

MENG 6610

Science Fiction

Summer 2024

Instructor:

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Course Description:

This course examines the genre of science fiction (as well as other genres that are often grouped together under the term speculative fiction). Science fiction is much more broad than spaceships and time travel or dragons and unicorns. Science fiction is different from other genres in its emphasis on ideas and examining what it means to be human within the context of the scientific worldview. We will study key texts and key ideas, striving to understand the larger questions of how to define science fiction, how has the scope of the genre changed over time, and what are the boundaries of the genre. The class is participation-oriented and considerable readings are required.

Texts:

Selected readings will be available on the Canvas online learning system.

Other texts will be obtained from Internet sources. Some purchases for the Amazon Kindle or a similiar product will be necessary.

These are the texts that must be purchased or obtained otherwise:

"The Churn," a James S. A. Corey novella (2014)
Amazon Kindle. ASIN: B00I82884W

"Enemy Mine" by Barry B. Longyear (1979)
Amazon Kindle. ASIN: B007AIPP6E

"Elder Race" by Adrian Tchaikovsky (2021)
Amazon Kindle. ASIN: B08QGJHS7N

"That Leviathan, Whom Thou Hast Made" by Eric James Stone (2010)
Amazon Kindle. ASIN: B004PLNL2E

"Emergency Skin" by N. K. Jemisin (2019)
Amazon Kindle. ASIN: B07VFMFPP4

Ted Chiang, "The Lifecycle of Software Objects" (2010)
Found in Ted Chaing, *Exhalation: Stories* (2019), ISBN-10: 1101947888

Grading Policies:

Grades will be determined on the following basis:

Weekly Papers	50%
Book Presentation	20%
Term Paper	30%

Grade range:

A 94-100	B 83-86	C 73-76	D 63-66
A- 90-93	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 60-62
B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D+ 67-69	F 0-59

Readings:

This class is discussion oriented. Each student will be expected to have completed the readings listed in the schedule for that day. We will discuss the readings and every student is expected to pose a pertinent question or make a statement about the readings as a spur to our class conversation. In the schedule, each reading entry is also listed with where to find the reading. Some of the readings are files located in our class on Canvas. The other sources are either found at a web address or through a purchase for the Amazon Kindle. If you have other sources for the readings, you may use those sources.

Learning Outcomes:

Literature Emphasis Learning Outcomes:

Student will demonstrate...

1. The ability to gather, analyze, and communicate information and insights critically.
2. The ability to closely read and analyze texts within historical contexts and critical frameworks.
3. The ability to apply current scholarship, practices, and/or theoretical and critical perspectives in their own writings.
4. The ability to use discipline-specific terminology and conventions in their written, oral, and/or multimodal presentations.

Weekly Papers:

Every week, starting the second week of class, you are expected to turn in a two page paper (500 words) that reflects on what we studied during the previous week of class. What are your reactions to the readings and our class discussions? (LO 1, 2, 5)

Term Paper:

On the last day of class, a 12-page, double-spaced term paper is due that reflects autobiographically about your personal relationship with the field of science fiction. You can also consider the other genres of speculative fiction (fantasy, horror, and similar flavors of young adult and middle grade fare). When did you become aware of science fiction or related genres and began to interact with it both as a written form and in media? How have you intellectually interacted with science fiction? How have your views changed over time? (LO 1, 2, 4, 5) While this paper will be very personal, it is also a research paper and must include at least eight sources.

Book Presentation:

Each student must select a science fiction novel to read. On an assigned date, the student will give a 15-20 minute in-class presentation on their novel. Describe the content of the novel and explain how it fits within the field of science fiction. The purpose of this exercise is to introduce the class to a broader variety of science fiction literature and the context of these novels in the history of science fiction. Each novel must be approved by the instructor. You might want to look at <http://www.npr.org/2011/08/11/139085843/your-picks-top-100-science-fiction-fantasy-books> for ideas of which of novel you want to read.

Grading Criteria Used for MENG Essays:

A: An essay or paper in this category:

- is well developed and well organized
- clearly illustrates and develops key ideas
- displays a high degree of inventiveness & originality
- displays a sophisticated and superior use of language
- demonstrates syntactic variety
- is virtually free from errors in mechanics, usage, sentence structure, and diction

B: An essay or paper in this category:

- is well organized and developed, though it may have small flaws in organization or paragraphing
- illustrates and develops some key ideas
- displays good control of language and a consistent tone
- demonstrates some syntactic variety
- is generally free from errors in mechanics, usage, sentence structure, and diction

C: An essay or paper in this category: (NOTE: ONLY Grades of B- or Higher Count Toward Degree Requirements)

- is adequately well developed and organized
- illustrates and develops one or two key ideas
- displays capable and accurate use of language
- may display occasional errors in mechanics, usage, sentence structure, and diction, but not a consistent pattern of such errors

Academic Dishonesty:

As specified in PPM 6-22 IV D, cheating and plagiarism violate the Student Code. Plagiarism is “the unacknowledged (uncited) use of any other person’s or group’s ideas or work.” Students found guilty of cheating or plagiarism are subject to failure of a specific assignment, or, in more serious cases, failure of the entire course and referral to the MENG Program Director.

Cell Phones, Texting, Tablets, and Laptops:

Put your cell phones on vibrate. Try to avoid leaving class to take a call, but an occasional emergency is understandable. There will be NO texting in this class. Laptops, tablets, or other personal digital tools may be used to take notes or look up material relevant to class discussions. No other uses of electronic tools will be tolerated.

Campus Closure:

In the event of an extended campus closure, please look at your Weber State email in order for instructions on how we will continue the class via email and the Canvas online course system.

Absence Policy:

This is a graduate course and attendance is expected. If you miss a class, regardless of whether it was for a health reasons or not, you are expected to turn in a three-page, double-spaced paper on the readings for the class you missed.

Students with Disabilities:

Any student requiring accommodations or services due to a disability must contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in Room 181 of the Student Service Center. SSD can also arrange to provide materials (including this syllabus) in alternative formats if necessary. PPM 3-34 notes: “When students seek accommodation in a regularly scheduled course, they have the responsibility to make such requests at the Center for Students with Disabilities before the beginning of the quarter [semester] in which the accommodation is being requested. When a student fails to make such arrangements, interim accommodations can be made by the instructor, pending the determination of the request for a permanent accommodation.”

Core Beliefs:

According to PPM 6-22 IV, students are to “[d]etermine, before the last day to drop courses without penalty, when course requirements conflict with a student's core beliefs. If there is such a conflict, the student should consider dropping the class. A student who finds this solution impracticable may request a resolution from the instructor. This policy does not oblige the instructor to grant the request, except in those cases when a denial would be arbitrary and capricious or illegal. This request must be made to the instructor in writing and the student must deliver a copy of the request to the office of the department head. The student's request must articulate the burden the requirement would place on the student's beliefs.”

Secondary Sources:

- *SFE: The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* at <http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/>.
- James Gunn, Matthew Candelaria, Brian Aldiss and Judith Berman, *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction* (2005).
- Thomas J. Roberts, *An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction* (1990).
- Brian Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: A History of Science Fiction* (1986).

Schedule:

June 25 (Tuesday) - *Introduction to Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction*

Terry Bisson wrote a dialogue-only short story in 1991 called "They're Made Out of Meat," which was made into an award-winning short video.

Watch in class: "They're Made Out of Meat"

SF music videos

Hugo Gernsback coined the original term of science fiction, though he initially combined the two words into a single word: "By 'scientification,' ... I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story---a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision." (1929)

How do we define science fiction? How is it different from its sister genres, fantasy and horror?

Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

Arthur C. Clarke's three laws:

1. When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong.
2. The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.
3. Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

June 27 (Thursday) - *Early Science Fiction*

Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) was an important mathematician and astronomer who figured out the mathematical laws of planetary motion. This corrected the serious mathematical flaws in Copernicus's heliocentric theory of the solar system and laid the foundation for the work on gravity and motion by Isaac Newton. He also wrote one of the first works that can be considered science fiction. A question to ponder: what is science fiction?

I should point out that referring to Kepler's work as science fiction is anachronistic in that the term science fiction was not coined until 1929. Before that date such stories were often called fantasy, fantastical, or scientific romances (the term romance has changed over time and this use of the word refers to a literary genre).

While this class is primarily about science fiction, that genre exists within a larger genre of speculative fiction. Within that umbrella are the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. These three genres are often all read by the same group of fans. In a pithy summary, science fiction is what we think might happen in the future, fantasy is what can never happen, and horror is what we fear will happen.

- **Read** "Kepler's Somnium: Science Fiction and the Renaissance Scientist" - available online at

<http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/8/christianson8art.htm>

- **Read** "A Variety of Readers" chapter from *Junk Fiction*
JunkFictionChapter.pdf (Canvas)

David Brin (1950-) is an astrophysicist and award-winning science fiction writer. He is considered one of the top "hard" science fiction writers in the field.

- **Read** "The Heresy of Science Fiction," by David Brin
DavidBrin_TheHeresyOfScienceFiction.pdf (Canvas)

Jules Verne (1828-1905) was a French science fiction writer who was famous for the detailed care he put into his extrapolations. *From the Earth to the Moon* was his imaginative effort to figure out how to send people to the Moon. He put such care into his thinking that he picked the ideal spot for such a cannon and chose Cape Canaveral in Florida, which is where NASA later located its launch facilities. His travelers do not land on the moon, but loop around it and return to Earth.

- **Read** first three chapters of Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* - available online at
http://www.online-literature.com/verne/earth_to_moon/

July 2 (Tuesday) - *Pulp Fiction and "The Golden Age"*

H.G. Wells (1866-1946) basically invented the time travel story, alien invasion story, invisible person story, biological horror story, and space travel story in a seven-year period. This does not mean that he was the first, but his examples essentially established these sub-genres to science fiction.

- **Read** *War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells (1898)

Available online at

<http://www.fourmilab.ch/etexts/www/warworlds/warw.html>

Isaac Asimov (1920-1992) was a famous science fiction writer and prolific writer of books on science and other non-fiction books. His "Nightfall," published when he was just 21, has been lauded as the best science fiction story ever written. That honor was based on a vote of his peers that only covered science fiction published from 1929 to 1964.

- **Read** "Nightfall" by Isaac Asimov (1941)

1941IsaacAsimovNightfall.pdf (Canvas)

Ray Bradbury (1920-2012) was primarily a prolific writer of fantasy and horror short stories, though he also was a screenwriter, and wrote several novels. *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962) are the best known. His story "Mars is Heaven!" was later renamed "The Third Expedition" and compiled with related stories into *The Martian Chronicles* (1950).

- **Read** "Mars is Heaven!" by Ray Bradbury (1948)

1948PlanetStories.pdf (Canvas)

July 4 (Thursday) - Holiday (no class)

July 9 (Tuesday) - *Space Travel and Aliens*

Science fiction has often been characterized as the genre that relied on evoking a “sense of wonder,” just as thrillers thrill you and horror stories are supposed to horrify or scare you. How do you react to the following stories?

- **Read** "Devolution" by Edmund Hamilton (1936)
1936AmazingStories.pdf (Canvas)

- **Read** “Arena,” by Fredric Brown (1944)
1944FredericBrownArena.pdf (Canvas)

Robert A. Heinlein (1907-1988) was a giant among science fiction writers in the mid-twentieth century. This story was published in 1947 in the *Saturday Evening Post*, one of the prestigious “slick” magazines, rather than the pulp magazines where most science fiction was published.

- **Read** “The Green Hills of Earth” by Robert A. Heinlein (1947)
1947RobertA.HeinleinGreenHillsOfEarth.pdf (Canvas)

Orson Scott Card (1951-) has been a prolific writer for the past four decades. His *Ender's Game* series won numerous awards and the novel has sold millions of copies. His publisher has also given away many copies of the novel in an effort to use the novel as a “gateway drug” to draw more readers into speculative fiction.

- **Read** "Ender's Game" by Orson Scott Card (1977)
Original short story available at
<http://www.hatrack.com/osc/stories/enders-game.shtml>

July 11 (Thursday) - *Horror and other SF Genres*

H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) was an influential horror novelist who usually wrote cosmic horror. He was very influential in supporting upcoming writers. Many of his stories were loosely related in a dark universe called the Cthulhu Mythos.

- **Read** "The Dunwich Horror" by H. P. Lovecraft (1929)
Online at <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/50133>

Robert E. Howard (1906-1936) was a prolific writer of pulp fiction and is best known for his swords and sorcery character Conan.

- **Read** "Pigeons from Hell" by Robert E. Howard (1938)
Online at
<https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0600721h.html>
or at
<https://archive.org/details/the-horror-stories-of-robert-e-howard/page/n1/mode/2up>

Arthur C. Clarke (1917-2008) was one of the most prominent science fiction and science fact writers of the twentieth century. He excelled at short stories as well as in novels. His homosexuality was well-known in the science fiction community, though he denied it. Born in England, he spent most of his life living in Sri Lanka.

- **Read** "The Nine Billion Names of God" by Arthur C. Clarke (1953)
1953TheNineBillionNamesOfGod.pdf (Canvas)

George R. R. Martin (1948-) is a well-respected science fiction writer and screenwriter. His "Sandkings" won both a Hugo and Nebula awards and was filmed as the first episode of the revived *Outer Limits* television series in 1995. His *Game of Thrones* fantasy series catapulted him into superstardom.

- **Read** "Sandkings," by George R. R. Martin (1979)
1979GeorgeRRMartinSandkings.pdf (Canvas)

Kate Wilhelm (1928-2018) was a Hugo Award-winning author who was very influential with the annual Clarion Workshop that she co-founded to foster new science fiction writers.

- **Read** "Naming the Flowers" by Kate Wilhelm (1993)
1993KateWilhelmNamingTheFlowers.pdf (Canvas)

July 16 (Tuesday) - *Media*

The Arthur C. Clarke short story, "The Sentinel," was the inspiration for the acclaimed 1968 movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Clarke also cowrote the screenplay and wrote a novelization of the movie.

- **Read** "The Sentinel" by Arthur C. Clarke (1951)
1951ArthurCClarkeTheSentinal.pdf (Canvas)

James S. A. Corey is a pseudonym for collaborators Daniel Abraham (1969-) and Ty Franck (1969-), authors of the science fiction series *The Expanse*, which is both a successful book series and a television series. The two writers also published short stories and novellas that rounded out the series. "The Churn" is set before the series began, an origin story for Amos Burton, one of the main characters of the series.

- **Read** "The Churn," a James S. A. Corey novella (2014)
Amazon Kindle. ASIN: B00I82884W

Barry B. Longyear (1942-) won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer in 1980, as well as the Nebula and Hugo awards for "Enemy Mine." A 1985 movie was made based on the novella, the result of which Longyear has vociferously condemned.

- **Read** "Enemy Mine" by Barry B. Longyear (1979)
Amazon Kindle. ASIN: B007AIPP6E

June 18 (Thursday) - *Immortality*

James Blish (1921-1975) was a prominent science fiction writer with a background in microbiology and zoology. He is best known for his *Cities in Flight* novels and his 1952 novella, "Surface Tension." It helps when reading the story to realize that the characters are microscopic.

- **Read** "Surface Tension," by James Blish (1952)
Galaxy_1952_08_JamesBlishSurfaceTension.pdf (Canvas)

P. J. Plauger (1944-) was not a prolific science fiction writer, even though he won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Author in 1975. His most well-known story was "Child of All Ages."

- **Read** "Child of All Ages" by P. J. Plauger (1975)
1975PJPlaugerChildOfAllAges.pdf (Canvas)

July 23 (Tuesday) - *Science Fiction and What it Means to be Human*

Daniel Keyes (1927-2014) was not a very prolific writer, but his “Flowers for Algernon” was so successful that he later turned it into a novel and a play. A movie was also made based on the story. An editor for a science fiction magazine wanted Daniel Keyes to change the ending of his story, but Keyes refused and took the story to another magazine.

- **Read** “Flowers for Algernon” by Daniel Keyes (1959)
1959FlowersForAlgernon.pdf (Canvas)

Octavia E. Butler (1947-2006) was an African-American science fiction writer. While often included among lists of gay science fiction writers, her own response to such listings was to feel both honored and amused, but she denied that she was gay. Most of her impressive output were novels and she wrote few short stories. “Bloodchild” won both Hugo and Nebula awards for 1984. She also received a MacArthur “Genius” Grant.

- **Read** “Bloodchild” by Octavia E. Butler (1984)
1984OctaviaButlerBloodchild.pdf (Canvas)

Rebecca Roanhorse (1971-) is a Native American and African American science fiction writer. This short story won both Hugo and Nebula awards in 2017. She also received the John W. Campbell Award for best new writer in 2018.

- **Read** “Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience™” by Rebecca Roanhorse (2017)
Available online at <https://www.apex-magazine.com/welcome-to-your-authentic-indian-experience/>

Students #1 and #2 book presentations

July 25 (Thursday) - *Utopias and Dystopias*

- **Read** H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895)
Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/35>

Adrian Tchaikovsky (1972-) is a British writer of Czech descent. A prolific writer of both science fiction and fantasy, his training in entomology and anthropology comes through in his writing.

- **Read** "Elder Race" by Adrian Tchaikovsky (2021)
Amazon Kindle. ASIN: B08QGJHS7N

Students #3 and #4 book presentations

July 30 (Tuesday) - *Alternate History*

Alternate history is a sub-genre of science fiction which speculates about how history could have turned out differently. Time travel may or may not be part of the story. Harry Turtledove (1949-) is the premiere alternate history writer.

- **Read** "The Road Not Taken" by Harry Turtledove (1985)
1985HarryTurtledoveTheRoadNotTaken.pdf (Canvas)

The following novel, written in the form of a history book from an alternate timeline, won the 2010 Sidewise Award in Alternate History.

- **Read** one chapter and the Author's Afterword from *When Angels Wept: A What-If History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* by Eric G. Swedin (2010)
2010EricSwedinWhenAngelsWeptChapterConclusion.pdf (Canvas)

Nancy Kress (1948-) is a respected science fiction and fantasy writer who remains a prolific contributor.

- **Read** "Little Animals" by Nancy Kress (2021)
https://clarkesworldmagazine.com/kress_06_21/

Students #5 and #6 book presentations

August 1 (Thursday) - *Science Fiction and Religion*

Ted Chiang (1967) is an Asian-American writer who only works in shorter forms of science fiction. He writes less than one story a year and that story is usually nominated for numerous awards. His short story, "Story of Your Life," was the basis for the 2016 film *Arrival*.

- **Read** "Hell Is the Absence of God" by Ted Chiang (2001)
2001TedChiangHellIsTheAbsenceOfGod.pdf (Canvas)

Eric James Stone (1967-) is a Utah-based science fiction writer who won the 2004 Writers of the Future contest and his 2010 novelette "That Leviathan, Whom Thou Hast Made" won the Nebula award for that year.

- **Read** "That Leviathan, Whom Thou Hast Made" by Eric James Stone (2010)
Amazon Kindle. ASIN: B004PLNL2E

Students #7 and #8 book presentations

August 6 (Tuesday) - *Hard Science Fiction*

- **Read** "The Crystal Spheres" by David Brin (1984, 2018)
<https://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/fiction/the-crystal-spheres/>

Larry Niven (1938-) is a prominent hard science fiction writer, best known for his *Ringworld* series and his collaborations with the late Jerry Pournelle (1933-2017). The short story "Neutron Star" won a Hugo award and is set in Niven's *Known Space* universe. "Inconstant Moon" also won a Hugo award.

- **Read** "Neutron Star" by Larry Niven (1966)
1966LarryNivenNeutronStar.pdf (Canvas)
- **Read** "Inconstant Moon" by Larry Niven (1971)
1971LarryNivenInconstantMoon.pdf (Canvas)

Greg Bear (1951-) is a prolific hard science fiction writer. His "Blood Music" won both the Hugo and the Nebula awards for best novelette in 1983.

- **Read** "Blood Music" by Greg Bear (1983)
1983GregBearBloodMusic.pdf (Canvas)

Students #9 and #10 book presentations

August 8 (Thursday) - *Science Fiction and Computers*

Murray Leinster was a pseudonym for Will F. Jenkins (1896-1975). A prolific writer of all forms of pulp fiction, except for romance (though not for lack of trying to write in that form), his favorite field was science fiction. He was also a successful inventor. When reading his short story, "A Logic Named Joe," remember that it was published in 1946, before the word computer meant what it means today.

- **Read** "A Logic Named Joe" by Murray Leinster (1946)

Available online at

http://www.baen.com/chapters/W200506/0743499107___2.htm

- **Read** "Murray Leinster and 'A Logic Named Joe'," by Eric G. Swedin and David L. Ferro (2011)

Pages 54-67 of 1946FerroSwedinAnalysisALogicNamedJoe.pdf (Canvas)

N. K. Jemisin (1972-) is a psychologist and African-American science fiction writer. Each of the novels in her *Broken Earth* trilogy won Hugo awards, the only time this has been accomplished. Her novelette, "Emergency Skin," won a Hugo in 2019.

- **Read** "Emergency Skin" by N. K. Jemisin (2019)

Amazon Kindle. ASIN: B07VFMFPP4

Ted Chiang won both a Locus award and a Hugo award for the following novella.

- **Read** Ted Chiang, "The Lifecycle of Software Objects" (2010)

Found in Ted Chiang, *Exhalation: Stories* (2019), ISBN-10: 1101947888

Students #11 and #12 book presentations

August 13 (Tuesday) - To be assigned later

August 15 (Thursday) - Spare day