



The History Of Science Fiction

By
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Those who read and write science fiction have long disagreed about where (and when) the first science fiction story was written. Some maintain that the form goes back to the legends of the ancient Greeks, while others place the origins much closer to modern times. However, few dispute that the first readily identifiable science fiction novel was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, published in 1818. The novel is a "what if?" story that explores consequences that might result from bringing people back from the dead. As such, it is science fiction in its purest form.

Just what is science fiction, anyway?

The purists will tell you that science fiction is, literally, fiction about science and scientists. By that measure, *Frankenstein* is science fiction, but *Star Wars* is not. Others say that it is fiction about the future. The only problem is that a great deal of SF takes place in the past, or in parallel universes, or in histories that never existed at all. Robert Heinlein liked to say that science fiction is a literature of speculation. It allows its writers and readers to explore the consequences of things that have not yet happened. Personally, I prefer a definition first promulgated by one of the science fiction editors. "Science fiction," he said, "is that which the science fiction editors are currently buying!" As one who expects to get paid for putting words on paper, I find his logic to be compelling!

Whatever the definition of SF, everyone knows that the first science fiction writer of note was the French novelist Jules Verne (1851). However, like many things that everyone knows, this isn't necessarily so. Jules Verne was a stockbroker with literary ambitions who was generally unsuccessful until he began to write *voyages extraordinaires* — stories of fabulous trips to mysterious and distant places, ostensibly written for the consumption of young boys. To get his people where they were going, he invented amazing vehicles, including balloons, submarines, and cannon shells that took men to the moon. None of these ideas originated with Verne. Each was a common concept in the literature of the day and some, such as the balloons and submarines, had actually been built! Verne used science primarily as stage dressing for his stories and to make his fabulous machinery seem more credible. Nor was he the last writer to use this technique. Much modern SF in movies and on television is written in this "baffle them with jargon" style.

The first writer to use science in a systematic way in his stories was, like Jules Verne, pretty much a failure in life. Herbert George Wells published his first story, "The Time Machine", in 1895. Over the next decade or so he developed many of the themes

and techniques that are still in use today. This is why H. G. Wells (rather than Jules Verne) is generally regarded as the first modern science fiction writer.

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, science fiction was not a separate category of literature. It was published in *Argosy* and other general circulation magazines, and the people who wrote it also wrote westerns, mysteries, and adventure stories. In fact, science fiction did not become a separate category until 1926, when Hugo Gernsback, publisher of *Electrical Experimenter* magazine, started a companion magazine called *Amazing Stories*. Even though it was the first, *Amazing* was not the most influential magazine in what came to be known as the Golden Age of Science Fiction. That title belonged to another.

In 1929, the Clayton Publishing Co. purchased a new color press with the capacity to print 8 magazine covers simultaneously. Their problem was that they only published six magazines at the time. Rather than waste paper, they launched two new magazines to use the extra capacity. One of these was a science fiction periodical named *Astounding Stories of Super-Science*, which became a powerhouse in the field when they hired an editor named John W. Campbell. Campbell was a graduate engineer and set about transforming the world of science fiction to conform to his own rather biased idea of how things ought to be.

Astounding (later renamed *Analog*) was the home of technological fiction where the authors dealt with the nuts-and-bolts details of rocket ships and other scientific wonders. They were expected to get the science right and Campbell made sure that they did. In remodeling SF in his own image, Campbell developed a stable of writers, including Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, and Robert Heinlein, men who would dominate the field for the next fifty years.

Prior to World War II, science fiction occupied a ghetto in publishing largely centered in the monthly magazines published on cheap pulp paper — known in the trade as “The Pulp.” The magazines paid poorly (1 to 2 cents per word) and the writers wrote quickly, producing a quality of writing that was often atrocious. Still, the sense of wonder the stories produced created a small and very loyal following of readers. Things would likely have stayed that way had it not been for an event that occurred on Halloween night, 1938. On that evening, Orson Wells scared the country out of its wits with his *War of the Worlds* broadcast.

The furor caused by the broadcast went on for weeks and caused millions to sample the little magazines with the lurid covers. (A typical cover showed a bug-eyed monster clutching a scantily clad woman in its pincers. It makes one wonder exactly what the monster intended to do with her!) Many readers found themselves hooked and SF magazine circulation skyrocketed. A similar phenomenon happened when *Star Wars* was released in the mid-1970s. Once again, people who had never considered reading science fiction began buying the little books with the lurid covers.

Following World War II, publishing changed. Many monthly magazines went out of business and books began to be published in paperback. No longer was short fiction the driving force behind the industry. Writers became novelists, putting out 60,000 words per story instead of the 5,000 to 15,000 words preferred by the magazines. And, to the great surprise of most of its practitioners, science fiction began to grow respectable.

In the heyday of the pulps, science fiction writers were largely regarded as hacks (as many of them were), with status only slightly higher than that of pornographers. With the invention of the atom bomb and the onset of the space race, people began to see science fiction as serious literature with something to say about modern life. By the 1970s, it had even reached the point where SF courses were taught at a few universities.

And science fiction began to invade the mass culture. With *Star Trek* on television and *Star Wars* at the movies, science fiction began to reach people numbering in the hundreds of millions. There were even times in the 1980s when a majority of the books on the New York Times bestseller list were science fiction novels. Nor has SF remained centered on its scientist-and-engineer-inspired roots. Hi-tech science fiction has been joined by fantasy, horror, and numerous other sub-genres. I even maintain that Tom Clancy (one of my favorite authors) writes contemporary military science fiction. The subject may be Red October, but the technique is pure science fiction.

And now it appears that the world is changing again. The opening up of world wide communications via the INTERNET has for the first time given the authors direct access to the readers. I began this adventure in publishing ten years ago, and today, including my own books, I am the publisher of 150 tomes, while working out of the office I had constructed behind my pool. We call it “the shack in the back.” Publishing has changed once again and in the future, you will not recognize it.

If you are already a science fiction enthusiast, keep reading — we writers need the money! If you aren't, please give us a try. Who knows, you might like it? But before you pick up that first science fiction story or novel, be warned! The addiction, once developed, lasts a lifetime.

For additional reading, see:

de Camp, L. Sprague and Catherine Crook; *Science Fiction Handbook, Revised*; Owlslick Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1975

Panshin, Alexei and Cory; *The World Beyond The Hill: Science Fiction and the Quest For Transcendence*; Jeremy P. Archer, Inc., Los Angeles, CA, 1989

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NOVELS

1. Life Probe - ^{US}\$4.50

The Makers searched for the secret to faster-than-light travel for 100,000 years. Their chosen instruments were the Life Probes, which they launched in every direction to seek out advanced civilizations among the stars. One such machine searching for intelligent life encounters 21st century Earth. It isn't sure that it has found any...

2. Procyon's Promise - ^{US}\$4.50

Three hundred years after humanity made its deal with the Life Probe to search out the secret of faster-than-light travel, the descendants of the original expedition return to Earth in a starship. They find a world that has forgotten the ancient contract. No matter. The colonists have overcome far greater obstacles in their single-minded drive to redeem a promise made before any of them were born...

3. Antares Dawn - US\$4.50

When the super giant star Antares exploded in 2512, the human colony on Alta found their pathway to the stars gone, isolating them from the rest of human space for more than a century. Then one day, a powerful warship materialized in the system without warning. Alarmed by the sudden appearance of such a behemoth, the commanders of the Altan Space Navy dispatched one of their most powerful ships to investigate. What ASNS Discovery finds when they finally catch the intruder is a battered hulk manned by a dead crew.

That is disturbing news for the Altans. For the dead battleship could easily have defeated the whole of the Altan navy. If it could find Alta, then so could whomever it was that beat it. Something must be done...

4. Antares Passage - US\$4.50

After more than a century of isolation, the paths between stars are again open and the people of Alta in contact with their sister colony on Sandar. The opening of the foldlines has not been the unmixed blessing the Altans had supposed, however.

For the reestablishment of interstellar travel has brought with it news of the Ryall, an alien race whose goal is the extermination of humanity. If they are to avoid defeat at the hands of the aliens, Alta must seek out the military might of Earth. However, to reach Earth requires them to dive into the heart of a supernova.

5. Antares Victory – First Time in Print – US\$7.00

After a century of warfare, humanity finally discovered the Achilles heel of the Ryall, their xenophobic reptilian foe. Spica – Alpha Virginis – is the key star system in enemy space. It is the hub through which all Ryall starships must pass, and if humanity can only capture and hold it, they will strangle the Ryall war machine and end their threat to humankind forever.

It all seemed so simple in the computer simulations: Advance by stealth, attack without warning, strike swiftly with overwhelming power. Unfortunately, conquering the Ryall proves the easy part. With the key to victory in hand, Richard and Bethany Drake discover that they must also conquer human nature if they are to bring down the alien foe ...

6. Thunderstrike! - US\$6.00

The new comet found near Jupiter was an incredible treasure trove of water ice and rock. Immediately, the water-starved Luna Republic and the Sierra Corporation, a leader in asteroid mining, were squabbling over rights to the new resource. However, all thoughts of profit and fame were abandoned when a scientific expedition discovered that the comet's trajectory placed it on a collision course with Earth!

As scientists struggled to find a way to alter the comet's course, world leaders tried desperately to restrain mass panic, and two lovers quarreled over the direction the comet was to take, all Earth waited to see if humanity had any future at all...

7. The Clouds of Saturn - US\$4.50

When the sun flared out of control and boiled Earth's oceans, humanity took refuge in a place that few would have predicted. In the greatest migration in history, the entire human race took up residence among the towering clouds and deep clear-air canyons of Saturn's upper atmosphere. Having survived the traitor star, they returned to the all-too-human tradition of internecine strife. The new city-states of Saturn began to resemble those of ancient Greece, with one group of cities taking on the role of militaristic Sparta...

8. The Sails of Tau Ceti – US\$4.50

Starhopper was humanity's first interstellar probe. It was designed to search for intelligent life beyond the solar system. Before it could be launched, however, intelligent life found Earth. The discovery of an alien light sail inbound at the edge of the solar system generated considerable excitement in scientific circles. With the interstellar probe nearing completion, it gave scientists the opportunity to launch an expedition to meet the aliens while they were still in space. The second surprise came when *Starhopper's* crew boarded the alien craft. They found beings that, despite their alien physiques, were surprisingly compatible with humans. That two species so similar could have evolved a mere twelve light years from one another seemed too coincidental to be true.

One human being soon discovered that coincidence had nothing to do with it...

9. Gibraltar Earth – First Time in Print — \$6.00

It is the 24th Century and humanity is just gaining a toehold out among the stars. Stellar Survey Starship *Magellan* is exploring the New Eden system when they encounter two alien spacecraft. When the encounter is over, the score is one human scout ship and one alien aggressor destroyed. In exploring the wreck of the second alien ship, spacers discover a survivor with a fantastic story.

The alien comes from a million-star Galactic Empire ruled over by a mysterious race known as the Broa. These overlords are the masters of this region of the galaxy and they allow no competitors. This news presents Earth's rulers with a problem. As yet, the Broa are ignorant of humanity's existence. Does the human race retreat to its one small world, quaking in fear that the Broa will eventually discover Earth? Or do they take a more aggressive approach?

Whatever they do, they must do it quickly! Time is running out for the human race...

10. Gibraltar Sun – First Time in Print — \$7.00

The expedition to the Crab Nebula has returned to Earth and the news is not good. Out among the stars, a million systems have fallen under Broan domination, the fate awaiting Earth should the Broa ever learn of its existence. The problem would seem to allow but three responses: submit meekly to slavery, fight and risk extermination, or hide and pray the Broa remain ignorant of humankind for at least a few more generations. Are the hairless apes of Sol III finally faced with a problem for which there is no acceptable solution?

While politicians argue, Mark Rykand and Lisa Arden risk everything to spy on the all-powerful enemy that is beginning to wonder at the appearance of mysterious bipeds in their midst...

11. Gridlock and Other Stories - US\$4.50

Where would you visit if you invented a time machine, but could not steer it? What if you went out for a six-pack of beer and never came back? If you think nuclear power is dangerous, you should try black holes as an energy source — or even scarier, solar energy! Visit the many worlds of Michael McCollum. I guarantee that you will be surprised!

Non-Fiction Books

12. The Art of Writing, Volume I - US\$10.00

Have you missed any of the articles in the Art of Writing Series? No problem. The first sixteen articles (October, 1996-December, 1997) have been collected into a book-length work of more than 72,000 words. Now you can learn about character, conflict, plot, pacing, dialogue, and the business of writing, all in one document.

13. The Art of Writing, Volume II - US\$10.00

This collection covers the Art of Writing articles published during 1998. The book is 62,000 words in length and builds on the foundation of knowledge provided by Volume I of this popular series.

14. The Art of Science Fiction, Volume I - US\$10.00

Have you missed any of the articles in the Art of Science Fiction Series? No problem. The first sixteen articles (October, 1996-December, 1997) have been collected into a book-length work of more than 70,000 words. Learn about science fiction techniques and technologies, including starships, time machines, and rocket propulsion. Tour the Solar System and learn astronomy from the science fiction writer's viewpoint. We don't care where the stars appear in the terrestrial sky. We want to know their true positions in space. If you are planning to write an interstellar romance, brushing up on your astronomy may be just what you need.

15. The Art of Science Fiction, Volume II - US\$10.00

This collection covers the *Art of Science Fiction* articles published during 1998. The book is 67,000 words in length and builds on the foundation of knowledge provided by Volume I of this popular series.

16. The Astrogator's Handbook – Expanded Edition and Deluxe Editions

The Astrogator's Handbook has been very popular on Sci Fi – Arizona. The handbook has star maps that show science fiction writers where the stars are located in space rather than where they are located in Earth's sky. Because of the popularity, we are expanding the handbook to show nine times as much space and more than ten times as many stars. The expanded handbook includes the positions of 3500 stars as viewed from Polaris on 63 maps. This handbook is a useful resource for every science fiction writer and will appeal to anyone with an interest in astronomy.