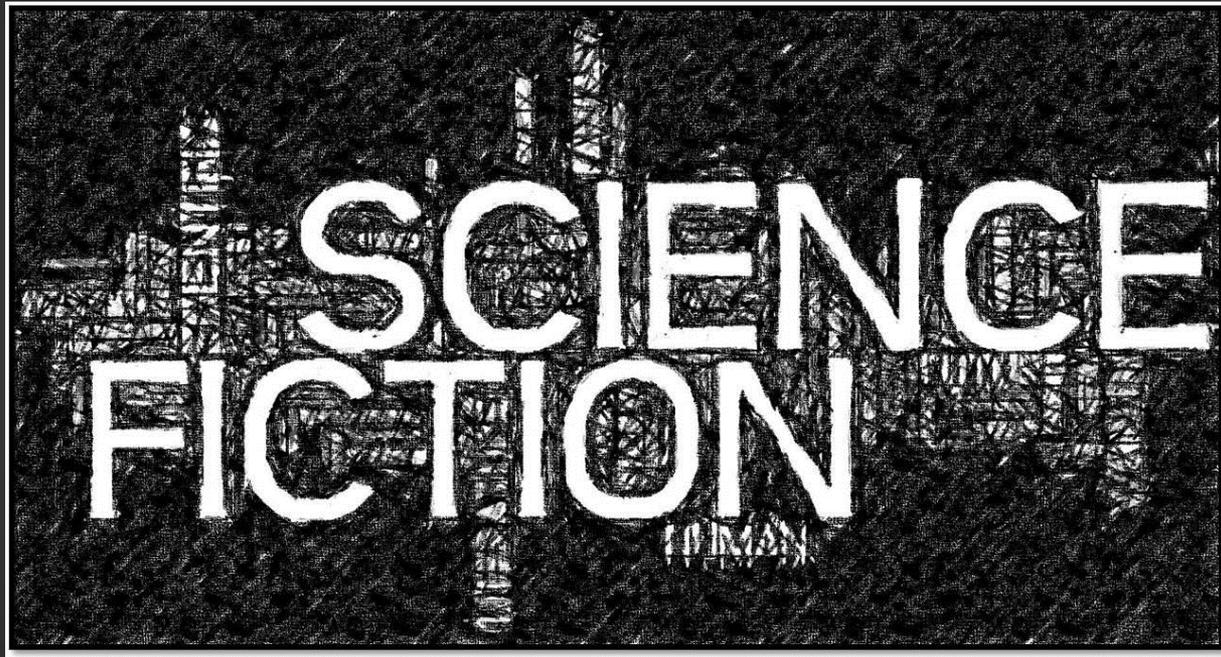


# What is Science Fiction?

Part 1

What *is*



???

**I don't know how to  
define it, but I know it  
when I see it...**





# Goals of This Unit

To understand science fiction basics such as science fiction lingo, concepts, themes, and types.

# Defining science fiction

- SF is a prose narrative that deals with a situation that could not happen in the world, as we know it, but deals with it so that it appears scientifically plausible and realistic.

# Defining science fiction

- SF is often confused with **fantasy** (does not give rational explanation for its wild and often visionary scenes) while SF must provide some sort of scientific rationale to hold the reader's sense of belief.

# Defining science fiction

- SF is often confused with the **myth** (a work whose major intent is the expression of that which is universal in man's experience.)

# Defining science fiction

- SF is often confused with the **horror story** (its purpose is to frighten or shock the reader)

# Defining science fiction

- SF is often confused with stories of the **occult** or **supernatural** (pure fantasy) but they do not attempt to provide scientific rationale for unrealistic occurrences.

# If we can't define it, then let's categorize it! (Types of Science Fiction)

- Hard SF
- Soft/Social SF
- Science Fantasy
- Fantasy

While science fiction stories might lean toward one category more than others, science fiction stories are a blend of different types.

# Hard SF

major impetus for exploration involves hard, physical sciences such as: chemistry, biology, physics, astronomy, geology, and possibly math, and the technology associated with and growing out of them.

- Gadget stories – a main interest in machines or technological devices.
- Extrapolative stories – the current knowledge from one of the sciences used to logically project what might be the next steps taken in that science.
- Speculative stories – projected further than extrapolative stories and consequently have some difficulty in projecting the development logically.

# Soft SF

- major impetus for exploration are sciences focusing on human activities and not as capable of prediction as the physical sciences such as: sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, theology, linguistics, and some approaches to myth.

- Extrapolative stories – same as Hard SF

- Speculative stories – same as Hard SF

# Science Fantasy

those stories which, assuming an orderly universe with regular and discoverable natural laws, propose that the natural laws are different from those we derive from our current sciences as: Para physics, telepathy, and the laws of magic.

- Alternative stories – where underlying natural laws are of different kind from those we know; telepathy and laws of magic belong here.
- Counter-science Fantasy – uses scientific information which has been shown incorrect at the time a story is written (Note – the science current at the time a story is written must be taken into account in classifying, not the science current at the time one reads the story.)
- Sword and Sorcery – primarily adventure; culture requires the use of swords and other primitive weapons rather than modern weapons and, usually, laws of magic work in the same way.

# Fantasy

(controversial) universal laws are implied; the reader can formulate laws governing the fantasy world, but the author gives little or no assistance.

# Common Themes of Science Fiction

- Man vs. His own technology
- Man vs. Extraterrestrial technology
- The evolution and growth of human civilization
- Humanity's social responsibilities
- Humanity's place in the universe

# What to Expect in Science Fiction

- Science knowledge helps, but is not required.
- Authors do not always explain all of their fancy technology.
- Often, authors spend a great deal of time world-building.

# Trust the Book

Trust that the author will explain what is important, but might not explain what is not important. And that's okay.

# The Origin of the term SF

It was not used to describe the genre for several years.

# The Origin of the term SF

The first popular terms for SF were the French “**voyage extraordinaire**” and “**voyage excentrique**” because of Jules Verne’s *Five Weeks in a Balloon* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. In England they were called “**scientific romances**”. When H.G. Wells’ stories came along, they too were called “**scientific stories**” or “**scientific fantasies**”. This term lingered until 1930.

# The Origin of the term SF

When pulp magazines began publishing science adventures stories, new terms were introduced. Frank Munsey, the editor of *Argosy*, referred to them as “**off-trail stories**”, then “**impossible stories**”. The term closest to present-day SF was introduced by Hugo Gernsback “**scientification**” in 1924 when he began publishing the magazine *Amazing Stories*. It wasn't until 1929 that Gernsback used “**science fiction**” when published his new magazine, *Science Wonder Stories*. Now it is affectionately termed **SF** (abbreviation).

# Reputation of SF

For most of its long history SF has had a poor reputation. It has been described as trashy literature because of its “creaking plots and cheap sensationalism, characters of cardboard-glue, a prose style to set one’s teeth on edge, and perhaps a degrading obsession with gadgets and machines.” Often, this description is painfully true.

# Reputation of SF

The type of SF that deserves this criticism is the *space opera* - a main brand image of SF. This is the type of SF that the “lay” population thinks makes up all the genre: unfortunately, their confusion is aggravated by many of the early pulp magazines as well as some of the poorer SF films and TV programs today. SF termed *space opera* gets its name primarily because it suffers from much of the same lack of creativity and originality that marked the early westerns or horse operas.

