



Ten of the Best Dystopian Novels

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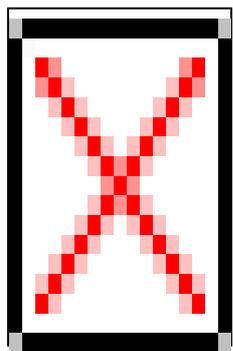
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Ten of the Best

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Geraldine Brennan chooses her top ten titles.

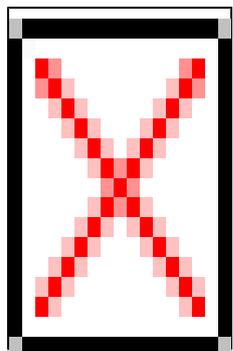
'Dystopias don't require alien invasions or what the late, great Jan Mark called 'people with daft names speaking in tongues': we create them for ourselves,' says Geraldine Brennan. 'So all my choices (in alphabetical order) explore worlds that are a credible extension of the one we live in and the behaviour of people who are like us.' Here **Geraldine Brennan** chooses her top ten dystopian novels.



The Wolves of Willoughby Chase

Joan Aiken, Red Fox, 978 0 09 945663 6, £5.99 pbk

An adventure for younger readers packed with incident and cliff-hanger chapter endings, set in an alternative period in history: the reign of James III in the 19th century. The dystopian element is provided by the wolves that terrorise the English countryside, having fled the continental land mass through a prematurely opened Channel Tunnel. The threat of the creatures adds to the vulnerability of cousins Bonnie and Sylvia when they are forced to flee from another predator, the malevolent governess Miss Slighcarp, and her cronies. The villains of the piece, as grotesque as any dreamed up by Dickens, remind us that many dystopias are underpinned by a culture that hates children. 7+

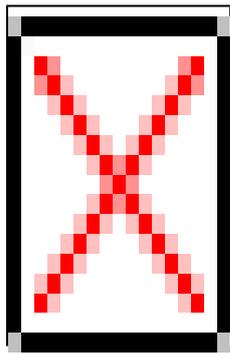


Matched

Ally Condie, Puffin, 978 0 14 133478 3, £6.99 pbk

No sooner is a girl told that she has found Mr Right than her hormones start craving Mr Wrong. But when the matchmaker is the Society, which controls every aspect of citizens' lives from daily calories to be consumed to poems permitted to be memorised, Mr Wrong is off limits. Model citizen Cassia, betrothed to her childhood friend, puts

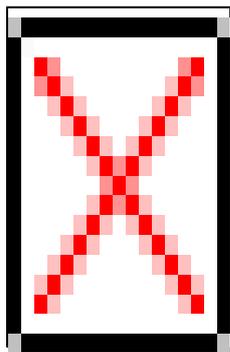
everything she holds dear in danger when she is attracted to a son of dissenters who is not allowed to reproduce. The tale of Cassia's resistance, inspired by her rebellious grandfather, explores the model of **Big Brother** and **The Handmaid's Tale** but adds turbulent relationship troubles. 12+



Never Let Me Go

Kazuo Ishiguro, Faber, 978 0 571 25809 3, £7.99 pbk

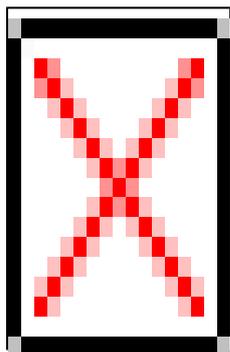
Three friends, with no family except one another and their peers, live at a residential school under a benevolent dictatorship. They find out why they are there almost imperceptibly and appear to accept their terrible fate. The calm, dispassionate voice of the narrator Kathy, the only one to survive past early adulthood, and the sedate, almost soothing, setting of England in an orderly recent past, throw the shocking circumstances into sharp relief. The bond that the friends are forced into by their predicament is at once oppressive and deeply touching. The sexual content is appropriate to the context. 14+



Tomorrow, When the War Began

John Marsden. Quercus, 978 0 85738 733 2, £6.99 pbk

Published 18 years ago and recently made into a feature film, this account of the transformation of small-town Australian teens into guerrilla warriors hinges on the same 'what if?' element as **How I Live Now**. Ellie and her friends return from camping in the bush to find the country has been invaded and their families imprisoned in the town showground. Ellie enters a new world in which she learns to kill in order to keep her remaining loved ones alive. The first in a series of seven novels, Marsden's account is infused with a spirit of compassion as well as white-knuckle excitement. We never find out who the invaders are, or learn about the wider context of the events seen from Ellie's perspective, which serves to underline her isolation. 14+

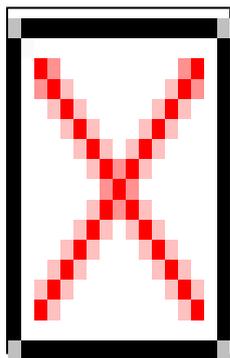


The Road

Cormac McCarthy, Picador, 978 0 330 51300 5, £7.99 pbk

The post-apocalyptic landscape in an America almost devoid of human life has been created by an unnamed natural disaster which has removed the ecosystem. There are no facts and figures, but this is an environmental crusaders' text

nonetheless. For the father and son trekking to the coast in the hope of finding food, shelter and more 'good guys', the conditions endured by Susan Beth Pfeffer's characters represent a relatively comfortable past. The boy has never known a world without imminent threat of starvation or cannibalism. We suspect that the destination will offer no more relief or comfort than the journey, but the power of McCarthy's language lifts the spirit in the face of pessimism. 14+



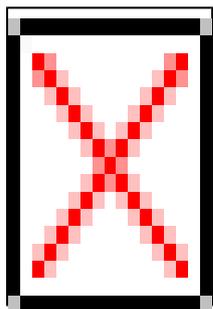
The Wind Singer

William Nicholson, Egmont, 978 1 4052 3969 1, £6.99 pbk

The next two volumes in 'The Wind on Fire' trilogy are firmly in the realms of fantasy but the over-achieving city state of Amaranth introduced in this first book has many parallels with our own world, subtly reminding us that intelligence is only worth having if it comes with empathy. 9+

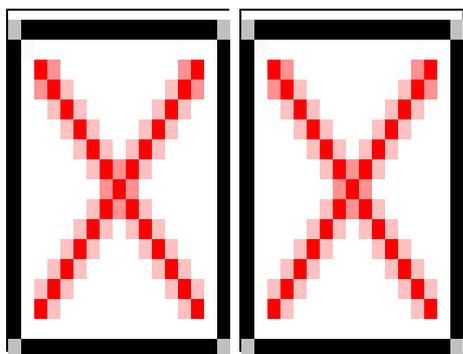
Akira

Katsuhiro Otomo, Titan Books, 978 1 84023 257 8, £22.99 pbk



The first in a cult manga series in six chunky volumes set in post-apocalyptic 'Neo-Tokyo' which opens in the not-too-distant 2030s as rival biker gangs tussle for supremacy. Cryogenics, psychic powers and drug dependency are just a few of the added elements

in this literally explosive tale of baddies and yet more baddies, which will keep older teens happy well into adulthood. Sometimes violent and sexually explicit, but the narrative drive is so strong that you barely notice it. 14+



Life as We Knew It

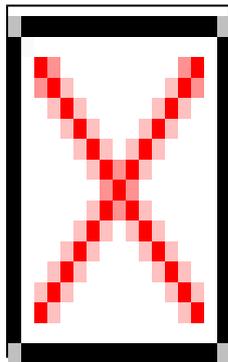
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The Dead and the Gone

978 1 4071 1732 4,

Susan Beth Pfeffer, Marion Lloyd Books, £6.99 each pbk

These twin novels explore the terrifyingly plausible outcome when an asteroid nudges the Moon out of orbit: tsunamis, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions lead to crop failure, disease, food riots and the breakdown of civilisation. **Life as We Knew It** is the diary of 16-year-old Miranda, whose family faces despair in a small Pennsylvania town. The paraquel, **The Dead and the Gone**, tracks the same events in Manhattan where bright Puerto Rican student Alex is left to care for his sisters when his parents are presumed dead and the city empties of all but the lawless. The daily threat of death and the drudgery of staying alive make the hope that is unexpectedly evoked in the reader seem like a blessing. 12+

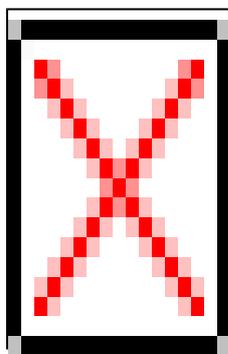


Mortal Engines

Philip Reeve, Scholastic, 978 1 4071 1091 2, £6.99 pbk

The first in a quartet of exciting, witty, highly visual but also chilling novels, set many millennia after most of the world has been destroyed in a Sixty Minute War. Most of the population live on wheeled 'traction cities' which patrol the dry ocean bed to devour smaller towns in a process called Municipal Darwinism.

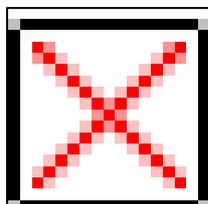
Philosophically-minded readers will enjoy the tension between the Historians with their reverence for Old Tech (useless electronics) and the Engineers who reinvent the past to improve it. Apprentice historian Tom and revenge-driven refugee Hester, who take on the London traction city as it plots to conquer the world's last free state, are complex and engaging characters. Follow them through the remaining three books: **Predator's Gold**, **Infernal Devices** and **A Darkling Plain**. 9+



Unwind

Neal Shusterman, Simon & Schuster, 978 1 84738 231 3, £6.99 pbk

Shusterman explores the aftermath of America's second civil war, with abortion replacing slavery as the issue that divides the nation. In a sickening compromise, unwanted children cannot be aborted but can be 'unwound' (their body parts recycled) between the ages of 13 and 18. Underachieving or misfit teens meet the same fate unless they can go underground until safely into adulthood. Following the fortunes of those who resist, **Unwind** forces the reader to contemplate big questions such as the conditions necessary for life (if your consciousness is split between 10 bodies, do you still exist?) and the lengths to which society will go to rid itself of those it rejects. 12+



Geraldine Brennan is the former Books Editor of **The Times Educational Supplement** and a freelance journalist.

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