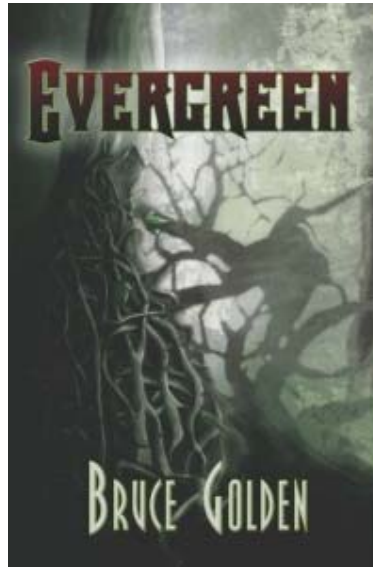


EVERGREEN

A Review by Linda Bona



The environment, and what we do about it, or what we should do, is at the heart of the new science fiction novel *Evergreen* (Zumaya Publications, 2009, 342 pages). Even though author Bruce Golden takes us to another planet—a planet of his creation, we know the lessons learned by the characters there apply equally to the planet Earth.

Evergreen is still a frontier planet where many forms of technology are limited by solar activity and the planet’s magnetic field. Solar power is the only power other than muscle and sweat, so you might think the colonists of this planet would be environmentally friendly—but not necessarily so—not as far as the planet itself is concerned.

The colony is being built on the backs of its indentured lumberjacks, while “the company” that owns the planetary mineral rights begins to set up mining operations.

When an ancient artifact is discovered on Evergreen, a heretic priest back on Earth becomes convinced it's the link that will prove his theory about the existence of an extraterrestrial "City of God." He forms an expedition to Evergreen that includes a renowned archaeology professor and others. Traveling aboard the same ship that will take them to Evergreen is Eamon, a young man wracked by both guilt and a need for vengeance. After years of searching, Eamon believes he's finally tracked down the man responsible for his mother's death. He intends to find the man and kill him. In order to do so, he has contracted himself to join the timber jockey workforce, which is made up mostly of debtors and convicts.

At this future point of man's exploration of space, several inhabitable planets have been discovered, but, as yet, not a single intelligent species outside of mankind has been found. However, an exobiologist studying a primate species on Evergreen believes these "ursu" may be only thousands of years away from evolving into a sort of primitive intelligence. She'll discover these creatures have a past as well as a future.

However, there's another intelligence on Evergreen. One not so readily visible. The vegetal consciousness that *is* the planet Evergreen—the ecosystem of this world—represents the wisdom of nature in this novel. And it's that wisdom, that intelligence, which leads the tale and all of its characters into one incredible climax.

As for the relevant issue of environmental protection, it's not something Golden slaps you across the face with. No character ever broaches it—there's no editorializing. But, by the end of the book, the message is clear, and so are the questions. Should mankind be allowed to do whatever he wants with whatever planet he encounters? By extension should he be able to do whatever he wants with planet Earth? The parallels are obvious because this is a world much like Earth. In fact, Golden says he used some actual bits of history from the timber mining that went on around the Lake Tahoe area as inspiration for the book.

Evergreen has everything you look for in a good science fiction novel. Believably tormented characters, unique world-building, realistic dialogue, adventure, exploration, alien life forms, conflict, resolution . . . by the time the book ended, I only wished it was longer. If I had one criticism, it's that the short chapters moved too fast. I wanted more of this alien world, and

wanted to know what happened to these characters next—at least those who still survived the wrath of the planet to reach the final page.