

Story from sci-fi author featured in popular online game

Paul Brög. SAWYER, Robert J.

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Even with computer games, seven years calls for some freshening up.

Enter Mississauga science fiction writer Robert J. Sawyer.

He was enlisted by Hamilton's SHG Studios to spice up their popular game *Star Pirates*.

Sawyer penned a story entitled *Operation*

Restore for the latest update of the browser game.

Somewhat similar to online roleplaying game *World of Warcraft*, *Star Pirates* features players interacting as characters within the digital realm.

Sawyer admits at first he scoffed a bit at how scientific something called *Star Pirates* could be, noting that TV, movies and games tend to play "fast and loose" with science for the sake of entertainment.

"I'm a serious science fiction writer. I take my science seriously. I was dubious at first about whether or not this was something that I wanted to associate my name with," he said.

"Right off the bat, somebody says to me, 'Star Pirates.' And I think, 'How can that economically possibly work? Under what possible circumstances does that make sense?'"

But, when he heard the futuristic backstory - the earth is uninhabitable and the only way to get natural resources is by mining asteroids or by stealing them from others - he was on board. It also didn't hurt that SHG Studios were fans of his work, either.

Sawyer began working a "novelistic" approach into the story and "had a blast doing it."

In the game's post-apocalyptic world, the only remaining authority is in the hands of artificial intelligences that are scattered throughout the solar system.

Sawyer's twist looks at why a freed humanity would restore their "cybernetic overlords."

Or, to use an analogy from a popular film franchise: "In the *Terminator* universe, would they want to turn back on Skynet after they finally shut it down?"

Star Pirates is not Sawyer's first time working with that particular medium. Years ago, he was involved with an unnamed proj-

ect for Montreal game developer Ubisoft.

He encourages all budding writers to diversify and look for other storytelling platforms.

In fact, he said, his first sale in 1980 was a science fiction show to the planetarium in Rochester, New York.

"Right from the very beginning I was aware that there were all kinds of ways you could tell your stories - they didn't have to be ink on dead trees."

The 15-year city centre resident is widely known for sacrificing a proverbial forest to his craft, winning multiple awards along the way. Most notably, earning the Hugo and Nebula awards for science fiction.

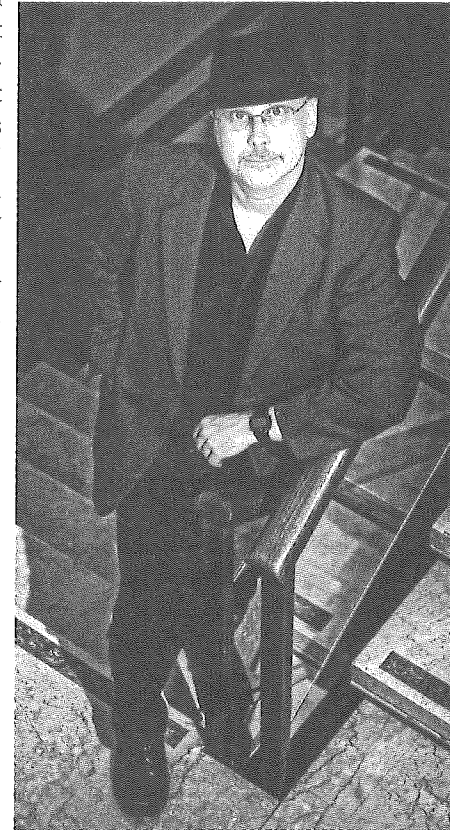
Given the boundless freedom that the genre affords him, Sawyer continues to tap the sci-fi vein with his 23rd book, *Quantum Night*, which comes out next March.

"I wanted to tackle the underlying psychological causes for human evil from a

science fictional point of view, and see if, maybe, that age-old canard, that you can't change human nature, might in fact be inaccurate and maybe there is a way out of the darkness for us."

Visit sfwriter.com for more on Sawyer's work.

Those interested in checking out the game can go to starpirates.net.



Mississauga science fiction writer Robert J. Sawyer recently penned a story for the popular online game *Star Pirates*.