



Within the last few years, we've witnessed the evolution of [biohacking](#), the rise of a [state-based social credit system](#), and a US election influenced by the use of [artificial intelligence](#). Futurists might be able to follow the thread on one or two of these technologies to determine where they will lead us. We may even be able to capitalize on this understanding to improve our national security. But what happens when they converge? How do we prepare for a future where [additive manufacturing](#) meets biohacking meets [a "lost boy" with an axe to grind](#)? Can we keep up?

It's almost impossible to predict how the convergence of a host of nascent technologies will influence society and therefore set the stage for a *Lasers of August* scenario. Sir Lawrence Freedman even dedicated an [entire book](#) to this point. Part of the problem is our lack of imagination. Dr. Kori Schake captured this in a recent *War on the Rocks* [article](#) arguing,

“Futurists of warfare suffer from the same failures of imagination that frequently shackle their brethren in other professions: They overemphasize present trends and assume that their [society’s cultural norms](#) will similarly bind their adversaries.” Thus, our lack of imagination causes us to focus on the things we are already prepared to handle. As Dr. Erik Gartzke, the Director of the Center for Peace and Security Studies at the University of California pointed out at recent MWI conference, “The things we aren’t worrying about will be the things that take us down.”

The Cure for a Lack of Imagination

So how can we break through Schake’s mental shackles? One way is to feed our brains a healthy dose of science fiction. Science fiction provides us with nutrients to grow our imaginations and be open to possibilities and connections that non-fiction doesn’t present us.

Over at the [Strategy Bridge](#), Major General Mick Ryan and Major Nathan Finney emphasized, “Science fiction drives us to think about the future and frees us from the constraints of the present, allowing us to see trends affecting today’s military in a new way.” Classics such as [Enders Game](#), [The Foundation Trilogy](#), [Forever War](#), and [Starship Troopers](#) help us think through future societal and technological challenges we will face even though they were written decades ago. Their importance is best expressed by General(ret) Martin Dempsey, who wrote in his forward to the sci-fi anthology [War Stories from the Future](#):

By provoking us to free our minds of constraint and convention, worthy science fiction allows us to create a mental laboratory of sorts. In this place, we can consider new problems we might soon face or contemplate novel ways to address old problems. It sparks the imagination, engenders flexible thinking, and invites us to explore challenges and opportunities we might otherwise overlook.

My Science Fiction Picks

Below are some of my favorite more recently published science fiction books. In sharing this list, I hope to generate interest for those who don’t typically read the genre. With the holidays upon us, I encourage you to grab a book, a good drink, and let your mind expand.

[Seventeves](#) by Neal Stephenson. What happen when the world faces an existential crisis? How will we react? Stephenson’s book covers a 5000 year span in which the governments on earth find out that time is running out to save the human race after a meteor hits the

moon and starts a catastrophic chain reaction. They pick a group to leave the planet to start life again somewhere else. Seveneves dives into astrophysics, synthetic biology, and explores some very heavy ethical questions that earth's leaders face as time runs out.

[*Ghost Fleet: A Novel of the Next World War*](#) by Singer and Cole. The main plot line gives us a glimpse at what happens when a peer adversary denies the U.S. the ability to project power. The authors do a remarkable job showing the effects of an opponent isolating the U.S. both physically and psychologically from the rest of the world. They also examine how it might look when non-state actors, private industry, and some of the latest technologies cross paths during the next global conflict.

[*Nexus: Install*](#) by Ramez Naam. In this book, a new nano-drug enables users to turn their brains into operating systems and download applications to control their bodies. Unfortunately, we're starting to see [variations of this premise play out in foreign militaries](#).

[*World War Z*](#) by Max Brooks. Even though this book is about a zombie outbreak, you can substitute the zombies for deadly virus, nuclear war, or catastrophic natural disaster. Brooks examines how a society attempts to rebuild when a majority of the population is wiped out.

[*American War: A Novel*](#) by Omar El Akkad. Okay, this one skirts the edges of the genre and is much more in the dystopian future category, however I still feel the need to add it. This is the story of a second American civil war that takes place about 60 years from now. The war begins after the federal government decides to impose a prohibition on the use of fossil fuels. Even though climate change has destroyed much of the U.S. coastline and drowned Florida entirely, a number of southern states still decide to secede rather than go along with prohibition. The novel follows the Chestnuts, a family living in southernmost Louisiana, as they are displaced from their home by war and forced into a southern refugee camp. Throughout the story Akkad weaves in drones, suicide bombers, and biological warfare..

[*The Circle*](#) by Dave Eggers. This book takes place in the near future and is about the company that comes after Facebook. What will they do with decades of accumulated data? They seek to create 100% transparency amongst all its users and a social credit system. Sound familiar?

[*The Three Body Problem*](#) by Cixin Lui is translated Chinese science fiction and the first book in a trilogy that explores an alien civilization on the brink of destruction. When a secret military project in China attempts to make contact with aliens, the Trisolarans capture the signals and decide to invade Earth. They use an online video game to identify Chinese

citizens sympathetic to their plight, then split them into two camps: those who welcome the aliens and those who want to fight them.

[War Stories from the Future](#) by August Cole. This anthology is only .99 at Amazon and the stories cover everything from a plot about a wifi connection used to assassinate a foreign leader to a minority report-like approach to counterterrorism. The stories are quick reads and thought provoking.

These are only a few of the science fiction titles I've read in the last couple of years and are valuable to NATSEC professionals. But there are so many more. For instance, check out this [Twitter feed](#): There are over 100 responses with great science fiction recommendations. Major General Mick Ryan and Major Nathan Finney also curated one of the best lists on the topic [here](#).

Past the Limits of the Possible

[Arthur C. Clarke](#), who predicted telecommunication satellites in 1945 and was one of the world's most prolific science fiction authors, [wrote](#), "The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible." If we want to prepare ourselves for the future it's best we heed Sir Authur's words and begin reading science fiction, letting our minds move into the impossible.

Do you have a book recommendation? Please leave it in the comments section below!

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