

## #READING

### Best Sci-Fi Books of All Time

Looking for your next read? Take a trip into the future with our pick of the best science fiction novels of all time

Since time immemorial, mankind has been looking up at the stars and dreaming, but it was only centuries ago that we started turning those dreams into fiction. And what remarkable dreams they are - dreams of distant worlds, unearthly creatures, parallel universes, artificial intelligence and so much more. Today, we call those dreams science fiction. Sci-fi brings out the best in our imaginations and evokes a sense of wonder, but it also inspires a spirit of questioning. Through the enduring themes of sci-fi, we can examine the zeitgeist's cultural context and ethical questions. Our favourite works in the genre make good on this promise, meditating on everything from identity to oppression to morality. As the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Doris Lessing said, "Science fiction is some of the best social fiction of our time. Here are the best science fiction books of all time.

#### Frankenstein, by Mary Shelley (1818)

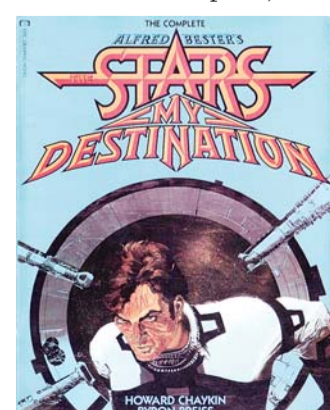


Mary Shelley started writing classic sci-fi with Frankenstein when she was 18 years old. Two centuries later, it is a major ancestor of both the science fiction and horror genres tackling huge themes like the nature of life and death, immortality and genetic engineering. It is a pro-science novel that at its heart shows Dr Frankenstein as the callous fiend of the story, who created a being and was not willing to accept responsibility for his actions.

In an age where the space between technical life and death is narrower than ever, and scientists are playing with the makeup of what makes us humans, Frankenstein can still teach an important lesson: just because you can, doesn't mean you should.

#### The Stars My Destination, by Alfred Bester (1957)

This landmark novel begins with a simple proposition - what if humans could teleport? - and sprawls into a tale of rebirth and vengeance. The winds across the Solar System: The Count of Monte Cristo for the interstellar age. First published as Tiger! Tiger! in the UK, named after the William Blake poem, it fol-



#### Foundation, by Isaac Asimov (1951)

Asimov was a prolific writer but many of his best works are classic short stories such as Nightfall or The Last Question, which play out like long jokes with a punchline twist at the end. In the Foundation series, he's in another mode entirely charting the rise and fall of empires in sweeping brush strokes. Asimov's prose can be stilted and ethereal questions. Our favourite works in the genre make good on this promise, meditating on everything from identity to oppression to morality. As the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Doris Lessing said, "Science fiction is some of the best social fiction of our time. Here are the best science fiction books of all time.

lows Gully Foyle - a violent, uneducated brute who spends six months marooned in deep space and the rest of the book seeking retribution for it.

#### Solaris, by Stanislaw Lem (1961)

If you think you know Solaris from the 2002 Steven Soderbergh film, the original book may come as a bit of a surprise. Written by Polish writer Stanislaw Lem in 1961, this short novel is heavier on philosophy than plot. It follows a team of humans on a space station who are trying to understand the mysterious living ocean on the planet Solaris, with little success - their research is limited to lengthy descriptions that paint a vibrant picture of the alien planet but fail to elucidate how it works. As they poke and prod, Solaris starts up exposing more about them than it does about itself, with the book demonstrating the futility of humans trying to comprehend something not of their world.

#### Ice, by Anna Kavan (1967)

The novel reads like a grown-up, nightmarish version of Alice in Wonderland: Kavan takes you on a simple proposition - what if humans could teleport? - and sprawls into a tale of rebirth and vengeance. The winds across the Solar System: The Count of Monte Cristo for the interstellar age. First published as Tiger! Tiger! in the UK, named after the William Blake poem, it fol-

#### The Moon is a Harsh Mistress, by Robert Heinlein (1966)

One of Elon Musk's favourite books, apparently, this gripping novel paints a plausible picture of life on Earth's satellite; three years before man set foot on the moon for the first time. Its depictions of the challenges of life in orbit and the ingenuity of human solutions to the problem even among the exiles and misfits who make up the lunar population are memorable.

Director Jasmeen K Reen's latest dark comedy Darlings has been declared as the biggest opener on Netflix for a non-English language Indian release. This Aaliya Bhatt starrer has also managed to wow the audience in 16 countries including Kenya, Malaysia, UAE and Trinidad & Tobago. For most women, the protagonist has done what they have only been dreaming of - take revenge on the husband!

## #MOVIE-SHUVIE



Shaillaza Singh  
Published author,  
poet and a YouTuber

# Darlings: The love that hurts & kills!



Some decades back, I had watched Shahrukh Khan and Juhi Chawla starrer Darr. Since then, I had always wondered what if Juhu Chawla's character had married Shahrukh Khan instead of Sunny Deol? Would she have lived happily ever after with the one who loved her to death? Would she have been loved gently or would it have been an obsessive, cruel kind of love? After all these years, later watching Aaliya Bhatt starrer Darlings, I think my question has been answered.

### Beating with love

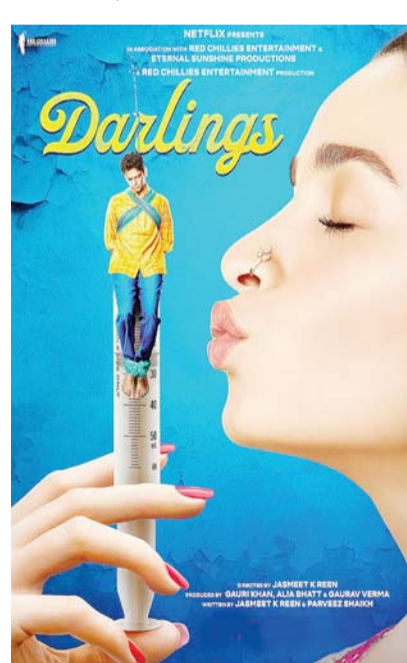
Along with Aaliya Bhatt who plays Badrunissa, Darlings stars Shefali Shah as her mother Shamsunissa, Vijay (as Badrunissa's husband Hamza Sheikh). The movie is backed by Shahrukh Khan's production house Red Chillies and is a story about a lower middle class Muslim couple Badrunissa and Hamza Sheikh who falls in love and get married. Badrunissa wants to live the dream of happily ever after with Hamza who loves her with a twist. He beats her over small things; badly cooked food, talking to other men, not listening to him, not wearing the right clothes, trying to help him to give up addiction by secretly mixing medicine in his food or even complaining about the violence he inflicts on her in the local police station.

His logic? He beats her out of love. Her logic? He will change, perhaps if he is able to leave alcohol or if they have a child. Her mother constantly tries to tell her that men like Hamza don't change but she doesn't want to believe her.

In the beginning of the movie, I found a dialogue particularly interesting.

Shamsunissa: Beta, abhi bhi der nahin, but hai! (There is still time)

Badrunissa: (watching television) Kal roasting try karen ammi. (Mother, should we try roasting tomorrow?)



Shamsunissa: Kal potla band ke garh aa wapsi! (Tomorrow, come back home with your bag and baggage)

Badrunissa: Koshish kar rahin hoon na! (I am trying)

Shamsunissa: Pichle teen saal se ye shakal surat ka dhoobi talab bana ke rakh diya hai uss aadmi ne. Pitai, phakte, dhulaiyee, chahi raha hai! (In the last three years, he has ruined your face! He keeps beating you over everything.)

Badrunissa: Amma, time lagta hai. Aise municipality ka nal thodi hai. Khola to phurr, paani band kiya to khatam. (Mother, it takes time. This is not like a public tap which can be switched on at will.)

Shamsunissa: Yeh aise thek nahin hoga. Teda sochna padega. Nahin to ek din itna marega ki mar javegi meri bachchi. Phir kya karegi? (This cannot be remedied like this. We need to think different! Else my child will die. What will you do then?)

### That thing called hope

This leaves Badrunissa thinking yet she willfully endures the violence for half the movie. Why? Because she

feels that her husband will change. Every night he batters her and every morning he apologizes to her. His logic? He hits her because he loves her and what does he not give her? He doesn't force her to wear the burqa, does not stop her from going anywhere and let her do what she pleases. Her reasoning? He hits her but loves her too! Her mother on the other hand knows that things would never change because she has endured a similar fate.

Much to Badru's chagrin, through out the movie, her mother keeps reminding her of a story of the frog and scorpion.

### Scorpions never change

Once a frog was resting on a river bank when a scorpion came to him. The scorpion wanted to go across the flooded river and begged the frog for help. The frog asked him, "what if you bite me?" The scorpion replied, "Bite you? Are you mad? If I bite you, even I will drown. I promise I won't bite you." The naive frog believed him and carried him on his back. Midstream, the scorpion bit the frog.

The shocked frog asked, "why did you bite me? You promised not to!" The scorpion said, "Oops sorry! It's my very nature to bite. I couldn't resist!" The truth of the story finally dawns on her when she after getting pregnant gets beaten up by her husband which results in a miscarriage. This changes everything for her and she decides to teach him a lesson by kidnapping him in his own home and torturing him the way he tortured her with the help of her mother and her friend Zulfi (Roshan Mathew).

### Earned respect

But even then she does not do it to take revenge on her husband. As she explains to her mother, she does it because she wants respect from him. A term that is often used in context of women but seldom practiced in real life.

Have you ever wondered why in the past few years there has been a deluge of movies centring around domestic violence? Yes, earlier too there were movies like Kab Tak Chup Rahungi, Mehndi, Raja Ki Aayegi Barat, Provoked and more recent



## Anti-Frizz Month

Frizz is a condition that happens when the humidity in the air gets into your cuticles making them spin out of control, and people with curly hair have it particularly bad. Thankfully there are ways to combat the frizz phenomenon and turn even the most humid of days into a great hair day. Anti-Frizz Month was established by Alberto VOS to help people all over the world combat frizz and see their way to a lifetime of great hair.

Thappad. However, most of them were about the woman walking away from the abuser. Darlings is somewhat different. It is about the abused turning tables on the abuser and giving him the taste of his own medicine.

### Hitting the psyche

There is part in the movie when Aaliya Bhatt's Badru buys a pair of high heeled red bellies along with a red dress to seduce her husband so that they can have a baby. However, before she can put her plan to action, the husband uses the same red bellies to break one of her fingers because she agrees to participate in her colony's redevelopment project. Yet, the next morning instead of doing something about it she simply vents out her anger by breaking some utensils in the kitchen. At a point in the movie she tells her mother 'Pehle to chot sif shareer par lagti thee, ab dimag pe lagti hai' (First it only use to hurt my body but now this abuse hurts my mind too).

### Justified abuse

The thing that really struck me here was that how easily do we women accept punishment or abuse from men? We deal with it by venting out our frustration or sometimes we even allow ourselves to believe that the fault lies within us, so in some twisted logic, we deserve the punishment. In this case Badru blamed first herself, then alcohol and finally realized that it was Hamza who was at fault. Is it something that has been ingrained in our psyche or have we been trained to accept everything that the men dole out to us? Even abuse? But interestingly men are not taught to accept that same abuse back. When Badru starts doing out the same treatment to Hamza, she keeps warning her to stop or else once he is freed, he will ensure that she suffers a worse fate.

Ultimately, there comes a time when she decides to kill him by tying him to the railway tracks. But in the nick of time, she decides to let him go because she feels that she cannot be as cruel as he had been to her. She tells her mother that initially she did all this to command respect from Hamza but eventually realized that she does not respect from anyone but except herself. However, as she frees him, he starts proclaiming that he will take his revenge only to get killed.



## #CYNOLGY

### Dementia Risk in Aging Dogs

"Hearing loss is one of the biggest predictors of dementia in people," Olby says.



A new study explores the connection between hearing loss and dementia in geriatric dogs.

The work could aid in both treatment of aging dogs and in understanding the relationship between sensory loss and cognitive function in dogs.

"In humans, we know that age-related hearing loss is estimated to affect one-third of people over age 65," says Natasha Olby, chair in gerontology at North Carolina State University and corresponding author of the study.

"We also know that the rate of cognitive decline is approximately 30-40% faster in people with age-related hearing loss and that hearing loss is a greater contributor to dementia risk than other factors such as hypertension or obesity. But we don't understand whether the same holds true for dogs."

In the study, Olby and colleagues evaluated 39 senior or geriatric dogs. Auditory and cognitive tests were performed on each dog and their owners were asked to fill out two commonly used questionnaires - one focused on cognitive ability and the other on quality of life. The researchers compared cognitive testing, questionnaire scores, and age between hearing groups.

The 'average' dog can hear tones at 50 decibels (dBs) with no difficulty. Of the study



cohort, 19 of the dogs could hear at 50 dBs, 12 at 70 dBs, and eight at 90 dBs (roughly equivalent to the noise made by a jet plane at take-off). The average age of the dogs within each group were 12, 13 and 14 years old, respectively.

When the researchers compared the hearing results with owners' quality of life questionnaire responses, they found that scores related to vitality and companionship declined significantly as hearing deteriorated.

Similarly, cognitive questionnaire scores ranked all eight of the dogs in the 90 dB group as abnormal, compared to nine of the 12 in the 70 dB group and eight of the 19 in the 50 dB group. Results from cognitive testing were similar: as hearing declined, so did the dog's ability to perform tasks.

"Hearing loss is one of the biggest predictors of dementia in people," Olby says.

By quantifying neurological and physiological changes in elderly dogs, we're not only improving our ability to identify and treat these issues in our pets, we're also creating a model for improving our understanding of the same issues in humans."

## #HUMAN-BEHAVIOUR



# Science Skeptics & Overconfidence

People who dispute scientific consensus on topics such as vaccine efficacy, climate change or the Big Bang tend to overestimate their own knowledge of these subjects, a new study finds.

The study surveyed thousands of Americans online, quizzing them on scientific facts and soliciting their opinions on eight contested topics, including the COVID-19 vaccine.

The researchers found that respondents who answered more factual questions correctly were more likely to agree with the scientific consensus about each topic. On the other hand, those who answered many factual questions incorrectly but thought they understood certain topics well were more likely to disagree with the scientific consensus.

For example, many who said in July 2020 that they would 'definitely not get the vaccine' incorrectly answered questions about how viruses spread and how vaccines work but then said they thought they had a 'thorough understanding' of how a COVID-19 vaccine would work.

The research appears in the journal Science Advances.

### What's 'True' Anymore?

Steven Sloman, a co-author of the study and a professor of cognitive, linguistic and psychological sciences at Brown University, says the findings demonstrate that whether or not people agree with scientists doesn't just depend on how well they understand the science, it also depends on how well they perceive their own understanding. The research also shows the extent to which alternative facts have taken hold in many communities.

"It is a sad fact that our society has returned to an era in which many people's sense of what's true is governed more by the beliefs of the people around them than by the hard work of scientists using evidence to test their hypotheses," Sloman says.

Nick Light, the study's lead author and an assistant professor of marketing at Portland State University, says the study reveals why fact-based educational interventions have had only limited success in convincing people to say get vaccinated or reduce their individual carbon footprints.

"Light, Sloman, and their co-authors offered two possible avenues for helping people understand the complexity of scientific topics and convincing them to trust experts. One is to encourage them to try to explain the mechanisms underlying complex scientific phenomena such as vaccines and climate change, since attempts to do so often reveal gaps in a person's knowledge.

Another is to compare complex scientific topics with topics they understand well such as those related to their jobs or hobbies; doing so, the authors wrote could help illustrate how much time and knowledge is required to master a topic bolstering people's confidence in experts who have spent years or decades working in a particular scientific field.

"For many years, smart people thought that the way to bring people more in line with scientific consensus was to teach them the knowledge they lacked," Light says.



"For many years, smart people thought that the way to bring people more in line with scientific consensus was to teach them the knowledge they lacked," Light says. "Unfortunately, our research suggests that there may be a problem of overconfidence getting in the way of learning... If people think they know a lot, they have minimal motivation to learn more."

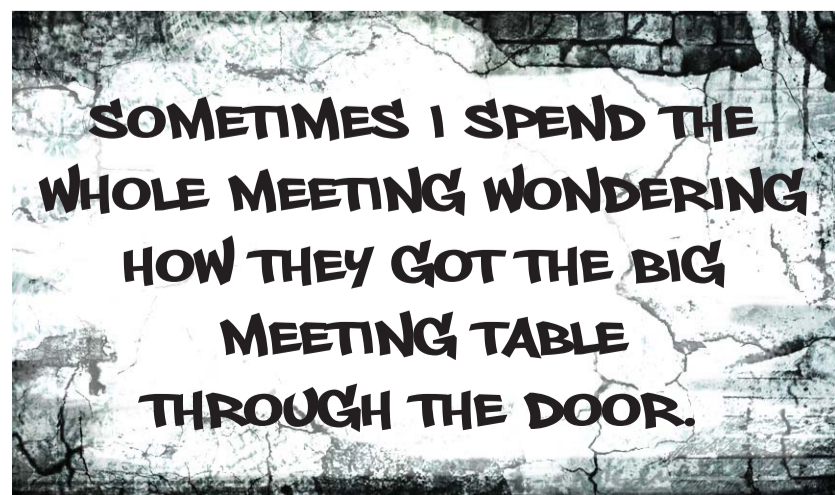
### Overconfidence & Ignorance

Light says that people who disagree with the majority of scientists on controversial topics might first need to understand all they don't know about these topics before they're likely to become receptive to educational interventions that could improve their financial well-being, personal health and more. But that's easier said than done, he says: "After all, no one likes to be told they're ignorant."

Light, Sloman, and their co-authors offered two possible avenues for helping people understand the complexity of scientific topics and convincing them to trust experts. One is to encourage them to try to explain the mechanisms underlying complex scientific phenomena such as vaccines and climate change, since attempts to do so often reveal gaps in a person's knowledge.

Another is to compare complex scientific topics with topics they understand well such as those related to their jobs or hobbies; doing so, the authors wrote could help illustrate how much time and knowledge is required to master a topic bolstering people's confidence in experts who have spent years or decades working in a particular scientific field.

## THE WALL

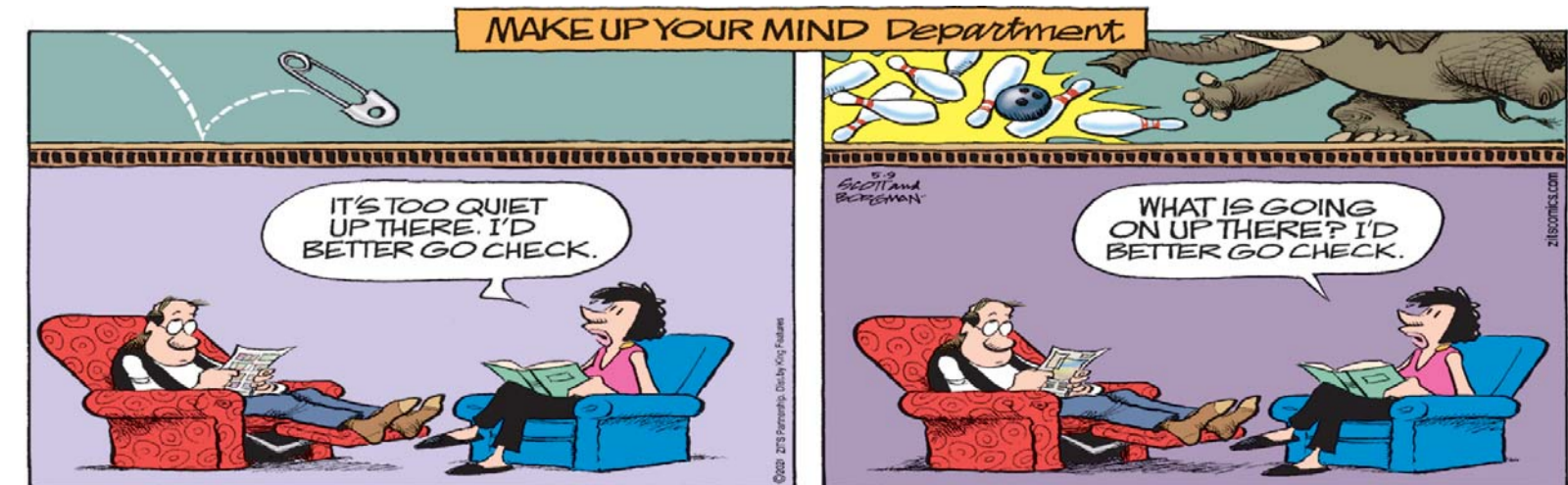


## BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman