

What is Science Fiction?

Ask two different people and you'll often get two different opinions about the definition of science fiction or even the best science fiction writer.

Fans will agree that reading science fiction is a great way to fuel your imagination and expand your mind. Science fiction or speculative fiction (SF for short) is a genre some say began as far back as 1831 with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Hard science fiction deals with new or imagined technology and its effect on the world. Hard science fiction authors include **Arthur C. Clarke**, **Larry Niven**, **Kim Stanley Robinson** and **Vernor Vinge**.

Speculative fiction focuses on ideas about what could happen in the future. These ideas may or may not be centered on technology. **Robert A. Heinlein** introduced the term speculative fiction in 1948.

Space Opera emphasizes exciting, action-packed adventure with larger than life heroes, villains, and epic storylines. Classic authors include **Poul Anderson**, **Robert A. Heinlein** and **Frank Herbert**. Contemporary authors include **Neal Asher**, **Iain M. Banks**, **Stephen Baxter**, **Lois McMaster Bujold**, **David Drake**, **Elizabeth Moon**, **Alastair Reynolds**, and **David Weber**.

Cyberpunk is a type of modern science fiction that combines high-technology landscapes with countercultural and political ideas. Authors include **Philip K. Dick**, **William Gibson**, **Richard K. Morgan**, **Rudy Rucker**, **Neal Stephenson**, **Bruce Sterling**, **Charles Stross** and **James Tiptree, Jr.**

Beyond Science Fiction ...

Did you know that some of our speculative fiction is housed in the general collection? For example, **Margaret Atwood's** novels such as *A Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* offer readers a glimpse of alternate realities and possible futures—one of the definitions of speculative fiction. Notably, **Michael Chabon's** *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* swept all the major science fiction awards—the Nebula, the Hugo and the Locus. You will find Atwood, Chabon, and many other writers of speculative fiction such as **Kurt Vonnegut**, **Anthony Burgess**, **Aldous Huxley** and **George Orwell** in general fiction.



Voorheesville Public Library
51 School Road
Voorheesville, NY 12186
518-765-2791

www.voorheesvillelibrary.org

October, 2008 (compiled by Anne Coletta)

The Library Recommends

science
fiction
and
beyond



Beyond Genre and Subgenre

Themes and characteristics of science fiction include virtual reality and the online world, genetic engineering, space exploration and colonization, utopias and dystopias, apocalypse and post-apocalypse, alternate history, time travel, and—finally—humor.

Utopias + Dystopias

Charles Stross, *Singularity Sky*

Humans have been scattered in colonies across the galaxy in the aftermath of the “Singularity,” a technological and social evolution beyond anything we can imagine.

Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

Philip K. Dick, *The Minority Report*

Cory Doctorow,

Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom

P.D. James, *The Children of Men*

Neal Stephenson, *The Diamond Age*

Virtual Reality + the Online World

(see also: Utopias + Dystopias)

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

Case, a burned out computer hacker, has to break into the most heavily guarded databank in the solar system. This is a modern classic that helped usher in a new age of cyberpunk.

William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition*

Rudy Rucker, *Postsingular*

Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash*

Vernor Vinge, *Rainbows End*

Genetic Engineering

Greg Bear

Darwin's Radio and *Darwin's Children*

These are fast-paced stories about genetically enhanced children who may be the next evolutionary step after humans.

David Brin, *The Kiln People*

Elizabeth Moon, *The Speed of Dark*

Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game*

Humor + Parody

Douglas Adams,

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

The first novel in the hilarious series from Douglas Adams. Arthur Dent finds himself a man without a home after Earth is destroyed to make way for an interstellar freeway.

A. Lee Martinez, *Gil's All Fright Diner*

Connie Willis, *To Say Nothing of the Dog*

Terry Pratchett, *Going Postal*

Time Travel + Alternate Histories

Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

Dana, a 20th-century African-American woman, finds herself repeatedly transported to the antebellum South.

Joe Haldeman,

The Accidental Time Machine

Orson Scott Card, *Pastwatch*

Jack Finney, *Time and Again*

Katherine Ann Goonan, *In War Times*

Madeline L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*

Connie Willis, *Doomsday Book*

Space Exploration + Colonization

Robert A. Heinlein

Stranger in a Strange Land

This seminal science fiction work is about a man born on Earth but raised on Mars by Martians. The man returns to Earth and has to learn to adapt to human customs.

Gregory Benford, *The Sunborn*

Arthur C. Clarke, *2001: A Space Odyssey*

Jack McDevitt, *Odyssey* and *Seeker*

Dan Simmons, *Ilium* and *Olympos*

Isaac Asimov, *Foundation* series

Larry Niven, *Ringworld* series

Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow*

Apocalypse + Post-Apocalypse

Walter M. Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

After a global nuclear holocaust and society's backlash against technology, a Jewish electrical engineer founds a monastic order, the Albertian Order of Leibowitz, dedicated to preserving knowledge by smuggling, hiding, memorizing and copying books.

Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend*

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

Philip K. Dick,

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

Frederik Pohl,

The Boy Who Would Live Forever