

TASTING LIGHT

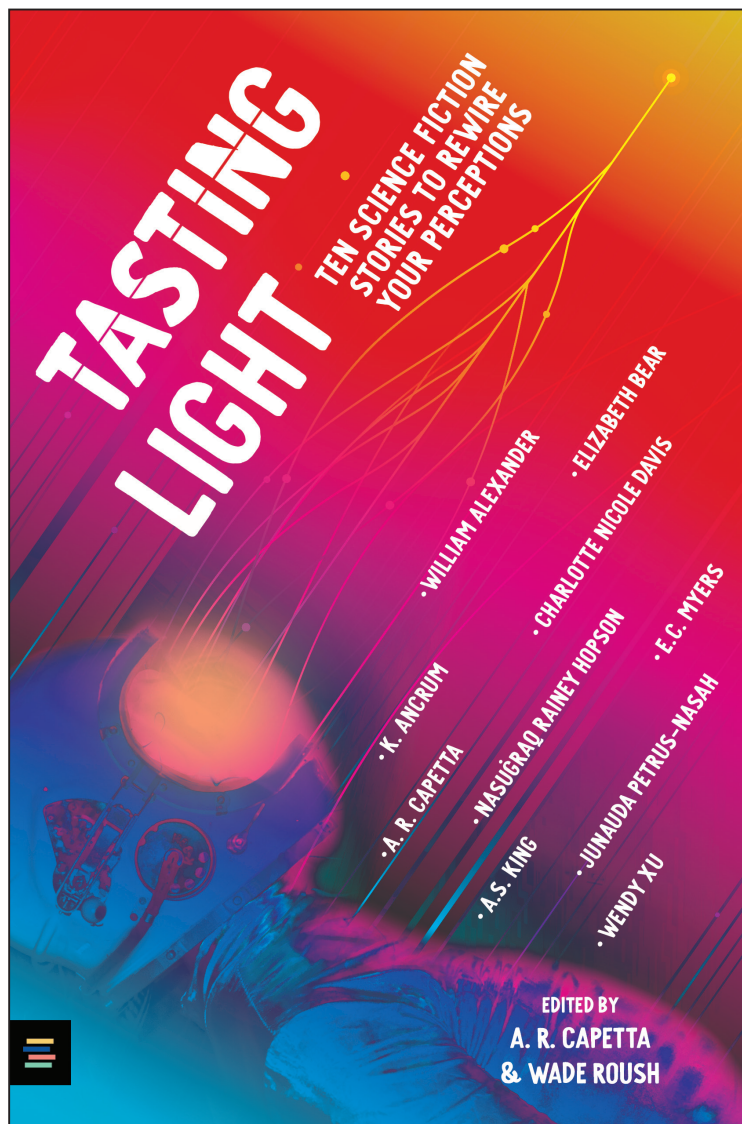
TEN SCIENCE FICTION STORIES TO REWIRE YOUR PERCEPTIONS

ABOUT THE BOOK

What does the future hold? Ten speculative short stories by leading young-adult authors imagine what the world could be through the lens of technologies emerging today. When the modification industry transforms how humans look, sound, and interact, a nonbinary teen braves the “reinvention room” to accept a gift from the dead. In an accidental city in space, a young apprentice holds neighborhoods together with braided carbon filaments until distraction and inspiration arrive in the wake of a visitor. Entitlement-fueled drug use alters the landscape of white privilege, robots remember the earth, and corporate “walkers” stroll for unknown subscribers—until one hacks the system. In tales buzzing with possibility, hope, innovation, anger, and tenderness, *Tasting Light* offers a dazzling challenge to connect with open minds, hearts, and senses in a fast-changing world.

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



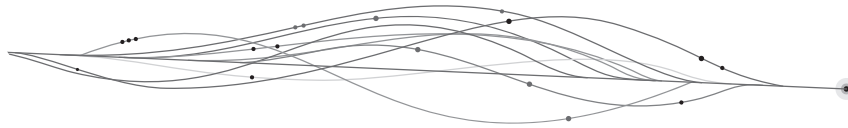
HC: 978-1-5362-1938-8

Also available as an e-book

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In “Cadence,” the first story in *Tasting Light*, Cadence is working to repair their identity—“righting a wrong,” as they put it—and mod technology offers them the chance to speak with an entirely different voice. Have you ever experienced a sense of wanting to “right a wrong” about an aspect of your identity? If you got a mod, what would it be, and why would you choose it?
2. The unnamed protagonist in “On the Tip of My Tongue” adapts Tía Cassie’s tongue mesh interface to sense how their orbital city, Eleum, is moving through space. It’s a kind of technology-mediated synesthesia. If you could choose something to experience from a completely new sensory perspective, what would it be?
3. In “Melanitis,” a drug meant to enhance academic performance gives white children dark skin when they grow up, forcing them to grapple with American society’s persistent anti-Black prejudices. Have you ever imagined how people might treat you if your own skin color were different? How does that thought experiment change the way you treat others?
4. In “Extremophiles,” X and Lileo are two young people, stuck in unimaginably remote environments on Jupiter’s moon Europa, who form a deep relationship (and share a mind-bending adventure) through secret DNA-coded correspondence. Can you imagine finding a soulmate without ever meeting them?
5. In the graphic story “The Memory of Soil,” the conscious robot formerly known as Jem helps Astrid come to terms with her anxiety and self-doubt. What does consciousness mean to you, and do you think robots could ever acquire it? If they did, would we be obliged to accord them full human rights? If so, why don’t we give rights to beings that *are* clearly conscious, like elephants?
6. In “Walk 153,” the Sentinel virtual-presence system allows a disabled older woman, Five/Sereфина, to experience the outdoor world through the eyes of college-age Ezra, her Sentinel Walker. Through the platform, Ezra and Five develop a deeply meaningful relationship—a kind of platonic May-December romance. How do you relate to the older people in your life? What would it take to form closer connections with them?
7. “The Weight of a Name” is set in a far-distant future where, in a tables-turned situation, a space agency terraforming a distant Earth-like exoplanet needs access to scientific data in journals belonging to a young Inupiaq woman, Allu Saakli. How can the dominant cultures of the industrial world revalue Indigenous cultures today? Can humans expand to other planets without repeating the mistakes of past eras of colonization?
8. In “Twin Strangers,” high-school wrestler Liam is dealing with what we might diagnose as body dysmorphic disorder and anorexia. It leads him to customize and train his online agent, or “dop,” in a way that leads to great mischief. How is the way you represent yourself online different from the real you? How might it change if you were able to accept yourself the way you are?

9. “The Cage” uses an intentionally destabilizing mix of storytelling devices from reality TV, YouTube, social media, and true-crime podcasts to piece together the story of two prep-school students who may or may not be experimenting with the idea of alternate universes. What do you think “really” happened to Nicky and Simon? Is it even possible to know? What does this story say to you about the truth-telling or truth-bending capacities of modern media culture?
10. “Smile River” feels like Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* in that it’s set in a dystopian future where a patriarchal autocracy is systematically erasing women’s autonomy and agency. What glimmers of this future do you see in the actual present? What can individuals (like the many generations of Graces and Roses in the story) do to prevent this future?



ABOUT A. R. CAPETTA

A. R. Capetta is the author of *The Heartbreak Bakery*, *Echo After Echo*, and *The Lost Coast* and the coauthor, with their spouse, Cory McCarthy, of the best-selling *Once & Future* series. They live in the Green Mountains and teach in the Writing for Children and Young Adults MFA program at Vermont College of Fine Arts.

ABOUT WADE ROUSH

Wade Roush is a journalist and audio producer who focuses on how science and technology are changing our lives and what we can do as individuals to steer that process. He is the editor of the hard sci-fi anthology *Twelve Tomorrows*, published by MIT Press. He holds a PhD from MIT in the history of technology and lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

These questions were prepared by editors A. R. Capetta and Wade Roush.