

Sci-Fi September

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Perhaps one of the earliest science fiction stories can be found in the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus, who dared to steal fire from the Olympian Gods in order to share the knowledge of it and future technologies with humans, with all the ramifications both good and bad that entails.

And to this day, the very best science fiction writers take our current level of scientific understanding, and then push it just a bit further ahead, to both inspire the reader and make observations about both the promise and perils of science and technology and the eternal human condition that mirrors those promises and perils.

Perhaps Ray Bradbury captured this tension at the heart of the genre when he wrote “Science fiction is any idea that occurs in the head and doesn't exist yet, but soon will, and will change everything for everybody, and nothing will ever be the same again. As soon as you have an idea that changes some small part of the world you are writing science fiction. It is always the art of the possible, never the impossible.”

It is in that spirit of wonder and imagination that we at the library invite you to come and explore our sci-fi collection. Here are a few titles to get you started on your journey of exploration through time and space!

BOOKS

Fans of Michael Crichton's sci-fi classic *Jurassic Park* may want to check out *The Kaiju Preservation Society* by John Scalzi, which has been hailed by critics as one of the best sci-fi novels of 2023. The inventive plot centers on a delivery driver in New York, Jamie, who, desperate for more exciting work, accepts his friend's offer of joining a field work team with his animal rights organization. Little does Jamie know that the “field work” involves travel to another dimension where large dinosaur-like creatures called Kaiju roam a human-free Earth, where their existence (and ours) is under threat.

Consistent with the strong tradition of sci-fi works that comment on contemporary social issues, Mary Robinette Kowal's Hugo Award winning 2018 novel *The Calculating Stars* presents a sci-fi story with feminist themes. After a massive meteorite falls to Earth in 1952 and wipes out most of the US East Coast, talented mathematician and member of the International Aerospace Coalition Elma York finds herself wondering why she cannot join the space mission to save humanity from the same fate that befell the dinosaurs. Determined to overcome sexism, York is relentless in her pursuit to become the world's first “lady astronaut.”

For those looking for more irreverent sci-fi in the tradition of legendary works such as Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, there are several options in our collection. *The Long Earth* is a collaboration between science fiction heavyweights Terry Pratchett and Stephen

Baxter, featuring a device called a “stepper” that is powered by a potato (yes, a potato) that enables travel between parallel universes. When a police officer in Madison, Wisconsin discovers the stepper at the burned out remains of a “mad” scientist’s house in 2015, her life, and a WWI era soldier’s life as well, will be changed forever. Another example of sci-fi with a humorous streak can be found in *The Martian* by Andy Weir, which is considerably funnier in tone than the movie adaptation starring Matt Damon as the novel’s stranded-on-Mars protagonist, Mark Watney.

Finally, while science fiction traditionally has been more of a “niche” fiction genre as compared to stalwarts like mysteries, thrillers, and historical fiction, there are occasionally sci-fi novels that go on to mainstream successes. One example of this phenomenon in our collection is *Ready Player One*, by Ernest Cline, a New York Times bestseller that was later adapted into a film by Steven Spielberg. The novel is a love letter to 1980s video game culture, despite being set in 2044 and featuring an immersive virtual reality called OASIS.

OASIS is widely used to escape the grim realities of the “real world”, and one user, Wade Watts, spends almost every waking minute of his existence “jacked into” its many utopian planets. But Watts’ experiences shift from mere escapism to much higher stakes when he decides to solve a series of puzzles that the recently passed away creator of OASIS left behind, with the promise of ownership of the entire virtual world to whoever can solve them first.

These titles are just a handful of the hundreds of science fiction titles in our collection. We encourage you to stop by the library in September, check out our special “Sci Fi September” book display, and journey with us to the stars and beyond!