Await Your Reply: A Novel

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**Description**
Review of *Await Your Reply: A Novel*

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Review By Jeffrey Barlow

Dan Chaon (pronounced as though written Shawn) is a very highly regarded novelist, though not yet one with the popularity of the sort that will soon bring his work to the bookshelves at your local supermarket. Among other literary prizes he has a National Book Award nomination (for his short stories), a Pushcart Prize, an O. Henry Award and an Academy Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Chaon’s previously best-known work was You Remind Me of Me. He teaches writing at Oberlin and is a very self-aware writer, cognizant of the masters and stylists who have preceded him [1]. This makes Await Your Reply: A Novel fun to read as we recognize some of his allusions and plot devices. In addition, it is both suspenseful and challenging [2].

Await your Reply and the earlier You Remind Me of Me both deal very much with identity and separation. In addition, Await your Reply is related to the Internet at almost every turn, and to its potential effects upon identity. It has been regarded by some, who are otherwise not particularly interested in this issue, as perhaps the best recent work to do so [3].

While Chaon is clearly quite familiar with the Internet and related security issues, this is definitely not geek fiction. The Internet has given the author a new way to explore the issue of identity and communication but otherwise the central issues—of trust, and of personal authenticity and integrity—are very familiar ones, and Chaon is largely disinterested in the details of identity theft or other computer crimes in this work.

The three intertwined plot lines are tied together by the relationships between the three central protagonists—occasionally so intertwined as to introduce deliberate confusion as to which characters is speaking or being discussed—and by the Internet. One of the three main characters and several important minor ones are criminally minded hackers. It is their hope to use computers simply for petty theft, but slowly their crimes bring them into the orbit of several different groups of truly dangerous criminals.
The primary character, the dominant voice, is the brother of the hacker and is doggedly and selflessly trying to track down his brother so as to save him from himself. The third major character is Lucy, the girlfriend of the hacker brother, if a relationship lacking intimacy and eroticism can be so characterized.

Most of the characters—perhaps all of them—represent for us the problems of creating identity in a world shaped increasingly by evanescent electronic pulses. Lucy, for example, knows only that she really wants to have money, though she is less certain why she wants it. She slowly becomes aware that her relationship with the hacker will require that she lose her familiar, if boring and confining, identity:

“What would happen to Lucy Lattimore now, she wondered. If she no longer entered the public record, if she never held a job or applied for a driver’s license or paid taxes or got married or had children, if she never died, would she still exist two hundred years from now, free-floating and unresolved in some record bank in some government dead-letter office computer? At some point, would they decide to expunge her from the official roster? [4]”

Lucy goes forward in the belief that this step will certainly give her relative wealth, the hope of material gain being for most of the characters the one constant in their lives.

Another key group of characters begin as slacker hackers, described as:

“...Dylan and his buddies spent a good portion of their time playing mean, stupid practical jokes on the Internet—posting bestiality porn videos on some lady’s bichon frise website, The Wonderful Fluffy World, and uploading graphic accident photos to message boards meant for children; terrorizing some poor girl who maintained a tribute site for a dead pop star they all loathed, sending hundreds of delivery pizzas to her house and getting her power turned off; hacking into the website for the National Epilepsy Foundation with a strobe-like animation they’d decided might send the epileptics into seizures. They sat around doing imitations of convulsions, and chortling wildly as Jay stood by watching with uneasy disapproval [5].”

While the Internet is essential to the development of character and plot, it is always subsumed to the story line. However, the author’s continual homage to “great works” of literature, film and even television, continually reminds us that the Internet is new, and potentially direly negative in its consequences.

For example, at one point, Lucy is taping hundred-dollar bills stolen through computer-enabled identity theft into a volume of Bleak House in the hopes of evading Customs inspection, treating us to curiously appropriate snippets of text as she does so:

“Are you sure this will work?” Lucy had said. She was flipping her way through Bleak House, fragments of text rising up as she laid a bill on the page and pinned it down. “The fog is very dense, indeed!” said I. And she pressed Ben Franklin over the line of words, and then flipped a
couple of pages forward. “It’s disgraceful,” she said. “You know it is. The whole house is disgraceful.” And she covered it again, though once again some grain of the book rose up: We found Miss Jellyby trying to warm herself at the fire ... [6]"

At another point, we see simultaneously the fate of old media, and the paranoia which afflicts those who make the Internet a part of their daily life—or in this case, lives:

“Down below his third-story window, he could see the roof of the building next door; a mummified newspaper, still rolled and rubber-banded but slowly decaying... and then a helicopter appeared, gliding heavily, passing close to the treetops, its thick propellers chopping the air up. On its way to the hospital, no doubt, though Miles watched it sternly. For years, Hayden had believed that helicopters were spying on him [7].”

For many readers, the value of this book will lie in its plot, its masterful development of narrative and its haunting images, which often verge quite deliberately on familiar ones from classic horror fiction and film. It is, however, the author’s talent and his ability to develop clearly defined yet highly intertwined characters and embed them in a continually interesting plot, which should make the book attractive for a very wide audience.

For those of us interested in the impact of the Internet, Awaiting Your Reply shows us how a truly dexterous writer can mine Internet tropes for plot elements such as identity theft, computer crime, ambiguity and threat, even computer addiction (one character wonders if he has wasted his time playing video games for ninety-one thousand hours—more over ten years) [8] —and yet at the same time, keep the Internet unobtrusive, merely what it has become for all of us, an inescapable part of our lives.

Endnotes


[7] – Highlight Loc. 2211-14 |

[8] – Highlight Loc. 2145-49

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4 THOUGHTS ON “AWAIT YOUR REPLY: A NOVEL”

**King Simmon**

**on January 30, 2014 at 6:17 PM** said:

Thank you, I have just been looking for info about this subject for ages and yours is the greatest I’ve came upon so far. However, what in regards to the conclusion? Are you certain about the source?

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**on February 4, 2014 at 10:17 AM** said:

Attractive section of content. I just stumbled upon your weblog and in accession capital to assert that I buy in reality enjoyed account your blog posts. Any way I will be subscribing for ones augment and even I achievement you access consistently quickly.

**nigeria entertainment news**

**on February 4, 2014 at 10:28 AM** said:

Normally I don’t learn article on blogs, nevertheless I want to say that this write-up very pressured me to check out and do it! Your writing taste has been amazed me. Thank you, very beneficial article.
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on February 4, 2014 at 10:37 AM said:

Hmm it looks like your web site ate my very first comment (it was quite long) so I guess I’ll just sum it up what I had written and say, I’m thoroughly enjoying your blog. I too am an aspiring blog writer but I’m nonetheless new to everything. Do you have any recommendations for novice blog writers? I’d undoubtedly appreciate it.|Woah! I’m really loving the template/theme of this blog. It’s simple, yet effective. Plenty of times it is difficult to obtain that “perfect balance” between user friendliness and visual appearance. I must say you’ve done a superb employment with this. Also, the blog loads very fast for me on Safari. Outstanding Blog!!Do you mind if I quote two your content as lengthy as I offer credit and sources back to your site? My blog internet site is within the same area of interest as yours and my targeted visitors would really benefit from lots of the information you offer here. Please enable me know if this alright with you. Thank you!|Hi would you mind letting me know which webhost you might be using? I’ve loaded your blog in Three different web browsers and I must say this blog loads much faster then most. Can you recommend a beneficial world wide web hosting provider at a honest price? Thanks, I enjoy it!|Fantastic web site you’ve right here but I was wanting to know in case you knew of any discussion boards that cover the exact same topics talked about here? I’d incredibly adore being a component of community wherever I can get advice from other experienced folks that share the same interest. In case you have any suggestions, please allow me know. Several thanks!!|Hey! This is my very first comment here so I just wanted to give a quick shout out and say I definitely appreciate reading your blog posts. Can you recommend any other blogs/websites/forums that go over the exact same topics? Appreciate it!|Do you’ve a spam difficulty on this website; I also am a blogger, and I was curious about your situation; we have made some nice practices and we are searching to exchange ways with other folks, please shoot me an email if interested.