
Clink Ink!

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The Oppenheimer Alternative The Secret History of The Manhattan Project

Bestselling futurist **ROBERT J. SAWYER** has been called “Canada’s answer to Michael Crichton” by *The Toronto Star* and “a writer of boundless confidence and bold scientific extrapolation” by *The New York Times*.

Now he turns his keen eye back on the past in this, the 80th-anniversary year of the beginning of **The Manhattan Project**. Sawyer’s 24th novel, **THE OPPENHEIMER ALTERNATIVE**, tells the secret history of the physicists behind that desperate effort to create the world’s first atomic bomb.

As **J. Robert Oppenheimer**, scientific director of The Manhattan Project, famously observed after the first A-bomb exploded, “**Now I am become Death, the Destroyer of Worlds.**” And, in our reality, that remains his legacy.

But in the “What if?” vein of Philip K. Dick’s ***The Man in the High Castle***, Sawyer’s novel **THE OPPENHEIMER ALTERNATIVE** veers cleverly into alternate-history territory. In it, Oppenheimer and his colleagues — including **Edward Teller** (the inspiration for Dr. Strangelove), flamboyant **Richard Feynman**, **Leo Szilard**, **Kurt Gödel**, and **Enrico Fermi** — join forces with **Albert Einstein**, ex-Nazi rocketeer **Wernher von Braun** and computing pioneer **John von Neumann** to try to save our planet from impending ecological doom. If they succeed, they’ll be able to declare, “**Now we have become Life, the saviors of our world.**”

“Every single person in my novel was both real and famous,” says Sawyer. “I spent two years full-time researching this book to make sure I got the characterizations exactly right.”

And do the experts agree? Yes!

- **Martin Sherwin**, co-author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning biography *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (the basis for **Christopher Nolan's** upcoming biopic *Oppenheimer*), declares Sawyer's novel is "an imaginative restructuring of a phantasmagoric life into an alternative phantasmagorical story. Oppenheimer fans will be intrigued."
- **Gregory Benford**, physicist at UC Irvine, says: "The feel and detail of the Manhattan Project figures is deep and well done. I knew many of these physicists, and Sawyer nails them accurately."
- Perimeter Institute physicist **Lee Smolin**, the author of *The Trouble with Physics*, agrees: "I know the history of this period well and I'm one or two degrees of separation from many of these people. Sawyer's portrayals ring true to me. I loved it!"
- And **Doug Beason**, former Associate Laboratory Director, Los Alamos National Laboratory, adds that "**THE OPPENHEIMER ALTERNATIVE** is incredibly realistic: the characters, locations, the era, and even the science. I felt like I was back in Los Alamos — and I should know: I worked there!"

"The trick of this novel," says Sawyer, "was to never contradict known fact. There's nothing in the book that's anachronistic or might not have actually happened. **This is as much a secret history as an alternate history.** So far as everything that's been made public is concerned, including the most recently declassified documents, what I'm describing really could have happened."

Indeed, Oppenheimer himself suggested there was a secret history to it all. When he lost his security clearance because of his Communist ties, Oppie really did declare:

"There is a story behind my story. If a reporter digs deep enough he will find that it is a bigger story than my suspension."

Deak Parsons, Oppie's second-in-command at the Manhattan Project's Los Alamos Lab, concurred. He told colleagues, in reference to Oppie being cut off from classified information, that even **President Eisenhower** was in the dark about the truth:

"I have to put a stop to it. Ike has to know what's really going on. This is the biggest mistake the United States could make!"

(Sadly, Parsons died the next day of a heart attack before speaking to the president.)

Even **Freeman Dyson**, Oppie's great colleague after the war at the **Institute for Advance Study in Princeton**, felt Oppie was hiding something:

"As a direct result of Oppenheimer's work, we now know that black holes have played and are playing a decisive part in the evolution of the universe. He lived for twenty-seven years after the discovery, never spoke about it, and never came back to work on it."

"Several times, I asked him why he did not come back to it. He never answered my question, but always changed the conversation to some other subject."

What was Oppenheimer hiding? The answers are in Sawyer's fast-paced, character-rich novel. The great alternate-history writer **S.M. Stirling** says:

"THE OPPENHEIMER ALTERNATIVE is a truly science fictional work of alternate history which turns on the decisions — and discoveries — of the great physicists who wrote the history of the 20th century: Einstein, Fermi, Gödel, and Oppenheimer. They are the vividly realized, all-too-human characters who people this novel, and give its brilliant speculations human life and blood. Bravo!"

Based on the **latest research and recently declassified documents**, Sawyer will enthrall your audience with **stunning revelations about the dawn of the atomic age**:

- **Following Hitler's suicide, many Manhattan Project scientists did not want to continue work on the atomic bomb.** Their initial fear had been that the Nazis would get it before the Allies did, and, once the war in Europe was over, they saw no reason to continue.
- **The Japanese had been making overtures to surrender through diplomatic back channels for over a year** before the US dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Had their *one* demand been accepted, the war in Japan would have ended in 1944.
- **Harry S. Truman shocked the hell out of Winston Churchill by deviating from their agreed script and demanding "unconditional" surrender** from Japan in a live radio broadcast. Churchill only subsequently backed that demand so as not to be seen as contradicting the American leader.

- In the end, despite the posturing about “unconditional” surrender, **the Allies gave the Japanese the one and only thing they’d wanted a year earlier, namely letting their divine emperor Hirohito retain his throne** (which he did until his death in 1989).
- **Leo Szilard**, who got Einstein to write to FDR urging the creation of an atomic weapon, circulated a petition calling for a demonstration of the bomb for Japanese experts, rather than its use on Japanese cities. Oppenheimer’s boss, **General Leslie Groves, had the petition branded “Top Secret”** and hidden away — so that the bomb could be tested on an actual city, establishing a post-war order with America as the only superpower.
- As an outgrowth of the Manhattan Project, **the US was developing an atomic-bomb-propelled rocket called *Orion* that could have put humans on Mars by 1965**. The Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, which banned nuclear explosions in space, scuttled the project.
- **ROBERT J. SAWYER** is a member of the **Order of Canada**, the highest honor given by the Canadian government, and he’s past president of the **Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America**.
- The **ABC TV series *FlashForward*** was based on Rob’s novel of the same name, and he is one of only eight writers in history to have won all three of the science-fiction field’s top awards for Best Novel of the Year: the **Hugo**, the **Nebula**, and the **John W. Campbell Memorial Award**.
- A multiple **TEDx** speaker, **Rob has been interviewed on radio and television more than 800 times**. He lives in Toronto.

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