

# My Heretical Fiction Ideas

## 1. Sam Bankman-Fried, but you root for him.

What would it take to make us empathize with Sam Bankman-Fried? He did have a grandiosely good purpose. I'm not too fond of his methods or poor choices, but maybe something nearby is entirely relatable, and to some extent maybe even defensible.

I would really enjoy reading a fictionalized account of his trajectory that does two things:

- Use narrative to seduce the reader's natural capacity for empathy — to make Sam feel more human, more understandable
- Given that the real Sam almost certainly did a bunch of uncalled-for things and made poor strategic choices in his pursuit, the fictional account would also need to edit some facts, such that the actions he eventually takes all come from a deeply strategic, earnest, true, and appropriate caring — rather than a misguided one.

## 2. Jesus as a strict utilitarian.

Every telling of the story of Jesus where he was just a strict utilitarian and managed to shape the world to be much better. I'd like to stick to the Bible — the main plot points and stories should stay as they are — but have freedom to edit the rest of history if necessary.

The animating question: *how would the world need to be for the most utilitarian thing for Jesus to do to be Jesus himself, and to do what the Bible tells us he did?*

This probably won't be written, partly because there's only one Scott Alexander and he's Jewish, but also because this particular community for the most part doesn't have the breadth and depth of thought about history to pull it off. Still, I'd be pretty excited to read even multiply short-comed versions of this.

## 3. Tales of extreme ambition.

A collection of tales tracking the different paths toward the most outsized stories of impact in the world we've had so far. Why not Will MacAskill and Toby Ord, Sam Bankman-Fried, the Anthropic founders, Dustin Moskovitz — and maybe Jason Matheny.

You'd follow them closely and try to answer: how do these different people relate to extreme ambition? What decisions do they take that are important, that shape years of their path and careers? In what ways do they double down on who they are, and in what ways are they intensely aware and strategic about reshaping what they do and who they are? I think that would be a truly enjoyable read.

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Also, these ideas feel to me like one of the strongest arguments for the value of fiction. If I read something like any of this, I would learn so much about different things that it would be really hard to learn any other way. And writing any of them would take some amount of sheer obsession and quality of thought that's hard to find anywhere.

But the thing is, the classics come from a similar place. They may not be posing the specific questions I'm trying to answer here, but they pose deep questions about the human condition, many of which could be relevant to the purposes I have myself.

So — what a good argument for fiction and the classics.