

Fantasy or Science Fiction: What's the Deal?

Ever wonder what makes a book fantasy or science fiction? And what about dystopian? How are these decisions made? Mostly it has to do with the content of the book, and how the author decided to tell the story.

First, let's get the basics out of the way. Fantasy and Science Fiction are categories of literature called **genres** (you probably already knew that). Each has defining characteristics.

Fantasy includes, as you might expect, fantastical elements. Dragons, magic, trolls, elves, talking animals, swords that glow an icy blue when orcs are near—all of these fantastical elements share one important thing. They aren't real. They could never happen in our world. It's a huge bummer, I know, but totally true. If an orc is hiding in your refrigerator, your sword won't glow blue to warn you. It's probably just giant mold anyway, because the orc is impossible, too. ;)

Books like Rick Riordan's **Hero of Olympus** series and J.K. Rowling's **Harry Potter** series are popular examples. But *Charlotte's Web*, by E.B. White, is fantasy, too. Sadly, talking animals are impossible too, making this classic solidly fantasy.

Key take away: If the author told her story with impossible elements, or elements that could never happen in our world, it's probably fantasy.

Science Fiction also deals with fantastical elements, but they're usually a bit different. Authors using science fiction elements extend science and theory from the real world, pushing innovation and technology to limits not yet reached, creating possible future worlds. The important word being *possible*.

In addition, the author may focus on the consequences of the advancement of such technology. How has society and humanity reacted? Was it good, or not so much? Are we more civilized, or not, and how, by the way, is civilized defined in this new future society? These are all questions you might ask after reading a sub-genre of science fiction, called **Dystopian** fiction. [Merriam-Webster](#) defines dystopia as: "an imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives." Authors of dystopian novels often shine a light on the negative ramifications of the evolution of scientific developments.

Great examples of science fiction are *The Giver* by Lois Lowry or *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins.

Key Take Away: If the author told his story with fantastical elements based on extending scientific theory, or if the fantastical elements could someday become possible, it's probably science fiction. Hope that helped! 😊

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