

Definition of Terms

Speculative fiction is a convenient umbrella term for fiction that deals with alternative worlds, whether past, present or future. It takes aspects of reality and “speculates” on what would happen if one thing were changed. The genre encompasses both science fiction, fantasy, futuristic, and supernatural storytelling, as well as other commonly linked forms like alternative history, horror, comics

Science fiction:

Takes place in our universe (even if in a different galaxy) following our physical laws of gravity, chemistry, physics, etc. Special powers are explained by natural phenomena, machines, or inventions such as:

- First Science fiction novel: *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, 1818 and 1831
- Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (volcanic wells)
- H. G. Wells’ *Time Machine* (a mechanical invention)
- *Andromeda Strain* and *Jurassic Park* by Michael Crichton; Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* series (genetic manipulation)
- Other examples: Star Trek, Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, Heinlein, Ursula LeGuin, James Tiptree Jr. (aka Alice Bradley Sheldon)

But also...

- W.E.B. Dubois “The Comet” (1920, end of world scenario), “Princess Steel” (1908, allegorical critique of capitalism and industrialization)
- *Black No More* by George S. Schuyler 1931
- Ray Bradbury, “Way in the Middle of the Air” 1950, in original *Martian Chronicles*, removed in 1997; and “The Other Foot” in *Illustrated Man* 1950
- Samuel Delaney and Octavia Butler vampires (*Kindred*) but also postapocalyptic (*Parable Series*) and *Lilith’s Brood* (Xenogenesis)
- Nalo Hopkinson: Queer black Caribbean and Canadian (*Skin Folk*)

(continued on reverse)

Fantasy often takes place in a different or parallel universe, thus doesn't have to follow the natural laws of our world. There can be dragons, elves, werewolves, vampires, and other mythological creatures; people can have magic and supernatural powers.

- Game of Thrones
- Lord of the Rings
- Harry Potter
- urban fantasy (werewolves, vampires, etc.)

But also...

- N.K. Jemisin (3-time Hugo winner—both sci-fi and fantasy), and
- Nnedi Okorafor (*Who Fears Death*, *Binti* series)
- Nisi Shawl (*Everfair* and editor of the amazing *New Suns* spec fic anthology)

Space Opera: some forms are in between sci-fi and fantasy, like Star Wars—yes, space travel, but the Force. This is a category of its own, with pangalactic quests that are a variation of the ancient Hero's Journey archetype.

Steampunk: Sci-fi/fantasy with a 19th-century aesthetic and an emphasis on retro-futuristic gadgets—"steam" meaning the time when steam engines ruled the world, and "punk" alluding to a free-for-all mash-up of eras. Don your top hats and goggles, because anachronisms are allowed in this cauldron of adventure.

Solarpunk: as with Steampunk, there is an emphasis on technology, but here, the focus is on solving the world's problems with scientific inventions and ingenuity. The feeling is more optimistic than....

Dystopia: We all know it 'em: Hunger Games, Station 11, The Road, 1984, The Handmaid's Tale—doom and gloom and more doom ahead.

Other adjacent forms--aka things that show up at the same cons (conventions):

Magical Realism/Fabulism: set in a world resembling our own, but with folkloric or magical elements slipped in.

Slipstream blends speculative and literary fiction, and often has a darker feel to it. The point is not so much a sense of wonder as a sense of weirdness or cognitive dissonance, to replicate the weirdness of modern times.

Alternate History: The "what would have happened if" genre, like *Man in the High Castle* or *Everfair*.

Horror

Comics/Graphic Novels