

REMEMBERING THE FUTURE

World-famous science-fiction author Robert J. Sawyer discusses his new novel, *Triggers*, among other things.

Words by Leo Graziani

It's been nine years since I've been to Robert J. Sawyer's home, and the moment I step through the door, the memories come flooding back. The last time I was here, I was a student doing an interview for an assignment. Many of the details I remember are still present: the neatly lined bookcases, the original cover art for some of his novels hanging on that wall there, the Neanderthal skull replicas, and the action figures from *Battlestar Galactica* and *Planet of the Apes*. There is a new detail, though: a large model of the *USS Enterprise*, with working lights that match the model used on the original show.

Sawyer is a household name in science-fiction. He's one of only eight writers—and the only Canadian—to ever win all three of the top awards in sci-fi for best novel: the Nebula, for *The Terminal Experiment* in 1995; the Hugo, for *Hominids* in 2003, and the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for *Mindscan* in 2005.

So it's apt that these memories come back to me as we sit down to chat about his new novel, *Triggers*. It's his 21st novel, and it's a sci-fi thriller—emphasis on *thriller*—which, along with assassination plots, terrorist attacks, secret military operations, and empathy, also deals extensively with memory.

Leo Graziani: The first thing I thought about when I read *Triggers* was how different it felt from your other works. I felt like I was reading an action movie.

Robert J. Sawyer: Well, that's very deliberate. I had a lot of success with the *FlashForward* TV series, which was an adaptation of my novel. The book was an introspective and philosophical

story, but to make it supposedly work in primetime television, the decision was made—with approval from me—to add conspiracies and thriller elements. And it brought me more readers than ever before. There are some people who now associate me with that kind of thriller, so I thought why not see if I could write a novel in that style?

But there's more to it: my forte for the last decade or more has been an exploration of the nature of consciousness, but the one part of consciousness I hadn't spent a lot of time on was memory. And as much as anything, that defines who we are. You are what you remember. In the last 15 years, we have learned an enormous amount about memory: how it's stored, how fallible it is, and the fact that what I remember, even vividly, is simply a reconstruction that my brain has made from a handful of clues that it has stored. All these elements came together to form *Triggers*.

LG: You've been called a futurist, a title that comes with the job of being a writer of speculative fiction. What do you think of the disparity between the present day and the future promised to us by pop culture in the '50s and '60s? What predictions do you see for the future?

RJS: We didn't get flying cars, but they probably were never a safe idea to begin with. And we didn't get food in pills, but that would've taken away the joy of eating. But what we did get is a world where the United States went from segregation to a black president in 50 years.

In my lifetime, I saw struggles for civil rights and gender equality, and now we're close to the end, I'm convinced, of the struggle for gender orientation rights. Despite Rick Santorum and all the rhetoric you hear in the Republican primaries, the tide has turned. There's no question now, that gay and lesbian lifestyles are accepted and are becoming more so every day, and that's wonderful. Even my particular minority, atheists, are getting to come out of the closet, and not be vilified or run out of town.

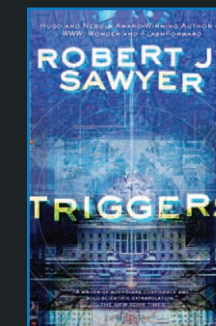
This is the best the world has ever been. It got better in the blink of an eye. It's got a long way to go, but the momentum behind progressive social change is so powerful, that I think clearly the best is yet to come.

For more from Sawyer on transhumanism, atheism, pacifism, and the future of the human race, visit MississaugaLife.ca

Triggers will be available April 3, 2012 at your local bookstore or online, or you can buy a signed copy directly from the author at <http://stores.ebay.com/Robert-J-Sawyer-Books>. You can also visit his website at <http://sfwriter.com>.

TRIGGERS BOOK LAUNCH

On April 3, 2012 at 7:00 p.m., join Robert J. Sawyer at the Dominion on Queen pub for the launch of *Triggers*! Presented by Bakka Phoenix Books and Penguin Group Canada.
500 Queen St. East
416-368-6893



TRIGGERS BOOK REVIEW

Viking Canada | 352 pages | \$30

The book starts with an assassination attempt on the president of the United States. He's rushed to hospital for surgery, and at this same hospital an experiment is taking place involving the memories and post-traumatic stress disorder of an Iraq War veteran. Then a bomb detonates, releasing an electromagnetic pulse that amplifies and scrambles the memory equipment, giving a random group of people access to each other's memories—which means someone has the president's memories and is now a threat to national security.

For the full review of *Triggers*, visit MississaugaLife.ca!



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