

# Dreams of a Subversive Future

## Sexuality, (Hetero)normativity, and Queer Potential in Science Fiction Film and Television

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**Abstract**

The aim of the thesis is to explore depictions of sexuality in popular science fiction film and television through a focus on storytelling, narrative, characters and genre. The thesis analyses science fiction as a film and television genre with a focus on the conventions, interpretations, and definitions of genre as part of larger contexts. Central to the argumentation is films and television series, from *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, to *Firefly* and *Torchwood*. The approach allows a consideration of how the storytelling conventions of science fiction are, and have been, affected by its contexts. Through a consideration of a historical de-emphasis on narrative complexity and character formation in science fiction, the thesis displays and analyses a salient tendency towards juvenile and heteronormative narratives. This tendency is represented by a concept that I call the *Starverses*, through which this dominant idea of science fiction as a juvenile, techno-centred, masculine, and heteronormative genre became firmly established. This generic cluster has remained a dominant influence on science fiction film and television since the 1980s. However, as argued, a major discursive shift took place in science fiction at the turn of the millennium. This adult turn in science fiction film, and television in particular, is attributed to contextual changes, but also to the influence of television dramaturgy. It explains why science fiction in the 21st century is not as unfamiliar with depictions of sexuality as its predecessors were. This turn does not signal a total abandonment of what the *Starverses* represent; it instead contributes to a change to this dominant idea of the generic identity of science fiction.

While sexuality has been disassociated from much science fiction, it is also argued that the science fiction narrative has extensive queer potential. Generic conventions, such as aliens and time travel, invite both queer readings and queer storytelling; the latter however is seldom used, especially in science fiction film. A majority of the examples of science fiction narrative that use this queer potential can be found in television. In cinema, however, this progression is remarkably slow. Therefore, the thesis analyses whether the storytelling techniques of Hollywood cinema, to which science fiction film owes much of its dramaturgy, could be considered heteronormative. A comparison is made to television dramaturgy in order to display the possibilities for the serialised, character-focused science fiction narrative. Ultimately, the thesis investigate the possibility for subversive storytelling and whether a normative use of dramaturgy needs to be overthrown in order to tell a subversive story.

**Keywords:**

Science fiction, film, television, genre, sexuality, queer, storytelling, gender, subversive, intelligibility, *Torchwood*, *Firefly*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, adult turn, *Starverses*, dramaturgy, heteronormativity, film history, Hollywood.

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