

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF SCIENCE FICTION

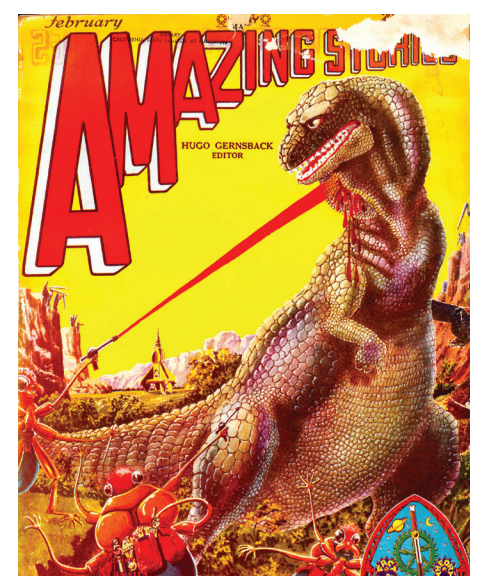
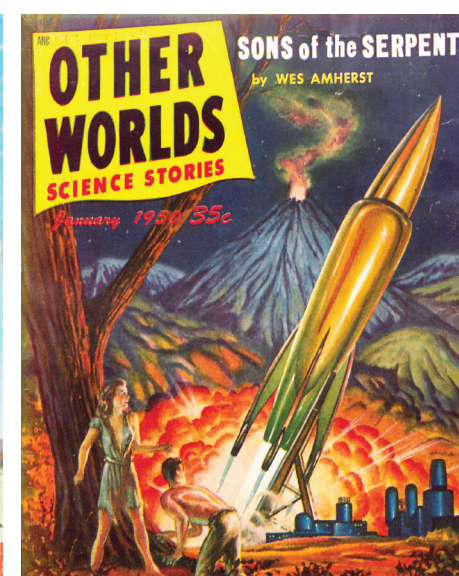
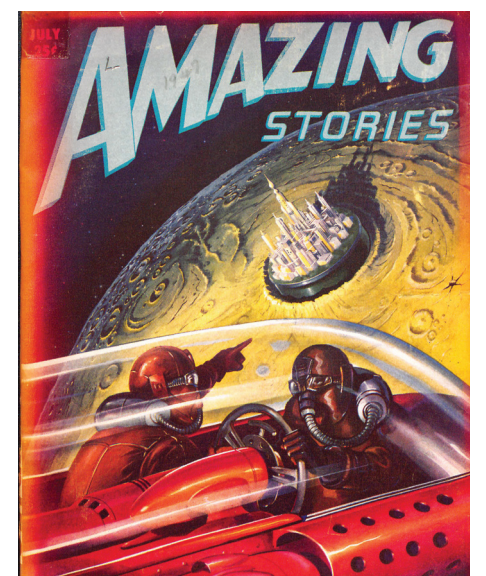
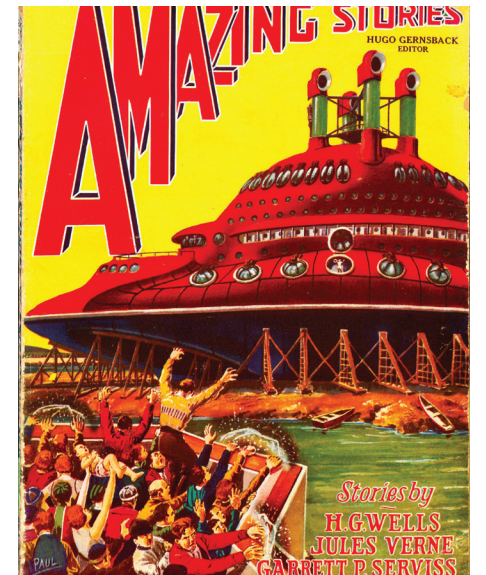
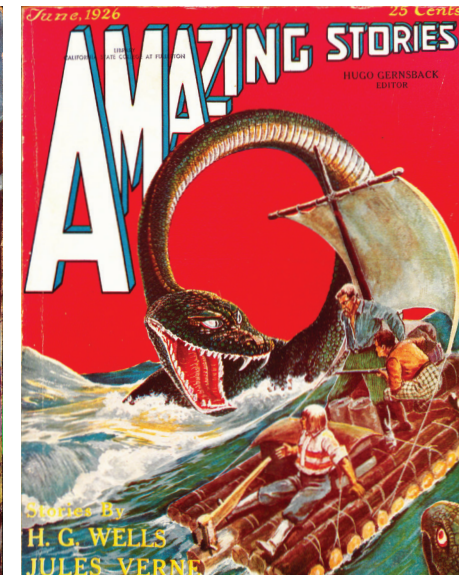
When Worlds Collide

By Sarah Muñoz / Images by Matt Gush

"I feel, after careful thought, that a life-size plaster statue of me standing meditatively before all my manuscripts and books and stories would be most appropriate. I will look into the costs of this, and report back to you accordingly (I'm just kidding; a statue like that would attract pigeons, and you don't want pigeons in your library)."

Philip K. Dick revealed a playful sense of humor in a 1973 letter to the Pollak Library's University Archives and Special Collections, where alternate worlds, alien beings and scholarly pursuits had begun to converge a few years earlier.

David Sandner, professor of English, comparative literature and linguistics, likes to call 2015-16 the year of science fiction at Cal State Fullerton. In October, the library celebrated the 50th anniversary of Frank Herbert's "Dune." This spring the University will host a two-day Philip K. Dick conference. And it all began with an English professor whose vision led to a pioneering science fiction collection that includes some of the most important titles, manuscripts and authors in the genre.



Brave New World

The late Willis E. McNelly taught some of the first university-level courses in science fiction as part of his 31-year career at CSUF. At a 1967 Science Fiction Writers of America meeting, he stressed the importance of the relationship of science fiction and academia.

“We have a ton of correspondence between McNelly and the authors,” says Patricia Prestinary, University Archives and Special Collections archivist. “He implored them to donate their manuscripts to universities. He was thinking of Cal State Fullerton, but he really wanted to preserve them — to let the writers know that they were just as important as any type of literary manuscript collection. He had the foresight to see that they would be highly influential in the future.”

McNelly also befriended some of science fiction’s most famous authors, including Ray Bradbury, who donated the manuscript of “Fahrenheit 451,” today an American classic taught in schools and universities. McNelly met Herbert in 1967, and the author asked if he was interested in acquiring the manuscripts of “Dune.”

“Interested? I fairly jumped at the opportunity,” wrote McNelly. “Thus, a few months later, I visited Herbert in the Bay Area, where he was then living, spent several days with him and his wife, Beverly, and returned to CSUF with a car trunk full of manuscripts. I was exultant.”

“Herbert published ‘Dune’ in 1965 and, because it was a 400-page science fiction novel, it broke all the barriers,” says Prestinary. “It was literature, it was extremely complex, it was long — far too long. A lot of publishers turned it down because they thought it was too long and difficult to read, which no one would have ever said to Charles Dickens or Dostoyevsky. But for science fiction, it was quite revolutionary at the time.”

CSUF’s Herbert collection includes all of Herbert’s personal copies of his books, short stories, correspondence and research files. McNelly’s most famous published scholarship is the critically acclaimed Dune Encyclopedia, which he edited and compiled with 42 other contributors.

Then there was Philip K. Dick. McNelly met him in 1972 and persuaded him to safeguard the manuscripts he still had at Cal State Fullerton. When Dick needed a place to stay, McNelly found a place in an apartment with CSUF students.

McNelly brought the manuscripts he collected to class, and often the authors as well. Dick became a campus regular. He spent the last 10 years of his life in Orange County and gave the University a large collection of books, manuscripts, unpublished material and other novels.

The Highlights

Besides Bradbury, Herbert and Dick’s contributions, manuscripts from Harry Harrison, Norman Spinrad, Avram Davidson, Brian Aldiss and other authors form part of the collection, as do McNelly’s own personal book and periodical

collections and donations from other patrons. A large number of pulp magazines, with hyper-dramatic covers dating back to the 1910s, includes now-famous contributors H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Herbert and Dick.

“Everything about a pulp issue is an artifact,” says Sandner. “There are people who study it not because they’re interested in fantastic literature, but because they’re interested in Americana.”

There are original “Star Trek” scripts, including “The Trouble With Tribbles,” which came with an alien tribble. And there is a lot of correspondence — Special Collections’ and McNelly’s files of letters and notes relating to those collections, in regular acid-free document boxes available to the public. Visitors arrive almost every week, says Prestinary.

“We had a recent researcher from Abu Dhabi writing a book about Middle Eastern influence in science fiction. The topic of ‘Dune’ was the first chapter of the novel,” she says.

Studying the Genre

The science fiction collection has become an important resource for scholars from around the world, and the intricacies of the genre often call for a multifaceted approach to its study.

“Our Special Collections provide us with a wonderful opportunity to bring faculty, staff and students from our eight colleges together via interdisciplinary programming, as we did with ‘Dune’ in the fall,” explains Scott Hewitt, interim university librarian.

The “Dune” speaker series included biology, kinesiology, political science and business faculty members analyzing “Dune” from their academic perspectives and connecting them to some of the topics of the University’s “Pathways to Success” general education program, including “Politics and Power,” “Sustainability,” “Global Studies” and “Food, Health and Well-Being.”

“The politics and control of power, ecology, longevity and interplanetary travel and trade are all important topics in ‘Dune,’” says Hewitt, who admits that “Dune” is his favorite science fiction novel. “It was very interesting to see ‘Dune’ through these four different perspectives, but what I enjoyed most was seeing how each speaker connected his perspective to the other speakers, showing that these different topics are interconnected both on Dune and Earth.

“Given that Special Collections hold the unique part of our collection, we plan to put more focus on these items via exhibits and programming,” he adds.

“The beauty of science fiction for the illustrator and the visual storyteller is that these worlds don’t exist, so you get to



1 Faculty and students contributed “Dune”-inspired artwork for the fall exhibition commemorating the 50th anniversary of the book. 2 3 Among the pieces: “Fremen,” left, by Garrett Kaida ‘13 (B.F.A. art-illustration), who is pursuing an M.F.A. in art-illustration, and “Dune,” below, by art professor Cliff Cramp.



“Dune” or “Star Wars?” #CSUFSciFi @CSUF

make them up,” says Cliff Cramp, professor of art, who curated and contributed some of the artwork for this year’s “Dune” exhibition and whose extensive body of work includes the cover art for “Star Wars: The Complete Saga” Blu-ray collection. “The alternative universe allows you to invent. For an illustrator, that’s a wonderful thing to do.”

The great thing about science fiction authors, he adds, is that “they deal with timeless themes. They’re not necessarily stuck in a generation. And we have the home-run hitters of the science fiction world — their original manuscripts, their notes — housed right here at Cal State Fullerton. I don’t know if you can get more significant than that.”

Sandner likes to study historical arguments — “what writers say about what they’re doing, what critics say complaining about it and reasons that arise in different eras about why we keep on.” From the moment there was any sort of fantasy literature, he says, critics of every era have complained about it. “Why don’t you stop reading this crazy stuff that has nothing to do with the real world? It would be more important to read about life now.”

“That complaint is hundreds of years old, and yet from the moment this type of literature appeared — with the Gothic in the 18th century, which is really the first popular literature — people loved it. They absolutely loved it,” he adds.

Andalee Motrenec, who is completing a master’s in English, was a student in Sandner’s Critical Approaches in Literature class, which begat the “SF at CSUF” website (sfatcsuf.wordpress.com). She helped design the site and scan many of the pulps.

“I really felt like I had the opportunity to learn about digital archiving and literary studies, a cross section within the humanities that is growing as more programs begin to have interdisciplinary components — and which started me on my first steps to finding a Ph.D. program that would fit my interests,” she says.

Working on the site with fellow students, she adds, “made us feel more connected to Orange County because we were studying authors who are connected to Cal State Fullerton and the growing community around this genre of literature.”

“I love science fiction because, when it’s done well, it shows us a mirror of our society — what it was, what it will be, what it could become — and warns us, scolds us, gives us hope about the things on the horizon,” says graduate student Jaime Govier ’13 (*B.A. English*), president of Acacia, the English department’s graduate student group. “Science fiction allows for radical thought to be more palatable, and more importantly, for us to question ourselves with a critical distance.”

Here and Now

Cal State Fullerton will host the “Philip K. Dick, Here and Now” conference April 29-30. The event is expected to bring scholars and writers from around the world and will feature an art show organized by Cramp, as well as films, including “Tim Powers, Here and Now,” a documentary directed by Motrenec featuring an interview with steampunk author Tim Powers ’76 (*B.A. English*).

“Philip K. Dick walked here, lived here and wrote novels that took place here, so we have a legacy that students can see — some kind of continuity,” says Sandner. “We’re not a very old university, but we have a literary history. And he’s a part of it.”

“Because Philip K. Dick is such an important part of Cal State Fullerton’s history, we knew that CSUF needs to be the place that hosts the first conference in his name,” says Govier. “So few people know that Cal State Fullerton was part of changing the cultural map of literature, and this should be celebrated.” ■



THE RISE OF STEAMPUNK

Another Cal State Fullerton claim to fame in the science fiction realm is the name of a popular sub-genre: steampunk.

When Philip K. Dick moved to Southern California, Willis McNelly sent several students to pick him up at the airport. One of these was Tim Powers. He, James Blaylock ’72, ’74 (*B.A., M.A. English*) and K.W. Jeter ’73 (*B.A. sociology*) had been collaborating on works that reimagined technology and steam-powered inventions in the 19th century.

“Philip K. Dick referred to his work as cyberpunk. He mentored Blaylock, Powers and Jeter; they were all his protégés,” says Cramp. “The story goes that when Jeter was

being interviewed about it, he picked up on cyberpunk and called the sub-genre steampunk.”

“All of us kind of hung out together,” noted Powers in 2012. “We would get together and drink scotch and smoke cigars, and though you’d think with Phil Dick, and Blaylock and me and Jeter that it would have been a lot of writing talk, but, in fact it was not. Sometimes we’d say, ‘Oh hell, I got a rejection letter from Ballantine,’ and Phil Dick would always say, ‘It’s just as well; there are too many books in the world already,’ which we’d take comfort from.”

1 The script from “The Trouble With Tribbles” episode of “Star Trek” and one of the furry alien tribbles that starred in the episode reside at Cal State Fullerton. **2** The illustration for the poster for the “Philip K. Dick, Here and Now” spring conference, created by Cliff Cramp. **3** Part of the Frederick & Patricia Shroyer Science Fiction and Fantasy Book collection at the Pollak Library. **4** Student Andalee Motrenec examines an early copy of Ray Bradbury’s “Fahrenheit 451,” now an American classic.

