

# Sci-Fi 101: History of Science Fiction

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# What is Sci-Fi?

- “Fiction is simply dreams written out. Science fiction is consists of the hopes and dreams and fears of a technically based society...an honest effort at prophetic extrapolation from the known must be made”  
----John W. Campbell
- “In science fiction a fantastic event or development is considered rationally.”  
---- James Gunn
- “Science fiction is what I point at when I say science fiction”  
---- Damon Knight

# SF literature and its influence

- Books: Bestsellers and scholarly journals;  
*10% of fiction published in U.S. (70-80s) was SF.*
- Movies: Big budget SF movies
- TV series: Star Trek, Doc Who...
- Comics: Watchmen, Spider man, Superman, Ghost in the Shell\*
- Games: Sid Meier's Civilization, Starcraft
- Space program
- Subculture: hippie, punk

# The Present

- Magazines

1<sup>st</sup> tier: Asimov's Science Fiction, Locus, F&SF

2<sup>nd</sup> tier: Omni, Analog

- Awards

Hugo Award, annual Worldcon

Nebular Award, SFWA

- Fandom

Publishing houses, clubs, conventions, Fanzines.

# Timeline

- 1818: *Frankenstein*, Mary W. Shelly  
The first Sci-Fi novel
- 1818~1920s: Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells
- 1911-1926: Pulp fiction, scientific romance, ghetto
- 1926: *Amazing Stories*, Hugo Gernsback  
Sci-Fi as a genre, space opera
- 1938-1950s: *Astounding Science Fiction*, John W. Campbell  
Modern Sci-Fi, Golden Age, hard SF
- 1950-1965: *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Galaxy*, *New Worlds (U.K)*, J. G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss...  
New Wave
- 1970-1980s: Cyberpunk, William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Philip Dick ...

# 1818 Frankenstein, Mary Shelly

- Distant Past:

Plato's Atlantis, Sir Thomas More's Utopia, Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels



don't contain one indispensable ingredient of SF:

-- a belief in a world being changed by man's intellect, a conviction that what was being written could really happen.

- Frankenstein, 1818

Mad scientist, monster, questioning the origin of life,

# 1813~1920s: Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells. "Father of Sci-Fi"

- Edgar Allan Poe
- Jules Verne; future wonders and voyages adventures, defined sci-fi, makes it popular and profitable.
- H. G. Wells (1866-1946): science and the future could be the subject of literature

Time travel ("The Time Machine"),

ET invasion ("The War of the Worlds"),

Artificial man ("The Island of Dr. Moreau")

Invisibility through chemicals , biologically controlled specialization, superman, duplicate or parallel worlds, impact of the airplane and the tank on warfare, A bomb and worldwide destruction, man-eating plants, conquest by ants, prehistoric people.....

# 1926: *Amazing Stories*, Hugo Gernsback

1911-1926: the rise of pulp fictions

“Tarzan of the Apes”, Edgar Rice Burroughs

“Martian princess” Edgar Rice Burroughs, pseudo-scientific, romance, dime novels

1926: Hugo Gernsback founding 1<sup>st</sup> SF magazine.

- Popularize science and technology through fiction.
- A roman mingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision... (Verner, Wells, and Allan Poe type of story)
- SF as a genre
- Adventure-dominant, Space opera, flat character.

E. E. Smith, Grey lens-man



# 1938-1950s: Golden Age

- *Campbell era, 1938, Astounding Science Fiction* and its editor John W. Campbell Jr.
- First Modern SF, serious literature.
- Concerns on society and philosophical, economical, psychological, and sociological aspects of change.
- Characters.
- Star writers: Big three, A. E. Vogt, Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury, Robert Silverberg, Hal Clement, etc.
- Hard-SF, science-dominant
  - Hal Clement's "Mission of Gravity"
  - Larry Niven's "Ringworld"
  - Arthur Clark's "Rendezvous with Rama"

# The Big Three: Heinlein (1907-1988)

- Robert A Heinlein: Future history series, “Strange in a strange land” (5M copies!), “The Moon is a Harsh Mistress”, “Double Star”, “Starship Troopers”
  - 1<sup>st</sup> entry into mass market publication giant: The Saturday Evening Post.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Hollywood movie of serious SF, Destination Moon.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> in Juvenile SF: “Have space suit, will travel”, “Citizen of Galaxy”
- Literalism, exposition, Bring naturalism to SF writing. (R. Kipling’s influence)

*Excerpt:*

*He punched the door with a code combination and awaited face check. It came promptly; the door dilated, and a voice within said, “come in, Felix.” (p5, Beyond the Horizon, 1942)*

# The Big Three: Asimov (1920-1992)

- Isaac Asimov: “Foundation” series, Galactic Empire, Robot series, Three laws of Robotics
  - 1) A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
  - 2) A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
  - 3) A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.
- Prolific, science non-fiction writings, and more.
- Member and Vice-President of Mensa International

# The Big Three: Sir Clarke (1917-2008)

- Sir Arthur C Clarke: "Rendezvous with Rama", "Childhood's End", "2001: a space odyssey"
- Scientific contributions: The Geostationary communications satellite
- Clarke's Three Laws:
  - 1) When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong.
  - 2) The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.
  - 3) Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic

# 1950-1965: Alternate SF and New Wave

- U.S. Magazines: *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Galaxy*
- *Sociology-dominant*
- *Writers: Ursula LeGuin, Robert Sherling, Frank Herbert*
- *U.K Magazine: New Worlds (U.K), editor Michael Moorcock, Shift from rationalism to sensationalism.*
- *J. G. Ballard, U.K., *The Drowned World, The Burning world, The Crystal World.**
- *Brian Aldiss, U.K., *Hothouse, The Saliva Tree and other strange growths**

# 1970-1980s: Cyberpunk

- From New Wave back to “conventional” SF with solid science.
- Cyber-“high tech”, Information technology, Artificial intelligence, Bio-engineering, virtual reality, hackers, brain-computer interface, human-biological enhancements...
- Punk: “low life”, Punk rock, post-industrial dystopias
- Works:
  - William Gibson: Neuromancer
  - Philip K. Dick: Do Androids dream of Electric Sheep, The man in the high castle.
  - Vernor Vinge: True names, A fire upon the deep.

Within thirty years, we will have the technological means to create superhuman intelligence. Shortly after, the human era will be ended.

— *“The Coming **Technological Singularity**” (1993) by Vernor Vinge*

# Sci-Fi's viewpoints: look at the humanity

Rationalism's distancing effect (Remote from the human-race):

- From the viewpoint of the universe

"I didn't feel like a giant. I felt very, very small."

– Neil Armstrong's, Apollo 11

"I completely lost my identity as an American astronaut, I felt a part of everyone and everything sweeping past me below".

– Rusty Schweickart, Astronaut

"When the resolution is no better than a few kilometers, there is no sign of life on earth? " "Where were men's monuments? Where were the signs of his civilization? " "For all our feelings of self-importance, we are only a kind of biological rust, clinging to the surface of our small planet, and weighing far less than the invisible air which surrounds us"

-- Carl Sagan, writer

# Dwarf Man again...

- From the viewpoint of the future

the important function of the present is to make possible the future.

- From the viewpoint of the alien
  - The relativity of our most cherished beliefs, the ridiculousness of our traditions, and our concerns, and the temporality of our societies.
  - Learn to share the broader vision that encompasses all living creatures.



“I decline to accept the end of man. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail.” ---- William Faulkner, 1950 Nobel-laureate speech