Introduction to Science Fiction

Science Fiction genre novels are literature about the future, telling stories of the marvels we hope to see, or for our descendants to see tomorrow, in the next century, or in the limitless duration of time. It doesn’t just have to be about science, though. It has been described quite suitably as: “A controlled way to think and dream about the future.” It can be about people, ideas, and where the world is going. It can also be about where people have already been.


**Definition**

Science fiction, sometimes called SF (meaning Speculative Fiction), is a genre of fiction dealing principally with the impact of actual or imagined science on society or individuals or having a scientific factor as an essential orienting component. This is a form of writing that is concerned with a world removed in some fundamental way from our own, whether in time, attitude or knowledge.

--Science Fiction is hard to truly define with an overlapping of other genres that can include fiction, nonfiction, fantasy, horror, etc.

**Characteristics of the Science Fiction Genre**

1. **Aliens**

   Aliens are one of the central characteristics of the science-fiction genre. A sci-fi novel may deal with aliens coming to Earth, humans encountering aliens on space explorations or a number of other variations. Sometimes the aliens are friendly, while other works portray aliens as mortal enemies.

2. **Space Travel**

   Space travel is a common element of sci-fi, regardless of whether or not it features contact with aliens. Space travel pops up in fiction over and over again as humans wonder whether or not they’re alone in the universe, and what might happen if humans encounter other life forms.

3. **Time Travel**

   In scientific theory, time travel is possible based on potential technologies utilizing scientific knowledge.
In fiction, time travel poses many questions, including that of the time travel paradox, and it is a popular topic for science fiction, as protagonists can glimpse the future or change events in the past.

4. Futuristic Setting Or Alternate History
Even if there's no time travel involved, science fiction novels are often placed in a futuristic setting, while other sci-fi novels feature alternate histories. Whether moving forward or back in time, very few sci-fi novels are set in the present day.

5. Advanced Technology
Early science fiction writers and editors focused on the hard science of science fiction, and much of that incorporates the development of advanced technology, or creative ways to utilize existing technology. As the last century has seen big advances in technology, it's not difficult to imagine some traditional sci-fi technology that could be very real in the future.

Additionally, some science fiction writers have proven almost prophetic in predicting the rise of technology that didn't exist during their time—notably Jules Verne, although other writers have foreshadowed or outright predicted other pieces of technology.

6. Dystopia
One common theme of many science fiction novels is a dystopia set sometime in the future. Dystopia sci-fi themes are often used to explore current social issues, and they have very little to do with science, except dystopian fiction that revolves around technological mis-utilization. "Nineteen Eighty-Four" is a good example of a dystopian sci-fi story.

7. Exploration Of Popular Societal Or Cultural Issues
Much of sci-fi attempts to explore popular societal or cultural issues through a sci-fi setting. These issues range from class struggles to misuse of technology, and sci-fi gives voice to the concerns of the society in which they are conceived. Common social issues include a world destroyed by war; a world destroyed by overuse; a world in which the government controls everything; or a world in which genetic experimentation has gone terribly awry.

8. Science Fiction Follows Scientific Rules
Whether or not it utilizes hard science, science fiction novels follow scientific rules, to some degree. They may follow an extrapolation of scientific rules or unfamiliar scientific principles, but sci-fi sticks to certain rules nonetheless, as opposed to an arbitrary system of the author's devising.

Sci-Fi and the 4 General Appeal Factors for any type of fiction

1. Storyline
Science fiction is widely recognized as speculative fiction. Works in this genre have storylines that explore moral, social, philosophical, technical and intellectual issues and/or questions. Authors utilize a setting that establishes otherness of time and/or place, a setting outside of everyday reality, to allow for the discussion of new, challenging and sometimes controversial ideas. There are typically many different
layers and levels to a science fiction storyline, and it can be enjoyed at any or all of those levels. Overall, science fiction is a genre that affirms the role of story in our lives.

2. Frame

One important part of the frame in science fiction works is the technical and scientific detail. As discussed above, one of the important traits of this genre is its focus on science and technology; without sufficient detail, works of science fiction lose this characteristic. It is important to note, however, that, since the 1950's, knowledge of scientific detail is not as critical to the reader's understanding of the work. Readers without a background in science can now pick up almost any work of science fiction and still understand the plot perfectly.

The frame of the story, the special setting or particular atmosphere, is instrumental in setting the tone. There is a wide range of frame, atmosphere and tone in this genre.

3. Characterization

Storyline and frame are the focus of this genre. Characters are usually secondary to the questions that are pursued through the action of the plot. Though the more literary end of the genre does focus more heavily on characters, in general the genre focuses on situations and events. Also, many of the science fiction characters are series characters, developed slowly over the course of the series.

4. Pacing

The pacing within the genre varies greatly with the particular work, but it is generally linked to the type and amount of action in the story. The action in science fiction works may be either psychological/philosophical (interior) or physical (exterior). Typically, the assumption is that works focused on interior action are slower paced and those focused on exterior action are faster paced.