



Reflecting on Science Fiction

For this issue of the *Journal of Science Fiction*, we reached out to a variety of science fiction authors and scholars and asked them, “*What has science fiction taught you about yourself?*”

I'd always been raised to believe that girls could do anything, but it was through the lens of science fiction that I was able to see that represented on-screen for the first time. I remember watching *Stargate SG-1* when I was twelve years old and being in awe of Sam Carter – a character who was not only a super-tough Air Force Captain, but also an astrophysicist. In non-genre fiction, it's so unusual to see female characters who are multilayered like that; they can be tough or smart or sexy, but rarely all of those things at the same time. Sam Carter was all of that and more, a true representation of what women can accomplish in the world (or, in her case, a multitude of worlds).

Since then, I've sought out and devoured science fiction with complex female characters in all different media. There seems to be something about the futuristic fantasy of sci-fi that allows consumers of media to accept that women can be soldiers, leaders, and innovators. Behind the sheen of “space marine” or “galactic leader,” suddenly a countless number of possibilities for women become conceivable. Of course, we already know that Ripleys and Black Widows and Reys exist everywhere in our own lives; but seeing that in the pages of books, on our television screens, in our theaters—the importance of that cannot be understated. It changes lives.

—Sam Maggs

Author

Assistant Writer, Bioware

Science Fiction has taught me to connect to other people's stories in a way that I could not have done just by reading a story set within our world.

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—Hope Nicholson

Editor

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Reflecting on Science Fiction, *continued*

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Like most academic critics, I tend to think of science fiction as a genre that speaks to large, historical issues: stories of utopian and dystopian possibilities, or stories that show us our own world in transfigured, yet revealing, form. So it's an interesting challenge to ask what science fiction has taught me about myself. A couple of lessons spring to mind.

Firstly, science fiction taught me that I wasn't who I thought I was. You might superficially have characterized the teenage me as naively technophilic: a regular consumer of *Omni* magazine, an occasional reader of *Sky and Telescope*, and, as far as anyone could tell, planning to use excellent science grades to enter a degree in astrophysics. And yet... the science fiction I read

and watched and enjoyed told different stories: Kurt Vonnegut's *Galápagos*; the movies *Soylent Green* and *Logan's Run*; even the BBC's *Blake's Seven* (with its famously downbeat ending, and Thatcherite villainess). Perhaps it was no surprise that I turned in time to the humanities, and then an English Literature degree.

Science fiction also – albeit indirectly – taught me how Scottish I was. This fact hadn't escaped my notice, but I didn't really appreciate how Scottishness was part of my identity. For many years, as an undergraduate student of English Literature, I read almost no science fiction, but I did read a great deal of Scottish Literature. I went off science fiction, I think, because I didn't seem to be in it. There was James Doohan's faux Scottish accent in *Star Trek*, but apart from that I (as a Scot) was rarely seen, or heard. I only came back to serious engagement with science fiction when, for an encyclopaedia article, I read everything Iain (M.) Banks had written, and came across a writer who had managed to mix Scottishness and futurity. Happily, we now have many more of them.

—Dr. Gavin Miller

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Reflecting on Science Fiction, *continued*

Growing up as the daughter of scientists (a neurobiologist and a molecular biologist), science was almost like a sibling to me. Science was always there, a constant companion and the dominant conversation at the dinner table. I understood from a very young age that Science was to look at the world and to try to know it and understand it. Science Fiction was to look at the world to dream about it.

When I think about the first time that I thought about the stars, it strikes me that it's around the same time that I began to think about stories. Why were they up there? I thought that someone had put them in the sky and I wanted to know who they were and why? That was the first dream. That was the first story I wanted to be told to me. Or that I would end up having to tell myself. That was made up, but it was rooted in the real. I liked that.

When I thought about work as a child, I thought about labs. And experiments. And imagining what could come next. About unlocking mysteries and dreaming up a hypothesis and finding answers that lead to more questions. And it strikes me that it's much the way I approach art now. To make art is to dream.

Science Fiction taught me to dream of the unknown. To tell a stories of the impossible, or the impossible right now. To travel further than I know and beyond what had ever been seen. To consider the best of humankind and to worry about the worst of it. Science Fiction has taught me to be empathetic and kind and also how to be a monster. Because that is what it takes to tell a story, the ability to push ideas to their most beautiful and to their most horrible.

—Cecil Castellucci
Author