

Steve's Much-Requested Sci-Fi Reading Guide

Hello,

After assembling a recommended Sci-Fi reading list for a friend with whom I'd been out of touch for several years, I realized that with slight (removing personal stuff) modifications, I could share the same list with my podcast and twitter followers who have often asked for exactly such a list.

There are no spoilers here, though I do give the reader some upfront sense for the general gist of that the plot is about. I'm always careful not to go much beyond what a reader would learn very quickly upon delving into any of the books.

This is by no means my own personal lifetime personal "best of" list. For example, nowhere is Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's "Mote in God's Eye." Nor have I listed Asimov's fabulous Robot novels "Caves of Steel", etc. Rather, this is just a list of relatively RECENT reading over the past year or two. But that said... oh my lord... there are some wonderful things here!

My #1 recent find was David Weber's "Honor Harrington" series. In it we meet a modest but determined and, we come to learn, rather special young woman in a future space navy. She's unassuming but strong, and initially unrecognized until, as a sort of political punishment she's given her own ship to command... after which the action never stops. This is mature space opera combat coupled with deep character development, believable interstellar politics and romance. I'm probably getting ready to reread the entire series because it's just SO fabulous:

David Weber's STUNNING "Honor Harrington" 13-novel Masterset:

- On_Basilisk_Station
- The_Honor_of_the_Queen
- The_Short_Victorious_War
- Field_of_Dishonor
- Flag_in_Exile
- Honor_Among_Enemies
- In_Enemy_Hands
- Echoes_of_Honor
- Ashes_of_Victory
- War_of_Honor
- At_All_Costs
- Mission_of_Honor-ARC
- A_Rising_Thunder
- *(And more of Honor's early life in the same universe...)*
- Changer_of_Worlds
- Fallen_Angels
- Shadow_of_Saganami

Those last three are out of the main story arc, but provide additional background and early Honor Harrington life story. (And the series is now being made into movies!)

Michael McCollum has become a personal friend, though we've never met. He's truly a "rocket scientist", having been involved with the design of the International Space Station. (He redesigned the nuclear reactor pump which failed after it caused the Three Mile Island disaster.) I was reading his earlier novels years ago on my Palm PDA, marking up and sending him any typos I was finding. Since he figured out that I'm a careful reader and useful typo-finder I've read over his last two novels (Gibraltar Stars and Euclid's Wall) before their release. I LOVE his work, and after you've read these two trilogies, I think you'll know why!

Gibraltar Earth opens with one of the most wonderful unexpected, short and clever space battles ever... I've read and reread just that opening sequence many times. It's just perfect. This trilogy is a "first contact" story with a wonderful twist which Michael then runs to conclusion:

Michael McCollum's "Gibraltar" trilogy:

- Gibraltar Earth
- Gibraltar Sun
- Gibraltar Stars

This second trilogy (written earlier) is no less wonderful than Gibraltar. Michael designs a fascinating universe where solar systems have one or more "jump points" where gravitational lines between stars interact and intersect to create opportunities to transit interstellar distances instantaneously. The plot involves the consequences of a star's going nova upsetting the long-standing trade routes among human colonized stars... and reconnecting stars in way which is "inconvenient."

One of the things you'll have picked up on from Michael's Gibraltar trilogy is how cleverly he weaves a story and situations together. Sure, as an author anyone could, but his contrivances are deeply satisfying:

Michael McCollum's "Antares" trilogy:

- Antares Dawn
- Antares Passage
- Antares Victory

Jack Campbell's "The Lost Fleet" series is up near the top of my faves. In it, we meet a hundred-year-cryo-frozen-survival-capsule "obsolete" space navy soldier who is discovered after a hundred years of multi-generational space warfare. What's so cool is that the war's casualty rate, and thus trained officer turnover, has been so extreme that all "classic space warfare" knowledge of how to fight fleets of sub-light space ships, with inertia, acceleration limits, speed of light delays across solar systems, and such... has long since been lost. They all charge headlong into battle.

So we “thaw out” our captain “Black Jack” Geary, one hundred years out of touch with contemporary politics and space warfare operations... but uniquely able to command fleets of fighting ships using his innate grasp of the “old knowledge.” It’s a fabulous premise and the space battles, and tricks, are something to behold:

Jack Campbell’s “Lost Fleet” Series:

- The Lost Fleet: Dauntless
- The Lost Fleet: Fearless
- The Lost Fleet: Courageous
- The Lost Fleet: Valiant
- The Lost Fleet: Relentless
- The Lost Fleet: Victorious

The first six-novel series leaves us with a mystery, which we then pursue...

- Beyond the Frontier: Dreadnaught
- Beyond the Frontier: Invincible
- Beyond the Frontier: Guardian

Peter F. Hamilton needs, of course, no introduction. If he DOES need an introduction for you, then drop whatever you’re doing and go get a copy – in any medium, of his “**Fallen Dragon**.” I think I’ve read it three times so far and it makes me wish for amnesia. As you’re reading it, know that the end is worth everything.

And if you somehow missed his “**Pandora’s Star**” and “**Judas Unchained**” novels (part one and two of a single story) they need to be next.

The two Pandora’s Star novels introduce you to Hamilton’s “Commonwealth” universe where we learn about a terrific future human civilization knit together with wormholes and a system of trains. That universe and many of the characters in it reappear in his next work, the Void trilogy: (Read the Pandora and Judas first!)

Peter F. Hamilton’s Void trilogy:

- The Dreaming Void
- The Temporal Void
- The Evolutionary Void

I was slow to jump on the Void trilogy this since I didn’t think I’d like whatever a “dreaming void” was. (I still recall Al Capone coming back to life in his earlier Night’s Dawn trilogy and hadn’t fully forgiven him for that.) But “The Void” trilogy is wonderful!

Gregory Benford is a UCI physicist and renown science fiction author whom I’ve read extensively. In his “Galactic Center Saga” series we follow the lives of a band of hard pressed humans where the biological vs machine war has not been going in their favor for quite some time. The series ranges widely, but is full of truly original and terrific ideas. And it’s lots of fun rooting for the weak but stalwart little humans!

Gregory Benford's "Galactic Center Saga" Series:

A deeply haunting series detailing a galactic war between mechanical and biological life.

- In the Ocean of Night
- Across the Sea of Suns
- Great Sky River
- Tides of Light
- Furious Gulf
- Sailing Bright Eternity

Graham Sharp Paul's "Helfort War" series follows the space navy career of Michael Helfort as he chases girls a bit, then enlists. He's a good kid who possesses some unsuspected gifts when it comes to spacial tactical cognition. He's got a good soul, but "the enemy" definitely does not. The result is a terrific ride...

Graham Sharp Paul's "Helfort's War" Series:

- The Battle at the Moons of Hell
- The Battle of the Hammer Worlds
- The Battle of Devastation Reef
- The Battle for Commitment Planet
- The Final Battle

Richard Philips takes us on an interesting journey, as three high school kids stumble upon "the second ship" – an extraterrestrial starship that hid itself in a cave not far from their homes... and it needs their help. I can't say more other than that there are some fabulous scenes and that my podcast listeners have LOVED this recommendation:

Richard Philips "Rho Agenda" series:

- The Second Ship
- Immune
- Wormhole

Alastair Reynolds' "Revelation Space" trilogy is the only work of Reynolds I've read aside from "House of Suns" which was excellent and which I discuss later. The success with me of House of Suns left me willing to try some more. "Revelation Space" was interesting, but dark. And apparently that's what he does... sort of "noir sci-fi." I'm unsure whether I'm a fan of starships piloted and crewed by practicing sadists, masochists and other deviant types... though it's difficult to argue that not all starships are going to be as well swept, polished and shiny as Jean Luc Picard's bright and boldly colored "Disneyland" Enterprise. That said... I **am** GLAD I plowed through this somewhat over-long trilogy. Reynolds does **not** possess Hamilton's story telling gift, but few do. In this plot we receive an interesting new theory about why we're encountering so few (none yet at the moment) star faring species:

Alastair Reynolds' "Revelation Space" series:

- Revelation Space
- Redemption Ark
- Absolution Gap

It was **Fred Saberhagen** who first wrote extensively and, I think, compellingly and cleverly, about the notion of anti-life machines left behind by "The Makers" – who may have been annihilated by their own machines. Now those self-repairing and ageless machines are bent upon and programmed to relentlessly eliminate all biological life from the universe. The concept is so compelling – what more perfect enemy for man than an utterly unfeeling, yet sentient and clever, killing machine?

As Fred, himself, first introduced his machines: *"Long ago, in a distant part of the galaxy, two alien races met and fought a war of mutual extinction. The sole legacy of that war was the weapon that ended it: the death machines, the BERSERKERS. Guided by self-aware computers more intelligent than any human, these world-sized battle craft carved a swath of death through the galaxy until they arrived at the outskirts of the fledgling Empire of Man. These are the stories of the frail creatures who must meet this monstrous and implacable enemy and who, by fighting it to a standstill, become the saviors of all living things."*

So Fred wrote countless stories from 1967 through 2005. I have the following electronic versions in my collection. Many are collections of short stories, all are wonderful:

Fred Saberhagen's Berserker Novels:

- Berserker (1967)
- Berserker's Planet (1975)
- Berserker Man (1979)
- The Ultimate Enemy (1979)
- Berserker Wars (1981)
- Berserker Throne (1985)
- Berserker Blue Death (1985)
- Berserker Kill (1993)
- Berserker Fury (1997)
- Berserker's Star (2003)
- Berserker Prime (2004)
- Rogue Berserker (2005)

Bringing the theme of self-aware machines down to Earth – literally – **Daniel Suarez's 'Daemon'** tells of a near-future sentience with an agenda. A terrific read, including its sequel "Freedom™". And "Kill Decision" is another terrific piece of fiction about the near-term use of drone technology:

Daniel Suarez "Daemon" Series:

- Daemon
- Freedom(tm)
- Kill Decision

Stand Alone Single Novels

Alastair Reynolds' "House of Suns" – This novel demonstrates that Alastair isn't stuck writing only Noir Sci-Fi. And the premise here is truly intriguing: We learn of a society of star travelers who explore, not "Deep Space" as much as "Deep Time". By taking advantage of Einsteinian relativistic time dilation, stasis and freezing, these travelers exist across the duration of the galaxy. It's fascinating.

Peter F. Hamilton's "Great North Road" – This one I don't yet know about since it's what I have queued up to read next... just as soon as I finish one of Peter's earlier works...

Peter F. Hamilton's "A Misspent Youth" – This is what I'm reading at the moment. I've just started, so I can't tell much about it. But it appears to be early Commonwealth formation. (The main character, Jeff Baker, has just invented the "datasphere.") It's also a bit darker than Hamilton's typical novel and Peter himself states that he understood it wasn't going to be as popular as his others. It's a character-driven work that examines the effect upon a family of the first successful rejuvenation of the family's patriarch... returning him to a young man. (He has a rather wild son and an "arranged" Barbie Doll wifey.)

Michael McCollum's "The Sails of Tau Ceti" – We're back with one of my favorite authors in a terrific romp. "Starhopper" was humanity's first interstellar probe. It was designed to search for intelligent life beyond the solar system. Before it could be launched, however, intelligent life found Earth. The discovery of an alien light sail inbound at the edge of the solar system generated considerable excitement in scientific circles. With the interstellar probe nearing completion, it gave scientists the opportunity to launch an expedition to meet the aliens while they were still in space. The second surprise came when Starhopper's crew boarded the alien craft. They found beings who, despite their alien physiques, were surprisingly compatible with humans. That two species so similar could have evolved a mere twelve light years from one another seemed too coincidental to be true. One human being soon discovered that coincidence had nothing to do with it...

Michael McCollum's "Euclid's Wall" – Weirdly enough, this is actually a seafaring science fiction novel, which Michael had been wanting to write for some time: An experiment in advanced physics goes very wrong at a Stanford University research facility which – quite literally – shakes civilization back to the dark ages. This is a fun tale of adventure that, among other things, helps to illustrate just how much we depend upon our 21st century infrastructure... and what would be required to survive without it!

Michael McCollum's "Gridlock & Other Stories" – A collection of Michael's short sci-fi stories.

Orson Scott Card's Enders Game – When the movie was not far off I decided to re-read this classic since the book is always better than the movie. It was. 😊

Gregory Benford Singles:

- **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.

I wasn't a huge fan of Artifact. I was hoping for more. What it was, was okay. But not, I thought, up to the author's other work.

Stephen King's "Under The Dome" – When the TV series was getting ready to begin, I quickly read the novel under the assumption, once again, that the book would be better. Oh my lord was the book better!! So much so that it was quite painful to watch the series on television.

So there for what it's worth, is a summary of my recent Science Fiction readings. You really can't go wrong with any of the series and trilogies I mention.

