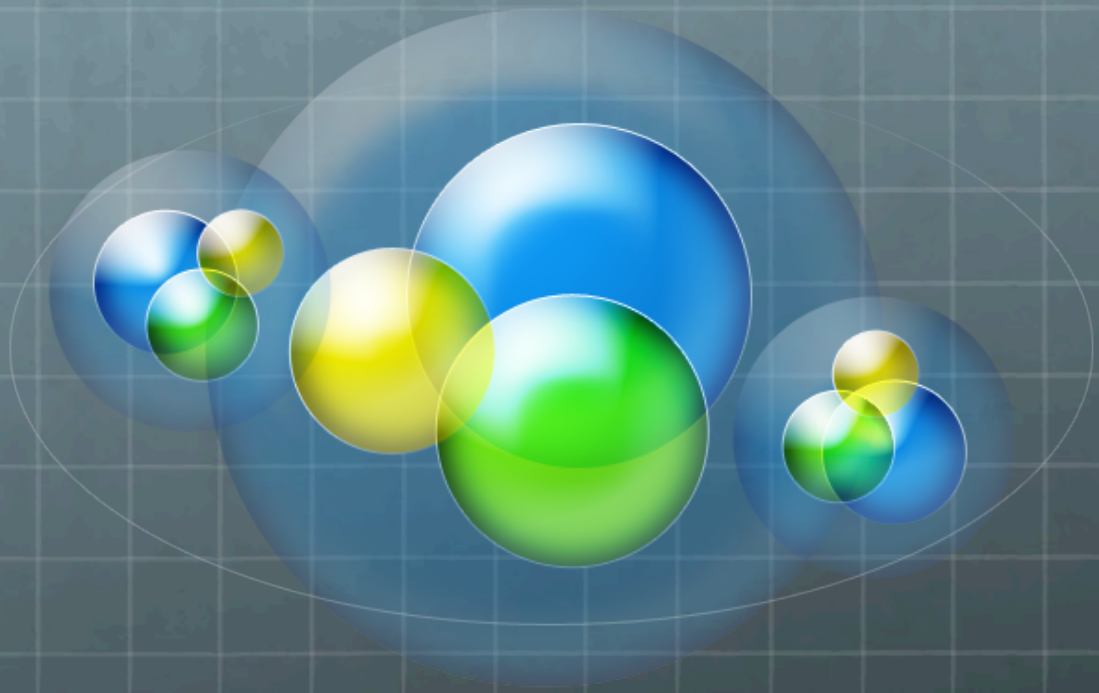
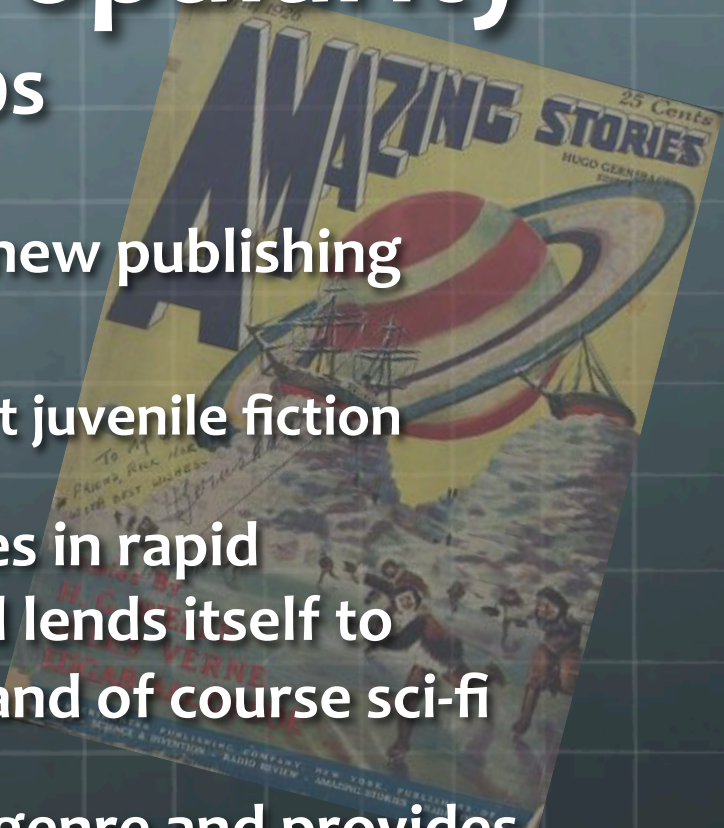


Golden Age

The Technical Revolution

Pulp Fiction and Popularity

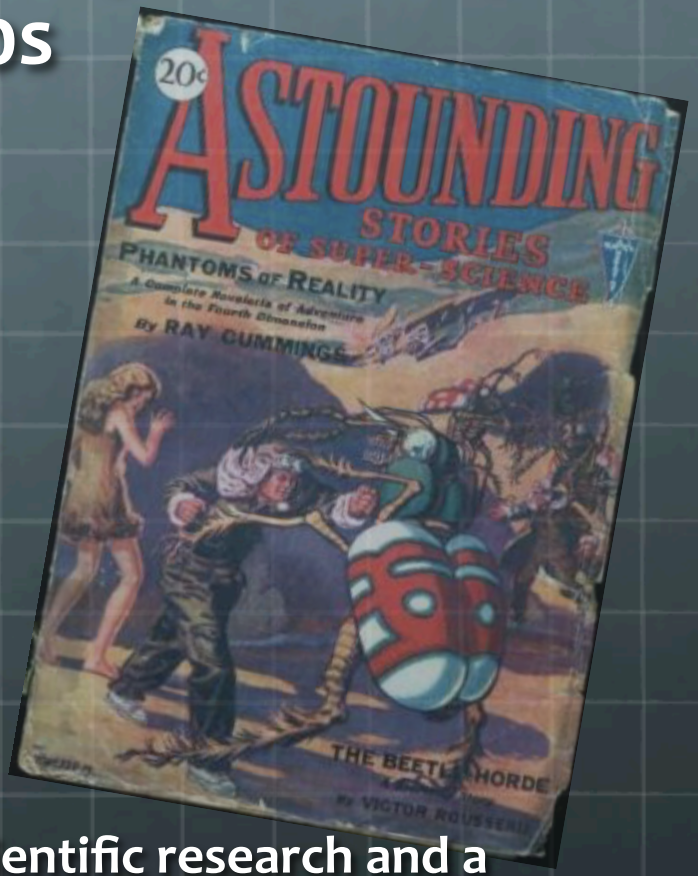
1920s and 1930s



- Cheaper print technologies open new publishing avenues for sci-fi
  - Magazines, dime novels, and short juvenile fiction
- "Pulp" fiction delivers short stories in rapid succession to a mass audience and lends itself to clear branding: western, fantasy, and of course sci-fi
- This venue is perfect for the sci-fi genre and provides a foot in the door for many young authors who will go on to even greater success in long fiction

Pulp Fiction and Popularity

1920s and 1930s



- *Amazing Stories* (1926)
- *Super Science Stories*
- *Galaxy Science Fiction*
- *Weird Tales*
- *Astounding Science Fiction* (1930)
  - Edited by John W. Campbell, Jr.
  - Campbell's insistence on accurate scientific research and a sense of literary style shapes the genre for decades

Pulp Fiction and Popularity

1920s and 1930s

- 1926: *Moon Maid* Series, by Edgar Rice Burroughs
- 1928: *Buck Rogers* Comic
- 1932: *Brave New World*, by Aldus Huxley
- 1934: *Flash Gordon* Comic

Atomic Shift and Prestige

1940s and 1950s

- WWII marks decline of pulps but new respectability for sci-fi
- Detonation of the first atomic bomb, the geopolitics of the new post-war era, the cold war, and the emerging space age prove fertile ground for sci-fi
- Because science is now a part of everyday life, and because its destructive power has become a reality, it's no longer a question of "What if?" but now… "What will it mean?"
- Sci-Fi trends away from gadgets (hard sci-fi) and toward speculation about the human condition (soft sci-fi)

Atomic Shift and Prestige

1940s and 1950s

- Film stills trend toward the cheap and formulaic—aimed at a juvenile audience—with particular focus on "alien invasion" and "mutant" scenarios
  - *The Man from Planet X* (1951)
  - *The Thing from Another World* (1951)
  - *Radar Men from the Moon* (1952)
  - *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954)
  - *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers* (1956)
  - *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1956)
  - *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957)
  - *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958)
  - *The Blob* (1958)

Atomic Shift and Prestige

1940s and 1950s

- Literature, however, becomes more sophisticated, more political, and far more serious
  - 1940: Heinlein and Asimov publish their first stories
  - 1948: *1984*, by George Orwell
  - 1950: *I, Robot*, by Isaac Asimov
  - 1950: *The Martian Chronicles*, by Ray Bradbury
  - 1951: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Film)
  - 1953: *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury
  - 1955: Arthur C. Clarke publishes his first story
  - 1955: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Film)
  - 1955: *Forbidden Planet* (Film)
  - 1958: Dick and Vonnegut publish their first stories

Isaac Asimov

1920-1992

- Born in Russia but raised in New York
- Began selling short stories to pulps in the late 1930s
  - John W. Campbell is a big influence
- Professor of biochemistry
- Atheist, Humanist, Rationalist
- Rarely writes of aliens, preferring instead to address the relationship between robotics and humans in future Earth scenarios

Isaac Asimov

The Foundation Series: 1940-1976

- Covers 500 years. Mathematician Hari Seldon develops a branch of mathematics known as "psychohistory," a concept of mathematical sociology that uses the law of mass action to predict the future

  Seldon predicts the fall of the Galactic Empire, which encompasses the entire Milky Way, and a dark age lasting 30,000 years before a another empire rises

  To shorten the period of barbarism, he creates two Foundations: small, secluded havens for all human knowledge, at opposite ends of the galaxy

- Within this entirely new universe, Asimov explores themes of social evolution, morality, and especially individualism—without pointing his finger directly at us

Isaac Asimov

The Robot Series 1950-1985

- Set in the first "positronic" age, the unique feature of Asimov's robots are the "Three Laws of Robotics," which all robots must obey, and which ensure they do not turn on their creators
- Positronic Brain
  - Central computer for a robot, and , in some unspecified way, provides it with a form of consciousness recognizable to humans
- Three Laws of Robotics

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey any orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the 1st Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the 1st or 2nd Law.