

## SCIENCE FICTION

### Five Author Challenge<sup>1</sup>

As originally conceived by Joyce Saricks

Updated 7/05

**Orson Scott Card:** Card is a prolific author in many genres. He writes SF, Fantasy, Christian Biblical Fiction and Horror novels. However, he is best known for his SF works, most notable the Ender Wiggins series. Card is a Mormon and his novels carry undertones of the teachings of John Smith although they are not overt. Card is a great storyteller. According to Joyce Saricks, “Card is known for his memorable characters, his engrossing and always moral stories, and his provocative view of a world in which individuals can make a difference.” No matter the genre, Card’s books are about the characters and how they handle morally difficult situations. Yet this does not mean they are slow paced. Card manages to focus on the characters but keep the story moving at a fairly brisk pace. *Ender’s Game*, a perennial librarian favorite, is a wonderful example of a Card book. An expert at simulated war games, Andrew “Ender” Wiggins believes that he is engaged in one more computer war game when, in truth, [SPOILER ALERT] he is commanding the last Earth fleet against an alien race seeking Earth’s complete destruction. Card’s secondary characters can be as rich as his protagonists; for example, the Ender Wiggins series has been expanded and retold from another character’s point of view (Bean).

**Nancy Kress:** Kress is extremely popular because her books offer readers of science fiction what they desire: provocative ideas and situations, descriptive writing, and suspense. Kress’s books tend to focus on aliens like in her Probability Trilogy or genetically engineered humans here on earth like in her Beggars Trilogy. In her novels, Kress delves into technical science, yet she also creates well rounded, interesting characters and places them in compelling stories. No matter the subject her works are about science and the ethical consequences of scientific advancement. It is important to note, that Kress’ works contain no humor or romance, as some science fiction writers of these kinds of tales tend to include. Kress’ novels are detailed and move at a leisurely pace but she adds elements of suspense and adventure to pick up the pacing in sections. In a recent book, *Crossfire* (2003), a man with a dark past leads a group of human colonists to a distant planet. This diverse group of thousands soon finds that they are not alone on this planet, and soon, the seemingly primitive aliens and the colonists are in the midst of an interstellar war.

**Kim Stanley Robinson:** Robinson is probably best known for his Mars Trilogy about the settlement and terraforming (literally, “Earth-shaping”; it is the process of modifying a planet, moon or other body to a more habitable atmosphere, temperature or ecology. It is a type of planetary engineering). *Red Mars*, *Green Mars*, and *Blue Mars* have all won either a Nebula or a Hugo award. This trilogy would fall under the category of “hard science fiction.” His work delves into ecological and sociological themes regularly, such as ecological sustainability and economic and social justice (specifically alternates to capitalism). Many of his novels also appear to be the direct result of his own scientific fascinations, such as the 15 years of research and lifelong fascination with Mars. Robinson was born in Waukegan, but now lives in California. His Three Californias Trilogy looks at the state in three near future possible scenarios. Robinson also has stand alone books like *Antarctica* which is similar to the Mars books only here on Earth’s last uninhabited continent.

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<sup>1</sup> With help from NoveList

**Neal Stephenson:** As described by Lynne Welch on NoveList, The work of Neal Stephenson appeals to readers on many different levels. The complicated post-modernistic stream-of-consciousness quality of his prose requires the reader's complete concentration to unravel the many torturous twists and turns. He builds snippets and chunks of actual history, math and science into the back-story and incorporates them seamlessly into the action. Although the concepts he presents are often highly technical in nature, Stephenson is able to make them not only understandable but interesting. Stephenson's main charm, however, lies in his mastery of the unexpected. One simply never knows on what tangent he will next veer. Many of his settings are futuristic urban wastelands; others juxtapose virtual reality with the physical universe, and the action jumps back and forth between the two. Explicit violence plays an important role in these stories as well, and although it is frequently shocking it is by no means gratuitous to the story line. Stephenson also employs strong language to develop the reader's mental view of his characters as eccentric, cynical, and hard-edged. A good example is *The Diamond Age* set in a future ruled by the rebirth of Victorian thinking, inhabited by a brilliant technologist who dares to rebel against it.

**Connie Willis:** Willis has won numerous Nebula and Hugo awards by exercising her witty imagination on subjects from time travel to Abraham Lincoln; it has been remarked that Willis certainly does not write the same book twice<sup>2</sup>. Willis often combines elements of romance and humor while commenting on the foibles of contemporary society. Unlike many SF books, Willis' novels have witty dialog, manage to keep multiple plot lines afloat, and include very memorable characters. She is one of the plainest spoken SF writers you will find. A good example of her style can be seen in *Remake* (1995). It is the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in Hollywood there are no more live actors and no new movies. Everything is a remake of an old movie with digital improvements. Here Alis, a female actor who dreams of actually dancing in a movie, meets Tom, a Special FX movie technician who might be able to make Alis' dream come true. [It is also important to note that Willis has been mentioned as a read-a-like option for fans of Jasper Fforde's Thursday Next Series.]

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<sup>2</sup> Booklist review of *Passage*, March 15, 2001.