

Top 10 sci-fi sagas for teens

1. **Splinter of the Mind's Eye by Alan Dean Foster**

Disney is kicking the Star Wars franchise back into life this year with a new series of sequel movies and tie-in novels and comics which expand the canonical universe that's still so far, far away. But here was the very first sequel, a tense and exciting drama on a deadly swamp world that pitched Luke and Leia and the droids against Vader and his troopers. I was eight in 1978 when this came out and I was agog. Reading this was like being let into secrets about what happened after that first, brilliant movie.

2. **Doctor Who in an Exciting Adventure with the Daleks by David Whitaker**

The very first tie-in Doctor Who novel, back in 1964, was a very atmospheric and nail-bitey condensation of seven long episodes into one perfect volume, beautifully written by TV script editor David Whitaker. From the moment fog closes around narrator Ian's car and the mysterious Dr Who steps out of the gloom we're on a non-stop wonderful romp that seems to fuse the very best of the worlds of HG Wells and Edgar Rice Burroughs.

3. **The War of the Worlds by HG Wells**

The original and best. Like many boys and girls of my generation I was introduced to this perfect novel via Jeff Wayne's still-astonishing musical version on double vinyl album set, complete with fold-out gatefold sleeve and lavish paintings. I can't read the book without thinking of Richard Burton, Julie Covington, the resounding "Ullas...!" of the Martian chorus and various catchy disco-inflected invasion tunes. Our teacher used to make us lie down on the drama studio floor and invent stage lighting accompaniments for listening to the record. Such is the force of the original novel I still somehow believe that the UK was invaded by Martians in the early part of the 20th century. Somehow it feels like realism to me.

4. **The Silver Locusts by Ray Bradbury**

Or The Martian Chronicles as it's sometimes known. This is an astonishing compendium of related tales, stretching over dozens of decades in the

invented history of Mars. Waves of settlers come and go and meet disaster, love, horror, mishaps, mayhem and are transformed by the beauty and strangeness of Mars. It's a very haunting collection.

5. [Dragonquest](#) by Anne McCaffrey

When I was in my teens and read the first of this long-running space series I fell in love with the clever fusion of science fiction and fantasy elements. Yes, the world is almost medieval, and the dragonriders of Pern are like knights flying through the skies with lances, but they're using lasers to combat the deadly parasitical threads that come falling out of the sky. Everything is underpinned by a loopy kind of science fiction reality, allowing us to spring into this wild and vivid world of dragons and castles and adventure. Something else brilliant about Anne McCaffrey. She was one of the first writers I ever wrote to in order to tell her how wonderful I thought her books were. She was the first author ever to write back to me, seeming genuinely pleased I'd taken the time to write. It's something I've never forgotten. Letters from readers are like precious messages from another world.

6. [Dune](#) by Frank Herbert

When I was 15 I was a school prefect and the only good thing about that apart from the badge was being able to stay in school during rainy lunchtimes. I read one Dune book after another. Has there ever been a more richly invented alien civilisation? It was mind-boggling in its detail and its weirdness. Its mix of grotesquerie and 1960s phantasmagoria have stayed with me ever since. It seems at first harder to get into than it actually is. Really, it's a soap opera with witchy queens and rebel heroes who turn into giant sandworms.

7. [Starbridge](#) by AC Crispin

Late to discover this – but I knew the author from her Star Wars, Star Trek and V tie-in novels. Here she takes the best elements of all those franchises and creates a wonderful space opera about first contact with all kinds of strange races and peoples. The first novel has a wonderful ensemble cast racketing about the solar system and it includes an adorable character who is basically a sentient mattress.

8. On the Flip Side by Nicholas Fisk

A very strange sci-fi novel, about the day the animals on earth suddenly start talking and one by one, people start disappearing spontaneously off the edge of the world into some unknown dimension. It's a stunning book by Fisk – who is better known for his other books, about demon grandmothers, space-jackings and robot revolutions. He was a fantastic stepping stone in sci-fi for kids of the 70s and 80s – he should come somewhere between Doctor Who and John Wyndham. Speaking of which...

9. Day of the Triffids by John Wyndham

A starchy stand-in teacher at school introduced us to this gem when we were 12. How we thrilled to the swear words and the gore! At the time it was the most believable alien invasion I'd ever read about – and it still might be exactly that. Everyone but a handful of folk go blind overnight due to a meteor storm and the resultant societal breakdown allows genetically modified orchids to go on a deadly and thoroughly enjoyable rampage. I also still love Wyndham's post-apocalyptic tale of mutants, *The Chrysalids* and who could forget the scary children of *The Midwich Cuckoos*? His books are perfect for rainy afternoons and comfortably summoning up the spectre of dreadful disaster.

10. The Tears of the Singers by Melinda Snodgrass

My guilty secret all these years has been my being a fan of Star Trek not in any of its TV or movie incarnations in particular – but rather the original novels from the 1980s. Melinda Snodgrass was one of a whole gang of women writers who wrote all the best Trek books (see also: Diane Duane, Barbara Hambly, AC Crispin, Jean Lorrh.) This one is my all-time favourite since it puts Uhura at the centre of the action. A world of singing alien seals are all that stands between the universe and utter destruction, and of course the seals are being clubbed to death one at a time by ruthless men who collect the crystals the seals shed at the point of death. It sounds sappy but it's absolutely wonderful. Where else would you ever have Uhura falling in love with a prog rock organist, a shipful of furious klingons, Captain Kirk vanishing into a vortex and a planet full of warbling manatees?