



# Quantum Night

*Robert J. Sawyer*

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**With such compelling and provocative novels as *Red Planet Blues*, *FlashForward* and *The WWW Trilogy*, Robert J. Sawyer has proven himself to be “a writer of boundless confidence and bold scientific extrapolation” (*New York Times*). Now, the Hugo and Nebula Award-winning author explores the thin line between good and evil that every human being is capable of crossing...**

Experimental psychologist Jim Marchuk has developed a flawless technique for identifying the previously undetected psychopaths lurking everywhere in society. But while being cross-examined about his breakthrough in court, Jim is shocked to discover that he has lost his memories of six months of his life from twenty years previously—a dark time during which he himself committed heinous acts.

Jim is reunited with Kayla Huron, his forgotten girlfriend from his lost period and now a quantum physicist who has made a stunning discovery about the nature of human consciousness. As a rising tide of violence and hate sweeps across the globe, the psychologist and the physicist combine forces in a race against time to see if they can do the impossible—change human nature—before the entire world descends into darkness.

## Quantum Night Details

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Author : Robert J. Sawyer

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# From Reader Review Quantum Night for online ebook

## Jacqie says

I read this book a while ago and enjoyed it while reading it. However, looking back at it, I can see quite a bit that's problematic.

The main character is a psychologist whose research area is psychopathy. The long and the short of it is that he and his mentor discover that there is a way to "switch" people from "normal" to psychopath to empathic. He posits that most ("normal") people do not actually have self-awareness, and uses this theory to explain mob mentality and trends. People don't examine what they do; they just exhibit herd behavior and do not actually have consciousness. They just exist in the way that animals animals do, responding to stimuli. Psychopaths have gained consciousness and self-awareness, but not empathy. "Normal" people are about 60% of the population, psychopaths about 30%, and empathaths about 10%.

I bet you think, "well, luckily I'm in the 10% of empathaths", just like I did. And that's what Sawyer wants his readers to think. He wants all of us to believe that we are the special, most enlightened part of humanity. But mathematically we can't all be, can we?

Sawyer also has a very unreliable narrator in Jim Marchuk, his viewpoint character. Jim believes that he is an enlightened philosopher. But he practices utilitarian philosophy, which, if I'm to believe the author, is rather chilling when you get down to it. The utilitarian approach is to maximize happiness for the most people. Jim's interpretation of this is to push for an abortion when he finds that he and his wife are going to have a Down's baby. When his wife refuses, he is repulsed by his child. In response to this reaction, his wife divorces him.

Jim is also not afraid to play God and change the entire world because he judges that it will maximize happiness for most people, even if it will change everyone fundamentally. I can't say much more without giving away most of the plot, but Jim acted more like an antisocial (in the psychological sense) person than an empath. He also had a cruddy sense of humor and expected everyone to enjoy his jokes- not very empathic if you ask me!

So, Sawyer really talks simplistically about psychology and ends up with a protagonist who acts more like a supervillain. Maybe Sawyer also knows this and wants his audience to see through his protagonist, but I have the uneasy suspicion that he truly thinks this guy is a hero. I'm not sure i want to read anything else by this author if that is indeed the case.

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

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## Acordul Fin says

5 stars for the first 40% of the book, 1.5 for the rest.

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## Ashleigh Mattern says

Robert J. Sawyer's newest book tackles an enormous number of dense subjects -- including consciousness, ethics, morality, philosophy, and quantum physics -- but my favourite part was seeing all the action take place on the Canadian prairies. The plot mostly revolves around Winnipeg and Saskatoon, places deeply familiar to me. I loved the hyper-local name-dropping in Saskatoon, like when the main character orders TJs Pizza or goes to the Konga Cafe. Aside from my local pride (which Sawyer managed not to bruise!), the story itself is fantastic: Part psychological thriller, part mystery, and all science fiction, this book is the definition of a page-turner. The plot takes place in 2020, and the whole book is very much about our world right now; the novel's current events are chilling and eerily believable because they hit so close to home (literally, for me in Saskatoon). Decades from now, this book will be a time capsule, but the sooner you read it, the more it will feel like a future that might happen tomorrow.

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## Alvaro Zinos-Amaro says

A lot of interesting ideas, but unfortunately the narrative presentation wasn't my cup of tea. The narrator's tendency to constantly provide factoids (in addition to teaching classes, which we get snippets of) and, in my opinion, unnecessary amounts of descriptive specificity, put me at a remove from the story. As much as the novel concerns itself with the nature of conscience, consciousness and memory, I didn't feel particularly moved by or interested in any of the characters, which was problematic. I found the prose mostly polished and serviceable (with some repetitions), but a constant barrage of pop culture references, puns and allusions may have also kept me a little at bay. This is a conceptually ambitious novel with a clever plot, but the "stop-and-pontificate" nature of the narrative wasn't aesthetically pleasing.

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## Derek says

Loved it! Yes, it's a thought experiment, and a simplistic one at that. But that doesn't mean you can't make a great novel out of it.

The idea that there might be three states of consciousness: Normal (people without actual self-consciousness), empathic and psychopathic, is pretty much what we all think. So, never mind the current state of the science, it's a theory that basically fits the facts. But I'm sure nobody thinks it explains everything. It's just a place to start a story that doesn't *contradict* anything that's scientifically proven. Actually having those states changed by merely losing consciousness was a bit much to swallow, but as a writer I know recently said, every story can contain one big lie.

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## Luke Burrage says

Full review on my podcast, SFBRP episode #302.

0.1 stars. If only Goodreads would let me.

This book isn't just the worst book I've finished in years, it's also utterly monstrous. I'm actually sickened that someone could write a book and their editor didn't say "Hold on, you're not going to put your name on this in public, right?"

Then there are these quotes from other reviewers here on Goodreads:

"And now I am really paranoid about who might be the psychopaths around me.... thank you Robert J. Sawyer.....thank you....."

"A flawless technique for detecting psychopaths... I hope I'm not the only one constantly looking over my shoulder after reading Quantum Night."

"You'll be talking about this with your family and friends -- or at least some of them -- for years."

"It is excellent reading and (dare I say it?) it might even be life changing."

"Interesting idea, like always from R.Sawyer, and will definitely use it."

"I can't help but find that I now label people as p-zeds, psychos, and quicks."

"Once you're done reading this, you'll spend a fair amount of time studying the people around you."

Congratulations, Sawyer, you've invented a new form of racism that your readers are now using to judge other people. Well done.

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## **Andrea McDowell says**

I am at a loss to explain how this atrocious novel was published, let alone how it found itself on the Canada Reads long list this year.

Before I get into its significant ethical and scientific flaws, I'll take a moment to point out that as a story, it also sucked. The characters were flat and gender stereotyped. The plot was nonsensical. All of the relationships in the book conveniently fit the needs of the plot; the dialogue was 95% info-dump; the main character was, besides an awful person (that below), a total bore. I couldn't put the novel down, not because I was enjoying it, but because I kept waiting for the plot twist that would make this piece of crap into something other than a piece of crap, which, needless to say, never came. I haven't hated a book this much since maybe *Tathea*, or even *Race Against Time*.

Scientifically, this novel is like someone reading a think piece about a butterfly's wings causing hurricanes on the other side of the world, and writing a novel in which global warming is caused by masses of undiscovered butterflies in the Amazon, which the protagonist vanquishes in order to save us all. You have to be so willfully ignorant to write it that it can't in any way claim to be science fiction.

Fair warning: spoilers galore. Since I can't in good conscience recommend anyone read this, I'd say go ahead and read the spoilers.

Quantum Night is the story of a middle-aged self-righteous bore with an inflexible obsession with utilitarian

philosophy as expressed, and only as expressed, by Peter Singer. The hidden results of a freak accident caused by a psychological experiment gone awry twenty years ago reveal to him the shocking truth: 4/7 human beings do not have consciousness, have no feelings, and aren't really people (referred to as p-zeds, for "philosophical zombies"). 2/7 human beings are psychopaths. Only 1/7 humans on this planet have both consciousness and a conscience. It goes without saying that Our Hero is one of these latter.

Further freak accidents--exclusively involving friends, loved ones, and friends and loved ones of friends and loved ones--make it plain that it is possible to switch someone between states from lower to higher using either a good blow to the head or a highly specialized piece of quantum equipment called a "tuning fork." Imagine that. Hundreds of years of psychologists and psychiatrists diligently working to understand psychopathy and how to change it, and all they needed was a 2x4 or a large hadron collider. Who knew? These states loop, so that zombies become psychopaths and psychopaths become empaths and empaths become zombies. Moreover, as our mental states are quantum-ly entangled, you can switch lots of people between states at the same time.

Meanwhile, global violence against minorities of various kinds is spinning out of control, set off by a hockey riot in Winnipeg. Yes indeed. Having newly discovered that it is possible to turn all 4 billion "zombies" into empaths and disable all 1 billion global "psychopaths" by turning them into zombies (i.e. forcing them all to switch up twice) by use of a collider in Saskatoon, and this being the only way Our Hero can think of to stop imminent nuclear war, he bravely charges off to do just that. Does it matter to him that his theoretical construct has not undergone any kind of experimental scrutiny? That all they have is a couple of suggestive anecdotes and a mathematical model? That he is engaging 7.7 billion human beings in a psychological experiment without their consent that could have disastrous consequences for their lives?

Nope. Off he goes. He and he alone, you understand, has a proper ethical understanding of the greatest good for the greatest number as expressed by Peter Singer's utilitarian philosophy, so even if his horrified girlfriend is doing everything she can to stop him because she doesn't want his experiment to turn her beautiful daughter into a psychopath, he must soldier on. After all, this is just irrational maternal feelings. So he successfully switches the states of everyone's consciousness, and nuclear war is avoided. Huzzah! Girlfriend, of course, is now a psychopath and disposes of her daughter with Our Hero, who is now going to be a fantastic father, because who wouldn't want to grow up in a household with a man who knows exactly what to do in every situation based on his detailed understanding of the utilitarian philosophy of Peter Singer? No one, obviously. The End.

You may have thought this was long already, Dear Readers, but I have a lot more to say, so get yourself a cup of tea or coffee and settle in for the long haul as I describe the ethical and scientific flaws, to put it politely, of this horrendous book:

## 1. The Utilitarian Philosophy of Peter Singer

In the Does This Really Need to be Said category: Oh my god are you fucking kidding me our protagonist the uber-philosopher never questions Peter Singer? Peter Singer is infallibly right about everything, always? Lots of people like Peter Singer, I get it; he's an influential guy; and he's got a ton of critics even within utilitarian philosophy. Surely someone as passionately married to this general philosophy would know something about someone other than Peter Singer and not just be his mindless disciple--besides which, the irony of the book's hero due to his very-conscious-consciousness being unable to question or debate the ethics of ONE utilitarian philosopher!

Hey, here's ONE utilitarian critic of Peter Singer. He makes some good points. And yet Our Hero is a total

slave to Singer's every dictate.

Even I, armchair philosopher that I am, can poke holes in the "ethics" displayed by Our Hero's choices. Example: Our Hero begins a long-distance relationship with a woman in Saskatoon. He can't justify the money spent on airfare to see her, as he currently donates \$20k/year for starving children in Africa and doesn't want to cut back, so resigns himself to driving there. Oh yeah. OK. Yup in an era of global warming, which Our Hero references regularly throughout the book, driving every weekend from Winnipeg to Saskatoon to have sex with your girlfriend is a morally blameless choice. It has no harm for any human or animal or any living thing. That is 100% consistent with his 'philosophy.'

## 2. 4/7 human beings are "zombies" and not really people

Ethically: this shouldn't need to be said, but we hardly need another book, whether fiction or not, positing that a majority of the world's population can be safely dehumanized. Putting this in a science fiction book with a bunch of pseudo-scientific gobbledygook pretending to give this abhorrent claim some veneer of scientific plausibility is so unethical it completely, utterly undoes any claim he has to an interest in ethics through his main character. You might think he doesn't really mean it, but I suspect he does. At the end of the book, he lists a bunch of books he claims support the science in the novel. Nowhere in the acknowledgements or in the further-reading section or \*anywhere\* does Sawyer say, hey, in case you were wondering, I don't think 4/7 people in the world are zombies without thought or real feelings.

Scientifically: There is substantial evidence that this is not the case. It's not like consciousness hasn't been scientifically examined, for god's sake; there are a bunch of theories for what it is and where in the brain it's produced and how it works, but there are NO scientific theories that claim that A MAJORITY OF HUMAN BEINGS ARE NOT CONSCIOUS. This is like writing a science fiction novel about gravity not existing 3/7 of the time: if it flatly contradicts science it is fucking not science fiction.

## 3. 2/7 of human beings are psychopaths and 1/7 people are conscious and have a conscience

Ethically: Sawyer claims here that good people are outnumbered by assholes 2:1. The judgement and arrogance of that claim is breathtaking.

Scientifically: a) If there are twice as many psychopaths as people with conscience, then how can one justify the claim that psychopathy is the disorder and that having a conscience is healthy?

b) It is not true that estimates of the prevalence of psychopathy in the population come solely from prison studies, as he claims. These are studies of the general population and the results indicate that the prevalence is very low, about 1%. One can dispute it but to jump from 1% to 30% is ... bizarre, to put it mildly. How in the world has society cooperatively functioned for millennia if only 1/7 human beings are functionally capable of or interested in cooperations?

## 4. People "switch" between being zombies, psychopaths and good people whenever they lose consciousness. Umm ... even though 4/7 people don't have consciousness to begin with.

This is so unbelievably stupid it doesn't even merit a takedown.

## 5. It is ethically in line with Peter Singer's utilitarian philosophy to switch people between mental states en masse without their prior knowledge or consent.

I mean ....

There are a number of classroom scenes in which Our Hero lays out actual and thought experiments on moral philosophy as barely-disguised info dumps in which the reader is encouraged to take particular stances on determining "the greatest good for the greatest number," including the Trolley Problem. Go ahead and click through: I won't make this any longer by describing it.

Beside the substantial ethical problems posited by a situation in which one self-righteous asshole is entitled to make decisions for all of humanity based on a brainstorming session he had with his girlfriend (really), the internal ethics of the novel aren't even consistent. He comes right out and says in a classroom scene that in the Fat Man version of the Trolley Dilemma, people feel morally hesitant to push him on to the tracks for good reason: do I know this will work? What if it doesn't? Am I sure that it wouldn't work if I volunteered to jump in front of the tracks? etc.

OK, so: How the hell does Our Hero know, surely enough to justify this course of action, that what he is doing is going to work? He doesn't. There is no experimental data. Everything that has occurred to that point in the novel is a fluke accident. None of it has been investigated or replicated. He is operating on wish fulfillment, guesswork and hubris.

6. His horrified girlfriend is operating only on maternal feelings rather than a solid understanding of Peter Singer's utilitarian ethics, and thus can be safely ignored

Ethically: This is sexist bullshit, pure "women are so emotional and irrational" nonsense. Not a surprise, coming in a novel where we are treated to a typical middle-aged man engaging in a relationship with a super-hot middle-aged mom who shows no physical evidence of childbirth and whose pubic hair grooming habits, for the benefit of whom isn't made clear because she doesn't date prior to Our Hero, is described for the reader for no reason I can fathom.

Scientifically: Every. Single. Time. Society. Intervenes. In Childrearing practices. On the assumption that maternal instincts are flawed and "science knows better." Absolute disaster ensues.

This has been demonstrated so many times for so long that there is no longer any question.

It has been examined and proven scientifically recently so many times that no actual scientist believes differently any longer.

Not all mothers are functional, and that is a problem; but maternal instincts as expressed by functional mothers evolved over a very long time to enhance the survival and fitness of offspring. They can generally be trusted.

Children do not need parents who are paragons of utilitarian philosophy as described by Peter Singer. They need parents who love them and act like it.

Our Hero took that away from his girlfriend's beautiful daughter, but the novel posits that this is ok because the "greater number" received the "greater good" through his heroic actions preventing nuclear war, which surely could not have happened any other way.

7. His description of society is so clueless and tone deaf it deserves its own savaging.



Says Sawyer, racism is only a problem for black people in the US.

And anti-semitism is only a problem for Jewish people in Europe.

And anti-native racism is only a problem for indigenous people in Canada.

Each society has one, and only one, racialized scapegoat out-group, and therefore other minorities are by default treated well there.

In Canada, non-native minorities are treated like white people, per the unnecessary input of the book's single, transitory black character. Yeah. I mean, this is clearly what we've seen with the spotless record of Canadian police departments and their utter lack of brutality towards black Canadians, and the 100% unanimous fully open-hearted embrace of Syrian refugees, and the total absence of any terrorist attacks against Muslims in, say, a mosque in Quebec ....

## 8. THE ETHICS OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS ARE FUCKING AWFUL

It did deserve the caps-lock treatment, per:

a) Middle-aged mom reuniting with previously-psychopathic boyfriend immediately introduces him to her daughter and has him stay the night. Speaking as a middle-aged single mom .... Hell No.

b) Said boyfriend immediately steps into the father-figure role without any qualms on the part of him, his girlfriend, or girlfriend's mom. Like on the first date. Apparently there are no negative impacts to be considered to the young girl if the relationship does not continue.

c) The entire cast is so psychotically secretive about everything it is ridiculous. The professors running the decades-ago experiment, in particular, will not alert the authorities or the police no matter how many awful things happen for no apparent reason except that the plot would not otherwise hold up. Someone kills your colleague and gouges out your eyeballs? No biggie. Just hide the body and pretend you were in a car accident. Why would you want this person in jail? Just because he's shown an ability to kill people brutally for no good reason and you have no idea when he's going to switch states and stop--and also, what if you lose your project funding? I just can't.

Keep in mind that these characters are all the 1/7 good guys with a conscience who are apparently capable of independent reasoning and interested in morals, ethics and philosophy. And then look at those actions and wonder where the hell their concern was for the wellbeing of that little girl, or the safety of society, or any good thing for any person other than themselves at all.

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This book is like the Da Vinci Code set in a psychological research institution, in which all 7.7 billion people engage unwillingly in an experimental treatment that fundamentally changes who they are because one middle-aged asshole thought it was the only way to avoid nuclear war, and it was totally ok anyway because 4/7 people aren't really people.

And then it was published and put on the Canada Reads long list.

WTAF

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## Simone says

HA! Finally, the Trump-Followers phenomenon explained!

I didn't love this book as much as I love just about everything Robert J Sawyer writes, but given the current political climate in March 2016 it was very entertaining... and enlightening... and frightening!!

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## Luke says

Those who are familiar with him know that Robert J Sawyer has grown into a vaguely conservative, late-middle-aged, sci-fi writer living in a famously soulless suburb west of Toronto. As he gets older, his work is coming more and more to reflect his circumstances. I can report that *Quantum Night* (2016) is definitely not among his best.

*Quantum Night* takes a smattering of fairly interesting speculative fiction ideas, and then proceeds to waste them in a story that is so childish as to be not credible.

The notion that the absence of small involuntary eye movements could be as a kind of "psychopath detector"? An intriguing premise! RJS then burns this concept with clumsily executed chapters written from the POV of a psychopath - which, as it turns out, mostly just consists of wanting to commit sexual assault and a swear-y internal monologue.

There is a further hook, arguably much more interesting (which I won't spoil here). Unfortunately, rather than incorporating science into our reality and drawing a narrative from that (as I would argue the best spec fic does) RJS engages in a wholesale replacement of our world. The version of reality left in its place is not a looking glass world, so much as it is a shoddily built soundstage. There are no backs to the buildings, there is a matte painting where the sky should be, and the empathy that we are supposed to feel for characters has been replaced with a sound effect.

The ending is both so shoddy and so broadly telegraphed that I assumed a wicked twist had to be coming. Sadly, such was not to be. The resolution of the book appears to have been lifted with minor edits from the writing assignment of an elementary school student. Readers may wonder whether they are supposed to feel insulted.

And none of this even begins to engage with the deeply, deeply elitist and paternalistic ideas that lie at the heart of this book. While I cannot argue against their inclusion on artistic grounds (they are, after all, the consequences of the speculative premises established), I find the way that the characters - and RJS himself by extension - respond to these are highly questionable from a moral standpoint.

This is the first book by Sawyer that I've read in a few years, and I'm sad to see the rather sharp turn his style has taken. I think I'll be rereading much earlier works before I try a new one again.

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## Tim Hicks says

This is the 22nd Sawyer novel I have read, and I rated most of them A in my records. This one's a B-minus or C-plus.

There's a HEAP of interesting research behind this, and I don't blame Sawyer for thinking "there's a novel in this!" But I am left with the feeling that he bogged down several times, struggled, and eventually just forced it to be a novel against the flow of narrativium. It just isn't credible.

There are many individual pieces that are not in themselves incredible. They have research behind them, and Sawyer makes sure we know it. But they are stitched together into a plot that makes me think of a bunch of square plates, each stacked overlapping so far that it NEARLY falls off. By the end the tower is 200 feet tall, and don't sneeze!

Menno's reactions throughout are just not credible. Each one is explained, but I just don't buy it, unless he was on heavy drugs the whole time. Kayla and Victoria and several others are just too convenient: just the right person in the right place at the right time.

There's one key event - (view spoiler) - that is very dramatic but seems to slide right into "OK, while I'm being stitched up and thinking about what just happened, I'm going to consider the consequences of Maranov's seminal 2004 paper on the psychosocial implications of soundproofed interview rooms."

The wider social, er, events that bring us to the final crisis are a BIG stretch, but not entirely implausible. I'd have liked a better explanation of why THIS was the time the situation inevitably had to spin out of control.

Our protagonist is a jerk, as many have noted - but I had no problem with that. Makes the story more interesting, and as we see it allows more range in plot development.

I'm Canadian, and up to a point I like references that remind us the author is One Of Us too, whether the Us is Canadians, musicians, geeks or whatever. But too many authors overdo it, and Sawyer has done that this time, say I as I sit here overlooking the Fraser River, not far from that bridge across Brunette Creek, you know, the one city councillor Jxxx Kxxx got so upset about when its closure made her late for that softball tournament but as a result she met the mayor having an ice cream cone at Anny's, and as they walked and talked he tripped over that wonky piece of sidewalk, you know the one, right by the nail salon, eh?

So many interesting ideas. So much "say what? A TUNING FORK?" even before the big payoff, when the world falls apart, the centre cannot hold, and they did WHAT? with What? The whole WORLD, all at once? Give me a BREAK!

This ending falls just short of Superman reversing time by spinning Earth backwards.

It's carefully worked out, using details from all over the book and neatly knitting them together. But for me, it's codswallop.

But then, as a Q3 like you, I'd think that, wouldn't I?

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## Joe Karpierz says

QUANTUM NIGHT is Robert J. Sawyer's 23rd science fiction novel. Throughout all those novels and all those years, Sawyer has explored any number of far ranging ideas, sometimes a good number of them in one book (some of his novels have so many different ideas in play it's sometimes tough to keep up with them all, let alone figure out how they all play into the particular story he is telling). One of his favorite topics to explore is the nature of consciousness, and Sawyer returns to that subject in a novel that reminds the reader of some of those earlier idea filled novels. From the idea a person can't be convicted of a crime because that may just be his (or her) nature, to the saying that a person's "lights are on, but no one is home" being a central theme to the book, Sawyer has the reader's head spinning from the opening pages. And it takes the thought that "you can't change human nature" and turns it completely on its ear.

Jim Marchuk has developed a technique for identifying the psychopaths in our midst. There are other techniques, but his appears to not only support the others but is 100% objective and accurate. Marchuk is called to appear as an expert witness in a murder trial; the defense claims that because the accused was "made that way" - that is, a psychopath - he cannot be found guilty of the crime (this is an idea that is not new, and appears here as a result of the mammoth amount of research that Sawyer has done for this novel. His method has determined that the defendant is indeed a psychopath; that is not in question. What started out as a cross-examination of the method turns into a cross-examination of Marchuk, the end result being that he has not only lost 6 months out of his life, but during that 6 months (he finds out later) he has done some pretty gruesome acts.

Not long after his day in court, Marchuk is contacted by an old girlfriend he had during that dark six month interval. Kayla is a quantum physicist. She and a colleague have discovered that the consciousness is quantum in nature, and that there are three states of consciousness: the philosopher's zombie or p-zed (the state where the lights are on and no one is home), the psychopath, and what the novel ends up calling the cwcs (quicks) - conscious with conscience. Each of the three is a actually a quantum state that is an indicator of a quantum entanglement in the brain (it's at this point that I think I'd better stop trying to explain the science here and let you read the novel for yourself, and after you do that take a good hard look at all the non-fiction reading that Sawyer has laid out at the end of the book, and although it might not be a bad idea to explain what a p-zed is, I don't want to take up half the review doing an info dump) and it turns out that an outside force can induce the brain to change quantum states.

However, there are several questions that are central to the story: why did Marchuk lose those 6 months, why is Kayla's brother in a coma, and why is there an increasing amount of violence occurring all over the world that appears to be somewhat unstoppable? The answers to the first two questions are handled relatively easily and in a straightforward fashion. The third one is a tad more difficult to come to grips with, and the solution is one that will change the makeup of the entirety of humanity.

QUANTUM NIGHT is certainly a story of ideas, but it is more than that. It's a story of how those ideas influence the people in the story, and how it makes them think of their own as well as all of humanity's morality. These are real people, and although they are facing very earth shattering concepts and ideas that will change the way they think of each other and the rest of the human race, they react in what I feel are very realistic ways to a crisis that threatens to take down a good portion of civilization.

It's probably reasonable to talk about how the science is presented in QUANTUM NIGHT. This is the third book I've read in the last several months which contains a great deal of complex science to make the story

work. The first was Kim Stanley Robinson's AURORA, and the second was Neal Stephenson's SEVENEVES. The first two novels have long stretches of infodumps - pages upon pages upon pages of infodumps. Robinson goes into gory detail telling the reader exactly why a generational starship will not work. Stephenson loves teaching his readers about orbital mechanics. Sawyer, on the other hand, weaves the science into the story so that while you're vaguely aware that you're getting a lecture in quantum mechanics (for example), it's not boring and tedious. It's part of the natural conversation of the story, and the characters react to it in realistic ways. As much as I love a good infodump, I really got tired of the orbital mechanics in SEVENEVES; my eyes were rolling so much I felt they would spin out of my head. And while it could be argued that Sawyer treads dangerously close to the "As you know, Bob" method of the infodump, I don't think he ever crosses that line. The conversations between the characters in which the science is explained to the reader is believable and interesting.

Oh, one more thing. If you start walking down the street or sitting in your car at a stop light looking at people and wondering if they're psychopaths, p-zeds, or quicks, Sawyer has done his job. He's making you think about the world around you in different ways. And that's what good science fiction - like QUANTUM NIGHT - does.

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## **Wanda says**

I have mixed feelings about this book. On one hand, there is a good, tense plot. On the other hand, there is an awful lot of philosophizing. Now, I'm the girl who sat through two lectures in a university philosophy class and then dropped that thing like a hot potato. It seemed to me like a bunch of pointless wrangling over things that a person should be sensible enough to know to do or not do without some complex philosophical position. I've since learned that not everyone is that sensible and that some people really do require being told to do the right thing.

So if you are interested in Utilitarian philosophy and in exploring questions about how many people have a conscience & how many psychopaths wander through our world, and you also have an abiding love of quantum physics, this will be a 5 star novel for you.

Me, I appreciated some of the details outside the main plot points. I live in Calgary and we currently have the first Muslim mayor in Canada, Naheed Nenshi. He's a pretty popular mayor (and his religion was never an issue during elections). Sawyer is writing about the near future (2020) and has Nenshi becoming Prime Minister of Canada, something that I could truly see coming true. Heck, I'd vote for him. And Nenshi is an avowed nerd, so I would imagine that he has read this book.

The political background to the action was fun—how many books do you read where the United States invades Canada? And then Russia's Putin and the American president (tactfully not named after any current figures) get into a power struggle, with Putin being willing to "liberate" Canada? Pretty ironic, after Crimea, yeah?

I often feel like I'm being held at emotional arms-length by Sawyer's writing. Rob Sawyer is an intellectual guy and I completely appreciate the amount of research he did (how many novels have a bibliography at the end?) and the complex issues being dealt with, but I never really found myself caring a great deal. Finishing the book was driven by the mechanics of the story, not by an emotional need to see how things ended.

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## Stacey Kondla says

I received an ARC of Quantum Night through my work and was quite happy about it! I took it home and basically read it in two sittings. Without summarizing the book, I will say that I was happy with the character development throughout the story and that the book read more like a psychological thriller than science fiction. It was thought provoking and kept me turning the pages.

And now I am really paranoid about who might be the psychopaths around me.... thank you Robert J. Sawyer.....thank you.....

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## Grampus says

**\*Nerd Alert\*** - sort of like a spoiler alert to let you know that if you don't want to read nerd stuff, please stop reading now.

I thought I'd try something new. I've been having a hard time being moved by anything I've been reading lately. As a result, I have not been writing any reviews. So, I thought I would try to apply a rating to the book as I move through it at 10% intervals. I already track how many pages I've read and my progress through the book and therefore, I thought this should not be hard to do. Yeah, yeah, I'm a data geek, but playing around in Excel with my Goodreads database actually translates into creative ways to view data in my job. Alright, and it's fun too.

From the chart, you can easily see that this was the print edition and although I was rating on a 10-point scale to pick up nuances as to how I felt at that point in the book. I then converted the score back to a Goodreads scale by dividing the average by 2. I know, I know, nerd stuff.

The chart shows that the book started out with so much promise with a great concept about being able to identify psychopaths in the population and started heading downhill from there with temporary lift about halfway through the book with a less than stellar finish.

One of the things that really annoyed me throughout the book was the continual unnecessary negative references to U.S. Presidents, which really impacted my impression at the 80% mark.

On the positive side, I got to learn about such exotic places as Saskatoon Canada (seriously, I don't think I've ever read a story with that as one of the featured places) and the possibilities of what could happen if we could really identify psychopaths so easily. Would it be a new way to discriminate or would it help us identify prevent future tragedies?

In the end, a 3-star rating – which means “I liked it” on the Goodreads scale, but just barely as the overall average translated to 3.15.

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## **C. A. says**

I will read anything by Robert J. Sawyer. And I say that even though I consider a lot of his work uneven, and many of his characters and settings repetitive. But the ideas that run through his stories, and the relentless examination of how those ideas might affect the world keep me thinking about his books long after I've put the book down. "Quantum Night," which I received from NetGalley and devoured in a day, is no different, and it is chillingly relevant.

The recap of the plot is above and I don't want to give any spoilers. The general idea is that years ago Jim Marchuk participated in a psychology experiment that caused him to somehow lose six months of his life. Discovering what he did during that period and what ramifications those discoveries mean for the rest of humanity is the plot, but that's not the most interesting part.

What Sawyer does is find a topic he's interested in and research it thoroughly, then he extrapolates real-world meanings to their logical extremes and tosses some Canadian, Star-Trek-quoting academics at it to see what happens.

In this case, it's what makes someone psychopathic and how many psychopaths there are in the world. Turns out, a lot. There are even more people who basically spend their lives on autopilot, reacting to input in predictable manners proscribed by family, community, school and peers. The people who are aware and have consciences are the distinct minority. Anyone who's watched mobs tear up towns on the news, followed the 2016 presidential race, or even read a day's worth of their friends Facebook posts will find this book unnerving as hell. And those mental states can be changed...

Sawyer writes about science and ethics, and he does so in a way that makes esoteric subjects perfectly understandable. The characters were interesting, the plot is good even if there are a few too many contrivances moving it along, and while the book certainly doesn't need a sequel I'd love to read about what happens next.

Highly recommended. You'll be talking about this with your family and friends -- or at least some of them -- for years.

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