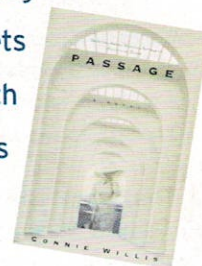


Connie Willis: Favorite Sci-Fi Stories



Connie Willis has won eight Hugo awards and six Nebula awards, more than any other science fiction author. Her works include *Fire Watch*, *Lincoln's Dreams*, *Doomsday Book* (Hugo and Nebula), *Impossible Things*, and *To Say Nothing of the Dog*

(Hugo). In her most recent novel, *Passage*, Willis reveals the secrets of the afterlife when a medical researcher who induces near-death experiences in healthy people decides to try it for herself. Willis lives with her family in Greeley, Colorado.



Although everyone who knows me knows that my favorite science fiction author is Robert A. Heinlein (especially his *Have Space Suit, Will Travel*) I'm not going to list any novels. Instead, I'm going to list my ten favorite science fiction short stories since I believe that it's in the short story that the heart of science fiction—and its best work—lies. It's what drew me and almost everyone who loves SF into the field. There are so many wonderful stories, this list barely scratches the surface, but here goes (in no particular order):

"A Little Something for Us Tempunauts"

by Philip K. Dick, 1974.

All of Philip K. Dick's work is wonderful, challenging our perceptions of what is human and what is reality, but this story about time travelers who foray into the future again and are killed on their attempt to return, to ride, impossibly, in a convertible in their own funeral parade is elegant, elegaic, and horrific, all at the same time—like time itself.

The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick: We Can Remember It for You Wholesale, Citadel Press.

"The Big Pat Boom"

by Damon Knight, 1963.

Science fiction is full of "first contact" stories, and the aliens are by turns terrifying, impossibly wise, and cute. Damon Knight is the only one who seems to have considered the possibility that they might be here merely to see the sights and buy some souvenirs. And their taste seems to be about as good as ours.

Available as an ebook (currently 49 cents) from <http://www.fictionwise.com>.

Vintage Season

by C.L. Moore and Henry Kuttner, 1946.

The reason I love science fiction is that it takes ideas and gives them a half-twist so that you look at them from a whole new angle. This is a tourist story, too, but of an entirely different kind, and one that forces us to re-examine our own attitudes toward travel. And toward history.

Last in print in *In Another Country/Vintage Season* (Tor Doubles No. 18), Tor Books.

"One Ordinary Day, with Peanuts"

by Shirley Jackson, 1954.

This little story is not nearly as well known as "The Lottery," but, like it, it looks below the surface of ordinary life to what is Really Going On. Only this one is funny—and very possibly true.

Just an Ordinary Day, Bantam Books.

Flowers for Algernon

by Daniel Keyes, 1959 (novella) and 1966 (novel).

Many of the best science fiction stories—and this one is arguably the best the field has ever produced—ask the question, "What makes us human?" but none more poignantly than this story of a lab rat and a drug that can turn us into geniuses. At a price. At a price.

Novella: Published in *Algernon, Charlie and I: A Writer's Journey*, Challenge Press. Novel: *Flowers for Algernon*, Skylark.

"Songs of War"

by Kit Reed, 1974.

Science fiction has produced some great stories about the war between the sexes—Joanna Russ's "When It Changed," James Tiptree, Jr.'s "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?," and pretty much everything Ursula LeGuin has written—but this is the best. And the funniest. And the only one with an actual war. *Weird Women, Wired Women*, Wesleyan University Press.



"The Light of Other Days"

by Bob Shaw, 1966.

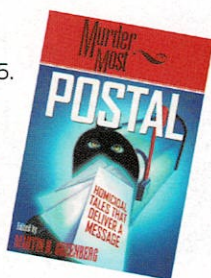
Science fiction is supposed to be about science, but its best stories always seem to be instead about the uneasy interface between us and the technologies we've created. And, no, I'm not talking about Frankenstein's monster. But even our most benign inventions seem to have side effects we never considered—and there are things even science can't do, like solve the problem of sorrow.

The Ascent of Wonder: The Evolution of Hard SF, Tor Books.

"Computers Don't Argue"

by Gordon Dickson, 1965.

Sometimes science fictions don't deal with possibilities or extrapolations but with the Absolute Truth, like this little gem about a



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man who received the wrong book from his Book of the Month Club and tried to correct the problem. Unfortunately, he kept having to deal with computers. It's hard to believe that this was written even before the days of Windows and email and other nightmares, but it was.

Murder Most Postal: Homicidal Tales That Deliver a Message, edited by Martin Greenberg, Cumberland House Publishing.

"The Man Who Lost the Sea"

by Theodore Sturgeon, 1956.

Although this is one of the classics of the field, I had never read it until last year, and oh, my gosh! It hit me like stories used to hit me when I was 13, and

made me incredibly glad, and proud, I was in the same field. This is the story to show people who think science fiction is all stories about spaceships and astronauts and Mars, even though that's exactly what this story is about.

My Favorite Science Fiction Story, edited by Martin Greenberg, Penguin.



"Lot"

by Ward Moore, 1953.

When I had to choose my single favorite science fiction story, this is the one I picked. I had read it when I was a kid, and it had stayed with me for years, and when I went back and read it again, it was even better. Ward Moore only wrote a handful of short stories and novels—including one of the best time travel novels of all time, *Bring the Jubilee*—and all of them are carefully crafted and beautifully written. "Lot" is about the end of the world, but it's much more than a disaster story. It's also about everything we have to give up in order to survive—"No time for niceties"—and about whether it's really worth it.

My Favorite Science Fiction Story, edited by Martin Greenberg, Penguin.

Oh, dear, this is a terrible list. I've left off Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" and Harlan Ellison's "Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes" and James Patrick Kelly's "Unique Visitors" and haven't even mentioned Fritz Leiber or Isaac Asimov. Or Zenna Henderson or Mike Resnick. And I'm sure there are dozens of stories I've forgotten. That's what's so nice about science fiction—you never run out of great stories, and there are always new ones—both time-honored classics and hot-off-the-presses-just-written jobs—to read. So get started.

CONNIE WILLIS

