

**OFF THE SHELF**  
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RE: Science Fiction Starter Pack

If you've never seen the appeal of space, imaginary technology, or aliens, then this column is for you. It's escapism with some intellectual heft behind it. Seeing the universe from every perspective imaginable helps us see things here on Earth with fresh eyes. Readers new to the science fiction (sci-fi) genre often start with a classic like *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card or *Dune* by Frank Herbert. Consider five sci-fi sub-genres that may get you hooked!

### **Robots**

*All Systems Red* by Martha Wells features a dangerous security construct who has achieved free will, but would rather watch its favorite TV shows in peace than get caught up in human squabbles. First of *The Murderbot Diaries*, every one of these books is delightfully hilarious and a staff favorite at NOLS.

### **Classic/Space Opera**

*Leviathan Wakes* by James S. A. Corey is part of an ongoing series and has been adapted into an excellent TV show. It has many of the classic tropes: spaceships, secretive corporations, interplanetary conflicts and politics, but they're all bound together by a detective noire storyline that is gritty and fast moving.

### **Optimistic/Solarpunk**

This newer sub-genre includes an all-time favorite book, *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* by Becky Chambers. This is space without the focus on technology. Characters are front and center so there is an incredible diversity of cultures and beings showcased. Second choice is

*Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel which follows a performing troupe through a plague-ravaged Canada, highlighting the importance of art and beauty in keeping us alive.

### **Military**

There are many military sci-fi books to choose from, but *Old Man's War* by John Scalia both embodies and transcends the category. In this world, retirement means joining the defense force and leaving Earth forever, which gives the reader epic space battles leavened with humor and a unique point of view.

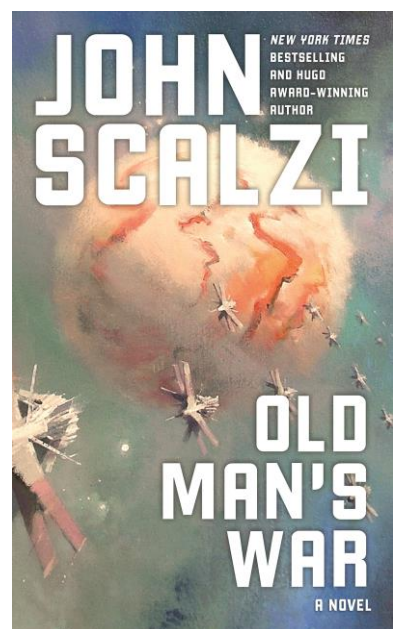
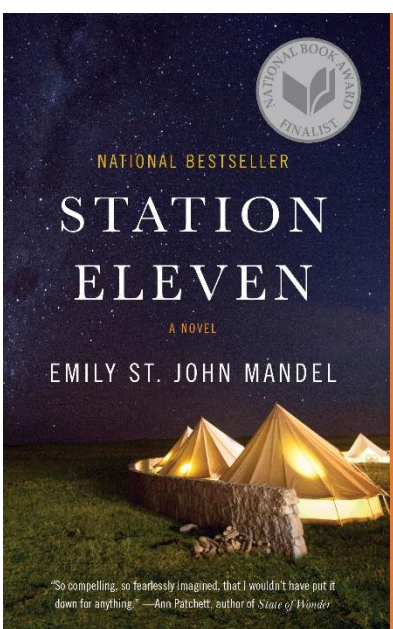
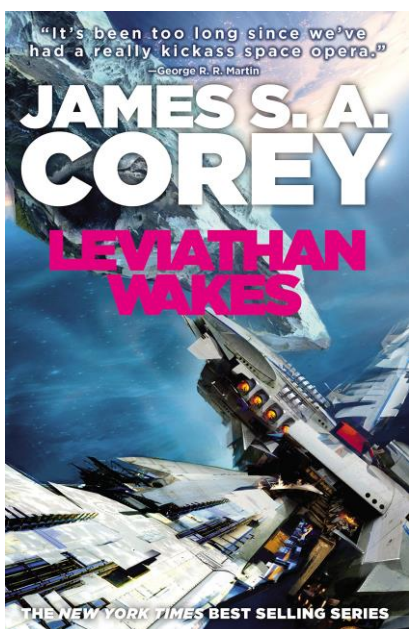
### **Sociological/Soft Science**

*The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin tackles ideas of gender, sexuality, communication, and religion like an anthropologist. Because it's not humans under the microscope, this thought experiment has much more power to challenge and question things we think are fundamental to our human identity.

Author Philip K Dick said, "The SF writer sees not just possibilities, but wild possibilities." Speculative fiction based on technology and science is so far seeing and yet so immediate. Unfortunately, there's no space left in this article to touch on steampunk, time travel like *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler, alternate history, or hard science like the mind-expanding *The Three Body Problem* by Liu Cixin. But, hopefully your book list has expanded to explore a new world of reading material!

### **More Information**

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