



The Big Book of Science Fiction

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The Big Book of Science Fiction From Vintage

Quite possibly the *greatest* science fiction collection of *all time*—past, present, and *future*!

What if life was neverending? What if you could change your body to adapt to an alien ecology? What if the pope were a robot? Spanning galaxies and millennia, this must-have anthology showcases classic contributions from H. G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke, Octavia E. Butler, and Kurt Vonnegut, alongside a century of the eccentrics, rebels, and visionaries who have inspired generations of readers. Within its pages, you'll find beloved worlds of space opera, hard SF, cyberpunk, the New Wave, and more. Learn about the secret history of science fiction, from titans of literature who also wrote SF to less well-known authors from more than twenty-five countries, some never before translated into English. In *The Big Book of Science Fiction*, literary power couple Ann and Jeff VanderMeer transport readers from Mars to Mechanopolis, planet Earth to parts unknown. Immerse yourself in the genre that predicted electric cars, space tourism, and smartphones. Sit back, buckle up, and dial in the coordinates, as this stellar anthology has got worlds within worlds.

Including:

- Legendary tales from Isaac Asimov and Ursula K. Le Guin
- An unearthed sci-fi story from W. E. B. Du Bois
- The first publication of the work of cybernetic visionary David R. Bunch in twenty years
- A rare and brilliant novella by Chinese international sensation Cixin Liu

Plus:

- Aliens!
- Space battles!
- Robots!
- Technology gone wrong!
- Technology gone right!



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Editorial Review

Review

“A stunning and satisfying retrospective. . . . This is a complex and fantastic project. . . . It’s handsome, huge, and amazingly well-curated; our editors, here, have done a fabulous job. . . . I couldn’t ask for more, truly. It’s diverse, wide-ranging, engaging, and fun; the stories are introduced well, juxtaposed better, and the overall effect is one of dizzying complexity and depth.” —Tor.com

“A definitive volume of the genre. . . . This is a big book, and it’s an essential tome for readers who are dedicated SF fans or casual newcomers alike. Do they manage to redefine science fiction? I think so.” —*The Verge*

“*The Big Book of Science Fiction* is exactly what it says it is, nearly 1,200 pages of stories by the genre’s luminaries, like H. G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke and Ursula K. Le Guin, as well as lesser-known authors. . . . [it] prizes diversity of all kinds, and translates work by several writers into English—some for the first time.” —*The New York Times Book Review*

“How big is big? In this case, we’re talking nearly 1,200 double-columned pages, dozens of representative short classics of science fiction, and newly translated work from around the world. There are surprises, too: Did you know that W.E.B. Du Bois wrote sf? That’s just one indication that the VanderMeers hope to establish a more culturally diverse science fiction canon.” —*The Washington Post* (10 Hidden Gems)

“An enormous anthology of science fiction put together by two of our sharpest purveyors of the genre. . . . This volume is a perfect mix of the classic and the unexpected.” —*Flavorwire*

“Everything about this book is exciting. First, it’s huge—some 750,000 words fill its 1,200 pages. Second, it’s been compiled by one of sci-fi’s coolest power couples—she’s a distinguished editor (Tor.com, *Weird Tales*), he’s a superb writer (2014’s *Southern Reach* trilogy). And finally, it’s not just another survey of white men in science fiction (aka Phillip K.’s dicks). For every Wells and Dick and George R.R. Martin, there’s work by Le Guin, Butler, and Katherine MacLean—not to mention stories from all over the world, from China (Liu Cixin) to Argentina (Silvina Campo). Gift it to a friend, then buy one for yourself.” —Jason Kehe, *Wired* (This Summer’s Must-Read Books)

“Borges once imagined an infinite book with pages of infinite thinness. The Vandermeers approach that event horizon with this double-columned paperback of more than 1,200 pages, containing some 750,000 words in more than 100 stories. . . . A review of a few hundred words can only begin to suggest both the contents and quality of this excellent collection of short fiction. The Vandermeers sidestep territorial quagmires by defining sci-fi, simply and effectively, as fiction that depicts the future in a stylized or realistic manner. This definition allows them a wide range of choices. . . . This book could serve as a portal to years of pleasurable and thought-provoking reading.” —*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

“Science fiction anthologies are a dime a dozen, but there’s that one that comes across every now and again that is truly essential. This is the case for Ann and Jeff Vandermeer’s *Big Book of Science Fiction*, an anthology that goes back to the genre’s roots in pulp fiction, all the way up to the end of the 20th Century, picking the best stories from around the world (including a number never before translated into English) . . . We took one look at this massive anthology’s Table of Contents, and fell in love at first sight.” —io9

“Whether you’re a life-long fan of science fiction or layperson diving deep into a new genre, this incredible anthology offers a comprehensive genre education between two covers. In more than 1,000 pages and upwards of 100 stories, the VanderMeers have compiled a truly representative history of SF from its early beginnings to its myriad modern incarnations. . . . This is an unparalleled achievement, and undoubtedly one of the most important books you’ll buy this year.” —*Barnes and Noble Booksellers’ Picks*

“When it comes to massive and comprehensive anthologies focused on a specific strain of fiction, the editorial team of Ann and Jeff VanderMeer has set the bar remarkably high.” —*LitHub*

“Ann and Jeff VanderMeer are a powerhouse editing team; their recent anthology of weird fiction helped define a genre, and took a smart historical global view while doing it. This anthology does a similar feat to science fiction, with an expansive aesthetic and work from a host of writers, including W.E.B. DuBois, Cixin Liu, Ursula K. Le Guin, and George R.R. Martin.” —*Vol. 1 Brooklyn*

“These stories were chosen for continuing relevance and arranged to interplay like voices in a great conversation: shifting and offering new insights. . . . Throughout this collection, every piece of wrack, scavenger bird, and sorceress contains multitudes.” —*Locus Magazine*

“A fun and solid genre education.” —*Library Journal* (Starred Review)

“At 105 stories—taken from around the world and since the genre’s very beginnings to its recent heights—and more than 1,000 pages, this extraordinary anthology handily earns its billing as the ‘ultimate collection’ of science fiction. . . . The VanderMeers, longtime SF/F editors (*The Time Traveler’s Almanac* and many others), provide a critical survey of the field as well as incisive biographies of the contributors.” —*Publishers Weekly* (Starred Review)

“If your readerly appetite is not quite novel-sized, you’ll definitely want to check out this month’s short fiction offerings. If you only choose one title, make it *The Big Book of Science Fiction* edited by Ann & Jeff VanderMeer.” —*Kirkus*

About the Author

Ann VanderMeer currently serves as an acquiring fiction editor for Tor.com, Cheeky Frawg Books, and weirdfictionreview.com. She was the editor-in-chief for *Weird Tales* for five years, during which time she was nominated three times for the Hugo Award, winning one. Along with multiple nominations for the Shirley Jackson Award, she also has won a World Fantasy Award and a British Fantasy Award for co-editing *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*. Other projects have included *Best American Fantasy*, three Steampunk anthologies, and a humor book, *The Kosher Guide to Imaginary Animals*. Her latest anthologies include *The Time Traveler’s Almanac*, *Sisters of the Revolution*, an anthology of feminist speculative fiction and *The Bestiary*, an anthology of original fiction and art.

Jeff VanderMeer's most recent fiction is the NYT-bestselling Southern Reach trilogy (*Annihilation, Authority, and Acceptance*), which *Entertainment Weekly* included on its list of the top ten novels of 2014 and which prompted the *New Yorker* to call the author “the weird Thoreau.” The series has been acquired by publishers in 34 other countries. Paramount Pictures/Scott Rudin Productions acquired the movie rights and *Annihilation* won both the Nebula Award and Shirley Jackson Award for best novel. VanderMeer’s nonfiction has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Washington Post*, the *Atlantic.com*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. A three-time winner of the World Fantasy Award, he has also edited or coedited many iconic fiction anthologies, taught at the Yale Writers’ Conference and the Miami International Book

Fair, lectured at MIT, Brown, and Library of Congress, and serves as the co-director of Shared Worlds, a unique teen writing camp located at Wofford College. His forthcoming novel is *Borne*.

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From the Introduction

Since the days of Mary Shelley, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells, science fiction has not just helped define and shape the course of literature but reached well beyond fictional realms to influence our perspectives on culture, science, and technology. Ideas like electric cars, space travel, and forms of advanced communication comparable to today's cell phone all first found their way into the public's awareness through science fiction. In stories like Alicia Yáñez Cossío's "The IWM 100" from the 1970s you can even find a clear prediction of Information Age giants like Google—and when Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon, the event was a very real culmination of a yearning already expressed through science fiction for many decades.

Science fiction has allowed us to dream of a better world by creating visions of future societies without prejudice or war. Dystopias, too, like Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, have had their place in science fiction, allowing writers to comment on injustice and dangers to democracy. Where would Eastern Bloc writers have been without the creative outlet of science fiction, which by seeming not to speak about the present day often made it past the censors? For many under Soviet domination during those decades, science fiction was a form of subversion and a symbol of freedom. Today, science fiction continues to ask "What if?" about such important topics as global warming, energy dependence, the toxic effects of capitalism, and the uses of our modern technology, while also bringing back to readers strange and wonderful visions.

No other form of literature has been so relevant to our present yet been so filled with visionary and transcendent moments. No other form has been as entertaining, either. But until now there has been no definitive and complete collection that truly captured the global influence and significance of this dynamic genre—bringing together authors from all over the world and from both the "genre" and "literary" ends of the fiction spectrum. *The Big Book of Science Fiction* covers the entire twentieth century, presenting, in chronological order, stories from more than thirty countries, from the pulp space opera of Edmond Hamilton to the literary speculations of Jorge Luis Borges, from the pre-Afrofuturism of W. E. B. Du Bois to the second-wave feminism of James Tiptree Jr.—and beyond!

What you find within these pages may surprise you. It definitely surprised us.

WHAT IS THE "GOLDEN AGE" OF SCIENCE FICTION?

Even people who do not read science fiction have likely heard the term "the Golden Age of Science Fiction." The actual Golden Age of Science Fiction lasted from about the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, and is often conflated for general readers with the preceding Age of the Pulps (1920s to mid-1930s). The Age of the Pulps had been dominated by the editor of *Amazing Stories*, Hugo Gernsback. Sometimes called the Father of Science Fiction, Gernsback was most famously photographed in an all-encompassing "Isolator" author helmet, attached to an oxygen tank and breathing apparatus.

The Golden Age dispensed with the Isolator, coinciding as it did with the proliferation of American science fiction magazines, the rise of the ultimately divisive editor John W. Campbell at *Astounding Science Fiction* (such strict definitions and such a dupe for *Dianetics*!), and a proto-market for science fiction novels (which would only reach fruition in the 1950s). This period also saw the rise to dominance of authors like Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Poul Anderson, C. L. Moore, Robert Heinlein, and Alfred Bester. It fixed science

fiction in the public imagination as having a “sense of wonder” and a “can-do” attitude about science and the universe, sometimes based more on the earnest, naïve covers than the actual content, which could be dark and complex.

But “the Golden Age” has come to mean something else as well. In his classic, oft-quoted book on science fiction, *Age of Wonders: Exploring the World of Science Fiction* (1984), the iconic anthologist and editor David Hartwell asserted that “the Golden Age of Science Fiction is 12.” Hartwell, an influential gatekeeper in the field, was making a point about the arguments that “rage until the small of the morning” at science fiction conventions among “grown men and women” about that time when “every story in every magazine was a master work of daring, original thought.” The reason readers argue about whether the Golden Age occurred in the 1930s, 1950s, or 1970s, according to Hartwell, is because the true age of science fiction is the age at which the reader has no ability to tell good fiction from bad fiction, the excellent from the terrible, but instead absorbs and appreciates just the wonderful visions and exciting plots of the stories.

This is a strange assertion to make, one that seems to want to make excuses. It’s often repeated without much analysis of how such a brilliant anthology editor also credited with bringing literary heavyweights like Gene Wolfe and Philip K. Dick to readers would want to (inadvertently?) apologize for science fiction while at the same time engaging in a sentimentality that seems at odds with the whole enterprise of truly speculative fiction. (Not to mention dissing twelve-year-olds!)

Perhaps one reason for Hartwell’s stance can be found in how science fiction in the United States, and to some extent in the United Kingdom, rose out of pulp magazine delivery systems seen as “low art.” A pronounced “cultural cringe” within science fiction often combines with the brutal truth that misfortunes of origin often plague literature, which can assign value based on how swanky a house looks from the outside rather than what’s inside. The new Kafka who next arises from cosmopolitan Prague is likely to be hailed a savior, but not so much the one who arises from, say, Crawfordville, Florida.

There is also something of a need to apologize for the ma-and-pop tradition exemplified by the pulps, with their amateurish and eccentric editors, who sometimes had little formal training and possessed as many eccentricities as freckles, and who came to dominate the American science fiction world early on. Sometimes an Isolator was the least of it.

Yet even with regard to the pulps, evidence suggests that these magazines at times entertained more sophisticated content than generally given credit for, so that in a sense an idea like “the Golden Age of Science Fiction is 12” undermines the truth about such publications. It also renders invisible all of the complex science fiction being written outside of the pulp tradition.

Therefore, we humbly offer the assertion that contrary to popular belief and based on all of the evidence available to us . . . the actual Golden Age of Science Fiction is twenty-one, not twelve. The proof can be found in the contents of this anthology, where we have, as much as possible, looked at the totality of what we think of “science fiction,” without privileging the dominant mode, but also without discarding it. That which may seem overbearing or all of a type at first glance reveals its individuality and uniqueness when placed in a wider context. At third or fourth glance, you may even find that stories from completely different traditions have commonalities and speak to each other in interesting ways.

BUILDING A BETTER DEFINITION OF “SCIENCE FICTION”

We evoked the names of Mary Shelley, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells at the beginning of this introduction for a very specific reason. All three are useful entry points or origin points for science fiction because they do not exist so far back in time as to make direct influence seem ethereal or attenuated, they are still known in

the modern era, and because the issues they dealt with permeate what we call the “genre” of science fiction even today.

We hesitate to invoke the slippery and preternatural word *influence*, because influence appears and disappears and reappears, sidles in and has many mysterious ways. It can be as simple yet profound as reading a text as a child and forgetting it, only to have it well up from the subconscious years later, or it can be a clear and all-consuming passion. At best we can only say that someone cannot be influenced by something not yet written or, in some cases, not yet translated. Or that influence may occur not when a work is published but when the writer enters the popular imagination—for example, as Wells did through Orson Welles’s infamous radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds* (1938) or, to be silly for a second, Mary Shelley through the movie *Young Frankenstein* (1974).

For this reason even wider claims of influence on science fiction, like writer and editor Lester del Rey’s assertion that the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh* is the earliest written science fiction story, seem appropriative, beside the point, and an overreach for legitimacy more useful as a “tell” about the position of science fiction in the 1940s and 1950s in North America.

But we brought up our triumvirate because they represent different strands of science fiction. The earliest of these authors, Mary Shelley, and her *Frankenstein* (1818), ushered in a modern sensibility of ambivalence about the uses of technology and science while wedding the speculative to the horrific in a way reflected very early on in science fiction. The “mad scientist” trope runs rife through the pages of the science fiction pulps and even today in their modern equivalents. She also is an important figure for feminist SF.

Jules Verne, meanwhile, opened up lines of inquiry along more optimistic and hopeful lines. For all that Verne liked to create schematics and specific detail about his inventions—like the submarine in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870)—he was a very happy puppy who used his talents in the service of scientific romanticism, not “hard science fiction.”

H. G. Wells’s fiction was also dubbed “scientific romanticism” during his lifetime, but his work existed somewhere between these two foci. His most useful trait as the godfather of modern science fiction is the granularity of his writing. Because his view of the world existed at an intersection of sociology, politics, and technology, Wells was able to create complex geopolitical and social contexts for his fiction—indeed, after he abandoned science fiction, Wells’s later novels were those of a social realist, dealing with societal injustice, among other topics. He was able to quantify and fully realize extrapolations about the future and explore the iniquities of modern industrialization in his fiction.

The impulse to directly react to how industrialization has affected our lives occurs very early on in science fiction—for example, in Karl Hans Strobl’s cautionary factory tale “The Triumph of Mechanics” (1907) and even in the playful utopian visions of Paul Scheerbart, which often pushed back against bad elements of “modernization.” (For his optimism, Scheerbart perished in World War I, while Strobl’s “reward” was to fall for fascism and join the Nazi Party—in part, a kind of repudiation of the views expressed in “The Triumph . . .”)

Social and political issues also peer out from science fiction from the start, and not just in Wells’s work. Rokheya Shekhawat Hossein’s “Sultana’s Dream” (1905) is a potent feminist utopian vision. W. E. B. Du Bois’s “The Comet” (1920) isn’t just a story about an impending science-fictional catastrophe but also the start of a conversation about race relations and a proto-Afrofuturist tale. The previously untranslated Yefim Zozulya’s “The Doom of Principal City” (1918) presages the atrocities perpetrated by the communism of the Soviet Union and highlights the underlying absurdities of certain ideological positions. (It’s perhaps telling that these early examples do not come from the American pulp SF tradition.)

This kind of eclectic stance also suggests a simple yet effective definition for science fiction: *it depicts the future, whether in a stylized or realistic manner*. There is no other definitional barrier to identifying science fiction unless you are intent on defending some particular territory. Science fiction *lives in the future*, whether that future exists ten seconds from the Now or whether in a story someone builds a time machine a century from now in order to travel back into the past. It is science fiction whether the future is phantasmagorical and surreal or nailed down using the rivets and technical jargon of “hard science fiction.” A story is also science fiction whether the story in question is, in fact, extrapolation about the future or using the future to comment on the past or present.

Thinking about science fiction in this way delinks the actual content or “experience” delivered by science fiction from the commodification of that genre by the marketplace. It does not privilege the dominant mode that originated with the pulps over other forms. But neither does it privilege those other manifestations over the dominant mode. Further, this definition eliminates or bypasses the idea of a “turf war” between genre and the mainstream, between commercial and literary, and invalidates the (weird ignorant snobbery of) tribalism that occurs on one side of the divide and the faux snobbery (ironically based on ignorance) that sometimes manifests on the other.

Wrote the brilliant editor Judith Merril in the seventh annual edition of *The Year's Best S-F* (1963), out of frustration:

“But that’s not science fiction . . . !” Even my best friends (to invert a paraphrase) keep telling me: That’s not science fiction! Sometimes they mean it couldn’t be s-f, because it’s good. Sometimes it couldn’t be because it’s not about spaceships or time machines. (Religion or politics or psychology isn’t science fiction—is it?) Sometimes (because some of my best friends are s-f fans) they mean it’s not really science fiction—just fantasy or satire or something like that.

On the whole, I think I am very patient. I generally manage to explain again, just a little wearily, what the “S-F” in the title of this book means, and what science fiction is, and why the one contains the other, without being constrained by it. But it does strain my patience when the exclamation is compounded to mean, “Surely you don’t mean to use that? That’s not science fiction!”—about a first-rate piece of the honest thing.

Standing on either side of this debate is corrosive—detrimental to the study and celebration of science fiction; all it does is sidetrack discussion or analysis, which devolves into SF/not SF or intrinsically valuable/not valuable. And, for the general reader weary of anthologies prefaced by a series of “inside baseball” remarks, our definition hopefully lessens your future burden of reading these words.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Nancy Jackson:

As people who live in often the modest era should be upgrade about what going on or information even knowledge to make all of them keep up with the era which can be always change and make progress. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to an individual is you don't know which one you should start with. This The Big Book of Science Fiction is our recommendation to help you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and wish in this era.

Sandra Conaway:

Spent a free the perfect time to be fun activity to perform! A lot of people spent their sparetime with their family, or their particular friends. Usually they carrying out activity like watching television, about to beach, or picnic inside park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Would you like to something different to fill your personal free time/ holiday? May be reading a book may be option to fill your totally free time/ holiday. The first thing you will ask may be what kinds of guide that you should read. If you want to test look for book, may be the publication untitled The Big Book of Science Fiction can be good book to read. May be it can be best activity to you.

Edward Bastian:

The book untitled The Big Book of Science Fiction contain a lot of information on the idea. The writer explains your ex idea with easy technique. The language is very clear and understandable all the people, so do certainly not worry, you can easy to read the item. The book was compiled by famous author. The author provides you in the new time of literary works. It is possible to read this book because you can read on your smart phone, or gadget, so you can read the book inside anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can wide open their official web-site in addition to order it. Have a nice read.

Charles Smith:

In this era globalization it is important to someone to receive information. The information will make someone to understand the condition of the world. The condition of the world makes the information quicker to share. You can find a lot of referrals to get information example: internet, classifieds, book, and soon. You will see that now, a lot of publisher that will print many kinds of book. The particular book that recommended to you is The Big Book of Science Fiction this book consist a lot of the information of the condition of this world now. This particular book was represented just how can the world has grown up. The terminology styles that writer make usage of to explain it is easy to understand. Typically the writer made some study when he makes this book. Honestly, that is why this book ideal all of you.

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