

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



# SCIENCE FICTION

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*Edited by Edward James  
and Farah Mendlesohn*

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## **The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction**

Science fiction is at the intersection of numerous fields. It is a literature which draws on popular culture, and which engages in speculation about science, history and all types of social relations. This volume brings together essays by scholars and practitioners of science fiction, which look at the genre from these different angles. After an introduction to the nature of science fiction, historical chapters trace science fiction from Thomas More to the present day, including a chapter on film and television. The second section introduces four important critical approaches to science fiction drawing their theoretical inspiration from Marxism, postmodernism, feminism and queer theory. The final and largest section of the book looks at various themes and sub-genres of science fiction. A number of well-known science fiction writers contribute to this volume, including Gwyneth Jones, Ken MacLeod, Brian Stableford, Andy Duncan, James Gunn, Joan Slonczewski and Damien Broderick.

## CONTRIBUTORS

BRIAN ATTEBERY's latest book is *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* (2002). He has also published two studies of fantasy literature, and is co-editor with Ursula K. Le Guin of *The Norton Book of Science Fiction* (1993). He won the IAFA Distinguished Scholarship Award in 1991 and the Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy Studies, 1992. He directs the graduate programme in English at Idaho State University.

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DAMIEN BRODERICK is a Senior Fellow in the Department of English with Cultural Studies in the University of Melbourne, Australia, and holds a PhD from Deakin University. His publications include novels, popular science, radio drama and literary theory, including *Reading by Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction* (1995) and *Transrealist Fiction* (2000); see bibliography at [http://www.panterraweb.com/the\\_spike.htm](http://www.panterraweb.com/the_spike.htm).

ANDREW M. BUTLER is Field Chair in Film Studies at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, where he also teaches Media Studies and Creative Writing. Since 1995 he has been features editor of *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association*. He is the author of *Pocket Essentials* on *Philip K. Dick* (2000), *Cyberpunk* (2000), *Terry Pratchett* (2001) and *Film Studies* (2002), as well as being the co-editor, with Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James, of *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature* (2001).

JOHN CLUTE was born in Toronto in 1940 and moved to London, England, in 1968. Novelist, writer, poet, editor and above all critic and reviewer, there is not much in science fiction that he has not been involved in. He has won three Hugo Awards for Best Related Work, for *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (with co-editor Peter Nicholls) in 1994, *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia* in 1996 and *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (with co-editor John Grant) in 1998. He also won a World Fantasy Award in 1998 for *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, and has won the Eaton Award, the SFRA's Pilgrim Award and the IAFA's Distinguished Scholar Award. Two volumes of his collected reviews have been published. His latest works are *The Book of End Times*, *Tesseract 8* (with co-editor Candace Jane Dorsey), and his first science fiction novel, *Appleseed*, published in 2001.

KATHRYN CRAMER is a writer, critic and anthologist presently co-editing the *Year's Best Fantasy* and *Year's Best SF* series with her husband David G. Hartwell. She recently completed *The Hard SF Renaissance* (2002), an anthology co-edited also with Hartwell; their previous hard science fiction anthology was *The Ascent of Wonder* (1994). She won a World Fantasy Award for best anthology for *The Architecture of Fear* (1987), co-edited with Peter Pautz; and she was nominated for a World Fantasy Award for her anthology, *Walls of Fear* (1990). She is on the editorial board of *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, and lives in Pleasantville, New York.

ISTVAN CSICSERY-RONAY, JR is Professor of English and World Literature at DePauw University, and a co-editor of *Science Fiction Studies*. He has published widely on international science fiction, and his book, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, is forthcoming from Wesleyan University Press. He won the Science Fiction Research Association's Pioneer Award for best critical article in 1992, for his essay 'The SF of Theory: Baudrillard and Haraway'.

ANDY DUNCAN won a Sturgeon Award for the novella 'The Chief Designer' (2001), a World Fantasy Award for the story 'The Pottawatomie Giant' (2000) and another World Fantasy Award for the collection *Beluthahatchie and Other Stories* (2000). His stories have appeared in *Asimov's*, *Realms of Fantasy*, *SciFiction*, *Starlight 1*, *Starlight 3*, *Weird Tales* and various year's-best anthologies, while his critical articles have appeared in *Foundation*, *The New York Review of Science Fiction* and the *SFRA Review*. With F. Brett Cox, he edited the anthology *Crossroads: Southern Stories of the Fantastic*. He lives in Northport, Alabama.

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*Immortals* (1962) (which was adapted into a TV movie and a series, 'The Immortal'), and half a dozen collections of short stories. His most recent novel is *The Millennium Blues* (2000) and his most recent collection is *Human Voices* (2002). He also has written extensively about science fiction, including the Hugo-Award-winning *Isaac Asimov: The Foundations of Science Fiction* (1982); *Alternate Worlds: The Illustrated History of Science Fiction* (1975); and *The Science of Science-Fiction Writing* (2000). He is the editor of many books, including the six-volume anthology series *The Road to Science Fiction* (1977–88). He has been president of the Science Fiction Writers of America and the Science Fiction Research Association, and has won the Pilgrim Award and the Eaton Award.

VERONICA HOLLINGER is Associate Professor of Cultural Studies at Trent University in Ontario, Canada. She co-edits the journal *Science Fiction Studies* and is co-editor, with Joan Gordon, of *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* (1997) and *Edging into the Future: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation* (2002). She was the first winner (in 1990) of the annual SFRA Pioneer Award for best critical essay on science fiction.

EDWARD JAMES is Professor of History at the University of Reading, although he spent the academic years 2001–3 in the Department of History at Rutgers University, New Jersey. He has published numerous studies on early medieval France and Britain, most recently *Britain in the First Millennium* (2001), as well as articles on the history of science fiction. He won the Eaton Award for best critical work on science fiction for *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (1994), and has co-edited three books of essays on science fiction. Between 1986 and 2001 he was editor of *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction*; he continues as its production editor.

GWYNETH JONES writes science fiction and fantasy for both adults and young people. She has been nominated for the Arthur C. Clarke Award five times, the fourth time for her novel *North Wind* (1995), the second in the Aleutian series. The first novel in the same series, *White Queen* (1991), was co-winner of the James Tiptree Award, for science fiction exploring gender roles. In 2002 she won the Clarke Award for *Bold as Love* (2001). Her fairy-tale collection *Seven Tales and a Fable* (1995) won two World Fantasy Awards. She writes for teenagers under the name Ann Halam; *The Fear Man*, by Halam (1995), won the Dracula Society's Children of the Night award. She lives in Brighton, UK.

ELISABETH ANNE LEONARD received her PhD from Kent State University, Ohio and her MFA from the University of Pittsburgh. She is the editor of *Into Darkness Peering: Race and Color in the Fantastic* (1997). She currently lives in northern California with her family.

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KEN MACLEOD was born in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis in 1954. He studied zoology at Glasgow University and researched biomechanics at Brunel University, where he became involved in socialist politics. After working for ten years in the information technology industry he became a full-time writer in 1997. He has written eight novels, several short stories and some articles and reviews. He won the 1996 Prometheus Award for *The Star Fraction* (1995), the 1998 Prometheus Award for *The Stone Canal* (1996) and also won the British Science Fiction Association Award for *The Sky Road* (1999). He lives in West Lothian, Scotland.

FARAH MENDLESOHN is Senior Lecturer in American Studies at Middlesex University. Between 1997 and 2003 she was Chair of the Science Fiction Foundation, and in 2001 she became Editor of the SFF's journal, *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction*. She has co-edited books of essays on *Babylon 5* and on Terry Pratchett, and published articles and reviews of science fiction. Her book *Quaker Relief Work in the Spanish Civil War* was published in 2001.

HELEN MERRICK is co-editor with Tess Williams of *Women of Other Worlds: Excursions through Science Fiction and Feminism* (1999), which received the Australian 'William Atheling Jr' award for science fiction criticism. She is author of a number of articles on feminist science fiction and science fiction fandom, and is working on a book called *Feminist/Science/Fictions*. Currently, Dr Merrick lectures in Internet Studies at Curtin University of Technology in Western Australia, where her research interests include cyberculture, virtual communities and comparative histories of the Internet and the science fiction community.



WENDY PEARSON is currently a PhD student in English Studies at the University of Wollongong in Australia. She has an MA in English from McGill University in Canada and taught for fifteen years in Cultural Studies and English at Trent University before returning to doctoral studies. She has published a number of articles, including 'Alien Cryptographies: The View from Queer', which won the Science Fiction Research Association's Pioneer Award in 2000 for the best critical article of the year. She is also the recipient of the Science Fiction Foundation's Graduate Student Essay Prize in 2001 for 'Science Fiction as Pharmacy: Plato, Derrida, Ryman' (published in *Foundation* 86, 2002).

JOAN SLONCZEWSKI teaches molecular biology at Kenyon College, Ohio, and studies *Escherichia coli* survival in extreme acid. Her science fiction explores future medicine, nanotechnology and alien sexualities. *Brain Plague* (2000), nominated for the Nebula Award, shows intelligent alien microbes that enhance human brainpower – at a price. Her Campbell-award winner *A Door into Ocean* (1986) creates a world covered entirely by ocean, inhabited by an all-female race of humans who use genetic engineering to defend their unique ecosystem. In *Daughter of Elysium* (1993) biologists engineer humans to live for thousands of years, then face a revolt by the machines that made it possible. She is currently authoring a major textbook, *Microbiology: A Genomic Perspective* which will include science fiction themes.

BRIAN STABLEFORD'S most recent science fiction project is a six-volume 'Future History' series published by Tor, starting with *Inherit the Earth* (1998). Other recent publications include the apocalyptic comedy *Year Zero* (2000) and a new translation of *Lumen* by Camille Flammarion (2002). He has a BA in Biology and a DPhil in Sociology from the University of York, and has taught at the Universities of Reading and the West of England, and at King Alfred's Winchester. He has been active as a professional writer since 1965, publishing more than fifty novels and 200 short stories as well as several non-fiction books; he is a prolific writer of articles for reference books, mainly in the area of literary history.

GARY WESTFAHL, who teaches at the University of California, Riverside, writes a bi-monthly column for the British science fiction magazine *Interzone* and contributes occasional film reviews and commentaries to the Locus Online website. He is also the author, editor or co-editor of fourteen books about science fiction and fantasy; his authored books include *Cosmic Engineers: A Study of Hard Science Fiction* (1996); *Islands in the Sky: The Space Station Theme in Science Fiction Literature* (1996); and *The Mechanics of Wonder: The Creation of the Idea of Science Fiction* (1998).

GARY K. WOLFE, Professor of Humanities and English and former Dean of University College at Roosevelt University in Chicago, is the author of six books and hundreds of essays and reviews; his most recent book is *Harlan Ellison: The Edge of Forever* (with Ellen Weil) (2002). Currently he is a contributing editor and reviewer for *Locus* magazine. Wolfe has received the Distinguished Scholarship Award from the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (1998); the Pilgrim Award for criticism and scholarship from the Science Fiction Research Association (1987); and the Eaton Award for critical work on science fiction (1981). A native of Missouri, Wolfe received his doctorate in English from the University of Chicago.

## FOREWORD

We met in a bedroom of the Royal York Hotel in Toronto in 1971, at the first meeting of the Science Fiction Research Association. There had been an earlier, organizing meeting in New York; it is remembered, in part, for the blackboard exhortation by Dena Brown (then married to Charles Brown, who not long before had started publishing *Locus*, still the main news and reviews magazine of the science fiction field): 'Let's take science fiction out of the classroom and put it back in the gutter where it belongs.' In those days, some fans considered the embrace of academia next to the kiss of death.

That was where we were, in Toronto, caught between our pulp traditions, our love for Edgar Rice Burroughs and A. Merritt and E. E. 'Doc' Smith, and the realization that science fiction was capable of greater sophistication and that it was worthy of study, of scholarship, even of being taught to students. We had already seen evidence that it could be literature in the pages of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, of *Galaxy*, even of *Astounding*; Kurt Vonnegut Jr was showing that science fiction could break out of the backwaters of general expectations into the eddies of the mainstream, even into best-seller lists, and earn critical acclaim as well, even if it meant taking the label off the books.

The writer and editor Judith Merrill was there in Toronto; and the critic Leslie Fiedler, a symbol of the new academic acceptance of science fiction; and Gerald Jonas, who was working on an article for *New Yorker*, had published a science-fiction story himself and later would become the science-fiction book-review editor of the *New York Times*. Robert Scholes showed up at a later meeting, I think. He was another academic convert who would present a series of insightful lectures three years later at Notre Dame (and get them published under the title of *Structural Fabulation*, just as Kingsley Amis had broken the critical ice in a series of lectures at Princeton a decade earlier, published as *New Maps of Hell*).

I do not remember who else was in the hotel room in Toronto, but Phil Klass was there. He had been one of those authors, writing as William Tenn,

who had revealed science fiction's potential; he had given up writing to teach English at Penn State University. I remember Phil's presentation in Toronto when he compared his encounter with science fiction with his first glimpse of the model of the solar system at the Hayden Planetarium, the same experience of knee-trembling epiphany of scope. But most of all I remember standing with Phil in front of a window looking out upon the Royal York Hotel grounds and Phil saying, 'We should come up with a canon before someone else does.'

That was where science fiction was back in 1971, filled with hope and anticipation but lacking almost all the tools of scholarship, the reference works, the indexes, the histories, the encyclopedias, the studies and the canon. The present volume, with its list of distinguished international scholars and published by a university press whose parent institution goes back to the Middle Ages, is a symbol of how far science-fiction scholarship has come in thirty years.

Where did it come from?

It all started in the pulp magazines invented in 1896 by Frank A. Munsey. Mostly filled with adventure stories in a variety of locales and periods, they became more specialized beginning in 1915 with the introduction of *Detective Story Monthly* and then *Western Story Magazine* in 1919 and *Love Stories* in 1921. Hugo Gernsback, an immigrant from Luxembourg, had been publishing popular-science magazines with science fiction stories in them. In 1926 he mustered his resources (and his courage) and founded *Amazing Stories*. Soon competitors began to appear, fans and new writers were attracted and a genre was born.

Science-fiction stories and science-fiction writers had been around before, but what they wrote was not quite science fiction and it was not even called science fiction (Gernsback gave it, in 1929, the name that would stick): Verne's adventure novels were called 'voyages extraordinaires' and Wells's stories and novels were 'scientific romances'. Although some critics have claimed that the direction in which Gernsback moved the new category was a blind alley and that it would have been better existing as a kind of mainstream variant, it is difficult to imagine how science fiction would otherwise have developed its sense of identity, a body of informed readers, shared assumptions that sometimes rigidified into conventions and a dialogue among writers, editors and readers that carried science fiction onward and upward.

Of course that is what the critics have attacked: the sense of identity that led to inwardness, insularity, ghetto-ism, fandom, conventions, self-congratulatory awards and all the other paraphernalia. Better, they say, the freedom, the lack of cohesion, the individual artistry of the mainstream.

Rightly or wrongly, the Gernsback tradition, modified by a succession of influential magazine editors beginning with John W. Campbell at *Astounding/Analog* and passing through Tony Boucher and J. Francis McComas of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Horace Gold and later Frederik Pohl of *Galaxy* and Michael Moorcock of *New Worlds*, shaped the way science fiction developed. That is what we deal with today, even when the mainstream seems to have broadened to accept the fanciful, and writers who have emerged from the Gernsback tradition seem to be free to venture where they will.

What may be significant, but has been largely overlooked, is that virtually all of the pulp magazines have disappeared except the science-fiction magazines. My conclusion from this (influenced, no doubt, by my early recognition that the science-fiction magazines were different from the other pulps) is that science fiction only seemed to be a part of the pulp-magazine tradition. Rather than emerging from the adventure pulps, science fiction was an outgrowth of the popular-science movement. Even today, *Analog* carries the designation: 'Science Fiction and Fact'. While the other category pulp magazines were supplanted by television, science fiction continues (diminished in circulation but surviving), even in the face of burgeoning science-fiction programming in film and on television.

The teaching of science fiction was started by fans. Sam Moskowitz taught evening classes at the City College of New York in 1953 and 1954. Mark Hillegas taught the first regularly scheduled course at Colgate University (New York State), in 1962, followed by Jack Williamson at Eastern New Mexico University and Tom Clareson at the College of Wooster (Ohio). From there courses proliferated, not only in English departments but in physics, chemistry, sociology, anthropology, history and others. Such courses are both less adventurous and better organized today.

Scholarship was another extraordinary journey. A single academic study, by Philip Babcock Gove, was published in 1941, followed in the postwar period by J. O. Bailey's *Pilgrims Through Space and Time* and Marjorie Hope Nicolson's *Voyages to the Moon*. But most of the tools of scholarship, like the postwar publication of science fiction in books, was provided by amateurs, by dedicated fans, some of them ascending to scholarly objectivity, such as Donald H. Tuck, Donald B. Day, the New England Science Fiction Association, Everett F. Bleiler and Sam Moskowitz.

Academic journals were created, first by fans in academic positions, then by more traditional scholars; Tom Clareson created *Extrapolation* in 1959, and *Foundation* began in Britain in 1972 and *Science-Fiction Studies* in 1973. All have moved around and changed editors from time to time, but they manage to persist and serve slightly different communities. Academic conferences on science fiction, that began with a section at MLA in the late 1950s, grew

into the Science Fiction Research Association's annual meeting, the Eaton Conference at the University of California, Riverside and the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, now in Fort Lauderdale; more specialized conferences now are held frequently throughout the year, and in recent years there have been important conferences in Britain, France, Greece and elsewhere.

Just as the mainstream publishers took over the task of publishing from the fans, academic scholars began to assume their traditional roles in the field, bringing to the study greater rigour, better focus and more resources. But even the scholarly field, inside and outside the academy, remains motivated more by a love for the field itself than occurs in other disciplines. Some science-fiction academic publishing houses have come and gone, including Advent (a fan publishing enterprise), Starmont House and Borgo Press. Greenwood Press and McFarland are still active in the field, and a number of university presses have been receptive to science-fiction texts, including Oxford University Press, one of the pioneers, beginning in the 1960s with Bruce Franklin's *Future Perfect*, I. F. Clarke's *Voices Prophesying War* and Mark Hillegas's *The Future as Nightmare*, a series of single-author studies in the 1980s, and continuing with Edward James's *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* in 1994. Today both Wesleyan and Liverpool University Presses maintain specialist science-fiction series, and Cambridge University Press has commissioned this book.

Now we enter a new period marked by general acceptance of science fiction as a respectable area of scholarship, widespread popularity of science fiction in film (the top ten best-grossing films of all time are mostly science fiction or fantasy) and the approximately two thousand books of science fiction and fantasy published each year (many of them, to be sure, and often the most popular, media tie-ins). But we now have most of the basic critical tools we need. John Clute and Peter Nicholls have produced substantial encyclopedias; Hal Hall, indexes to reviews; William Contento, indexes to collections and anthologies; and substantial contributions also from Marshall Tymn, and Mike Ashley in Great Britain. And the scholars are gathering.

James Gunn

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## CHRONOLOGY

- 1516 Thomas More, *Utopia*
- 1627 Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*
- 1634 Johannes Kepler, *A Dream*
- 1638 Francis Godwin, *The Man in the Moone*
- 1686 Bernard de Fontenelle, *Discussion of the Plurality of Worlds*
- 1741 Ludvig Holberg, *Nils Klim*
- 1752 Voltaire, *Micromégas*
- 1771 Louis-Sebastien Mercier, *The Year 2440*
- 1805 Cousin de Grainville, *The Last Man*
- 1818 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
- 1826 Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*
- 1827 Jane Webb Loudon, *The Mummy! A Tale of the Twenty-Second Century*
- 1848 Edgar Allan Poe, *Eureka*
- 1865 Jules Verne, *From the Earth to the Moon*
- 1870 Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*
- 1871 George T. Chesney, 'The Battle of Dorking'
- Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race*
- 1887 Camille Flammarion, *Lumen*
- W. H. Hudson, *A Crystal Age*
- 1888 Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*
- 1889 Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*
- 1890 William Morris, *News from Nowhere*
- 1895 H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*
- 1896 H. G. Wells, *The Island of Dr Moreau*
- 1897 Kurd Lasswitz, *On Two Planets*
- 1898 H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*
- 1901 H. G. Wells, *The First Men in the Moon*
- M. P. Shiel, *The Purple Cloud*



## Chronology

- 1905 Rudyard Kipling, 'With the Night Mail'
- 1907 Jack London, *The Iron Heel*
- 1909 E. M. Forster, 'The Machine Stops'
- 1911 Hugo Gernsback, *Ralph 124C 41+*
- 1912 J. D. Beresford, *The Hampdenshire Wonder*  
Garrett P. Serviss, *The Second Deluge*  
Edgar Rice Burroughs, 'Under the Moons of Mars'
- 1914 George Allan England, *Darkness and Dawn*
- 1915 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*  
Jack London, *The Scarlet Plague*
- 1918 Abraham Merritt, 'The Moon Pool'
- 1920 Karel Čapek, *R. U. R.: A Fantastic Melodrama*  
W. E. B. Du Bois, 'The Comet'  
David Lindsay, *A Voyage to Arcturus*
- 1923 E. V. Odle, *The Clockwork Man*
- 1924 Yevgeny Zamiatin, *We*
- 1926 Hugo Gernsback starts *Amazing Stories*  
*Metropolis* (dir. Fritz Lang)
- 1928 E. E. Smith, *The Skylark of Space*
- 1930 Olaf Stapledon, *Last and First Men*  
John Taine, *The Iron Star*  
*Astounding Science-Fiction* launched
- 1932 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*
- 1934 Murray Leinster, 'Sidewise in Time'  
Stanley G. Weinbaum, 'A Martian Odyssey'
- 1935 Olaf Stapledon, *Odd John*
- 1936 *Things to Come* (dir. William Cameron Menzies)
- 1938 John W. Campbell, Jr. (as Don A. Stuart), 'Who Goes There?'  
Lester del Rey, 'Helen O'Loy'
- 1939 Stanley G. Weinbaum, *The New Adam*
- 1940 Robert A. Heinlein, 'The Roads Must Roll'  
Robert A. Heinlein, "'If This Goes On —'"  
A. E. Van Vogt, *Slan* (book 1946)
- 1941 Isaac Asimov, 'Nightfall'  
L. Sprague De Camp, *Lest Darkness Fall*  
Robert A. Heinlein, 'Universe'  
Theodore Sturgeon, 'Microcosmic God'
- 1942 Isaac Asimov, 'Foundation' (book 1951)  
Robert A. Heinlein, *Beyond This Horizon* (book 1948)
- 1944 C. L. Moore, 'No Woman Born'