Ursula Le Guin’s
science fiction & fantasy
book picks

FANTASY


SCIENCE FICTION


Remembering
Ursula Le Guin

October 21, 1929– January 22, 2018

“The only questions that really matter are the ones you ask yourself.”

“Great artists make the roads; good teachers and good companions can point them out. But there ain’t no free rides, baby.”
Ursula Le Guin was one of the first Science Fiction writers to gain literary recognition outside of the genre and was embraced by the academic community.

She brought literary depth and a tough-minded sensibility to science fiction and fantasy. Her stories combine a rigorous narrative logic, and a lean and lyrical style of writing.

Rocannon's World was her first novel.

The male protagonists in Le Guin's work are notable for avoiding the macho posturing of many science fiction and fantasy heroes. These characters typically face conflicts rooted in a clash of cultures that are resolved more by conciliation and self-sacrifice than by swordplay or space battles.

Ursula Le Guin wrote more than 20 novels, + 100 short stories, 13 children's books, 7 collections of essays, 12 books of poetry.

Earthsea Series

Earthsea is a series of fantasy books named after their setting. A world of islands surrounded by an uncharted ocean. Earthsea is inhabited by literate non-industrial civilizations comparable to an early Iron Age society.

With the exception of one society, magic is ubiquitous and a central part of life. A strong theme in the Earthsea stories is the connection between power and responsibility and the Taoist inflected message of the need to maintain "the "balance" in the world. This is attained through the use of "good" wizardry which seeks to harmonize with the world. “

"Bad" wizardry can lead to catastrophe. Dragons in the series are powerful guardians who instinctively seek to maintain this balance.


Hainish Novels & Short Story Collections

Set in an alternate history/future history, this series concerns civilizations of human beings on planets orbiting a number of nearby stars, including Terra (Earth). These beings are contacting each other for the first time and establishing diplomatic relations, setting up a confederacy under the guidance of the oldest of the human worlds, peaceful Hain.

The Hainish novels combined a feminist themes, mythology and Taoism. Le Guin introduced the "ansible" in these novels, a simultaneous communicator, the ansible was later used by other SF writers.

Reading order of The Hainish Cycle

Rocannon's World, 1966
Planet of Exile, 1966
City of Illusions, 1967
The Left Hand of Darkness, 1969
Nebula Award winner, 1969; Hugo Award winner, 1970
The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia, 1974
Hugo Award winner, 1975
Nebula Award winner, 1974
Locus Award winner for Best SF Novel, 1975
The Word for World is Forest, 1976
Hugo Award winner for Best Novella, 1973
Nebula Award nominee for Best Novella, 1973
Four Ways to Forgiveness, 1995
The Telling, 2000
Locus SF Award winner, 2001

Orsinian Tales

Orsinian Tales is a collection of eleven short stories primarily set in the imaginary country of Orsinia which is located somewhere in Central Europe. Aside from the common setting, the stories are not linked, but they do all involve personally moving events set within the political context of wars and revolutions.

Stories in the Orsinian Tales Series

The Fountains; The Barrow, Ile Forest, Conversations At Night, The Road East, Brothers and Sisters, A Week in the Country, And the Musik, The House, The Lady of Moge, Imaginary Countries.

These stories have been published as a one-volume collection.