

Why Science Fiction?

As I look back to my writing's earliest days I realize that, even then, I had an inexplicably curious preference for science fiction. I was at my best and most comfortable when writing little stories about UFO's or shooting bullets into backyard tornadoes to make them disappear. But, why?

Why wasn't I prone to writing war stories, spy stories, sword and sorcery stories or westerns? I had nothing personally against those other genres but I just couldn't force myself to pick up a pencil and write about any of them.

I think it had to do with what genre I'd been exposed to first as a child. I remember, down in the basement of my house on Woodbine Drive in Round Lake Beach, Illinois, in the early 1970's, my dad, being an avid science fiction fan, hung a huge book case and filled it with books written by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert Heinlein, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov and Arthur C Clarke (and many more). I recall, before I could read, spending hours and hours pulling books from the book case and staring at all those exciting and colorful covers – silver, gleaming rocket ships blasting away from exploding planets; giant robots invading the Earth, swatting down mile-high skyscrapers like they were made of balsa wood; strange alien beings with a hundred eyes and wormlike bodies drinking the blood of poor, weak, pitiful, horrified humans. Did things like that really happen? Could it really happen? Oh, my God! My imagination went wild with the possibilities!

Among my favorites were the Edgar Rice Burroughs book covers, painted by the master, Frank Frazetta. They often depicted overly-muscled men carrying scantily-clad women as they shot laser guns while riding strange, six-legged beasts over exotic volcanic wastelands. I mean, who'd want to write westerns when all they offered were six-shot revolvers and four-legged horses? BORING! I couldn't get enough of these fantastic interpretations of what was on the pages inside these books. As soon as I could read, my dad lent me Heinlein's "The Rolling Stones," and I was hooked on science fiction forever.

I often wonder if my dad had stocked that book case full of Zane Grey westerns, would I be writing westerns instead of science fiction? I'm eternally glad I'll never know the true answer to that.

All of this is fine and dandy, but why hasn't my interest in science fiction waned at all as I advance ever further towards the cobwebs of adulthood? Why haven't I grown up to write the next great American novel of fine literature?

The great Ray Bradbury spoke often and eloquently on the subject of science fiction. One of the quotes that I feel pertains to me most personally is this one: *"When you grow up in science fiction you grow up in everything! It's the greatest and only field worth growing up in. It's the total field."*

What I think he means is that science fiction is the only genre open to every other genre in literature. Science fiction can absorb the western, the war story, the spy story, the sword and sorcery story and yes, even the romance story and it will still remain a science fiction story. That's the thing I love most about science fiction, there are no barriers to it. It's free and open and welcoming and for that reason it will never stagnate, and that means I, as a writer, will never stagnate.

Bradbury also once wrote that *we are all living in the future*. He's absolutely right about that. Every second that ticks off the clock propels us into an uncertain future and science fiction is the only genre that offers solutions, through science, to the many problems we all face in that future.

So, have some fun. Consider yourself a time traveler in your own first person-narrated book of science fiction, even while you're at work, sitting down at the table eating dinner or sleeping in bed dreaming of flying to a better place.

In closing, since I don't think I can do it as well as Mr. Bradbury, below are a handful of quotes where he talks about science fiction, its meaning and importance to our present day culture...

"Anything you dream is fiction, and anything you accomplish is science, the whole history of mankind is nothing but science fiction."

"Science fiction is the most important literature in the history of the world, because it's the history of ideas, the history of our civilization birthing itself. ...science fiction is central to everything we've ever done, and people who make fun of science fiction writers don't know what they're talking about."

"In science fiction, we dream. In order to colonize in space, to rebuild our cities, which are so far out of whack, to tackle any number of problems, we must imagine the future, including the new technologies that are required."

"Science fiction is any idea that occurs in the head and doesn't exist yet, but soon will, and will change everything for everybody, and nothing will ever be the same again. As soon as you have

an idea that changes some small part of the world you are writing science fiction. It is always the art of the possible, never the impossible.”

“A science fiction story is just an attempt to solve a problem that exists in the world, sometimes a moral problem, sometimes a physical or social or theological problem.”

“The history of science fiction started in the caves 20,000 years ago. The ideas on the walls of the cave were problems to be solved. It’s problem solving. Primitive scientific knowledge, primitive dreams, primitive blueprinting: to solve problems.”

Thanks for your time,
GC Rosenquist