WELCOME TO SCI-FI (and fantasy) LITERATURE!

Focus:
Some of you will undoubtedly be asking yourselves, ‘wait a moment, I thought this was sci-fi and fantasy literature.’ Well, in all truth, these are two very different genres, and though there certainly will be elements of fantasy and the fantastic explored in this class, I’ve chosen to focus our semester together on Sci-Fi literature – from the classic age to the present. Together, we will explore the history of the development of science fiction as a genre from some of its earliest manifestations in order to first understand its history as a genre; then we will launch into a journey that can only be understood to be – universal and vast. I’ve also intentionally chosen the works below to reflect one of the most important threads to constitute the sci-fi genre: the quest into the unknown and the power of liminal space. Trust me, you will not be disappointed from our semester together; in fact, my hope is that this class leaves you wanting to continue to explore this genre more fully!

Required Works:
You will be responsible for the following works. I have indicated which titles are available free online as .pdfs with an (E) – I will attempt to send out my pdf copies but if the files are too large to go through the school server, then you will be responsible for finding the version we will be using in class (I will at least send you the links I used to get to these free downloads); feel free, however, to purchase text copies of any or all of the (E) works below if you would rather have a book in your hands (I know I often do but I’ve utilized as many online free texts as possible to keep the class cost low). I have indicated which titles are available in book form only with a (B) – these have been ordered for you through the bookstore, but I highly recommend that you go online and find cheaper versions of these ASAP. Finally, I have indicated which titles we will be enjoying together as films with an (F) that I will be screening in class; since we have 3 hour sessions, I have elected to use this option as appropriate. NOTE: When we will be discussing E or B texts in class, you will be responsible for having your copy with you in class. So, you may either print out the E versions or have them accessible to you, preferably via a laptop and not on your phone which would make them very difficult to see and read.

The works for which you will be responsible will be, in this order:

Shakespeare *Macbeth* (F) – Orson Welles b/w version (year published: 1623)
Jules Verne *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (E) (yp: 1864)
HG Wells *War of the Worlds* (E) (yp: 1898)
Isaac Asimov *Nightfall* and *I, Robot* (E) (yp: 1944)
Ray Bradbury *The Martian Chronicles* (B) (yp: 1950)
Robert Heinlein *Starship Troopers* (E) (yp: 1959)
Frank Herbert *Dune* (F) – David Lynch 1984 version (yp: 1965)
Ursula Le Guin *The Dispossessed* (B) (yp: 1974)
William Gibson *Burning Chrome, Johnny Mnemonic and Red Star, Winter Orbit* (E) (yp: 1975-85)
Carl Sagan *Contact* (F) Jodie Foster 1997 version (yp: 1985)
Clive Barker *The Hellbound Heart* and stories from *Book of Blood* (E) (yp: 1987)
Selected episodes of *Star Trek: Voyager* (F) on Netflix (yp: 1995-7)
Selected episodes of *X-Files* (F) on Hulu (yp: 1998-2002)
Michel Faber *Under the Skin* (B) (yp: 2000)

There are 16 works listed above, and we have 16 weeks together – so our syllabus is rather simple to figure out. Starting on our very first night together, we will deal with the above one week at a time (so, yes, we will be watching *Macbeth* in class on our first night together).

I will attach a more detailed syllabus with weeks and texts due, and assignments due, at the end of these course sheets.

**Assignments:**

**Pop Quizzes:** 20%
There will be five pop quizzes throughout the course that will test your knowledge regarding the texts you are to read for class on those days; quizzes will be given during the first 15-20 minutes of class, and if you miss a class or come to class late that day, you cannot make up the quiz. Each quiz will be graded on a 50 point scale, and only the top four quiz scores will be used towards your final grade. Each of your top four quiz grades will count as 5% of your final course grade for a total of 20% of your final course grade.

**Short Essay:** 30%
You will be responsible for two analysis and evaluation essays over the course of the term – and you get to choose the two works you wish: the only rule is, you must complete one of these by the end of week eight of the semester. These short essays will require that you explore one specific aspect of the work you choose and relate it to sci-fi as a genre, and then evaluate the work according to that aspect. These essays will be 1000-1250 words long. Each will be worth 15% of your final grade. Each will be graded on a 150 point scale.

**Long Study:** 50%
You will be responsible for one long study. The long study must endeavor to explore a sustained literary concept of sci-fi literature that you will trace through 3-4 of the works listed above and will require at least five outside sources. This will be an MLA essay with Works Cited: 2000-2250 words. This will be worth 50% of your final grade. The long study will be due to me on XXX and it must be sent to me as a word.doc attachment via email to my school email address above. This will be graded on a 500 point scale.
Attendance:
This class will be so frackin’ amazing that you will definitely want to be here each week. However, you do have two – and only two – excused absences for the term. Use them anytime you wish, but use them wisely. On the third absence, I will either withdraw you from the course or I will have to assign you a non-passing grade for the course if your third absence occurs after the drop date. If you wish to drop this course, it is your responsibility to do so. To sweeten the pot, I will add 2 points to your total points for the semester for each class you attend – yep, you read that correctly. That means, if you attend all 16 classes, you will achieve an additional 32 bonus points on top of the points you earn from your assignments listed above. = )

Grading Scale:
Final course grades will be determined by adding up all of the points you earn on your assignments, quizzes and attendance bonus points to reflect the following:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>925-1000</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>850-924</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>775-849</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>700-774</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>&lt;700</td>
<td>F</td>
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Class Do’s and Don’ts:
1) Please be on time and plan to stay until the end of each class session, especially on nights when we will be screening films and having discussion afterwards.
2) Please do not do any outside work in class or jump on your cell phone to shop for clothes; if I see you not paying attention, I will make sure that you know that I know you aren’t paying attention.
3) Please be respectful of each other at all times; our class is our safe space, and our journey is one we will be taking together. Space is vast; we humans need to take care of each other out there . . .
4) When it is necessary, I will lecture on topics related to the material we will be covering in class. Please do not talk over me, but please feel free to ask any and all questions – no question is without merit as long as it pertains to the subjects we are covering.
5) I will encourage and invite you to participate in both class and small group discussions over the course of the term; this class is going to be only as good as we all make it, and that means you must come prepared to class and be ready to discuss the works at hand. All works are to be read by the date indicated on the syllabus (movies, however, we will screen together in class and do not require you to watch them beforehand). I know there is a lot of reading for this course, but I know these works will entice you if you give them the chance. I’ve also tried to “stagger” longer and shorter works, and break up the course with films when appropriate so that you can get your reading and long study done on time: please do your reading completely or our class discussions will be flat and meaningless for you, and for all of us.
6) If you have writing challenges, it is strongly recommended that you work proactively with free tutors available to you through the Writing Center in the Library on campus.
This is a literature course, and as such, I will not have time to lecture on composition; my expectation is that you will know how to write properly using MLA formatting and rules, and that you will know how to conduct the research required to complete your long study. You may always email me with questions or make an appointment to see me during my office hours to help you. I will not lie to you – I have high expectations when it comes to writing, analysis and assignments; however, you will find me to be a fair and equitable professor. I am more interested in hearing and reading your ideas than I am about the ideas of some scholar you may have read. I encourage you to use your mind and your wits both in class and on paper – they will be acknowledged and rewarded.

7) **Do not plagiarize.** If you do, I will give you a zero for that assignment. If you plagiarize a second assignment, I will dismiss you from the class. If you don't know what plagiarism is or how to avoid it, make sure that you set up a time to meet with a Librarian in the Library and find out. Your long study will be sent through a plagiarism search engine to make sure it is your own work.

8) If you have a documented learning disability, please submit your blue DSPS forms to me early in the term so that I can help you be successful in this course. If you suspect you may have a learning disability, please go to DSPS services and be evaluated. I cannot honor requests concerning a learning disability without the blue forms from DSPS.

9) There is no extra credit in this course, and no extensions will be given for your long study. Make sure you turn that in to me on time. If you turn in your long study late, I will deduct 25 points from the total of that assignment for each day the long study is late – not each class period, *each day*.

10) I will do my best to return your work by the next class period. For your long studies, I will turn them around as fast as I can, but do give me an extra week to do this – I spend a good deal of time with your work and responding to your work, giving you feedback. Please read through my comments and feedback carefully, come see me in my office hours if you have any concerns or questions, and try to improve as you go by incorporating my suggestions into your future assignments. When it comes to feedback, I go by the motto, “If you give me 100% of your effort, I will give you 150% of my effort in feedback – but if you turn in crap, don’t expect me to spend a heck of a lot of time on what you give me; I’ve got lots of students, you know!”

11) Be engaged and HAVE FUN!
Week by Week Syllabus

August 29: Class introductions; overview of sci-fi as a genre
Screened: Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*

September 5: Read Jules Verne *Journey to the Center of the Earth*

September 12: Read HG Wells *War of the Worlds*

September 19: Read Isaac Asimov *Nightfall* and *I, Robot*

September 26: Read Ray Bradbury *The Martian Chronicles*

October 3: Read Robert Heinlein *Starship Troopers*

October 10: Screened: Frank Herbert’s *Dune*

October 17: Read Arthur C Clark *2001: A Space Odyssey*

**YOU MUST HAVE AT LEAST ONE SHORT EVALUATION ESSAY IN TO ME BY THIS DATE**

October 24: Read Ursula LeGuin *The Dispossessed*

October 31: Mid-Semester Reflections: Discussion of Long Study Topics

November 7: Read William Gibson *Burning Chrome, Johnny Mnemonic* and *Red Star, Winter Orbit*

November 14: Screened: Carl Sagan’s *Contact*

November 21: Read Clive Barker *The Hellbound Heart* and selected storied from *Book of Blood*

November 28: Screened: *Star Trek: Voyager (The Caretaker: Parts I and II)*

December 5: Screened: *X-Files (two episodes)*

**YOUR LONG STUDY IS DUE BY 12 NOON ON FRIDAY DECEMBER 7; SEND YOUR LONG STUDY TO ME AS A WORD.DOC ATTACHMENT (no google.doc please): cirrons@scc.losrios.edu**

December 12: Read Michel Faber *Under the Skin*

December 19: Read in class: Steve Cirrone *The Way of the World*
End of Semester Review and Celestial Celebration
Written Assignments: Further Explanation and Directions

Short Essays

Choose any of the works assigned to you and write a short essay using MLA formatting and rules that answers the following:

What aspect of the work strikes you as the most representative of the sc-fi-genre, and how do you know this? As you analyze this aspect of the work and trace its significance in the work, make sure you also evaluate whether or not the work successfully employs this aspect—how to determine “success” is something you will have to measure and rate in a way that makes sense with respect to the genre. Make sure that you consider the time the work was written when writing this analysis and evaluation essay. Short studies are due on the day the work you choose to write on is being discussed in class. I will not accept a short study handed in after we discuss the work in class; the only exception to this rule are the films screened in class—for those works, you may turn in a short essay the following week if you like.

Long Study

The purpose of the long study is to showcase a “thread” in the works that have been assigned to you for this course (including films) and to highlight how and why this “thread” brings meaning, cohesion or significance to the sci-fi genre. This is why you must deal with 3-4 works in your study, and you must back up your claims with valid, reliable sources. This essay will require that you adhere to MLA formatting and rules, and that you provide a Works Cited page.

How to identify and choose this “thread” will become more apparent to you as we journey together, but I urge you to come up with an idea, write out your basic plan of action into a kind of one page “proposal” that contains your thesis and your plan of action, including what works you may use to help make your case, and to bring this to me for my review as early in the term as possible—only with such a “proposal” before me, and in consultation with you, can I truly help you craft and shape your study into something focused, controlled and meaningful. If you do not wish to seek my guidance by coming to me with a one-page “proposal,” that’s up to you—and fare thee well, Captain.

Remember, your Long Study is to be sent to me as a word.doc, .docx or .rtf attachment to my email by 12 noon on December 7; any late studies will be penalized 25 points for every day the study is late.

Quizzes

These are going to pop quizzes, meaning you won’t know which works I will choose to quiz you on until you arrive in class that day. So, come to class prepared!