



# The Four Thousand, the Eight Hundred

*Greg Egan*

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## **The Four Thousand, the Eight Hundred** Greg Egan

Camille is desperate to escape her home on colonized asteroid Vesta, journeying through space in a small cocoon pod covertly and precariously attached to a cargo ship. Anna is a newly appointed port director on asteroid Ceres, intrigued by the causes that have led so-called riders like Camille to show up at her post in search of asylum.

Conditions on Vesta are quickly deteriorating—for one group of people in particular. The original founders agreed to split profits equally, but the Sivadier syndicate contributed intellectual property rather than more valued tangible goods. Now the rest of the populace wants payback. As Camille travels closer to Ceres, it seems ever more likely that Vesta will demand the other asteroid stop harboring its fugitives.

With *The Four Thousand, the Eight Hundred*, acclaimed author Greg Egan offers up a stellar, novella-length example of hard science fiction, as human and involving as it is insightful and philosophical.

## **The Four Thousand, the Eight Hundred Details**

Date : Published November 2016 by Subterranean Press (first published 2016)

ISBN : 9781596067912

Author : Greg Egan

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Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Short Stories

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# From Reader Review *The Four Thousand, the Eight Hundred* for online ebook

Carly says

"I seriously need to hear that this can't happen."

Egan is one of my go-to authors for thought-provoking stories. He has a gift for bringing "what-if" questions to life, and his novella *The Four Thousand, The Eight Hundred* is no exception. The story alternates between the asteroids Vesta and Ceres. Centuries ago, when Vesta was colonized, the Sivadier syndicate brought only intellectual property rather than material goods. Members of the New Dispensation Movement see an injustice that they seek to redress by leveraging an increased tax on the descendants of the Sivadiers. No matter how insane Vestan resident Camille finds it, the NDM is gaining popularity:

"If the majority believe that they're the victims of injustice, it doesn't matter what the adjudicators say."

*The Four Thousand, The Eight Hundred* is one of those books that I found thought-provoking in ways that I'm not sure the author intended. The core issue for the NDM is reparations: they want the Sivadiers to pay for what their ancestors did. In an era where the issue is very much in the public consciousness, Egan circumvents the real issues of reparation to create a strawman where the aggrieved are clearly out of line, a world away from the questions of systemic inequality broached today:

"A tiny group of vexatious litigants, powered by nothing but their own limitless sense of entitlement."

Intentionally or not, this emphasizes what I believe to be the true role of reparations: to *repair*, to give new generations equal footing, to ensure that the injustices of the past do not continue to reverberate into the future.

The Sivadier descendants on Vesta are left with a terrible choice: pay the extortionate tax and accept a lessening of dignity, or fight. And if they fight, what actions can they take that will not contribute to ***an existential threat that will make them want to wipe us out*** ? If neither terrorism nor capitulation will help, what options are left? As both sides become increasingly angry, how can anyone prevent the escalation?

On Ceres, Anna is facing her own moral dilemma, a truly diabolical instance of the Trolley Problem, and that's where the story truly shines. As she puts it:

"We have a special name, here, for a certain kind of failure to defer to the greater good-- for putting a personal sense of doing right above any objective measure of the outcome. It's called 'moral vanity.' On Ceres, it's about the worst thing you can be accused of."

It is in this philosophical forced choice that the story truly shines. While *The Four Thousand, The Eight Hundred* took me less than an hour to read, the questions it provoked stayed with me far longer, and what higher praise can there be?

***I received this book through Netgalley from the publisher, Subterranean Press, in exchange for my honest review. Quotes were taken from an advanced reader copy and may not reflect the final phrasing.***

## **Michael says**

The novella tries to breathe life in an old ethical scenario, The Trolley Problem , by putting a variant of it into a story with characters. As the driver of a trolley with failed brakes, do you let it mow down five workers in its path, or divert it onto a spur with one man in the way, thereby becoming an active participant in killing a bystander. An older variant makes the result of the latter type of choice a family member. In this story, the equivalent of the latter situation corresponds to 800 innocent passengers on a space ferry slated to dock at the colony space station Ceres, many of them friends or family members of the colonists. The equivalent of the larger set of potential victims corresponds to residents of a planet, Vesta, who are trying to escape economic oppression by flying individually in space suits strapped to rocks. The pilot of the ferry and a Ceres administrator are trying to work out a strategy to save the escaping Vestans from being killed that gambles the fate of the ferry passengers.

Versions of the ethic scenario always came off as an abstract thought problem to me, so it attracted my interest to experience a version that could bring the moral choices to life. Unfortunately, the characters weren't lively enough to engage significant caring over their anguish. Also, I had trouble emotionally investing in the situation of the escapees, whose excessive taxation to balance exploitative behaviors of their ancestors in the foundation of Vesta didn't seem sufficient enough to risk their lives on escape. The ambition of Egan to pursue a philosophical question and his reputation does lead me to want to pursue other books by him, a serious gap in my reading history.

This novella was provided as an e-book for review by the publisher through the Netgalley program.

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## **Anna says**

Trolley problem in space. Barrel of laughs it was not.

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## **L'ours inculte says**

Je vais pas vous refaire le coup de présenter la collection « Une heure lumière » du béliard, Cérès et Vesta est le septième donc vous devez commencer à piger le truc, novellas SF, couverture qui tue d'Aurélien Police, bla, bla, tout ça, tout ça...

Cette dernière parution est un récit de Greg Egan d'une centaine de pages, un auteur que j'ai jamais lu mais qui officie dans l'art de la hard-SF (ce qui n'est pas de la SF porno, non...). Les Cérès et Vesta du titre sont deux astéroïdes qui ont été colonisés par l'homme. Chacun manque de ressources dont l'autre dispose donc un commerce permanent existe entre les deux colonies sous forme d'un flux continu de roche et de glace qui fait l'aller retour entre les deux cailloux. L'histoire nous plonge dans une crise sociale qui prend place sur Vesta, où les descendants des premières familles de colons se foutent sur la gueule pour des raisons... un peu stupides... Jugez donc : Ils ont tout à coup décidé que les citoyens issus de la famille Sivadier devraient payer un impôt en plus parce que cette famille n'avait contribué à la colonie que par des brevets et trucs

administratifs mais sans jamais vraiment mettre les mains dans le cambouis comme tous les autres, ce qui avait convenu à tout le monde à l'époque mais les nouvelles générations se disent que c'est naze.

Histoire de faire bien puant, les colons de Vesta peuvent reconnaître les descendants Sivadier au premier coup d'œil parce que c'est le futur et on a tous des google glass de la mort. Du coup ça donne des lancers d'insultes dans la rue, des regards à la con et ce genre de joyeusetés, ambiance. Les concernés commencent à migrer sur Cérès parce que c'est vraiment la merde, ils utilisent pour ça le flux de rocaille commerciale comme monture en se cryogénisant et se collant dessus. Un peu roots mais ça passe. Dans ce joyeux bordel on suivra plusieurs points de vue : Tout d'abord Camille, une Sivadier de Vesta qui va commencer un mouvement de résistance pour lutter contre ces injustices. On aura ensuite le point de vue de Cérès par le regard d'Anna, responsable d'un des quais de Cérès qui récupère les réfugiés congelés pour les aider à se remettre de leur voyage et à s'intégrer.

Évidemment, le livre parle beaucoup de racisme avec cette transposition. C'est pas vraiment un problème d'origine ethnique ici mais on retrouve les mêmes mécanismes, l'exclusion à la gueule, les insultes et la citoyenneté à deux niveaux. D'un point de vue social et construction, le message passe bien, il est percutant et permet à l'auteur de pousser son sujet jusqu'au bout. Le monde futuriste mis en place par Greg Egan est rudement bien construit et très réfléchi, on sent que le monsieur a de la bouteille dans le domaine. On a les détails technologiques et les petits gadgets bien vus, crédibles et qui donnent de l'épaisseur à l'univers. Le roman suit la naissance de cette ségrégation et les conséquences sur les habitants des deux colonies, partant du cas de Camille pour partir ensuite sur des conséquences plus politiques à travers une crise bien tendue comme il faut avec sa cargaison de dégueulasseries révoltantes.

Le sujet est globalement très bien présenté et l'ensemble est crédible. L'ambiance SF est prenante et permet de bien se plonger dans l'univers. Le problème que j'ai eu est assez commun a pas mal de trucs de hard-SF que j'ai essayé : Egan se concentre tellement sur la politique, la société et l'univers en général qu'il laisse un peu de côté la construction des personnages. D'après Apophis, c'est une caractéristique de l'auteur qui est bien connue mais ça m'a empêché de vraiment rentrer dans l'histoire et la problématique. Si je ne m'attache pas aux protagonistes, j'ai toujours du mal à me plonger dans un univers. Peut-être que les gros lecteurs de SF n'ont pas ce soucis mais je le rencontre régulièrement quand je lis ce genre.

Globalement, les personnages se résument à leurs prénoms mais on sait très peu de choses d'eux, il n'y a aucun effort de fait pour les rendre humains et créer de l'empathie chez le lecteur, laissant une impression de froideur qui me dérange toujours. Encore une fois c'est personnel, je ressens la même chose en lisant du Asimov ou du Simmons donc ça pourrait ne pas être un problème pour d'autres lecteurs, mais moi ça m'a bien sorti du truc. J'en avais rien à faire de Camille et de ces préoccupations, d'autant plus qu'elle fait pas les choix les plus subtils ni les plus malins dans son parcours (Je fais une mission de résistance dont je connais pas le but ni les instigateurs mais c'est pas grave).

Il faut aussi ajouter à ça une construction légèrement confuse, chaque chapitre change de point de vue entre Vesta et Cérès pour donner une vision globale du machin, mais ça encore ça va, c'est assez clair. Mais le plus perturbant c'est que les chapitres ne se placent pas dans la même époque, on change de chapitre et sans prévenir on s'aperçoit qu'on fait des bonds dans le temps, propulsant le lecteur deux ou trois ans plus tard sur Cérès sans prévenir pour revenir ensuite à l'époque d'origine en revenant sur Vesta. Ça s'explique parce que le mouvement de migration des réfugiés prend trois ans pour faire le voyage d'un astéroïde à l'autre donc on se balade dans le temps autant que dans l'espace. Finalement on s'y retrouve mais c'est pas super-fluide, moi qui était déjà pas super immergé, ça m'a un peu dérouté.

Cérès et Vesta est un récit de SF qui explore les problématiques d'exclusion et d'immigration avec

pertinence et surtout une construction d'univers exemplaire. On a certainement là un grand auteur de SF mais le traitement secondaire réservé aux personnages m'a sorti de ma lecture, ce qui me fait dire que Greg Egan n'est peut-être pas un auteur pour moi (Et que j'ai décidément du mal avec la grosse SF hardcore qui tâche).

<http://ours-inculte.fr/ceres-et-vesta/>

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## **Koeur says**

<https://koeur.wordpress.com/2016/10/1...>

Publisher: Subterranean Press

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Rating: 2.4/5

Publishers Description: With "The Four Thousand, the Eight Hundred," acclaimed author Greg Egan offers up a stellar, novella-length example of hard science fiction, as human and involving as it is insightful and philosophical.

Review: Early Vesta colonizers are getting persecuted and fleeing into the void, strapped to rocks while chemically suspended to survive the trip to Space Station Ceres. Ceres Director, Anna Dingbat must make some hard choices as the colonizers are labeled war criminals and pursued through space.

Holy moly this was boring. As a novella you would think that with the compressed story line, the movement would gallop at a good clip while developing the characters. Not so much here. The characters are thinly constructed so you really have no emotional investment in any outcome that may transpire. There was also an inordinate amount of dialogue, mostly about the greater good and the injustices of persecution. Wah. What stood out like a dick in a bowl of hot dogs was trying to force a big slice of social commentary down the gullet of hard Science Fiction. Didn't work for me.

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## **Chris says**

\*copy from Netgalley in exchange for a review\*

The Four Thousand, The Eight Hundred is a sci-fi novella by Greg Egan. It's rather dense, exploring the themes of otherness, of democracy, disenfranchisement, and the role of a moral centre. It also talks about asteroids used as building materials, and explores the social norms of societies on other worlds. Yes, that does mean rather a lot is going on.

There are two worlds on display here – one a seemingly egalitarian society, work apportioned to those who need it, and another, where, a century after settlement, there's question of debt. The latter is intriguing. In a society where the founders' wealth was measured in the tonnage they could bring into orbit, and then to the moon they were colonising, the intangible is, understandably, less visible. But there is a minority in this novella, descendants of founders who sold their intellects, who held patents on mining drills, on methods of extraction, and used that leverage to be part of the original landing team.

A century later, a minority group has pushed, and pushed, to look on the descendants of those users of intellectual property as freeloaders. The text is looking at the way society deals with pressure – in this case, perhaps, by creating a sense of otherness, by legitimising discontent with certain aspects of that society. The question of whether those descendants of intellectual 'pirates' owe a debt is thrown open to the popular vote – and is approved by a slim margin. This may reflect concerns in contemporary politics, but it also allows the text to explore the concerns of the tyranny of the majority. This is a story which is exploring the strengths and weaknesses of systems, but also those of people. As a ballot measure to declare a minority of the population on one moon in debt to the others gathers pace, there's a feeling of disbelief, then acceptance...and then a reaction, a counter reaction, and an escalating process of havoc.

Looking in through the window of contemporary politics, this is well, and neutrally done - where the characters struggle against an injustice, it seems clear to them that it is one (and indeed, is portrayed to the reader in this way). The majority of the populace, however, are not portrayed as malevolent, merely acting on opinions which impact those around them. In this space, there is also sanctuary – the other moon, the duo pushing ice and building material back and forth in a ring of trade. Here, things are different – at least in that they're not fighting amongst themselves. Here they accept the "riders", individuals entering a hibernation state, strapped to an asteroid, risking destruction whilst seeking sanctuary. It's a world which, if not equal, is certainly not self-harming in an orgy of otherness, as we watch their cousins do.

The characters – well, I would have liked more space for them here. That said, given the length of the novella, they do well enough. There's the member of a minority, gently sucked into actions that they don't entirely agree with, feeling their way along the process of escalation before absconding. There's the third party, not immediately impacted, but with an increasing zeal. And there's those looking in from the outside, sorrowful, trying to put some of the pieces back together again afterward. If I didn't see enough of the protagonists, they were present enough in the text to feel genuine, to add a sense of humanity to a piece of sci-fi which is largely driven by social issues – by focusing those issues down, and giving us a view of their impact on the individual.

The plot looks at the rise of intolerance in one of the two moons, of the way in which part of their own population is slowly disenfranchised, and then reacts. Of the way society reacts to that reaction, slowly driving both parties to extremes. But it's also a story of people fleeing that society, of having the personal courage to strap themselves to revolving pieces of rock and throw themselves into an interstellar void, with a chance at a better life at the end. There's also the view from the outside, as a member of the uninvolved interacts with an escapee, and draws their own moral lines, perhaps not in line with their social expectations, but in line with what they consider human – a discussion which can be opened with every reader, that. Not where you draw the line, but whether the line must, at some stage, be drawn.

In any event, this is an interesting piece of sci-fi. It uses its short length to full effect, drawing a plausible universe, one where the impact of character's choices will hit the reader just as hard. It's looking at some of the issues which affect us as societies, and exploring how those issues might play out in a future context. It's clever work, and rewards close reading. If you're in the mood for a read which is challenging, and encourages reader engagement in a plausible sci-fi premise, then this is worth looking at. It's short, but packs a serious

narrative and emotional punch.

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### **Lindsay says**

An interesting short story which escalates from an ethics issue in an asteroid-based society right into a variant of the classic ethical question of the Trolley Problem.

The asteroid of Vesta has a political situation where a persecuted minority are fleeing to Ceres. Ceres itself seems to be heading down the same road after the population narrowly passes legislation which makes second-class citizens of the same minority (depressingly familiar story at the moment). Then a situation comes up where the protagonist, a member of that minority, is forced to make a horrible choice.

This was excellent, but the details of the "stone river" are not well described. They don't really need to be to get the gist of the story, but I found it a bit frustrating.

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### **James says**

I can't make up my mind if this should have been trimmed into a short or made into a novel. The basic premise, people of one family are taxed for their ancestry and resist is a good one and the first half would have made a good short. It falls apart in the second half when the lowly port director is the only one negotiating with a warship over very short period of time when the potential confrontation had been known for over a month. The results seemed forced and the ending seemed nonsensical. Needs some more time on the book tree or an axe is needed to wack off the last half.

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### **Claudia says**

A story about conscience and choices, spinning around the subversive faction of people from Vesta and their try to sabotage the system.

Interesting idea but I found the story somewhat flat and could not connect with most of the characters. Usually, when there is a choice like this to be made (not telling which is it), the reader should be tormented as the character in question; however, not even empathy was there for me.

But, despite all these, I liked the line of the story, Camille and the society on Ceres enough to make an enjoyable reading out of it.

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### **Bradley says**

What a surprisingly fun read! It looks like I've neglected this author for far too long.



This novella was full of sharp prose and even sharper ideas, turning the old ethical quandary of the many and the few into a pretty harrowing conflict.

These are just people whose ancestors may or may not have profited by intellectual capitalism, and yet the modern society has decided to culturally and lawfully punish the current innocents. What happens later is nothing less than a fight for doing the right thing against heavy ethical scales. All choices become bad ones, and how this gets resolved is quite poignant.

Hard SF? Yes, but it doesn't even feel like it. It feels like a great story that should be studied from any field of literature. Great characters? Absolutely. I feel almost as if it was happening now, and perhaps it is.

Think of the amazingly oppressive social and economic stigma put on Germany and the innocents who had never been a part of the war. This story is on this high level, and I applaud. Greg Egan is a smart man with one hell of an ethical heart. :)

Thanks goes to Netgalley for this ARC!

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### **Manuel Antão says**

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

Frog in a Pot of Cold Water Over the Fire: "The Four Thousand, The Eight Hundred" by Greg Egan

After reading the latest Egan's work, I got thinking about the Caribbean Islands. I understand that the Caribbean Islands were discovered by successive explorers from Europe. I understand that Slaves from Africa were taken to these Islands as were White Indentured Workers, a polite name for White Slaves, by the people that had purchased Estates on these Islands. In this process the Indigenous peoples of these Islands the Carib Indians were to all intents and purposes wiped out, so for people of African descent to claim that they have a right to present day Islands is a nonsense. Drawing a parallel with the two factions in Egan's work, I do not deny it benefited some people, but don't kid ourselves that it boosted the living standards of the ordinary people. This myth was invented back in the 50's or 60's by some Caribbean professor to give those of African descent a sense of grievance against those that imported their ancestors, mind you he stopped short of saying that it was their fellow Africans that enslaved them in the first place. I suspect the feeling of distrust is true of all Countries, it's well known and it's called Xenophobia. That's what a stake in Egan's piece using the trappings of SF.

if you are into SF, read on.

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### **Xavi says**

7/5/10

An interesting novella, easier than other works I've read by this great author. The sociological speculation about migrations and refugees in space is very original.

Review in english: <http://dreamsofelvex.blogspot.com/201...>

Review in spanish: <http://dreamsofelvex.blogspot.com/201...>

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### **Althea Ann says**

I'd heard good things about this one, running up to the Hugo nominations, but didn't end up having time to read it before the voting deadlines. It's a good, solid science fiction story - very idea-oriented, but not to the detriment of the plot. There are actually two ethical concepts that Egan asks the reader to consider here.

One is that referred to in the title; and has to do with the ethics of endangering the 'few' when the lives of the 'many' are threatened. It's a dilemma familiar to most sci-fi fans, as well as ethicists, but the scenario drawn here is an original and dramatic twist on the theme.

The other idea that the bulk of the story deals with is the question of whether it is wise or justified to hold one group of citizens responsible in some way for the situations and/or responsibilities of the past. On this colony world, one political group dominates a minority, using justifications from the founding of the society to demand reparations - and, in the process, creating a toxic environment in which the seeds of persecution thrive. The situation is different enough on many levels from that of our own society for it to avoid polemic and allegory - while succeeding in being very thought-provoking, showing how small and seemingly insignificant demands can contribute to a zeitgeist, snowballing out of control.

Thank to Subterranean and NetGalley for the opportunity to read. As always, my opinions are unaffected by the source of the book.

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### **Mike Bruce says**

I expected more science and less politics from Greg Egan.

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### **Liviu says**

a "cold equations" for our times (ie a person in a position of some power must choose if to save the four thousand away or the eight hundred close) with a little more back story; not really my kind of story and characterization (which this story depends crucially on to make us care) is not the author's strong suit, so a readable but not particularly exciting or memorable story

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