

SCIENCE FICTION

LCC 3214 B / Spring 2009 / MWF 11:05-11:55am / Skiles 371

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Description

“Why do human beings expect an end of the world at all? And if this is conceded to them, why must it be a terrible end?” - Immanuel Kant

“...the prophetic words ‘End of the world,’ so often heard today, signify solely ‘End of the earth’...” - Camille Flammarion

The aim of this course is to provide you with a historical overview of the genre of science fiction (SF). To do this, we will focus on a general theme – “the end of the world” – through which we can compare and contrast SF works from different historical periods, from different cultural contexts, and in different media (books, film, TV, comics, etc.). This general theme of “the end of the world” also opens onto other themes that are equally central to SF, including: utopia and dystopia, science and religion, human vs. machine, alien invasion, disaster/ecology and cosmology. Along the way we will address questions such as: What makes SF different from other genres of storytelling? What are the central themes of SF stories? What are the formal and stylistic characteristics of SF? How does SF invite us to think about the key cultural, social, political, and philosophical problems of our world?

Required Texts

All books may be purchased at the GaTech bookstore or through Amazon.

- Bear, Greg. *Blood Music* (Gollancz, 2007).
- Flammarion, Camille. *Omega: The Last Days of the World* (Bison Books, 1999).
- Moore, Alan, and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen* (DC Comics, 1995).
- Stapledon, Olaf. *Last and First Men* (Dover, 2008).
- Van Troyer, Gene, and Grania Davis, eds. *Speculative Japan* (Kurodahan, 2007).

Course Requirements

- Two in-class essay exams = 15% each = 30%
- Final paper of 10-15 pages = 30%
- Weekly T-square assignments = 20%
- Attendance and participation = 20%

NOTE: *This is an upper-level course, and will require your commitment as a student.* Preparation is absolutely essential for this class. Students are expected to complete the assigned readings, and to come to class with questions, comments, and ideas. You will also be asked to develop an independent research project that will culminate in a paper at the end of the term. Further details follow on the next page...

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Below are further details about the class and your grade:

Grades: I will calculate all letter grades according to the following scale:

A = 90-100; B = 80-89; C = 70-79; D = 60-69; F = 1-59

All grades for the course as a whole are final and are not subject to change. *Please note that failure to complete a major course assignment (such as an exam or the final paper) may result in the failure of the course as a whole.*

Exams: The two exams will be in-class, essay-style exams. They will be based on the readings and in-class lectures. We will talk about these in more detail as the term goes on.

Final paper: The final paper will be a scholarly, research paper of 10-15 pages in length. It will involve external research and will incorporate external sources. The final paper will be based on a topic of your choosing that is related to the class and the readings. All paper topics must be approved by me. I strongly encourage you to discuss your final paper topic with me in advance. I will give you a handout describing the details of the final paper later in the semester.

T-square: Each week you will be required to post responses of at least 400 words on T-square [t-square.gatech.edu]. Questions will be posted on Fridays, and you are expected to respond by class time the following Monday. Additionally, all course materials (syllabus, handouts, announcements) will also be available here.

Participation: The participation component of the course includes things such as in-class discussion and group activities. Strong in-class participation involves the following:

- Coming to class on time, having completed the readings.
- Bringing the day's readings and/or books to class.
- Both speaking *and* listening.
- Working as part of the whole class as well as in smaller groups.

By contrast, there are a number of things which will work against you in terms of participation:

- Failure to complete the readings and/or assignments.
- Being disrespectful towards others in the class when they are talking.
- Class disruptions (e.g. habitual tardiness, chit-chat with your neighbor during class time, playing with your phone or browsing the Internet, sleeping during class).
- Also, mobile phones, iPods, and all other gadgets are to be turned OFF and put away while in class.
- No food is allowed in class.

Any serious case of disruptive behavior will be taken up with the relevant GT offices as stipulated in the Student Honor Code.

Attendance: More than three unexcused absences will lower your final grade by half a grade. *More than six unexcused absences may result in the failure of the course as a whole.* The following are examples of excused absences and their conditions:

- Missed class due to a health or family emergency.
- Missed class due to a job or internship interview, with relevant documentation.
- Travel due to an official GT extra-curricular activity, with a note or letter from the proper authority.

Honor Code: All students are expected to adhere to the Georgia Tech Honor Code [www.honor.gatech.edu], which defines academic misconduct as:

- Possessing, using, or exchanging improperly acquired written or verbal information in the preparation of any essay, exam, or other assignment included in an academic course;
- Unauthorized collaboration with a student in the commission of academic requirements;
- False claims of performance or work that has been submitted by the claimant;
- Alteration or insertion of any academic grade or rating so as to obtain unearned academic credit;
- Deliberate falsification of a written or verbal statement of fact to a member of the faculty to obtain unearned academic credit;
- Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any institute document relating to the academic status of a student.

The writing you do for any assignment should be your own. If I have reason to suspect that you are plagiarizing, I will take the appropriate actions with the office of the Dean of Students.

Students with disabilities should contact Access Disabled Assistance Program for Tech Students (ADAPTS) to discuss accommodations: (404) 894-2564 (voice) / (404) 894-1664 (voice/TDD) or www.adapts.gatech.edu.

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Week 1 - Introduction

M	1/5	What is SF?	
W	1/7	The history of SF	
F	1/9	The end of the world...	T-square

Week 2 – Early SF

M	1/12	Thomas More, excerpt from <i>Utopia</i> (1516) Francis Bacon, excerpt from <i>The New Atlantis</i> (1627)	
W	1/14	Edward Bellamy, excerpt from <i>Looking Backward 2000-1887</i> (1888) Clip from <i>Just Imagine</i> (dir. David Butler, 1930)	
F	1/16	Discussion con't...	T-square

Week 3 – Early SF

M	1/19	NO CLASS	
W	1/21	Jean-Baptiste Grainville, excerpt from <i>The Last Man, or Omegarus and Syderia</i> (1806) H.G. Wells, “The Star” (1897) J.D. Beresford, “A Negligible Experiment” (1921)	
F	1/23	Camille Flammarion, excerpt from <i>Lumen: Stories of Infinity</i> (1897) Edgar Allen Poe, “The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion” (1850)	T-square

Week 4 – Early SF

M	1/26	Camille Flammarion, <i>Omega</i> (1894) Clip from <i>La Fin du Monde</i> (dir. Abel Gance, 1931)	
W	1/28	Camille Flammarion, <i>Omega</i> con't	
F	1/30	Camille Flammarion, <i>Omega</i> con't	T-square

Week 5 – Golden Age SF

M	2/2	John W. Campbell Jr., “Voice of the Void” (1930) John W. Campbell Jr., “Twilight” (1934) John W. Campbell Jr., “Who Goes There?” (1938)	
W	2/4	A.E. Van Vogt, “Black Destroyer” (1939) A.E. Van Vogt, “Discord in Scarlet” (1939) Jack Williamson, “With Folded Hands” (1947)	
F	2/6	Discussion con't...	T-square

Week 6 – Golden Age SF

M	2/9	Olaf Stapledon, <i>Last and First Men</i> (1930)	
W	2/11	Olaf Stapledon, <i>Last and First Men</i> con't	
F	2/13	Olaf Stapledon, <i>Last and First Men</i> con't	EXAM #1

Week 7 – Golden Age SF

M	2/16	Isaac Asimov, “Nightfall” (1941) Arthur C. Clarke, “The Nine Billion Names of God” (1953) Robert Heinlein, “Year of the Jackpot” (1952)	
W	2/18	Isaac Asimov, “That Thou Art Mindful of Him” (1974) Arthur C. Clarke, “Guardian Angel” (1950) Arthur C. Clarke, “The Sentinel” (1953) Clip from <i>The Day the Earth Stood Still</i> (dir. Robert Wise, 1951)	
F	2/20	Discussion con't...	T-square

Week 8 – New Wave SF

M	2/23	Ray Bradbury, “There Will Come Soft Rains” (1950) Roger Zelazny, “For a Breath I Tarry” (1966) Clip from <i>Forbidden Planet</i> (dir. Fred Wilcox, 1956)	
W	2/25	Brian Aldiss, “Hothouse” (1961) Ursula K. Le Guin, “Vaster Than Empires and More Slow” (1971)	
F	2/27	Discussion con't...	T-square

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Week 9 – New Wave SF

M	3/2	James Blish, "A Case of Conscience" (1953) Walter M. Miller Jr., "A Canticle for Leibowitz" (1955)	
W	3/4	James Blish, "We All Die Naked" (1969) Norman Spinrad, "The Big Flash" (1969)	
F	3/6	Discussion con't...	T-square

Week 10 – New Wave SF

M	3/9	J.G. Ballard, "The Atrocity Exhibition" (1966) J.G. Ballard, "The Drowned World" (1962) J.G. Ballard, "The Terminal Beach" (1964)	
W	3/11	Phillip K. Dick, "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale" (1966) Phillip K. Dick, "The Electric Ant" (1969)	
F	3/13	Discussion con't...	PAPER TOPICS DUE

Week 11

M-F	3/16-3/20	SPRING BREAK	
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Week 12 – Cyberpunk & Global SF

M	3/23	Greg Bear, <i>Blood Music</i> (1985)	
W	3/25	Greg Bear, <i>Blood Music</i> con't	
F	3/27	Greg Bear, <i>Blood Music</i> con't	T-square

Week 13 – Cyberpunk & Global SF

M	3/30	<i>Blade Runner</i> (dir. Ridley Scott, 1982) Orson Scott Card, "Ender's Game" (1977) William Gibson, "Burning Chrome" (1982)	
W	4/1	<i>Blade Runner</i> con't Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild" (1984) Pat Cadigan, "Pretty Boy Crossover" (1986)	
F	4/3	Discussion con't...	EXAM #2

Week 14 – Cyberpunk & Global SF

M	4/6	<i>Akira</i> (dir. Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988) Stories from <i>Speculative Japan</i>	
W	4/8	<i>Akira</i> con't Stories from <i>Speculative Japan</i>	
F	4/10	Discussion con't...	T-square

Week 15 – Cyberpunk & Global SF

M	4/13	Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, <i>Watchmen</i> (1986-87)	
W	4/15	Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, <i>Watchmen</i> con't	
F	4/17	Discussion con't...	T-square

Week 16 – Weird SF

M	4/20	J.-H. Rosny-aîné, "The Shapes" (1887) Ambrose Bierce, "The Damned Thing" (1894)	
W	4/22	H.P. Lovecraft, "The Shadow Out of Time" (1936) Junji Ito, excerpt from <i>Uzumaki</i> (1999)	
F	4/24	Discussion con't	T-square

Week 17 – Final Paper

T	4/28	FINAL PAPERS DUE	
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