

Read the future with science fiction and AI

What's coming next? To expand your understanding of the future, try reading these science fiction picks, as recommended by Prof. Fabrizio Ferraro.



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Ex machina

By [Fabrizio Ferraro](#)

Science fiction has always been a genre that looked to the future, often using far-fetched but nonetheless believable scenarios to explore what life might be like in years, decades or even centuries to come. In recent years, the popularity of science fiction books, movies and TV shows has only increased, with stories like *Black Mirror* and *The Martian* becoming cultural touchstones. For corporate leaders and managers, science fiction can be more than just entertainment. These stories can provide valuable insights into the future of business, technology and society. By understanding the trends and ideas that are being explored in science fiction, corporate leaders can make better decisions today that will help their companies survive and thrive in the years to come.

Let me confess that I did not write the previous paragraph. I asked an AI bot ([the OpenAI GPT-3 model](#)) to “write an essay on how contemporary science fiction novels can help corporate leaders and managers to understand the future.” Five seconds later, I had a first paragraph I’d be happy to call my own. The illustration on this page is also [AI-generated according to my prompts](#). As science fiction writer William Gibson mused: “The future is already here — it’s just not very evenly distributed.”

I also asked the bot to suggest the best contemporary science fiction novels for understanding the future, but it turns out AI has only read the classics — *Dune*, *Neuromancer* and *Snow Crash*. Those are all great books, but I think other contemporary works of speculative fiction can offer key insights into our future and, perhaps more importantly, our present.

Science fiction entertains, but it also raises big questions about how societies can be organized, what they can achieve and what can go wrong. The best speculative fiction helps us realize that it isn’t just technology or the market that allows us to thrive or causes us to fail — it’s human nature.

Here, I (and not the algorithm) recommend 10 of the most intriguing and innovative speculative novels of the past 10 years (listed alphabetically by author), which offer us glimpses of what the future may hold.

Blow your mind with these 10 books

[The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet](#)

Becky Chambers

If your favorite part of Star Wars was watching aliens hanging at the bar, this is the book for you. But taking inter-alien relationships seriously can also be useful in the real world, as we face the challenges and opportunities of unleashing the power of diversity.

[Attack Surface](#)

Cory Doctorow

Doctorow, the 2022 winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Imagination in Service to Society Award, has leveraged his deep understanding of the relationship between technology, capitalism and politics to explore the potential for dystopian surveillance scenarios and how we can prevent them.

[AI 2041: Ten Visions for Our Future](#)

Kai-fu Lee & Chen Qiufan

Lee, former head of Google China, and novelist Chen Qiufan worked together on these 10 “eye-opening” short stories, which explore where AI may be leading us, from job reallocation to autonomous weapons, set everywhere from Munich to Mumbai.

[The Three-Body Problem](#)

Liu Cixin

This hugely successful Chinese and international bestseller seems a classic sci-fi tale of humanity facing an alien invasion. But dig deeper and the book offers a lucid, if pessimistic, view of how societies respond to existential threats.

[Luna: New Moon](#)

Ian McDonald

McDonald admits to a fascination with writing about developing economies: “It’s just that this one happens to be on the moon.” Specifically, on a multicultural, polyglot moon that forms the setting to a Game of Thrones-reminiscent tale of corporate intrigue and deceit.

Embassytown

China Miéville

Depicts a planet where humankind lives alongside the native species but cannot learn their language. It's a fast-paced story that is also philosophical, embracing important ideas about communication and colonialism.

Infomocracy

Malka Older

How might our political systems respond to tensions between local and global forces? Older offers a post-cyberpunk take on a global micro-democracy, and a take-down of the idea that any system can fix the flaws of human nature.

Too Like the Lightning

Ada Palmer

Enlightenment-era philosophy meets a richly imagined sociopolitical world 500 years from now. It's an imperfect utopia, where concepts like citizenship and nation-states no longer exist, and it raises fundamental questions about civilization.

The Ministry for the Future

Kim Stanley Robinson

Required reading for anyone trying to think how we can deal with climate change as a society. Some ideas might seem outrageous (airships, anyone?) but others, like involving central banks, are already being seriously considered.

Fall; Or, Dodge in Hell

Neal Stephenson

Stephenson takes the idea of the metaverse to its logical (and metaphysically challenging) extremes. What happens when you can upload yourself?

READ ALSO: [The metaverse: will virtual live up to reality?](#)

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