes, my anxiety includes books when I'm "afraid" of what is going to happen next, whether I'm right or

wrong about what actually happens.)

In actual fact, it wasn't that bad (or is still to come in book 2) and once I got going again, I got fully caught up in the book and read the second half in a few days.

I picked up a few things I probably missed the first time through - for example, where a character was riding a horse and then walking through a city with no indication of what happened to the horse. Little things, but I did notice them.

It also takes a jump at the middle where we go from the "training" section of the book to the "questing" section of the book and our protagonist suddenly seems to take a step up in knowledge and power that doesn't quite match where he was shown to be at the end of the training. I think the problem was that the first part concentrated on how hard we was finding it all and how bad he was at it, without showing enough clear progress to make the learning seem fully learned.

But those are little things. When I finished, I wanted to give the book a 10/10 because it left me feeling very happy about it, and with the same kinds of emotions I had carried through the years in my memory of the books. But I remember that hard first half and so I've dropped in to 9/10.

Maybe the next time I reread it, I just start at the halfway point?

I'm looking forward to rereading the sequel (it's a duology, so only two books) soon, but I'm going to fit in a few other things first.

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