

The Rise of Science Fiction from Pulp Mags to Cyberpunk, <https://electricliterature.com/the-rise-of-science-fiction-from-pulp-mags-to-cyberpunk-e00f6efdca0>

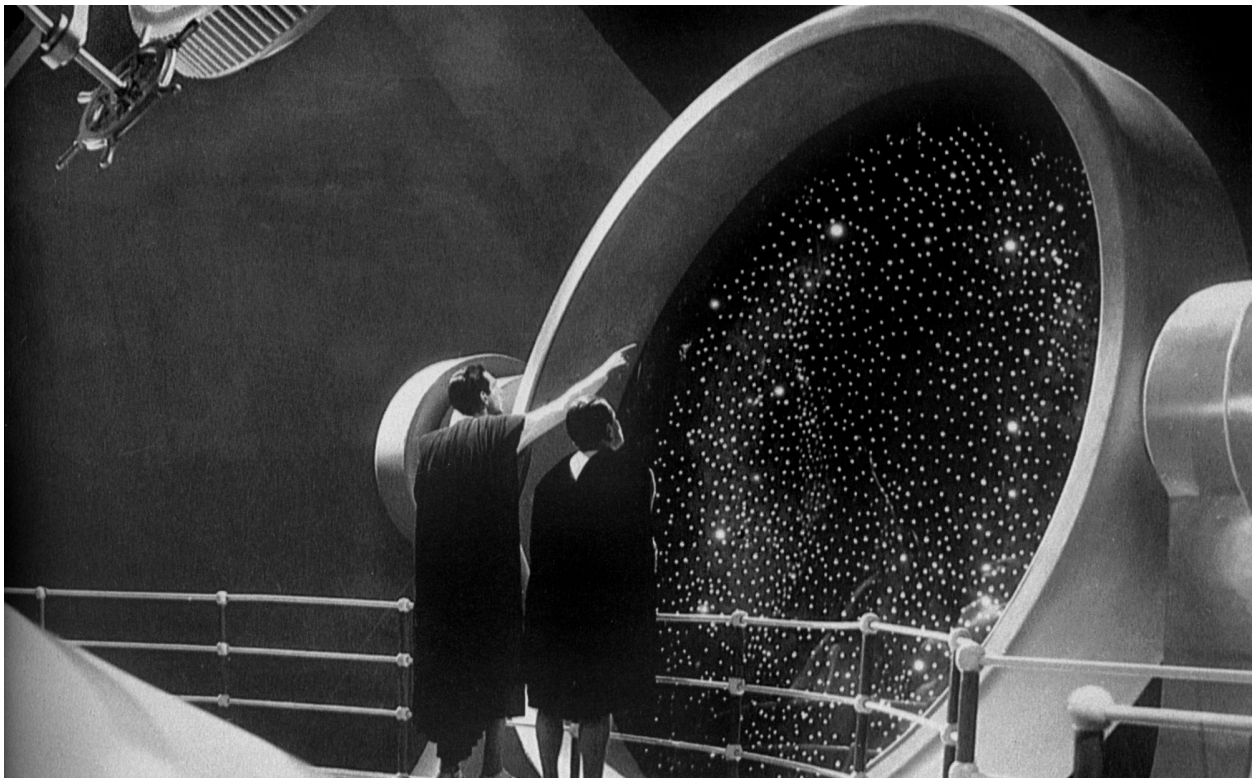


[Jeff VanderMeer](#)

Dec 22, 2016

The Rise of Science Fiction from Pulp Mags to Cyberpunk

Ann and Jeff VanderMeer break down Sci-Fi's many eras, icons and offshoots—from Jules Verne to William Gibson and beyond



Things to Come, 1936.

This wide-ranging exploration of the impulses, movements, and unique voices in twentieth century science fiction originally appeared as the introduction to this year's [The Big Book of](#)

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[Science Fiction](#) from *Vintage Books*. Ann and Jeff VanderMeer's next project will be *The Big Book of Classic Fantasy*, also from *Vintage*.

Since the days of Mary Shelley, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells, science fiction has not just helped define and shape the course of literature but reached well beyond fictional realms to influence our perspectives on culture, science, and technology. Ideas like electric cars, space travel, and forms of advanced communication comparable to today's cell phone all first found their way into the public's awareness through science fiction. In stories like Alicia Yáñez Cossío's "The IWM 100" from the 1970s you can even find a clear prediction of Information Age giants like Google—and when Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon, the event was a very real culmination of a yearning already expressed through science fiction for many decades.

Science fiction has allowed us to dream of a better world by creating visions of future societies without prejudice or war. Dystopias, too, like Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, have had their place in science fiction, allowing writers to comment on injustice and dangers to democracy. Where would Eastern Bloc writers have been without the creative outlet of science fiction, which by seeming not to speak about the present day often made it past the censors? For many under Soviet domination during those decades, science fiction was a form of subversion and a symbol of freedom. Today, science fiction continues to ask "What if?" about such important topics as global warming, energy dependence, the toxic effects of capitalism, and the uses of our modern technology, while also bringing back to readers strange and wonderful visions.

No other form of literature has been so relevant to our present yet been so filled with visionary and transcendent moments. No other form has been as entertaining, either. Before now, there have been few attempts at a definitive anthology that truly captures the global influence and significance of this dynamic genre—bringing together authors from all over the world and from both the "genre" and "literary" ends of the fiction spectrum. *The Big Book of Science Fiction* covers the entire twentieth century, presenting, in chronological order, stories from more than thirty countries, from the pulp space opera of Edmond Hamilton to the literary speculations of Jorge Luis Borges, from the pre-Afrofuturism of W. E. B. Du Bois to the second-wave feminism of James Tiptree Jr. —and beyond!

What you find within these pages may surprise you. It definitely surprised us.

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Robert Heinlein, L. Sprague de Camp, and Isaac Asimov, Philadelphia Navy Yard, 1944.

What Is the “Golden Age” of Science Fiction?

Even people who do not read science fiction have likely heard the term “the Golden Age of Science Fiction.” The actual Golden Age of Science Fiction lasted from about the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, and is often conflated for general readers with the preceding Age of the Pulps (1920s to mid-1930s). The Age of the Pulps had been dominated by the editor of *Amazing Stories*, Hugo Gernsback. Sometimes called the Father of Science Fiction, Gernsback was most famously photographed in an all-encompassing “Isolator” author helmet, attached to an oxygen tank and breathing apparatus.

The Golden Age dispensed with the Isolator, coinciding as it did with the proliferation of American science fiction magazines, the rise of the ultimately divisive editor John W. Campbell at *Astounding Science Fiction* (such strict definitions and such a dupe for *Dianetics!*), and a proto-market for science fiction novels (which would only reach fruition in the 1950s). This period also saw the rise to dominance of authors like Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Poul Anderson, C. L. Moore, Robert Heinlein, and Alfred Bester. It fixed science fiction in the public imagination as having a “sense of wonder” and a “can-do” attitude about science and the universe, sometimes based more on the earnest, naïve covers than the actual content, which could be dark and complex.

But “the Golden Age” has come to mean something else as well. In his classic, oft-quoted book on science fiction, *Age of Wonders: Exploring the World of Science Fiction* (1984), the iconic anthologist and editor David Hartwell asserted that “the Golden Age of Science Fiction is 12.” Hartwell, an influential gatekeeper in the field, was making a point about the arguments that “rage until the small of the morning” at science fiction conventions among “grown men and women” about that time when “every story in every magazine was a master work of daring, original thought.” The reason readers argue about whether the Golden Age occurred in the 1930s, 1950s, or 1970s, according to Hartwell, is because the true age of science fiction is the age at which the reader has no ability to tell good fiction from bad fiction, the excellent from the

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terrible, but instead absorbs and appreciates just the wonderful visions and exciting plots of the stories.

This is a strange assertion to make, one that seems to want to make excuses. It's often repeated without much analysis of how such a brilliant anthology editor also credited with bringing literary heavyweights like Gene Wolfe and Philip K. Dick to readers would want to (inadvertently?) apologize for science fiction while at the same time engaging in a sentimentality that seems at odds with the whole enterprise of truly speculative fiction. (Not to mention dissing twelve-year-olds!)

Perhaps one reason for Hartwell's stance can be found in how science fiction in the United States, and to some extent in the United Kingdom, rose out of pulp magazine delivery systems seen as "low art." A pronounced "cultural cringe" within science fiction often combines with the brutal truth that misfortunes of origin often plague literature, which can assign value based on how swanky a house looks from the outside rather than what's inside. The new Kafka who next arises from cosmopolitan Prague is likely to be hailed a savior, but not so much the one who arises from, say, Crawfordville, Florida.

There is also something of a need to apologize for the ma-and-pop tradition exemplified by the pulps, with their amateurish and eccentric editors, who sometimes had little formal training and possessed as many eccentricities as freckles, and who came to dominate the American science fiction world early on. Sometimes an Isolator was the least of it.

Yet even with regard to the pulps, evidence suggests that these magazines at times entertained more sophisticated content than generally given credit for, so that in a sense an idea like "the Golden Age of Science Fiction is 12" undermines the truth about such publications. It also renders invisible all of the complex science fiction being written outside of the pulp tradition.

Therefore, we humbly offer the assertion that contrary to popular belief and based on all of the evidence available to us . . . the actual Golden Age of Science Fiction is twenty-one, not twelve. The proof can be found in the contents of this anthology, where we have, as much as possible, looked at the totality of what we think of "science fiction," without privileging the dominant mode, but also without discarding it. That which may seem overbearing or all of a type at first glance reveals its individuality and uniqueness when placed in a wider context. At third or fourth glance, you may even find that stories from completely different traditions have commonalities and speak to each other in interesting ways.

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Death of Curate, Henrique Alvim Correa. War Of The Worlds Illustrations, 1906

Building a Better Definition of “Science Fiction”

We evoked the names of Mary Shelley, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells at the beginning of this introduction for a very specific reason. All three are useful entry points or origin points for science fiction because they do not exist so far back in time as to make direct influence seem ethereal or attenuated, they are still known in the modern era, and because the issues they dealt with permeate what we call the “genre” of science fiction even today.

We hesitate to invoke the slippery and preternatural word *influence*, because influence appears and disappears and reappears, sidles in and has many mysterious ways. It can be as simple yet profound as reading a text as a child and forgetting it, only to have it well up from the subconscious years later, or it can be a clear and all-consuming passion. At best we can only say that someone cannot be influenced by something not yet written or, in some cases, not yet translated. Or that influence may occur not when a work is published but when the writer enters the popular imagination—for example, as Wells did through Orson Welles’s infamous radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds* (1938) or, to be silly for a second, Mary Shelley through the movie *Young Frankenstein* (1974).

For this reason even wider claims of influence on science fiction, like writer and editor Lester del Rey’s assertion that the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh* is the earliest written science fiction story, seem appropriative, beside the point, and an overreach for legitimacy more useful as a “tell” about the position of science fiction in the 1940s and 1950s in North America.

But we brought up our triumvirate because they represent different strands of science fiction. The earliest of these authors, Mary Shelley, and her *Frankenstein* (1818), ushered in a modern sensibility of ambivalence about the uses of technology and science while wedding the speculative to the horrific in a way reflected very early on in science fiction. The “mad scientist”

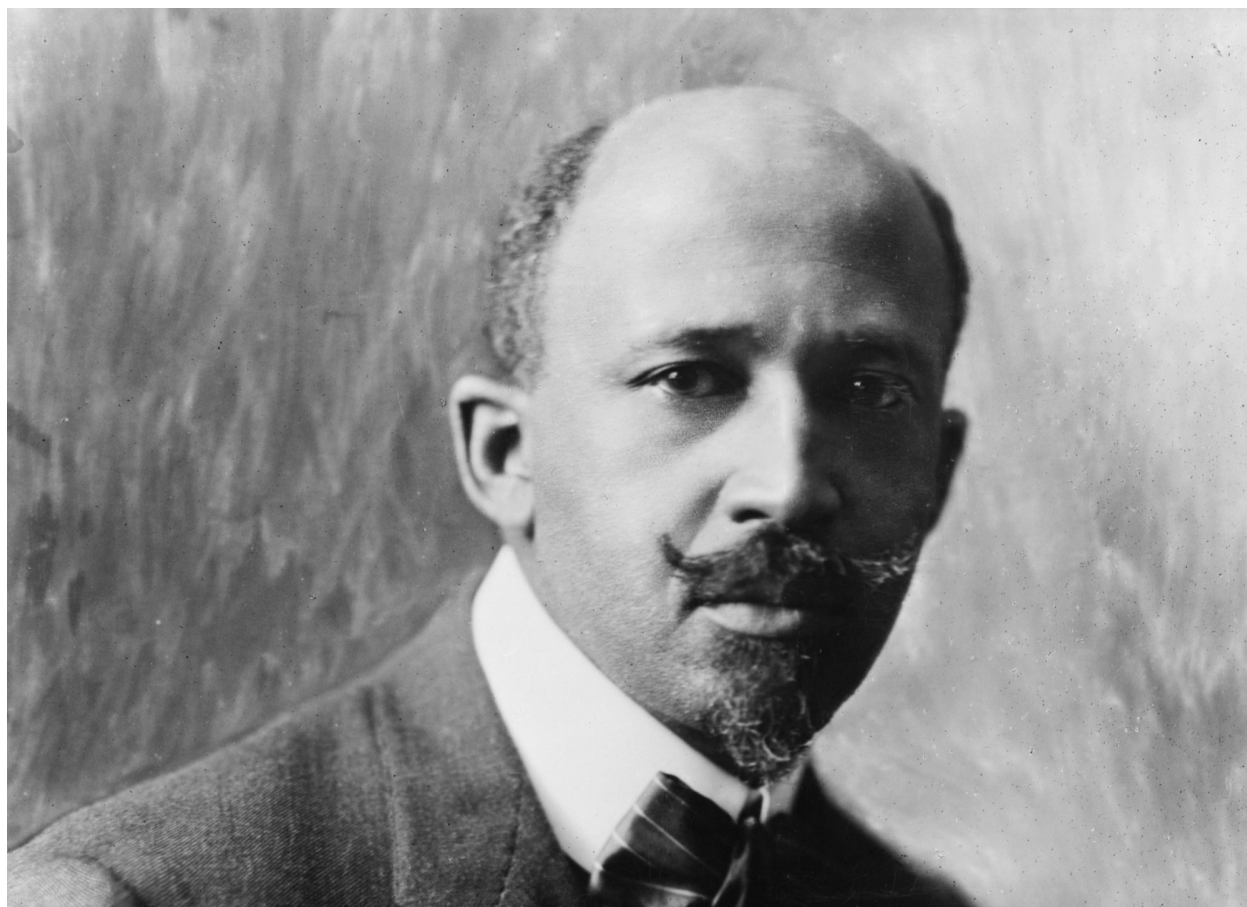
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trope runs rife through the pages of the science fiction pulps and even today in their modern equivalents. She also is an important figure for feminist SF.

Jules Verne, meanwhile, opened up lines of inquiry along more optimistic and hopeful lines. For all that Verne liked to create schematics and specific detail about his inventions—like the submarine in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870)—he was a very happy puppy who used his talents in the service of scientific romanticism, not “hard science fiction.”

H. G. Wells’s fiction was also dubbed “scientific romanticism” during his lifetime, but his work existed somewhere between these two foci. His most useful trait as the godfather of modern science fiction is the granularity of his writing. Because his view of the world existed at an intersection of sociology, politics, and technology, Wells was able to create complex geopolitical and social contexts for his fiction—indeed, after he abandoned science fiction, Wells’s later novels were those of a social realist, dealing with societal injustice, among other topics. He was able to quantify and fully realize extrapolations about the future and explore the iniquities of modern industrialization in his fiction.

The impulse to directly react to how industrialization has affected our lives occurs very early on in science fiction—for example, in Karl Hans Strobl’s cautionary factory tale “The Triumph of Mechanics” (1907) and even in the playful utopian visions of Paul Scheerbart, which often pushed back against bad elements of “modernization.” (For his optimism, Scheerbart perished in World War I, while Strobl’s “reward” was to fall for fascism and join the Nazi Party—in part, a kind of repudiation of the views expressed in “The Triumph . . .”)



W.E.B Du Bois in 1918

Social and political issues also peer out from science fiction from the start, and not just in Wells's work. Rokheya Shekhawat Hossein's "Sultana's Dream" (1905) is a potent feminist utopian vision. W. E. B. Du Bois's "The Comet" (1920) isn't just a story about an impending science-fictional catastrophe but also the start of a conversation about race relations and a proto-Afrofuturist tale. The previously untranslated Yefim Zozulya's "The Doom of Principal City" (1918) presages the atrocities perpetrated by the communism of the Soviet Union and highlights the underlying absurdities of certain ideological positions. (It's perhaps telling that these early examples do not come from the American pulp SF tradition.)

This kind of eclectic stance also suggests a simple yet effective definition for science fiction: *it depicts the future, whether in a stylized or realistic manner*. There is no other definitional barrier to identifying science fiction unless you are intent on defending some particular territory. Science fiction *lives in the future*, whether that future exists ten seconds from the Now or whether in a story someone builds a time machine a century from now in order to travel back into the past. It is science fiction whether the future is phantasmagorical and surreal or nailed down using the rivets and technical jargon of "hard science fiction." A story is also science fiction whether the story in question is, in fact, extrapolation about the future or using the future to comment on the past or present.

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Thinking about science fiction in this way delinks the actual content or “experience” delivered by science fiction from the commodification of that genre by the marketplace. It does not privilege the dominant mode that originated with the pulps over other forms. But neither does it privilege those other manifestations over the dominant mode. Further, this definition eliminates or bypasses the idea of a “turf war” between genre and the mainstream, between commercial and literary, and invalidates the (weird ignorant snobbery of) tribalism that occurs on one side of the divide and the faux snobbery (ironically based on ignorance) that sometimes manifests on the other.

Wrote the brilliant editor Judith Merril in the seventh annual edition of *The Year’s Best S-F* (1963), out of frustration:

“But that’s not science fiction . . . !” Even my best friends (to invert a paraphrase) keep telling me: That’s not science fiction! Sometimes they mean it couldn’t be s-f, because it’s good. Sometimes it couldn’t be because it’s not about spaceships or time machines. (Religion or politics or psychology isn’t science fiction—is it?) Sometimes (because some of my best friends are s-f fans) they mean it’s not *really* science fiction—just fantasy or satire or something like that.

On the whole, I think I am very patient. I generally manage to explain again, just a *little* wearily, what the “S-F” in the title of this book means, and what science fiction is, and why the one contains the other, without being constrained by it. But it does strain my patience when the exclamation is compounded to mean, “Surely you don’t mean to use that? *That’s not* science fiction!”—about a first-rate piece of the honest thing.

Standing on either side of this debate is corrosive—detrimental to the study and celebration of science fiction; all it does is sidetrack discussion or analysis, which devolves into SF/not SF or intrinsically valuable/not valuable. And, for the general reader weary of anthologies prefaced by a series of “inside baseball” remarks, our definition hopefully lessens your future burden of reading these words.



Silvina Ocampo

Consider Another Grand Tradition: The *Conte Philosophique*

Inasmuch as we have put on our Isolator and already paid some tribute to the “dominant” strain of science fiction by briefly conjuring up the American pulp scene of the 1920s through 1940s, it is important before returning to that tradition to examine what the Loyal Opposition was up to in the first half of the twentieth century—and for this reason, it is important to turn our attention to an earlier form, the *conte philosophique*.

Conte philosophique translates as “philosophical story” or “fable of reason.” The *contes philosophiques* were used for centuries in the West by the likes of Voltaire, Johannes Kepler, and Francis Bacon as one legitimate way for scientists or philosophers to present their findings. The *conte philosophique* employs the fictional frame of an imaginary or dream journey to impart scientific or philosophical content. In a sense, the fantastical or science-fictional adventure became a mental laboratory in which to discuss findings or make an argument.

If we position some early science fiction as occurring outside of the American pulp tradition but also outside of traditions exemplified by Mary Shelley and H. G. Wells, what remains as influence is both extremely relevant to science fiction and also relevant to more dominant traditions.

Early twentieth-century science fiction like Hossein’s “Sultana’s Dream,” Scheerbart’s utopian fables, or Alfred Jarry’s “Elements of Pataphysics” from his novel *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician* (1911; first published in English in the 1960s) makes infinitely more sense in this context. More importantly, these stories take their rightful place within the history of speculative literature. Instead of being considered outliers, they can be seen as the evolution of a grand tradition, one that inverts the usual ratio of the fictional to nonfictional found in a typical

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conte philosophique. It is a mode that certainly helps us better understand Jules Verne's fiction. In many cases, Verne was taking his cue from the trappings of the *conte philosophique*—the fantastical adventure—and using that form as a vehicle for creating his entertainments.

The *conte philosophique*, with its non/fictional fusion, also creates a fascinating link to Jorge Luis Borges and his essay-stories from the 1940s. These stories often serve as a vehicle for metaphysical exploration. Indeed, Borges's work can in this context be seen as the perfect expression of and reconciliation of the (pulpish) adventure fiction he loved and the intellectual underpinnings of his narratives, which rely in part on severe compression into tale (coal into diamonds) rather than traditional short story. Other Latin American examples include Silvina Ocampo's "The Waves" (1959) and Alicia Yáñez Cossío's "The IWM 1000" (1975). Even Stanisław Lem in his *Star Diaries* voyages of the 1960s and 1970s is reimagining the *contes philosophiques*—there is the actual voyage (exciting enough!) but it is once again a pure delivery system for ideas about the world.

Although this tradition is not as common in the pulps, "science fiction tales" like A. Merritt's "The Last Poet and the Robots" (1935) and Frederik Pohl's "Day Million" (1966) can be seen as a fusion of the "speculative fairy tale" and the *conte philosophique*, or simply a mutation of the *conte philosophique*, which was itself influenced by ancient myths of fantastical journeys. Ironically, some of these stories add in elements of "hard science fiction." Interpreted charitably and not from a position espousing the superiority of the *conte philosophique*, this form infiltrates the pulps in the sense that the pulps showcase the physical actuality of the *contes philosophiques*—they are *contes physiques* into which can be reinjected or refeed an abstract quality—"what/why/how/if?" And they can embody that quality or kind of inquiry as subtext. (Whereas on the mainstream side of the divide that subtext must manifest as metaphysics to be considered literature or be doomed in terms of approval—as would any non-character-based fiction.)

In this context, whether just as a thought experiment to turn the tables and challenge dominant modes of thinking, or as a subversive "real" metaphorical or metaphysical construct, we could then come to see American pulp space-travel fiction as a kind of devolution—a mistake in which the scaffolding (or booster rockets) used to deliver the point of a *conte philosophique* (the journey) is brought to the foreground and the idea or scientific hypothesis (the "what if") is deemphasized or subtextual only. A case of throwing out the baby to glorify the bathwater?

Science fiction in the United States has often positioned itself as the "literature of ideas," yet what is a literature of ideas if they can only be expressed through a select few "delivery systems"? Aren't there ideas expressed in fiction that we can only see the true value of—good or bad, sophisticated or simple—if we admit that there are more than a few modes of expression with which to convey them? In examining the link between the *conte philosophique* and science fiction, we begin to grasp the outlines of the wider context: how many of these "alternative" approaches are—rather than being deformed or flat or somehow otherwise suspect as lesser modes—just *different* from the dominant model, not lesser, and as useful and relevant. (For example, where otherwise to fit Czechoslovakian writer Karel Čapek—both his 1920s robot plays and his gonzo novel *War with the Newts* from the 1930s?)

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Just like our definition of science fiction, this way of thinking about science fiction works both from the “literary mainstream” looking in *or* from genre looking out. The reason it works is that the position or stance—the perspective or vantage taken—is from outside of either. And this is in a sense pure or uncontaminated by the subjective intent—colonizing or foundationally assumed superior—of either “mainstream” literary or genre.

In taking this position (on a mountaintop, from a plane, in a dirigible, from the moon, within a dream journey) much less is rendered invisible in general, and more “viable” science fiction can be recovered, uncovered, or discovered without being any less faithful about our core definition. Thus, too, in this anthology we have the actuality of exploration and the idea of it, because both thought and action expend energy and are both, in their separate ways, a form of motion.

Perhaps the reason the *conte philosophique* to date has been undervalued as an influence on science fiction is because of the “cultural cringe” of the dominant American form of science fiction, which has consistently positioned itself in relationship to the literary mainstream by accepting the literary mainstream’s adherence to the short story as needing to have three-dimensional, psychologically convincing characters to be valid. Even reactions against this position (pre-Humanist SF) have in essence been defining science fiction in relationship to the über-domination of the mainstream.

This is particularly ironic given that a fair amount of early science fiction fails at the task of creating three-dimensional characters (while displaying other virtues) and thus as the century progresses the self-punishment the science fiction genre parcels out to itself for not meeting a standard that is just *one* tradition within the mainstream looks increasingly odd, or even perverse, as are excuses like “the Golden Age of Science Fiction is 12.” The genre would have been far better off taking up the cause of traditions like the *conte philosophique* to bypass mainstream approbation rather than continually recycling the Mesopotamian Defense or the Hawthorne Maneuver (“Canon fodder Nathaniel Hawthorne was the first science fiction/fantasy writer”) to create legitimacy or “proof of concept” on the mainstream’s terms.



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Weird Tales, July 1944.

Further Exploration of the Pulp Tradition

Remember the Age of the Pulp and later Golden Age of Science Fiction (the 1920s to mid-1940s)? Collectively, this era successfully exported itself as a system of plots, tropes, story structures, and entanglements to either emulate or push back against. It was typified not so much by movements as by the hegemonies created by particular influential editors like H. L. Gold, the aforementioned Campbell, and Frederik Pohl (at *Galaxy*).

Many of these editors, trying to create an advantage in the marketplace, created their own fiefdom, defended borders, laid down ground rules for what science fiction was and what it wasn't. In some cases, it might be argued they had to because no one yet knew exactly what it was, or because enthusiasts kept encountering new mutations. These rules in the cutthroat and still-stuffy world of freelance writing could affect content quite a bit—Theodore Sturgeon reportedly stopped writing for a time because of one editor's rules. Writers could make a living writing for the science fiction magazines in an era with no competition from television or video games—and they could especially make a living if they obeyed the dictates of their editor-kings. These editorial tastes would come to define, even under new editors, the focus of magazines like *Amazing Stories*, even if editorial tastes are not sound or rational systems of thought. Still, they shape taste and canon as much or more so than stable systems or concrete movements—in part because the influence of editors often exists out of the public eye and thus is less subject to open debate.

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In a few other cases, magazines like *Weird Tales* successfully forged identities by championing hybrid or new modes of fiction, to the point of becoming synonymous with the type of content they provided to readers. Dashing men in dashing machines having dashing adventures were not as prevalent in such magazines, nor in this Golden Age era. It was more likely that the dashing man might have a dashing accident and be dashed up on some malign alien world or be faced with some dashing Terrible Choice based on being dashed on the rocks of misfortune.

In fact, much written in the mode of purely optimistic fiction has not aged well—in part because it simplified the complexities of a very complex world and the universe beyond. For example, with each decade what we know about what it takes to travel in space makes it more and more unlikely that we will make it out of our own solar system. Even one of the foremost supporters of terraforming, Kim Stanley Robinson, admitted that such travel is highly improbable in a 2014 interview.

The other reason this brand of science fiction has mostly historical value is because the twentieth century included two world wars along with countless significant regional conflicts, the creation

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of the atom bomb, the spread of various viruses, ecological disaster, and pogroms in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Against such a growing tally, certain kinds of “gee-whiz” science fiction seem hopelessly out of date; we need escapism in our fiction because fiction is a form of play, but escapism becomes difficult to read when it renders invisible the march of history or becomes too disconnected from readers’ experience of science, technology, or world events. When you also throw in institutional racism in the United States, a subject thoroughly ignored by science fiction for a very long time, and other social issues dealt with skillfully by non-SF through the first five decades of the twentieth century, it perhaps makes sense that there is very little from the Golden Age of Science Fiction in this anthology. Our representative choices are ones where the predictive nature of the story or its sophistication stands up to the granularity of the present day.

It is also worth remembering that in the wider world of literature writers outside of science fiction were trying to grapple with the changing nature of reality and technological innovation. After World War I, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and others experimented with the nature of time and identity in ways that at times had a speculative feel to it. These were mainstream attempts to engage with science (physics) that only entered into the science fiction tradition as influence during the New Wave movement of the 1960s.

This modernist experimentation and other, more recent evidence suggests that, despite frequent claims to the contrary, science fiction is not *uniquely* suited to interrogate industrialization or modern tech—many nonspeculative stories and novels have done so quite well—so much as it doesn’t seem as if science fiction could *exist* or have arisen without the products and inventions particular to industrialization. The physicality of science fiction depends on it in a way that other kinds of fiction do not (for example, historical fiction). Although a spaceship may be more or less a focal point, for example—potentially as unobtrusive as a cab (a ride to a destination)—this is in truth rarely the case. Because spaceships don’t exist yet, at least not in the way they are rendered in science fiction, as a *literalization* of the future. Even the most “adventure pulp” stories of early science fiction had to take a position: celebrate the extrapolated future of industrialization and ever-more-advanced technology or bemoan it, speak in terms of splendors and a “sense of wonder” or strike at the ideology behind such thinking through dystopia and examination of excesses. (In such a context, science fiction cannot be seen as escapist or nonpolitical so much as conformist when it does not ask “Why this?” in addition to “What if?”)

Still, the pulp tradition as it matured was never as hackneyed or traditional or gee-whiz as it liked to think it was or as twelve-year-old readers fondly remember. It was not nearly as optimistic or crude as the covers that represented it and that science fiction outgrew. In part, this was due to the influx or infusion of a healthy dose of horror from near the start, via *Weird Tales* and its ilk. Magazines like *Unknown* also often published fusions of horror and science fiction, and as some of the author/story notes to early stories in this volume indicate, the “rise of the tentacle” associated with twentieth-century weird fiction (à la Lovecraft) first appeared in weird space operas by writers like Edmond Hamilton. Among stories from this period that have relevance, many have a depth derived from the darkness that drives them—a sense that the underpinnings

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of the universe are indeed more complex than we know. In short, cosmic horror has been around for longer than Lovecraft and has helped to sustain and lend depth to science fiction as well.



A Saucer of Loneliness: Volume VII: The Complete Stories of Theodore Sturgeon.

Post–World War II: How Science Fiction Grew All the Way Up the Walls of the World

Largely because it has no “movement” associated with it, the 1950s are sometimes seen as a transitional period, but Robert Silverberg rightly considered the 1950s the true Golden Age of Science Fiction. The full flowering of science fiction in the US and UK dates from this period, in part because opportunities through magazines, book publication, and anthologies proliferated and in part because new and more inclusive gatekeepers entered the field.

The fiction of such highly literate and sophisticated writers like Fritz Leiber (mostly in fantasy and horror), James Blish, and Frederik Pohl came into its own in the 1950s, not just because these writers were encouraged by a much more vital publishing environment but also because of their background with the Futurians, a science fiction club, which had nurtured interests across a wide range of topics, not just genre fiction.

Blish’s “Surface Tension” (1952) demonstrates the fruits of that sophistication in its exploration of fascinating ideas about terraforming humans. Philip K. Dick started to publish fiction in the early 1950s, too; in his very first story, “Beyond Lies the Wub” (1952), he staked a claim to that hallucinatory, absurdist, antiestablishment space in which he would later write classics like *Ubik* (1969) and *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* (1974).

Arthur C. Clarke had been a fixture of the Golden Age but transitioned into the 1950s with such classic, dark stories as “The Star” (1955), as did Robert Heinlein. Ray Bradbury continued to write brilliant fiction, coming off of his success with *The Martian Chronicles*, and Robert

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Silverberg was extremely prolific in the 1950s, although our choice for a reprint from him was published much later.

Several underrated writers published some of their best fiction, too, including James H. Schmitz, William Tenn, and Chad Oliver. Tom Godwin shook things up with his very long “The Cold Equations” (1954), a good story not included herein that would become an item of debate for Humanist SF writers, some of whom would try to replicate it. Tenn’s “The Liberation of Earth” (1953), a harsh satire of alien invasion inspired by the Korean War, was a touchstone for protesters during the Vietnam War and become a classic. Damon Knight began to establish his legacy with the unusual and strange alien contact story “Stranger Station” (1956). C. M. Kornbluth (another Futurian) published some of his best stories during this era, including “The Silly Season” (1950) and “The Marching Morons” (1951), although these tales have not dated well. Other notable writers from the era include Robert Sheckley, Avram Davidson, and Judith Merril (who would achieve lasting fame as an anthology editor).

In hindsight, though, perhaps the most unique and important science fiction writer of the 1950s was Cordwainer Smith, who published most of his science fiction in the mid-1950s. His unique tales set on a far-future Earth and the surrounding universe came out of seemingly nowhere and had no clear antecedent. In “Scanners Live in Vain” (1950) and the story included herein, “The Game of Rat and Dragon” (1955), Smith revitalized space opera just as he remade so much else across an oeuvre as influenced by Jorge Luis Borges and Alfred Jarry as genre science fiction. Even today, Smith’s stories stand alone, as if they came from an alternate reality.

Almost equaling Smith in terms of being sui generis, Theodore Sturgeon brought a willfully literary sensibility to his fiction and an empathy that could at times manifest as sentimentality. But in his best work, like “The Man Who Lost the Sea” (1959), Sturgeon displayed a much-needed pathos to science fiction. Sturgeon was also unafraid to explore horror and to take on controversial topics, and with each new story he published that pushed a boundary, Sturgeon made it easier for others to follow.

Another interesting writer, James White, wrote about a galactic hospital in stories like “Sector General” (1957), which in their reliance on medical mysteries and situations pushed back against the standard conflict plots of the day. In White’s stories there are often no villains and sometimes no heroes, either. This allowed White to create fresh and different plots; one of his best hospital stories involves taking care of an alien child who manifests as a huge living boulder and who has vastly different feeding needs than human children. Neither Smith nor White was as popular as writers like Arthur C. Clarke, but their body of work stands out starkly from the surrounding landscape because it took such a different stance while still being relatable, entertaining, and modern.

The fifties also saw more space made for brilliant woman writers like Katherine MacLean, Margaret St. Clair, and Carol Emshwiller. What MacLean, St. Clair, and Emshwiller all shared in their fiction was a fascination with either speculative sociology or extremes of psychological reality, within a context of writing unique female characters and using story structures that often came from outside the pulp tradition. MacLean in particular championed sociology and so-called

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soft science, a distinction from “hard” science fiction that would have seemed fairly radical at the time. St. Clair, meanwhile, with her comprehensive knowledge of horror and fantasy fiction as well as science fiction, crafted stories that could be humorous, terrifying, and sharply thought-provoking all at once. In some of her best stories, we can also see an attempt to interrogate our relationship to the animal world. Together, these three writers not only paved the way for the feminist science fiction explosion of the 1970s, they effectively created room for more unusual storytelling.

Elsewhere in the world, Jorge Luis Borges was continuing to write fascinating, unique stories, and the tradition of the science fiction folktale or satire was used by Mexican writer Juan José Arreola to good effect in “Baby H.P.” and other flash fictions. Borges’s friend and fellow Argentine Silvina Ocampo even wrote science fiction, not a form of speculation she was known for, with “The Waves” (1959), translated into English herein for the first time. In France, Gérard Klein was just beginning to publish fiction, with early classic stories like “The Monster” (1958), his emergence presaging a boom in interesting French science fiction. And, even though Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (the Strugatsky brothers) wouldn’t achieve international fame until the 1970s, with the translation of *Roadside Picnic* (1979) and other books, they were publishing provocative and intelligent work like the alien-contact story “The Visitors” (1958) in the Soviet Union.

That there was no particular unifying mode or theme of science fiction in the 1950s is in some ways a relief and afforded freedom for a number of unique writers. Clearly, the way was clear for science fiction to climb even farther up the walls of the world.

But, in part, they would have to do it by tearing down what had come before.



The New Wave and the Rise of Feminist Science Fiction

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The overriding story of science fiction in the 1960s would be the rise of the “New Wave,” largely championed at first by the UK magazine *New Worlds*, edited by Michael Moorcock, and then finding expression in the US through Harlan Ellison’s *Dangerous Visions* (1967) and *Again, Dangerous Visions* (1972) anthologies.

New Wave fiction had many permutations and artistic ideologies associated with it, but at its core it was often formally experimental and sought to bring mainstream literary technique and seriousness to science fiction. In effect, the New Wave wanted to push the boundaries of what was possible while also embodying, in many cases, the counterculture of the 1960s. New Wave fiction tended to be antiestablishment and to look with a cold eye upon the Golden Age and the pulps. Sometimes, too, it turned that cold eye on the 1950s, with New Wave writers finding much of what had gone before too safe.

But this opposition was sometimes forced on the New Wave by its detractors. For the average science fiction writer raised within the tradition of the pulps and existing within an era of plenty in the 1950s, especially with regard to the American book market, it must have been a rude awakening for writers from across the pond to suddenly be calling into question everything about their ecosystem, even if just by implication. The essential opposition also occurred because even though the 1950s had featured breakthroughs for many new voices, it had also solidified the hold upon the collective imagination of many Golden Age icons.

Further, the New Wave writers had been either reading a fundamentally different set of texts or interpreting them far differently—such that the common meeting ground between New Wave and not-New Wave could be like first contact with aliens. Neither group spoke the other’s language or knew all of its customs. Even those who should have made common cause or found common understandings, like Frederik Pohl and James Blish, found themselves in opposition to the New Wave.

In the event, however, the New Wave—whether writers and editors opposed it or lived within it and used it to create interesting work—would prove the single most influential movement within science fiction, with the concurrent and later rise of feminist science fiction a close second (and in some cases closely tied to the New Wave).

Out of the New Wave came countless writers now unjustly forgotten, like Langdon Jones, Barrington Bayley (both reprinted herein), and John Sladek, but also giants of literature, starting with Michael Moorcock and J. G. Ballard, and including M. John Harrison and Brian Aldiss (actually from an earlier generation, but a hothouse party-crasher). Subversive publishers in the UK like Savoy fanned the flames.

These writers were helped in their ascendancy by the continued popularity of writers from outside of genre fiction whose work existed in sympathy to the New Wave, like Kurt Vonnegut Jr. and William S. Burroughs, and those within genre who were sympathetic and winning multiple Hugo Awards and Nebula Awards, like Harlan Ellison. Ellison’s own work fit the New Wave aesthetic to a T and his dual devotion to championing edgy work by both new and established writers in his anthologies created an undeniable New Wave beachhead in North

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America. American writers like Thomas Disch and Philip José Farmer received a clear boost to their careers because of the existence of the New Wave. Others, like Carol Emshwiller and Sonya Dorman, more or less wandered into the verdant (if also sometimes disaster-clogged) meadows of the New Wave by accident—having always done their own thing—and then wandered out again, neither better nor worse off. Unique eccentricists like David R. Bunch, whose Moderan stories only seem more prescient every day, could not have published their work at all if not for the largesse of daring editors and the aegis of the New Wave. (It is worth pointing out that his Moderan stories in this volume are the first reprints allowed in over two decades.)

As or more important was the emergence of Samuel R. Delany as a major voice in the field, and the emergence of that voice linked to New Wave fiction with bold, unusual stories like “Aye, and Gomorrah” (1967). Delany just about matched Ellison Nebula Award for Nebula Award during this period and not only led by example in terms of producing sophisticated speculative fiction that featured diverse characters but also was, quite frankly, one of the only African-American or even nonwhite writers in the field for a very long time. Although the huge success of bestsellers like *Dhalgren* (1975) helped prolong the New Wave’s moment and furthered the cause of mature (and experimental) fiction within science fiction, it did not seem to help bring representative diversity with it.

Indeed, by 1972, Terry Carr wrote in his introduction to volume 1 of *The Best Science Fiction of the Year*,

By now the ‘new wave’ as such has come and gone; those stories that could stand on their merits have . . . These writers realize a truth basic to all art[:] Innovations are positive to the extent that they open doors, and an avant garde which seems to destroy rather than build will only destroy itself all the faster . . . Personally, I thought most of the work produced during the height of the ‘new wave’ was just as bad as bad science fiction has always been; if there has been an effective difference to me, it was only that I sometimes had to read a story more carefully to discover I disliked it.

Terry Carr was a good and influential editor (who grew with the times), but wrong in this case, although it seems unlikely anyone could have understood how fundamentally the New Wave had changed the landscape. Despite a certain amount of retrenchment after the mid-1970s—at least in part because of the huge influence of Hollywood SF, like *Star Wars*, on the genre as a whole—New Wave fiction had enduring effects and created giants of culture and pop culture like J. G. Ballard (the most cited author on a variety of tech and societal topics since the 1970s).

And, in fact, Carr was also wrong because the New Wave overlapped with another significant development, the rise of feminist science fiction, so the revolution was not in fact over. In some ways it was just beginning—and there was much work to do. In addition to conflict in society in general over the issues of women’s rights, the book culture had decided to cynically cater to misogynistic tendencies in readers by publishing whole lines of paperback fiction devoted to novels demonstrating how “women’s lib” would lead to future dystopias.

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If it feels like a bit of a misnomer to call this “rise” the “ascendency” of “feminist” SF, it is because to do so creates the danger of simplifying a complex situation. Not only did the fight to create more space for stories with positive and proactive women characters in science fiction need to be refought several times, but the arguments and the energy/impulse involved in “feminist” SF were also about representation: about creating a space for women writers, no matter what they wrote. And they were further complicated by the fact that identification of an author with “feminism” (just as identification with “New Wave”) can create a narrowed focus in how readers encounter and explore that writer’s work. Nor, largely, would this first focus on feminist science fiction address intersectional issues of race or of gender fluidity. (It is worth noting that in the milieu traversed by American surrealists of the 1960s and 1970s, a territory that existed parallel to science fiction, intersectionality appears to have been more central much earlier.)

Kingsley Amis had pointed out in *New Maps of Hell* (1960), his influential book on science fiction published on the cusp of the New Wave, that “though it may go against the grain to admit it, [male] science-fiction writers are evidently satisfied with the sexual status quo.” This written in a context where few examples of complex or interesting women characters written by men seemed to exist, beyond a few stories by Theodore Sturgeon and John Wyndham (another one-off, marginally associated with the New Wave but, understandably and blissfully, enthralled by plants, fungi, lichen).

By the 1970s, writers like Joanna Russ were giving bold and explicit voice to the cause of science fiction by featuring women. Russ accused science fiction, in her essay “The Image of Women in SF” (1970), of “a failure of imagination and ‘social speculation,’” making the argument that the paucity of complex female characters derived from accepting societal prejudices and stereotypes without thought or analysis. This echoed sentiments about clichés and stereotypes later expressed by Delany with regard to race.

Feminist writers were concerned in part about the peculiar and unuseful way in which writers had for so long literalized archetypes, making women stand-ins and not individualized: Madonna/Whore, Mother Earth, etc. As the forever amazing and incisive Ursula K. Le Guin wrote in her essay “American SF and the Other” (1975), “The women’s movement has made most of us conscious of the fact that SF has either totally ignored women, or presented them as squeaking dolls subject to instant rape by monsters—or old-maid scientists desexed by hypertrophy of the intellectual organs—or, at best, loyal little wives or mistresses of accomplished heroes.”

The irony of having to push back against misogynistic portrayals in science fiction should not be lost on anyone. Within a tradition of “what if,” a tradition not of realism but of supposedly dreaming true and of expressing the purest forms of the imagination, science fiction had still chosen in many cases to relegate women to second- or third-rate status. In such an atmosphere, without a revolution, how could anyone, male or female or gender-fluid, see clearly a future in which such prejudices did not exist?

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Therefore the rise of feminist SF was about the rise of unique, influential voices whose work could be overtly feminist but was not of interest solely for that reason. Writers like James Tiptree Jr. (Alice Sheldon), Russ, Josephine Saxton, Le Guin, and others were in some cases core New Wavers or were writing corrections of Golden Era simplifications, much as Delany sometimes did, and in other cases bringing sociology, anthropology, ecological issues, and more to the fore in a way that hadn't yet been seen. Rather than being narrow in focus, this fiction *opened up* the world—and did so from within an American and British science fiction community that was at times resistant.



Destination: Amaltheia, 1960.

The Important Role of International Fiction

Sometimes it is useful to take a step back and examine the frenzy of enthusiasm about a particular era from a different perspective. While the New Wave and feminist science fiction were playing out largely in the Anglo world, the international scene was creating its own narrative. This narrative was not always so different from the Anglo one, in that in regions like Latin America women writers generally had to work twice as hard to achieve the same status as their male counterparts. For this reason, even today there are still women writers of speculative fiction being translated into English for the first time who first published work in the 1950s through 1970s. These roadblocks should not be underestimated, and future anthologists should make it a mission to discover and promote amazing work that may at this time be invisible to us.

Frederik Pohl, Judith Merril, and Damon Knight, all three excellent writers, were at least as influential in putting on their editor hats and were particularly useful in bringing new, international voices into the English-language science fiction field. These gatekeepers and others, including the ubiquitous David Hartwell, were sympathetic to international science fiction, and as a result from the 1950s through the 1980s in particular stories in translation

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appeared with more frequency. (It is worth noting, though, that in many cases what was translated had to conform to Anglo ideas about what had value in the marketplace.)

“International” science fiction may be a meaningless term because it both exoticizes and generalizes what should be normalized and then discussed in specifics country by country. But it is important to understand the overlay of non-Anglo fiction occurring at the same time as generally UK/US phenomena such as the New Wave and the rise of feminist SF—even if we can only focus on a few stories given the constraints of our anthology. For example, by the 1960s the Japanese science fiction scene had become strange and vital and energetic, as exemplified by work from Yoshio Aramaki and Yasutaka Tsutsui, but also so many other talented writers.

Although it wouldn’t be clear until the publication of a score of English-language Macmillan Soviet science fiction anthologies and novels in the 1980s—many of them championed by Theodore Sturgeon and the Strugatsky brothers—Russian and Ukrainian science fiction came of age in the 1960s and 1970s. From 1960 to the mid-1970s, a number of writers little known in the West published fascinating and complex science fiction—some of it retranslated for this volume.

For example, Valentina Zhuravlyova published “The Astronaut” (1960), which managed to escape being an advertisement for the Soviet space program by virtue of its intricate structure and commitment to the pathos of its space mission emergency. The fairly prolific Dmitri Bilenkin, who would appear in several English translations, wrote “Where Two Paths Cross,” an ecological contact story still unique and relevant today. With its alien collective, the story could be said to comment on the communist situation. Perhaps the most unlikely Russian writer of the time was Vadim Shefner, whose graceful fiction, with its deceptive lightness of touch, finds its greatest expression in “A Modest Genius” (1963). How this subversive and wise delicacy evaded the Soviet censors is a mystery, but readers everywhere should be glad it did.

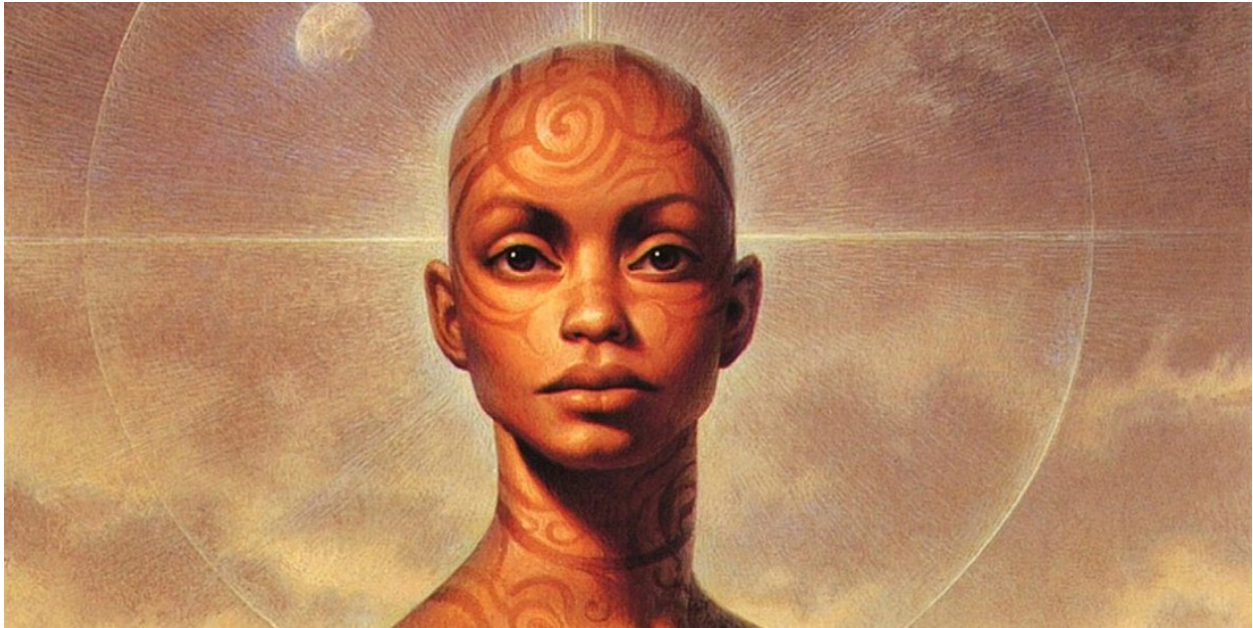
The best Soviet short-story writer of the era, however, was Sever Gansovsky, who wrote several powerful stories that could have been included in this anthology. Our choice, “Day of Wrath” (1964), updates the Wellsian “Dr. Moreau” trope while being completely original. Gansovsky was not as visionary as the Strugatsky brothers, whose *Roadside Picnic* would dominate discussion in the US and UK, but there is in his directness, clarity, grit, and sophistication much that compensates for that lack.

Many examples of Latin American science fiction from the 1960s and 1970s are yet to appear in English, so the complete picture of that time period is unclear. We know that Borges and Ocampo were still publishing fiction that was speculative in nature, as was another major Argentine writer, Angélica Gorodischer. Adolfo Bioy Casares published occasional science fiction, such as “The Squid Chooses Its Own Ink” (1962), retranslated for this volume. The giant of Brazilian SF André Carneiro published his most famous story, “Darkness,” in 1965, a tale that stands comfortably alongside the best science fiction of the era. Alicia Yáñez Cossío’s “The IWM 1000” (1975) is another great example of Latin American SF from the period.

Yet, as noted, our sample as readers in English is still not large enough to draw general conclusions. All we can say is that in this volume you will find both synergy with and divergence

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from 1960s and 1970s Anglo SF that adds immeasurable value to the conversation about science fiction.



Art from the cover of Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*

Cyberpunk, Humanism, and What Lay Beyond

The New Wave and the rise of feminist SF would always be a difficult epoch to follow because such giants strode the Earth and expressed themselves willfully and with intelligent intent during that era. But the two movements most associated with the 1980s and 1990s, cyberpunk and Humanism, would in their own ways be both quietly and not-so-quietly influential.

Cyberpunk as a term was popularized by editor Gardner Dozois, although first coined by Bruce Bethke in 1980 in his story "Cyberpunk," subsequently published in a 1983 issue of *Amazing Stories*. Bruce Sterling then became the main architect of a blueprint for cyberpunk with his columns in his fanzine *Cheap Truth*. William Gibson's stories appearing in *Omni* in the mid-1980s, including "Burning Chrome" and "New Rose Hotel" (reprinted herein), and his novel *Neuromancer* (1984) fixed the term in readers' imaginations. The Sterling-edited *Mirrorshades* anthology (1986) provided a flagship.

Cyberpunk usually fused noir tropes or interior design with dark tales of near-future technology in a context of weak governments and sinister corporations, achieving a new granularity in conveying elements of the Information Age. Trace elements of the recent punk movement in music were brought to the mix by writers such as John Shirley.

Just as some New Wave and feminist SF authors, like Delany and Tiptree, had tried to portray a "realer" realism relative to traditional Golden Age science fiction elements or tropes, cyberpunk often tried to better show advances in computer technology and could be seen as naturally

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extending a Philip K. Dickian vision of the future, with themes of paranoia and vast conspiracies. The brilliant John Brunner's *The Shockwave Rider* (1975) is sometimes also mentioned as a predecessor. (The Humanist equivalent would be Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*.)

Writers such as Rudy Rucker, Marc Laidlaw, Lewis Shiner, and Pat Cadigan published significant cyberpunk stories or novels, with Cadigan later editing *The Ultimate Cyberpunk* (2002), which contextualized cyberpunk within earlier influences (not always successfully) and also showcased post-cyberpunk works.

“Humanist SF” at times seemed to just be a call for three-dimensional characters in science fiction, with feminism added on top, sometimes with an emphasis on the so-called soft sciences, such as sociology. But Carol McGuirk makes an interesting point in an essay in *Fiction 2000* (1992) when she notes that the “soft science fiction” that predominated in the 1950s (remember MacLean?) strongly influenced the New Wave, cyberpunk, and Humanist SF, which she claims all arose, in part, out of this impulse. The difference is that whereas New Wave and cyberpunk fiction arose out of a starker, darker impulse (including the *contes cruels*) replete with dystopian settings, Humanist SF grew out of another strand in which human beings are front and center, with technology subservient, optimistically, to a human element. (Brothers and sisters often fight, and that seems to be the case here.)

Practitioners of Humanist SF (sometimes also identified as Slipstream—ironically enough, a term coined by Sterling) include James Patrick Kelly, Kim Stanley Robinson, John Kessel, Michael Bishop (a stalwart hybrid who at times partook of the New Wave), and Nancy Kress, with Karen Joy Fowler's work exhibiting some of the same attributes but too various to be pigeonholed or in any sense to be said to have done anything but flown the coop into rarefied and iconic realms. (The gonzo fringe of the impulse was best expressed by Paul Di Filippo, who would go so far as to pose naked for one book cover.)

Humanism was initially seen as in opposition to cyberpunk, but in fact both factions “grew up” rather quickly and produced unique work that defied labels. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the perceived conflict was that cyberpunk seemed to revel in its science fiction origins without particularly caring what the mainstream thought, perhaps because they had access to a wider audience through pop culture; see: *Wired* magazine. Humanists on the other hand generally identified with core genre but wanted to reach beyond it to mainstream readers and convince them of science fiction's literary worth. Interestingly enough, the cause of Humanist SF would be championed either directly or indirectly by the legendary Damon Knight and Kate Wilhelm, whose Clarion and Sycamore Hill (for more advanced writers) writers' workshops tended to be of most use for those kinds of writers.

Critics of both “movements” argued that cyberpunk and Humanism were retrenchments or conservative acts after the radicalism of the New Wave of the 1960s and the rise of feminist SF in the 1970s—cyberpunk because it fetishized technology and deemphasized the role of governments even while critical of corporations. Readers from within the computer industry pointed to Gibson's lack of knowledge about hacker culture in writing *Neuromancer* and suggested flaws in his vision were created by this lack. A fair amount of cyberpunk also

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promoted a more traditional idea of gender roles (imported from noir fiction) while providing less space for women authors.

Yet around the same time in Argentina Angélica Gorodischer was publishing such incendiary feminist material as “The Unmistakable Smell of Wood Violets” (1985), and in the US one sui generis writer whose work pushed back against some of these ideas was Misha Nogha, whose Arthur C. Clarke Award finalist *Red Spider White Web* (1990; excerpted herein) portrays a nightmarish future in which artists are commodified but also exist in life-threatening conditions. Technology is definitely not fetishized and the hierarchies of power eventuate from every direction. The novel also features a unique and strong female main character who defies the gender stereotypes of the time. In this sense, Nogha’s groundbreaking novel pointed the way toward a more feminist vision of cyberpunk.

The criticism leveled against Humanism, meanwhile, was that it gentrified both the New Wave and feminist impulses by applying middle-of-the-road and middle-class values. (The more radicalized third-wave feminism science fiction of the current era fits more comfortably with New Wave and 1970s feminism despite not always being quite as experimental.) Yet, whatever the truth, what actually happened is that the best Humanist writers matured and evolved over time or had only happened to be passing through on their way to someplace else.



From Arrival (2016), adapted from a story by Ted Chiang

Arguably the most influential science fiction writers to come out of the 1980s and 1990s were Octavia Butler, Kim Stanley Robinson, William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, and Ted Chiang. In far different ways they would change the landscape of popular culture and how readers thought about technology, race, gender, and the environment. Ted Chiang’s influence exists mainly

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within the genre, but this may change due to forthcoming movie adaptations of his work. Karen Joy Fowler would begin to exert a similar influence via her nonspeculative novels like *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013), which deals with the issue of animal intelligence and our relationship to that intelligence.

Fowler's example provides some inkling of how such prominence occurs: by having ideas or fiction that breaks out beyond core genre. Although Gibson and Sterling could be said to have founded cyberpunk, for example, it is their writings, both fiction and nonfiction, beyond the initial cyberpunk era that have the most relevance, as they have broadened and sharpened their interrogations of modern society and the technology age.

Butler has undergone a resurgence in popularity and influence because her themes resonate with a new generation of writers and readers who value diversity and who are interested in postcolonial explorations of race, gender, and social issues. (And because she wrote wonderful, unique, complex science fiction unlike anyone in the field.) It is only Robinson who has achieved breakout influence and status while writing from within genre, forcing readers to come to him with a series of groundbreaking science fiction novels that are often referenced in the context of climate change. (Only Paolo Bacigalupi has come to close to being as influential since.)

However, cyberpunk and Humanism were not the only significant impulses in science fiction during this period. Other types of inquiry existed outside of the Anglo world during this period and extending into the twenty-first century. For example, a significant window for Chinese science fiction in the early 1980s (closed shut by regime change) gave readers such interesting stories as "The Mirror Image of the Earth" by Zheng Wenguang and others collected in *Science Fiction from China*, edited by Dingbo Wu and Patrick D. Murphy (1989; with an introduction by the indefatigable Frederik Pohl). Other remarkable Chinese writers, like Han Song, created enduring fiction that either had no real Western antecedent or "cooked" it into something unique—and eventually Liu Cixin would break through with the Hugo Award-winning novel *The Three-Body Problem* (2014), both a critical and a commercial success. His novella "The Poetry Cloud" (1997), included in this volume, is a stunning tour de force that assimilates many different strands of science fiction and, in a joyful and energetic way, rejuvenates them.. It in effect renders much of contemporary science fiction obsolete.

In Finland, Leena Krohn, one of her country's most respected and decorated fiction writers, spent the 1980s and 1990s (and up to the present day) creating a series of fascinating speculative works, including *Tainaron* (1985), *Pereat Mundus* (1998), and *Mathematical Creatures, or Shared Dreams* (1992), from which we have reprinted "Gorgonoids." Johanna Sinisalo has also been a creative powerhouse, and her Nebula Award finalist "Baby Doll" is included herein. Other fascinating Finnish writers include Anne Leinonen, Tiina Raevaara, Hannu Rajaniemi, Viivi Hyvönen, and Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen.

Other science fiction in the wider world includes Kojo Laing's "Vacancy for the Post of Jesus Christ" (1992), which is not an outlier for this speculative fiction writer from Ghana, and

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Tatyana Tolstaya’s “The Slynx.” Both are highly original and not atypical examples of a growing number of fascinating voices from places outside of the Anglo hegemony.

Although not always thought of in a science fiction context so much as a dystopia one (*The Handmaid’s Tale*), Canadian Margaret Atwood contributed to the conversation with her *MaddAddam Trilogy* (2003–2013), which still holds up today as perhaps the single most significant and useful exploration of near-future ecological catastrophe and renewal. The significance of these novels in terms of mainstream acceptance of science fiction cannot be understated. Although science fiction had already conquered popular culture, without Atwood’s example the current trend of science fiction being published by mainstream literary imprints would be unlikely. This type of positioning also helps gain a wider, more varied readership for science fiction generally and accelerates the cultural influence of this kind of fiction.

The growing diversity in the twenty-first century of the science fiction community, combined with the influx of international science fiction and the growing acceptance of science fiction within the mainstream literary world, promises to create a dynamic, vibrant, and cosmopolitan space for science fiction literature in the decades to come.



Organizing Principles for This Anthology

In compiling *The Big Book of Science Fiction*, we have thought carefully about what it means to present to the reader a century’s worth of short stories, from roughly 1900 to 2000, with some outliers. Our approach has been to think of this anthology as providing a space to be representative and accurate but also revelatory—to balance showcasing core genre fiction with a desire to show not just outliers, but “outliers” that we actually feel are more central to science

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fiction than previously thought. It has also seemed imperative to bring international fiction into the fold; without that element, any survey of an impulse or genre of fiction will seem narrow, more provincial and less cosmopolitan.

Particular guidelines or thought processes include:

- Avoiding the Great Certainty (interrogate the classics/canon)
- Meticulous testing of previous anthologies of this type
- Identifying and rejecting pastiche previously presented as canon
- Overthrowing the tyranny of typecasting (include writers not known for their science fiction but who wrote superb science fiction stories)
- Repairing the pointless rift (pay no attention to the genre versus literary origins of a story)
- Repatriating the fringe with the core (acknowledge the role of cult authors and more experimental texts)
- Crafting more complete genealogies (acknowledge the debt from surrealism and other sources outside of core genre)
- Articulating the full expanse (as noted, explore permutations of science fiction from outside of the Anglo world, making works visible through translation)

We also have wanted to represent as many different types of science fiction as possible, including hard science fiction, soft (social) science fiction, space opera, alternative history, apocalyptic stories, tales of alien encounters, near-future dystopia, satirical stories, and a host of other modes.

Within this general context, we have been less concerned about making sure to include certain authors than we have about trying to give accurate overviews of certain eras, impulses, and movements. For this reason, most readers will no doubt discover a favorite story or author has been omitted . . . but also come across new discoveries and new favorites previously unknown to them.

We have also weighed historical significance against readability in the modern era, with the guiding principle that most people picking up this anthology will be general readers, not academics. For this reason, too, we have endeavored to include humorous stories, which are a rich and deep part of the science fiction tradition and help to balance out the preponderance of dystopias depicted in many of the serious stories. Joke stories, on the other hand, and most twist stories have been omitted as too self-referential, especially stories that rely too heavily on referring to science fiction fandom or core genre.

The Rise of Science Fiction from Pulp Mags to Cyberpunk, <https://electricliterature.com/the-rise-of-science-fiction-from-pulp-mags-to-cyberpunk-e00f6efdcab0>

Because ecological and environmental issues have become increasingly urgent, if given the choice of two equally good stories by the same author, we have also chosen to favor stories featuring those themes. (For example, our selection from Ursula K. Le Guin.) One regret is not being able to include fiction by John Brunner, Frank Herbert, and other giants in the field whose novels are arguably much more robust and vital on this topic than their short fiction.

In considering the broadness of our definition of science fiction, we have had to set limits. Most steampunk seems to us to have more in common with fantasy than science fiction, and stories of the very far future in which science is indistinguishable from magic also seem to us to belong to the fantastical. For this latter reason, Jack Vance's *Dying Earth* stories and M. John Harrison's *Viriconium* stories, and their ilk, will fall within the remit of a future anthology.

In considering international fiction we have chosen (after hard-won prior experience) to take the path of least resistance. For example, we had more access to and better intel about Soviet-era and certain strands of Latin American science fiction than some other traditions. It therefore seemed more valuable to present relatively complete "through-lines" of those traditions than to try to provide one representative story for as many countries as possible. In addition, given our access to international fiction and a choice between equally good stories (often with similar themes) set in a particular country, one by an author from that country and one by an author from the US or UK, we have chosen to use the story by the author from the country in question.

With regard to translations, we followed two rules: to be fearless about including stories not previously published in English (if deemed of high quality) and to retranslate stories already translated into English if the existing translation was more than twenty-five years old or if we believed the existing translation contained errors.

The new translations (works never before published in English) included in this anthology are Paul Scheerbart's "The New Overworld" (1907), Hanz Strobel's "The Triumph of Mechanics" (1907), Yefim Zozulya's "Doom of Principal City" (1918), Silvina Ocampo's "The Waves" (1959), Angélica Gorodischer's "The Unmistakable Smell of Wood Violets" (1985), Jacques Barbéri's "Mondocane" (1983), and Han Song's "Two Small Birds" (1988).

The retranslated stories are Miguel de Unamuno's "Mechanopolis" (1913), Juan José Arreola's "Baby H.P." (1952), Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's "The Visitors" (1958), Valentina Zhuravlyova's "The Astronaut" (1960), Adolfo Bioy Casares's "The Squid Chooses Its Own Ink" (1962), Sever Gansovsky's "Day of Wrath" (1965), and Dmitri Bilenkin's "Where Two Paths Cross" (1973).

In contextualizing all of this material we realized that no introduction could truly convey the depth and breadth of a century of science fiction. For this reason, we made the strategic decision to include expanded author notes, which also include information on each story. These notes sometimes convey biographical data and in other cases form miniature essays to provide general context. Sometimes these notes quote other writers or critics to provide firsthand recollections. In researching these author notes, we are very fortunate to have had access, in a synergistic way, to the best existing source about certain writers, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*—with the

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blessing of its founders, John Clute, Peter Nicholls, and David Langford. Entries containing information from the encyclopedia as their nucleus are noted in the permissions acknowledgments (pages 000–000).

Finally, as ever, certain stories could not be acquired for this anthology—or for anyone’s anthology due to the stance of the estates in question. The following stories should be considered an extension of this anthology: A. E. van Vogt’s “The Weapon Shop” (1942), Robert Heinlein’s “All You Zombies—” (1959), and Bob Shaw’s “Light of Other Days” (1966). In addition, for reasons of space we have been unable to include E. M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops” (1909), an excerpt from Gustave Le Rouge’s strange novel about a mission to a Mars inhabited by vampires (1909), and an excerpt from Doris Lessing’s 1970s science fiction novels.

If we have brought any particular value to the task of editing this anthology—and we will let others debate that question—it lies in three areas: 1) we love all kinds of fiction, in all of its many forms, and all kinds of science fiction; 2) we have built up an extensive (and still-growing) network of international literary contacts that allowed us to acquire unique content; and 3) we did not approach the task from the center of genre, which is where most editors of these kinds of anthologies have come from. We belong to no clique or group within the science fiction community and have no particular affiliation with nor disinclination to consider any writer in the field, living or dead.

That said, we are also not coming to the task from the sometimes too elevated height of mainstream literary editors with no connection to their speculative subject matter. We do not care about making a case for the legitimacy of science fiction; the ignorance of those who don’t value science fiction is their own affliction and problem (as is the ignorance of those who claim science fiction is the be-all and end-all).

Throughout our three-year journey of discovery for this project, we have also had to reconcile ourselves to what we call Regret Over Taxonomy (exclusion is inevitable but not a cause for relief or happiness) and Acknowledgment of the Inherent Imperfection of the Results. However, the corollary to this latter recognition is to never accept or resign oneself to the inherent imperfection of the results.

Now we hope you will put aside this overlong introduction and simply immerse yourself in the science-fictional wonders here assembled. For they are many, and they are indeed wondrous and startling and, at times, darkly beautiful.