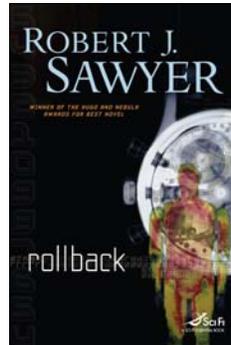


## Rollback

Robert J. Sawyer

Donald and Sarah Halifax are given a *rollback*, a medical procedure that will make them both 25 again, but it doesn't work for Sarah — leaving Don 60 years younger than his wife. Don soon strays into the arms of Lenore, a real 25-year-old, while Sarah and her robot companion Gunter are left to decrypt a message from an alien world.



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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. Don mentions his old list of ten things he once wanted to do before he dies. What would be on your own list of such things? Why do you think Don has such a list but Sarah apparently doesn't?
2. Sawyer asserts that rather than exchanging scientific knowledge, aliens will really be more interested in exchanging culture. Do you agree? There's a reference in the text to Carl Sagan's quip about not sharing Bach, because "that would be bragging." What human works do you think would be of greatest interest to aliens? What sort of thing would you like aliens to send to us?

3. The premise of *Rollback* is tragic: both members of a happily married couple are supposed to be rejuvenated, but only one of them is. How would you react if the treatment had succeeded for you but failed for your spouse? What about if it had failed for you, but succeeded for your spouse?

4. Do you believe Sarah when she says she would have left Don if their situation had been reversed? Are there any circumstances under which it would have been right for Don to leave Sarah? What would you do under similar circumstances?

5. Did Don really need to break up with the young grad student, Lenore, or could he have kept the affair going — dealing with a legitimate physical need? Did Don break up with Lenore because he's from an older generation that is more uptight about sex? Does morality actually change from generation to generation, or is it just that most people go through a liberal-to-conservative transition as they age?

6. What did you think of Don's relationship with Lenore? Can a relationship that has such a disparity in life experience ever be one of equals? Was it on a more even footing by the end of the book? Did you like Lenore?

7. Gunter's caregiver role in the novel could have been played by a real human being. Why did Sawyer choose to make Gunter a robot? Why do you think Gunter showed more loyalty to Sarah than to his creator, Cody McGavin?

8. Much of the novel explores whether there are ethics that transcend species boundaries. Do you think there are absolutes in morality, and, if so, what are they? Can we at least agree that something as straightforward as the golden rule — do unto others as you would have them do unto you — is probably universally shared?

9. Rarely, if ever, are adulterers portrayed positively in fiction — or in real life. Does Sawyer succeed in making Don a sympathetic character? Are there things Don does in the book that you can't forgive him for?

10. Do you feel that SETI (the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) is a worthwhile investment of time and money? Sawyer argues that SETI is a wonderfully altruistic undertaking, because it goes counter to our usual desire for immediate, short-term gratification. Do you agree with him? If not, what things, if any, do we do as a species that are altruistic?

11. Sawyer jumps decades ahead in the epilogue. Were you pleased to see this glimpse of the characters' future, or would you have rather it had been left as an exercise for the reader's imagination? What did you think of the world of 2067 Sawyer (briefly) portrays.

12. The final assessment of Sarah given at the end of the book is from Lenore. Should she have had the last word, or should it have come from Don, or someone else?

**Robert J. Sawyer** — "Canada's dean of Science Fiction," according to **Booklist** — is one of only seven writers ever to win all three of the science-fiction field's top awards for best novel of the year: the Hugo, which he won in 2003 for **Hominids**; the Nebula, which he won in 1996 for **The Terminal Experiment**; and the John W. Campbell Memorial Award, which he won in 2006 for **Mindscan**. He's also won the top SF awards in Canada, France, Japan, and Spain. A popular keynote speaker as well as a bestselling author, Rob lives just west of Toronto with his wife, poet Carolyn Clink.



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