

Not Your School's Reading List 12: Science Fiction and Space Opera

At *Intellectual Takeout*, we strive to offer not only commentary on current events but also tangible advice for engaging with our increasingly chaotic world. That's why we're proud to present this ongoing series of literature recommendations.

Set across the universe, these stories tell of fictional worlds and futures, first encounters with extraterrestrials, the human condition and its consequences, and thrilling tales of adventure in the final frontier.

Read the previous list [here](#).

1. Edgar Rice Burroughs. [*A Princess of Mars*](#). 1912.

"The beginning of an incredible odyssey in which John Carter, a gentleman from Virginia and a Civil War veteran, unexpectedly finds himself on to the red planet, scene of continuing combat among rival tribes. Captured by a band of six-limbed, green-skinned savage giants called Tharks ... and when his captors take as prisoner Dejah Thoris, the lovely human-looking princess of the city of Helium, Carter must call upon every ounce of strength, courage, and ingenuity to rescue her."

2. C.S. Lewis. [*Out of the Silent*](#)

Planet. 1938.

“In the first novel of C.S. Lewis’s classic science fiction trilogy, Dr Ransom, a Cambridge academic, is abducted and taken on a spaceship to the red planet of Malacandra, which he knows as Mars. His captors are plotting to plunder the planet’s treasures and plan to offer Ransom as a sacrifice to the creatures who live there. Ransom discovers he has come from the ‘silent planet’ – Earth – whose tragic story is known throughout the universe...”

3. Isaac Asimov. I, Robot. 1950.

“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.”

4. Ray Bradbury. The Martian Chronicles. 1950.

“Leaving behind a world on the brink of destruction, man came to the Red Planet and found the Martians waiting, dreamlike. Seeking the promise of a new beginning, man brought with him his oldest fears and his deepest desires. Man conquered Mars—and in that instant, Mars conquered him.”

5. Walter M. Miller Jr. A Canticle for Leibowitz. 1959.

“In a nightmarish ruined world slowly awakening to the light after sleeping in darkness, the infant rediscoveries of

science are secretly nourished by cloistered monks dedicated to the study and preservation of the relics and writings of the blessed Saint Isaac Leibowitz. From here the story spans centuries of ignorance, violence, and barbarism, viewing through a sharp, satirical eye the relentless progression of a human race damned by its inherent humanness to recelebrate its grand foibles and repeat its grievous mistakes.”

6. Stanisław Lem. Solaris. 1961.

“When Kris Kelvin arrives at the planet Solaris to study the ocean that covers its surface, he finds a painful, hitherto unconscious memory embodied in the living physical likeness of a long-dead lover. Others examining the planet ... are plagued with their own repressed and newly corporeal memories. The Solaris ocean may be a massive brain that creates these incarnate memories, though its purpose in doing so is unknown, forcing the scientists to ... wonder if they can truly understand the universe without first understanding what lies within their hearts.”

7. Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. Roadside Picnic. 1972.

“Red Schuhart is a stalker, one of those young rebels who are compelled, in spite of extreme danger, to venture illegally into the Zone to collect the mysterious artifacts that the alien visitors left scattered around. ... But when he and his friend Kirill go into the Zone together to pick up a ‘full empty,’ something goes wrong. And the news he gets from his girlfriend upon his return makes it inevitable that he’ll keep going back to the Zone, again and again, until he finds the answer to all his problems.”

8. Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle. [The Mote in God's Eye](#). 1974.

"In 3016, the 2nd Empire of Man spans hundreds of star systems, thanks to faster-than-light Alderson Drive. Intelligent beings are finally found from the Mote, an isolated star in a thick dust cloud. The bottled-up ancient civilization, at least one million years old, are welcoming, kind, yet evasive, with a dark problem they have not solved in over a million years."

9. Orson Scott Card. [Speaker for the Dead](#). 1986.

"In the aftermath of his terrible war, Ender Wiggin disappeared, and a powerful voice arose: The Speaker for the Dead, who told the true story of the Bugger War. Now, long years later, a second alien race has been discovered, but again the aliens' ways are strange and frightening...again, humans die. And it is only the Speaker for the Dead, who is also Ender Wiggin the Xenocide, who has the courage to confront the mystery...and the truth."

10. Ted Chiang. "[Story of Your Life](#)." 2002.

"Alien lifeforms suddenly appear on Earth. When a linguist is brought in to help communicate with them and discern their intentions, her new knowledge of their language and its nonlinear structure allows her to see future events and all the joy and pain they may bring."

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