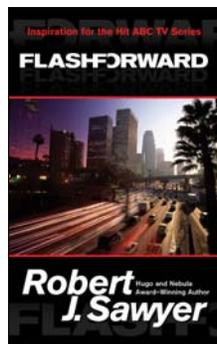


FlashForward

Robert J. Sawyer

A physics experiment goes awry, causing the consciousness of everyone on Earth to jump ahead 21 years for a period of two minutes. What are the real consequences of foreknowledge of the future? Can we change the future, or is it as immutable as the past? *FlashForward* combines the intimately human with the grandly cosmic.



TOR BOOKS, New York

US\$7.99 • Cdn\$9.99 • ISBN 978-0-7653-6383-0

The following questions should stimulate an interesting group discussion. Please note that they reveal much of the novel's plot; to preserve your reading pleasure, please don't look at these questions until after you've finished the book.

1. Because Lloyd Simcoe doesn't want to feel responsible for all the death and destruction that occurs during the Flashforward, he's desperate to believe that the past, present, and future are fixed; if they are fixed, then what happened was inevitable and therefore not truly Lloyd's fault. Theo Procopides, meanwhile, discovering that he will be dead in 21 years, desperately wishes to believe that the future is *not* fixed. Do you believe the future is fixed, or can it be changed? Is Lloyd to blame for Tamiko's death?

2. If you were in the same situation as Lloyd and Michiko, knowing that 21 years down the road you

would no longer be together, would you go ahead with the planned wedding? If you were in the same situation as Theo's brother, Dim, and discovered that your dreams were never going to come true, what would you do?

3. In the novel, people had no choice about seeing their lives in the future. If you were given a choice, would you choose to have a glimpse of what the future hold for you? How would you react if, like Theo, you discovered that you would be dead 21 years in the future?

4. Reverse the premise: What one piece of information from today would you want to tell yourself 21 years ago? Job advice? A hot stock tip? Something about your interpersonal relationships? What truth about your life as it is today would you have been grateful to know 21 years ago?

5. In the novel, author Sawyer says the majority of the human race would decide that they want to have the CERN experiment reproduced. Granted the insights into the future are fascinating, but given all the carnage that occurred the first time, do you think it's realistic that most people would be willing to try again? What could go wrong with Project Klaatu (the attempt to make sure no one gets hurt the second time the experiment is run)?

6. *FlashForward* is full of scientists. Did they seem like real people to you? Could you identify with them, even if you, yourself, are not a scientist? Why or why not?

7. What, if anything, is Theo's *hamartia* — his fatal flaw? Do all of the characters have a fatal flaw? What is your fatal flaw? Does knowing what our flaws are help us? Or are we blind to our own flaws, and can only see them in others?

8. Theo Procopides survives at the end, even though he had no vision. In essence, his future is now a

blank slate. Do you accept his sudden need for family, for someone to fill that void? What do you think the future holds for Theo and Michiko?

9. Lloyd is offered immortality — but with strings attached. Would you take the opportunity to live forever? What if your spouse could not live forever with you? Did you believe Lloyd's choice, turning down immortality in favor of living out the rest of a normal life with Doreen? What if you were the *only* immortal, and you outlived the rest of the human race — would you want to live forever even if it meant you would be all alone?

10. Young Jacob Horowitz makes his vision come true. At the end of the novel, he and Carly Tompkins are happily married with children. Did their relationship succeed *because* of their mutual visions? Would Lloyd Simcoe have said they were "fated" to be together?

Suggestions for Further Reading: The German philosopher Immanuel Kant claimed that the three fundamental problems of metaphysics are: Do we have free will? Is there life after death? And does God exist? Sawyer explores the first of these conundrums in this book. He tackles the second question in his Nebula Award-winning *The Terminal Experiment*. And number three is the topic of his *Calculating God*.

Robert J. Sawyer — "the dean of Canadian science fiction," according to the CBC — is one of only seven writers in history to win all three of the science-fiction field's top awards for best novel of the year: the Hugo (which he won for *Hominids*), the Nebula (which he won for *The Terminal Experiment*), and the John W. Campbell Memorial Award (which he won for *Mindscan*). The ABC TV series *FlashForward* is based on his novel. Visit his website at SFWRITER.COM.



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