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**Time for Equal Opportunities”**

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**«Фантастические романы, предсказывающие будущее: российские  
и зарубежные авторы»**

“Fantasy novels that try to predict the future: Russian and foreign authors”



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A huge number of people around the world are fans of Science-Fiction, commonly shortened to Sci-Fi, as a genre that effectively combines innovations within technology with man's greater struggle for ingenuity, progress and security. Despite its appeal among the general public, it is still derided by large parts of the media, literary critics and within academic circles.

Unacknowledged by its critics is the fact that Sci-Fi is not always based around some hyper-futuristic reality or development, but sometimes simply depicts technology just beyond our own understanding, encouraging those who shape our modern world to think a little harder and look a little further. While it is true that most Sci-fi ideas never see the light of day as part of our lived experience, the goal of this essay is to provide several notable examples of fiction influencing the progression of our species.

In the fields of transportation, advanced weaponry, genetic modification and mass entertainment, it is visible how literature's once fanciful imaginings have become the next generation's brave new world.

It is possible that no writer better demonstrated the potential link between fantasy and reality than French author Jules Verne. His seminal novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* inspired the American inventor Simon Lake to construct the Argonaut, the first successful submarine in 1898 and he was even lauded with a congratulatory note from Verne himself. Likewise, a young Russian boy named Igor Sikorsky read Verne's novel *Clipper of the Clouds* or *Robur the Conqueror*. So taken with the idea of an airborne ship, Sikorsky went on to invent his very own flying machine, known to most as the modern helicopter.

However, Verne was far from the only novelist to witness his imaginings brought to life. Victor Appleton's Tom Swift, a character from a series of novels depicting the adventures of a teen genius, utilised an electric rifle which shot electricity instead of typical bullets. Despite the politically incorrect subject matter, this book inspired a NASA researcher to invent the taser: an electroshock weapon used to incapacitate people.

H.G. Wells's *The World Set Free* provided an even more distressing overview of the potential pitfalls of atomic power. Wells theorised that atomic power would either destroy mankind or lead it to eliminate violence entirely in order to focus on humanitarian development. His book, published in 1914, allegedly inspired the scientist Leo Szilard to devote his life and career to atomic energy and resulted in the creation of the atomic bomb.

Verne and Wells literary heritage produced a great impact on modern technological progress. The major difference in their outlooks was that Verne focused on new types of transportation, and Wells' ideas normally tended towards more sophisticated ways in which humanity might obliterate itself. Despite this broad difference in perspectives, the latter's *The War of the Worlds* featuring terrifying Martians and their interplanetary ships, prompted American scientist Robert H. Goddard to use the novel as the basis for a new mode of transportation: a liquid fueled rocket.

In yet another instance of imagination paving the way for modernity, Arthur C. Clarke's short story *Dial F for Frankenstein*, published as early as 1964, told the story of a telephone network seizing control and eventually becoming the World's Plague. But, despite Clarke's cold warning, his story struck a chord with a teenager named Tim Berners-Lee who later became the inventor of the world wide web. A similar prototype of the Internet is to be found in the works of the Strugatsky brothers. The 'Great All-Planet Informatorium' was used by the characters of the World of Noon cycle to search for valuable information. The 'informator' worked very slowly and receive a response to a simple request, one had to wait for several hours. However, all the information was accurate and reliable, obtained only from official sources. It in many ways resembled a more accurate version of modern day Wikipedia.

Synthetic food was also piloted as a plot idea by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky in the story *The Distant Rainbow*. However, the characters in that particular piece considered such food to be bland and abhorrent: "How unpleasant, after two years of abundance, to return again to synthetic food, to artificial steaks, to pears with a taste of toothpaste, to chlorella "rural soups", to quasi-biotic mutton cutlets and other miracles of synthesis

<...>”. Today, even flavoursome synthesized meat can be produced and, in further testament to the brothers’ enduring vision, the same book also proposed online delivery services, videochat, slow motion filming and 5-D cinemas.

*Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury gave us a dystopia in which everyone is so zonked out on technology that books are routinely burned. Bradbury would probably be less than thrilled to know that his ‘sea shells’ and ‘thimble radios’, as described in the book, have come true in the form of earbuds and Bluetooth headsets. Nearly everyone in the world owns a pair of earbuds, but some consolation for the author might come from the fact that at least some of those using them are listening to audiobooks.

This is only a very brief summarization of Sci-Fi authors’ fantastic ideas becoming real-world creations. Science-Fiction has always been and will ever remain a treasure trove for the most perceptive and imaginative inventors. Ideas are simply seeds waiting to be planted. Thus, the reading of Sci-Fi literature is well worth the time spent, as it expands, in a far broader sense than most realise, the horizons of humankind.

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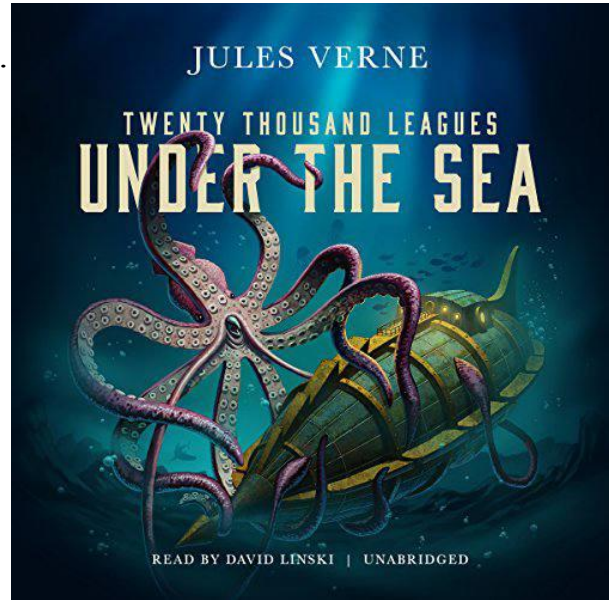
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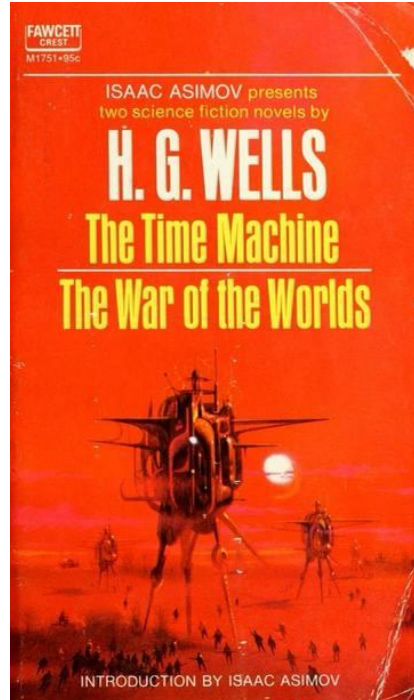


1. Jules Gabriel Verne

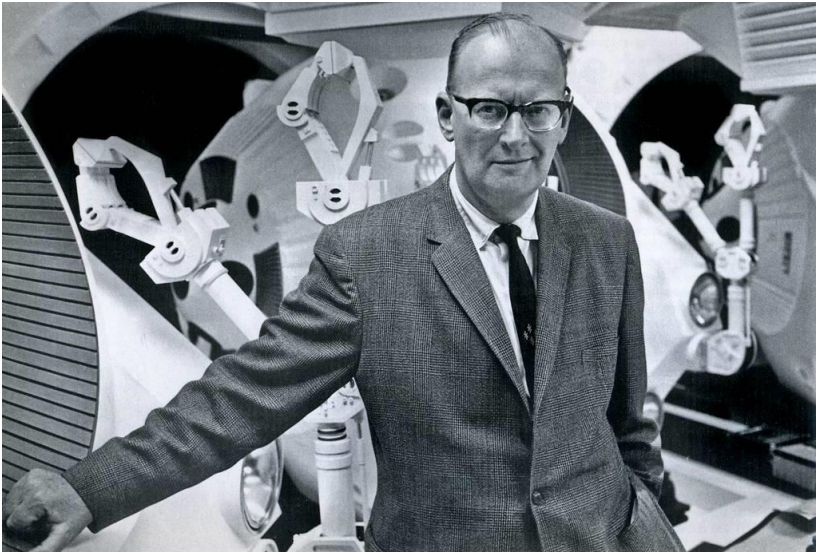
## Appendix



2. H.G. Wells







3. Arthur C. Clarke

4. The Strugatsky brothers