

BARTON

LIBRARY

Dare to Know

Steampunk Fiction

Science fiction set in the 19th century that features steam-powered machinery and related technologies extrapolated from the science of that era.

A sub-genre that is generally set in the Victorian or Edwardian eras, and involves the application of steam power as advanced technology. There is minimal scientific detail, and the gadgets are often best described as retro-futuristic. These stories draw inspiration from the aesthetics of Victorian science fiction (e.g., H. G. Wells or Jules Verne), and simultaneously re-envision the capabilities of modern technology and speculate on possible futures. Thus, they create an alternate history. The term “steampunk” was coined in the 1980s by author K. W. Jeter, although Mervyn Peake’s *Titus Alone* (1959) and Michael Moorcock’s *The Warlord of the Air* (1971) are widely regarded as the first novels in this sub-genre.

Common Elements

Steam power
Airships
Analog computers
Automata
Clockworks

Copper or brass fittings
Victorian-style clothing, especially corsets
Goggles
Absence of plastics or synthetic material

Benefits of Reading

Entertains readers with subverted expectations and the uncanny
Presents to readers iconic Victorian aesthetics and fashion
Encourages readers to consider the similarities and contrasts between

Victorian political and cultural conditions and those of the present
Inspires readers to reflect on themes of exploration and pushing boundaries
Offers readers optimistic stories of invention and adventure into the unknown

Modern Literary Examples

<i>The Aeronaut’s Windlass</i> (2015) by Jim Butcher
<i>Airborn</i> (2004) by Kenneth Oppel
<i>An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors</i> (2017) by Curtis Craddock
<i>Anti-Ice</i> (1993) by Stephen Baxter

<i>Arabella of Mars</i> (2016) by David D. Levine
<i>The Black God’s Drums</i> (2018) by P. Djèlí Clark
<i>Bonshaker</i> (2009) by Cherie Priest
<i>Buffalo Soldier</i> (2017) by Maurice Broaddus

<i>Clockwork Angel</i> (2019) by Cassandra Clare
<i>The Difference Engine</i> (1990) by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling
<i>The Half-Made World</i> (2010) by Felix Gilman
<i>Homunculus</i> (1986) by James Blaylock
<i>Infernal Devices</i> (1987) by K. W. Jeter
<i>The Last Uncharted Sky</i> (2020) by Curtis Craddock
<i>Levithan</i> (2009) by Scott Westerfeld
<i>Morlock Night</i> (1979) by K. W. Jeter
<i>Mortal Engines</i> (2001) by Philip Reeve

<i>Spymaster</i> (2017) by Margaret Weis and Robert Krammes
<i>Perdido Street Station</i> (2000) by China Miéville
<i>The Peshawar Lancers</i> (2002) by S. M. Stirling
<i>Prudence</i> (2015) by Gail Carriger
<i>Terminal World</i> (2010) by Alistair Reynolds
<i>The Watchmaker of Filigree Street</i> (2015) by Natasha Pulley
<i>The Wolves of London</i> (2014) by Mark Morris