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Dare to Know

Science Fiction Comics

Comics that depict imagined scientific or technological advances (e.g., time travel, artificial intelligence) and their impact on society.

This genre is often called the “literature of ideas” and can be written in two basic styles: “hard” science fiction and “soft” science fiction. Hard science fiction comics are those which concentrate on natural science concepts (e.g., physics, chemistry, astronomy), with less of a focus on character development or plot. This scientific realism shapes the aesthetic and becomes the defining feature of the story. These books relate stories from a perspective that conforms to actual scientific knowledge and physical laws. Great attention is paid to technological detail, although there may be some measure of plausible speculation. Soft science novels feature less focus on science and more on characters. When necessary, these stories usually deal with social sciences (e.g., psychology, anthropology, sociology), and are more concerned with human activity and affairs in a science fiction setting. The term “science fiction” was popularized, and possibly invented, by publisher Hugo Gernsback in the 1920s.

Science fiction comics often present futuristic imaginings that comment directly and indirectly on the time in which they are published. Stories tend to be allegorical, and authors and artists may use the genre’s conventions to express social commentary and critique science, technology, and the human condition. The sequential art medium of science fiction comics lends itself to the futuristic and surrealistic nature of the genre. Science fiction comics began appearing as newspaper strips in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and were soon followed by comic books. These stories were often inspired by classical literature, overlaid with futuristic depictions of spaceships and ray guns, and separated from the real world with settings of distant planets. Publishers catered to a juvenile audience, and scientific and technological plausibility was often lacking. By the early 1950s, stories were achieving a greater narrative complexity and sophistication, and an increased adherence to proven science. With the imposition of the Comic Code Authority in 1954, publishers were forced once more to market to young readers in order to survive. This period of moderation and unoriginality continued into the 1960s. Later in that decade, the underground comix movement pushed for a greater degree of innovation in art and content and began to produce stories that appealed to adult readers. Science fiction comics would not reenter the mainstream until the mid-1970s when successful television and film productions in the same genre captured the popular imagination. William Ritt and Clarence Gray’s *Brick Bradford* (1933-1987); Alex Raymond’s *Flash Gordon* (1934-2003); Carl Pfeufer and Bob Moore’s *Don Dixon and the Hidden Empire* (1935-1942); Fiction House’s *Planet Comics* (1940-1953); Frank Hampson’s *Dan Dare* (1950-1969); EC Comics’ *Weird Science* (1950-1953), *Weird Fantasy* (1950-1953), *Weird Science Fantasy* (1953-1955), and *Incredible Science Fiction* (1955-1956); Avon Comics’ *Strange Worlds* (1950-1955); DC Comics’ *Strange Adventures* (1950-1973) and *Mystery in Space* (1951-1966); Charlton Comics’ *Space Adventures* (1952-1979); and Atlas Comics/Marvel Comics’ *Tales to Astonish* (1959-1968) are classic examples.

Common Elements

Speculative science
Advanced technology
Extraterrestrial lifeforms
Fictional worlds
Communications
Artificial intelligence

Fear of the “other”
One's place in the universe
Intergalactic war
Faster-than-light travel
Hyperspace

Artificial gravity
Wormholes
Teleportation
Mind control
Worldbuilding

Graphic Novel Examples

<i>1984: The Graphic Novel</i> (2021) by George Orwell and Fido Nesti
<i>Alex + Ada Volume 1</i> (2014) by Jonathan Luna and Sarah Vaughn
<i>Black Hole</i> (1995) by Charles Burns
<i>Camelot 3000: The Deluxe Edition</i> (2008) by Mike W. Barr and Brian Bolland
<i>The Complete Concrete</i> (1994) by Paul Chadwick
<i>Complete Multiple Warheads</i> (2014) by Brandon Graham
<i>Death Strikes: The Emperor of Atlantis</i> (2023) by Dave Maass and Patrick Lay
<i>Descender Volume 1: Tin Stars</i> (2015) by Jeff Lemire
<i>Ex Machina: The Complete Series Omnibus</i> (2018) by Brian K. Vaughan and Tony Harris
<i>Fear Agent Final Edition Volume 1</i> (2018) by Rick Remender, Tony Moore, and Jerome Opeña
<i>The Finder Library Volume 1</i> (2011) by Carla Speed McNeil
<i>Flash Gordon: On the Planet Mongo</i> (2012) by Alex Raymond
<i>Freak Angels Volume 1</i> (2008) by Warren Ellis
<i>Galaxy Quest: The Journey Continues</i> (2015) by Erik Burnham and Nacho Arranz
<i>Gilgamesh II Volume One</i> (1989) by Jim Starlin
<i>Grimjack Omnibus Volume 1</i> (2015) by John Ostrander and Timothy Truman

<i>Hard Boiled</i> (2017) by Frank Miller and Geof Darrow
<i>The Incal</i> (2015) by Alejandro Jodorowsky and Moebius
<i>The Invisibles: Say You Want a Revolution</i> (1999) by Grant Morrison
<i>Joyride Volume 1</i> (2016) by Jackson Lanzing
<i>Judge Dredd: The Complete Case Files 01</i> (2010) by John Wagner, Brian Bolland, and Ian Gibson
<i>Letter 44 Volume 1: Escape Velocity</i> (2014) by Charles Soule and Alberto Jiménez Albuquerque
<i>Lone Sloane: The 6 Voyages of Lone Sloane</i> (2015) by Phillippe Druillet
<i>Metabarons</i> (1992) by Alejandro Jodorowsky and Juan Giménez
<i>Mister X: The Archives</i> (2008) by Dean Motter
<i>Past Tense</i> (2023) by Jason McNamara and Alberto Massaggia
<i>Puma Blues: The Complete Saga in One Volume</i> (2015) by Stephen Murphy and Michael Zulli
<i>Primordial</i> (2022) by Jeff Lemire and Andrea Sorrentino
<i>Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451: The Authorized Adaptation</i> (2009) by Ray Bradbury and Tim Hamilton
<i>The Rocketeer: The Complete Adventures</i> (2009) by Dave Stevens

<i>Slaughterhouse-Five: The Graphic Novel</i> (2020) by Kurt Vonnegut, Ryan North, and Albert Monteys	<i>Titanium Rain Volume 1</i> (2010) by Josh Finney and Kat Rocha
<i>Southern Cross Volume 1</i> (2016) by Becky Cloonan, Andy Belanger, and Lee Loughridge	<i>The Underwater Welder</i> (2012) by Jeff Lemire
<i>Star Hawks Volume 1</i> (2017) by Ron Goulart and Gil Kane	<i>The Walking Dead: Book One</i> (2006) by Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore
<i>Starslayer</i> (2017) by Mike Grell	<i>A Wrinkle in Time: The Graphic Novel</i> (2012) by Madeleine L'Engle and Hope Larson
<i>The Surrogates</i> (2005) by Robert Venditti and Brett Weldele	<i>Y: the Last Man: Unmanned</i> (2003) by Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra