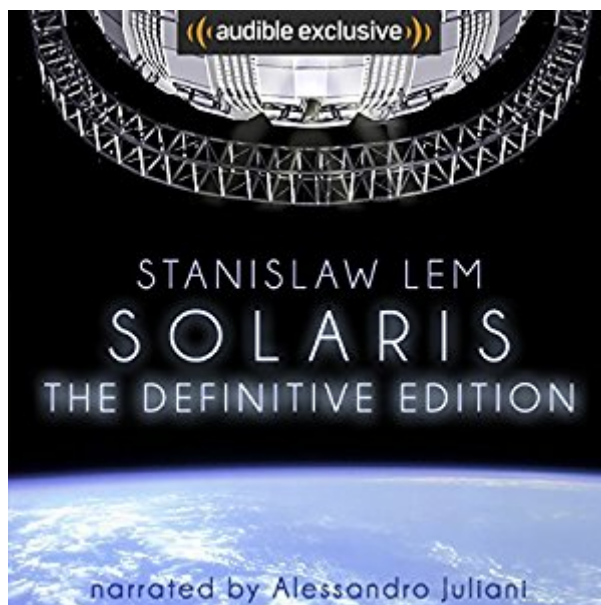


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Solaris: The Definitive Edition



Synopsis

At last, one of the world's greatest works of science fiction is available - just as author Stanislaw Lem intended it. To mark the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Solaris*, Audible, in cooperation with the Lem Estate, has commissioned a brand-new translation - complete for the first time, and the first ever directly from the original Polish to English. Beautifully narrated by Alessandro Juliani (*Battlestar Galactica*), Lem's provocative novel comes alive for a new generation. In *Solaris*, Kris Kelvin arrives on an orbiting research station to study the remarkable ocean that covers the planet's surface. But his fellow scientists appear to be losing their grip on reality, plagued by physical manifestations of their repressed memories. When Kelvin's long-dead wife suddenly reappears, he is forced to confront the pain of his past - while living a future that never was. Can Kelvin unlock the mystery of *Solaris*? Does he even want to?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Read this book if you're patient and you like asking questions more than getting answers. It's a book where, about two-thirds of the time, nothing happens. Here's why you should read the book: 1. Mood. Bleak. So bleak. The longest Sunday afternoon in the universe. 2. Structure. Defiantly weird. Page after page of digressions. A spectacular, brilliantly imagined sci-fi universe described via summaries of summaries of scientific texts. A first-person narrator who frequently specifies that nothing interesting happened. 3. Ideas. Mostly in the form of intriguing questions about what it means to be human, what it means to be alien, and what makes humans want to understand the alien. 4. Writing.

This new, 2011 translation directly from the Polish is quite readable and sometimes rapturously beautiful. The descriptions go over better than the dialog, which can be pretty dense, but if you pay close attention, you won't get totally lost. It's very sophisticated writing, with metaphors and allusions that make the story even more intriguing.⁵ It's unfilmable. I admit I haven't actually watched the movie adaptations all the way through, but I checked out some clips on YouTube and that's all I needed to see. So the book is the deal.

In a recent issue of *The New Scientist* one of their year end issues tries to make predictions regarding future developments.....i.e., if we should contact alien life, re-engineer life, cause pandemics, nuclear wars, end population growth, etc. Most science fiction writers try to do the same by extrapolating from present trends into the future - and usually get things wrong. The article is less critical of P.K.Dick and, another fellow, Stanislaw Lem...who, contrary to these extrapolations, invents entirely new futures with considerable detail by breaking free of present trends. For example, many new planets are being discovered with characteristics similar to or completely different from the Earth. What would life be like on these worlds? *The New Scientist* has special praise for *Solaris*, about a visitation to and establishment of a research station on just such a planet. The story can be read selectively, the chapters out of order and still get the sense of the novel because the central focus is contemplation rather than progressive action. And, there are no "models of existence" derived from experiences on Earth to help in the comprehension of the events described,,,except within the materials brought to the planet for the construction of the research station. On that planet is a great ocean dotted with small, scattered islands....But what sort of ocean?....It defies explanation. And seemingly once on the planet the explorers are transformed by something inexplicable... In effect, the story resembles *Alice in Wonderland*, as the characters find situations, "Curiouser and Curiouser!!" (increasing Incomprehensible). H. P. Lovecraft once pointed out that the most merciful property of the Universe is that the human mind cannot comprehend it ...such comprehension would be the ultimate form of "madness". Models for such understanding are not available to the ordinary mind...such models essential for the understanding of this planet and its huge, mysterious ocean...with capabilities far different from that of the Earth, even to the point of creating dynamic, fluid crystalline "quasiorganisms". The only similar ideas are those of PKD, whose characters have personalities "tangential" to those of other people and closer to the truth. Also, James Lovelock's "Gaia Hypothesis" where the Earth manipulates and maintains conditions suitable for life. Further, at least the moon, Titan has a hydrocarbon surface ocean, and Enceladus moon having an extensive interior ocean all seem to be related ideas. And, are not living things composed

of quasi-static systems of water and organic/ inorganic matter capable of the most extraordinary feats, including the creation of not only form and function but also, "mind " - so cleverly most scientists do not go beyond "description" and rarely "explanation" in accounting for these phenomena? From this prospective, Lem makes perfect sense. Otherwise, we are left with the baseless conjecture of "Life Forces": elan vital, entelechy, and its other manifestations, all to no avail. Lem often includes digressions from the progressive action of the story line when one of the central characters discovers an archive of the history of research into the Sea of Solaris, revealing the futility of answering the "Big Questions" (What is consciousness? What is the Theory of Everything?) by scientific methods - an extension of religion where man is seeking redemption. Cosmologists have, in fact, admitted they, "Want the Universe to be beautiful - that beauty expressed in the elegance of mathematics." Or, "They continue to search for 'Life in the Universe' because we want "communication" rather than the forlorn sense of being, "all alone". The passionless search for objective fact is seemingly less significant. Otherwise, a reader might confuse the purposes of Lem in his seeming digressions with that of Herman Melville with his digression in the form of the natural history of whales in Moby Dick. In the case of Lem, in most cases the story line progresses from the point of view of one central character, then replaced with commentary by a omniscient observer as in Greek Drama. Are all of human labors and studies futile, without an "Observer" ? Camus suggests that the only rational god (observer) could be "chance". Lem also posits the question, is "consciousness" shared by all forms of matter?...This consciousness of a sort that communicates to "minds" its contents without any suggestion of the ultimate nature of its being, except through vague, manipulative signals. When a chemical reaction occurs in elementary chemistry, color changes, gas production and the like are these very signals that suggest "something" is there, not "what"; the "what" including the consciousness of the constituents of the mind, itself. Here, one must point out that physicists usually do not entertain such ontological questions, contrary to Kant who distinguishes the "phenomena" from the "noumena". However, "consciousness experiments" are planned by Lucien Hardy at the Perimeter Institute in Canada. In brief, the Bell Test will be involved - (a way of determining if atomic particles at a distance are, in fact, entangled. Such tests suggest that they are). In this case, EEG brain activity of test subjects will be used from people 100 kilometers apart to switch settings on measuring devices at each location. If the readings differ from the results of previously done Bell Tests, such results would indicate a violation of Quantum Physics by a process outside established science namely, the "Consciousness". Such a result would mean that physics can overcome by processes outside standard formulations. These tests would reveal further the insights of Lem with the Great Ocean of

Solaris and the human inhabitants of the research station in completing their remarkable communications. Near the end of Solaris, one of the principal observers prepares to abandon the research station, even though the Ocean still seems inexplicable. An editorial in the most recent issue of the NS states that the events of 2016 are not explainable as well. Yet the author demands there will always be someone who persists in solving the most intransigent puzzles, Who is right? Physicists suggest that a Theory of Everything may not be possible. Events just happen. String Theory and Relativity can be made concordant to a millionth, billionth, billionth, billionth of a centimeter. Is this close enough? Or, still no cigar? The events described within the station...the characters witnessing them without comprehension... the inability of the reader to interpret such events based on Earth based models seem the principal points of fascination in Solaris. The characters express themselves to a very limited degree....their actions remain free of the constraints of philosophic preference. Only the fascination of one of them for a perfectly beautiful contrabiological will be immediately understood by all. "I dropped a berry into a stream and caught a little silver trout When I had laid it on the floor, I went to blow the fire aflame But something rustled on the floor, and some one called me by my name: It had become a glimmering girl with apple blossom in her hair Who called me by my name and ran and faded though the glimmering air. I will find where she has gone and kiss her lips and take her hand; And walk through the dappled grass, and pluck till time and times are done The silver apples of the moon, the golden apples of the sun. For every thing that's lovely is but a brief, dreamy, kind delight From change to change; I have been many things - A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light - All of these things were wonderful and great, But now I have grown nothing, knowing all,," WB

First of all, this translation is excellent: I would never had known this book was in translation had I not been informed of that fact. It's a poetic read in many places. I don't like to put much plot in reviews, so as not to serve up spoilers. Suffice to say that, although written at the dawn of the 1960s, the story does not suffer at all from feeling archaic (there are some technologically obsolete bits, such as extensive use of books and paper, but it's still easy to suspend disbelief). I found Solaris to be a profound interplanetary love story and engrossing philosophical exploration -- highly recommended!

I had the advantage of reading 'Solaris' in its original language. English readers have a problem here because the translation of this edition was made from French. Some of the meaning was definitely lost in the dual translation process. Unfortunately, a direct translation can only be obtained

in an audiobook or e-book format. I couldn't get through the first two pages when I tried to read the book for the first time. But, when the next time I managed to get through the beginning, I couldn't put the book down. When I got to the end I was sitting there, wondering where the second half of the book could be found...Whilst media, SF writers and the Hollywood kept exploring UFOs and alien civilisations, hoping for a direct dialog with the extra-terrestrials, Lem became increasingly sceptical in his writings. Written in 1961, 'Solaris' shows the futile and bizarre attempts of two completely different kinds of intelligence to communicate. In his later writings he reached a point where he saw no possibility for any meaningful contact at all. Try 'Eden' or 'Fiasco' to appreciate why he had good reasons to think that way. Despite belonging to SF genre, 'Solaris' should be seen as a more of psychological drama, exploring the inaccessible part of the human mind, which the alien intelligence was able to tap into. I have read a lot of SF and have many favourites, but 'Solaris' still tops my list.

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