

# Contemporary Sci-Fi

Experimentation, Genre Bending, and Film

# 1960s: Experimentation & Genre Bending

- The flexible and allegorical nature of sci-fi meets the needs of a world in civil, political, and cultural unrest
- Now a popular *and* prestigious genre, sci-fi begins to experiment both in form and content, blending genres and moving even further to the "softer" side of science
- **Hard Sci-Fi:** Centers on natural sciences (e.g. physics, genetics, chemistry, engineering) and generally concerns itself with scientific accuracy and technical detail
- **Soft Sci-Fi:** Centers on social sciences (e.g., anthropology, psychology, sociology, poli-sci) and generally concerns itself with character studies and speculative societies

# A Turbulent Time

- 1955: Vietnam War
- 1957: Space Race (Sputnik)
- 1960: JFK Elected (NASA Moon Program)
- 1961: Berlin Wall
- 1961: Freedom Riders
- 1962: Cuban Missile Crisis
- 1962: Desegregation of Ole Miss
- 1963: JFK Assassinated
- 1964: Civil Rights Act

# A Turbulent Time

- 1965: China's Cultural Revolution
- 1965: Voting Rights Act
- 1965: Malcom X Assassinated
- 1968: MLK Assassinated
- 1968: RFK Assassinated
- 1969: Moon Landing
- 1969: Stonewall Riots
- 1969: Woodstock

# 1960

- *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, by Walter Miller
  - Genre: Post-apocalyptic Epic
  - Set in a Catholic monastery, the story spans thousands of years as civilization rebuilds itself through the help of a monastic order that has preserved the remnants of man's scientific knowledge
  - Themes:
    - Cyclical History
    - Church and State
    - Faith and Science

# 1961

- *Stranger in a Strange Land*, by Robert Heinlein
  - Genre: Future History
    - Post-WWIII; Organized religions are politically powerful
  - The story of a human who comes to Earth after being raised on Mars, and his adaptation to our culture
  - Themes:
    - Role of Religion in Culture
    - Power as a Corrupting Force
    - Spirituality of Sex

# 1962

- *A Clockwork Orange*, by Anthony Burgess
  - Genre: Dystopian Crime
  - Set among the violent youth subculture of a near future England, the young street thug Alex narrates his violent exploits and his experience with the State's attempt to "reform" him
  - Themes:
    - Juvenile Delinquency and Behaviorism
    - Social Norms and Subversive Subculture

# 1962

- *The Man in the High Castle*, by Philip K. Dick
  - Genre: Alternate History
  - Set in 1962, the novel concerns the political intrigues between the “victorious” Axis Powers of Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany as they rule over the former U.S. and totalitarianism reshapes our culture
  - Themes:
    - Fate and Free Will
    - Classism and Racism
    - Politics, Power, and Corruption



# 1963

- *Doctor Who* Premieres in England
- *Planet of the Apes*, by Pierre Boulle
  - Genre: Alternate History
  - The story of three human explorers from Earth who visit a planet orbiting the star Betelgeuse, only to find great apes are the dominant intelligent and “civilized” species, while “humans” are reduced to a savage animal-like existence.
  - Themes:
    - Prejudice and Racism
    - Religion vs. Science

# 1966

- *Star Trek* Premieres in U.S.
- *Dune*, by Frank Herbert
  - Genre: Sci-Fi Saga
  - Set within a future interstellar feudal society in which noble houses, in control of individual planets, owe allegiance to the Padishah Emperor, *Dune* is something of a futuristic and more expansive *Game of Thrones*, exploring the ways in which politics, religion, ecology, and technology—even human emotion—overlap and civilizations rise and fall

# 1968

- *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, by Philip K. Dick
  - Genre: Sci-Fi Detective Noir
  - Set in a post-nuclear future in which most animals are extinct, the environment has been severely damaged, and citizens have been encouraged to migrate to off-world colonies, the story follows Deckard, a bounty hunter who is charged with “retiring” six escaped androids (allowed only on off-world colonies). Though virtually identical in all other ways, unlike humans, androids possess no empathy.
  - Theme:
    - What it means to be human

# 1969

- *The Andromeda Strain*, by Michael Crichton
  - Genre: Techno-Thriller
  - The story follows a team of scientists investigating the outbreak of a deadly extraterrestrial micro-organism
  - Themes:
    - Chance, Human Error, and Technological Failure

# 1969

- *Slaughterhouse-Five*, by Kurt Vonnegut
  - Genre: Sci-Fi Satire
  - Billy Pilgrim, “tall and weak and shaped like a bottle of Coca-Cola,” was born in Ilium, N.Y. He attended night sessions at the Ilium School of Optometry before being drafted for military service in WWII, where he was taken prisoner by the Germans and survived the firebombing of Dresden. After the war, he went back to Ilium and became a wealthy optometrist married to a huge wife named Valencia. They had two children. In 1968 Billy went on a late night radio show and explained how he had come “unstuck in time.” Billy also said that on his daughter’s wedding night he was kidnapped by a flying saucer from the planet Tralfamadore, flown there through a time warp, and exhibited with a movie star named Montana Wildhack.
  - Themes: Memory and Time, Acceptance, Dignity, and Free Will

# 1970s: Emergence of Film

- As the field of special effects matures and more original screenplays are produced, many filmmakers achieve the same level of respect as their literary counterparts
- What begins with *A Space Odyssey* in 1968 continues into the '70s, with many stories written exclusively for the screen\*
- Kubrick: \**2001: A Space Odyssey* and *A Clockwork Orange*
- Lucas: \**Star Wars* Series
- Spielberg: \**Close Encounters*, \**E.T.*, *Jurassic Park*, \**A.I.*, *Minority Report*, *War of the Worlds*
- Scott: \**Alien*, *Blade Runner*, *The Martian*

# 1970s: Emergence of Film

- *Soylent Green*

- Genre: Sci-Fi Police Procedural
- With the world ravaged by the greenhouse effect and overpopulation, an NYPD detective investigates the murder of a CEO with ties to the world's main food supply.

- *Solaris*

- Genre: Psychological Drama
- A psychologist is sent to a space station orbiting a planet called Solaris to investigate the death of a doctor and the mental problems of cosmonauts on the station. He soon discovers that the water on the planet is a type of brain which brings out repressed memories and obsessions.

# 1970s: Emergence of Film

- *Logan's Run*
  - Genre: Dystopian Adventure
  - In the year 2274, young residents enjoy an idyllic, hedonistic lifestyle within the protective confines of a domed city. The general belief is that when each person turns 30, they are reincarnated for another blissful life cycle. Those who know the much darker truth become "runners"
- *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, by Steven Spielberg
  - Genre: Family Drama
  - After an encounter with U.F.O.s, a line worker feels undeniably drawn to an isolated area in the wilderness where something spectacular is about to happen.



# 1970s: Emergence of Film

- *Star Wars*, by George Lucas
  - Genre: Space Opera/Space Western
  - The Imperial Forces, under orders from cruel Darth Vader, hold Princess Leia hostage, in their efforts to quell the rebellion against the Galactic Empire. Luke Skywalker and Han Solo, captain of the Millennium Falcon, work together with the droid duo R2-D2 and C-3PO to rescue the beautiful princess, help the Rebel Alliance, and restore freedom and justice to the Galaxy. Oh...and there's a love story.
- *Alien*, by Ridley Scott
  - Genre: Space Horror
  - In deep space, the crew of the commercial starship Nostromo is awakened from their cryo-sleep capsules halfway through their journey home to investigate a distress call from an alien vessel. The terror begins when the crew encounters a nest of eggs inside the alien ship. An organism from inside an egg leaps out and attaches itself to one of the crew, causing him to fall into a coma.