

Some very good science fiction:

- **Douglas Adams**

- The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

- (followed by several more in the series)

- Join Douglas Adams's hapless hero Arthur Dent as he travels the galaxy with his intrepid pal Ford Prefect, getting into horrible messes and generally wreaking hilarious havoc. Dent is grabbed from Earth moments before a cosmic construction team obliterates the planet to build a freeway. You'll never read funnier science fiction; Adams is a master of intelligent satire, barbed wit, and comedic dialogue. *The Hitchhiker's Guide* is rich in comedic detail and thought-provoking situations and stands up to multiple reads. Required reading for science fiction fans, this book (and its follow-ups) is also sure to please fans of Monty Python, Terry Pratchett's Discworld series, and British sitcoms.

- **Isaac Asimov**

- Asimov is best known for his 'foundation' series. if by some chance you haven't read those, read them now (see below).

- Nemesis

- When Eugenia Insigna of the Settlement Rotor, an independent space station, discovers an unknown red dwarf star two light years from Earth, she names it Nemesis. Led by Dr. Janus Pitt, Rotor and its population travel to the star to build a new, morally pure society. Insigna's daughter Marlene, who can read body language like a telepath, learns that Nemesis is moving dangerously close to Earth's solar system. After trying to communicate her knowledge, Marlene discovers that a conspiracy is suppressing it. Asimov is at his best when his characters discuss science and their schemes for saving Earth's people from destruction by Nemesis.

- Foundation

- (followed by *Foundation and Empire* & *Second Foundation*)

- Foundation* marks the first of a series of tales set so far in the future that Earth is all but forgotten by humans who live throughout the galaxy. Yet all is not well with the Galactic Empire. Its vast size is crippling to it. In particular, the administrative planet, honeycombed and tunneled with offices and staff, is vulnerable to attack or breakdown. The only person willing to confront this imminent catastrophe is Hari Seldon, a psychohistorian and mathematician. Seldon can scientifically predict the future, and it doesn't look pretty: a new Dark Age is scheduled to send humanity into barbarism in 500 years. He concocts a scheme to save the knowledge of the race in an Encyclopedia Galactica. But this project will take generations to complete, and who will take up the torch after him? The first Foundation trilogy (*Foundation*, [*Foundation and Empire*](#), [*Second Foundation*](#)) won a Hugo Award in 1965 for "Best All-Time Series." It's science fiction on the grand scale; one of the classics of the field.

- I, Robot

- In this collection, one of the great classics of science fiction, Asimov set out the principles of robot behavior that we know as the Three Laws of Robotics. Here are stories of robots gone mad, mind-reading robots, robots with a sense of humor, robot politicians, and robots who secretly run the world, all told with Asimov's trademark dramatic blend of science fact and science fiction.

- **Gregory Benford**

- Artifact

- A small cube of black rock has been unearthed in a 3500-year-old Mycenaean tomb. An incomprehensible object in an impossible place; its age, its purpose, and its origins are unknown. Its discovery has unleashed a global storm of intrigue, theft and espionage, and is pushing nations to the brink of war. Its substance has scientists baffled. And the miracle it contains does not belong on this Earth. It is mystery and madness -- an enigma with no equal in recorded history. It is mankind's greatest discovery ... and worst nightmare. It may have already obliterated a world. Ours

is next.

- **Ray Bradbury**

- The Martian Chronicles

- From "Rocket Summer" to "The Million-Year Picnic," Ray Bradbury's stories of the colonization of Mars form an eerie mesh of past and future. Starting in the far-flung future of 1999, expedition after expedition leaves Earth to investigate Mars. The Martians guard their mysteries well, but they are decimated by the diseases that arrive with the rockets. Colonists appear, most with ideas no more lofty than starting a hot-dog stand, and with no respect for the culture they've displaced.

- Bradbury's quiet exploration of a future that looks so much like the past is sprinkled with lighter material. In "The Silent Towns," the last man on Mars hears the phone ring and ends up on a comical blind date. But in most of these stories, Bradbury holds up a mirror to humanity that reflects a shameful treatment of "the other," yielding, time after time, a harvest of loneliness and isolation. Yet the collection ends with hope for renewal, as a colonist family turns away from the demise of the Earth towards a new future on Mars. Bradbury is a master fantasist and *The Martian Chronicles* are an unforgettable work of art.

- **Marion Zimmer Bradley**

- The Heritage of Hastur

- Bradley has written over a dozen books about a world called 'Darkover', a place without much technology but with useful mental forces. This is one book in the series, it isn't the first, but it is one of the better ones. If you like it, there are many more. Stacey really likes this series: THE HERITAGE OF HASTUR is a brilliant epic of the pivotal events in the strange love-hate relationship between the terrain worlds and the semi-alien offspring of forgotten peoples. This is the novel of the Hastur tradition and of the showdown between those who would bargain away their world for the glories of star-borne science and those who would preserve the special "matrix" power that was at once the prize and the burden of ruddy-sunned Darkover.

- **David Brin**

- Earth

- A microscopic black hole has accidentally fallen into Earth's core, threatening to destroy the entire planet within 2 years. Some scientists are frantically for ways to prevent the disaster. But others argue that the only way to save the earth is to let the evolutionary rewind and start all over again. 'Earth' is an edge-of-the-seat thriller, a kaleidoscope novel peopled with extraordinary characters and challenging new visions of an incredibly real future.

- The Practice Effect

- Physicist Dennis Nuel was the first human to probe the strange realms called anomaly worlds - alternate universes where the laws of science were unpredictably changed. But the world Dennis discovered seemed almost like our own - with one perplexing difference. To his astonishment, he was hailed as a wizard, and found himself fighting beside a beautiful women with strange powers against a mysterious warlord as he struggled to solve the riddle of this baffling world.

- **John Brunner**

- Stand on Zanzibar

- This is a giant of a book. It had to be to give elbow-room for its subject matter - the portrayal of an entire world. There are seven billion-plus of our species, crowding the surface of the twenty-first century Earth in an age of acceleratubes, Moonbase Zero, intelligent Computers, mass marketed psychedelics, politics by assassination, scientists who burn incense to appease volcanoes -- hive-living hysteria that is reaching its bursting point all over the world. But a hive seldom knows its own madness until it's too late.

- Employing a dazzling range of literary techniques, John Brunner has created a future world as real as this morning's newspaper -- moving, sensory, impressionistic, as jagged as the times it portrays, this book is a real mind-stretcher -- and yet beautiful orchestrated to give a vivid picture of the whole.

- **Orson Scott Card**

- Ender's Game

- This has several sequels - also very good. This, as well as the second, was written as a stand-alone novel:

- Intense is the word for ENDER'S GAME. Aliens have attacked Earth twice and almost destroyed the human species. To make sure humans would win the next encounter, the world government has taken to breeding military geniuses - and then training them in the arts of war. The early training, not surprisingly, takes the form of 'games'. Ender Wiggin is a genius among geniuses; he wins all the games. He is smart enough to know that time is running out. But is he smart enough to save the planet?

- **Jack Chalker**

- Jack Chalker has written more than 2 dozen novels, and we had a long debate about which to include. He tends to write in multi-book series; these are the 1st in two different series, but both stand alone as novels.

- Lilith: A Snake in the Grass

- (followed by 3 more books in the same universe)

- Somewhere, from among the 4 human-settled worlds of the Warden Diamond, hostile aliens were spying on earth. But no agent could be sent to investigate and report back. All trips to the Warden worlds were one-way. There, a microscopic symbiont invaded all life forms, after which life became impossible outside the Warden system. The same organism destroyed any form of machinery, so no message could be beamed back by normal means.

- Midnight at the Well of Souls

- (followed by 4 more books in the same universe)

- Entered by a thousand unsuspected gateways - built by a race lost in the clouds of time - the planet its dwellers called the Well World turned beings of every kind into something else. There spacefarer Nathan Brazil found himself companioned by a batman, an amorous female centaur and a mermaid - all once as human as he. Yet Nathan Brazil's metamorphosis was more terrifying than any of those...and his memory was coming back, bringing with it the secret of the Well World. For at the heart of the bizarre planet lay the goal of every being that had ever lived -- and Nathan Brazil and his comrades were...lucky?...enough to find it!

- **Arthur C. Clarke**

- Childhood's End

- Childhood's End is a novel of the next step in the evolution of Man. It is compounded of intellectual daring and vaulting imagination -- a book in the great tradition of the novel of ideas. It tells of a world made perfect and a race transformed -- and of the unexpected tragedy of perfection.

- Rendezvous With RAMA

- (followed by 3 more books in the same universe)

- At first, only a few things are known about the celestial object that astronomers dub Rama. It is huge. It weighs more than ten trillion tons. And it is hurtling through the solar system at inconceivable speed. Then a space probe confirms the unthinkable: Rama is no natural object. It is, incredibly, an interstellar spacecraft. Space explorers and planet-bound scientists alike prepare for mankind's first encounter with alien intelligence. It will kindle their wildest dreams ... and fan their darkest fears. For no one knows who the Ramans are or why they have come. And now the moment of rendezvous awaits -- just behind a Raman airlock door.

- **Hal Clement**

- Mission of Gravity

- (followed by 1 or 2 more books in the same universe)

- For a profit - and adventure - Barlennan would sail the *Bree* thousands of miles across uncharted waters, into regions where gravity itself played tricks. He would dare the perils of strange tribes and stranger creatures - even dicker with those strange aliens from beyond the skies, though the

concept of another world was unknown to the inhabitants of Mesklin. But in spite of the incredible technology of the strangers and without regard for their enormous size, Barlennan had the notion of turning the deal to an unsuspected advantage for himself - all in all a considerable enterprise for a being very much resembling a 15 inch caterpillar!

- **Robert L. Forward**

- Rocheworld

- Powered by a revolutionary laser-driven starship, the first interstellar spaceship would reach the double planet that circled Barnard's Star in a mere twenty years. Some of the world's finest scientists were aboard that ship, and they would arrive prepared for adventure, danger and – to them, most important of all – the thrill of scientific discovery. But what they would find, both in terms of danger and discovery, would surpass all their expectations.

- Unlike so much "far out" science fiction this novel is based on solid scientific reasoning by a world-class physicist. The weird intelligences of *Rocheworld* are imaginary, but we could start work on Forward's laser-driven starprobe tomorrow.

- **William Gibson**

- Neuromancer

- (followed by 2 more books in the same universe)

- Case was the best interface cowboy who ever ran in Earth's computer matrix. Then he double-crossed the wrong people. (This won many awards for an interesting portrayal of the future - a future full of global information networks, used by everyone in their daily lives. Gibson is generally given credit for popularizing the term 'cyberspace'.)

- **Peter Hamilton**

- Neuromancer

- (really a two book story)

- Hamilton's exhilarating new opus proves that "intelligent space opera" isn't an oxymoron. By the 24th century, the vast human Commonwealth has spread from Earth via artificial wormholes. Various benign or seemingly indifferent alien races have been encountered during exploration of new planets, but an astronomer sparks curiosity by announcing that a pair of stars is enclosed by a mysterious energy barrier. Unfortunately, a space expedition discovers that the shield was created to imprison an insatiably greedy mass mind that sees any other race as a mortal threat. When the barrier somehow is lowered, the alien immediately attacks the largely unprepared Commonwealth, while humans begin wondering if yet another inhuman power has manipulated events that unleashed this threat. The author deftly juggles many characters in multiple plot lines, sometimes slowing down the action briefly, at other times racing forward. Revelations late in the book will have readers scurrying back to earlier pages to reinterpret what they initially thought. Not many SF writers are capable of tackling such a big project so confidently. In this respect, Hamilton (*Fallen Dragon*) resembles a less cheery but very tech-savvy—and extremely paranoid—Charles Dickens. Given the abrupt cliffhanger of an ending, some may prefer to save this massive installment until the story's conclusion, *Judas Unleashed*, appears next year. Anyone who begins this one, however, probably won't be able to put it down.

- **Frank Herbert**

- Dune

- (followed by 4 or 5 more books in the same universe)

- Dune - A planet of harsh deserts, subtly shifting sand tides and overwhelming storms ripping across the bleak landscape.

- Dune - A forbidding world where water was more precious than the rarest jewel and men went in fear of the awesome *shai-hulud*, huge sandworms that dwarfed even interstellar spaceships.

- Dune - The nexus of a galactic plot encompassing more worlds and more lives than even the treacherous star-noblemen who had spawned it could guess - and where ultimately would arise the *Lisan al-Gaib*, the savior foretold in the prophecies of a tormented, angry people ripe for bloody revolt.

- **Ursula K. Le Guin**

- The Left Hand of Darkness

- The Left Hand of Darkness is a science fiction novel unlike any you've read before. It is a novel of exotic adventure on a far planet whose people are completely human but for one thing: they are all of the same sex.

- The lack of sexual differentiation on the planet Winter provides the powerful theme of this book, but it is in no sense a "sensational" novel. As you see this world through the eyes of Earth's first envoy, caught up in the subtle intrigues among the nations of Winter, battling across immense and forbidding ice-fields in a desperate bid for survival, you'll come to understand gradually and with wonder what it is to be an alien being... and what it is to be a human.

- **Anne McCaffrey**

- Dragonflight (Volume 1 of the Dragonriders of Pern)

- Lessa's last chance.

- After ten long Turns, Lessa was ready to come out of hiding, to reclaim her birthright... and to Impress the young dragon queen and become Weyrwoman of Benden.

- Suddenly the deadly silver Threads once again threatened all Pern with destruction. But the mighty telepathic dragons that for centuries had defended Pern were now few in number, not nearly enough to protect the planet in its hour of greatest peril. Then Lessa hatched a daring and dangerous scheme to rally support from people who had long ago ceased to exist!

- **Vonda N. McIntyre**

- Dream Snake

- The Healing Poison. They called the healer Snake, and she bore the name proudly, for the medicine she distilled from the venom of the viper she carried with her was a potent cure; and the soothing power of her other companion, the alien dreamsnake, banished fear. But the primitive ignorance of those she served killed her dreamsnake and wrecked her career - for dreamsnakes were dreadfully rare, and Center would not grant her another.

- Snake's only hope was to find a new dreamsnake - and on her quest, she was pursued by two implacable followers, one driven by love, one by fear and need.

- **Walter M. Miller**

- A Canticle for Leibowitz

- Down the long centuries after the Flame scoured the earth clean, the monks of the order of St. Leibowitz the Engineer kept alive the ancient knowledge. In their monastery in the Utah desert, they preserved the precious relics of their founder: the blessed blueprint, the sacred shopping list and the holy shrine of Fallout Shelter.

- Watched over by an immortal wanderer, they witness humanity's rebirth from ashes, and saw reenacted the eternal drama of the struggle between light and darkness, life and death.

- **Larry Niven**

- (I think that Niven is the best of the modern SF writers. If you like these, there are at least a dozen more that you will like)

- The Mote In Gods Eye

- (may be the best SF book ever)

- In the year 3016, the Second Empire of Man spans hundreds of star systems, thanks to the faster-than-light Alderson Drive. No other intelligent beings have ever been encountered, not until a light sail probe enters a human system carrying a dead alien. The probe is traced to the Mote, an isolated star in a thick dust cloud, and an expedition is dispatched.

- In the Mote the humans find an ancient civilization--at least one million years old--that has always been bottled up in their cloistered solar system for lack of a star drive. The Moties are welcoming and kind, yet rather evasive about certain aspects of their society. It seems the Moties have a dark problem, one they've been unable to solve in over a million years.

Ringworld

In the first book of this award-winning series, a huge architectural ring is constructed in outer space. In time it will house the inhabitants of the dying Earth. A whole new world is emerging, a world of huge dimensions, encompassing an area three million times the area of the Earth. Ringworld has a gravitational field and high walls to preserve its atmosphere. Its proximity to the sun maintains the new planet's climate. With those kinds of resources at its disposal, humankind can begin anew -- but not without meeting the disquieting challenges of a brave new world. Breath-taking ingenious from start to finish, RINGWORLD is fast becoming a science fiction classic.

- **Frederik Pohl**

- Gateway

- (followed by 4 more books in the same universe)

- This book won tons of awards. It is a great book!

- Rich man, dead man. These were the choices Gateway offered - the same for women, too, of course. Gateway opened on all the wealth of the Universe - and on reaches of unimaginable horror. The humans who rode the alien Heechee spacecraft stored on the planetoid couldn't know whether the trip would make them millionaires or corpses.

- The Space Merchants (with C. M. Kornbluth)

- (followed by another book in the same universe)

- ad agencies dominate governments and everything else. Now Schoken Associates, one of the big players, has a new challenge for star copywriter Mitch Courtenay. Volunteers are needed to colonise Venus. It's a hellhole, and nobody who knew anything about it would dream of signing up. But by the time Mitch has finished, they will be queuing to get on board the spaceships.

- **John Scalzi**

- Old Man's Way

- Though a lot of SF writers are more or less efficiently continuing the tradition of Robert A. Heinlein, Scalzi's astonishingly proficient first novel reads like an original work by the late grand master. Seventy-five-year-old John Perry joins the Colonial Defense Force because he has nothing to keep him on Earth. Suddenly installed in a better-than-new young body, he begins developing loyalty toward his comrades in arms as they battle aliens for habitable planets in a crowded galaxy. As bloody combat experiences pile up, Perry begins wondering whether the slaughter is justified; in short, is being a warrior really a good thing, let alone being human? The definition of "human" keeps expanding as Perry is pushed through a series of mind-stretching revelations. The story obviously resembles such novels as *Starship Trooper* and *Time Enough for Love*, but Scalzi is not just recycling classic Heinlein. He's working out new twists, variations that startle even as they satisfy. The novel's tone is right on target, too—sentimentality balanced by hardheaded calculation, know-it-all smugness moderated by innocent wonder.

- **Dan Simmons**

- Hyperion

- (followed by 3 sequels)

- On the world called Hyperion, beyond the laws of the Hegemony of Man, there waits the creature called the shrike. There are those who worship it. There are those who fear it. And there are those who have vowed to destroy it. In the valley of the Time Tombs, where huge, brooding structures move backwards through time, the Shrike waits for them all. On the eve of Armageddon, with the entire galaxy at war, seven pilgrims set forth on a final voyage to Hyperion seeking the answers to the unsolved riddles of their lives. Each carries a desperate hope - and a terrible secret. And one may hold the fate of humanity in his hands.

- **Joan D. Vinge**

- The Snow Queen

- (followed by 2 more books in the same universe)

- The Winter colonists have ruled Tiamat for 150 years, slaughtering the gentle sea mers in trade

for off-world wealth. But soon the gate to the galactic Hegemony will close, Tiamat will be isolated, and the 150-year reign of the Summer primitives will begin. Unless...

ARIENRHOD, the ageless, corrupt Snow Queen, can commit a genocidal crime -- and destroy destiny ...unless SPARKS DAWNTREADER, the Snow Queen's companion, can survive sea and city, palace and slums -- and find destiny ...unless HEGEMONY COMMANDER JERUSHA PALATHION, the Snow Queen's victim, can find one ally on Tiamat -- and change destiny ...And unless MOON SUMMER, a young mystic, can break a conspiracy that spans space -- and control destiny. Because Moon is the Snow Queen's lost weapon. The Snow Queen's lost rival. The Snow Queen's lost soul. Moon is the Snow Queen's clone...

- **James White**

- Final Diagnosis

- (preceded and followed by more books in the same universe)

- It's a massive hospital space station on the Galactic Rim – 384 levels, a staff of thousands – where human and alien medicine meet. But Patient Hewlitt, new to Sector General, doesn't want to meet alien medicine – or alien doctors, or alien nurses, or aliens of any kind. Which is just too bad; he's an interesting case, and he'll have to get used to it. In the meantime, it's always been an article of faith among Sector General's multispecies staff that infections can't pass from one alien race to another. But in this season of anomalies, it looks like they might have their first-ever interstellar virus on their hands, their tentacles, their cilia.... Combining intrigue, ingenious puzzles (and even more ingenious solutions), action, adventure, and White's characteristic easy charm, *Final Diagnosis* is a science-fictional treat.