

Earth by David Brin Bantam Spectra 1990

Is Earth a realistic vision of our near future? Did you find it believable? What changes do you see in the way people speak, dress, travel and communicate?

Is the author trying to predict the way things truly will be...or to warn about things we should avoid? The term 'gedankenexperiment' refers to a thought experiment that explores possible consequences of our actions. Does that term fit Earth?

Does Earth depict a utopic future, a dystopic warning...or a mix? Which of those three is most like real life?

Think of other novels or movies, such as Dr. Strangelove or On the Beach that warned about dire future scenarios. How does Earth compare to these stories?

What cataclysms (man-made or natural) may have the capacity to change our planet's future? What cataclysms in earth's past had profound, extinction-level consequences?

Is the planet itself a character in the book? If so, have you seen this done anywhere else? How does the author present the vast span of earth's history? Scientifically? Artistically?

The black hole in the earth might be viewed as the ultimate form of pollution from human arrogance. Is this the way the reader keeps viewing it as the plot develops?

In New Zealand, Alex contemplates, "We all create monsters in our minds. The only important difference may be which of us let our monsters become real." What do you think?

Who are the real villains in the novel? What do they want? What empowers them?

"Light is the scourge of evil." What was the significance of the Helvetian War to end the "evils of secrecy"? How do Brin's concepts of transparency and accountability echo in news today, particularly in the banking world?

How have concepts of privacy changed under the "all intrusive eye of the Net?" How has technology (such as True-Vu goggles) empowered posses of elderly vigilantes – and oppressed the young?

How does Earth portray climate changes affecting earth's ecosystems? What is the significance of the Life Arks? What types of large-scale geo-engineering projects are being tried in Earth to modify earth's climate? Might we try some of these in the future?

Is some of the plot driven by good people who disagree?

Two women strive to represent the planet. How do Jen and Daisy differ? Where do they overlap?

What is the significance of that first biblical commandment, to Name the Beasts, to “observe God’s works, and glorify Him by giving names to all things”? How does this relate to science and the joy of discovery? What was the importance of the Voyager spacecraft?

Earth has been credited with accurately predicting some elements, such as wearable computing, Virtual Reality glasses, blogs, reading plaques, an early version of web pages, sea level rise, as well as global warming. Does that fact lend it credibility in your eyes? Which other predictions do you think may come to pass?

“A hallmark of sanity is the courage to face even unpleasant points of view.” Brin presents a definition of sanity that involves flexibility, satiability, empathy and the ability to realistically estimate the consequences of one’s actions. How do you define sanity?

Jen comments, “Each of us is many. Within every human, a cacophony of voices rages.” Neuroscientists speak of the “multimind” theory – that the human mind is composed of many small minds. Have you ever felt your brain function this way?

U.S. coins read “E pluribus unum” -- From many, one. An “emergent” trait a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts. How does this relate to Jen’s ideas of consciousness?

What is the role of intelligence on planet earth? Can the earth be likened to a living organism? Look up the Gaia Hypothesis. Why do some biologists take this notion seriously? --What is the difference between the “strong” and “weak” Gaia hypotheses? --In Earth, is there a transformation between the strong and weak Gaia hypotheses?

The author notes, “Earth suggests that it is too late to choose a simple pastoral lifestyle for humanity.... that we must take up the challenge of being scientific and ethical managers of a vast planetary ecosystem.” Do you agree or disagree?

Recall Jen’s conversation with Nelson. Are cooperation and competition really two sides of the same coin? How do these forces operating in both the natural and manmade world?

Seek the common thread among the various definitions of a “singularity”: 1) gravitational: a black hole; 2) mathematical: a sudden discontinuity; 3) technological: the emergence of true artificial intelligence; and 4) cultural: a rapid acceleration of super-human intelligence.

“Change can’t be prevented, only guided.” How do the characters in Earth seek to guide change? How do leaders around the world today seek to do so?

What do you foresee as the great innovation that will save mankind – or improve our future on planet earth?