

Science Fiction Book List

The following are books that show a variety of ideas about life in the future. You may choose one of these books or you may choose one not on this list as long as you clear it with me first.

The Companions by Sheri S. Tepper. 2003. 549 pages.

Fans will hail Hugo nominee Tepper's compelling story of an ordinary woman flung into extraordinary circumstances, but interesting ideas left undeveloped, awkward transitions from first to third person and unfair withholding of information may annoy others. Earth, incredibly overcrowded, has passed a new law prohibiting nonhuman life on the planet. Jewel Delis, dog keeper and member of an underground animal-rights group, wrangles her way to the planet Moss with several dogs, ostensibly to help her unpleasant half brother Paul, a linguist, figure out the peculiar language of the planet's varied inhabitants. Jewel finds Moss every bit as odd as advertised, with strange and dangerous plants, fantastic dances performed by creatures that may or may not be intelligent, and a group of humans descended from the crew of a spaceship that crash-landed years earlier.

The Dispossessed by Ursula K. Le Guin. 1974.

Won both the Hugo Award and the Nebula Award in 1975. The story takes place on the fictional planet Urras and its moon Anarres (since Anarres is massive enough to hold an atmosphere, this is often described as a double planet system). In order to forestall an anarcho-syndical workers' rebellion, the major Urrasti states gave Anarres and a guarantee of non-interference to the revolutionaries, approximately two hundred years before the events of *The Dispossessed*. The protagonist Shevek is a physicist attempting to develop a General Temporal Theory. The physics of the book describes time as having a much deeper, more complex structure than we understand it. It incorporates not only mathematics and physics, but also philosophy and ethics.

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? by Philip K. Dick. 1968. 256 pages.

"Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" takes place in 2021 (in the original publication, the story takes place in 1992) several years after the fallout resulting from "World War Terminus" destroyed much of Earth. In the aftermath, the United Nations encourages people to emigrate to off-world colonies to preserve the human race from the effects of the radioactive dust. One incentive is that each emigrating family will receive a custom-built android servant (derogatively referred to as an "andy"). The people who remain on Earth live in cluttered cities where radiation poisoning causes significant illness and gene damage. All animals are endangered. Owning and caring for an animal is considered a civic virtue and a status symbol, depending on the rarity of the species.

Door into Summer by Robert A. Heinlein. 1957. 192 pages.

The novel, which is told in the first person, opens in the year 1970. Daniel Boone Davis, an engineer and inventor, is well into a long drinking binge. He has lost his company, Hired Girl, Inc., to his partner Miles Gentry and the company bookkeeper, Belle Darkin. She had been Dan's fiancée, deceiving him into giving her enough voting stock to allow her and Miles to seize control. Hired Girl is a robot vacuum cleaner, like the real Roomba. Dan had been developing Flexible Frank, an all-purpose household robot, when Miles announced his intention to sell the company (and Frank) to a large corporation where he would become a vice-president. Wishing to stay independent, Dan opposed the takeover, but was outvoted and then fired as Chief Engineer. Left with a large financial settlement, and his remaining Hired Girl stock, he elects to take "cold sleep" (suspended animation) with his beloved pet cat "Pete," hoping to wake up thirty years later to a brighter future.

Earthfuture - Stories from a Sustainable World by Guy Dauncey. 2000. 176 pages.

Imagine a future in which people had successfully come to terms with each other and with our spaceship home, where we used only as many resources as would regenerate in a given year, and where we were actually restoring the Earth's bounty. Set in the early years of the new millennium, *Earthfuture* is a book of short stories which describe a world of ecovillages and self-organizing city neighborhoods, of near-zero garbage and climate-friendly cars, of work-sharing and social investment, of neighborhood democracy and the syntropy revolution, of a world-wide sustainable trade and environment treaty, and the Earth Pledge. In short, a world where wealth is defined by peace, a healthy environment, and the high quality of our relationships. At the same time, it is not, of course, a world without its nightmares—such as antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and genetic pollution—nor is it free from difficult choices.

Fountains of Paradise by Arthur C. Clarke. 1953. 352 pages.

In the novel, Clarke uses the life of the ancient king Kalidasa to foreshadow the adventures of engineer Vannevar Morgan in his single-minded determination to realize the space elevator. Subplots in the novel include human colonization of the solar system and the first contact with extraterrestrial intelligence. Clarke also hypothesizes that religion in humans is a consequence of sexual reproduction, although the idea does not play a central role in the novel.

The Futurological Congress: From the Memoirs of Ijon Tichy by Stanislaw Lem. 1971. 149 pages.

Various adventures and misfortunes befall Ijon Tichy, most of which are the result of the government bombing the hotel (and the rest of the city) with LTN (Love Thy Neighbour) gas bombs to quell a riot. The hallucinogenic effects of the gas make the character dream about being reanimated in a time several centuries from now. He discovers a world that gives an impression of contentness and wealth, but later realizes that all of it is a sham based on intake of mind altering chemicals (called "cryptochemocracy" by one character), e.g. a chemical that "masks" the reality of freezing weather (a new Ice Age has started). More significantly, it is a world where there is no hope of actually getting through to the "true" reality since the government officials, who are supposed to see things as they are, are also targets of chemical mind alteration by their fellows.

Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams. 1979. 224 pages.

In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the characters visit the legendary planet Magrathea, home to the now-collapsed planet building industry, and meet Slartibartfast, a planetary coastline designer who was responsible for the fjords of Norway. Through archival recordings, he relates the story of a race of hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings who built a computer named Deep Thought to calculate the answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything.

I, Robot by Isaac Asimov. 249 pages.

The three laws of Robotics: 1) A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm 2) A robot must obey orders given to it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. 3) A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law. With these three, simple directives, Isaac Asimov changed our perception of robots forever when he formulated the laws governing their behavior. In *I, Robot*, Asimov chronicles the development of the robot through a series of interlinked stories: from its primitive origins in the present to its ultimate perfection in the not-so-distant future--a future in which humanity itself may be rendered obsolete. Here are stories of robots gone mad, of mind-read robots, and robots with a sense of humor. Of robot politicians, and robots who secretly run the world--all told with the dramatic blend of science fact and science fiction that has become Asimov's trademark.

The Moon is a Harsh Mistress by Robert A Heinlein. 1966. 384 pages.

The book is set in the year 2075 on the Lunar Colonies, a collection of underground colonies scattered across the Moon. Most Loonies (Lunar colonists) are (or are the descendants of) people involuntarily transported to the Moon either for criminal or political reasons. Due to the low surface gravity of the Moon, anyone (including transportees from Earth) who stays longer than a few months undergoes irreversible physiological changes and become unable to live safely for more than a short time in Earth's much greater gravitational field. The action takes place in the underground warren known as Luna City, the Authority complex, and during a visit to Earth after the coup. The year is 2075, and the Lunar colonies have been established for at least 80 years.

Neuromancer by William Gibson. 1984. 384 pages.

Winner of the Nebula Award, the Philip K. Dick Award, and the Hugo Award. *Neuromancer* tells the story of Henry Dorsett Case, a talented computer hacker and thief in the high-tech dystopian future of the novel's setting. The novel's opening finds Case working as a low-level hustler in the back streets of Chiba city, living out the last days of a self-destructive arc of risky behavior and fast deals in the underworld of Japan. Formerly a talented hacker, Case made the mistake of stealing from his employers who retaliated by damaging his central nervous system with a Russian military mycotoxin, leaving him unable to use the direct brain-computer interfaces required for high-speed access to the cyberspace representations of the global computer network.

Red Mars by Kim Stanley Robinson. 1993. 672 pages.

Won the BSFA Award in 1992 and the SFWA's Nebula Award in 1993. *Red Mars* starts in 2026 with the first colonial voyage to Mars. Later, "the First Hundred" colonists (composed for the most part of Russians and Americans) establish the first settlement on Mars (called "Underhill") and lay the groundwork for more scientists and engineers to follow. However, due to the greed of the transnational corporations, which dominate and control the nation states of Earth, the new Martian towns become overcrowded and undermaintained. Several cases of sabotage of terraformation infrastructure occur, blamed on anti-terraforming forces. The situation results in a violent revolution in 2061, in which many of the First Hundred are killed, and much of Mars' infrastructure, notably the space elevator, is destroyed. Most of the surviving members of the First Hundred are forced into hiding in the "underground."

Rendezvous With Rama by Arthur C Clarke. 1972. 274 pages.

Won both the Hugo and Nebula awards. The "Rama" of the title is the starship, which is initially mistaken for an asteroid and named after the Hindu deity Rama. (By the 22nd century, we are told, scientists have run out of Greek and Roman mythological figures to name astronomical bodies after.) The nature and purpose of the starship and its creators remains enigmatic throughout the book.

The Sirens of Titan by Kurt Vonnegut. 1959. 336 pages.

The protagonist is Malachi Constant, originally of Hollywood, California, and the richest man in 22nd-century America. He possesses extraordinary luck, which he has used to build upon his father's fortune, but he has done nothing else significant with his life. He becomes the centerpoint of a journey that takes him from Earth to Mars in preparation for an interplanetary war, to Mercury with another Martian survivor of that war, back to Earth to be pilloried as a sign of God's displeasure, and finally to Saturn's moon Titan to meet the man responsible for his respective good fortunes (or lack thereof).

Six Moon Dance by Sheri S. Tepper. 1998. 544 pages.

In *Six Moon Dance*, veteran fantasy and science fiction writer Sheri S. Tepper tells the tale of the strange planet Newholme. An intriguing human society occupies the metal-poor planet, a society with gender values quite different from Earth, resulting from a virus that kills 50 percent of baby girls at birth. Newholmians use the best and the worst of dogma, religion, and "patriarchy" to uphold a society where men manage the money but women hold the keys to power through church, reproductive control, and their own short supply. "Family men" pay exorbitant dowries in order to gain a temporary wife, contracted for wifely duties and reproduction for a number of years. When their marriage contracts are finished, the women, relieved of duty, retire to enjoy the sexual services of male "Consorts."

Spin by Robert Charles Wilson. 2005. 454 pages.

Won the Hugo Award for Best Novel in 2006. *Spin* details Earth's response to an artificial membrane placed around the planet which selectively blocks and filters incoming electromagnetic radiation, blocking out the view of anything beyond low Earth orbit. The novel is told in first person, from the viewpoint of Tyler Dupree. Tyler is a close childhood friend of Jason and Diane Lawton, twins of E. D. Lawton (a wealthy industrialist who makes his money from the developing areostat business). As children, Jason, Diane, and Tyler witness the dramatic arrival of the "Spin," as the phenomenon comes to be known, when the stars suddenly disappear one night as they are looking at the sky. Initial experiments show that the membrane is permeable, allowing space probes to pass through, but that time outside passes at a highly accelerated rate, roughly 100 million years for every year on Earth. Thus within a generation, the surrounding solar system will age 4 billion years, and Earth will be destroyed by the expanding Sun.

Woman on the Edge of Time by Marge Piercy. 1985. 384 pages.

Thirty-seven-year-old Latina Consuelo (Connie) Ramos is committed to the psychiatric ward in Bellevue Hospital after another episode in a series of violent family crises. It is there that Connie, diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, starts envisioning Luciente, a woman from the future. She travels to Luciente's time, in which virtually the entire political and social agenda of the late sixties and early seventies radical movements has been fulfilled. Environmental pollution, homophobia, racism, phallogocentrism, class-subordination, consumerism, imperialism, and totalitarianism no longer exist in the rural community of Mattapoisett.