The Gates

John Connolly

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Extract

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THE GATES

A strange novel for strange young people



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PRAISE FOR THE GATES:

'Brilliant. I loved every word of it. John has found a voice that compares favourably with Stephen King and Monty Python which is not an easy trick. *The Gates* is delightfully horrific and hilarious and will create legions of fans among the living and undead, who will be blood-thirsty for more.' *Eoin Colfer*

'Scientists are not after the truth; it is the truth that is after scientists.'

Dr Karl Schlecta (1904–1985)

One

In Which the Universe Forms,
Which Seems Like a Very Good Place to Start

In the beginning, about 13.7 billion years ago, to be reasonably precise, there was a very, very small dot.[1] It was the dot, which was hot and incredibly heavy, contained everything that was, and everything that ever would be, all crammed into the tiniest area possible. The dot, which was under enormous pressure due to all that it contained, exploded, and it duly scattered everything that was, or would be, across what was now about to become the Universe. Scientists call this the 'Big Bang', although it wasn't really a big bang at all because it happened everywhere, and all at once.

Oh, and just one more thing about that 'age of the universe' stuff. There are people who will try to tell you that the Earth is only about 10,000 years old; that humans and dinosaurs were around at more or less the same time, a bit like in the movies Jurassic Park and One Million Years B.C.; and that evolution, the change in the inherited traits of organisms passed from

[1] **Scientists call the dot the 'singularity'. People who are religious might call it the mote in God's eye. Some scientists will tell you can't believe in the singularity and the idea of a god, or gods. Some religious people will try to tell you the same thing. Still, you can believe in the singularity *and* a god, if you like. It's entirely up to you. One requires evidence, the other faith. They're not the same thing, but as long as you don't get the two mixed up, then everything should be fine.**

one generation to the next, does not, and never did, happen. Given the evidence, it's hard not to feel that they're probably wrong. Many of them also believe that the Universe was created in seven days by an old chap with a beard, perhaps with breaks for tea and sandwiches. This may be true but, if it was created in this way, they were very long days: about two billion years long, give or take a few million years, which is a lot of sandwiches.

Anyway, to return to the dot, let's be clear on one thing, because it's very important. The building blocks of all that you can see around you, and a great deal more that you can't see at all, were blasted from that little dot at a speed so fast that, within a minute, the Universe was a million billion miles in size and still expanding, as the dot was responsible for bringing into being planets and asteroids; whales and budgerigars; you, and Julius Caesar, and Elvis Presley.[2]

Oh, and Evil.

Because somewhere in there was all the bad stuff as well, the stuff that makes otherwise sensible people hurt one another. There's a little of it in all of us, and the best that we can do is to try not to let it govern our actions too often.

But just as the planets began to take on a certain shape, and the asteroids, and the whales and the budgerigars and you, so too, in the darkest of dark places, Evil took on a

[2] **In fact, about one per cent of the static that sometimes appears on your television set is a relic of the Big Bang and, if your eyes were sensitive to microwave light instead of just visible light, then the sky at night would appear white instead of black, as it continues to glow from the heat of the Big Bang. And because atoms are so small, and are constantly recycled, every breath you take contains atoms that were once breathed by Julius Caesar and Elvis Presley. So a little bit of you once ruled Rome, and sang 'Blue Suede Shoes'.**

form. It did it while the Earth was cooling, while tectonic plates shifted, until, at last, life appeared, and Evil found a target for its rage.

Yet it could not reach us, for the Universe was not ordered in its favour, or so it seemed. But the thing in the darkness was very patient. It stoked the fires of its fury, and it waited for a chance to strike . . .