

World Wide Web destined to become conscious

Forget Web 2.0 — Get ready for *Reticulum sapiens!*



The World Wide Web will soon have as many interconnections as does the human brain. And, just as reflective, self-aware consciousness spontaneously emerged in *Homo sapiens* some 40,000 years ago so too might consciousness emerge in the vast network that is the Web.

On April 7, 2009, **Ace Science Fiction** (part of Penguin Group USA) will release the first volume in Hugo Award-winner **Robert J. Sawyer**'s new **WWW** trilogy. The three books — *Wake*, *Watch*, and *Wonder* — explore the consequences for humanity of this global brain waking up and developing an agenda of its own.

“I’m calling it William Gibson meets William Gibson,” quips Sawyer, who lives just outside Toronto. “One William Gibson wrote *Neuromancer*, the book that gave us the term ‘cyberspace.’ And the other William Gibson wrote *The Miracle Worker*, the play and movie about Helen Keller’s emergence from sensory deprivation to full consciousness.” In *Wake*, Caitlin Decter, a blind 15-year-old computer wiz, serves as the Webmind’s miracle worker.

“Cyberpunk, and its quarter-century-old visions of the world being controlled by a streetwise underground of hackers, is totally at odds with what really has developed,”

MORE ...

says Sawyer. His **WWW** trilogy will deal with the emergence of a planetary consciousness in a very familiar setting: the homes and workplaces of the world we know, as the infrastructure we rely on for knowledge retrieval literally comes to life — an entity with a million webcam eyes and billions of gigabytes of data at its disposal, a consciousness that knows everything you’ve ever said in an email, and everything anyone has ever said about you.

“Science fiction has too often taken a simplistic, alarmist approach to the concept of artificial intelligence,” says Sawyer. “Well, I for one *don’t* welcome our new robot masters. This is my attempt to present a positive symbiosis — a world where humans are no longer the smartest thing on the planet, but in which we find a way of continuing to exist without giving up our essential humanity or individuality.”

Sawyer has made a specialty of writing about consciousness, and has been richly rewarded for it. He’s one of only seven writers in history to have won all three of the SF field’s top awards for best novel of the year, all of which he won for novels exploring the nature of consciousness:

- the World Science Fiction Society’s **Hugo Award** (SF’s “people’s choice” award), which he won in 2003 for his novel *Hominids*;
- the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America’s **Nebula Award** (the field’s “academy award”), which he won in 1996 for his novel *The Terminal Experiment*;
- and the **John W. Campbell Memorial Award** (SF’s major juried award), which he won in 2006 for *Mindscan*.

The *New York Times* calls Sawyer “a writer of boundless confidence and bold scientific extrapolation.” *New Scientist* says his work is “scientifically plausible, fictionally intriguing,

and ethically important.” *The Montreal Gazette* calls him “Canada’s answer to **Michael Crichton**.” And the Denver *Rocky Mountain News* says he’s “just about the best science-fiction writer out there.”

Of the computer in Sawyer’s first novel, *Golden Fleece*, **Orson Scott Card** (who called Sawyer’s book the best SF novel of the year) said, “Sawyer’s JASON is the deepest computer character in all of science-fiction.” Sawyer’s latest novel, *Rollback*, was a Hugo and Campbell Memorial finalist, and in 2007 he won China’s **Galaxy Award** — that country’s top honor in SF — as “most popular foreign author.” Meanwhile, **ABC** is developing a TV series based on Sawyer’s 1999 novel *Flash Forward*.

Beside writing his bestselling science-fiction novels, Sawyer is very much in demand as a futurist and corporate consultant. He wrote the guest editorial for the special 2007 robotics issue of *Science*, the world’s leading scientific journal. He’s given keynotes for **Gartner, Inc.**, and **CA** (Computer Associates), and recently spoke at the **Library of Congress** and at a conference in Istanbul. He was one of the participants in the inaugural **Science Foo Camp** (consisting of “the hundred brightest people we know”) sponsored by **O’Reilly Media**, held at the headquarters of **Google**, where he presented a talk on the very subject of his forthcoming trilogy: the World Wide Web gaining consciousness.

INTERVIEWS with Robert J. Sawyer:

Email: sawyer@sfwriter.com

The Robert J. Sawyer web site: sfwriter.com