



Alternate Realities, Spacemen, & Fantastic Creatures: A Science Fiction & Fantasy Manual (updated 11/14/02)

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First of all, we distinguish between Science Fiction and Fantasy in that Science Fiction involves strangeness extrapolated from science and technology, rather than contrary to natural law. Fantasy presumes the unbreakable laws of nature, as analyzed by human reason, to be unnaturally or uncannily violated.

From Ultimate Science Fiction Website <http://www.magicdragon.com/UltimateSF/thisthat.html#sfdef>

SCIENCE FICTION: SPACE OPERA

Stories are generally about people who live in, work in, or visit outer space and other planets on a regular basis. Scientific theory is not necessary to the telling of the story as the characters' lives, not how everything works, is what is central to the plot. This sub-genre is usually more accessible to young adults and mainstream audiences.

- **Poul Anderson** - Prolific author of dozens of novels in several series, including the *Technic Civilization* and *Time Patrol* books
- **Iain Banks** - Scottish author known especially for his novels about the Culture, the antithesis of the typical galactic empire often found in space opera
- **Alfred Bester** - One of the classic writers of science fiction, responsible for adding style and quality to the genre. Winner of the very first Hugo Award.
- **Lois McMaster Bujold** - her *Miles Vorkosigan* books focus on the life and times of a young man making his way in the universe.
- **Orson Scott Card** - the *Ender* books (starting with "Ender's Game") have strong humanist elements even though there are alien races a-plenty!
- **Samuel R. Delany** - Ambitious novels that attack gender, sex, and race issues. "Not an easy read, but a necessary one." (*Science Fiction: the illustrated encyclopedia*)
- **Lester del Rey** - 1950's & 60's classics set in our galaxy on space stations, the moon, & other planets
- **Debra Doyle & James MacDonald** - *Mage Wars* series is epic in scale (interplanetary war) but is also the personal story of the ruler of the planet Entibor & her family as they battle the raiders from the Mage planets
- **Karen Haber** - an empath on the run in a galaxy that fears empaths teams up with a merchant ship that tends to stretch the legal limits of trade
- **Robert Heinlein** - early works (mostly from the 1950's) are known as his "juveniles" as they were written about teenagers (& mostly for teenagers) but they are rollicking good adventure stories for all ages.
- **L. Ron Hubbard** - His relationship to Scientology may put people off but he began life as a science fiction author & his early novels are grand fun.
- **Zach Hughes** - has written many books set in the same universe with people aboard deep space tugs who encounter a wide variety of adventure
- **Keith Laumer** - Indiana Jones-like characters have a wide variety of often humorous adventures in space
- **P.K. McCallister** - Gypsy families in space use *Sailships* rather than caravans to travel & trade. Wonderful
- **Melissa Michaels** - *Skyrider* series; inhabitants of asteroid belt want autonomy from Earth; great female lead character
- **Elizabeth Moon** - an ex-Navy (space fleet) captain is cashiered & gets a job running a ship owned by a horse-mad old woman - horses in space & good old-fashioned space adventures! There are also several other books in this seven book series that are more military based.
- **Andre Norton** - the Grand Dame of Science Fiction. Though better known these days for her *Witch World* series, her early novels are some of the very best 'rocket opera' ever written. Space opera series include *Central Control*, *Dipple*, *Forerunner*, *Free Traders*, *Hosteen Storm*, *Janus*, *Jern Murdock*, *Pax*, & *Solar Queen*. Visit

<http://www.andre-norton.org/books/serie.html> for the specific books in these series. Highly recommended.

- **Jody Lynn Nye** – Has a wonderful two book series (*Taylor's Ark & Medicine Ship*) about a traveling doctor's office (in a fully equipped starship lab) which treats all kinds of patients – most of whom aren't human.
- **Steve Perry** – 2 book series, *Stellar Rangers*, about (Texas-type) Rangers in space complete with 6-shooter & cowboy hat. Not suitable for kids but would be ok for older teens. His other books are *Hard SF*.
- **Larry Segriff** – His 2 (so far) book series, ***Space Dreams*** & ***Alien Dreams***, are the closest new books yet to early Heinlein
- **Charles Sheffield** - The "Jupiter" series of books are great stories about young men and women coming of age in outer space.
- **Robert Silverberg** – An author with a truly impressive output under several pseudonyms. Although better recognized for his short fiction (*Hugo for Nightwings* in 1969), each novel is new and different contribution to the genre.
- **Dan Simmons** - Writes in a variety of genres, but is notable for his far-future, interstellar *Hyperion* sequence. Though probably not for the SF beginner, this quartet offers complexity, mythic resonance, and ample "sense of wonder" moments, from giant tree ships to farcasters that allow homeowners to build rooms on different planets, to an armored god of retribution moving backwards through time.
- **E.E. 'Doc' Smith** – his *Lensmen* series is noted for its internal consistency, long-term story planning, and breathtaking originality of plot and concept. Much of modern SF is directly derived from it, and the entire field owes a huge debt to the *Lensmen*.
- **Allen Steele** - writes many styles of SFF; ***A King Of Infinite Space*** would appeal to fans of space opera
- **Jack Vance** - Notable especially for his *Dying Earth* stories and his planetary romances, which showcase his genius for fully-realized settings
- **Vernor Vinge** – His earlier work (***True Names***, the *Realtime* books) were speculative SF examining computers, virtual reality, and genetic engineering, but ***A Fire Upon the Deep*** and ***A Deepness in the Sky*** are multi-layered though fast-paced space opera, set in a galaxy in which physical laws are not constant, but vary from one zone to another.
- **David Weber** – His *Honor Harrington* series is considered by many to among the best military science fiction written

SCIENCE FICTION: HARD SF –

Stories use real scientific theories as the jumping off point for the book & plot devices hinge on the characters' knowledge of scientific law and theory. Scientific explanations are usually offered for all new technology introduced within the story, especially in areas of space travel and computers.

- **Isaac Asimov** - himself a scientist in several branches of study, he is most famous for his books about robots.
- **David Brin, Greg Bear, and Gregory Benford** - Known collectively as "The Killer B's" for their individual novels incorporating hard science theory into complex plot lines.
- **Arthur C. Clarke** - deep discussions about humanity's place in the cosmos within really imaginative stories.
- **Hal Clement** - Classic hard-SF author, perhaps best known for his **Mission of Gravity**, in which an alien captain comes to the aid of humans on a high-gravity world.
- **Nicola Griffith** – Lambda literary award winner, her books, which are moderately dark, explore the boundaries of gender & identity.
- **Larry Niven** – Niven's "Known Space" includes marvels of engineering (Ringworld), heretical suggestions about human evolution and aging (Protector), intricate science fiction detective stories (The Long Arm of Gil Hamilton), and some of the most entertaining aliens ever created (Neutron Star).
- **Jerry Pournelle** - Ambition, greed, and bureaucratic indifference abound, leading to horrifying tragedies. Yet there are also great heroes who triumph past intimidating odds, struggling for the survival of the human race.
- **Kim Stanley Robinson** - most notable for his work on books about terraforming Mars.
- **Allen Steele** – writes many styles of SFF; **Orbital Decay; Clarke County, Space; Lunar Descent; Labyrinth Of Night; Oceanspace; A King Of Infinite & Coyote** are all hard SF based on science
- **Neal Stephenson** – cyberpunk SF, Newsweek calls him the Hacker Hemingway. Long novels and very hip.
- **H.G. Wells** – Classics that (mostly) held up well. **War of the Worlds**, in particular, is still compelling reading.
- **John Wyndham** – **Day of the Triffids** is a wonderfully disturbing, hard-to-put-down classic. All of his books twist modern life.

SCIENCE FICTION: TEMPORAL/ALTERNATE DIMENSION –

Time travel or alternate dimensions are used to explore cause and effect on both a large and a small scale (ranging from how one person's decision not to go to the store on a certain day changed history to what might have happened had Hitler won the Battle of Britain).

- **John Barnes** - two opposing forces wage war across timelines to push their influence as far as possible.
- **Jack L. Chalker** - the *G.O.D., Inc.* series thrusts its protagonists into a maze of parallel dimensions where they learn how their lives and their worlds have been shaped.
- **Eric Flint** – **1632** & **1633** are wonderful examples of this sub-genre. They begin the removal of a section of West Virginia (complete with a number of unionized coal miners) from modern times. The section is then dropped into an area now known as Germany - smack in the middle of the Thirty Years War. Great fun!
- **Simon Hawke** - Fabulous series called *Time Wars*. 12 book series about a police/commando team that travels through times trying to keep the timelines from being changed. Every book in the series is based on a well-known classic (*Ivanhoe*, *Jules Verne*, *ETC*) or historical event (*OK Corral*) – very cleverly done. Great for kids.
- **Jack Finney** – ***Time After Time*** & ***From Time to Time*** are classic time-travel novels in which mysteries are solved & history is occasionally interfered with. They make travel to the past believable - you'll think you can actually do it!
- **Andre Norton** – has several books which incorporate time travel: *Time Traders* series (***The Time Traders***, ***Galactic Derelict*** [stupendous], ***The Defiant Agents***, ***Key Out of Time***, ***Echoes in Time***, ***Firehand***) & the *Crosstime* series (***The Crossroads of Time***, ***Quest Crosstime***)
- **Eric Nyland** – ***Pawn's Dream*** is about living both on earth as we currently know it and in another dimension in dreams. Superb.
- **Allen Steele** – writes many styles of SFF; ***The Tranquility Alternative*** & ***Chronospace*** would appeal to fans of Temporal/ Alternative Dimension
- is speculative
- **Harry Turtledove** - often uses the Civil War or World War II as turning points to create alternate timelines.
- **Connie Willis** - ***The Doomsday Book*** is the first in a series about time travelers.

SPECULATIVE SCIENCE FICTION -

Focus on social issues. Setting is usually future or near future Earth, but can sometimes be an alternate dimension or another planet used as an allegory for contemporary Earth. Societal structure is often a complete dystopia or a utopia that is based on an ethically questionable act, such as ritual human sacrifice or Big Brother.

- **John Barnes** - examines the relationship between humans and technology and illustrates societal changes.
- **Ray Bradbury** - many books, now considered American Classics, which explore ideas & attitudes taken to often unhealthy extremes.
- **Octavia E. Butler** - writes from an African-American feminist perspective.
- **Phillip K. Dick** - his major theme is that technology cannot solve fundamentally human problems. The movie *Bladerunner* is based on Dick's **Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?**
- **William Gibson** - Author of the seminal cyberpunk novel **Neuromancer**, although he has written alternative history (**The Difference Engine**, with Bruce Sterling) as well.
- **Robert Heinlein** - later books question religion and social mores about relationships. Early books are *Space Opera*.
- **Frank Herbert** - the *Dune* series & many others which are less well-known but still deserve to be read (like **The Green Brain** which involves insects acting as one unit)
- **Nancy Kress** - genetic engineering addressed in many of her works.
- **Ursula Le Guin** - Besides her popular fantasy works (*Earthsea* trilogy, etc.), she has written textured explorations of societies and cultures; **The Dispossessed** and **The Left Hand of Darkness** are two of her important novels. **Allen Steele** - writes many styles of SFF; **The Jericho Iteration** is speculative
- **Mary Doria Russell** - **The Sparrow** (premise: Jesuits in space) tells of a disastrous first contact from an anthropological, linguistic, and religious perspective; its sequel, **Children of God**, explains and expands events and perspectives from the first installment.
- **Clifford D. Simak** - Rural Wisconsin might seem an odd choice of setting for an SF author, but Simak used it to explore man's moral role in the larger universe. **Way Station** and **City** are particularly fine works.
- **Allen Steel** - writes many styles of SFF; **The Jericho Iteration** would appeal to fans of speculative SF
- **George Turner** - usually addresses overpopulation and class structure.
- **Kurt Vonnegut** - One of the funniest writers of our time, Vonnegut twists and changes perspective in his stories to make us look at the implications of our life choices and our culture's mistakes. An outstanding writer of any form, he is a standout in speculative SF.
- **Jack Williamson** - This prolific writer's career has matched that of the evolution of science fiction writing. Unlike more recent writers, his writing continues to reflect that everything will work out for the best. Best work: *Darker than you think*.

SCIENCE FICTION: MEDIA TIE-INS –

Novels based on popular media projects like movies, television shows, or video games. Characters and events may go beyond what has been presented in the original media format. However, the property holder must approve significant diversions.

- **Alien Nation** – *Based on the television series more than the movie*
- **Babylon5** - *Television series*
- **Batman, Superman, other superheroes** - *Comic books*
- **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** - *Television series*
- **Dr. Who** - *Television series - where this category all began*
- **Earth: Final Conflict** - *Television series*
- **Roswell** - *Television series*
- **Star Trek** – *Numerous television series & movies-the series that showed what a money-maker tie-ins could be*
- **Star Wars** - *Movies*
- **Stargate, Stargate: SG1** - *Movie, television series*
- **X-Files** - *Television series*
- **Xena/Hercules** - *Television series*
- **More no doubt coming soon!**

FANTASY: EPIC –

Story is often structured as a traditional hero myth with a noble protagonist, less powerful helpers, magical equipment, wizened advisor, and almost impossible tasks. Magic may or may not be present in the story. Sword and sorcery books will have it; traditional knight's tales will not. Story is often long and may take several books to tell completely.

- **David Eddings** - creator of several high fantasy epics - is regarded as one of the top authors in the genre.
- **Raymond Feist** – political & magical intrigue
- **Lynn Flewelling** – a magical twist on the age-old thief-with-a-heart-of-gold story
- **Terry Goodkind** - author of the *Sword of Truth* series - is a master epic fantasy writer.
- **Elizabeth Haydon** - magically gifted woman travels through time to restore a kingdom
- **Robin Hobb** – she writes trilogies about dragons & living ships with a healthy dollop of political & social intrigue
- **Brian Jacques** – woodland creatures with swords. *It works, honest!*
- **Robert Jordan** – the *Wheel of Time* books have become bestsellers despite their phenomenal length.
- **Mercedes Lackey** – her *Valdemar* series sets a gold standard for other authors; many sets of trilogies tell the history of *Valdemar* as well as other kingdoms
- **Ann Marston** – several trilogies & all are connected; her world is an alternate realm based largely on Celtic myth
- **George R.R. Martin** – *A Song of Ice and Fire* series is both popular & award-winning, other books of his are more science fiction than fantasy (like the *Wild Cards* series or **Tuf Voyaging** – a must for cat lovers)
- **J.R.R. Tolkien** – the master – need we say more?!
- **Roger Zelazny** – the *Amber Chronicles* sprawl over 10 (short) volumes; a wonderfully imagined world in which political intrigue among family members is aided by the ability to manipulate the fabric of the world

FANTASY: MODERN –

Magical creatures such as unicorns and elves often are mixed with ordinary people from our world. Humorous fantasy is included in this category because the puns are usually based on concepts only a modern reader would understand, such as computers. Magic is present, but not always explained as well as in other types of fantasy. The setting can be our world, a new fictitious country, or a re-hash of a pre-existing fictitious country such as Oz.

- **Piers Anthony** - *His Xanth series of books is famous for devious puns that sometimes build over the entire novel.*
- **Robert Lynn Asprin** - *His M.Y.T.H. books are fun-filled adventures with plenty of mirth sprinkled in for good measure.*
- **Terry Brooks** - ***Running With the Demon** and its sequels do a great job of illustrating a normal person's reactions to the supernatural.*
- **Emma Bull** – *many books but is best-known for **War for the Oaks** which mixes rock 'n roll, elves, Pookahs, & war into a very hard-to-put-down story*
- **Rick Cook** – *regular people suddenly find themselves dealing with elves, dragons, &, occasionally, war.*
- **Tom Holt** – *very funny books mostly based on popular European folktales*
- **Mercedes Lackey** – *Her Bard's Tale series (based on a game) are a mix of music, fast cars, Elves, both friendly & unfriendly*
- **C.S. Lewis** – *his Narnia series is a must-read for everyone*
- **Terry Pratchett** – *Disc world series, extremely well-done & very funny; Pratchett fans are extremely devoted*
- **Philip Pullman** – *Pullman's His Dark Material series is read by adult and young adult fans; daemons, a totally developed alternate universe, heroic good guys, and really chilling bad guys*
- **J.K. Rowling** - *The Harry Potter books are now famous the world over and loved by fans of all ages.*

FANTASY: HISTORICAL –

Large portion of the story takes place in the past of Earth, although the protagonist is often a modern-day person who has traveled through time. Although the plot does not have to be 100% factual, our history and that of the novel should not be as divergent as in an alternate history science fiction novel. Light magic may be present, but is used more as a mystical tool or as a means for time travel. Major events and people are often but not always the focus of the story.

- **Piers Anthony** - *His Geoddyssey cycle tells the story of man's history through the same characters re-incarnated.*
- **Orson Scott Card** - *The Alvin Maker books show a more mystical early America than the history books.*
- **Barry Hughart** - *Novels "of an ancient China that never was"; absolutely magical'*
- **Nick O'Donohoe** - *the Gnomeworks series is set in New England during WWII; the Gnomes & Demons are in a struggle to control the industrial infrastructure (which is run by humans & is quite faithful to historical fact) needed to win the war.*

FANTASY: SCIENCE -

Elements of fantasy and science fiction are mixed almost equally. Magic and scientific laws co-exist in the same universe, although one may be dominant over the other. Magic may be used in lieu of technology. Characters may be ignorant of one or both aspects as explanations for natural phenomenon. The everyday world may be used as a backdrop for the scientific laws, but it is not as prominently used as it is within the Modern Fantasy Theme.

- **Douglas Adams** – a zany & satirical look at an attempt to explain life, the universe, & everything
- **Piers Anthony** - His *Adept* series successfully splits the setting between a world of magic and a world of science while his *Mode* and *Incarnations of Immortality* series mash them together in the same realm.
- **T.A. Barron** – scientists investigating various phenomena discover that magic is behind many of them; excellent for YAs
- **Barbara Hambly** – her *Windrose* series & *Darwath* ‘trilogy’ (there are lots of books connected to this trilogy) take a computer programmer (*Silicon Mage*) & a Medieval historian (*Darwath*) from our world & draw them into another where Mages & magic rules
- **Anne McCaffrey** - From bio-genetically engineered dragons to ships powered by telepathy and song, McCaffrey is a master at mixing science into fantasy fiction.
- **Will Shetterly** - He merges the post-disaster urban setting of *Bordertown* with the fantasy of *Elfland* to create a varied landscape for the characters’ adventures.

FANTASY: DARK –

An ominous, but not necessarily terrifying or horrifying, tone pervades the novel. Characters may include non-human creatures such as vampires, werewolves, or ghosts. Magic may be an element of the world in which the story is set. Protagonist may not be particularly heroic or morally upright. Super-natural elements are almost always included

- **Terry Brooks** – his trilogy (**Running With the Demon, A Knight of the Word, & Angel Fire East**) combines coming-of-age stories with a battle of good vs. evil between our world and the Void
- **P.N. Elrod** - This dark fantasy author's books are considered to be classics of the genre.
- **Mark Frost** – Arthur Conan Doyle investigates supernatural crimes
- **Neil Gaimon** – his mysterious stories always involve supernatural or mythic elements as well as battles of good & evil
- **Barbara Hambly** – her vampire series (*Those Who Hunt the Night & Travel With the Dead*) is set around the turn of the 20th century in London; James Asher is 'hired' by Don Simon Ysidro, the oldest of the London vampires, to discover who is killing them while they sleep & a somewhat awkward partnership ensues.
- **Tanya Huff** – her *Blood* series involve a Private Eye, a vampire, & a homicide detective investigating X-Files-like crimes
- **Richard Knaak** – **Frostwing** is a creepy story about a gargoyle who has spent millennia stealing parts of the main characters soul
- **H.P. Lovecraft** – the godfather of dark fantasy
- **Mervyn Peake** - the *The Gormenghast Novels*(**Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone** - a trilogy) are classics