

Brian Aldiss  
with David Wingrove

# TRILLION YEAR SPREE

THE HISTORY  
OF SCIENCE FICTION

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Ever since Brian Aldiss's first Science Fiction novel *Non-Stop*, appeared in 1958, his name has stood high in the ranks of imaginative writers. His often controversial career has been marked by a series of individual novels, frequently calculated to startle, and to overturn the image established by the previous fiction. Milestones along this course include *Hothouse*, *Report on Probability A*, *The Hand-Reared Boy*, *The Malacia Tapestry*, *Frankenstein Unbound*, *Brothers of the Head*, and the *Helliconia* novels.

His fiction has won Aldiss many awards, including the Hugo and the Nebula. He has been voted the United Kingdom's most popular SF writer and 'World's Best Contemporary Science Fiction Author'. Several collections of his short stories are in print.

For his criticism he has been uniquely awarded. He holds the James Blish Award for Excellence in SF Criticism, the Pilgrim Award, and the first IAEA Distinguished Scholarship Award of Outstanding Contributions to the History and Criticism of the Fantastic in Literature. The present book won the Hugo Non-Fiction Award for 1987.

Brian Aldiss was born in Norfolk, but escaped to the Far East for some years. He lives outside Oxford, is married, and has four children. For many years he was Literary Editor of *The Oxford Mail*.

David Wingrove was born in Battersea, London in 1954. He left a lucrative career in banking in 1979 to study at the University of Kent, Canterbury, from where he emerged with a First Class Honours Degree in English and American Literature and a Masters Degree. He has edited two popular guides to the SF field, *The Science Fiction Source Book* (1984) and *The Science Fiction Film Source Book* (1985). At present he is dividing his time between looking after his two young daughters and writing.

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BRIAN W. ALDISS  
with DAVID WINGROVE

# Trillion Year Spree

The History of Science Fiction

**'Without the aid of the imagination all the pleasures  
of the senses must sink into grossness'**

- MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT,  
*Letters Written during a Short Residence  
in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*

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**The authors of this book  
dedicate it with respect and  
affection to two men also  
concerned with the history and  
histories of science fiction:  
Sam Lundwall and Marshall Tymn**

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>13</b>
---------------------	-----------

## **PART ONE: OUT OF THE GOTHIC**

<b>1</b>	<b>On the Origin of Species: Mary Shelley</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Something Monomaniacal: Edgar Allan Poe</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Honourable Ancestors: Good Places and Other Places</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The Gas-Enlightened Race: Victorian Visions</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>The Great General in Dreamland: H. G. Wells</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>The Flight from Urban Culture: Wells's Coevals</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>From Barsoom to Beyond the Borderlands: Swords, Sorceries and Zitidars</b>	<b>192</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>In the Clutches of the Zeitgeist: Mainly the Thirties</b>	<b>216</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>The Future on a Chipped Plate: The Worlds of John W. Campbell's <i>Astounding</i></b>	<b>256</b>

## **PART TWO: INTO THE BIG TIME**

<b>10</b>	<b>After the Impossible Happened: The Fifties</b>	<b>287</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>The Dawn of the Day of the Dumpbin: Cinemas, Computers, Colleges and Canticles</b>	<b>338</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>The Day of the Life-Style: Into the Sixties</b>	<b>358</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>The Men in Their High Castles: Dick and Other Visionaries</b>	<b>390</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>The Stars My Detestation: Sailing the Seventies</b>	<b>427</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>How to Be a Dinosaur: Seven Survivors</b>	<b>485</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>The Future Now</b>	<b>517</b>
	<b>Notes</b>	<b>571</b>
	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>655</b>
	<b>Index</b>	<b>659</b>

---

## List of Illustrations

Miniature of Mary Shelley by Reginald Easton (*Bodleian Library*)  
*An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* by Joseph Wright (*National Gallery, London*)  
The tombstone of Jules Verne, from *Amazing Stories*  
H. G. Wells on the set of *Things to Come*  
Edgar Rice Burroughs (*Edgar Rice Burroughs Inc*)  
Cover of Edward S. Ellis's *The Huge Hunter*  
European proto-SF magazines: *Der Orchideengarten* and *Hugin*  
Hugo Gernsback hearing through his teeth  
Frank R. Paul and *Amazing Stories*.  
Hubert Rogers and *Astounding Science Fiction*  
Portrait of John W. Campbell by Kelly Freas  
Olaf Stapledon (*courtesy of Agnes Z. Stapledon*)  
John Schoenherr *Analog* cover illustrating *Dune*  
Alex Schomburg cover for *Fantastic*  
Robert A. Heinlein, L. Sprague de Camp and Isaac Asimov during  
World War II (*US Navy*)  
Arthur C. Clarke (*Fred Clarke*)  
Frederik Pohl (*Wolfgang Jeschke*)  
Philip K. Dick  
*New Worlds* in 1968, cover design by Charles Piatt and Christopher  
Finch  
Forrest J. Ackerman, Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss at an SF  
symposium in Rio de Janeiro (*Cine-Foto Real*)  
Michael Moorcock (*Grafton Publishing*)  
J. G. Ballard (*Fay Godwin*)  
A scene from *Solaris*  
A scene from *Star Wars*  
A cover for an SF convention booklet

**William Gibson**

**Greg Bear**

**SF authors at NASA HQ in Houston** (*Rosemary Herbert*)

*Text Illustrations*

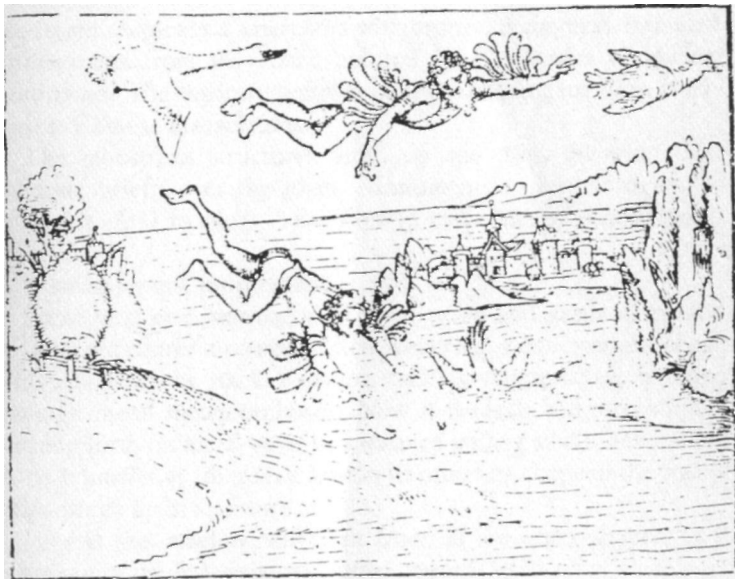
- page 11*    **A German depiction of Daedalus and Icarus, 1493**
- page 27*    **A French illustration of an electrical flying machine,  
dating from 1775**
- page 285*    **Drawing by Alan Hunter**



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## Trillion Year Spree

The History of Science Fiction



A German interpretation of the Greek myth of Daedalus and Icarus. This first depiction of men flying appeared in F. Riederer's *Spiegel der Wahren Rhetorick*, published in Freiburg in Breisgau, 1493.

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## Introduction

Someday my father would stop writing science fiction, and write something a whole lot of people wanted to read instead.

- Kurt Vonnegut: *Galapagos*

You are standing on a vast flat plain. Something appears on the horizon and moves rapidly towards you. It is a shaly hillside on which a cave is evident, its mouth fortified. It whirls by.

Something else is approaching. A series of objects moves towards you. A village on stilts wading into a lake. A small brown city with mud walls. A pyramid, encrusted with bronze. A ziggurat. Immense fortifications from the Aztec culture. The palisades of ancient Zimbabwe. The intricate temples of the East, Angkor Wat, Borabadur. Chinese mausoleums.

The monstrous structures loom up and pass, throwing their shadows briefly over the plain. Monuments to life, to death, to conquest. And to piety - the Gothic cathedrals of Europe drift past.

Tombs, towers, universities.

Something else, moving with great noise and gasps of smoke. Nearer and nearer it comes, at first labouring, a cumbersome shape with a high smoke stack. Refining itself as it approaches, writhing through metal metamorphoses. Now it is sleek and streamlined, rushing forth on metal rails, its carriages trailing snake-like behind it. As it hurtles by, there is a hint in its mutating shape of the rocket ships which lie in its future.

Why is this machine different from all the other shapes, as it roars out of the industrial revolution towards us?

Because it has the power to move itself. Because it is the first thing on land ever to move faster than a cheetah, a stag, a galloping horse.

Because it brings us into a world of timetables, where we have to conform to a thing's convenience, not it to ours. Because the timetables induce us to look ahead to the material world stretching like the endless plain before us.

Because it emerges from the eighteenth century vibrating with technological change.

Science fiction is one of the major literary success areas of the second half of the twentieth century. It is now largely - in emphasis and in fact - an American art form, coinciding with a time of great technological evolution and with the rise of the USA to super-power status.

The origins and inspirations for science fiction lie outside the United States, though within the period of the Industrial Revolution. As we might expect. Only in an epoch when a power source more reliable than ocean currents or the wind, faster than the horse, has been developed, can we expect to find a literature that will concern itself with problems of power, either literal or metaphorical. Such problems lie at the heart of SF, the fiction of a technological age.

Nowadays, everyone knows of SF and thinks he or she knows what it is. Not everyone reads, not everyone approves. But every age gets the art it deserves.

Good SF does not necessarily traffic in reality; but it makes reality clearer to us.

This is the story of science fiction, told from its humble beginnings right up to the present day. It is a wonderful and fascinating story, even to those who are not necessarily aficionados. When Cinderella finally makes it to the ball, everyone is pleased. (Except those Ugly Sisters.)

But what is science fiction? Read on.

This book has grown out of *Billion Year Spree*, which was published in 1973. Since then, science fiction has gone forth and multiplied to a remarkable extent. What was once virtually a secret movement has become part of the cultural wallpaper. This new book chronicles and makes sense of that dramatic growth, while discussing the milestones along the way.

Anyone even remotely connected with the science fiction field

knows that great advances are taking place. But are such alterations tokens of a wider general acceptance or of a dismal decline in standards? Indecision, an awareness of crisis, is in the air. We hope to clarify the situation, whether or not all our arguments are found immediately acceptable.

All discussion of science fiction involves generalization. The time has never existed when 'science fiction' was a homogeneous commodity - regurgitated, it might be, by some vast alien mass mind. True, attempts have been made from various points of the literary compass to impose uniformity - by Michael Butor, by John W. Campbell, by fandom. Most writers evade such stereotypes. Yet still the trade mark 'science fiction' carries much weight with friends and foes alike.

At any time, there are only individuals working under a common banner, though some individuals are more individual than others. Some would like to get out from under the banner. Others would like to get further in. Many march with overweening pride under the banner.

Those who subscribe most ardently to a set of common derived conventions will produce the most clearly defined generic fiction. Those who are most independent will produce work which - obviously enough - pays least heed to the restrictions of formula and will transcend it.

To defy or meet expectations? Both are well-recognized literary ploys.

The difficulty - the infinitude of SF - lies in the obdurate fact that it is both formulaic and something more than a genre. It is a mode which easily falls back into the genre.' The model is flexible, changing with the times. New designs are forever produced. SF can be conventional and innovative at one and the same time.

The science fiction field flourishes best when both kinds of writer, the iconoclast and the iconolater, exist in tension, one set distrusting the other. But there is rarely close agreement even between members of the same set. Some writers do not feel themselves to be members of either set, and reject categorization.

This point requires stressing at a time when some publishers have set up clearly defined SF lines. Others publish only SF. The perils of such a monoculture are twofold: generic (generally action) SF will get published while less flamboyant work is rejected; and a

boom-or-bust situation, an unpleasant symptom of SF publishing, will be perpetuated.

SF cannot exist without divergent opinions. The material with which it deals is itself controversial. Shall we increase technology until the whole surface of the planet is covered by concrete and steel? Is all religion an aberration? Is war inevitable? Will artificial intelligence take over our governance, and is that desirable? Do we need to conquer space? How could Utopia come about? What of our immortal souls?

Of course, the ability to generalize is a vital instrument of reason. Without the ability to deal in generalities, we should have no laws. If this book did not trade in generalities, we should have no book. We talk of the Thirties, for instance, as if those years had a unique flavour, like raspberries or mangoes. We all know this was not the case. It still remains convenient to point to 'the Thirties' or 'the Sixties', sure of a general understanding.

There is an argument which says that SF has no history, and that the story in this book is another generalization, and a false one. That E. E. Smith has no place in a book with Lucian of Samosata, or A. E. van Vogt with Jonathan Swift. That no evolution such as is described ever took place. That the pulp magazines are entirely irrelevant to the writings of Aldous Huxley or George Orwell.

This argument, put forward by the Disintegrators, is ingenious - too ingenious. It is an argument which pays attention to the aims of the writer. A history of science fiction, however, must pay attention to the interests of the reader. And to the reader of science fiction, Thomas More's Utopia is as interesting as Burroughs's Barsoom, or *1984* as *2010*. C. S. Lewis is as rewarding as Robert Heinlein. In this volume, we are entirely on the side of the reader. Definite generic interplays exist.

One generalization we shall be unable to abolish. That is the generalization which says that all science fiction is rubbish. Generalization-22.

Generalization-22 is not solely the creation of the hostile outside world. It has been fostered in part by the SF world, who have insisted for several generations that its kind of reading is Different. And not just Different but Better. Such defensive boasting is counter-productive. The illogic is apparent: this latest dismal SF novel by X (once so brilliant when we were young) is not better

than Y, the new Argentinian novelist's first book. But maybe, just maybe, the next brilliant SF novel by Z may be even better than Y's second novel. Literary judgement has to deal with individual cases, not with a cattle market.

The sooner this truth is acknowledged within the SF field, the sooner we shall convert the heathen and make Generalization-22 obsolete. One of the unreasonable hopes of this book is that it may convert the odd heathen here and there. The heathen always have their own viewpoint.

For many, science fiction has become an environment. It contains all they wish from life. Yet an SF story or novel consists of words, like any other kind of book. And generally a recognizable form of words - a particular kind of narrative guarantees much of SF's interest. Yet the form, which is an inheritance of the Gothic, is often ignored. The Gothic was a type of romance developed in the late eighteenth century, relying on suspense and mystery and containing a number - a limited number - of startling props. A word more about that.

The rise of industrialization fostered the growth of large manufacturing towns and the spread of cities. People were obliged to live among strangers to make their living. Church bells were replaced by the more exacting railway timetable.

The effects of these unprecedented changes - culminating in our day in an *umwelt* of continual change - was far-reaching. The human psyche was not immune to them.

The fiction that evolved to accommodate this situation - a middle class fiction, somewhere between romance and realism, as it was between science and myth - was the Gothic fantasy. Backward-looking and nostalgic at first, it developed rapidly during the nineteenth century to confront more closely the conditions which nurtured it.<sup>2</sup> The archetypal figures of cruel father and seducing monk were transformed into those of scientist and alien.

Designed as pure entertainment, as 'escapism', the Gothic proved to have remarkable strengths when it traded on current fears, hopes, and obsessions. It could venture where the solid realistic social novel could not go. Although the social novel is seen as the dominant literary form of the nineteenth century, its doppelganger, the Gothic, kept in silent step with it, from *Franken-*

*stein* at the century's beginning to *Dracula* at its end. Indeed, the archetypal figures who emerged from those novels are now familiar all over the world; *Oliver Twist*, *Madame Bovary*, and *Anna Karenina* enjoy a more tenuous existence beyond their respective volumes than do *Frankenstein* and *Count Dracula*.

Such a thing as pure genre does not exist. The Gothic is by no means homogeneous. It can incorporate and reinforce itself by the qualities of Romance and of a partial Realism. Quest novels, which enjoy such popularity in the nineteen-eighties, are clearly a blend of Gothic fantasy and veins of story-telling far more ancient. But impurity, adaptation, invention, even imitation, are of the essence of story-telling. Listeners and readers require novelty; they also require the touchstone of familiarity.

One strong Gothic theme is that of descent from a 'natural world' to inferno or incarceration, where the protagonist goes, willingly or otherwise, in search of a secret, an identity, or a relationship. This volume embraces many stories with such motifs, from famous exercises such as Jules Verne's adventures at the centre of the earth to *Frankenstein's* descent into charnel houses, *Dracula's* descent to his earth-coffins, or the journey to Trantor, in effect a total underground planet, to the metaphysical search for his father undertaken by the less-known hero of *Land Under England*.

This reluctant protagonist developed from the distressed maidens of Mrs Radcliffe into modern figures. The vital role emerged, via the refinements of Poe, Wilkie Collins, and Conan Doyle, into the modern detective or private eye. Along the way, the role divided, to become also the scientist, the inventor, the space-traveller.

The need to find a secret, an identity, a relationship, accompanied the questing traveller to other worlds or futures. Industrialization had assisted many sciences, including geology and astronomy. A new comprehension of the dynamism of the natural world (once regarded as a static stage for a theological drama) was incorporated in Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, one of the great gloomy interventions of the nineteenth century which still colours our intellectual discourse. Evolution provided an essential viewpoint powering the new sub-species of Gothic, science fiction. Here, it seemed, was a key to the most puzzling, most impressive

question of identity of all - the identity of mankind. A mere brute in clothes, a degenerate ape, a culmination of eon-long processes, a godling?

And evolution also provided a clue in that dark search for a relationship. In the struggle for survival, who are our friends? Is the alien always to be feared? Should we not regard ourselves as some kind of alien? Shall we become Utopians and live in peace?

Many questions to be dramatized, treated deeply or frivolously. Along with the changed questions went elements practically unchanged since Ann Radcliffe's day: the climate, the effects of the light, the desolate scenery. No longer in fifteenth century Italy, perhaps . . . but on a planet just as remote from us. In that remoteness lies another marked feature of science fiction, alienation. Both the Industrial Revolution and evolution have brought a marked sense of isolation to humanity in general: isolation from one another - and from Nature, so often seen in science fiction as an enemy to be conquered, as if we were no longer ourselves a part of the natural world.

*Trillion Year Spree* is a very much revised, altered and enlarged version of the 1970's book. It includes and attempts to digest all that has been happening in the science fiction field over the last two decades.

What has not altered in that time are my convictions. True, I have changed my opinions of this or that; how could it be otherwise? But my basic convictions have merely strengthened over the intervening years. I refer to certain ideas which, tentatively proposed before, roused anger, shock, vituperation, threats of violence, and occasional acceptance, in my readers.

Of course I understand that bosoms can scarcely be expected to remain tranquil in companies where SF is supported, is idolized, is a way of life. Any deviation from an established order of ritual must be challenged. Equally, one must stand by one's beliefs.

Foremost among these beliefs is a certainty about the origins of SF. Of course, it is in a way a Stone Age truth to say that SF began with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The more we know, the less certain we can be about origins; the date of the Renaissance becomes less clear decade by decade as research goes on.

Nevertheless, bearing in mind that no genre is pure, *Frankenstein*



is more than a merely convenient place at which to begin the story. Behind it lie other traditions like broken skeletons, classical myth, a continent full of *Märchen* tales. But Mary Shelley's novel betokens an inescapably new perception of mankind's capabilities, as is argued in Chapter One. Moreover, *Frankenstein* is marvellously good and inexhaustible in its interest. Not a negligible point.

Were there women writers before Mary Shelley? Research into this subject is carried out in all the world's universities. One name at least emerges, that of the lively Margaret Cavendish, impoverished Duchess of Newcastle, whose *The Description of a New World, called The Blazing World* was published in 1666. The absence of Margaret Cavendish and Mary Shelley from standard literary histories reminds us that science fiction is not the only thing against which learned men have harboured baseless prejudices.

Before I wrote, almost no one paid any attention to that old pre-Victorian novel of Mary Shelley's. Having seen travesties of the theme on film and television, they believed they knew what they did not. The situation has remarkably improved since then. (After writing the history, I wrote a novel, *Frankenstein Unbound*, designed to draw attention to its great original.)

Like all discoveries, this one was prompted by more than circumstantial evidence. It was born of a wish to refute certain nonsensical claims previously put forward, which did a mode of writing I much enjoyed no honour.

My belief in SF has not diminished over the intervening years, and remains strong at a time when true science fiction appears under threat, swamped by an avalanche of imitations and wish-fantasies in the United States and, in England, the virtual disappearance of young science fiction writers, thanks to the chill climate of discouragement which there prevails.

For all its tragic flaws, its absurd pretensions, its monstrous freights of nonsense, the platonic ideal of science fiction remains alive, as the literature most suited to our progressing and doom-threatened century, the literature most free to take aboard new-perspectives, new manifestations of the *Zeitgeist*.

Critics expected the Gothic to go away. It never has. Born pseudonymously from the mind of Horace Walpole, fourth Earl of Orford, it proved to have all the adaptability of a living species. Critics expected SF to go away. It never has. It is the urban

literature and will, we hope, exist as long as there are cities, in whatever form.

Both the thesis that *Frankenstein* marked a beginning and that SF was a Gothic offshoot were so unacceptable that *Billion Year Spree* scarcely received any reviews in those journals in which its appearance should have been instantly greeted; indeed, had it not been for the vigilant intervention of my old friend and ally, Harry Harrison, those reviews would have been even sparser.

It is hard to recognize now the confusion that existed then. Before my book appeared, there was no accepted idea of when SF began. Some critics claimed it all started in a semi-juvenile pulp magazine in the twenties, others that Homer wrote science fiction. Ludicrously enough, these were often the same critics. Yet to have no understanding of this matter is to have no understanding of the function and nature of SF.

The new synthesis I developed was embodied in my definition of science fiction, contained in Chapter One. Of course that definition has been challenged, and rightly. Of course I have wanted to improve it. And rightly. And I have done so by one word.

The definition defines both function and mode, which together comprise SF's nature. The pretensions of the first part of the definition are defused by the limitations of the second. The Gothic is, after all, a mode of entertainment, generally ranked below what we may call for convenience the modern novel.

My definition is the only one to link content and form, which are inseparable.

Here perhaps I should add parenthetically that neither I nor my collaborator, David Wingrove, have any aversion to the modern novel; we do not adopt the philistine stance of so many commentators, in praising SF at the expense of the modern novel, with which we are tolerably familiar.

We take SF seriously, and would be crazy not to; but we do not forget that it is in the main a commercial genre, and treated as such even by some of its most honoured practitioners. Our title acknowledges as much. A trillion years is no laughing matter; a spree is.

Part of the problem of seeing SF in true perspective lies in the difficulty of judgement attendant on the early SF magazines, notably Hugo Gernsback's. Most of the opprobrium first visited on *Billion Year Spree* centred round my comments on Gernsback and

his magazines. Yet no convincing argument was put forward to make me retract what I said. One has merely to consult the texts.

Those readers who enjoyed such magazines as *Amazing Stories* and *Wonder Stories* in their youth - often their extreme youth - naturally retain fond memories of those pages and those days. Nostalgia, however, provides no sound basis for literary judgement. The covers of those old magazines retain a weird specialized attraction; but the reading matter between the covers is, almost without exception, unutterably poor. This situation did not improve until about 1938 and a small miracle.

If we do not perceive this, if we believe that these pathetic tales, in which the namby-pamby has intercourse with the sensational, represent some kind of a Golden Age, then we can have no engagement with contemporary SF, at least in its higher reaches. Appreciation is not omnivorous.

It is an old-fashioned idea, yet not entirely false, that we read to develop our understanding and aesthetic appreciation. That is part of our pleasure. Reading, like the taking of lovers, rarely begins in exalted taste. Cultivation is important. If we remain loyal to the reading of our childhood, it is a false loyalty, a puppy-love. Uncle Hugo has his place in sub-literature, perhaps an honoured place. But we must set his works aside with a sigh, to see clearly how greatly SF has evolved and sophisticated itself since then.

As much needs saying, though it is obvious enough. A lot rests on that obvious truth, for what follows from it provides the whole *raison d'être* of this volume. Our chronicle has a thesis, never insisted upon: that the best SF being written today is an improvement on the crude SF of the early magazines; that it has acquired many skills and graces, possibly at the expense of new ideas; that we are now in a Modern Period of SF, the birth of which may be dated roughly from the first publication of *Dune* in 1963-4, which period actually exhibits many of the same traits as does the modern novel, in terms of amplification and sophistication at the expense of innovation; that there remains much to be admired, as well as much to be deplored; that recent achievements are real, and to be praised. Our perspective is a positive and forward-looking one, as we hope will be acknowledged.

An argument has been advanced recently which says that it is impossible to write a history of science fiction. That SF consists merely of the worst. That such writers as Gore Vidal in *Messiah*, or Olaf Stapledon in *Last and First Men*, or Doris Lessing in her *Canopus in Argos* series, knew nothing of the continuity of science fiction, of its traditions, or of its rules (which means in fact a few prescriptions laid down by a small clique of, in the main, non-writers); and in consequence cannot be said to be a part of science fiction at all.

This is a fallacy. If we can imagine that a playwright like Eugene O'Neill, or a poet like Thomas Hardy, or a novelist like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, knew nothing of the history of the drama, poetry, or the novel, the fact would in no way lessen the contributions those writers made to their chosen medium, or to the influence they had on those who followed them.

There is no such entity as science fiction. We have only the work of many men and women which, for convenience, we can group together under the label 'science fiction'. Many dislike that label; many glory in it.

Throughout the book, as previously, we allow only the abbreviation 'SF'. That down-market appellation 'sci-fi', sometimes heard on the lips of the would-be trendy in the media and elsewhere, is purposely avoided. We bow to the fact that much of what passes for science fiction these days is nearer fantasy. SF can, after all, be imagined to stand for science fantasy, as it can for speculative fiction (for those who are attached to that term).

*Billion Year Spree* concluded with a prediction concerning the future rise of SF-as-study and an SF academia. The prediction has been fulfilled beyond my expectations. There was then almost no body of SF scholarship; nor was there more than the smallest student body. Now SF is a recognized discipline in universities and colleges across the United States. Such associations exist as the SFRA, the Science Fiction Research Association, which was amiable and perceptive enough to bestow on me a Pilgrim Award, mainly for the earlier edition of this book, and the IAFA, the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts - which has kindly presented me with its first Distinguished Scholarship

Award - to which two societies the most eminent SF scholars belong.

Following this development, publishers have sprung up who publish nothing but SF criticism. Not all criticism is of the first rank, as is to be anticipated of such a youthful discipline, but we may have every expectation that it will improve, strengthening its present rather remote relationship with real English and becoming more adventurous in its subject matter.

*Trillion Year Spree* is devised for the enjoyment of the reader, that reader whom Dr Johnson and Virginia Woolf rejoiced to call 'the common reader'; nor has anything changed in that respect. But we move with the times. More rigour has now been shown. The book is designed to serve in schools where SF is on the curriculum. It provides, as no other volume does, a synoptic grasp of the whole field, with as much neutrality and freedom from favouritism or prejudice as its authors can contrive between them.

Yet it remains, in some aspects, a personal book. I have excluded all discussion in the text of my own writing, whether fact or fiction; yet the book is imbued - or so I hope - with the intuitions gained from many years as a writer of science fiction (and not only science fiction). My hope is that it may prove of some value to my fellow writers, so hostile to it first time round, and to beginner writers.

Perhaps I have not always shown what some may regard as proper reverence. I am too familiar with it for that: my first SF story was written when I was eight.

Nor are these aspirations mine alone. The extensive work and research involved in the compilation of this book would never have been undertaken, let alone completed, without the assistance of my staunch ally, David Wingrove. Indeed, more than assistance. Perfect collaboration.

Appreciation is not omnivorous. I felt I could not bring the same fresh eye to the books, films, and events of the startling last fifteen years as I did to previous ones. A more eager and energetic - a younger - presence was required.

David and I met many years ago. As a fan, he surveyed me first through field-glasses from a neighbouring property, the way one

spots rare old birds of a migratory nature. There has been nothing migratory about our friendship since, which dates from the moment he set down his field-glasses and came up our drive. *Billion Year Spree* was one of the first SF books he read, so he makes a particularly appropriate partner in the enterprise.

I played a minor part in two of David's critical works, *The Science Fiction Source Book*, and *The SF Film Source Book*, as well as forming the main dish in the Brian Griffin and David Wingrove *Apertures: A Study of the Writings of Brian W. Aldiss*. It has been a pleasure to work with him in collaboration. His enthusiasm and cheerfulness have never failed.

Our opinions are not always identical. If they were, it would be useless for us to work together. Many of the judgements are his, not mine. For a lot of readers, David will have written the more interesting part of the book. We have modified but rarely altered each other's opinions. We have rewritten each other's texts to such an extent that it is now hard to determine who exactly said what.

A word to critics who dislike science fiction. The over-productivity of science fiction writers is a byword. There is a lot of it about, and it is popular. For some, that is enough to condemn it without further enquiry. The question upon which all literary criticism runs on the rocks is this: if it is good, can it be popular; if it is popular, can it be good?'

We take the reasonable point of view that science fiction gives pleasure to many people; our task is to compare the varying degrees of pleasure. We find SF (some of it) immensely readable and enriching.

Conversations with many friends have greatly helped in forming critical opinions. Especial thanks must go to Michael Collings, Patrick Edington and Charles N. Brown. Also to Dr Robert Collins of Florida Atlantic University, whose influence has been greater - and more benign - than he probably realizes. The title, *Billion Year Spree*, was first mentioned in print in 1964. Much has happened since that date. Friends change, publishers change, the world changes. But I am happy to acknowledge now, as I did then, the help of my wife Margaret as we sailed these endless seas of paper.

She it was who aided us through successive drafts, and poured the whole enterprise through the word-processor into its present form.

*Woodlands*  
*Boars Hill*  
*Oxford*  
*July 1986*

BRIAN W. ALDISS

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PART ONE  
Out of the Gothic



This wonderful electrical flying machine was depicted in a French work, *Le philosophe sans prétension, ou l'homme rare*, by Louis Guillaume de la Folle, published in Paris in 1775. It shows that interest in practical applications of electricity was alive some while before Mary Shelley wrote.



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