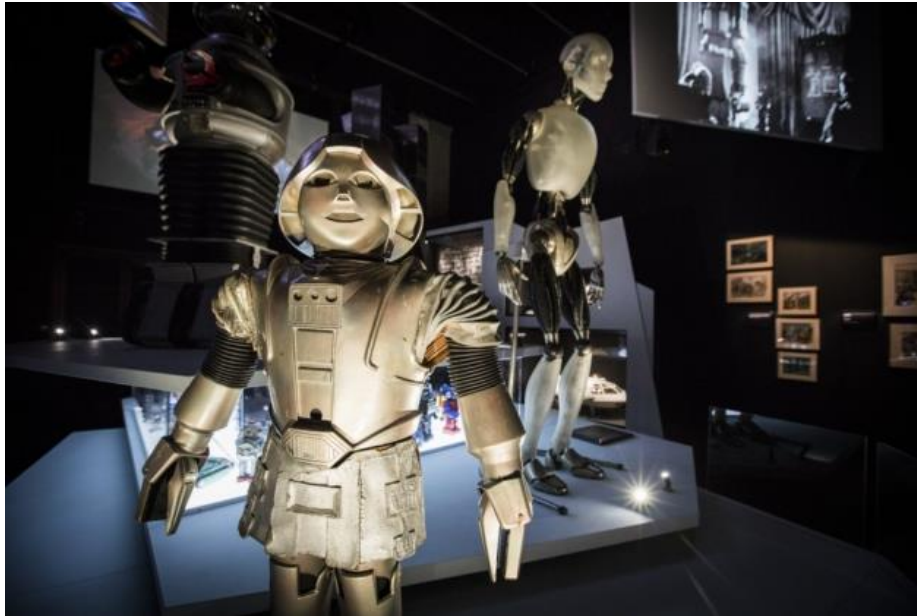


Into the Unknown: A Journey Through Science Fiction

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Final Frontiers. Picture: Tristan Fewings/Getty Images for Barbican Centre

Zoe Paskett visits the Barbican's new sci-fi exhibition, which extends throughout the building covering film, tv, literature, art and music



A general view of Into the Unknown: A Journey Through Science Fiction. Picture: Tristan Fewings/Getty Images for Barbican Centre

It wasn't so long ago that science fiction was considered a niche interest, reduced to reading comic books and dressing up for fan conventions – but fascination for science fiction has been around since long before it was defined so.

With origins in Ancient Greek mythology, Persian folklore and medieval literature, it wasn't until 1926 that the term actually appeared.

Now Star Wars, Avatar, Jurassic World and Avengers are some of the highest grossing films of all time; after Trump's inauguration, sales of Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four went through the roof; and any British actor worth their salt has appeared in at least one episode of Doctor Who.

In other words, science fiction is everywhere – literature, film, music, art, even elements of politics. In many ways, it is a part of the human condition: creating alternative realities based on our existing knowledge.

The Barbican's new exhibition, Into the Unknown: A Journey Through Science Fiction, is a celebration of sci-fi, its origins and the people who have piqued our curiosity.

"Science fiction is responsible for some of the world's most iconic film, music, literature and art," says historian and writer Patrick Gyger, who has curated this exhibition with the Barbican Intergalactic Enterprises; sorry – International. "Today, the interaction between digital, virtual and physical spheres further blurs the boundaries between it and our current reality."

Tracing a journey through sci-fi's intersection with history, discovery and invention, the exhibition draws together more than 200 books, original manuscripts and storyboards, artworks, film and TV clips, interactive installations and new commissioned works across the whole centre. Larissa Sansour's film In The Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain fuses sci-fi, archaeology and politics to explore myth in history and national identity; an edited episode of Black Mirror, which seems to have predicted some bizarre events since it began in 2011 runs in the foyer.

In the main exhibition, the opening section, "Extraordinary Voyages", sees the genre rooted in our fascination with discovery (Atlantis, Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver's Travels) and archaeology (Jurassic Park). There are Jules Verne's original manuscripts, James Gurney's Dinotopia series artwork and dinosaur models by Ray Harryhausen. They take you into the realm of "future history" where we can imagine things we know have been proven to be impossible – such as living alongside dinosaurs.



Territory Studio Interactive NASA Installation at Into the Unknown: A Journey Through Science Fiction exhibition. Picture: Tristan Fewings/Getty Images for Barbican Centre

Part two, "Space Odysseys" looks at what we normally connect with science fiction: aliens, other worlds and intergalactic space travel. This is where the inner-child emerges. The VFX specialists from Ridley Scott's *The Martian* have created an exciting interactive exhibit, based on a NASA Mission Control sequence in the film, where you can play at heading up a rocket launch.

There are props and models from *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* and *Interstellar* as well as the original spacesuits worn by John Hurt, Sam Rockwell, Cillian Murphy and Leonard Nimoy.

This whole section is *Star Wars* galore: original Darth Vader and Stormtrooper helmets, concept art and an interactive adaptation by graphic novelist Martin Panchaud of Episode IV: A New Hope (called SWANH.NET) – I could spend hours scrolling through this 123 metre infographic of the entire film, which includes every line of dialogue and every movement of each character.

"Brave New Worlds" take us into the realm of imagined worlds: dystopian civilisations, futuristic cities and the apocalypse. This section contains designs from Ben Wheatley's recent film *High Rise* and some of the most enduring texts – Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins and, of course, the terrifyingly present *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

"Final Frontiers" is the exhibition's climax: the boundaries of science and technology are pushed and we question our place in the universe. With artificial intelligence, clones, robots, time travel and parallel worlds, this is an exploration of identity.

Sunspring, a film written by an AI bot for SciFi London's 48 hour film challenge, might be nonsense, but it uses the same technology as our smartphones and shows how close the possibility is of AI becoming part of our daily lives.

It makes you wonder at the future of technology and at the imaginations of our forebears – how much, and how little, we have fulfilled their predictions: we may not zoom around on (real) hover boards but we do have Siri.

Into The Unknown: A Journey Through Science Fiction runs until September 1; **Sci-fi Sundays** screen cult and classic hits from June 18 to August 27.



A selection of alien models by Ray Harryhausen. Picture: Tristan Fewings / Getty Images

barbican.org.uk/intotheunknown