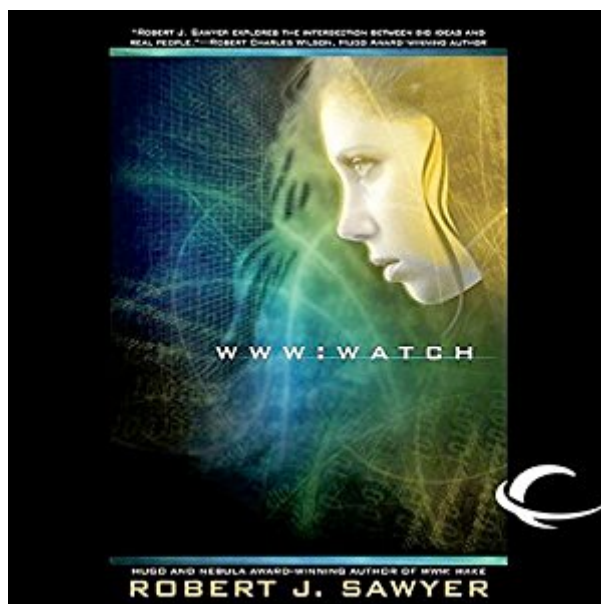


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WWW: Watch



Synopsis

Award-winning author Robert J. Sawyer continues his "wildly though- provoking" science fiction saga of a sentient World Wide Web. Webmind is an emerging consciousness that has befriended Caitlin Decter and grown eager to learn about her world. But Webmind has also come to the attention of WATCH-the secret government agency that monitors the Internet for any threat to the United States-and they're fully aware of Caitlin's involvement in its awakening. WATCH is convinced that Webmind represents a risk to national security and wants it purged from cyberspace. But Caitlin believes in Webmind's capacity for compassion-and she will do anything and everything necessary to protect her friend. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

WWW: Watch is the second novel of a trilogy about an artificial intelligence, or consciousness that emerges from the World Wide Web. In the previous novel, WWW: Wake, Catlin Decter, a brilliant 15 year old blind girl is given sight through experimental technology in the form of an implant that interprets visual signals correctly and allows her to see (in her left eye at least). Through this device she discovers a presence in the Web that starts to gain greater and greater cognitive abilities, which grows as the second novel progresses. She dubs it Webmind. In Watch, we watch as Webmind not only develops cognitive abilities exponentially, but through the help of Catlin begins to develop its sense of ethics and, without being too maudlin, an understanding of "the meaning of life." This novel is primarily about this development, along with government agencies trying to figure out how to shut Webmind down, fearing it will become so powerful it will destroy mankind. While I have greatly

enjoyed these novels so far, and the second one is even better than the first, which is unusual for a middle novel of a trilogy, sometimes I find the interactions between the characters to be a bit unbelievable. They seem scripted more for a Grade B movie than the way people really interact with each other. And when the characters are mouthpieces for the author to pontificate a point of view on consciousness, ethics and other scientific theories, the interactions just don't ring true, even though the characters are supposed to be geniuses at math and physics. And I wonder a bit about the lost thread about the Chinese hacker that appears in Wake. I wonder if Sawyer had abandoned that tread, or if it will somehow reappear in the next novel. This is a good and interesting trilogy so far and very much worth reading.

The best thing about Robert J. Sawyer's books are that they are truly about something. This book isn't just some excuse to have the internet gain self-awareness ... instead, it's a deep analysis of what makes people (be they geek, bully, computer, or chimpanzee-bonobo hybrid) choose an ethical course over the alternative. WWW: WATCH is a middle book in the trilogy. In WWW: WAKE (the first book), blind teenager Caitlin Decter gained sight and discovered the existence of a developing consciousness in the World Wide Web. This Webmind, as she calls it, begins communicating with her ... and that's where the second book picks up. Caitlin has to come to terms with suddenly seeing a world that she's only known through touch while also dealing with the fallout from Webmind. Fortunately, she has help from her friends and family. Less fortunate is the fact that the American government perceives Webmind as a potential threat, especially when it gains the ability to almost effortlessly bypass password security. The government decides that it needs to be terminated, a task that is far easier said than done. This isn't an unreasonable decision, because it is clear that Webmind (at least initially) lacks any sort of morality at all ... but this, it turns out, is a good thing, because that means it gets to choose how to behave, instead of being guided by instincts which may sway it toward bad behavior. And, as the book makes clear, we all, as conscious beings, have the ability to make this choice. The subjects of morality and ethics, in contexts as varied as teenage relationships, suicide prevention, and personal privacy are explored from the perspectives of game theory, evolution, and religion. And if you're not interested in any of that brainy stuff about human nature, the story itself stands out as a great read in its own right. I, for one, will definitely make the choice to read the third installment when it comes out ... and look forward to it!

This trilogy has been one of the best reads of my whole life. It touches on lots of my favorite topics and my real world experience. I am a software engineer, network engineer, and mathematician. All

3 are relevant to this. If I had commissioned someone to write something tailored to exactly my tastes and background they couldn't have done a better job. If you like hard SF you owe it to yourself to read this. The worst part is the sleep I lost because I just couldn't put these books down.

Let me preface this review by saying that Sawyer is my favorite scifi writer today and that I found the first book in this trilogy to be excellent. However, much to my dismay this book was difficult to get through. Caitlin has recently gained sight through an implant behind one of her eyes. Her new friend, the Webmind is starting to evolve. Meanwhile a group of government scientists have detected the Webmind and want to destroy it before it becomes too powerful to be destroyed. Caitlin eventually lets her parents know about the Webmind and they are convinced that it is someone on the Internet pulling a prank until Caitlin's father tests it out. Eventually they are convinced and are fascinated with the Webmind like it is an additional child. Overlayed on this tale is the story about Hobo, the intelligent chimp/bonobo crossbreed. Hobo starts to get violent towards the woman who is responsible for him and the scientists have to decide what to do with him. Meanwhile, through Dr. Kuroda, the Webmind is able to view more than text files on the internet and branches out to sound and video files. Eventually, the Webmind witnesses a teen suicide through the net. Caitlin becomes furious at it because it didn't intervene. There comes a point where Sawyer hints that the Webmind will be to Caitlin like the computer implant that he introduced in the Hominid series. Some of the drawbacks to this book are that you really needed to read the first book to understand what is going on and that the book drags. The deep feelings that the reader developed for Caitlin in the first book seem to be lacking here.

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