Welcome to the University of Warwick Science Fiction and Fantasy Society.

If your idea of fantasy is David Eddings, Tolkien and Harry Potter, and you think SF stopped when Isaac Asimov died (not that I have anything at all against Eddings, Tolkien or Asimov) then you’re missing out on a tremendous wealth of really interesting writing. There now follows a necessarily subjective and highly incomplete list of recommended authors and books.

If your favourite author is missing (and there are several obvious candidates who were intentionally omitted because, well, everybody’s already heard about them) then please come to the Tuesday evening social and tell us.

Books

Iain Banks is one of the best known contemporary British SF writers, and one of the few that has also attained mainstream literary success. His SF fiction is written under the cunning pseudonym of Iain M Banks, and include a series of novels (The Player of Games and Use of Weapons are particularly recommended) set on the edges of a utopian galactic society called the Culture, as well as a few other SF novels (for example Against a Dark Background and The Alphabet). His ‘mainstream’ fiction is also recommended, especially the family mystery story The Crow Road (almost worth reading just for its opening line of “It was the day my grandmother exploded”) and the supremely twisted Twice Upon a Time.

Jorge Luis Borges An univalved master of magic realism, the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) is best known for his essays and short stories. A good place to start is the anthology Labyrinths which contains many of his best-known stories: The Library of Babel (which illustrates concepts of infinity by means of a library containing a copy of every possible book), Funes the Memorious (a meditation on memory and knowledge) and The House of Asterion (in which a well-known legend is told from an unexpectedly different perspective).

Susanna Clarke’s award-winning fantasy novel Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell, is set against the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars in an alternate England where practical magic has historically existed. The title characters, the dour and miserly Norrell and his more affable student Strange, seek to return England to a golden age of magic. This book was accurately described by Neil Gaiman as “unquestionably the finest English novel of the fantastic written in the last seventy years”, and if you haven’t already done so you should go and read it right now. An anthology of short stories, The Ladies of Grace Adieu (with beautiful illustrations by Charles Vess), is also a must.

Greg Egan, a software engineer and mathematician, writes imaginative hard SF exploring ideas from theoretical physics. Particularly recommended are Permutation City and Schild’s Ladder together with the short story collection Azimuth.

Jasper Fforde has written two series of highly entertaining fiction-inspired novels, one (The Eynre Affair, First Among Sequels, etc) featuring the government agent Thursday Next, and the other (The Big Over Easy and The Fourth Bear) featuring Inspector Jack Spratt of the Reading Police Department (Nursery Crimes division).

Neil Gaiman is perhaps best known for his Sandman series of graphic novels (see later), whose morose title character is the Lord of Dreams. His other work includes the contemporary fantasy American Gods and its comic sequel (of sorts) Anansi Boys, as well as the modern fantasy Neverwhere and the faerie story Stardust (the film adaptation of which was released last October).

William Gibson has been hailed, along with Bruce Sterling, as the godfather of the Cyberpunk genre. If you haven’t read Neuromancer, Count Zero and Mona Lisa Overdrive then you’ve missed out on some of the most influential SF literature of the last thirty years.

Jon Courtenay Grimwood Perhaps best described as ‘alternate future’, Grimwood’s novels include the Arabesque trilogy (Pashazade, Effendi and Felahene) set in an alternate near-future Egypt where the Ottoman empire never fell, and four novels (neoAddix, Lucifer’s Dragon, reMiss and redRobe) in the twenty-first century of a world where France won the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.

Laurel K Hamilton is one of the leading lights of the ‘urban fantasy’ genre. Her best-known work is the Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter series, which starts out with the entertaining supernatural murder-mystery Guilty Pleasures (but takes a disconcertingly and progressively sado-masochistic turn from about the sixth or seventh book onwards).

Tom Holt is best known for his contemporary comic fantasy novels. Particularly recommended are Expecting Someone Taller? and Flying Dutch, the latter based on the premise that shortly before being cursed with immortality, a certain legendary Dutch sea captain took out a life insurance policy, the terms of which now threaten total worldwide economic collapse in the event of the policy maturing. Also worth reading are the four books set in the firm of J W Wells and Company, 70 St Mary Axe (The Portable Door; In Your Dreams; Earth, Air, Fire and Custard and You Don’t Have To Be Evil To Work Here But It Helps).

Diana Wynne Jones has been writing imaginative fantasy stories for children and young adults for at least three decades before J K Rowling wandered into that Edinburgh café. Her work includes the Chrestomanci series (Charmed Life, The Magicians of Caprona, etc) and the standalone novels Eight Days of Luke, Fire and Hemlock and Howl’s Moving Castle (the latter made into an animated film by the Japanese master animator Hayao Miyazaki).

Ursula K Le Guin is best known for her Earthsea series of fantasy novels, although the award-winning The Left Hand of Darkness and The Dispossessed are also very highly regarded.

Ken MacLeod’s novels typically include elements of anarchist, socialist or libertarian politics set in the near future. His Fall Revolution series (The Star Fraction, The Stone Canal, The Cassini Division and The Sky Road), Engines of Light trilogy were well-received; his latest novel The Night Sessions was published earlier this year.

China Miéville was recently appointed to a lectureship in creative writing here at the University of Warwick, and came to prominence with his novel Perdido Street Station, a supremely imaginative story set in the dark industrial city of New Crobuzon, and which won the Arthur C Clarke Award in the significant and auspicious year of 2001. He has since written two further books (The Scar and Iron Council) set in the same world, as well as the novel Un Lun Dun, set in a dark, mirrored version of London.

Jeff Noon came to prominence in 1993 with the publication of his first novel Vurt (followed over the next four years by Pollen, Automated Alice and Nymphomation), all of which are recommended. His collection Pixel Juice is almost worth reading just for the poem Metaphorazone.

Mervyn Peake (1911–1968) is best known for his gothic fantasy trilogy Gormenghast (comprising the novels Titus Groan, Gormenghast and Titus Alone) which describe the fortunes of Titus, son and heir of Sepulchrave, 77th Earl of Groan and ruler of the unchanging, oppressive, ramshackle Castle Gormenghast, and the chaos and change wreaked upon this dusty, ritual-bound world by the Machiavellian outsider Steerpike. This is one of the great classics of 20th century fantasy literature.

Christopher Priest’s best known novel is perhaps The Prestige, a complex tale of feuding Edwardian magicians, which was recently made into an excellent film starring Hugh Jackman, Christian Bale and Michael Caine (and featuring David Bowie as Nikola Tesla). Also well worth reading are The Separation (winner of the 2002 BSFA and Arthur C Clarke Awards) and The Affirmation.

Robert Rankin writes highly entertaining comic fantasy, including the Brentford Trilogy (currently standing at eight books, including The Brentford Triangle, East of Eating and The Brightonomicon; an adaptation of the latter is currently being broadcast on BBC 7) and various standalone novels,
many of which (for example, *The Hollow Chocolate Bunnies of the Apocalypse* and *The Witches of Chiswick*) are almost worth reading just for the titles.

**Alastair Reynolds** was for several years a research astrophysicist working for the European Space Agency, before taking up writing full-time in 2004. He first found critical acclaim with his hard SF space opera * Revelation Space* (since followed by four other novels and two novellas set in the same universe). His 2004 novel *Century Rain*, much of which is set in an alternate 1950s Paris, is also highly recommended.

**Justina Robson**’s first few novels *Silver Screen*, *Mappe Mundi*, *Natural History* and *Living Next Door to the God of Love* partly centre around philosophical questions about consciousness and identity, involving concepts such as artificial intelligence and nanotechnology. She is currently in the process of writing the tremendously fun *Quantum Gravity* series of near-future cyberpunk fantasy novels (the first two, *Keeping It Real* and *Selling Out* are now in print) featuring elven rock stars and cyborg secret agents.

**Neal Stephenson**’s first major success was the cyberpunk novel *Snow Crash*; he followed this up with *The Diamond Age* and the codebreaking thriller *Cryptonomicon*. His latest work, the *Baroque Cycle* trilogy (*Quicksilver*, *The Confusion* and *The System of the World*) is in some sense a historical prequel to *Cryptonomicon*.

**Charles Stross** The Edinburgh-based writer Charles Stross previously worked as a pharmacist, software engineer and a technology journalist. His near-future novel *Accelerando* follows three generations of a family living through a technological singularity, and was nominated for a Hugo award in 2006. The parallel-worlds fantasy series *The Merchant PR* (worth reading even if the third book, *The Clan Corporate*, was recently published in paperback), as are his two Lovecraftian technothriller *Laundry novels* (*The Arctivity Archives* and *The Jennifer Morgue*) and the two ‘post-singularity space opera’ *Eschaton* novels (*Singularity Sky* and *Iron Sunrise*).

**Sheri S Tepper** Particularly recommended are the *True Game* trilogy of fantasy novels (*The True Game*, *The Chronicles of Maen Manypshaped* and *The End of the Game*) and the Arblai trilogy (*Grass*, *Raising the Stones* and *Sidemaker*)

**Connie Willis** Best known for her entertaining Victorian time-travelling comedy romance *To Say Nothing of the Dog* (featuring a brief cameo appearance from Jerome K Jerome). Willis’ other work includes *Passage* (which concerns a small group of medical researchers investigating near-death experiences) and *Bellwether* (which explores the nature of fads, serendipity and research funding).

**Carrie Vaughn** is another rising star of the urban fantasy genre (and, as it happens, an old friend of mine). She is the writer of an ongoing series of novels about a late-night talk show running continuously since 1988. The central character, John Constantine, is a fast-talking trenchcoated magician with highly questionable ethics.

**The Invisibles** Grant Morrison’s comic series (1994–2000) concerning the five members of a cell of the Invisibles, a secret occult organisation battling against the forces of oppression. Splendidly and entertainingly bizarre.

**The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen** Made into a rather poor film in 2003, this series of (at present, two) graphic novels features the adventures of a small group of adventurers from popular fiction (including Allan Quatermain, Mina Murray, Captain Nemo and others) recruited by British military intelligence to further the interests of the Empire. Written by Alan Moore and illustrated by Kevin O’Neill.

**Sandman** Neil Gaiman’s ongoing comic series (1989–1996) concerning Dream of the Endless, the (somewhat morose) anthropomorphic personification of sentient beings’ ability to dream and tell stories (his six siblings also put in occasional appearances, most notably his more cheerful elder sister Death). Full of clever references to mythology and folklore, this was the first graphic novel I read, and makes Neil Gaiman one of a very small number of people who have completely changed the way I think about an entire art form.

**Serenity Rose** I really like this one. It’s about a young, introverted American art student and world of roughly fifty known people worldwide with inherent magical ability) named Serenity ‘Sera’ Rose. All the goths want to be her friend, but she’d really just like them all to leave her alone, please.

**Strangers in Paradise** Terry Moore’s witty and poignant story of the complex relationships of three friends, played against a backdrop of a mafia-style organisation with influence at the highest political levels.

**The Tale of One Bad Rat** Bryan Talbot’s award-winning story of a young woman fleeing abusive parents, and her search for peace in the Lake District of Beatrix Potter.

**Usagi Yojimbo** translates roughly as ‘rabit bodyguard’ and follows the fortunes of Miyamoto Usagi, a wandering ronin who happens to be a rabbit. Formerly retainer to Lord Mi-fune (a tiger) he occasionally fights in the service of Lord Noriyuki (a panda) of Clan Geishu, and alongside Tomoe (a cat) and Gen (a rhinoceros).

**V for Vendetta** “People should not be afraid of their governments, governments should be afraid of their people”. Another genre-changing work from Alan Moore, this was made into a film starring Hugo Weaving and Natalie Portman.

**Watchmen** Alan Moore’s reinvention of the entire superhero subgenre, taking as its premise the idea that someone who regularly dresses up in a garish costume to fight crime is, at best, somewhat disturbed.

**Why I Hate Saturn** Anne is a brilliant but neurotic writer whose life takes a turn for the surreal when her mildly de-reanged sister Laura (who proclaims herself to be the Queen of the Leather Astro-Girls of Saturn) turns up out of the blue on the run from her dangerous and well-connected ex-boyfriend. Written by Kyle Baker.
Recommended Books By John Oâ€™Hagan. Trying to become a better backgammon player? One of the best ways to improve is by reading some of the excellent books that have been written about this complex game. The books I recommend in this article are a pretty good investment â€“ they arenâ€™t overly expensive and virtually everyone will learn something from reading them. The more of these books you read, the more you will learn, and the better your results will be in the long run. If you're on the hunt for something new and interesting to read, you have plenty of places to turn. This week, we're looking at five of the best book recommendation sites, services, or groups, based on your nominations. If you're on the hunt for something new and interesting to read, you have plenty of places to turn. This week, we're looking at five of the best book recommendation sites, services, or groups, based on your nominations. These are the books that have impacted me the most. I also have a list of what I am reading now. As a result, these lists change frequently. Check back. My Recommended Books. The Best Books I Have Ever Read. Leaders are readers. Readers are leaders.