Cyberpunk Fiction

Science fiction that depicts the relationship between human beings and the rapid advancement and omnipresence of technology, which leads to a radical change in the social order.

A sub-genre that explores the interactions between humans and technology. Cyberpunk features the combination of man and machine, either literally or metaphorically. The lines between the physical world and the cyberworld are often blurred, sometimes with multiple forms of virtual reality. For traditional cyberpunk, the setting is typically the Earth, but a dystopian one that is immersed in a dark and bleak cyberworld where corporations control society and standards of living have broken down. Author William Gibson described cyberpunk as "a combination of low life and high tech." Protagonists are typically hackers who interact, physically and digitally, with other people equally immersed in the cyberworld. Authors writing in cyberpunk may use the style to criticize corporate power and the invasive rise of technology.

Stories concerning bio-robotics discuss the addition of mechanical prosthesis or enhancements to human physiology. Similar works involving cyborgs feature "bionics"—the integration of humans and machines. Novels on artificial intelligence (AI) depict one or more artificial minds becoming fully sentient. They may be mainframe computers, mobile androids, or, more recently, software on the internet. This portion of the sub-genre is generally focused on one of three mentalities: pro-machine, anti-machine, or ambivalence. In a pro-machine plot, robots or artificial intelligence entities are benevolent. In an anti-machine plot, there is generally confrontation with robots, androids, or AI; sometimes as mechanical servants malfunction, assert rights, or launch a coldly logical and diabolical plan. In an ambivalent plot, robots perform their functions but there remains some anxiety about them. William Grove's *The Wreck of the World* (1889), Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (1921), Eando Binder's "I, Robot" (1939), Jack Williamson's *With Folded Hands* (1947), Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* (1950), Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* (1956), D. F. Jones's *Colossus* (1966), Robert A. Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (1966), and Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968) are founding works in this sub-genre.

Common Elements

Exploration of the relationship between humans and computers	Cyborgs
	Cyberspace
Human concerns of sentient technology	Virtual reality
	The internet
"Frankenstein complex"	Robotics
Malicious compliance	Artificial intelligence
Consequences of technological interference in human lives	Corporate domination
	Class divides
Alienation from society	Ecological collapse
Social revolution	Megacities
Computer hacking and hackers	Transhumanism
Omni-present surveillance	Freedom from need to work
Cybernetic implants	Personal gratification
Prosthetics	Power to rule

Benefits of Reading

Offers readers cautionary tales of human nature and out-of-control technology	Inspires readers to ponder the corrupting influence of money and power
Encourages readers to consider corporate exploitation in society	Warns readers of disconnecting from the real world in favor of the virtual

Modern Literary Examples

Accelerando (2005) by Charles Stross	*The Golden Age* (2002) by John C. Wright
All Systems Red (2017) by Martha Wells	*He, She and It* (1991) by Marge Percy
Ariel (1984) by Jack M. Bickham	*The Infinity Courts* (2021) by Akemi Dawn Brown
Cinder (2012) by Marissa Meyer	*The Lifecycle of Software Objects* (2010) by Ted Chiang
A Closed and Common Orbit (2016) by Becky Chambers	*The Mall* (2022) by Brandon Cornett
Cyborg (1972) by Martin Caidin	*Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson
Glow (2021) by Tim Jordan	

Pirate Utopia (2016) by Bruce Sterling		*Software* (1982) by Rudy Rucker
Repo Virtual (2020) by Corey J. White		*Speak* (2015) by Louisa Hall
River of Gods (2004) by Ian McDonald		*Synners* (1991) by Pat Cadigan
Robopocalypse (2011) by Daniel H. Wilson		*Tik-Tok* (1983) by John Sladek
Sea of Rust (2017) by C. Robert Cargill		*Trouble and Her Friends* (1994) by Melissa Scott
Snow Crash (1992) by Neal Stephenson		*Wake* (2009) by Robert J. Sawyer