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Transplanting his consciousness into an android body in order to escape death, Jake Sullivan falls in love with the android Karen, a situation that is further complicated when Jake's biological body takes hostages and demands its mind back.

Mindscan Details

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From Reader Review Mindscan for online ebook

Debbie says

What if you could exchange your faulty body for one that would never get sick, or age? You could keep all your memories, thoughts, etc. But you would have to send your old body to live out the rest of it's natural life in a nursing home on the dark side of the moon. What if a cure was then found for the terminal disease you had, and the old body wanted to come back?

Lots of questions to think about.

Navi says

A great read that really makes you question the meaning of personhood and consciousness!

Chazzbot says

I've read several of Robert Sawyer's SF novels, and they have all been consistently entertaining and thought-provoking. This novel is set in 2045, at a time when it has become possible to scan and store one's brain into a new, virtually indestructable android body.

Sawyer thoroughly explores the social and scientific implications of this development, following two characters: a novelist facing the physical frustrations of old age and a man in his late 30s who is genetically prone to strokes. These two characters meet and eventually fall in love, leading to complications in their respective familial and professional lives.

The novel is less a romance, however, than an exploration of the ideas behind such concepts as consciousness, retirement, personality, and the soul. Sawyer's plot mechanisms do become a bit formulaic near the climax of the novel, where the storyline is divided between a court proceeding on inheritance rights and a hostage crisis on the moon (where "retired" physical bodies are sent to die); however, the novel is so packed with fascinating ideas that I found the contrivances of the plot only mildly annoying.

The courtroom debates on the nature of individuality may remind Star Trek fans of similar discussions involving Lt. Data, but Sawyer, like many classic SF writers, grounds his story in plausible scientific developments and theories. While engaging you with the fate of his characters, Sawyer also delivers a compelling overview of consciousness theory (he even includes a bibliography at the end of the book).

This is a novel of ideas more than characters, but that shouldn't diminish one's enjoyment of the story. This is perfect summer fare for readers who enjoy some intellectual stimulation with their potboilers.

James Steele says

What happened to Calculating God happened to this book as well. Sawyer tried to build a story around some complex questions, and the only way he could was to have characters flat out ask them.

The basic premise of the story is illogical. Why the hell would anybody agree to copy their mind into a robotic body when they know it'll be the robot that gets to be immortal and not them!?! Nothing will change for them; they'll still be in their aging, frail bodies, so this procedure does nothing to help the biological person.

It made me wonder what Jacob expected. He knew ahead of time that he was copying his consciousness into a robotic body, and that he, himself, would not be in that body. I shook my head thinking you idiot, you knew this was going to happen, and it's your own damn fault you're in this mess now. It probably would've been easier to believe (and even more dramatic to debate) if the company destroyed the original, biological person as soon as the robotic one started up. Then they could've debated whether or not the copy is the same person, it would've been an even finer line to argue, and it would've given the characters reason to believe that they'd be the same person.

But this book isn't about the characters—in terms of actual story it's very thin. Mindscan is about the debate over what life and consciousness is. The story is an excuse to present the questions, and Sawyer couldn't think of a better way to present them than in a courtroom, which allowed him to ask the questions from both sides. I would've liked it to be presented in a story instead of orated in court.

I've always thought a courtroom trial is a cliché because Star Trek took this exact same question to court several times, ending with the same decide-for-yourself conclusion. (See ST-TNG: "The Measure of A Man," and ST-VOY: "Author, Author.") The book is not boring, for the questions it proposes are entertaining in their own right, but readers looking for a satisfying story will feel lost in an ocean of hair-splitting cross examinations. The bulk of the book is the cross examinations themselves, and very little becomes of them. There has to be a more engaging way to present this. I wonder if he gave too much thought to the research (he did a hell of a lot, and it shows) and not enough to the story. The meaning of life is contained in these pages...and science has a way of making it depressingly biological.

Sophie says

Jake Sullivan est un homme entre deux âges. Il lui resterait plusieurs années à vivre en temps normal, mais il souffre d'une affection au cerveau qui menace de le plonger dans le coma à tout instant. Lorsque le processus du Mindscan fait son apparition, il est dans les premiers à s'inscrire pour le programme. L'idée en soi est assez simple: une copie de son cerveau est insérée dans une machine pouvant être updatée à l'infini, et l'original biologique de sa personne est envoyé dans un vaste complexe de vacances sur la lune jusqu'à sa mort. Les droits individuels sont transférés au Mindscan, qui prend la place de l'original biologique (désormais considéré comme un "shed skin") sur la Terre. Mais, évidemment, les contestations ne tardent pas à arriver, car peut-on réellement considérer un robot comme un humain ?

Mindscan relève, en mon sens, d'une des meilleures adaptations des conceptions religieuses et philosophiques sur ce qui nous rend humain, sur la conscience, dans un contexte de science-fiction. Si une machine possède vos moindres pensées, tous vos souvenirs, qu'est-ce qui vous distingue d'elle ? L'âme ? La capacité à vieillir ? Votre passé du fœtus ? Mindscan s'intéresse aussi à la conception des droits individuels: pourrait-on réellement choisir de les transférer à un objet que l'on considère être soi-même ? Quelle est la valeur d'un tel transfert à l'échelle de l'humanité ? Jusqu'où pourrait-on repousser les limites de ce qui est

qualifié de vivant ? La copie robotique de notre conscience peut-elle devenir plus humaine que les humains ? C'est une lecture à la fois remplie de suspense et de réflexions qui suscitent le développement problématique de ces questions. Plusieurs pistes sont abordées pour tenter d'imaginer ce que serait un monde avec des intelligences artificielles, mais également dans une esthétique du post-humain fort intéressante et abordée sous plusieurs points de vue. Les événements auxquels le lecteur est confronté dans ce roman sont si ambivalents qu'il est difficile de se faire une idée claire et sans équivoque de notre conception de l'humanité, et c'est ce qui fait la force de ce roman: on apprend à se penser en tant qu'individu, on amorce la réflexion sur ce qui nous distingue des autres règnes du vivant, mais aucune définition à proprement parler ne nous est imposée.

Lu dans le cadre de mon défi lecture 2015 dans la catégorie "un livre que vous avez, mais que vous n'avez pas lu encore".

Natasha says

This is the second Robert J. Sawyer book I've read and I have not figured out if I like his writing so much as I like the ideas he's writing about. The main concept in this book, mindscanning, is really something to wrap my mind around especially as I am a firm believer in my soul but having what I consider to be true or real challenged certainly made this book entertaining. I think I'll have a gander at some of his other novels that are available in my local library.

Ethan says

I've read several of Sawyer's books, and I've always enjoyed them. Some reviewers here don't like his prose, but I find it perfectly serviceable. Sawyer writes in a thriller, page-turner style; it's not fancy, it's not poetic, but it gets the job done. I even like the corny jokes.

Most of his books are basically novel-length philosophical thought experiments, which is especially the case with *Mindscan*. In this case, the thought experiment is this: what if there were an exact copy of your mind in another body? Would that other "you" be you? Sawyer's not a philosopher by training so he can be forgiven for not bringing up John Locke's work on personal identity, although I am impressed that more recent work by Daniel Dennett, David Chalmers, and John Searle are mentioned in the book. But this is mostly a book that Locke would love. More on the philosophical bits over at my blog:
<http://examinedworlds.blogspot.com/20...>

As for the story, there's a lot of interesting stuff here, including a dramatic trial (somewhat reminiscent of the trial in the Star Trek: The Next Generation episode "The Measure of a Man"). The trial drags on a little bit toward the end (sometimes I wish the lawyers would get to the point!), but it does a good job of keeping the tension going and bringing up the issues while the rest of the story takes place. The main character, Jake, wasn't entirely likable (or at least one version of him wasn't), but I did like Karen a lot. Did I forget to mention the quantum entanglement? That's always fun for science fiction writers to wheel out to "explain" weird stuff. I'm not sure I liked the way the main story wrapped up, but the epilogue was fun.

Naomi says

Every time I read a Robert Sawyer book I always wonder the same thing: what kind of amazing novel would come out of a collaboration between Sawyer, who has great ideas about theme and plot, and another writer, who can write good characters and dialogue? Yes, *Mindscan* kept me reading: the premise is compelling and thought provoking. But like so many of Sawyer's novels, it's full of ham-handed author intrusion. The characters are so obviously loaded down with the pet peeves, knowledge and thoughts of the author, displaying them at every opportunity (and so many scenes seem to be contrived to create those opportunities) that it's distracting and I find it inhibits the development of emotional connection with his characters and his story. Yes, *Mindscan* is worth a read, however I can't help feeling cheated of the pleasure of reading the great novel it could have been had the characters been allowed to be themselves. And this is usually how I feel after finishing a Sawyer's book. On the other hand, regardless of that, I continue to read his work, so that says something.

Martin says

I haven't read much of Sawyer's work, but what I have has always been very well written, and this is no exception. I found myself giving up on it after only a few chapters though, because of what to me is fatal flaw in the central concept he actually raises himself but then proceeds to ignore.

The protagonist, who has a congenital condition which leaves him vulnerable to aneurysm, decides to take advantage of new technology which will scan his brain and enable his personality and memories to be installed into an artificial body; he signs his "rights of personhood" over to the new version of himself, and along with the other customers retires from society.

Clearly complications are going to arise down the road, but I couldn't get past the total absurdity: supposedly his motivation is terror of the inevitable brain bleed leaving him mentally damaged, as happened to his father. But of course this scheme does nothing to reduce the likelihood of this: he will still experience whatever happens to the original flesh and blood version of himself, and the fact that an android version will remain alive and unaffected has no bearing on how the rest of his own life will feel to him.

I simply didn't believe he would do it, and couldn't get any interest going in the happenings after that. A shame - I'll still be looking up more of his books, since as I say I really like the writing and the problem here is very specific to this plot.

Anita says

The basic idea of the story about people who decide to have their minds uploaded into fabricated durable bodies is good. The complications that happen were interesting. The story was told in a rather dry fashion and I didn't care for that. I felt that most of the book was pretty empty. The other Sawyer books I've read have been a bit heavy on philosophy, but this one seemed overly so. I did read it all, so I can't say that it was bad, but to me it was not good either.

William says

Put yourself in the following situation: You are a young person in the prime of your life when you are told that you are terminally ill. You will be able to spend the rest of your life in peace and quiet provided you agree to live on the moon while your clone replaces you at work (you are a productive person after all). While on the moon colony for the terminally ill, you find out that the disease you have has been cured, but the clone refuses to give up what he has on Earth and the rules forbid your return. Sure, they'll cure you, but you cannot come home. What would you do? That is exactly what happens in this interesting novel by one of Canada's premier SF writers.

Lucy says

Jake Sullivan has a hereditary, potentially terminal disease. He lives his life in a state of utmost care so as not to trigger it, and knows that he, like his father, will probably die a young man. So when he hears about a new process, called mindscanning, he is intrigued. Immortex claims to be able to make a scan of your brain and duplicate your mind in an artificial body. The new body, the new you, will become the primary you, while the old you will live out the rest of your days in a luxury resort on the moon.

As a mindscan, Jake can finally face a future without the fear of imminent death. And he finds love with another mindscan, Karen.

But things begin to get complicated when Karen's son sues for his inheritance, claiming that the mindscan is not his mother, his mother is actually dead, and he and his children are entitled to inherit. Now, the future of mindscans' rights is on the line, as the question is raised: what does it mean to be a human being? To be an individual? What is it that makes us who we are?

This is an interesting book that raises interesting questions, but I felt like there was something lacking. It wasn't as strong as I wanted it to be, and as the second half of the book focuses almost entirely on the trial, it felt like a science fiction version of Jodi Picoult. Interesting, and thought-provoking, but I felt that it didn't go as far as it might have.

Bryan says

This is a great page-turner, combining contemporary issues of civil rights and identity with some classic sci-fi themes of immortality, moon bases and artificial intelligence. Starts to veer into preachy territory a few times, but overall extremely enjoyable and thought-provoking.

Cheryl says

So, the first Sawyer I read, Flashforward, explored the concept of Destiny vs. Free Will. This explores the concept of Consciousness. Not a whole lot of action, some depressing ideas about the direction we're headed

in the near future, characters more as role-players and less as authentic people... but still, a heck of a read, imo. I will keep reading Sawyer, as Ideas is what I read SF for.

Prashanth Srivatsa says

A terminally ill man transfers his consciousness to an identical android who takes his place on earth to live forever. It is, once again, a probing into the uncontrollable desire of humans to prolong lives, to approach infinity, and all that in a way that mirrors reality. It is a conundrum whose ethical motives are questioned in Mindscan. Sawyer stands neutrally in an argument about the existence of a soul, and pitches for an adapted consciousness by weighing it against faith. But, that life is composed of man's failures, limitations and conflicts ultimately comes to haunt him and his not-so-farfetched proposal.
