

SCIENCE FICTION

Bradbury, Ray. *The Martian Chronicles*. This group of short stories is knit together by the theme of the historical settlement of Mars. The first three expeditions fail; all of their crews are killed by native Martians. By the fourth, however, nearly all Martians have died from Earth-borne chickenpox and colonization from Earth has begun. A few of the stories center on the few Martians left, who interact sporadically with the new settlers, some of whom have their own stories. When a world-wide nuclear war seems imminent, most of the colonizers go back to Earth until the red planet is left almost entirely uninhabited. Twenty years after the Great War, and at the brink of human civilization's final collapse, some people escape their home planet to start over in Mars.

Brooks, Max. *World War Z*. The Zombie War came unthinkable close to eradicating humanity. Max Brooks, the narrator, driven by the urgency of preserving the acid-etched first-hand experiences of the survivors from those apocalyptic years, traveled across the United States of America and throughout the world, from decimated cities that once teemed with upwards of thirty million souls to the most remote and inhospitable areas of the planet. He recorded the testimony of men, women, and sometimes children who came face-to-face with the living, or at least the undead, hell of that dreadful time.

Cline, Ernest. *Ready Player One*. In the year 2044, all of Earth is basically impoverished and resource-depleted. The only time teenager Wade Watts feels alive is when he's jacked into the virtual utopia known as the OASIS. Wade has devoted his life to studying the puzzles hidden within this virtual world—puzzles that are based on their creator's obsession with 1980s pop culture. If and when three puzzle clues are solved huge power and fortune will be given to the winner. When Wade stumbles upon the first clue's answer, he finds himself confronted by a corporation and its CEO who will stop at nothing to find the remaining solutions. The race is on, and if Wade's going to survive, he'll have to win.

Crichton, Michael. *Jurassic Park*. Scientists have been able to replicate the DNA of dinosaurs from the Jurassic Age, when they were violent predators. They have been kept on an island in the Caribbean but when visitors arrive, the raptors are set loose since the computerized security apparatus has been turned off by a traitorous employee of the Park who has been bribed to steal embryos by a rival biotech firm. The raptors are interested in feeding and not just on other dinosaurs -- but on the visitors themselves.

Heinlein, Robert. *Stranger in a Strange Land*. Valentine Michael (Mike) Smith is the sole, unexpected child of the first, disastrous, Martian expedition. He is returned to a post-World-War-III, religion-influenced Earth 25 years later, having been raised by Martians. So Mike is basically a Martian, and has an entirely Martian philosophy and some superhuman abilities. He also seems to own the entire planet of Mars, thanks to a quirk in the law. This makes him a target for all kinds of politicians, religious leaders, and more. Eventually Mike starts his own religion, which earns him enemies galore.

Herbert, Frank. *Dune*. Paul Atreides, heir to the House Atreides, is taken to the planet Arrakis (Dune), when his father is given control of that planet in a plot by the Emperor and the family's rival noble house. The first third has the trap developing, pushing Paul and his mother Jessica to hide and live among the locals, the Fremen, a messianic tribe. The second third has Paul confirming his skills as a foretold genetically perfect human and also as the foretold mystical leader of the Fremen. The final part is about the acceptance of his leadership as hero of the Fremen, and what he sees as an unavoidable, decade-long Fremen jihad through the universe.

King, Stephen. 11/22/63. Life can turn on a dime or stumble into the extraordinary, as it does for Jake Epping, a teacher in Maine. A bizarre secret comes to light when Jake's longtime friend Al, owner of the local diner who is dying of lung cancer, enlists Jake to take over a mission that had become an obsession—to prevent the Kennedy assassination. How? By stepping through a portal in the diner's storeroom, and into the era of Ike and Elvis, of big American cars, sock hops, and cigarette smoke. Finding himself in warmhearted Jodie, Texas, Jake begins a new life. But all turns in the road lead to a troubled loner named Lee Harvey Oswald. The course of history is about to be rewritten...and more than once.

Miller, Walter M., Jr. A Canticle for Leibowitz. In a ruined world slowly awakening to the light after sleeping in darkness for centuries, 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 and discovery, violence and compassion, barbarism and small steps toward a new civilization, but ultimately it's about a human race damned by its inherent humanness to recelbrate its grand foibles and repeat its grievous mistakes.

Russell, Mary Doria. The Sparrow. When others can't decide if music from another planet, Rakhat, deserves investigation, the Jesuits, believing the music divinely inspired, launch their own mission, sending out eight people. Only one of those sent, Father Emilio Sandoz, survives. After 40 Earth years he is rescued, disfigured and emotionally shattered. Eventually he is summoned to a tribunal to explain what happened and to justify his actions, including committing seemingly cold-blooded killings and being a willing sex slave to the aliens. Revelations about two alien cultures on the same planet, as well as the source and meaning of the music, impact the whole concept of interpreting God's will.

Scalzi, John. Redshirts. There's something strange about the starship *Intrepid*. New crew members realize that on the frequent "away missions," some lowly ensign always seems to die a horrible and oddly hackneyed death. Ensign Andrew Dahl is the newest crew member and the latest one to realize something's amiss. He stumbles on information that changes his and his fellow under-officers' understanding of what the *Intrepid* really is and gives them a slim chance to save their lives. Remember: in the original *Star Trek* Kirk, Spock, Bones and Scotty were very dangerous men to stand next to if you were wearing the ensign's red shirt.

Stewart, George R. Earth Abides. One of the few people left alive after a devastating virus, Isherwood (Ish) Williams first has to learn to survive without the comforts of civilization. Then, as he begins to meet a few others, they have to struggle to keep some semblance of society. His "wife," Em, is a major force. But slowly the desire to learn fades and superstition takes over and the struggle becomes one of ensuring the group has enough technology (ability to build fires and the manufacture of bows and arrows) just to survive.

Weir, Andy. The Martian. Six days ago, astronaut Mark Watney became one of the first people to walk on Mars. Now, he's sure he'll be the first person to die there. Thinking he's dead, and for their own survival, his team has left him stranded there. Now, somehow, he has to let someone know he's alive and has to be able to survive *if and when* someone returns. It's a Robinson Crusoe for the 22nd century.