

# CHAPTER 7 Fantasy, Science Fiction, Utopias, and Dystopias



## What Is Fantasy?

Fantasy comes from a Greek word meaning “a making visible.” Perhaps more than any other form of literature, fantasy refuses to accept the world as it is, so readers can see what could have been (and still might be), rather than merely what was or must be.

The appeal of fantasy may be, simply, that it is so elemental. Some see its most comparable form of communication in music, which may be why so many composers have been influenced by it. Fantasy sings of our need for heroes, for the good, and for success in our eternal fight against evil or the unknown. Composers of works as dissimilar as Stravinsky’s *Firebird*, Mahler’s *Song of the Earth*, and Strauss’s *Thus Sprach Zarathustra* have sung that song. On its lighter side, musicians sing of beauty, love, and dreams and dreamers, as in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* or Ravel’s *Daphnis and Chloë* and Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*. Writers sing their lighter tales through stories about Beauty and the Beast, the happier and younger life of Arthur, and many of the old folktales and legends that are childhood favorites. (See Focus Box 2.1, *New Tellings of Old Stories*, p. 44.)

Ray Bradbury maintains that fantasy is elemental and essential:

The ability to “fantasize” is the ability to survive. It’s wonderful to speak about this subject because there have been so many wrong-headed people dealing with it. We’re going through a terrible period of art, in literature and living, in psychiatry and psychology. The so-called realists are trying to drive us insane, and I refuse to be driven insane. . . . We survive by fantasizing. Take that away from us and the whole damned human race goes down the drain.<sup>4</sup>

Fantasy allows us—even forces us—to become greater than we are, greater than we could hope to be. It confronts us with the major ambiguities and dualities of life—good and evil, light and dark, innocence and guilt, reality and appearance, heroism and cowardice, hard work and indolence, determination and vacillation, and order and anarchy. Fantasy presents all these, and it provides the means through which readers can consider both the polarities and the shadings in between.

## Conventions of Fantasy

Jo-Anne Goodwin’s comment about the nature of fantasy is worth repeating for its accuracy and succinctness.

Classic fantasy is centered around quests. The quest may have any number of different motives—spiritual, political, sexual, material—but its presence in the text is essential. The quest expresses the desire to accomplish a thing fraught with difficulty and danger, and seemingly doomed to failure. It also enables fantasy writers to deal with rites of passage; the central figure grows in stature as the quest evolves. Typically, the journey will be full of magical, symbolic, and allegorical happenings which allow the hero to externalize his or her internal struggles: thus Odysseus must pass through Charybdis and Scylla and the Knight of Temperance must extricate himself from Acracia and the Bower of Bliss.

Fantasy also deals with flux. The central characters operate in a world turned upside down, amid great wars and events of a cataclysmic nature. The possible outcomes are open and endlessly variable; the responsibility carried by the hero is enormous. In fantasy, the imagined world is always a global village. No action can take place in isolation. Every decision taken by the hero affects someone else, and sometimes the fate of nations. It is a deeply social genre.<sup>5</sup>

Heroes must prove worthy of their quest, although early in the story they may be fumbling or unsure about both themselves and their quests. John Rowe Townsend, both a fine writer of young adult novels and one of the most perceptive and honored critics of the field, maintained that the quest motif is a powerful analogy of life's pattern:

Life is a long journey, in the course of which one will assuredly have one's adventures, one's sorrows and joys, one's setbacks and triumphs, and perhaps, with luck and effort, the fulfillment of some major purpose.<sup>6</sup>

We all begin our quest, that long journey, seeking the good and being tempted by the evil that we know we must ultimately fight. We face obstacles and barriers throughout, hoping that we will find satisfaction and meaning during and after the quest. Our quests may not be as earthshaking as those of fantasy heroes, but our emotional and intellectual wrestling can shake our own personal worlds. In the December 1971 *Horn Book Magazine*, Lloyd Alexander wrote this kind of comparison:

The fantasy hero is not only a doer of deeds, but he also operates within a framework of morality. His compassion is as great as his courage—greater, in fact. We might consider that his humane qualities, more than any other, are really what the hero is all about. I wonder if this reminds us of the best parts of ourselves?<sup>7</sup>

## Fears of Fantasy

Attacks on fantasy are common and predictable. Fantasy is said to be childishly simple reading. It is true there are simple fantasies, but anyone who has read Walter Wangerin, Jr.'s, *The Book of the Dun Cow* or Evangeline Walton's Mabinogion series knows that fantasy need not be childish or simple. Fantasies are often difficult and demand close reading, filled as they are with strange beings and even stranger lands with mystical and moral overtones and ambiguities.

Fantasy has been labeled escapist literature, and, of course, it is in several ways. Fantasy allows readers to escape the mundane and to revel in glorious adventures. For some readers (perhaps for all readers at certain times), escape is all that's demanded. For other readers, venturing on those seemingly endless quests and encountering all those incredible obstacles leads to more than mere reading to pass time. The escape from reality sends those readers back to their own limited and literal worlds to face many of the same problems they found in fantasy.

Fantasy has come under attack because of its use of magic. Therefore, presumably, fantasy justifies young peoples' interest in magic. From that, censors

jump to their easy conclusion that evil can only come from magic, and since fantasy usually focuses on the struggle between evil and good—and evil is almost always more intriguing than good in fantasy or real life—fantasy clearly attracts young people away from good and surely to evil. Thus goes the circuitous attack.

In the most illogical objection (and more common than we could have predicted only a few years ago), fantasy has been attacked for being unreal, untrue, and imaginative (the term *imaginative* seems to have replaced *secular humanism* as one of today's leading bogeymen). To critics who believe that using imagination leads to unwillingness to face reality, fantasy doubtless seems dangerous. But fantasy is about reality, as Ursula K. Le Guin explained over thirty years ago.

For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons because they are afraid of freedom.

So I believe we should trust our children. Normal children do not confuse reality with fantasy—they confuse them much less often than we adults do (as a certain great fantasist pointed out in a story called “The Emperor's New Clothes”). Children know perfectly well that unicorns aren't real, but they also know that books, about unicorns, if they are good books are true books.<sup>8</sup>

Or as Marjorie N. Allen wrote, “Fantasies often have more to do with reality than any so-called realistic fiction. Like poetry, fantasy touches on universal truths.”<sup>9</sup>

## **The Popularity of Fantasy in Schools**

“Move over, Holden Caulfield. There's a new breed of teen heroes in town,” wrote Anita Silvey in a feature article in the October 2006 issue of *School Library Journal*. She went on to explain:

In fact, there's been such a shift in young adults' reading tastes that all of us are scrambling to figure out what truly appeals to teens. Of one thing I'm certain: instead of craving realistic stories about people like themselves, today's teens are crazy about characters (and scenarios) that have little in common with their own everyday lives. As one young reader put it, his peers are hunting for novels that will “take them away to another world, not like this one.”<sup>10</sup>

Although Silvey was writing about suspense and mystery as well as fantasy, it is fantasy that has forced us, as well as many school librarians, to increase the size of our bookshelves. Certainly, the success of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books has something to do with it, but as Tamora Pierce told us at the 2006 ALAN meeting in Nashville, it is not so much that writers suddenly climbed onto the Harry Potter bandwagon. Instead, what happened is that Rowling's success made publishers, especially the publishers of children's books, look at fantasy with new respect and give more serious readings to the kinds of manuscripts they



## Focus Box 7.1

### New Fantasy for Young Teens

*Crispin: At the Edge of the World* by Avi. Hyperion, 2006. In this continuation of *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* (Hyperion, 2002), Crispin and Bear are again hunted by men who have decided that Bear is traitor to their Brotherhood, which is working to overthrow England's oppressive rulers. Troth, a disfigured girl, joins Crispin and Bear in crossing the English channel.

*Flame* (The Farsala trilogy No. #1) by Hilari Bell. Simon & Schuster, 2003. Set in ancient Persia, this is the story of a kingdom (Farsala) striving to stay free from the oncoming Roman army. It is told through the eyes of two teenagers and a young merchant, each of whom have a role to play in the survival of their country. *Rise of a Hero* followed in 2005.

*The Game* by Diana Wynne Jones. Firebird/Penguin, 2007. A dangerous game, forbidden by the parents but played by wild young people, allows youngsters to enter the "mythosphere" and ride in and out of folktales and myths.

*Gnat Stokes and the Foggy Bottom Swamp Queen* by Sally M. Keehn. Philomel, 2005. Humor and irreverence rule this lively story of twelve-year-old Gnat and her determination to rescue Goodlow Pryce, who seven years earlier was stolen by the magical Swamp Queen.

*The Golem's Eye* by Jonathan Stroud (The Bartimaeus Trilogy). Hyperion/Miramax, 2004. In this sequel to *The Amulet of Samarkand* (2003), Nathaniel and Kitty are faced with challenges, including those provided by the demon Bartimaeus, whose presence also provides opportunities for humor and sarcasm.

*Goose Chase* by Patrice Kindl. Houghton Mifflin, 2001. Alexandra's life is suddenly changed when she becomes wildly rich and gorgeous, all because she helped an old woman.

*A Hat Full of Sky* by Terry Pratchett. HarperCollins, 2004. A would-be witch is threatened by a parasite that hopes to take over her mind and her magic.

*The Old Willis Place: A Ghost Story* by Mary Downing Hahn. Clarion, 2004. The events in this spooky and beautifully written story are told through the eyes of two girls, Diana and Lissa, who call the Old Willis Place home. While they keep to themselves and consider making friends "against the rules," their reasons are different.

*Sign of the Qin* by L. G. Bass (Outlaws of Moonshadow Marsh Series). Hyperion, 2004. This opening to the Moonshadow Series tells the story of Young Prince Zong in the traditions of classical Chinese epics and modern kung fu films.

*Soul Eater* Book Three of *The Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* by Michelle Paver. HarperCollins, 2007. Torak, a gifted boy, who lives 6,000 years ago in Northern Europe can inhabit the souls of animals. One of his best friends, Wolf, is captured by the Soul Eaters and Torak must save him.

*Troll Fell* by Katherine Langrish. HarperCollins, 2004. Viking ships and some fantastic creatures add a Scandinavian touch to this adventure about young Peer Ulfsson, who discovers after his father dies that his greedy uncles are going to sell him to the Troll king, who wants to give him as a slave to his newly married son.

*Un Lun Dun* by China Miéville. Del Rey, 2007. The title is really an allusion to a London that is not quite normal. Twelve-year-olds Zanna and Deeba find themselves in this alternate reality where typewriters "seep," umbrellas are sentient, and milk cartons make endearing pets. It is recommended to readers who liked Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth* and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*.

*The Unseen* by Zilpha Keatley Snyder. Delacorte, 2004. The heart of this story is Xandra Hobson's feeling that she is unloved by her family, but the fun of the story is the way she finds this to be untrue after she rescues a bird from some hunters and it leaves her a feather, which is really a key to another world.

had been receiving all along. See Focus Box 7.1, New Fantasy for Young Teens. Books for slightly older readers are listed in Focus Box 7.2, Reality May Not Be Fantasy, But Fantasy Is Reality.

In an *English Journal* article, Melissa Thomas offered two reasons why fantasy works in schools.



### Reality May Not Be Fantasy, But Fantasy Is Reality

*Elsewhere* by Gabrielle Zevin. Farrar, 2005. Liz Hall awakens in a strange bed near a strange companion who has a small red wound at the base of her skull. Both girls are dead and heading for Elsewhere and some unusual experiences.

*Epic* by Conor Kostick. Viking, 2007. In New Earth, everyone plays a fantasy computer game called Epic. An unfair ruling by the Central Allocations Committee leads young adults to challenge the committee and to eliminate Epic.

*Everlost* by Neal Shusterman. S & S, 2006. Nick and Allie are killed in an automobile accident and get acquainted as they head down that mythical tunnel toward "the light." They learn they are Afterlights, who cannot be seen or heard by the living.

*The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* by Patricia McKillip. Atheneum, 1974. The great-granddaughter of a wizard controls enchanted beasts, but she fears men who come into her private world.

*Foundling* (from *Monster Blood Tattoo Series*, Book No. #1) by D. M. Cornish. Putnam, 2006. In this new and refreshing series, Rossamünd Bookchild ventures out of the orphanage and into the fascinating but dangerous world of Half-Continent.

*A Glory of Unicorns* edited by Bruce Coville. Scholastic, 1998. Coville collected twelve stories about his favorite creature, the unicorn, and how it works with and affects people.

*The Hunter's Moon* by O. R. Melling (*Chronicles of Faerie Series*). Abrams/Amulet, 2004. Successfully published in Ireland in 1992 and in Canada in 1993, Melling's story about a teen who must save her unwilling cousin from the Faerie lands is a blend of Irish mythology and geography.

*The Lion Hunter* (*The Mark of Solomon Series Bk. #1*) by Elizabeth Wein. Viking, 2007. Set in sixth century Africa, this story has all the intrigue and imagination of an Arthurian legend but in a very different part of the world. It continues the story of the boy Telemakos, whom readers met in *The Sunbird* (Viking, 2004).

*Listening at the Gate* written and illustrated by Betsy James (*The Seeker Chronicles Series*). S&S/Atheneum, 2006. In this sequel to *Long Night Dance* and *Dark Heart*, Kat falls in love with a seal/man, not at all like her father's repressive fellow merchants. The starred review in *School Library Journal* gives James credit for "redrawing the pattern of the classic hero's quest."

*London Calling* by Edward Bloor. Knopf, 2006. When an old radio takes Martin back in time to London during World War II, he makes some startling discoveries.

*Magic of Madness* by Justine Larbalestier. Penguin/Razorbill, 2005. A girl named Reason grows up in the Australian bush fearing and avoiding her grandmother, but when she is fifteen, her mother goes insane and Reason is sent to live with her frightening grandmother. She escapes through a magic door, only to find herself in New York City.

*The Naming* by Alison Croggon. Candlewick, 2005. When sixteen-year-old Maerad meets Cadvan, her life changes because he is a magically gifted Bard who begins teaching her about her own gifts and abilities and the responsibility he sees for her future.

*The Navigator* by Eoin McNamee. Houghton Mifflin, 2007. Owen, the Navigator, is chosen by the resisters to save the world from their enemies, the Harsh.

*The Sea of Trolls* by Nancy Farmer. Simon & Schuster/Atheneum, 2004. Farmer melds mythology, humor, and suspense in this fantasy that starts when Jack and his sister are kidnapped from their Saxon village by Vikings. A sequel, *Land of the Silver Apple* (2007) was also well received.

*Summerland* by Michael Chabon. Hyperion/Talk Miramax, 2002. In this original story, a Little League baseball player is recruited by an old-timer from the Negro leagues to play in a game that has the potential to save the world.

*The Turning* by Gillian Chan. Kids Can/KCP Fiction, 2005. After his mother's death, sixteen-year-old Ben Larsson goes reluctantly with his folklorist father on a sabbatical to England. He learns that he has inherited "old blood, hero's blood" from his Icelandic grandfather and now is needed to combat the evil designs of the Faerie folk.

*Wicked Lovely* by Melissa Marr. HarperCollins, 2007. Aislinn is a human who can see fairies. When the Summer King decides Aislinn is the Summer Queen he has long lusted for, the Winter Queen sets out to destroy her.

*The Wish List* by Eoin Colfer. Hyperion/Miramax, 2003. When Meg and her friend Belch try to rob their elderly neighbor, Lowrie McCall, a nearby gas tank explodes and sends Meg through that long tunnel to the afterlife. However, Saint Peter and Beelzebub can't decide who should get Meg and so they send her back to patch things up with Lowrie McCall.

1. Students like it.
2. It is a metaphor for the human condition—rife with mythic structures, heroic cycles, and social and religious commentary.<sup>11</sup>

We might not have needed another endorsement of fantasy, though all such endorsements are welcome. In recent years, as fantasy has moved to the center of YA interest, Tolkien has virtually been awarded sainthood, and given the steady or growing popularity of such writers as Ursula K. Le Guin (see p. 222) and Anne McCaffrey (see p. 225), both winners of the Margaret A. Edwards Award. Other popular fantasy writers include Cornelia Funke, Tamora Pierce, and Diana Wynne Jones. And if there's a more popular writer in the world than J. K. Rowling, we have no idea who it could be.

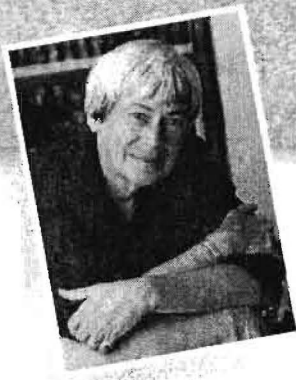
The summer of 2007 was a Harry Potter summer around the world. Since Rowling's first, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in 1997, Rowling has written six other Potter books, all of them incredibly successful. By October 1999, the first three books had been translated into twenty-eight languages (the figure was sixty-four by the time Book Seven was sold), while on July 18, 2005, an estimated 6.9 million copies of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* were sold in the United States within the first twenty-four hours the book was on the market.

Stephen King wrote a rousing review of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in the July 11, 2003, *Entertainment Weekly*, and ended by writing, "My own feeling is that they are much better than Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, which is their only contemporary competitor."<sup>12</sup> Two years later in the July 19, 2005, *Entertainment Weekly*, Christopher Paolini went gaga for *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Even the French, who are notoriously suspicious of everything English, fell under the Potter spell as a *London Times* headline revealed on July 1, 2003. Worse yet, some adults—real adults—read Harry Potter with great enthusiasm, much to the disdain of English novelist A. S. Byatt, who wrote an op-ed in the July 7, 2003, *New York Times* lamenting the number of adults who enjoyed Harry as much as their kids. One young woman, who was twelve, was not amused by Byatt and wrote,

I see nothing wrong with grown-ups liking J. K. Rowling's books. . . . My parents have both read the Harry Potter books and enjoyed them. I do not appreciate a stranger calling my parents childish for reading (in my opinion) wonderful books that our whole family and many others enjoy.<sup>13</sup>

Why is Harry so popular? Even a cursory reading of the series would suggest some answers. Harry is a remarkable character. He is almost impossible to dislike; he's an incredibly apt student of magic at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry; he's athletic in the game of Quidditch (played in midair by students on broomsticks); he's clearly a fighter; and he has friends that are attractive to readers.

His parents were murdered by the evil Voldemort, and there are enough reminders of Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader and other aspects of *Star Wars* to fascinate readers for years. In a *School Library Journal* interview, Rowling was asked what young readers are most curious about. She answered, "They were very keen to know whom I'm going to kill." And shortly, a related question was



# Margaret A. Edwards Award Winner (2004)

*Ursula K. Le Guin*, **Master  
of Fantasy**

Le Guin was honored for *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Farthest Shore*, *The Tombs of Atuan*, *Tehanu*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and *The Beginning Place*. The books were praised for having helped adolescents address questions about their role and their importance in society and in the world. Honors previously given to these books include a Newbery Book Award, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, the National Book Award for Children's Books, and the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award. If we had been making the list we would have also added Le Guin's realistic *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else* and her two later books, *Tales from Earthsea* and *The Other Wind*.

In 2004, Le Guin began her *Annals of the Western Shore* with *Gifts*, followed in 2006 with *Voices* and in 2007 with *Powers*, which received starred reviews from both *Publisher's Weekly* and *School Library Journal*. In praising *Powers*, which features a dark-skinned and hook-nosed slave boy named Gav, the *PW* reviewer wrote that Le Guin's fans have ample reason to hope that her new saga is building toward a fantasy cycle as ambitious and as satisfying as are the beloved *Chronicles of Earthsea*.

The same year that YALSA honored Ursula K. Le Guin

with the Margaret A. Edwards Award, the Children's Services Division selected her to give the May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture based on the richness that she has added to books for young readers. We were fortunate that the Maricopa County Libraries were chosen to host the event and that they invited our English department to coordinate a daylong seminar on Le Guin and her writing. In getting ready for the symposium, we developed a whole new appreciation for the amount and the variety in Le Guin's books, which include short stories, novels, poetry, translations, criticism, and books of essays. When we first announced the symposium and sent out a call for papers, we were surprised at the variety of inquiries and responses that came in, and at how many people felt so close to her books that they offered us advice, as with one man who sent an email reminding us not to forget her children's books. When we shared his message with her, she responded:

*It is interesting that [your correspondent] feels people ignore my kids' books; a good many people pay attention only to them. But then there are many critical-type people who ignore YA and kidlit on prin-*

posed, "The first two Harry Potter books are very lighthearted. Will the series remain that way?" Rowling answered,

The books are getting darker, and that's inevitable. If you are writing about Good and Evil, there comes a point where you have to get serious. This is something I really have had to think about.<sup>14</sup>

## **Other Significant Writers of Fantasy Listed Alphabetically**

Lloyd Alexander Lloyd Alexander, who died on May 17, 2007, is best known for his *Chronicles of Prydain*. Alexander grew up in Pennsylvania, but in World War II was trained in Wales to work as a staff sergeant in intelligence and counterintelligence. His years in Wales provided him with knowledge of the Mabino-



... as others ignore SF, or fantasy, or realism, or historical. Mostly people want to recognize one of the kinds of writing I do and to dismiss the rest as unimportant, which is tiresome, but what's the use protesting?

One of the speakers at the symposium was science fiction writer Nancy Farmer, who on the following day would be an honored guest, along with Le Guin, at the Arizona Book Festival. It was a pleasure to see these two brilliant and like-minded women meet in person for the first time. Le Guin's praise for Farmer's 2002 *The House of the Scorpion* had already been printed on the back cover of Farmer's book and reveals what Le Guin values in both her own and other people's writing:

*It is a pleasure to read science fiction that's full of warm, strong characters—people who are really fond of one another, children who are ignorant and vulnerable, powerful evildoers whom one can pity, good people who make awful mistakes. It's a pleasure to read science fiction that doesn't rely on violence as the solution to complex problems of right and wrong. It's a pleasure*

*to read science fiction that gets the science right. It's a pleasure to read *The House of the Scorpion*.*

The six books of the Earthsea series make up an amazing myth, full of love and danger and anger and evil and goodness and the need for balance, for individuals and society. For readers, Tenar and Ged are real people, not mere characters in books. Though aimed at young adults, the books make no apologies for posing difficult and unanswerable and universal questions and dilemmas.

When for the June 2004 *School Library Journal*, Francisca Goldsmith asked Le Guin what she wanted to teach in the Earthsea books, Le Guin explained that she sees herself as a storyteller, but that in a sense the story tells itself.

*I am responsible for telling it right. The words that I work in are the words of the story. I'm not a philosopher. I'm not a moralist. If my story seems to begin preaching, I make it stop, if I notice it. I'm not a preacher either. My responsibility is to my art and to the people who perceive it, the readers. That's an aesthetic responsibility and if it's aesthetically right, then it will probably also be morally right. ❁*

gion, a collection of Welsh legends and myths, as well as some interesting settings, both of which he later used in his fantasies. The Prydain chronicles consist of five volumes about Taran, the young Assistant Pig-Keeper. The opening book of this rich fantasy, *The Book of Three*, introduces Taran and sends him on his quest to save his land of Prydain from evil. Taran also seeks his own identity, for none know his heritage. Taran's early impatience is understandable but vexing to his master, Dalben, who counsels patience "for the time being."

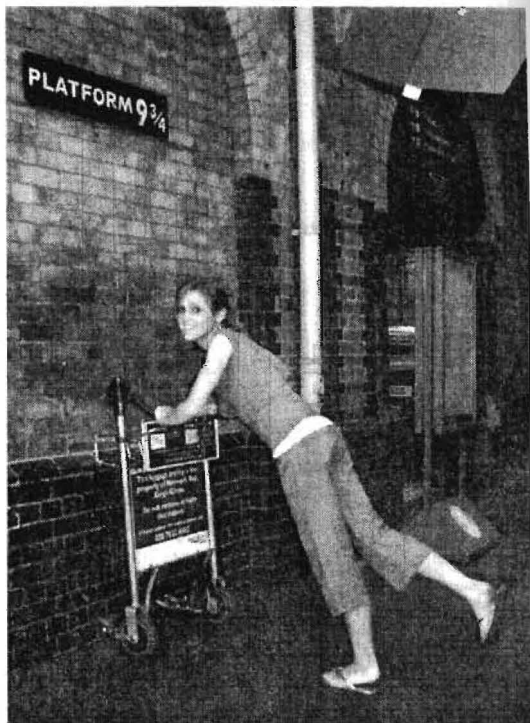
"For the time being," Taran burst out. "I think it will always be for the time being, and it will be vegetables and horseshoes all my life."

"Tut," said Dalben, "there are worse things. Do you set yourself to be a glorious hero? Do you believe it is all flashing swords and galloping about on horses? As for being glorious. . . ."

"What of Prince Gwydion?" cried Taran. "Yes, I wish I might be like him."



So many people at Kings Cross Station in London were asking for Track 9¾ (the track to Hogwarts School) that officials provided a photo op for tourists by hanging up a sign and cutting a luggage cart in two.



“I fear,” Dalben said, “that is entirely out of the question.”

“But why?” Taran sprang to his feet. “I know if I had the chance. . . .”

“Why?” Dalben interrupted. “In some cases,” he said, “we learn more by looking for the answer to a question and not finding it than we do from learning the answer itself.”

Taran, youthful impetuosity and righteous indignation aglow, is bored by Dalben’s thoughts and wants action, and that he finds soon enough in the books that follow: *The Black Cauldron*, *The Castle of Llyr*, *Taran Wanderer*, and *The High King*, which was awarded the Newbery Medal in 1969.

Peter Dickinson Readers are presented with adventures and ideas and an initiation rite in *The Ropemaker*. For twenty generations, the Valley has been safe from barbarians to the north and the evil Empire to the south through powerful magic, but now that the magic grows thin, people from the Valley set out to find help. In this fantastic, scary, and satisfying novel, they learn of the Ropemaker, a powerful magician who has been protecting their Valley. They set out to find him, but in the end, it is a young girl, Tilja, who becomes responsible for protecting her people. In *A Bone from a Dry Sea*, Dickinson uses two narrators, one contemporary, one historic. Vinny joins his archeologist father in Africa searching for signs of earlier life. Li, a prehistoric figure, shows evidence of earlier forms of reasoning and imagination that may help her and her people survive. In *Water: Tales of Elemental Spirits*, Dickinson and his wife, Robin McKinley, further



# Margaret A. Edwards Award Winner (1999)

*Anne McCaffrey*, **The Dragon Lady**

Honored novels include *Dragonflight*, *The White Dragon*, *The Ship Who Sang*, *Dragonquest*, *Dragonsong*, *Dragonsinger*, and *Dragondrums*. Like other science fiction and fantasy writers, Anne McCaffrey created a fictional world that took over many of the books that followed. Her world of PERN (Parallel Earth Resources Negligible) was created for a short story and that, supposedly, was that, but it has since been used for fifteen novels, three more short stories, three reference works, and one CD. The novels are required reading for anyone into fantasy.

Every two hundred years PERN is threatened by shimmering spores—organisms that devour all organic matter. The only protection is the dragons, who are able to destroy the threads as they fall. Beginning with *Dragonflight* in 1968, followed by *Dragonsong*, the books have considerable science fiction mixed with fantasy. This is not unusual for writers working either genre, but McCaffrey has long maintained that she writes science fiction, not fantasy.

When she was interviewed for the June 1999 *School Library Journal*, Michael Cart asked her again in which genre she wrote. She answered,

*We keep having to settle that question. I write science fiction. It may seem like fantasy because I use dragons, but mine were biogenetically engineered; ergo, the story is science fiction.*

In *Dragonflight*, Lessa sees her parents killed and pursues the killer. Having succeeded, she searches for something fulfilling and becomes the female leader of Benden Weyr, the home of the dragons. *Dragonquest* illustrates the conflict that follows when the dragonriders, brought forward two hundred years into their future by Lessa, try to force the new society to return to the old and nobler ways.

*Dragonsong* is a favorite of many McCaffrey fans because of its especially intriguing heroine, which McCaffrey modeled after two of her youthful friends. Her name is Menolly and she wants nothing more than to become a musician on PERN, but only men are allowed to become harpers. As punishment for her ambitions, her father beats Menolly, but she is rescued by a dragonrider. When the Master Harper of PERN lis-

tens to her music, he invites Menolly to become the first female harper. It's not surprising that Menolly, with her talents and her obstacles and her bravery, is a model for female readers. She deserves to be.

*Dragonsinger* carries Menolly's story into her studies at Harper Hall and the obstacles caused by her teachers and jealous students. Menolly emerges even more admirable and engaging.

McCaffrey's dragons are almost as attractive to readers as are her characters. One of her friends told McCaffrey that dragons may have universal appeal but they have had bad press for years. So McCaffrey created dragons that are attractive to readers and gentle and devoted to their riders. McCaffrey agrees that given her fascination with dragons, it's no great stretch to call her the dragon lady. (The original Dragon Lady was a bewitching but dangerous woman in *Terry and the Pirates*, a comic strip of the 1940s.)

McCaffrey says that *The Ship That Sang* is her favorite because her father had fought in three wars and then died at age sixty-three. McCaffrey has said that in the grieving for the death of a character in *The Ship That Sang*, she was grieving for her father's death and for the lost chance to prove to him that she would amount to something. In this novel, shell persons—crippled females—and their brawns—males chosen to aid them in their jobs—give up their lives to run ships with their minds. Heroism and devoting one's life to the good of others is a theme that runs through her books, and no place is that better illustrated than in *The Ship That Sang*.

Her more than sixty books translated into twenty-one languages have brought her fame, security, and a legion of loyal fans. She was the first science fiction writer to receive the Margaret A. Edwards Award and to win both the Hugo and the Nebula awards. For the second edition (1985) of this textbook, she told us that she writes love stories that are "xenophilic, rather than xenophobic since I do feel that we shall, one day or another, encounter other sentient beings. I can devoutly hope that our species will greet them with tolerance and an overwhelming desire to understand alien minds and mores." Yes, no question about it, Anne McCaffrey is committed to science fiction. ●

explore some of their favorite themes through six short stories about mermaids and the Kraken and sea serpents. Dickinson's *Eva*, which may be his most popular book, is a blend of fantasy and science fiction.

**Alan Garner** One of the most widely respected writers in the genre, Alan Garner is known largely for *The Owl Service* (1968), which appeared in the early days of modern adolescent literature in the United States and created something of a sensation among the teachers and librarians who read it. Based on the Mabinogion legends, the three young characters in the story find a set of dishes. As the three get to know each other better, they also find that the pattern reflects a story of love and jealousy and hatred, one of the Mabinogion's tales of a triangular love that ends disastrously.

**Diana Wynne Jones** Diana Wynne Jones's versatility delights her readers. She always tells a good story, and each story somehow reminds readers of the last Jones book except that it is somehow different. In *Howl's Moving Castle*, Sophie is changed into an old crone by the Wicked Witch and finds shelter in a strange moving castle owned by a wizard named Howl, who has also been cursed by Wicked Witch. *Howl's Moving Castle* is a fantastic story, which was later filmed in animation by Hayao Miyazaki. *A Charmed Life*, about young witch Gwendolyn Chant and her brother, Cat, is set in an enchanted England where the government is in charge of magic.

**Robin McKinley** *Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast* and the more recent *Rose Daughter* are so amusing and so spirited that in this one narrow niche of fantasy, Robin McKinley leads all the rest. McKinley's *Beauty* is strong and unafraid and loving. When her father steals a rose from the Beast's garden and forfeits his life, *Beauty*, who is thinking of ways to save him, says about the beast:

"He cannot be so bad if he loves roses."

"But he is a beast," said her father helplessly.

I saw that he was weakening, and wishing only to comfort him, I said, "Cannot a Beast be tamed?"

The answer to that question, in both *Beauty* and *Rose Daughter*, is yes, with time and kindness and love.

Early in her writing career, McKinley created the mythical kingdom of Damar. Her first heroic fantasy set in Damar was *The Blue Sword*, the story of Harry, a female orphan, kidnapped by the Hillfolk and slowly convinced that she should take up the legendary blue sword to free the Hillfolk. McKinley writes that on her first day of warrior training Harry's "heart rose up, despite her fears, to greet the adventure she rode into." Cathi Dunn MacRae noted in her book *Presenting Young Adult Fantasy Fiction* that this could be an epigraph for all of McKinley's heroic protagonists. McKinley won the 1985 Newbery Medal for *The Hero and the Crown*, a prequel to *The Blue Sword*.

**Christopher Paolini** In 2003 Christopher Paolini surprised the world with *Eragon*, a quest fantasy, and the first book in the *Inheritance* trilogy. Paolini was



*In our ASU classes, we've been holding Harry Potter Day right after Halloween, when we can get bargain prices on decorations, food, and costumes. Last year, the student committee in charge decorated the room and performed magic tricks. They used a sorting hat to divide us into houses, and then had us compete in a trivia contest and in creating new charms and spells and manufacturing our own wands.*



a home-schooled boy living in Montana who, when he was fifteen, began writing the story of a middle-ages farm boy who finds a strange blue stone. He takes it home, where it hatches into a dragon. The boy keeps the dragon secret, but then terrible things start happening. In 2002, when Paolini was seventeen, his parents helped him self-publish and sell 10,000 copies of the 500-page book. At this stage, the book came to the attention of Knopf, a major publishing house, which edited and promoted the book worldwide. The 2006 movie was also well received, as has been *Eldest*, the second book in the trilogy. However, the video game that was introduced alongside the film has not been as successful.

Tamora Pierce When she was in high school and college, Tamora Pierce fell under the influence of J. R. R. Tolkien and began to write. In every one of our young adult literature classes, we have at least a couple of students who are Tamora Pierce fans. The books they have mentioned most recently are the ones about Beka Cooper, including *Bloodhound: The Legend of Beka Cooper* and *Terrier*, along with *Trickster's Choice* and *Trickster's Queen*. We especially like *Shatterglass*, the concluding volume of her second quartet of the Circle Opens series, because of the way it combines mystery and magic when Keth's glass balls reveal the past, including some brutal murders. For an October 1993 article in *School Library Journal* titled "Fantasy: Why Kids Read It, Why Kids Need It," Pierce wrote:

Fantasy, more than any other genre, is a literature of empowerment. In the real world, kids have little say. This is a given; it is the nature of childhood. In fantasy,

however short, fat, unbeautiful, weak, dreamy, or unlearned individuals may be, they find a realm in which those things are negated by strength. The catch—there is always a catch—is that empowerment brings trials. Good novels in this genre never revolve around heroes who, once they receive the “Spatula of Power,” call the rains to fill dry wells, end all war, and clear up all acne. Heroes and heroines contend as much with their granted wishes as readers do in normal life.

**Philip Pullman** After writing several excellent historical novels for young adults, Philip Pullman turned his attention to fantasy and a three-part series he called *His Dark Materials*. They are dark indeed. *The Golden Compass* introduces readers to Lyra Belacqua, her Oxford University education, and her daemon (something akin to a soul but in an animal form that reflects both its own and its owner’s personalities). *The Subtle Knife* introduces readers to Will Parry, whose father has been lost in the Arctic. Will sets out to find his father, and in the journey, he slides into another universe and meets Lyra. The trilogy ends with *The Amber Spyglass*, not entirely successfully.

Pullman’s books are filled with adventures and a constant stream of wonders and magic. In the first book, readers learn about the golden compass, or Aletheometer, which can foretell the future. In the second, the subtle knife, called Aesahaetr, is entrusted to Will. It can cut through anything, real or magical. The significance of the knife and the seriousness of Pullman’s books are revealed when a witch remarks that the name of the knife “sounds as if it meant *god-destroyer*.” Almost a year in advance, the publishers began an ambitious campaign hoping that the release of the *Golden Compass* film in December of 2007, which had been in the making since 2002, would boost sales of the trilogy.

**J. R. R. Tolkien** For many readers J. R. R. Tolkien is the writer against whom all other fantasy writers are measured. *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*, began in 1933 as a series of stories that Tolkien told his children at night about

Some teachers and librarians were surprised to open up their mail and find a Golden Compass T-shirt, along with other materials, for promoting the ten-year anniversary of Pullman’s book and the upcoming film.



a strange being, Bilbo the Hobbit. *The Lord of the Rings*, his three-part series, is even better known, especially with the release of three movies made from the *Ring* series revealing his love of adventure and his fascination with language. But Tolkien is not done with us yet. The Associated Press reported on May 6, 2007, that more than 900,000 copies had been printed of *The Children of Hurin*, a prequel to *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien had started *The Children of Hurin* in 1918 and eventually abandoned it. His son, Christopher, edited it for publication.

## Specific Kinds of Fantasy

**Animal Fantasies** Animal stories aimed at instructing humans are as old as Aesop and as recent as yesterday's book review. Many teenagers have fond memories of such books as E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, Jane Langton's *The Fledgling*, Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, and Richard Adams's *Watership Down*. They may be ready to read Walter Wangerin, Jr.'s, *The Book of the Dun Cow*, a delightfully funny theological thriller retelling the story of Chauntecleer the Rooster. Supposedly the leader for good against evil (the half-snake, half-cock—Cockatrice—and the black serpent—Wyrm), Chauntecleer is beset by doubts. He is aided by the humble dog Mondo Cani, some hilariously pouting turkeys, and assorted other barnyard animals.

Several other fantasies have focused on animals. Clare Bell sets her *Ratha's Creature* books twenty-five million years ago. Ratha leads a group of intelligent wild cats who have developed their society and who have learned to herd and keep other animals. Erin Hunter's *Warriors: Into the Wild* portrays four clans of wild cats living in a loose harmony with each other as they share a forest, but when one clan becomes too powerful, the equilibrium is threatened. *Warriors: Fire and Ice* continues the saga. *Fire Bringer* by David Clement-Davies is about intelligent deer who have developed a complex society predicated on their own myths. He later wrote *The Sight*, about an intelligent wolf society. The birth of two pups, Fell, who is black, and Larka, who is white, leads to the acceptance of an ancient myth about foreseeing the future. A 2007 sequel, *Fell*, tells the story of one of the grown-up pups, his betrayal of the family, and then his redemption.

Eoin Colfer's books about Artemis Fowl go against the old idea that fantasy has to be highly serious. They are playful mysteries, as well as fantasies. And surely a large part of the pleasure in Philip Pullman's *Golden Compass* trilogy comes from the animal daemon that each human has, while much of the fun in the Harry Potter books comes from the animals, including Fang, Hedwig, Scabbers, Greyback, Pigwidgeon, and Crookshanks. The animages, Prongs, Padfoot, Moony, and Wormtail, play important parts in the plot, while a good joke is when Hagrid's hippogriff, Buckbeak, is on the Ministry's "Wanted" list and Hagrid thinks he can hide or at least disguise this huge flying creature by changing his name from Buckbeak to Witherwings.

**Fantasy and the Mabinogion** The *Mabinogion* is a collection of medieval Welsh tales, first published in English in 1838 to 1849 by Lady Charlotte Guest. The eleven stories deal with Celtic legends, myths, and personalities. There are also

four independent tales and four Arthurian romances. These stories are important for the influence that they have had on later writers, including Lloyd Alexander, whose *Prydain Chronicles* go back to the old stories.

Evangeline Walton also used the *Mabinogion* as a basis for her four-part series, *The Prince of Annwin: The First Branch of the Mabinogion*, *The Children of Llyr: The Second Branch of the Mabinogion*, *The Song of Rhiannon: The Third Branch of the Mabinogion*, and *The Virgin and the Swine: The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogion*. This last volume was reprinted in 1970 as *The Island of the Mighty: The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogion*. It is among the best of the retellings of the old Welsh legends.

Walton's quartet is both mythology and ecology, a pattern being followed by several contemporary writers who are worried about sustaining the earth. She makes the earth a divinity that must not be despoiled by humanity. In an afterword to the first book, she wrote "When we were superstitious enough to hold the earth sacred and worship her, we did nothing to endanger our future upon her, as we do now."

**King Arthur and Other Myths in Fantasy** Arthurian legends have long been staples of fantasy. T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* (a source, for which it can hardly be blamed, for that dismal musical *Camelot*) is basic to any reading of fantasy. In four parts, *The Sword in the Stone*, *The Witch in the Wood*, *The Ill-Made Knight*, and *The Candle in the Wind*, White retells the story of Arthur—his boyhood, his prolonged education at the hands of Merlin, his seduction by Queen Morgause, his love for Guinevere and her affair with Lancelot, and Mordred's revenge and Arthur's fall.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* focuses on the conflict between the old religion of the Celts, represented by Morgan Le Fay (here called Morgaine) and the new religion of Christianity, represented by Guinevere (here called Gwenhyfar). Young readers curious about the Arthurian world have a choice of several good books. Leading the list, as usual, is Katherine Paterson, whose *Parzival: The Quest of the Grail Knight* complements our knowledge of Arthur's knights and Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* opera. Nancy Springer's *I Am Mordred* related the sad, even accursed life of Arthur's bastard son.

Two recent Arthurian fantasies should appeal to young readers, Alice Borchardt's *The Dragon Queen: The Tales of Guinevere* shows a powerful and magical Guinevere battling against Merlin to prove she's worthy of being Arthur's queen. In Diana Wynne Jones's *The Merlin Conspiracy*, Roddy and Grundo wonder if a conspiracy is behind the death of Merlin, but who will believe them, since they are only children?

**Fantasy on Other Worlds: Here There Be Dragons** Several other writers have written marvelous tales of dragons and fantastic worlds. Jane Yolen's *Dragon's Blood*, *Heart's Blood*, and *A Sending of Dragons* comprise a series with two extraordinarily likable young people fighting for their lives and for their dragons. Patricia C. Wrede's *Dealing with Dragons* and *Talking to Dragons* are funny adventure stories. Her best work can be found in *Book of Enchantments*.





## What Is Science Fiction?

As a follow-up to the audio recording of Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, which was released as part of a twentieth-year celebration of the book's publication, Card laughingly told about the difference between science fiction and fantasy. He said it was a matter of rivets versus trees. If the cover of a book shows trees, it is a fantasy, but if it shows rivets holding pieces of metal together, then it is science fiction.

With his mention of rivets, Card was alluding to space travel and the related idea that other planets have intelligent or frightening life forms that may differ drastically from Earth's humans. Contemporary problems are projected hundreds or thousands of years into the future, and those new views of overpopulation, pollution, religious bickering, political machinations, and sexual disharmony often give readers a quite different perspective on our world and our problems.

The prime requirement for "good" science fiction (the kind listed in Focus Box 7.3) has been the idea that the technology in science fiction must fit into natural laws, that is, readers must be able to believe in at least the possibility of the events that occur in a story. In a 1983 *Nightcap* talk show on Arts Cable Television, Isaac Asimov agreed that "The best kind of sci-fi involves science," but then he went on to say that even though he knows that "Time travel is theoretically impossible," he wouldn't want to give it up as a plot gimmick. What he was saying is that "rules" count, but that plot and excitement count even more. The internal consistency and plausibility of a postulated imaginary society creates its own reality.

Science fiction was never as popular on radio as it deserved to be, although *Dimension-X* and *X Minus One* had many fans. Television was a different story. From Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone* on through the ever-new casts of *Star Trek*, viewers seemed to find TV science fiction irresistible. A more recent entry in the field, *The X-Files*, was different enough that it found an audience. N. E. Genge's *The Unofficial X-Files Companion* is a record of the plots and characters along with the serial killers, cults, werewolves, robots, and other strangenesses that have roamed through *X-Files* episodes.

Because of the increasing abilities of filmmakers to create special effects, science fiction is a natural source for films (see Film Box 7.1 for some all-time favorites). In March 2007, even the United States Postal Service joined in a *Star Wars* celebration. To soften the blow that postage was being increased, the postal service remodeled selected mailboxes around the country to look like R2-D2, and at the Star Wars Celebration IV fan conference held in the Los Angeles Convention Center, they released a page of fifteen Star Wars stamps and let the fans be the first to vote on which stamp would be made permanent. On the back of the sheet was information about each of the pictured characters and the overall explanation:

For 30 years, the *Star Wars* Saga has thrilled moviegoers with its epic story of good versus evil. Set across a fantastic galaxy of exotic planets and bizarre creatures, the saga tells the mythic tale of the disintegration of the Old Republic, the creation of



## Science Fiction Tells about Our Future So We Can Know the Present

*The Alien Years* by Robert Silverberg. Prism, 1998. Aliens landing on the Earth and controlling it may spell the end of humanity.

*The Best Alternate History Stories of the 20th Century* edited by Harry Turtledove and Martin H. Greenberg. Del Rey, 2001. History is turned on its head in this anthology; e.g., what if the South had won the Civil War, what if the Nazis had won World War II.

*Black Hole* written and illustrated by Charles Burns. Pantheon, 2005. In this powerful graphic novel, suburban teens are faced with "The bug," a sexually transmitted disease that causes mutations.

*Crossfire* by Nancy Kress. Tor, 2003. On an interstellar planet, human colonists must decide which of two alien societies they will support.

*Coyote* by Allen M. Steele. Ace, 2003. Three stories tell about the right-wing government that has overtaken the constitutional government of the United States and a lonely planet called Coyote.

*Darkover Landfall* by Marion Zimmer Bradley. DAW Books, 1972. In this introduction to a well received series, colonists from Earth travel to the planet Darkover with its one sun and four multicolored moons. Over 2,000 years, they lose touch with their home planet and evolve new cultures and new myths.

*Doppelganger* by David Stahler, Jr. HarperCollins, 2007. After killing and possessing the body of a popular athlete, the shape-shifting killer becomes involved with the dead boy's life.

*Dust* by Arthur Slade. Random/Wendy Lamb, 2003. The very real setting of a dry and dusty summer during the Great Depression gradually becomes evil and scary when "traders" from the stars begin taking children.

*Firestorm* by David Klass. Farrar/Frances Foster Books, 2006. This fast-moving science fiction thriller (the first of three in a planned series) will appeal to readers who have always suspected that they were somehow "different" from their parents.

*Fire-Us: The Kiln* by Jennifer Armstrong and Nancy Butcher. Eos, 2003. The *Fire-Us* title of this trilogy, which also contains *The Kindling* and *The Keepers of the Flame*, is a pun on the virus that has killed almost everyone on earth. A small group of kids in Florida managed to survive the virus and now must survive the other "survivors."

*Larklight: A Rousing Tale of Dauntless Pluck in the Farthest Reaches of Space* by Philip Reeve, illustrated by David Wyatt. Bloomsbury, 2006. Here's a rousing pirate story even more fantastic than those in the movies. It is set in 1851 when the British Empire included extraterrestrial territories and rambling old houses floating through space.

*The People of Sparks* by Jeanne Duprau. Random, 2004. In a sequel to *The City of Ember*, Lina and Doon face the challenge of helping the four hundred people they have brought from their underground city avoid the escalation of conflicts arising between the low-tech farmers in Sparks and the high-tech people from Ember.

*Singing the Dogstar Blues* by Alison Goodman. Viking, 2003. Eighteen-year-old Joss Aaronson is the sarcastic and funny heroine of this Australian novel that combines time travel and alien relationships with the elements of a mystery thriller.

*The Sky So Big and Black* by John Barnes. TOR, 2002. A young Marswoman wants to become an ecospector who will find ways of releasing gasses and water to make Mars more habitable.

*Tomorrowland*, edited by Michael Cart. Scholastic, 1999. Prominent YA authors contributed these ten stories about the future.

*True Talents* by David Lubar. Tor, 2007. The sequel to *Hidden Talents* finds Eddie can move things with his mind, but when he's kidnapped, his friends at Edgeview Alternative school save him with their own psychic powers.

*Wintersmith* by Terry Pratchett. Harper, 2007. Tiffany Aching, a witch in training, is attracted to the dreaded one who threatens her family.

*Wizards of the Game* by David Lubar. Philomel, 2003. Junior high boys ignore their fantasy games for a time so they can help real aliens return to their planet.

*Who Goes Home?* by Sylvia Waugh. Delacorte, 2004. In this British sequel to *Space Race* (2000) and *Earthborn* (2002), thirteen-year-old Jacob Bradwell discovers that his father is from the planet Ormingat and that he is expected to return to Ormingat with his father.

*Z for Zachariah* by Robert C. O'Brien. Atheneum, 1975. Ann Burden lives in an isolated and geologically protected valley. She believes that she is the sole survivor of a nuclear blast, but then she discovers another survivor and learns that she is in more danger from him than from all the other problems she faces.

## Fantasy, Science Fiction, and Dystopias



**Blade Runner** (1982, 118 min., color, R; Director: Ridley Scott; with Harrison Ford and Rutger Hauer) A former police officer is hired to destroy Androids who have come to Earth illegally. From Philip Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

**Children of Men** (2006, 100 min., color, R; Director: Alfonso Cuarón; with Clive Owen and Julianne Moore) By 2027 women can no longer become pregnant. Then a young girl is found pregnant, and Theo devotes his life to saving her. From P. D. James's novel.

**Cloverfield** (2008, 84 min., color, PG-13; Director: Matt Reeves; with Lizzy Caplan, Jessica Lucas, and T. J. Miller) Five young people are attending a going-away party for a friend when a monster the size of a skyscraper attacks New York City. They are the tellers and the photographers of this truly scary story.

**Pan's Labyrinth** (2007, 112 min., color, R; Director: Guillermo del Toro; with Ivana Baquero, Sergi López, Maribel Verdú, and Doug Jones) Ofelia meets a tall faun who tells her she must complete three tasks to return to the underworld.

**Frankenstein** (1931, 71 min., black and white; Director: James Whale; with Boris Karloff) Mary Shelley's story of a man-created being and what he did.

**Groundhog Day** (1993, 102 min., color, PG; Director: Harold Ramis; with Bill Murray) A bored TV weatherman finds he is trapped, repeatedly replaying the same day.

**Howl's Moving Castle** (1994, 119 min., color, PG; Director: Hayao Miyazaki; with the voices of Jean Simmons

and Christian Bale). A young girl falls under a witch's spell and discovers a moving castle. From Diana Wynne Jones's novel.

**Ladyhawke** (1985, 124 min., color, PG; Director: Richard Donner; with Michelle Pfeiffer and Rutger Hauer) A medieval story about two lovers caught up in an evil spell.

**Pleasantville** (1998, 123 min., color/black and white, PG-13; Director: Gary Ross; with Reese Witherspoon, Tobey Maguire, and Jeff Daniels) A brother and sister are transported within their TV to a 1950s happy sitcom, *Pleasantville*.

**The Purple Rose of Cairo** (1985, 87 min., black and white/color; Director: Woody Allen; with Mia Farrow and Jeff Daniels) A Depression-era waitress finds relief from her misery in films until her favorite actor walks out of his film.

**Stranger Than Fiction** (2006, 105 min., color, PG-13; Director: Marc Foster; with Will Ferrell, Dustin Hoffman, and Emma Thompson) An IRS auditor hears an audible voice repeating his own thoughts.

**The Time Machine** (1960, 103 min., color; Director: George Pal; with Rod Taylor and Yvette Mimieux) A scientist creates a time machine that can go forward to see what humanity has done to itself.

**Young Frankenstein** (1974, 105 min., black and white, PG; Director: Mel Brooks; with Gene Wilder, Peter Boyle, Cloris Leachman) A loving parody of Frankenstein with touches of *Bride of Frankenstein* tossed in.

the Empire, the rise of the evil Darth Vader, and the ultimate victory of the Rebel Alliance. From the wisdom and power of Yoda to the brave deeds of Jedi Knights and improbable heroes, *Star Wars* has inspired generations of fans with its unbridled sense of adventure, advancing the art of filmmaking while leaving an indelible mark on our cultural imagination.

## Types of Science Fiction

The most obvious type, and probably the first to be read by many later fans of science fiction, is the simpleminded but effective story of wild adventure, usually with a touch of sociological or environmental concerns. H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* spawned many imitations as we read, for example, about this group of aliens invading Earth and that group of aliens attacking another threatened outpost of civilization. Such books combine the best of two worlds—science fiction and horror.

Time travel has been a theme in science fiction since H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, while in many other books authors work with the wonder and danger of space travel. For example in Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *The Mote in God's Eye*, humans have colonized the galaxy and an alien society sends emissaries to work with the humans. When the aliens accidentally die, the humans must send representatives dashing through space to ward off disaster and war.

Another kind of story is about the mad scientist or the threat of science gone sour or insane. Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (reissued as *Blade Runner* in 1982 when the film adaptation came out) presents a gloomy view of the future. A cop/bounty hunter searches for human-created androids who have escaped from another planet to come back to a horribly drizzling and bleak Earth.

Harry Turtledove's *Worldwar: In the Balance* is a kind of "what if" science fiction. The author changes history as when Turtledove sets his story in 1942 when the Allies are at war with the Axis powers. An alien force of lizard-like things invades Earth with a technology that far surpasses human knowledge.

Cyberpunk is one of the wildest, rampaging kinds of science fiction today. Gene LaFaille defines cyberpunk as

A subgenre of science fiction that incorporates our concern about the future impact of advanced technologies, especially cybernetics, bionics, genetic engineering, and the designer drug culture, upon the individual, who is competing with the increasing power and control of the multinational corporations that are extending their stranglehold on the world's supply of information.<sup>15</sup>

Cyberpunk is about technology and the power of communication, particularly power used to manipulate people. William Gibson's 1984 *Neuromancer* was the novel that brought cyberpunk to readers' attention.

Humor is not often the strongest feature of science fiction, but Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is a genuinely funny spoof of the genre. The book began as a BBC radio script, progressed to a television script, and ultimately became a novel. When Arthur Dent's house is due for demolition to make way for a highway, he finds Ford Prefect, a strange friend, anxiously seeking a drink at a nearby pub. Ford seems totally indifferent to Arthur's plight because, as he explains, the world will soon be destroyed to make way for a new

galactic freeway. Soon the pair are safe aboard a Vagon Construction Fleet Battleship, and that is the most easily explained of the many improbabilities that follow.

Many people think of science fiction as a male genre, but Jane Donawerth countered this idea in an *English Journal* article, where she noted that between 1818, when Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley published *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus*, and the 1930s, women were among the most important writers dealing with technological utopias and similar topics that foreshadowed science fiction:

But the times when such visions were welcomed did not last; at least in *Amazing Stories* and in *Wonder Stories*, the women virtually disappeared by the mid-1930s. I think that editorial policy, or simply civic pressure on the women, kept their stories from earning money that could go, instead, to a man supporting a family during the Depression.<sup>16</sup>

By the time women returned to science fiction in the 1940s, they used masculine-sounding pen names, for example, Andre Norton and Leigh Brackett. Today, however, science fiction readers have a number of women writers, as shown by the fact that winners of the Margaret A. Edwards Award include: Madeleine L'Engle, Ursula K. Le Guin, Lois Lowry, and Anne McCaffrey.

## **Significant Science Fiction Writers Other Than the Margaret A. Edwards Award Winners**

**Isaac Asimov** Isaac Asimov's response to a question of what he would do if he knew he were going to die the next day, is said to have been "Type faster!" And before his death in 1992, he indeed typed fast. He wrote more than five hundred books in so many fields that he comes close to being a truly Renaissance figure. But whatever his contributions to the study of the Bible or Shakespeare, no one can question his contributions to science fiction. The several volumes in his Foundation series established the basis for a multidimensional society that an incredible number of readers have temporarily inhabited and accepted. Asimov's *The Ugly Little Boy* is a combination horror and science fiction story in which scientists trap a young Neanderthal boy and bring him back to our time. A nurse is hired to take care of him until he will be sent back to his own time. The boy is a terrified mess, and the nurse is horrified by him, but her native compassion and his normal need for a friend bring the two together. Asimov's first book of short stories was entitled *I, Robot*, and when in 2004 Twentieth Century-Fox released the film, *I, Robot*, starring Will Smith, they credited Isaac Asimov's stories.

**Ray Bradbury** While arguably less interested in the mechanics of science fiction than any other major writer, Ray Bradbury may have been the most sensitive of them all about humanity's ability to befoul Earth and the rest of the universe. He seemed to have almost no interest in how his characters moved from Earth to Mars, but *The Martian Chronicles* is a wonderful set of semirelated short stories about the problems of being human in a universe that does not treasure our humanity. In a prefatory note to Bantam's 1954 edition, Clifton Fadiman

described Bradbury as “a moralist who has caught hold of a simple, obvious, but overwhelmingly important moral idea—that we are in the grip of a psychosis, a technology-mania, the final consequences of which can only be universal murder and quite conceivably the destruction of our planet.”

Bradbury argues that the appeal of science fiction is understandable because science fiction is important literature, not merely popular stuff. Opening his essay “Science Fiction: Why Bother?” he compared himself to a fourth-rate George Bernard Shaw who makes an outrageous statement and then tries to prove it. The outrageous statement that he went on to make is that “Science fiction is the most important fiction being written today. . . . It is not part of the Main Stream. *It is the Main Stream.*”<sup>17</sup>

Arthur C. Clarke Regarded as one of the fathers of science fiction, Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End* is one of the classics in the field, and his short story *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which was developed into a full-length film, is perhaps the most widely cited of any work in science fiction. In the introduction to his *Profiles of the Future*, Clarke wrote:

A critical—the adjective is important—reading of science-fiction is essential training for anyone wishing to look more than ten years ahead. The facts of the future can hardly be imagined *ab initio* by those who are unfamiliar with the fantasies of the past.

This claim may produce indignation, especially among those second-rate scientists who sometimes make fun of science-fiction (I have never known a first-rate one to do so—and I know several who write it). But the simple fact is that anyone with sufficient imagination to assess the future realistically would inevitably be attracted to this form of literature. I do not for a moment suggest that more than one percent of science-fiction readers would be reliable prophets; but I do suggest that almost a hundred percent of reliable prophets will be science-fiction readers—or writers.<sup>18</sup>

We thought of Clarke’s statement when, just after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack, we heard a commentator say that readers of science fiction did not take nearly as long as did other Americans to realize that an airplane flying into one of the Twin Towers was not an accident.

Robert Heinlein In 1953 Robert Heinlein defined science fiction as speculative fiction based on the real world, with all its “established facts and natural laws.” He went on to say that while the result can be extremely fantastic in content, “it is not fantasy: it is legitimate—and often very tightly reasoned—speculation about the possibilities of the real world.”<sup>19</sup> Heinlein began his career writing young adult books, and then moved on to adult material and never looked back. Books for the young such as *Farmer in the Sky* and *Pokayne of Mars* may be largely forgotten, but for many young people, these books provided a vision of the future new to them. Later books, particularly *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* and *Stranger in a Strange Land*, are both better written and far more powerful visions of a deeply troubled universe. And while Heinlein may have been unable to picture a believable, strong woman, as critics claim, he wrote exceptionally fine science fiction.

**William Sleator** William Sleator's books are in the genre spawned by H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* in which a group of aliens invade Earth. The genre combines science fiction and horror. Sleator's *Interstellar Pig* may sound like an odd or funny book, but it is not. Sixteen-year-old Barney is intrigued to discover that three different neighbors moved next door. Soon, Barney and the three are playing a board game called *Interstellar Pig*, and Barney learns fast enough that he stands between the neighbors and the destruction of Earth. *Parasite Pig* is an intelligent sequel. Sleator's *House of Stairs* illustrates how mad psychologists can become to prove their point. Five young people are brought to an experimental house made up almost entirely of stairs madly going everywhere, and the young people learn that adults can be truly cruel. There are similar emotions in Sleator's *The Last Universe*, in which a mysterious maze in the garden behind Susan's house terrifies her.

**Scott Westerfeld** The Westerfeld set of books that our YA students are the most enchanted with started with *Uglies* in 2005, followed the same year by *Pretties*, then in 2006 by *Specials*, and in 2007 by *Extras*. They are set in a futuristic society where all sixteen-year-olds can have an operation to make them beautiful, but not everyone wants to lose what makes them unique. The job of the *Specials* is to keep the *Uglies* down and the *Pretties* stupid. *Extras* gets its title from the large adoring crowds that in the old days were hired for films. The economy is fame-based, which reminds readers of the way amazon.com assigns numerical sales rankings to authors' books and to the way people keep track of the number of viewers checking into their websites.

Westerfeld's *Peeps*, on the 2005 Honor List, is set in New York City, where *peeps* is slang for people who are "parasite-positive," a euphemism for various kinds of scientifically based vampirism. Luckily some of the peeps can maintain an almost normal life and can use their specialized abilities to help save New York City from mutant creatures much worse than the old alligators in the sewers. Rock music plays a part in a follow-up book, *The Last Days*.



## Utopias and Dystopias

Utopias and dystopias are neither science fiction nor fantasy, but they share characteristics with both. Readers must suspend disbelief and buy into the author's vision, at least for the duration of the story. As with science fiction, utopian and dystopian books are usually set in the future, with technology having played a role in establishing the conditions out of which the story grows. Unlike science fiction, and more like fantasy, however, once the situation is established, authors focus less on technology and more on sociological and psychological or emotional aspects of the story.





# Margaret A. Edwards Award Winner (2007)

*Lois Lowry, Who Gave Us  
The Giver*

Most of Lois Lowry's books are written for children, although young teens love both *Number the Stars* (a Holocaust story that won the 1990 Newbery Medal) and her first book, the 1977 *A Summer to Die*, in which she shares the emotions, although not the actual events, connected to the death of her sister, Helen. The Margaret A. Edwards Award committee honored Lowry for *The Giver*, which won the 1994 Newbery Medal, and is accessible to readers as young as twelve or thirteen, while at the same time being rich enough to stimulate serious thinking on the part of adults and college students.

*The Giver* is set in a futuristic society which has as its goal to make everything "the same." Babies are born to designated birth mothers and raised in a nursery until at age two they are either "released" (a euphemism for *killed*) or assigned to a "family," which will consist of two parents and a son and a daughter. The society is so controlled that the citizens are conditioned not to see colors and not to question authority or such things as "releases" and the making of lifelong work assignments when children turn twelve. At school, the children learn the values of their culture, but not its history or anything about neighboring societies. The group's memories are entrusted to a single individual, a man designated as The Giver.

The book's protagonist is a twelve-year-old named Jonas, who is startled when at the society's annual end-of-the-year ceremonies he is designated to be the next Giver. He is to start training immediately to become the Receiver of the community's memories. Lowry told Anita Silvey, who interviewed her for the June 2007 *School Library Journal*, that this unusual idea was inspired by visits she made in the early 1990s to her mother and father when they were in their late eighties and living in a nursing home in Staunton, Virginia. Lowry would fly down from Boston and on the trip home always had things to ponder.

Her mother was blind and very frail, but her mind was intact and she shared many experiences with her daughter, even talking about the painful ones including the death of Lois's older sister, Helen. In contrast, Lowry's father was

physically healthy but his memory was gone and so as they would look at the scrapbook that Lowry and her brother had put together for him, she would have to tell him over and over again about such things as Helen's death. He would feel sad for a few minutes, but then in contrast to the deep sadness with which Lowry's mother would relive some of her experiences, he would soon forget and ask again about the girl in the scrapbook.

This unpredictability of memory and what goes on in the human mind is what Lowry set out to explore when she wrote *The Giver*. She says she had no intention of writing a dystopian novel; it just turned out that way. This may be why the first few pages of the book seem so bright and why readers feel the negative aspects all the more strongly when they become privy to the memories that Jonas receives from The Giver. Lowry further explores the mystery of memory in her 2006 *Gossamer*, in which a girl called Littlest is being trained as a dream giver to bring better dreams to a troubled boy. In 2000, she published *Gathering Blue* as a companion volume to *The Giver*. The protagonist is a crippled girl who is skilled at embroidery and is taken from her village to the palace where her job of restoring the ceremonial robes that tell the story of her people is made more difficult by the ruling powers and their philosophy of "management."

When we brought *The Giver* to class after it won the 1994 Newbery Medal, our YA students predicted that it had a great future as a book for common reading. They were correct in this prediction, but they were wrong in their companion prediction, which was that teachers would have no censorship problems because the book has "no sex, no violence, and no objectionable language." Within a couple of years, *The Giver* had become a frequently censored book. We suspect that the dystopian vision of a society that bears some resemblance to our own frightens and depresses some adults, but because this is a difficult concept to recognize, much less communicate, they look for specific incidents to protest such as the use of "released" as a *euphemism* for "death" and the mention of the pills that children take as they reach puberty and begin to feel "the stirrings." ●



## Focus Box 7.4

### Utopias and Dystopias in YA Fiction

*After* by Francine Prose. HarperCollins, 2003. After a nearby school shooting, Central High School receives a threat and administrators vow to protect the students. And protect them they do with random locker searches and urine tests, and a whole list of restricted items including wearing anything colored red because it's a gang color. When J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is found in a locker, it is confiscated and removed from the literature curriculum because "Studies have proved that it has a terribly deleterious—*destructive*—effect on students too young to realize that Holden Caulfield is a highly negative role model."

*The Dirt Eaters* by Dennis Foon (The Longlight Legacy Trilogy Series Book No. #1). Annick, distributed by Firefly, 2003. In this dystopian story, fifteen-year-old Roan is forced to leave his peace-loving village after it is destroyed and his younger sister is taken to the city. At first he thinks he has been rescued by the leader of a band of warriors, but the more he learns the more certain he is that he must leave. Follow-up books include *Freewalker*, and *The Keeper's Shadow*.

*Dreamquake: Book Two of the Dreamhunter Duet* by Elizabeth Knox. Farrar, 2007. *Booklist* editors, as well as the YALSA committee, chose Knox's *Dreamquake* as one of the best books of the year. *Dreamhunter* was published in 2006, and both books are praised for their unique blend of fantasy and history. Edwardian heroines Rose and Laura uncover a government plot involving the Place where horrible dreams are created and used for such nefarious purposes as controlling prisoners.

*Eva* by Peter Dickinson. Delacorte, 1989. A famous scientist is devoting his life to working with chimpanzees, which in this futuristic world are the biggest of the remaining animals. The scientist, his wife, and Eva (their thirteen-year-old daughter) are in a horrible wreck and when Eva wakes up she slowly discovers that her brain has been transferred to the body of the chimpanzee. The rest of the book is about the next thirty years of Eva's life; the psychological and social aspects of the story are even more interesting than the technological.

*Feed* by M. T. Anderson. Candlewick, 2004. Modern life, particularly the corporate world, is satirized as a group of

young people are connected to each other through the "feed," an implant in their brains that provides whatever they want to know. When they arrive on the moon they receive "feeds" on where to stay and who to know and what to eat and what's hot in styles and more.

*Firestorm* by David Klass. Farrar, 2006. Jack learns he is not an all-American boy but rather a visitor from the future sent to save Earth.

*The House of the Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer. Atheneum, 2002. This prize-winning book is a grim, futuristic novel set mostly on an opium farm along the Mexican border of the United States. The owner, Matteo Alacrán, also known as El Patron, is nearly 110 years old. He has lived so long because of taking replacement parts from young people raised as "clones." Readers meet Matt, a future clone, when he is six years old and follow him through his escape and "rescue" as part of a work camp that is a modern equivalent of the kinds of orphanages that Charles Dickens wrote about.

*Life as We Knew It* by Susan Beth Pfeffer. Harcourt, 2006. A family survives when a meteor hits our Moon and causes floods and assorted other catastrophes.

*The New Policeman* by Kate Thompson. HarperCollins/Greenwillow, 2007. In this lively Irish story, a fifteen-year-old musician sets out to find where all the time has gone in hopes of filling his mother's birthday request of having more time. And while Liddy makes it to the Land of Eternal Youth, he is surprised that it isn't the utopia he expected, but it is filled with fantasy, folklore, and music.

*Rash* by Pete Hautman. Simon, 2006. Bo examines a future society that's given up freedom in favor of safety. Sent to a prison, he survives by his own athletic ability and an artificial intelligence program.

*The Secret under My Skin* by Janet McNaughton. HarperCollins, 2005. The year is 2368 when a technocaust has destroyed most of the technology. Scientists are blamed for the disaster and sent to concentration camps, but as the world begins to heal a new class of specialists develops. Blay, who tells the story, starts out as a young orphan scrounging through garbage, but then she becomes an assistant and an observer in her own right.