

## Strange Facts About Science Fiction

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Whether you are a lover of science fiction or not, here are some interesting facts about the subject. Find the home site of author Bill Allin at <http://billallin.com>

### Strange Facts About Science Fiction

Opinions vary about when the science fiction genre began. Writer Hugo Gernsback founded the first known science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*, in 1926.

But the ancients--remember what you learned in high school about the mythology of the ancient Greeks for example--had people abducted by beings from the sky, humans who could morph into strange beasts and events that would make Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein turn over in their graves. Okay, Einstein was cremated, but you know what I mean.

Getting back to Gernsback, the most famous award for science fiction writing today is The Hugo. At one point he even tried to trademark the term *science fiction*. Gernsback loved greenbacks. (Oh, that was too easy.) He paid writers for his magazine so little that H.P. Lovecraft dubbed him "Hugo The Rat."

In order for science fiction writers to earn a decent living from their work, they often wrote under several different pen names so they could have more than one story published per issue. Ray Bradbury, for example, used six different pseudonyms.

Science fiction writers today dislike the term *sci-fi* because it reminds people of cheap B-movies. They prefer *SF*.

Despite how outrageous some of the "science" was in SF stories, several well known real scientists contributed to SF literature. Wernher Von Braun, German science genius turned US nuclear and space advisor, wrote space fiction and provided expertise for such SF movies as *Conquest of Space*.

One famous SF writer of the 1960s, James Tiptree Jr., who wrote such classics as *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* remained in such secrecy that he was suspected of being a spy. In 1961, Tiptree's identity was discovered. Not a spy after all, but prominent feminist Alice B. Shelton.

Some SF writers have a strange aversion to technology, surely a startling irony. Ray Bradbury won't use a computer or an ATM and claims he has never driven a car.

Isaac Asimov, a legend in both science and science fiction, wrote about interstellar space flight, but refused to use airplanes to move around the country.

The relationship between today's technologies such as the flip phone and the communicators of *Star Trek* can't be denied. Less well known may be Neal Stephenson's inspirations for well known online programs. Stephenson's *Metaverse* inspired Second Life and his panoptic Earth application is a similar concept to Google Earth.

While we don't yet have a machine that can produce food and beverages as the *Star Trek* crews had, SF writer Gene Wolfe helped to develop the machine that makes Pringles. Robert Heinlein devised the first modern waterbed. You have to wonder if Heinlein's waterbed had anything to do with the sexual liberation so common in his books.

After the overwhelming popularity of Arthur C. Clarke's *2001, A Space Odyssey*, US airline Pan Am released an actual list of names of people wanting to go to the moon. Among the 80,000 names were those of Ronald Reagan and Walter Cronkite.

Though the HAL computer of *2001* discussed its own feelings and cared about people (albeit sometimes maliciously), today's computers have trouble sorting out conflicting software and are less intelligent but more annoying than doorknobs.

Science fiction has a long history of stories where the heroes save the world, usually using technology to kill the

enemy. Might SF be as influential on our reality if its heroes found ways to save the world using peaceful means, such as by using their intellect?

Bill Allin

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