



## Triggers

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On the eve of a secret military operation, an assassin's bullet strikes President Seth Jerrison. He is rushed to the hospital, where surgeons struggle to save his life—and where Professor Ranjip Singh is experimenting with a device that can erase traumatic memories.

Then a terrorist bomb detonates. In the operating room, the president suffers cardiac arrest. He has a near-death experience—but the memories that flash through Jerrison's mind are not his own. The electromagnetic pulse generated by the bomb amplified and scrambled Professor Singh's equipment, allowing a random group of people to access one another's minds.

One of those people can retrieve the President Jerrison's memories—including classified information regarding the upcoming military mission, which, if revealed, could cost countless lives. But the task of determining who has switched memories with whom is a daunting one—particularly when some of the people involved have reason to lie...

## Triggers Details

Date : Published April 2012 by Penguin (first published March 23rd 2012)

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Author : Robert J. Sawyer

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## From Reader Review Triggers for online ebook

### Stephanie says

This book has all the trademarks of a Sawyer novel: a very plausible premise, great characters across a wide spectrum, and a fast-paced plot. I especially

Like the way he addresses the pros and cons of being able to read someone's memories. The dynamics of knowing the most personal thoughts of either a stranger or someone you know is explored in depth. Cultural, racial, and ethnic differences make for compelling reading. I was loving this book immensely until the ending blew for me.

While the ending is in some ways fantastic, it is too fantastic. It requires a major leap from the science of the rest of the story and is just too neat a way to end the book. It leaves us hanging on how these characters would have handled their life going forward and how they dealt with the some major events in a more logical fashion.

I know many people will love this ending but in reading the reviews, many others agree with me. It is still worth a read for the Sawyer fans and others but be prepared for a less than satisfying ending - a first for all the Sawyer books I have read.

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### Mike says

Until about the last 50 pages, I would have rated this book much higher (probably a 4 of 5), but I admit I hated the ending and felt it ruined much of the book.

In a nutshell, a freak accident causes a chain of people to be able to access the memory of the next person in the chain -- A can read B's memories, B can read C's, etc. Most of the novel deals with the ramifications of this: what does privacy mean, how problematic is it if you now know classified information you aren't cleared for, how do you cope with remembering another's racism or abuse (either victim or perpetrator), etc.

Things I liked about this book:

- Interesting theme. A lot of Robert Sawyer's stand alone novels posit a single technological change in the near term future, and explore the ramifications of this change primarily through attention on a small focal group of characters. This largely follows that pattern.
- Complete characters. A few characters are essentially placeholders, but several are well developed, conflicted individuals cast in shades of gray.

Things I did not like about this book:

- Mystical spiritual ending out of nowhere. I felt the ending was both saccharine and cheesy, and the rules changed abruptly and with very little internal consistency. I don't like that.
- Lack of internal consistency. The change posited in the book was caused by a freak event, but then suddenly mutates without following any of the established rules of how it worked.

Things I did not like about this book:

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### **Timothy Reynolds says**

A terrific political scientific terrorist thriller with a completely unexpected ending. This would make a great film!

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### **Denise says**

I won a copy of *Triggers* from Penguin Books, through the Goodreads First Reads giveaway program.

The technology imagined by Robert J. Sawyer inevitably causes me to think "I never could have thought of that!" *Triggers* provoked that thought a few times...

When a terrorist attack coincides with an experimental medical treatment designed to erase traumatic memories, the result is remarkable: a random group of people end up sharing memories. And since one of the group members is the U.S. President, someone from the group suddenly has access to confidential, national security matters.

More than half of *Triggers* takes place within 24 hours of the event, providing ample opportunity for the reader to witness how individuals in the group react to having a second set of memories. As we've come to expect from Sawyer, the varied responses raise broader questions about individual vs. group rights, racism, politics, relationships and more.

As the situation evolves, the pace of the story accelerates, to the point where the ending is almost a blur. While the resolution is satisfyingly hopeful, I would have appreciated a slightly slower tempo, so that Sawyer could have done a more complete job highlighting the individual and societal implications. Instead, I'm left pondering these on my own. But perhaps that was Sawyer's intent.

Featuring a large cast of characters, an interesting blend of tempos and on-going surprises, *Triggers* will be a welcome addition to the bookshelf of any science fiction fan. Thanks for the good read, Mr. Sawyer.

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### **Sean Randall says**

I utterly enjoyed this novel, and it was very nearly a 5 star read. But as with something like *Flashforward* the overwhelmingly transhumanic ending ruined it a little for me.

Other than that, the characters were fascinating, and there aren't many who could've so deftly handled the memory mismanagement. I think the most fascinating mental swap for me was Tarasov reading Dora and the trauma from her childhood, which rang particularly strong for me having a very young daughter of my own.

Nikki's surgery was also extraordinary to observe, and this is only a small portion of the genius Sawyer's nailed in this book.

Some have noted the way in which this book is almost written to be turned into a movie. I sort of saw that; although there were several cliffhanger moments which made me think series more than film. Nonetheless, it's not harshly written or shallow. If the ending was a bit more my taste, assuredly a 5 star title.

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### **Jaclyn says**

Very interesting book. The story starts off as a fairly standard thriller -- people's memories are linked in a chain of unknown length, and a Secret Service agent must find out who has access to the memories of the US President. Sawyer's fascination with science is prevalent, particularly in the character of a Canadian doctor who chronicles each new development in the phenomenon almost gleefully. It was difficult to get into the story at this point, simply because there were so many characters, and the stories felt so disjointed.

Then Sawyer's optimistic view of the potential science holds for humanity takes over, and the story becomes more than a standard thriller. The linking of people's minds helps increase understanding and remove prejudice. Of the large cast of characters in the beginning, selfish, unlikable ones are shunted off, and those that remain part of the story have opportunities to do something good with their access to another's memories. The story, fittingly enough, itself becomes more cohesive.

Sawyer has a tendency to moralize, and a lot in this story is much more feel-good than I would normally like. However, it's hard to argue with such earnest idealism, such genuine belief in humanity's inherent goodness and potential for connectivity.

3 stars for the beginning of the book, bumped up to 3.5/4 for the almost childlike idealism that I, at least, find welcome.

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### **Lisa says**

(originally reviewed on Starmetal Oak Reviews)

Triggers really intrigued me through its premise: the fact that a group of people, through some kind of freak event, are able to access another person's memory. One of the person affected by it is the President of the United States, who winds up in the hospital where this all goes down after he is almost killed by a would-be assassin. Someone is now able to access the President's memories and Secret Service agent Susan Dawson.

There were many things about Triggers I enjoyed, although overall I would say I didn't feel as into it as I would have liked. The science of memories was fascinating and seeing how the group's newfound ability to access another's memories was just plain cool. There's physics and biology which Sawyer really manages to explain in a compelling and approachable way. Also, his writing is deft at creating the right amount of suspense for this kind of action-packed novel.

Another great thing about Triggers was the topical nature. It's set just a bit in the future but not so much that things are unrecognizable. The United States has been attacked several times by terrorists and even the

President had almost been killed. This creates a fast-paced political thriller that has many cinematic qualities, with the more apparent plot being the mystery of who has the President's memories.

My only reservations are caused by what I believe is the fact I didn't connect too well with the characters. There's many, many characters and we get to experience the discovery of memories as they do, which makes for a lot of background information. The only character I really came to connect to was Susan Dawson and that's because I felt sympathetic about her loyalty to the President.

Overall, *Triggers* was fascinating and well-written, but it wasn't enough to make this a must-read. It would definitely be a great read for those who are motivated by the mystery of the memory phenomena itself, or those who are particularly interested in science fiction political thrillers. There are twists and turns and I didn't really see the end coming, which is a good thing. I would definitely read more Sawyer in the future, and I particularly would like to finish his *WWW* series.

*Review copy of this book was provided by the publisher.*

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### **Lisa says**

[I received a free advance reading copy of this book through a Goodreads First Read giveaway. ]

Oh Robert J. Sawyer. I want to love your books. I usually love the ideas (*Flash Forward* was so creative a concept!), but something in the execution always frustrates me. The characters always seem so flat, and yet I can feel you trying (too hard) to make them real. You have a story to tell me and sometimes I swear I can feel you bonking me over the head with your plot.

Things that bothered me about this one:

- I hate reading about the US President. It's so overdone and can't help but be a cliche no matter what you do.
- a main character that is a Canadian Sikh is different and interesting, but don't keep throwing how interesting and unique it is in my face. By page 150 you can probably just refer to your character by name, rather than referring to him as "the Canadian" or "the Sikh". This is an example of trying to make a character interesting via characteristics instead of depth.

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### **Chantal Boudreau says**

I love science fiction, but I rarely read it. The reason I rarely read it is because I don't like the way most people write it. There are exceptions to the rule. I'm a big fan of Arthur C. Clarke; *Rendezvous with Rama* and *Childhood's End* are two of my favourites. I also adored Asimov's *I, Robot*, and enjoyed science fiction by Anne McCaffrey, Orson Scott Card and Robert Heinlein, but these are the exceptions. I find the majority of science fiction writers who take a hard science approach to their stories turn the science into the protagonist or antagonist of the tale, rather than allowing that privilege to one or more of their characters. It accentuates the science, but makes the story feel cold and analytical. It loses its heart. Thankfully, Robert J. Sawyer is not one of those writers, and that's why I continue to enjoy his books.

*Triggers* is another one of those delights. The science is woven into the core of the plotline and his research is obvious, but his characters are not just part of the backdrop presented to highlight the science. There is a

strong human element to his tale, and he uses the scientific anomaly in the story to touch on such topics as racism, domestic and sexual abuse, professional ethics, and the conflict that sometimes occurs between human rights and the need for national security. I was very impressed by the multiple story threads he had entwined around the central theme, none of them more significant than another, and all of them tied to the science of his fiction. I also like the way he plays with a few extraneous ideas, like the thought processes of those on the autism spectrum (something that impacts me directly) and unusual but notable occurrences like “nominative determinism” (which I just happened to be discussing with my co-workers a couple of days before I read that section of the book, coincidentally.)

I've always been fascinated with the concepts of telepathy and the science of memory, so this book probably ranks as one of my favourites by Mr. Sawyer, along with Rollback and The Terminal Experiment (the first book of his I ever read.) I would definitely recommend it as both an enlightening and an entertaining read.

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### **Shane says**

I read that Robert Sawyer excels in the SF/mystery crossover novel, that his plots are grounded in current reality and are not strung out in distant planets, and that he often explores the intersection of science and religion, and contemplates consciousness. For all these reasons I picked up this book which was blurbed as a plot against America replete with assassins, terrorists and science experiments gone wrong.

And I wasn't disappointed, for the mystery novel was obvious: the US President is shot by an insider, and the White House is destroyed by a bomb. The science fiction takes over when a memory altering experiment being carried out in a nearby Washington hospital, the same one that the injured president is rushed to, is disturbed by an electromagnetic pulse emanating from the White House explosion. Those in the vicinity of the experiment start seeing other people's memories in addition to their own. The linkages are not reciprocal but linear, and the hunt is on to find out who has access to the President's memories, for that would be tantamount to a national security breach, particularly as the President has recently given the go ahead for an international military operation of an unprecedented scale.

The part that didn't work for me was that there were too many characters, many rendered as cartoon cut-outs in order to move the twisting and turning plot along. It was hard to keep track of who was linked to whom memory-wise, and the implications thereof. And yet this unnatural situation poses ethical questions regarding privacy, forcible confinement, campaign trail lies, and relationships, all that are boldly explored. As a result of the linked memories, new associations are formed and others are fractured, and everyone is on edge for knowing too much. And as the days pass, this addling of memories only gets worse and more complex.

Sawyer, a Canadian, who seems at ease in his US scene-setting, makes his sentiments known about his country's prime minister through the mouths of his characters. For example, the fictional US President describes the Canadian PM as “a weaselly petty man.” Conversely, the author absolves the former of his campaign trail lies by saying, “an evil politician lies all the time, a good one picks and chooses when to lie.”

Much has been said about the bizarre ending of this book which vaults it out of its mystery trajectory. And yet, given that the novel is categorized as science fiction, I think this dislocation—just like the memory dislocation—is necessary to return the book to its science fiction roots and to the premise that “while an individual can do damage on an increasing scale with evolving technology, the collective desire for good can negate it.” However, with this departure, I was also left wondering why the fast-paced plot twists of the

earlier mystery novel were needed when the author was trying to establish a totally different premise?

I was also left with a further question, which all good science fiction is supposed to do, and that was: “why would we all want to be the same on this planet, all knowing and all understanding? How boring a place would that be, and why would we need so many of us, all of whom would be clones of each other?” Perhaps that will be the dilemma to be solved in Sawyer’s next novel, if he hasn’t addressed it already.

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### **Alex Telander says**

Award-winning author Robert J. Sawyer’s new novel, *Triggers*, is a little different to what readers might be used to from this science fiction writer, as the genre he’s used to writing in some ways becomes secondary to the main story, which is more about the relationships and interactions between a great cast of characters. The science fiction is still very much there as part of the plot, but by the end you’re caring more about the people than the science.

In a time not too distant from our own, there is a world ravaged by terrorism and fear. The United States is one of its most vulnerable victims, the events of September 11, 2011 merely a precursor to more devastating attacks on other cities such as San Francisco, Chicago and Philadelphia. With the development of a new kind of bomb that remains undetected, its destruction is unmatched, and yet it isn’t nuclear; its fallout emits an electromagnetic pulse, and by then it’s too late.

President Seth Jerrison begins a very important speech at the Lincoln Memorial, as he mentally prepares for the ultimate attack aimed at those who have caused the most harm; a devastating message equal to that made during World War II that brought it to its abrupt end. Barely into the speech, an assassination attempt is made and Jerrison is shot. He is rushed to the hospital and immediately treated, barely surviving a traumatic injury. At the same hospital is Dr. Ranjip Singh who is performing a unique experiment on a patient to see if he can halt the man’s post-traumatic stress dreams and episodes; the device is supposed to erase these memories.

But then another terrorist attack takes place, destroying most of the White House, just as Singh begins his experiment. The EM pulse hits and something very strange happens to all the people located within a certain distance of this device. They begin having memories; only not their own, but other people’s memories all within this specific area. It begins a chain of events that will eventually affect every person on the entire planet.

In *Triggers*, Robert J. Sawyer should first be applauded for a wonderfully diverse cast, as readers are immediately introduced to a powerful female secret service agent, an impressive African-American female doctor who is the president’s primary physician, and the interesting Dr. Singh, who is actually Canadian, which is Sawyer’s own nationality. The book juggles an impressive cast of characters, which Sawyer does excellent job of keeping both straight and complex. The weak point of the book to some will be the ending, nevertheless, it is a powerful novel that plays around with some great science fiction, but ultimately explores the lives of a number of interesting people and how they would react in a given situation, if they started sharing each other’s memories and thoughts.

Originally written on March 17, 2012 ©Alex C. Telander.

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### **Louis Prosperi says**

Another good SF novel by Robert J. Sawyer. I really enjoyed this book (I read the serialized version in Analog on my Kindle), but there were a few loose ends I would have liked to have seen addressed. Nothing major at all, but some plot threads here and there seemed to be left dangling and unresolved.

Like all of Sawyer's book, this one is very thought-provoking, and does a great job of exploring many of the implications of its premise, in this case, that of people having other people linked to our memories. These implications aren't only those of a personal nature, but also legal and societal implications of a shared event. If a group of people are changed by an event, what rights to the individuals involved have with regard to reversing and/or preserving the change brought about by that event? Do the desires of the many outweigh those of the few?

I also expected a little more science and exposition, especially towards the end. While I appreciate authors leaving it up to their readers to figure out what happens in their stories without excessive exposition, at times I think this story could have used a little more. Compared to Sawyer's last few novels, this one had a noticeably smaller amount of science. That's not a bad thing, necessarily, but it was something that stood out to me.

The ending actually took a turn that I wasn't fully expecting at the time, though in hindsight, it shouldn't have surprised me. I would have preferred for the events at the end to take a little more time to develop. It almost seemed as though the author was writing to a word limit rather than giving the story the room it needed to be resolved, but that could be my affinity for neatly and cleanly resolved stories.

Though my comments might suggest that I didn't like this, I want to clarify that I really enjoyed this, and couldn't wait for each installment. While not my favorite Sawyer novel (I think that title belongs to *Rollback*), this is still a good story with the same thought-provoking themes you would expect from Robert J. Sawyer, and I recommend it to anyone who enjoys good science fiction.

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### **Michael Smith says**

I was so intrigued by the blurbs for this novel that, upon starting it, I was threatening to quit my job just so I could have uninterrupted time to finish it. And in fact I did finish it in about three sessions over the next day. However, despite some fascinating twists here and there, the novel seems to spin out of control into a fuzzy, unbelievable, feel-good ending that doesn't feel emotionally supported by the structure of the novel: a quick and easy resolution, a *deux ex machina* that resolves all character problems, and all world problems for that matter, at once. The novel strikes me as being written in a cardboard-flavored bestseller-ese that I don't recall the author employing in *Flashforward* or the Neanderthal series, with a correct cast of two-dimensional multicultural characters, and so my final take on this reading experience was that I was glad to have seen what it was about but that I wouldn't necessarily recommend it to anyone. It is really odd that a bestseller can be a page turner and yet leave you wondering at the end why you invested so much time and energy in it.

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### **Bryan Schmidt says**

So strongly written, great characters, great suspense, great plot, but just fell apart in the last few chapters. For me, it totally jumped the shark. I just couldn't buy the ending. It seemed like Sawyer pushed the limits of credibility. Even in the context of the world in which he tells it, it just wasn't believable, and that's too bad. Because up until that point, he totally had me. I was turning pages and couldn't stop. I was on the edge of my seat. I was even hoping it was the start of a trilogy, but ultimately, it appears Sawyer struggled to find a way to keep it going and that the ending suffered for it. Sawyer has deservedly won all the big awards and many more. He is one of the finest writers working in science fiction today, but read *Flashforward* and the *WWW* books, if you want to see him at his best. This, for me, doesn't live up to his usual, at least at the end, and endings do matter. Excellent craft except for that one thing but it spoiled it for me.

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### **Chip says**

Robert Sawyer constantly amazes me - he's one of the most creative speculative fiction writers around, constantly coming up with wonderful "what if" scenarios (although admittedly his characterization skills are at best acceptable). And *Triggers*, for the first two-thirds or so, was typical "wow that's an interesting idea/situation" Sawyer. Unfortunately, and atypically for him, I thought he ended up taking the story to a very disjointed and disappointing resolution. Four stars (well, maybe) for the first part, but the last third was just bad, on multiple levels - *deus ex machina*, jumping the rails of the plot line, and general silliness.

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