Science Fiction and Fantasy
What is SCIENCE FICTION?
Aliens!

Space ships!

Robots!
Science Fiction - Elements

1. Speculation about humanity’s future
2. The effects of science and technology on people
3. Settings in an alternate time and place
4. “What if?” is the starting point for all science fiction.
Science Fiction – Definitions

- “Literature of ideas”
- Contemplates possible futures
- “no easily delineated limits”
- Represents how people in the present feel about the future
- Future is appealing because it can’t be known; a “safe, sterile laboratory for trying out ideas in....a means of thinking about reality, a method”
- “Science fiction is what we point to when we say it.”
“What if there was more than just us in the universe? What if war was across solar systems? What if the Earth disappeared to make way for a hyperspace bypass and you only had a towel and your dressing gown to your name?”

“I love that it is so distant from my reality, but still relatable – so I can escape from paying bills, cleaning, boring life and visit somewhere else and feel like I am having an adventure.”

“I love seeing all the myriad ways different authors envision our possible futures. The forms of space travel are often different, and carry different implications for how human societies function.”

“...it talks about what is possible – not just in terms of technology and science, but also in terms of relations between humans, other humans, aliens and the worlds they inhabit.”
SUB-GENRES YOU SHOULD KNOW

(and a pretty slide of the Carina Nebula)
“Hard” science fiction

- Based on the “hard” sciences, or natural sciences – biology, chemistry, physics
- Characterized by an emphasis on scientific accuracy
- Authors operate within the limits of the worlds in which they write (so hard sci fi from the 1960s will be very different from modern hard sci fi)
- Problems are often rooted in science, and the solutions are rooted in science (no deus ex machina...and nothing gets solved with “The Force”)
- Became very popular in the 1950s and 1960s as the US space program developed, but can be traced back to the 1870s with Jules Verne’s Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea and Around the World in Eighty Days
“Hard” science fiction – authors/books

• Arthur C. Clarke
• Isaac Asimov
• Larry Niven
• Kim Stanley Robinson
• Peter F. Hamilton
• Michael Crichton – The Andromeda Strain, Sphere
• John Sandford and Ctein – Saturn Run
• Neal Stephenson – Seveneves
• Andy Weir – The Martian, Artemis
“Soft” science fiction

- Explores the “soft” sciences or the social sciences, such as anthropology, psychology, sociology
- Also refers to science fiction that is not scientifically accurate
- More concerned with character and society than science and engineering
- Usually very much a product of its time
- Problems and solutions rooted in social science
- Often features political intrigue, ruthless leaders, anti-heroes, problems often solved with logical traps, shrewd wit, or military insurgency
“Soft” science fiction – authors/books

• George Orwell – *1984*
• Ursula K. LeGuin
• Anthony Burgess – *A Clockwork Orange*
• Madeline L’Engle – *A Wrinkle in Time*
• Robert Heinlein – *Stranger in a Strange Land*
• David Levithan – *Every Day*
• Colson Whitehead – *The Underground Railroad*
• Alena Graedon – *The Word Exchange*
Dystopian fiction

• Explores social and political structures in “a dark nightmare world”
• Society characterized by poverty, squalor and oppression
• an imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives
Dystopian fiction – authors/books

- Margaret Atwood – *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *The Heart Goes Last*
- Philip K. Dick – *A Scanner Darkly*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *Minority Report*
- Paolo Bacigalupi – *The Water Knife*, *The Windup Girl*, *The Calorie Man*
- George Orwell – *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*
- Ray Bradbury – *Fahrenheit 451*
- Aldous Huxley – *Brave New World*
- Emily St. John Mandel – *Station Eleven* (also near future, apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic)
- Suzanne Collins – *Hunger Games* trilogy (also near future, apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic)
- Naomi Alderman – *The Power*
- Omar El Akkad – *American War*
- Blake Crouch – *Wayward Pines* series
The Handmaid’s Tale: Science Fiction vs. Speculative Fiction

The Handmaid’s Tale received the Arthur C. Clarke award in 1987

- Award given for best science fiction novel
- Atwood rejected the idea of her piece belonging to the genre of "science fiction". She argued that nothing she included had not happened somewhere already in human history and all she did was take some commonly held ideas (regarding women, etc.) and take them to their logical conclusion.

"I like to make a distinction between science fiction proper and speculative fiction. For me, the science fiction label belongs on books with things in them that we can’t yet do, such as going through a wormhole in space to another universe; and speculative fiction means a work that employs the means already to hand, such as DNA identification and credit cards, and that takes place on Planet Earth. But the terms are fluid."

"Science fiction has monsters and spaceships; speculative fiction could really happen."

Dystopian/Apocalyptic.....pregnancy fiction?

- Louise Erdrich – *Future Home of the Living God*
- Kaethe Schwehn – *The Rending and the Nest*
- Leni Zumas – *Red Clocks*
- Carrie Vaughn – *Bannerless*
- Megan Hunter – *The End We Start From*
Apocalyptic/Post-Apocalyptic Fiction

- Apocalyptic: concerned with the end of civilization through nuclear war, plague, or other disaster
- Post-apocalyptic: set in a world after such a disaster
- “Oh no, it’s happening!” vs “Oh no! It happened.”
- Post-apocalyptic deals with hardships or psychology of survivors
- World is often agrarian, non-technological future world, or a world where only small bits of technology remain
Apocalyptic/Post-Apocalyptic authors/books

- Cormac McCarthy – *The Road*
- Stephen King – *The Stand* (some debate about whether this is sci fi, or just horror/fantasy)
- William Forstchen – *One Second After* (and its sequels)
- Hugh Howey – Silo series: *Shift*, *Wool*, *Dust*, standalone: *Sand* (as an aside, Howey credits *Fraggle Rock* with being the biggest influence on him)
- Charlie Jane Anders – *All the Birds in the Sky*
- Karen Thompson Walker – *Age of Miracles*
- Justin Cronin – *The Passage* series
- PD James – *Children of Men*
- Colson Whitehead – *Zone One*
Alternative History

• What if history had developed differently?
• Mostly set in real historical contexts merged with science fiction tropes like time travel between alternate histories, splitting one timeline into two
Alternative History – authors/books

• Philip K. Dick – *The Man in the High Castle* (also a series on Amazon)
• Stephen Fry – *Making History*
• Michael Chabon – *The Yiddish Policeman’s Union*
• Steve Erickson – *Shadowbahn*
• Harry Turtledove – *The Guns of the South*
• Omar El Akkad – *American War*
• Kim Stanley Robinson – *The Years of Rice and Salt*
• William Gibson and Bruce Sterling – *The Difference Engine*
Alternate Reality/Parallel Universe

• a self-contained separate reality co-existing with our own
• can range in size from a small geographic region to an entire new universe, or several universes forming a multiverse
Alternate Reality/Parallel Universe books

• Stephen King – *The Dark Tower* series
• Blake Crouch – *Dark Matter*
• Alan Averill – *The Beautiful Land*
• Iain M. Banks – *Transition*
• Cory Doctorow – *Someone Comes to Town, Someone Leaves Town* (free download from his website!)
• Peter Clines – *The Fold*
• Audrey Niffenegger – *The Time Traveller’s Wife*
Near Future

• Takes place in the present day or in the next few decades
• Elements of the setting should be familiar to the reader: local, earth-bound
• Technology may be current or in development – such as nanotechnology or genetics
• Extrapolations of current technologies and situations that seem like they might already be possible
• “where we are already heading, just with shinier toys”
Near Future authors/books

• Philip K. Dick – Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?
• Ernest Cline – Ready Player One
• Max Berry – Jennifer Government
• Octavia E. Butler – Parable of the Sower
• Ray Bradbury – Fahrenheit 451
• Neal Stephenson – Snow Crash
• Rachel Cantor – A Highly Unlikely Scenario: or a Neetsa Pizza Employee’s Guide to Saving the World
Space Opera

- Space opera emphasizes space warfare, melodramatic adventure, interplanetary battles, chivalric romance, and risk-taking.

- Set mainly or entirely in outer space, it usually involves conflict between opponents with advanced abilities, futuristic weapons, and other sophisticated technology.

- Most space operas conveniently violate the known laws of physics by positing some form of faster-than-light travel.

- The term has no relation to music, but is instead a play on the term soap opera, or horse opera, which is a term coined in the 1930s to refer to clichéd and formulaic Western movies.
Space Opera – authors/novels

- John Scalzi – The Collapsing Empire
- Kameron Hurley – The Stars Are Legion
- Ernest Cline – Armada
- Frank Herbert – Dune
- Anne McCaffery – The Ship Who Sang
- Larry Niven – Ringworld
- Lois McMaster Bujold – Shards of Honor
- Orson Scott Card – Ender’s Game
- Peter F. Hamilton – The Commonwealth Saga ("the one with all the trains")
- Becky Chambers – The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet
Generation Ship

• hypothetical type of “ark” starship that would travel much slower than light across great distances between stars

• Takes numerous generations to reach its destination; loaded up with passengers who will live out their lives, raise children, and die before ever reaching the destination

• Ship must be self-sustaining

• Stories usually feature breakdowns in moral and social structure, questions of reproductive rights, themes of totalitarianism etc.
Generation Ship – authors/novels

- Beth Revis – *Across the Universe* (series – YA)
- Kim Stanley Robinson – *Aurora*
- Mur Lafferty – *Six Wakes*
- Greg Bear – *Hull Zero Three*
- Richard Paul Russo – *Ship of Fools*
- Larry Niven and Gregory Benford – *Bowl of Heaven*
Cyberpunk

- Focus on high-tech and low-life
- Advanced technology coupled with the breakdown of the social order.
- "Classic cyberpunk characters were marginalized, alienated loners who lived on the edge of society in generally dystopic futures where daily life was effected by rapid technological change, an ubiquitous datasphere of computerized information, and invasive modification of the human body"
Cyberpunk authors/novels

• William Gibson – Neuromancer, Mona Lisa Overdrive, Pattern Recognition, Burning Chrome
• Neal Stephenson – Snow Crash, Reamde, The Diamond Age, Cryptonomicon
• Philip K. Dick – A Scanner Darkly, Do Androids Dream....
• Ernest Cline – Ready Player One
• Richard K. Morgan – Altered Carbon
Light/Humorous – definition and books

• May occur within any one of the subgenres, or (often) spoof a subgenre
• Douglas Adams – Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy
• John Scalzi – Red Shirts
• Charles Strosser – The Laundry Files series
• Cory Doctorow – Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom
• Ursula K. LeGuin – Changing Planes
Steampunk

- incorporates technology and aesthetic designs inspired by 19th-century industrial steam-powered machinery
- a genre of science fiction that has a historical setting and typically features steam-powered machinery rather than advanced technology.
- literary origins are sometimes associated with the cyberpunk genre, but steampunk works are often set in an alternative history of the 19th century's British Victorian era or American "Wild West"
- Also called “gaslamp fantasy” by some authors
Steampunk authors/novels

• William Gibson and Bruce Sterling – The Difference Engine
• Scott Westerfeld – Leviathan trilogy
• China Mieville – Railsea (also a retelling of Moby Dick)
• Daniel H. Wilson – A Clockwork Dynasty
• Philip Reeve – Mortal Engines
• Mary Shelley – Frankenstein
• Cherie Priest – Boneshaker
• Phil & Kaja Foglio – Agatha H & the Airship City
Weird/New Weird

• Weird fiction is a subgenre of speculative fiction originating in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

• It can be said to encompass the ghost story and other tales of the macabre.

• Weird fiction is distinguished from horror and fantasy in its blending of supernatural, mythical, and even scientific tropes.

• "The fact of the weird is the fact that the worldweave is ripped and unfinished. Moth-eaten, ill-made. And through the little tears, from behind the ragged edges, things are looking at us."
Weird/New Weird – authors/books

• Edgar Allan Poe (Weird)
• H.P. Lovecraft (Weird)
• China Mieville – *Three Moments of an Explosion: Stories*
• Jeff VanderMeer – *Borne*, *Southern Reach* trilogy (*Annihilation*, *Authority*, *Acceptance*) (New Weird)
• Laline Paull – *The Bees* (described as *The Handmaid’s Tale* meets *The Hunger Games*.....)
Slipstream

• “The fiction of strangeness.”
• “Books that have genre trappings, but literary aspirations, books that defy genre categories.”
• Slipstream “slides between genres” like science fiction and horror.
• Cognitive dissonance is the desired goal, whereas with magical realism, the fantastical or mythical elements are meant to co-exist with the realistic elements as though there is nothing jarring about their co-existence.
Slipstream – authors/books

- Mohsin Hamid – Exit West
- Robin Sloan – Mr. Penumbra’s 24-Hour Bookstore
- Kurt Vonnegut – Slaughterhouse-Five
- Emma Donoghue – Wonder
- Kate Atkinson – Life After Life
..Oh geez. There’s MOAR?

- Metafiction – when the author or characters become aware of the story (**Cat’s Cradle**, **Red Shirts**)
- Military Sci-Fi (um, self-explanatory?)
- Singularity – radical changes to society brought about by new technology (often AI)
- First Contact – first meeting between humans and aliens
- Alien Invasion – technologically superior race invades Earth to enslave us. Or use us for food, etc.
- Time Travel
- Virtual Reality (**Snow Crash**, **Ready Player One**)
Fantasy – Definition/Elements

• Set in a fictional universe, often without any locations, events, or people referencing the real world
• Distinguished from the genres of science fiction and horror by the absence of scientific or macabre themes
• Most fantasy uses magic or other supernatural elements as a main plot element, theme, or setting. Magic and magical creatures are common in many of these worlds.
• Fantasy is distinguished from science fiction by the plausibility of the narrative elements.
High Fantasy/Epic Fantasy

• defined by the epic stature of its characters, themes or plot
• set in an alternative, fictional, “secondary” world rather than in the primary or “real” world; this secondary world has its own set of rules and physical laws
• often told from the viewpoint of one main hero (who usually has a mysterious heritage or nature)
• often an evil that must be defeated (sometimes a Dark Lord type of character)
High Fantasy authors/books

• J.R.R. Tolkien – *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy
• Laini Taylor – *Strange the Dreamer*
• George R.R. Martin – *A Game of Thrones* series
• Brandon Sanderson – *Mistborn* trilogy
• N.K. Jemisin – *The Broken Earth* trilogy
• Terry Brooks – *Shannara* series
Low Fantasy

• also called intrusion fantasy - where magic events intrude on an otherwise normal world
• realistic environments; no magical creatures like elves or orcs in low fantasy, and it can often be gritty – depictions of poverty, street crime
• The word "low" refers to the level of prominence of traditional fantasy elements within the work, and is not any sort of remark on the work's quality
• Personified animal, personified toys etc. are considered low fantasy
Low fantasy authors/novels

- Leigh Bardugo – *Six of Crows*, *Crooked Kingdom*
- Ransom Riggs – *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children*
- Tamora Pierce – *Terrier*
- John Updike – *The Witches of Eastwick*
- Stephen King and Peter Straub – *The Talisman*
Contemporary Fantasy

• also known as modern-day or indigenous fantasy
• describes stories set in the "real world" (often referred to as consensus reality) in contemporary times, in which it is revealed that magic and magical creatures secretly exist, either living in the interstices of our world or leaking over from alternate worlds
• Set in the present day, or more accurately, in the time period of the maker
Contemporary Fantasy – authors/novels

• J.K. Rowling – Harry Potter series
• Charlie Jane Anders – All the Birds in the Sky
• Peter S. Beagle – various
• Michael Ende – The Neverending Story
• Scott Hawkins – The Library at Mount Char
• Charlaine Harris – Southern Vampire series (and its tv show True Blood)
Urban Fantasy

• Subset of contemporary fantasy
• defined by place; the narrative has an urban setting
• many are set in contemporary times and contain supernatural elements. However, the stories can take place in historical, modern, or futuristic periods, as well as fictional settings. The prerequisite is that they must be primarily set in a city.
Urban Fantasy

• Jim Butcher – The Dresden Files series
• Patricia Briggs – Mercy Thompson Series
• Silvia Moreno-Garcia – Certain Dark Things
• Lindsay Ribar – Rocks Fall, Everyone Dies (described as Twin Peaks meets Stars Hollow....)
• Chuck Wendig – Miriam Black series (described as Six Feet Under if Stephen King and Chuck Pahlniuk got a hold of it...)
Magical Realism

• expresses a primarily realistic view of the real world while also adding or revealing magical elements
• It is sometimes called fabulism, in reference to the conventions of fables, myths, and allegory
• "what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe"
Magical Realism

- Yann Martel – *Life of Pi*
- Toni Morrison – *Beloved*
- Laura Esquivel – *Like Water for Chocolate*
- Eowyn Ivey – *The Snow Child*
- Alice Hoffman – *Practical Magic*
- Erin Morgenstern – *The Night Circus*
Juvenile Fantasy

- Children’s literature with fantasy elements
- Fantasy intended for readers who aren’t yet adults
- The protagonists are usually children or teens who have unique abilities, gifts, possessions or even allies that allow them to face powerful adversaries
Juvenile Fantasy – books

• J.K. Rowling- Harry Potter series
• C.S. Lewis – Chronicles of Narnia
• Brian Jacques – Redwall
• Rick Riordan – Percy Jackson series....
• Christopher Paolini – Eragon
• Erin Hunter – Warriors, Seekers, etc.
Sword and Sorcery – sword play, sorcery, medieval brand adventure
Romantic fantasy – warriors (either gender) seeking to right a wrong on a quest, romantic entanglements
Superhero – characters with superpowers/unusual abilities
Dark – elements similar to horror, but setting is in a fantasy world
Mythic – draws from myths, folklore and fairy tales
YA/Juvenile Sci-Fi and Fantasy

• Laini Taylor – Daughter of Smoke & Bone series, Strange the Dreamer series (contemporary fantasy and high fantasy)
• Leigh Bardugo – The Grisha Trilogy (Shadow & Bone, Siege & Storm, Ruin & Rising), Six of Crows & Crooked Kingdom
• Maggie Stiefvater – The Raven Cycle, The Shiver Trilogy, The Scorpio Races
• Suzanne Collins – The Hunger Games series (obviously)
• Rhoda Belleza – Empress of a Thousand Skies (space opera)
• Paola Bacigalupi- Ship Breaker, The Drowned Cities & Tool of War
• Charlie N. Holmberg – The Paper Magician (first in a series)
• Sarah Maria Griffin – Spare and Found Parts
• Julianna Baggott – Pure (series)
• Rainbow Rowell – Carry On
Podcasts etc.

• LeVar Burton Reads (Geordi LaForge reads his favourite sci-fi and fantasy stories)
• Our Opinions Are Correct (Charlie Jane Anders and Annalee Newitz discuss science fiction and how it’s relevant in the modern world)
• Coode Street Podcast
Resources

• Worlds Without End website: https://www.worldswithoutend.com/index.asp

• Smithsonian Magazine: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/how-americas-leading-science-fiction-authors-are-shaping-your-future-180951169/?all

• Electric Literature: https://electricliterature.com/oh-slippery-slipstream-who-is-the-weirdest-genre-of-them-all-755bead4389c
Go then, there are other worlds than these.