

# First Paragraphs

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Prof. Wythoff

**What are the different ways in which our authors use language to introduce their readers to a new world?**

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## Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993)

EARTHSEED: THE BOOKS OF THE LIVING

Saturday, July 20, 2024

I had my recurring dream last night. I guess I should have expected it. It comes to me when I struggle—when I twist on my own personal hook and try to pretend that nothing unusual is happening. It comes to me when I try to be my father’s daughter.

Today is our birthday—my fifteenth and my father’s fifty-fifth. Tomorrow, I’ll try to please him—him and the community and God. So last night, I dreamed a reminder that it’s all a lie. I think I need to write about the dream because this particular lie bothers me so much.

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## Samuel R. Delany, *Trouble on Triton* (1976)

He had been living at the men’s co-op (Serpent’s House) six months now. This one had been working out well. So, at four o’clock, as he strolled from the hegemony lobby onto the crowded Plaza of Light (thirty-seventh day of the fifteenth paramonth of the second year<sub>N</sub>, announced the lights around the Plaza—on Earth and Mars both they’d be calling it some day or other in Spring, 2112, as would a good number of official documents even out here, whatever the political nonsense said or read), he decided to walk home.

He thought: I am a reasonably happy man.

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## Lavie Tidhar, *Central Station* (2010)

I first came to Central Station on a day in winter. African refugees sat on the green, expressionless. They were waiting, but for what, I don't know. Outside a butchery, two Filipino children played at being airplanes: arms spread wide they zoomed and circled, firing from imaginary under-wing machine guns. Behind the butcher's counter, a Filipino man was hitting a ribcage with his cleaver, separating meat and bones into individual chops. A little farther from it stood the Rosh Ha'ir shawarma stand, twice blown up by suicide bombers in the past but open for business as usual. The smell of lamb fat and cumin wafted across the noisy street and made me hungry.

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## Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Windup Girl* (2008)

"No! I don't want the mangosteen." Anderson Lake leans forward, pointing. "I want that one, there. *Kaw pollamai nee hkap*. The one with the red skin and the green hairs."

The peasant woman smiles, showing teeth blackened from chewing betel nut, and points to a pyramid of fruits stacked beside her. "*Un nee chai mai kha?*"

"Right. Those. *Khap*." Anderson nods and makes himself smile. "What are they called?"

"*Ngaw*." She pronounces the word carefully for his foreign ear, and hands across a sample.

Anderson takes the fruit, frowning. "It's new?"

"*Kha*." She nods an affirmative.

Anderson turns the fruit in his hand, studying it. It's more like a gaudy sea anemone or a furry puffer fish than a fruit. Coarse green tendrils protrude from all sides, tickling his palm. The skin has the rust-red tinge of blister rust, but when he sniffs he doesn't get any stink of decay. It seems perfectly healthy, despite its appearance.

"*Ngaw*," the peasant woman says again, and then, as if reading his mind. "New. No blister rust."

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## Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City* (2010)

*In Zoo City, it's impolite to ask.*

Morning light the sulfur color of the mine dumps seeps across Johannesburg's skyline and sears through my window. My own personal bat signal. Or a reminder that I really need to get curtains.

Shielding my eyes—morning has broken and there's no picking up the peices—I yank back the sheet and peel out of bed. Benoît doesn't so much as stir, with only his calloused feet sticking out from under the duvet like knots of driftwood. Feet like that, they tell a story. They say he walked all the way from Kinshasa with a Mongoose strapped to his chest.

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## Cixin Liu, *The Three-Body Problem* (2008)

*China, 1967*

The Red Union had been attacking the headquarters of the April Twenty-eighth Brigade for two days. Their red flags fluttered restlessly around the brigade building like flames yearning for firewood.

The Red Union commander was anxious, though not because of the defenders he faced. The more than two hundred Red Guards of the April Twenty-eighth Brigade were mere greenhorns compared with the veteran Red Guards of the Red Union, which was formed at the start of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in early 1966. The Red Union had been tempered by the tumultuous experience of revolutionary tours around the country and seeing Chairman Mao in the great rallies in Tiananmen Square.

But the commander *was* afraid of the dozen or so iron stoves inside the building, filled with explosives and connected to each other by electric detonators. He couldn't see them, but he could feel their presence like iron sensing the pull of a nearby magnet. If a defender flipped the switch, revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries alike would all die in one giant ball of fire.

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## Kim Stanley Robinson, *2312* (2012)

The sun is always just about to rise. Mercury rotates so slowly that you can walk fast enough over its rocky surface to stay ahead of the dawn; and so many people do. Many have made this a way of life. They walk roughly westward, staying always ahead of the stupendous day. Some of them hurry from location to location, pausing to look in cracks they earlier inoculated with bio-leaching metallophytes, quickly scraping free any accumulated residues of gold or tungsten or uranium. But most of them are out to catch glimpses of the sun.

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## Nnendi Okorafor, *Binti* (2015)

I powered up the transporter and said a silent prayer. I had no idea what I was going to do if it didn't work. My transporter was cheap, so even a droplet of moisture, or more likely, a grain of sand, would cause it to short. It was faulty and most of the time I had to restart it over and over before it worked. *Please not now, please not now*, I thought.