

Science Fiction East and West (SAS)

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CL 1417

Office Hours: Mondays 1:30-2:30 and Wednesdays 4:45 – 6:45

This course compares Slavic and Anglophone science fiction texts and films, examining how a given culture's dominant concerns are articulated in this genre. Students will analyze works that imaginatively posit "fantastic" situations rooted in spatial, temporal, and biological explorations beyond those currently verified by science. Students will discuss topics like progress, utopia/dystopia, human perfectibility, the limits of science, the nature of knowledge, and the boundaries of human identity, with a view to comparing Eastern and Western elaborations of these concerns.

More broadly, I also hope that students in this course will improve their analytical and critical skills as they read, explain, critique, and problematize the course's texts, ferreting out ideological bias, relevance, social commentary, narrative coherence, and artistic merit, and applying critical frameworks to works' representations of societies, economies, genders, ideologies, and scientific assumptions.

Course Requirements

Students are required to complete the assignments scheduled for each class. This will normally mean reading up to 100 pages, or watching a film on your own time. The course readings will come in the form of required books, online stories, or email handouts; the films can all be found at Hillman Library, and many of them are also available through the Carnegie Libraries of Pittsburgh or through Netflix. You may watch the films whenever and however you would like, as long as you have watched them in time for the class session during which they will be discussed. Though the class is large, students are also required to participate in class discussions, and class participation will constitute a part of your final grade. Each individual will not be expected to participate in every class, but participation should be CONSISTENT, INTELLIGENT, AND SUSTAINED throughout the semester.

Grading

There will be two noncumulative exams for this course, each worth 30% of your grade. There will be unannounced quizzes administered throughout the semester (anywhere from 8-12 in number), worth 20% of your grade. Participation will be worth 20% of your grade.

Grading Scale:

A+ 98-100	A 93-97	A- 90-92	B+ 87-89	B 83-86	B- 80-82
C+ 77-79	C 73-76	C- 70-72	D+ 67-69	D 63-66	D- 60-62

I always round up, so, for example, an 86.5 to an 86.9 will become an 87.

Attendance

I will circulate an attendance sheet at the beginning of every class session. More than three unexcused absences will automatically result in a lower grade; six unexcused absences will result in an F grade. If illness prevents a student from attending class, a doctor's excuse must be provided on the day the student returns to class.

Email

Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address.

This is an official University policy, but more than that, I will be sending required readings and important announcements to you via the Pitt email system. The roster for this class is too large to conveniently maintain an email list apart from the Pitt website's roster email system. If you fail to check your email and miss a required assignment, it is your own fault.

Class Integrity

I expect every student in the course to rigorously follow the guidelines laid out in Pitt's *Handbook on Integrity* regarding cheating, plagiarism, etc. I take a dim view of academic integrity violations, and violators will be penalized to the full extent possible.

University Disability Policy

If you have a disability that requires special modifications, please notify both me and Disability Resources and Services by the second week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (voice or TDD) to schedule an appointment. The office is located in the William Pitt Union, Room 216.

Required Books

The Time Machine and *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells

The Futurological Congress and *Solaris* by Stanislaw Lem

We by Yevgeni Zamyatin

Heart of a Dog by Mikhail Bulgakov

Omon Ra by Victor Pelevin

War with the Newts by Karel Capek

Other Readings

“All You Zombies” by Robert Heinlein

“We Can Remember It For Your Wholesale” by Philip K. Dick

“Johnny Mnemonic” and “Burning Chrome” by William Gibson

“The Bloodchild” by Octavia Butler

Required Film Viewings

Metropolis

Equilibrium

First on the Moon (on YouTube)

Alien

Kin-dza-dza

Blade Runner

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (original)

The Day the Earth Stood Still (original)

Schedule of Readings and Viewings

Monday, August 29: *The Time Machine*

Wednesday, August 31: “All You Zombies”

Labor Day: No class

Wednesday, September 7: *Metropolis*

Monday, September 12: *We*, first half

Wednesday, September 14: *We*, second half

Monday, September 19: *The Futurological Congress*

Wednesday, September 21: *Equilibrium*

Monday, September 26: *Heart of a Dog*, first half

Wednesday, September 28: *Heart of a Dog*, second half

Monday, October 3: *Omon Ra* (I am assigning the entire book, but we will likely discuss it over two class sessions.)

Wednesday, October 5: *First on the Moon*

Fall Break: No class

Wednesday, October 12: EXAM 1

Monday, October 17: *Solaris* (Again, I am assigning the entire book, but we may discuss it over two sessions.)

Wednesday, October 19: *Alien*

Monday, October 24: War with the Newts, first half
Wednesday, October 26: War with the Newts, second half

Monday, October 31: Kin-dza-dza
Wednesday, November 2: "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale"

Monday, November 7: "Johnny Mnemonic" and "Burning Chrome"
Wednesday, November 9: Blade Runner

Monday, November 21: War of the Worlds, first half
Wednesday, November 16: War of the Worlds, second half

Monday, November 21: Invasion of the Body Snatchers
Thanksgiving: No class

Monday, November 28: The Day the Earth Stood Still
Wednesday, November 30: "The Bloodchild"

Monday, December 5: TBA
Wednesday, December 7: EXAM 2