

New suggestions

Lauren Beukes - Bridge (2023, 432 pages)

Bridget Kittinger has always been paralyzed by choices. It has a lot to do with growing up in the long shadow of her mother, Jo, a troubled neuroscientist. Jo's obsession with one mythical object, the "dreamworm"—which she believed enabled travel to other worlds—led to their estrangement.

Now, suddenly, Jo is dead. And in packing up her home, Bridge finds a strange device buried deep in Jo's freezer: the dreamworm. Against all odds, it actually can open the door—to all other realities, and to all other versions of herself, too. Could Bridge find who she should be in this world, by visiting the others? And could her Jo still be alive somewhere? But there's a sinister cost to trading places, and others hunting the dreamworm who would kill to get their hands on it . . .

Across a thousand possible lives, from Portland to Haiti, from Argentina to the alligator-infested riverways of North Carolina, Bridge takes readers on a highly original thrill ride, pushing the boundaries of what we know about mothers and daughters, hunters and seekers, and who we each choose to be.

Martin MacInnes – In Ascension (2023, 496 pages)

Leigh grew up in Rotterdam, drawn to the waterfront as an escape from her unhappy home life and volatile father. Enchanted by the undersea world of her childhood, she excels in marine biology, travelling the globe to study ancient organisms. When a trench is discovered in the Atlantic ocean, Leigh joins the exploration team, hoping to find evidence of the earth's first life forms – what she instead finds calls into question everything we know about our own beginnings. Her discovery leads Leigh to the Mojave desert and an ambitious new space agency.

Drawn deeper into the agency's work, she learns that the Atlantic trench is only one of several related phenomena from across the world, each piece linking up to suggest a pattern beyond human understanding. Leigh knows that to continue working with the agency will mean leaving behind her declining mother and her younger sister, and faces an impossible choice: to remain with her family, or to embark on a journey across the breadth of the cosmos.

Marina J Lostetter - Activation Degradation (2021, 370 pages)

When Unit Four—a biological soft robot built and stored high above the Jovian atmosphere—is activated for the first time, it's in crisis mode. Aliens are attacking the Helium-3 mine it was created to oversee, and now its sole purpose is to defend Earth's largest energy resource from the invaders in ship-to-ship combat.

But something's wrong. Unit Four doesn't feel quite right. There are files in its databanks it can't account for, unusual chemical combinations roaring through its pipes, and the primers it possesses on the aliens are suspiciously sparse. The robot is under orders to seek and destroy. That's all it knows. According to its handler, that's all it needs to know.

Determined to fulfill its directives, Unit Four launches its ship and goes on the attack, but it has no idea it's about to get caught in a downward spiral of misinformation, reprogramming, and interstellar conflict.

Most robots are simple tools. Unit Four is well on its way to becoming something more

Mur Lafferty – Six Wakes (2017, 361 pages)

Imagine waking up on a malfunctioning spaceship: The artificial gravity is disabled. Blood floats through the air. And the corpse that blood is coming from is ... your own. Kind of. You're a clone —

and your original self, along with most of your crewmates, are dead. As your ship plummets through interstellar space, off course and carrying thousands of hibernating colonists to the planet Artemis, you and your fellow clones take on a daunting task: solving the mystery of what happened to the six people from whom you were cloned. Was it mass murder? Mass suicide? Or something far more complicated and sinister?

Nick Clark Windo - *The Feed* (2018, 355 pages)

The Feed is everywhere. It can be accessed by anyone, at any time. Every interaction, every emotion, every image can be shared through it.

Tom and Kate use *The Feed*, but they have resisted addiction to it. And this will serve them well when *The Feed* collapses.

Until their six-year-old daughter, Bea, goes missing.

Because how do you find someone in a world devoid of technology? And what happens when you can no longer trust that your loved ones are really who they claim to be?

Olivie Blake - *Masters of Death* (2018, 416 pages)

Viola Marek is a struggling real estate agent, and a vampire. But her biggest problem currently is that the house she needs to sell is haunted. The ghost haunting the house has been murdered, and until he can solve the mystery of how he died, he refuses to move on.

Fox D'Mora is a medium, and though is also most-definitely a shameless fraud, he isn't entirely without his uses—seeing as he's actually the godson of Death.

When Viola seeks out Fox to help her with her ghost-infested mansion, he becomes inextricably involved in a quest that neither he nor Vi expects (or wants). But with the help of an unruly poltergeist, a demonic personal trainer, a sharp-voiced angel, a love-stricken reaper, and a few high-functioning creatures, Vi and Fox soon discover the difference between a mysterious lost love and an annoying dead body isn't nearly as distinct as they thought.

Ray Bradbury - *Dark Carnival* short stories (1947, 480 pages)

I don't think anyone needs an introduction to Ray Bradbury. *Dark Carnival* is his first collection of short stories, and it has recently been republished so it is easily available.

The only downside is that us SF nerds will already have read everything Ray Bradbury has ever written, but this would be a great introduction for anyone who isn't familiar with Bradbury's work.

Scott Alexander Howard - *The Other Valley* (2024, 304 pages)

Sixteen-year-old Odile is an awkward, quiet girl vying for a coveted seat on the Conseil. If she earns the position, she'll decide who may cross her town's heavily guarded borders. On the other side, it's the same valley, the same town--except to the east, the town is twenty years ahead in time. To the west, it's twenty years behind. The towns repeat in an endless sequence across the wilderness.

When Odile recognizes two visitors she wasn't supposed to see, she realizes that the parents of her friend Edme have been escorted across the border from the future, on a mourning tour, to view their son while he's still alive in Odile's present. Edme—who is brilliant, funny, and the only person to truly see Odile—is about to die. Sworn to secrecy in order to preserve the timeline, Odile now becomes the Conseil's top candidate, yet she finds herself drawing closer to the doomed boy, imperiling her entire future.

Vajra Chandrasekera - The Saint of Bright Doors (2023, 384 pages)

Fetter was raised to kill, honed as a knife to cut down his sainted father. This gave him plenty to talk about in therapy.

He walked among invisible devils and anti-gods that mock the mortal form. He learned a lethal catechism, lost his shadow, and gained a habit for secrecy. After a blood-soaked childhood, Fetter escaped his rural hometown for the big city, and fell into a broader world where divine destinies are a dime a dozen.

Everything in Luriat is more than it seems. Group therapy is recruitment for a revolutionary cadre. Junk email hints at the arrival of a god. Every door is laden with potential, and once closed may never open again. The city is scattered with Bright Doors, looming portals through which a cold wind blows. In this unknowable metropolis, Fetter will discover what kind of man he is, and his discovery will rewrite the world.

Vikram Paralkar - Night Theatre (2017, 224 pages)

As dusk approaches, a former surgeon goes about closing up his dilapidated clinic in rural India. His day, like all his days, has been long and hard. His medical supplies arrive late if at all, the electricians in the clinic threaten to burn out at any minute, and his overseer, a corrupt government official, blackmails and extorts him. It is thankless work, but the surgeon has long given up any hope of reward in this life.

That night, as the surgeon completes his paperwork, he is visited by a family - a teacher, his heavily pregnant wife and their young son. Victims of a senseless attack, they reveal to the surgeon wounds that they could not possibly have survived.

And so the surgeon finds himself faced with a preposterous task: to mend the wounds of the dead family before sunrise so that they may return to life. But this is not the only challenge laid before the surgeon, and as the night unfolds he realises his future is tied more closely to that of the dead family than he could have imagined.

Yoon Ha Lee - Phoenix Extravagant (2020, 356 pages)

Gyen Jebi isn't a fighter or a subversive. They just want to paint.

One day they're jobless and desperate; the next, Jebi finds themselves recruited by the Ministry of Armor to paint the mystical sigils that animate the occupying government's automaton soldiers.

But when Jebi discovers the depths of the Razanei government's horrifying crimes—and the awful source of the magical pigments they use—they find they can no longer stay out of politics.

What they can do is steal Arazi, the ministry's mighty dragon automaton, and find a way to fight.

Previous suggestions

Alan Dean Foster – With Friends Like These and Who Needs Enemies?

Two linked anthologies by Foster. He writes fairly straightforward stories, but they have their charm and I enjoyed both books.

Frank Herbert – Dune

Since it's being screened over the next few years. Although John's view is the book is edging towards the pretentious side of deep and meaningful.

James Dorr – Tombs

Collection of linked short stories in a vaguely "Dying Earth" style.

It had been a time when the world needed legends, those years so long past now. Because there was something else legends could offer, or so the Poet believed. He didn't know quite what—ghouls were not skilled at imagination. Their world was a concrete one, one of stone and flesh. Struggle and survival. Survival predicated on others' deaths. Far in the future, when our sun grows ever larger, scorching the earth. When seas become poisonous and men are needed to guard the crypts from the scavengers of the dead. A ghoulish-poet will share stories of love and loss, death and resurrection. Tombs is a beautifully written examination of the human condition of life, love, and death, through the prism of a dystopian apocalypse.

Jesse Bullington - Enterprise of Death

As the witch-pyres of the Spanish Inquisition blanket Renaissance Europe in a moral haze, a young African slave finds herself the unwilling apprentice of an ancient necromancer. Unfortunately, quitting his company proves even more hazardous than remaining his pupil when she is afflicted with a terrible curse. Yet salvation may lie in a mysterious tome her tutor has hidden somewhere on the war-torn continent.

She sets out on a seemingly impossible journey to find the book, never suspecting her fate is tied to three the artist Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, the alchemist Dr. Paracelsus, and a gun-slinging Dutch mercenary. As Manuel paints her macabre story on canvas, plank, and church wall, the young apprentice becomes increasingly aware that death might be the least of her concerns.

Note that this is 465 pages.

Laird Barron - The Croning

Strange things exist on the periphery of our existence, haunting us from the darkness looming beyond our firelight. Black magic, weird cults and worse things loom in the shadows. The Children of Old Leech have been with us from time immemorial. And they love us... Donald Miller, geologist and academic, has walked along the edge of a chasm for most of his nearly eighty years, leading a charmed life between endearing absent-mindedness and sanity-shattering realization. Now, all things must converge. Donald will discover the dark secrets along the edges, unearthing savage truths about his wife Michelle, their adult twins, and all he knows and trusts. For Donald is about to stumble on the secret ... of The Croning.

Kentaro Miura - Berserk (vol 1+)

Berserk is a Japanese manga series written and illustrated by Kentaro Miura. Set in a medieval Europe-inspired dark fantasy world, the story centres on the characters of Guts, a lone swordsman, and Griffith, the leader of a mercenary band called the "Band of the Hawk". The series follows Guts' journey seeking revenge on Griffith, who betrayed him and sacrificed his comrades to become a powerful demonic being.

M. Suddain - Theatre of the Gods

A space-opera, a philosophical quest, a steampunk adventure of epic proportions.

This is the story of M. Francisco Fabrigas, explorer, philosopher, heretical physicist, who took a shipful of children on a frightening voyage to the next dimension, assisted by a teenaged Captain, a brave deaf boy, a cunning blind girl, and a sultry botanist, all the while pursued by the Pope of the universe and a well-dressed mesmerist.

Dark plots, demonic cults, murderous jungles, quantum mayhem, the birth of creation, the death of time, and a creature called the Sweetie: all this and more waits beyond the veil of reality.

Note that this is 622 pages.