

Introduction

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It is often argued all art, including writing, is inherently political. An author's words and ideas are shaped by their environment and reflect their own personal ideology. Science fiction, and speculative fiction more broadly, is no stranger to political critiques and speculation on the future of political society. George Orwell's works of *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) were written as the Soviet Union under Stalin entered the Cold War and reflected Orwell's own personal Anti-Stalinist Left views on totalitarianism. Margaret Atwood speculated on a possible future as the Christian Right rose to prominence in 1980s America in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). What these examples in particular bring to their political critiques is offering alternative forms of governance from the liberal democratic traditions their authors came from. It is divergence from our norms where we can see easily the biggest critiques and possible alternatives to our own ways of governing.

However, much of the science fiction canon is filled with works where the governments underpinning the society are merely set dressing reflections of our own real world and history: simplistic totalitarian regimes, liberal democratic republics, hereditary monarchies, etc. Often there is not much time spent on reflecting on the impact of these governments on society at large, or alternatives to them. They simply exist so the story has a somewhere familiar to take place.

For this symposium, we asked contributors to examine works which do engage with ideas of governing outside our existing norms. Some articles will examine a collection of works with similar themes, looking at how different authors approach the same issue in governing. Other articles look at a particular author to examine the author's own personal views on governance as reflected in their work. All of these articles look at ways the question "how do we run a society" have been answered by science fiction's authors. Some of those answers could serve as inspiration for the next wave of reformatory political movement, and some could serve as cautionary tales.

I've been excited for the symposium to be released because for me, the core to science fiction is looking at the ways things could be, but aren't, good and bad. And when we apply that lens to something as grand and fundamental as governing ourselves, you pave the way for discussions that could maybe one day reshape society.

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