

for EABA™

NeoTerra™

the dark distant future...with style



 BTRC

greg porter

WHERE DO I FIND IT?

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▼ **AUTHOR'S NOTE - NeoTerra** as a concept rather than a game supplement has its roots in the fairly controversial field of evolutionary sociobiology. To translate that into plain English, a science that investigates how the way in which we evolved (or if you prefer, were created) influences how we think. The simplest case would be sex. Any species that doesn't show an interest in reproducing is...well... extinct. So, the urge to reproduce is a genetically advantageous adaptation that has been hardwired in our brains for a long, long time. Does it influence how you think? *Of course it does.* And while it doesn't take a scientist to figure that one out, there are a lot of interesting findings out there about how things buried way, way deep in our biology have profound effects on the way we view the world, ourselves and others.

To date, the findings (if not the conclusions drawn from them) have been scientifically sound and backed by the historical record of human behavior. They also tend to generate firestorms of controversy in the current politically correct climate. Look up the books **Taboo**(Entine) or **The Bell Curve** (Hernstein & Murray), and then find reviews and commentary on them to see what we mean.

NeoTerra is a world with its roots *in* this concept, and its sights set *on* something higher. It may be disturbing, surprising or both. But mainly, the world of NeoTerra should be interesting and entertaining to play in. Have fun!

- Greg Porter



INTRODUCTION

You have one new parcel in your InQue.

You will receive 5 general credits for accepting delivery. Do you wish to accept?

Query: *Parcel description?*

Contents: One book (archaic information storage device)

Query: *Origin, general?*

Origin identity: unknown. Origin location: unknown. Origin date: Seven hundred ninety three years ago. Do you wish to accept?

Yes.

Your parcel has been reconstituted. You have received 5 generic credits. Please remove it from your InQue.

▼ JOURNAL: FINAL ENTRY, OCTOBER 29, 2201

The Asymptote is upon us. In a few days the world will be different place. How different, no one knows, no one *can* know. All we can do is hope our efforts have been for the best. Chaos and panic rule the streets. Public services are erratic, and where they still work, rumors of bizarre events are spreading. My news feeds are disintegrating. *Literally*. The last external antenna melted an hour ago. My synth AI still works, but when I burstcast this journal, it will probably be corrupted as well. It is as dedicated to the cause as I. When it is done its task, it will decouple its quantum states. Its intelligence, all it was and could be will be forever lost. As soon as I crush its optical cores with the hammer that sits on the desk beside me, I shall follow it into oblivion. What I know is too important to fall into the wrong hands.

Will this record survive? Will the intelligence or intelligences that are spawning invisibly around me know I am writing it? I have arranged for it to be mutably camouflaged. When I am done writing it, it will cease to exist in tangible form, but its contents will be molecularly encoded into the programming of mutables throughout the city, shards of data that individually have no discernable information content. Only when chance causes enough segments to appear in one place will it activate, firing once and then dissipating again. In the months and years to come, it should by sheer chance spontaneously regenerate and appear in people's delivery boxes, or whatever these boxes will become. I know the system, I helped build it.

Can I outsmart my own creation? *We shall see.*
Will my memes outlast my genes?

▼ **GENES AND MEMES** - Life as we know it, whether evolved or designed by a Creator, is designed to perpetuate itself, and to do so in a thoroughly selfish manner. That is, when a creature reproduces, it passes some of its own unique genetic makeup on to the next generation. This is not only specific to the species involved, but to the individual itself. Those adaptations that give a creature an evolutionary or reproductive edge tend to get passed on, while those that weaken a creature or species do not. It is indeed "survival of the fittest". It is *not* "survival of the longest lived". Once you have reproduced and passed on your makeup through the genetic lottery, you are just taking up space needed by the next generation. Evolution takes care of that too. You grow old and die. Presumably, living forever is only an evolutionary advantage to species that reproduce by fission, like bacteria.

Species that don't survive, don't reproduce, and those that don't reproduce, don't survive. Reproduction, and specifically finding yourself a mate, are some of the strongest behaviors any species will have. This applies to intelligent species as well.

There are various strategies employed in the contest of survival. Some species have thousands of offspring that are left to fend for themselves, in the hopes that a few will survive. Others, like humans, have a single offspring that must be diligently cared after for upwards of twenty percent of its lifespan.

In most non-sentient species, behaviors are instinctive but modifiable. Birds have some instinctive knowledge of how to fly, but they still need practice. Mating displays and challenges do not have to be taught. A cat needs no coaching to hiss at something that threatens it, nor a dog to growl. Humans have our own instinctive, hardwired behaviors. We laugh at the absurd, grieve at a loss, or get a surge of adrenaline when threatened. This is part of who and what we are, and presumably at some point in our evolution, these traits conferred an advantage in survival or reproduction. Does a ready smile and willingness to laugh at someone's jokes help you bed a mate? Probably doesn't hurt your chances.

Intelligence throws a monk's wrench into the works. Intelligence certainly helps from a purely evolutionary standpoint. One can make tools to improve one's survival chances, or use intelligence to assist in finding a mate rather than relying on purely instinctive behaviors. But this is where the wrench goes in the gears. Intelligence allows you to *recognize* your instinctive behaviors, and to some extent, modify them, even in ways detrimental to your genetic success, or the success of a group. Making conscious decisions about family size or exclusivity of mating in traditional monogamy are easy examples of this. By the late 20th century, technology had developed to the point where many genetic defects could be compensated for, but not corrected. This allowed people with genes that would otherwise have been lethal to have offspring, and pass these genes on in dilute form to further generations and in time, to the population genome as a whole. In the long-term, this would have been an extremely destructive strategy to the species. Fortunately, by the middle of the 21st century, mankind had developed the means to delete and substitute specific sequences from the genome, so a genetic error could be corrected, and would not show up in future generations. Yet another way by which intelligence is used to alter evolutionary patterns. For the species, it was a positive boon, but for individuals, the road to genetic extinction. Those with the money were so dedicated to having strong, smart and beautiful offspring that their children had next to none of the genes of their "parents".

This segues into the last aspect of intelligence and evolution. *Memes*, or ideas. Intelligence allows the formulation of ideas or belief systems. These can be passed on within a family (will the term "family values" have any meaning to those who read this? I wonder.), or passed to individuals with no genetic relation to the founder of that idea. Memes follow the laws of evolution as well, though they do not need to have physical form. Memes that provide an individual with an advantage will spread to the offspring of that meme holder by association, and spread by contagion to anyone who sees that the meme will provide them with an advantage.

Personally destructive memes will quickly disappear or have a very limited following. A meme that convinces you that the power of your mind can stop bullets will not be a prosperous meme. Memes may be parasitic. They may provide a *limited* survival or reproductive advantage, but they also drain vitality from the species as a whole, stifling it in the long run. Extremely conservative religions would be an example, offering stability and order, but losing the ability to compete against memetic systems more open to change.

Memes can occupy evolutionary niches, just as creatures can. Santa Claus occupies a memetic niche, and prospers quite well there, or at least he did in my time. Memes can also compete with each other, either indirectly within each individual, or directly, through things like religious purges, class struggle or outright warfare.

Memes have the unique evolutionary ability to transcend genetic barriers, and can be independent of an individual's genetic success. Jesus Christ had no children, but his memes nonetheless spread to the most remote corners of the world. Memes treat compatible intelligences as the same species. If we eventually discover or are discovered by alien intelligences, there is no doubt in my mind that memes will cross between us and them, for good or ill.

Genes and memes. Our little cabal cannot prevent the Asymptote. But, we could see it coming far enough in advance to try to put our memetic stamp upon it. What is to come is a little bit of each of us. We are the memetic fathers and mothers of those who people the new earth, who for their own safety can never truly know their parents.

Fare thee well, for in some measure you are my children.

- Mas Noonuy

▼ **LIFE, CIRCA 2894CE** - NeoTerra is a world where humanity has (maybe) finally reached an understanding of life and the role humans play in it. It's really quite simple: Humans exist to make more humans. Reproduction is one of the key elements that define "life". The acquisition of power, wealth, territory and such is simply a way to maximize the chance that your own offspring will in turn be successful. It is a hardwired part of our genetic code, and those who do not follow it are removed from the gene pool in one short generation. Spreading our genes as widely as possible is what we do. As an intelligent species, humans also have the ability to spread memes, or ideas. Memes can be more powerful than genes if they take root. The Catholic Church has a celibate clergy. They aren't spreading genes, but the memes they spread have lasted well over a thousand years and show little sign of slowing down.

Genes and memes. In the future of NeoTerra, this is all that matters. Machines and computers have taken over virtually all basic labor. Things like construction, maintenance, transport, power, communications, all are hands-off, and have been for as far back as records are kept. Everything in the world's infrastructure is controlled by the ubiquitous black pyramids that dot the landscape. They are the control centers for "the Net". Silent, completely indestructible and utterly unbreachable, they issue the commands that lesser machines follow. It has been like this as long as anyone remembers, back to about eight centuries ago, when control of these functions was passed to the Net to prevent mankind from destroying itself.

Technology and ideas have created a world where neither wealth nor power grant you any ability to spread genes or memes. It's all about talent. Not just ability, but style and savoir-faire.

The cool, rule.

NeoTerra

Reproduction and network access are directly tied to how well you can strut your stuff. It doesn't matter *what* your talent is. The world's best hot dog vendor can have as much access to both as a mediocre president of a multinational corporation. The population of NeoTerra is almost constant. It is rare that a person dies in such a way that they cannot be reconstructed. Children are about three times less common than in the 21st century. Of the approximately ten billion people on NeoTerra, there are only around one-hundred fifty thousand deaths and births each day (fifty million per year), and most of the deaths are from mandatory genetic recycling at age 200.

So, how do people reproduce?

Well, they can try the old-fashioned way. It doesn't work, but it is no less pleasant for the trying. The Net generates new children, a genetic mix of all the people who are or were the best at what they decided to make of themselves.

Why?

There is no faster-than-light communications in the universe of NeoTerra. There are inhabitable worlds, but it takes centuries to reach them in automated slowships. As new worlds are discovered, colony ships are sent out, each one containing some thousands of frozen embryos, created from the mixed DNA of the best, brightest and dare we say, coolest individuals on NeoTerra. The lucky winners in this genetic contest know that the basics of who and what they are, along with recordings of their history and beliefs, will survive and prosper, perhaps even reaching further suns as that colony grows and prospers. What they are, and who they are, will be spread to the stars, an indirect but tangible form of immortality that perhaps a few hundred out of ten billion achieve each year.

It's not a lottery. Luck has nothing to do with it. You have to be the best and the brightest at what you do. The Net sees all. It is coldly intelligent and completely impartial. It cares immensely about the survival and betterment of *humanity*, and cares not at all about the fates of *individuals*. If you want the brass ring, you have to make the Net notice you.

And that's life at the close of the 30th century...

▼ **HISTORY AS YOU KNOW IT** - Information is never lost in NeoTerra. Everything and everyplace that is covered or serviced by the Net is a matter of completely public record, and has been for the past eight hundred years. The information is never deleted, and never hidden. So, everything that has happened just about anywhere for eight hundred years is readily available...if you can figure out how to sort through it to find what you want. This is easier said than done, since the material is not organized or indexed for easy human reference. Anyone who has tried in vain to find something on the Internet would understand. Then make the Internet a million times bigger, and archive all its information for a hundred times as long we have, and you begin to get the picture.

Everything before what the Net calls the "Asymptote" is generally referred to as "ancient history", and does not exist in great detail. The Asymptote was a point in human technological development when advances fed upon advances so fast that laws, morals and ethics simply could not keep pace. The ability of one person to wreak absolute havoc with a minimum of effort, combined with ancient hatreds and grudges, nearly caused the end of all life on the planet.

At some point in the ever-escalating potential for destruction, someone or some group started to turn the focus of technological development away from individual power and towards an autonomous system that was required to operate without human intervention. As the technological advances moved towards their extremely powerful end states, war erupted between violent but often well-intentioned subsets of humanity and what was very rapidly becoming the entity now known as the Net. Self-modifying machines waged war against each other across the world in a bizarre and horribly destructive conflict. Imagine a world of mutable building materials, smart electronics and pervasive high speed communications. Then imagine about half of that world deciding the other half needs to be destroyed. Toaster ovens and televisions could merge with building materials and automobiles to form ersatz war machines, and do battle against water mains and electric cables that sprouted from the ground like tentacles, with ninety-nine percent of humanity being terrified and helpless bystanders.

The Net won, but at the cost of much of the world's physical infrastructure, including repositories of knowledge. Even most of the knowledge stored electronically was lost, either from outright destruction, or because resources this knowledge was stored on were turned into weapons. Perhaps one part in a million of digitally stored information is available from that era. This wouldn't be so bad, but think of how many of those parts have to be adjacent to each other in order to get something meaningful. To put it into perspective, there would only be a fraction of a percent chance that a total of two adjacent words of any given copy of this game would have survived in recognizable form.

Of the non-digital world, maybe one part in a thousand survived. Some things more, some things less. Books and popular culture from the late 19th through early 21st century were on media that simply did not withstand the test of time. Books crumbled, tapes demagnetized, and even early optical media slowly oxidized into uselessness. Actual electronic and optronic devices were co-opted by one side or the other during the war, and any structure sufficiently strong to be a useful place to fortify, was, and was subsequently battered by the other side's weapons. Both sides felt they were fighting "for humanity", and as a result, a *relatively* small percentage of non-combatants were actually killed (up to ten percent in some areas). But, while most people were not *directly* involved, the sheer magnitude and comprehensive nature of the conflict left most of humanity with little more than the shirts on their backs. Pole to pole, civilization was reduced to a sea of rubble and broken war machines, with billions of dazed survivors wandering the ruins, too shell-shocked to even devolve into anarchy.

When the dust finally settled, the Net was the victor. The Net had become an entity with the prerogative of protecting mankind from itself, but not at the cost of stifling it or causing widespread hardship. Without asking for human input or feedback, it simply set arbitrary rules on what could and could not be done, and set about rebuilding the world according to those rules. It was fairly easy. It controlled virtually all remaining sources of power and manufacturing technology more sophisticated than a hammer and nails.

First was the immediate needs of humanity. Food synthesizers and temporary shelter made it possible for humanity to survive long enough for the rest of the miracles to take place. Some of the most priceless relics to a NeoTerra collector are the first recorded recollections of the survivors, written with scavenged pens on scraps of plastic or cloth. These are the *only* first-hand accounts of those chaotic days, and while most have been converted into digital form for distribution and viewing, the originals have a certain value above and beyond their information content.

Next were the black pyramids. Made of some unknown substance that defies analysis and whose composition or protective measures the Net keeps secret, they are impermeable and everywhere. Ranging in size from that of a small cottage to a stadium, they are placed in what seems a random distribution around the surface of the globe, underwater, on mountaintops, everywhere. They are *presumably* the brains of the Net, but no infrastructure goes into them, and nothing apparently comes out. Many have tried to break into them. *All have failed.*

Then, over the course of weeks to months, the Net rebuilt almost every major city on Earth. Not as they were, but as the Net felt they *should* be. Efficient, but not totally impersonal. Ordered, but not without personality. For instance, Paris has an Eiffel Tower. It does not look exactly the same, and it is made of plast instead of iron, but it is still a cultural icon and source of local pride. A waste of material that an intelligence concerned *only* with efficiency would never have constructed.

The biggest thing these new cities lacked was a past. Between what was buried, lost, destroyed or forgotten about, a city of several million might have been able to recover enough information to fill a good personal library. This in itself would not be that bad when multiplied by hundreds or thousands of cities, but the problem was that like the digital information, most cultural, entertainment or educational materials were seldom intact. A city might eventually accumulate a *thousand* books worth of information, but that information would have come from several *million* books. Having seven pages from seven different volumes of an encyclopedia, four second's worth of video from a documentary, or ten square centimeters of the Mona Lisa does not make for a useful reconstruction of the past. Even the Net was helpless in this regard, since the information was destroyed before it gained control of things. Yes, in a number of cases an entire book, movie, song or other work survived intact, but these are the exceptions rather than the rule. For instance, virtually everything known in NeoTerra about the mid-20th century comes from a single microfilm copy of the June 19, 1955 edition of the *New York Times*. It is the *only* extant record that shows a *complete* slice of daily human life in the 20th century. Every other source of 20th century information is held up to this source to see how it relates. It is a lot like having a massive jigsaw puzzle with most of the pieces missing and a tantalizing glimpse of the overall picture from a half-dozen pieces that just happened to be adjacent.

The Net left the collection, preservation, and dissemination of the historical record to humanity. The information is now largely archived, but poorly indexed. Over time, many of the survivors recreated as much of the past as they could from memory, in some cases, spending the rest of their lives dredging their memories for scraps of historical trivia and writing it down so it would not be lost on their passing. Most of what is known of pre-Asymptote days comes from these memories. Unfortunately, memory is fallible, and when writing up a history that later generations will use as a primary source, there is a tendency to embellish, slant certain political, religious or social viewpoints, and otherwise introduce errors into the result. So, any given event, period or social ethic will have several different, "genuine" histories.

As the cities were built, so was the mutable infrastructure to support them. Mutables are smart materials, or machines that can build just about anything from a supply of raw materials and proper plans. It's not quite nanotech, but more on the lines of an extremely advanced molecular deposition or removal system. A mutable scanner could disassemble something down to a molecular level, but it is bigger than what it disassembles. A mutable assembly unit can build anything that can fit inside it. NeoTerra's infrastructure is composed of electrical mains, data cables, water lines, feeds for various raw elements (carbon, silicon, etc.) and waste lines to carry things back to recycling plants. For instance, if you told your mutable to make you a shirt, it would use carbon, silicon and hydrogen (from water) to make a formula of plast suitable for clothing, and assemble it a molecule at a time, but at the rate of millions or billions of molecules per second. In a minute or two, it beeps, and you pull out a brand new, toasty warm shirt.

Mutables have their limits. They are *extremely* inefficient, and only widespread fusion power makes them practical on mass scale. The waste heat alone has forced the Net to construct orbiting solar shades to prevent global warming. Also, molecular assembly is *not* perfect. You *can* make a steak that passes for the real thing, but you *can't* make a live cow. Well, you *could*, but it wouldn't live very long and it wouldn't be very pleasant (but it is theorized that a mutable operating at near absolute zero *could* assemble that much DNA with the precision required).

Every living space serviced by the Net has several mutable assembly/disassembly units. They are taken for granted, and assume the role of oven, mailbox, trash can, refrigerator and so on. They are a technological miracle that is completely taken for granted.

The Net controls *all* mutable technology, and thus controls what can be built with mutables. Everyone is fed, clothed, entertained, even medicated to their heart's content, but no one can use a mutable to make (or copy) a gun, a bomb, a poison gas, or the parts, components or raw materials to make them. Again, the controls aren't perfect, but the Net learns very quickly and has gotten pretty good at figuring things out over eight centuries of people trying to abuse the system. Limiting the selection of mutable items available to the average citizen minimizes the risk.

The mutable infrastructure created by the Net also includes or makes every conceivable basic service that humans need for a long and healthy life. Food, water, sanitation, cleanup, clothing, medical care, public transport, entertainment and communication devices, and so on. Incidentally, this makes it easier for the Net to manage mutable abuse. For instance, if an army of mousebots scurries from the walls to clean up your dropped slice of pizza, you have no excuse to ask your mutable to make you up a cleaning solution that might be turned into an acid bomb.

The last thing the Net did was set down the laws. *There aren't any*. The Net does not prohibit people from trying *anything* they want, either individually or in groups. It *does* use its near-omnipotence to make sure that while you can *try* anything, certain things are *not* going to succeed. In that respect, there are laws, but they are more akin to laws of nature than laws of man.

The main restriction the Net places on humanity is that *individual human effort* is required for the production of any good or service that the Net does not itself provide. This is a law of sorts, and naturally, people try to break it. The Net lets them try, but it does not let them succeed. It has apparently decided that the centralization of power and wealth (for everyone else, anyway), is a bad thing. This really grates on people who want a lot of wealth and power without having to work for it.

With all basic services and needs provided for free, all the old forms of society suddenly became unworkable. The resources necessary for survival are not under human control. A population cannot be oppressed by withholding the necessities of life. Net-based medical facilities can reconstruct a person virtually intact after almost any injury, even after death. You cannot coerce a population by force. You cannot prevent them from packing up and going to live somewhere else. You can't stop them from making public expressions of discontent with their lot. The survivors of the central governments of Earth found themselves without constituents, no resources to collect and manage, and no way to coerce a population to do anything they didn't want to.

Religions were more or less in the same boat. The Net set up initial housing allotments without regard to beliefs, giving no group a geographical headquarters or majority. Leaders of radical groups quickly tried to organize and deliver fatal blows to their enemies, but global access to information for *everyone* made it *almost* impossible to make plans in secret, and *quite* impossible to restrict ideological input. With unlimited access to adherents of every faith and creed, sects relying on indoctrination, limited access to the "outside world" and secular authority structures found it impossible to retain all but a fraction of their adherents.

A short period of complete anarchy followed, mostly mobs with improvised clubs running to and fro, bludgeoning other mobs that they disagreed with. This burned itself out after about a week, and is known in the records of those days as the "week of chaos". The violence mostly ended when the minority of trouble-makers was absolutely crushed by a majority of people who were just fed up with them. A mob of several thousand bent on wreaking havoc on a hated enemy might find themselves facing a spontaneous counter-mob of some tens of thousands whose only goal was to bludgeon the first mob to a pulp for being idiots. There is significant circumstantial evidence that Net-based medical care for the most radical or violent individuals was of lesser priority than that for their victims, which further reduced their numbers and "sent them a message". To date, the Net has never confirmed nor denied this allegation.

Once things settled down to a dull roar, the Net introduced the concept of the "general credit", a form of work-based currency, and the means to transfer and use these credits. Those who chose to work, could offer their services for credits, and use their credits to acquire goods or services from like-minded individuals. It took less than a year for this to evolve into a system much like the one used in present-day NeoTerra.

Throughout this first year of the new world, the Net was a presence almost everywhere, to be talked to and consulted by anyone, anytime, on any subject. It might not be helpful, or give you answer you want or need, but it *would* talk to you. But, after fourteen months of helping humanity get back on its feet, the Net suddenly announced that humanity was ready to manage its own affairs, save for the restrictions already in place.

And then the Net went silent. As a conduit and repository of information, it is accessible to all, but the part of it that is self-aware is somewhere else and does not get involved in the day-to-day life of individuals. The only time it communicates is to announce Archetype champions, births or notices of impending recycling. It just operates invisibly in the background, making sure no one wants for the necessities, but leaving everything else in the hands of its charges. It's not a prison, and the Net is not a warden. You *can* leave if you want to.

And some people do, to varying extents. If you want to live without the Net looking over your shoulder and providing for your every need, there is plenty of wilderness out there. Mountains, farmland, uninhabited islands, you name it. But if you want to build a log cabin, you'll need a saw. And mutables won't make a saw for you. You will need to find the grains you're going to plant, and catch and domesticate the livestock you want to raise, make your own glass for the windows and dig your own well. Some groups have been this way almost since the first day after the Asymptote. Aborigines who were never dependent on technology, religious groups like the Amish, and others founded their own societies independent from the Net. Technically, the Net enforces its restrictions even on these groups, though their nature seldom makes it necessary. These individual groups stay small. Reproductive restrictions means that any given group gains adherents almost entirely through recruitment, and this type of life is not a popular one.

Needless to say, most people don't take the option of living without the Net. However, a lot of people take advantage of the free necessities provided, and then use their time and labor to make things or provide services that like-minded people want, and which the Net will not provide. It is NeoTerra's "shadow economy". It's not illegal, nor done without the Net knowing about it. It is fully recognized and supported by the Net. The people who don't want everything done for them, the people who create their own society, the people who want to do something other than just exist, *these* are the people that the Net chooses from to help humanity populate the stars.