Title: Is the Universe a Dark Forest?

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ABSTRACT

After the age of the science fiction giants, for some decades science-fiction experienced a prominent dystopian turn, in which planet Earth was destroyed or heavily threatened by the man's clumsy attempts to do better than nature. We may define such a period – spanning a few decades through the transition between two millennia – as an age of harsh criticism of the human intelligence: science and technology were blamed as the architects of all environmental disasters. A modern science-fiction was long awaited by fans, if not by those who craved a narrative of anticipation speaking again of the possible wonders of the future world. Some excellent authors came up since the second decade of years 2000, such as James Corey (pseudonym used by Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck), Andy Weir, Daniel Suarez, and others.

For the dystopian science-fiction the Universe was something not to be disturbed (polluted), and humans should maintain a low profile forever, having wasted their own planet. In the modern science-fiction, the interaction between the more or less reckless human initiative, and the uncertainties of the nature appears more balanced. Evil entities (the *"macromolecule"* of "The Expanse") are more the outcome of a fatal ancient initiative of another intelligent species, not specifically targeted to harm any target civilization. Universe might be intended as an *indifferent universe*, where advanced civilization leave after themselves dangerous remnants, showing a complete indifference for the fate of possible future civilizations.

Another thread has raised, from East, headed by the Chinese writer Liu Cixin, in his trilogy "The Three-Body Problem". He develops the theory that the whole Universe is a hostile *"Dark Forest"*. Such a narrative suggests that, not only, we should avoid disturbing the universe, yet we also would better hide ourselves as much as possible. Even worse than the dystopian sci-fi, the Dark Forest hypothesis suggests that the universe is a dangerous, silent place where civilizations remain hidden to avoid destruction by others, explaining the Fermi Paradox[1]. From a psychological point of view, the dark forest looks like a paranoid attitude, based on a compulsive risk analysis, where the best risk mitigation is striking first. A pessimistic, game-theoretic interpretation of potential alien life interactions. From a philosophical angle, this theory tries to sweep away many theological and/or humanist cosmologies, based on the concept of the universe as a great benign entity, in which love and compassion towards the mortal inhabitants of solar systems here and there in the galaxy prevail, and the best risk mitigation is loving first.

Our main philosophical point: according to the dark forest theory, intelligence is bad, and aims to the bad. The more a species develop its intelligence, the more it grows dangerous and aggressive toward other species, and therefore subject to become a target. Authors were not touched by the thought that intelligence, and even more so superintelligence, could naturally tend towards good, because it would understand that, in an environment of virtually infinite resources, the more competitors means more opportunities for everybody.

Once again, and even more with respect to the eco-science-fiction, according to the dark forest philosophy our species should better decrease its level of intelligence, regressing to a rural society.

The goal, this time, is not to “live in harmony with nature”, yet not to appear as an aggressive, high-risk competitor within the wider galactic ecosystem!

This paper explores the cultural flaws of the dark forest theory, and tries to seed proper literary anti-corps.

1 Science Fiction evolves according to real science evolution, and more

The science fiction has changed, during the centuries, according to the evolution of science and space technologies. What 50 years ago was pure sci-fi speculation, nowadays is chronicle. As science began to overtake science fiction, the latter veered towards futuristic sociology, leaving science alone in its dizzying development.

Once considered an unreachable domain, outer space has now become the venue of an enthusiastic and original space industry. Governments and big investors across the world are more and more concerned about – in turn – establishing a primacy on non-terrestrial celestial bodies, and being allowed to have a site at the immense “table” of space resources. People’s concerns at large include the burning raise of artificial intelligence, that’s compromising the balance of employment, already suffering after many decades of economic crises, and climate/environmental issues, that are worsening at an increasing pace.

Science fiction, as a literary broad current, represents what is dramatically underdeveloped in the philosophical field: a view of cultural evolution and vision of the future. From the beginnings – scientists and lone heroes – , to sociological and utopian-fiction, through a too large dystopian or *de-science* fiction, to social criticism (post ’68), the good alien (*deus-ex-machina*), and the too long-awaited modern science fiction.

We will not explore, here, the broad genre of science fiction, which includes several non-space themes, but will focus on just one of its subgenres: space science fiction.

2 The forerunners of Science Fiction

Even before the advent of modern science, triggered by the Renaissance, some authors dared to think about space travel, and human expansion outside our mother planet.

(From Wikipedia): “Ancient Indian poetry such as the Hindu epic the Ramayana (5th to 4th century BCE) includes Vimana, flying machines able to travel into space or under water, and destroy entire cities using advanced weapons. In the first book of the Rigveda collection of Sanskrit hymns (1700–1100 BCE), there is a description of "mechanical birds" that are seen "jumping into space speedily with a craft using fire and water ... containing twelve *stamghas* (pillars), one wheel, three machines, 300 pivots, and 60 instruments". The ancient Hindu mythological epic the Mahabharata (8th and 9th centuries BCE) includes the story of King Kakudmi, who travels to heaven to meet the creator Brahma and is shocked to learn that many ages have passed when he returns to Earth, anticipating the concept of time travel. Other holy scriptures, in many different cultures, talk about flying machines, and gods traveling from space to earth.”[2]

We cannot know if those writings were the outcome of the writers’ fantasy or memories of true facts…

2.1 Lucian of Samosata

Lucian of Samosata, a Syrian-Greek satirist writing in the 2nd century AD, is considered by many the Grandfather of Sci-Fi Tropes[3]. He wrote a story called “A True Story (Verae Historiae)”[4][5]. It is widely considered by many literary historians—including famous sci-fi figures like Isaac Asimov—to

be the earliest known work of science fiction. It isn't just a fantasy tale about gods; it features elements that became absolute staples of modern sci-fi. The protagonists' ship is lifted by a whirlwind and carried to the Moon. The Moon is inhabited by bizarre, non-human life forms, including spiders that spin webs between the Moon and Venus. The King of the Moon and the King of the Sun go to war over the colonization of the Morning Star (Venus), complete with space armies and celestial blockades. He describes artificial atmospheres, liquid air, and beings with cybernetic-like biological features. While Lucian wrote it as a parody of exaggerated travel logs (like Homer's Odyssey) and explicitly told his readers not to believe a word of it, the tropes he invented are undeniably science fiction. Purists argue that the novel is more a fantasy than a science fiction story: the journey to the moon happens via a magical whirlwind, not a rocket or a mechanical device.

Lucian wrote *A True Story* in the mid-to-late 2nd century AD (around 160–170 AD). This was the absolute peak of the Pax Romana (the Roman Peace), specifically during the reign of the "Five Good Emperors" (Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius)[6]. The stability of the Pax Romana (2nd century AD) unified the Mediterranean via Roman roads and shipping. For a multicultural traveler like Lucian, globalization effectively "shrank" the known Earth. With terrestrial maps completed by Roman bureaucrats, the cosmic sky became the only remaining uncharted wilderness to explore. Lucian lived during the Second Sophistic[7], a booming cultural revival of Greek literature and public speaking. Because intellectuals fiercely competed for wealthy Roman patrons, the era suffered from rampant intellectual fraud[8]. Travel writers, historians, and pseudo-prophets invented outrageous lies for clout. Lucian hated this dishonesty and chose to weaponize satire, amplifying their lies into outer space to expose their absurdity[9]. Living inside a massive, expansionist empire, Roman colonialism was deeply ingrained in Lucian's worldview. When *A True Story* depicts the kings of the Sun and Moon warring over the colonization of Venus, Lucian is directly parodying the arbitrary geopolitical lines drawn by distant Roman emperors. Thanks to contemporary advancements—like the astronomer Ptolemy mapping the geocentric universe from Alexandria[10]—educated citizens of the Roman empire viewed the Moon as a tangible, physical sphere rather than a terrifying mystical deity, transforming space into a viable narrative destination[11].

2.2 Giordano Bruno

While Bruno still didn't write a narrative "novel" with characters and a plot like Lucian of Samosata, his work was not just dry theology. Through his explicit focus on the human capability to transcend Earth, Bruno provided a deeply structured, visual, and theoretical roadmap for space flight. He wasn't just building a setting, he was actively arguing that humanity belonged out there.

In his 1591 masterpiece written in Frankfurt, "De Immenso" (On the Infinite and the Innumerable)[12], Bruno included his own woodcut diagrams, explicitly mapping out the relationships and the physical space between the Earth and the Moon. In these diagrams, he broke away from traditional medieval physics and partially metaphysics. And this conception came from some Greek philosophers, it was not a medieval tradition. Aristoteles considered the Earth as physically different from all celestial bodies, which he supposed were constituted of a different kind of matter and were the place of perfection, while the Earth was the place of imperfection. Others (like Lucian...) of course disagreed. Instead of drawing rigid metaphysical borders separating Earth from the heavens, he sketched dynamic diagrams illustrating planetary perspective. He showed that if an observer were standing on the Moon, the Earth would look like a moon to them, and vice-versa. It is interesting that Lucian of Samosata said something fully equivalent: the Earth looked like any other body when seen from space, to his space travelers. By physically drawing the space between the Earth and the Moon as medium that can be crossed in both ways, he laid down the geometric possibility of moving between them.

Dr. Marie-Luise Heuser[13] highlights that in De Immenso, Bruno describes undertaking journeys to the Moon and other celestial bodies "with the wings of the spirit/mind" (pennis ingenii et intellectus). While a modern reader might dismiss this as simple poetic metaphor, Heuser's lectures emphasize that for Bruno, this was a serious thought experiment in cosmic anthropology. Bruno argued that human beings possess a dual nature: a physically bound, finite body, but an inherently infinite mind. Because the mind can conceive of the infinite, human beings are natural "border crossers" (Grenzgänger). Bruno used this philosophical framework to argue that humanity's desire to leave the Earth and transcend its horizon is not an unnatural fantasy, but a fundamental trait of human destiny. In essence, he argued that because we can cognitively travel through space, we are meant to physically invent the means to do so.

According to Dr. Heuser was trying to solve the why of space travel. She presents Bruno as the foundational thinker of Transterrestrialism[14]. Bruno didn't just accidentally predict space; he analyzed the core psychological and ontological reasons why man is driven to overcome limited horizons and explore the cosmos.

With relation to the question of this paper – is universe a Dark Forest? – Giordano Bruno seems to feel the Universe as a boundless civilian, urbanized territory, where the different people's feelings, good and bad, mix together as usual. Being such a space so large, people do not feel constrained nor pressured, therefore it does not seem that psychotic evil behaviors had reasons to prevail. And this rationale resonates of course even with an older positive thinker, Plato, that we will not disturb this time, in this discussion (😊), though we always have him in our cultural background and in our heart.

2.3 Giacomo Leopardi

Giacomo Leopardi had a profound, lifelong fascination with space, the cosmos, and the concept of life on other celestial bodies. His interest wasn't just poetic; he was deeply read in the scientific and astronomical discoveries of his time (and past eras). In several works – namely within the "Operette Morali" *Dialogues*, but also in other writings – Leopardi explores the solar system, extraterrestrial life, and humanity's insignificance in a vast universe.

In the "Dialogue between the Earth and the Moon"[15], the Earth strikes up a conversation with the Moon, expecting the Moon to be populated by beings similar to humans. The Moon blankly responds that she's inhabited, but has no idea what "arms, ambition, or politics" mean. However, when the Earth asks if the Moon knows what "vice, misfortune, and pain" are, the Moon replies that it is entirely full of them. Leopardi uses this to critique anthropocentrism. The Moon confirms that while its inhabitants are completely different from humans, suffering is a universal, cosmic law, not something exclusive to Earth. An anticipation of the cosmic pessimism, nowadays taking the form of the Universal Dark Forest? Or maybe an independent assessment of the *First Noble Truth* of Buddhism. Leopardi did not know the following three Noble Truths, so his conception stays in the pessimistic field.

"Il Copernico" (Copernicus)[16] is arguably Leopardi's most explicit and brilliant comedic take on the "plurality of inhabited worlds" and how the rest of the solar system reacts to Earth. In this dialogue, the Sun decides it is tired of moving around the Earth just to warm a few "invisible little creatures" on a "fistful of mud." It decides to stay still and demands that Copernicus go fix the physics of the universe so Earth does the moving instead. When Copernicus travels to the Sun's palace, he presents a hilarious, highly detailed cosmic domino effect concerning the other planets and moons. Copernicus warns the Sun that shifting the center of the universe away from Earth will deeply offend human pride, but worse, it will cause a geopolitical crisis among the planets. He explains that once the other planets notice Earth moving just like them, they won't want to look "bare, simple, and

unadorned" anymore: "They will also want their own rivers, their own seas, their own mountains, their plants, and also their own animals and inhabitants, seeing no reason why they should be any less than Earth." Humanity will then realize it is completely insignificant. Leopardi uses this interplanetary population boom to deliver his ultimate philosophical punchline: the crushing of human narcissism via astronomy.

A 15-year-old Leopardi spent months locked in his father's vast library in Recanati and wrote a massive, incredibly detailed 600-page treatise: History of Astronomy from its Origins up to the Year 1811[17]. This is a legitimate academic and historical text tracking how humanity's understanding of the cosmos evolved from the Chaldeans up to Isaac Newton and the discovery of the asteroid Ceres. He didn't view astronomy as a cold, dry science, but rather as the most sublime science because it forces humans to look at the immense scale of the universe and face our own vulnerability.

In other (poetic) writings, we can find the great reverence of the infinite – “L’infinito”[18]

In “La Ginestra” (The Broom Flower)[19] we read an ode to the resilience of a plant capable of flourishing even in the desert[20]. A symbol of the human capacity to fight and survive even in harsh natural conditions (including space?). La Ginestra includes the beginning of a solution, where it praises human solidarity and deprecates reciprocal harm among humans.[21]

Leopardi's take on space was ahead of its time: he blended the cutting-edge astronomy of the Enlightenment with a deeply philosophical, almost sci-fi existentialism, always using the vastness of the solar system as a mirror to show humanity its true, humble place in nature. Impossible not to recognize the Giordano Bruno’s concept of a universe populated by infinite worlds, in which Earth is just one, peripheral, small province. Leopardi is seen as a pessimist, but he was also profoundly humanist. Although driven by a scathing satirical streak against presumption, vanity, and the underestimation of the difficulties encountered on the path to better living conditions, he firmly believed in a future in which the limitations of our world could be overcome. Indeed, he was deeply irritated and disgusted by the boastful authorities of his time and their utter inadequacy in addressing the challenges posed by nature to humanity. In his ferocious satire, we can read, even stronger than pessimism, a vibrant call for a humanist intellectual rebellion, advocating for a far more serious approach to the scientific and cultural endeavors of his time—the same endeavors we are still facing today.

2.4 Jules Verne

Verne didn't start out as a scientist. He studied law in Paris to please his father, but his true passion was the theater: he spent his early career writing plays, librettos, and working as a stockbroker to pay the bills. His life changed when he met the publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel who was looking for educational yet entertaining literature for young people. Together, they launched the “Voyages extraordinaires”, the series that made Verne famous.

The 19th-century was an era of breathless industrialization, colonial expansion, and scientific triumph, the peak of the Industrial Revolution. France was expanding its railways, building steamships, and marveling at the telegraph. Science was no longer just for academics; it was changing daily life. Verne tapped into this collective cultural awe.

He's considered the First Science Fiction Writer. Mary Shelley wrote Frankenstein in 1818, which many consider the true birth of science fiction. Yet Shelly did not write about outer space. Verne was arguably the first to write hard science fiction properly said. He did not use impossible conceits (like time travel machines or anti-gravity metals). Verne strictly used the known science of his day and extrapolated from it. When writing about a submarine or a space capsule, he spent pages calculating the dimensions, displacement, and physics required to make it plausible.

In 1865, Verne published From the Earth to the Moon (followed by Around the Moon). He didn't choose this subject out of pure fantasy, but rather as a response to the geopolitical and technological zeitgeist. The book is set right after the American Civil War. Verne, fascinated by American industrial might, created the "Gun Club"—a group of bored weapons manufacturers who decide to redirect their ballistics expertise toward a peaceful, monumental goal: firing a projectile at the Moon. The Moon represented the next logical step for human exploration. Humanity had mapped most of the Earth; the skies were the next boundary. Verne wanted to prove it could theoretically be done. He consulted mathematicians and engineers to make his space gun as scientifically accurate as possible. Shockingly, he got several things right: he placed his launchpad in Florida (very close to modern-day Cape Canaveral), calculated a three-man crew, and accurately predicted the sensation of weightlessness.

Coming to the Verne's Philosophical Vision of the Universe, it was complex, evolving from bright optimism to deep skepticism. Early in his career, Verne subscribed to positivism—the belief that scientific knowledge and human reason could solve all of humanity's problems. In his eyes, the Universe was a giant, orderly machine waiting to be decoded. Nature wasn't something to fear; it was a frontier to be explored, categorized, and mastered by human ingenuity. Despite his love for gears and numbers, Verne's Universe was deeply romantic. Characters like Captain Nemo (20,000 Leagues Under the Sea) find a spiritual, almost religious solace in the vast, untamed parts of the world—the deep oceans, the polar ice caps, and the vacuum of space. The Universe was grand, majestic, and humbled mankind, even as we tried to conquer it.

As Verne aged, his philosophy widened considerably. Verne wrote "Paris in the Twentieth Century" in 1863, just after "Five Weeks in a Balloon". It was not published because the publisher found it too pessimistic, but it is absolutely contemporary of his most famous optimistic works. It is true that he personally grew a little more pessimistic as he grew older, but his production did not drastically change. For instance, one of his late works that were published posthumously is "The golden meteor", where a scientist finds the way to deviate an asteroid rich of gold, in order to recover it... a prediction about using asteroid materials! Even if the story is largely about human greed. In "Paris in the XX Century" his worry is not at all about environment, but about the abandonment of humanistic culture and values in a world dominated by science. Some of his works, throughout his whole career, are about adventure and exploration, and some are somewhat dramatic and sad, but in consideration of his whole career, the pattern of a growing pessimism is not there. The truth is that he was always more balanced than he is often depicted, in showing both positive and negative sides of life.

Jules Verne was a brilliant chronicler of human ambition. He stood at the crossroads of the romantic past and the industrial future, using the scientific building blocks of the 19th century to launch humanity's imagination into the 20th and beyond.

3 From traditional "spaceships and aliens" stories to human life in space

The Pulp Era, or "Super-Science" (1920s–1930s), defined science fiction across prominent magazines like *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Stories*. Btw, 2026 marks the centennial of the first publication of "Amazing stories", where science fiction received its name.

Mirroring the European Futurist movement, this era possessed a deeply optimistic mindset. It celebrated contemporary scientific advancements by imagining fantastic future developments where wonder trumped strict technical accuracy. In the same years, both in Germany and in the United States, visionary romantic geniuses were trying to fly the first self-made rockets. The era completely ignored the realities of massive industrial infrastructure and corporate engineering.

Instead, it championed the "lone heroic scientist", or artisan, who could build a starship in a backyard lab with a soldering iron. While the science was wrapped in heavy technobabble, the stories maintained a profound respect for the *potential* of science and engineering to conquer cosmic catastrophes, explore the universe, and save humanity.

A selection of Key Authors might include:

- **Edward Elmer "Doc" Smith**, the "Father of Space Opera" who invented the interstellar epic (*Skylark of Space*, *Lensman* series), featuring universe-spanning tech and battles with grotesque aliens
- **John W. Campbell Jr.**, known for vast cosmic scales and pioneering the "humans vs. shape-shifting alien" trope in *Who Goes There?*;
- **Edmond Hamilton**, the "World-Wrecker" who wrote massive-scale cosmic catastrophes and created the blueprint for military sci-fi with his *Interstellar Patrol* series;
- **Jack Williamson**, who balanced the lone-hero trope with genuine wonder, famously coining the terms "terraforming" and "genetic engineering" in works like *The Legion of Space*;
- **Stanley G. Weinbaum**, who revolutionized the genre in *A Martian Odyssey* by introducing friendly, intelligent aliens with distinct, non-human psychologies rather than simple monsters;
- **Ray Cummings & H.P. Lovecraft** merged lone academics with ancient alien histories, blending cosmic horror and wonder.

The Golden Age of Science Fiction (Late 1930s–1940s), spearheaded by John W. Campbell Jr. after he became editor of Astounding Science Fiction in 1937, marked a major shift away from the unchecked imagination of the Pulp Era. Campbell injected the genre with a new sense of rigor, demanding engineering-level scientific respect and a serious focus on how human societies adapt to technological breakthroughs.

The "lone garage scientist" was replaced by complex bureaucratic networks, corporate research teams, and government-backed initiatives. Stories moved away from solitary backyard operations to mirror realistic geopolitical, economic, and institutional systems. Characters gained significant psychological depth. Instead of flamboyant larger-than-life heroes, protagonists were written as pragmatic, competent professionals—such as asteroid miners, structural engineers, rationalist intellectuals, astronauts, or even psychologically fractured outcasts and neurodivergent individuals—navigating complex emotional and mental landscapes. Aliens evolved beyond simple "bug-eyed monsters." The era introduced complex non-human dynamics, ranging from predatory creatures interacting with human research expeditions to benign, incomprehensibly advanced alien intellects that challenged human logic and philosophy.

The Golden Age was predominantly defined by a wave of cosmic optimism, driven by a high degree of confidence in human intelligence, rationalism, and analytical methodology. Humanity was viewed as capable of mastering its destiny through engineering, logic, and evolutionary advancement.

Core Authors include:

- **Robert A. Heinlein**, the undisputed pioneer of the era's gritty realism. He introduced structured "future history" timelines and focused heavily on epistemology, general semantics (influenced by Alfred Korzybski), and political systems. His characters often grappled with the limits of metaphysics and the psychological boundaries of human language. “The purpose of metaphysics is to ask questions: "Why are we here?" "Where are we going after we die?" (and so on). Asking the questions is the point of metaphysics, but answering them is not, because once you answer this kind of question, you cross the line into religion.”

- **Isaac Asimov**, who brought rational science and logic to its peak. He introduced institutional and generational heroes, viewing individuals as small cogs in massive historical shifts. His Foundation series introduced "Psychohistory"—a mathematical science used to predict the behavior of entire civilizations over millennia.
- **Arthur C. Clarke**, definitely a champion of Cosmic Optimism! Clarke is the prophet of hard sci-fi, who married rigorous physics and orbital mechanics with grand philosophical wonder, often depicting humanity encountering benevolent, highly advanced alien intellects.
- **Alan E. van Vogt**, a great Cosmic Optimist, served as a bridge from the Pulp Era, grounding wild plots in psychological complexity and non-Aristotelian philosophy. He frequently explored Homo Superior (telepathic mutants) and characters unlocking immense mental sanity and capability. His “Non-A” is a masterpiece of non-Aristotelian philosophy, a strong endorsement of deep analytical methodology, referred to the Korzibsky’s theory (“The map is not the territory”), and a deep praise of human intelligence, toward psychological sanity. A cosmic optimist, with very high confidence in human capacities.
- **Theodore Sturgeon** provided the emotional and literary heart of the era. He explored deep psychological themes, empathy, telepathic gestalts, and the ethical responsibilities of playing God with hyper-accelerated species.

4 Science Fiction authors and the Dark Forest? Not a great relationship

Sci-fi writers are quite sensible social antennas. Even before the mid of past century they have left the territory of the Hard Science Fiction, and resigned following science and technology. From the early 1950’s great authors such as Isaac Asimov (with his concept of "Psychohistory" in the Foundation series), Ray Bradbury, Ursula Le Guin, and many others, turned their fantastic pens to the social sphere. Later, during 1960’s and 70’s, authors like John Brunner reacted to the backward theories of radical ecologists (e.g. the Club of Rome), with vibrant novels prizing human intelligence and initiatives.

While "Hard SF" focuses on the "hard" sciences (physics, astronomy, chemistry, engineering), "Soft SF" focuses on the "soft" or social sciences (anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science). It describes stories where the technology is merely a background tool or a catalyst, and the true focus is an exploration of human behavior, social structures, and political systems.

In the realm of literature, we had excellent works, invading the field of anthropological and sociological futurological investigation. George Orwell, with his two masterpieces Nineteen Eighty-Four (1948) and the Animal Farm (1945), could be considered the forerunner of this subgenre. Animal Farm is a satirical allegorical dystopian novella, in the form of a beast fable, reflecting the events leading up to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and then on into the Stalinist era of the Soviet Union. Orwell: "Animal Farm was the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole." The political ideas in Orwell’s trilogy—Homage to Catalonia, Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four—were profoundly influenced by the theme of Leon Trotsky’s book The Revolution Betrayed (1937)[22].

Ray Bradbury's “Fahrenheit 451”, Ursula K. Le Guin's “The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia”, Kurt Vonnegut's dialogue between utopia and dystopia, and Philip Dick too, with his uchronic novels, may be included in the dystopian social criticism literary movement.

Aldous Huxley’s dystopian vision focused on social decadence due to technological manipulation, consumerism, and psychological conditioning. His cornerstone works Brave New World (1932)[23] and Brave New World Revisited (1958)[24] are non-fiction essays in which Huxley also discusses modern geopolitical, overpopulation and propaganda. His final novel Island (1962)[25], Huxley

explores the concept of a society that integrates Eastern spiritual philosophy with Western science, a key issue, against the separation of science and humanistic disciplines.

5 The “green” dystopian thread

With the raising of ecologist and the environmentalist movements, a dystopian current was born, recruiting more in the cinematographic field than in the literary one.

The late 1960s and early 1970s marked a massive, permanent shift away from the campy, technophilic "space adventures" and giant monster movies of the 1950s. Instead, cinema entered a dark, cynical era of Dystopian, Cyberpunk, and Post-Apocalyptic Sci-Fi. Instead of celebrating the rocket ship, directors began using cameras to warn that our blind worship of unchecked industrialization, corporate capitalism, consumerism, and cybernetics would determine the death of Nature on planet Earth.

This thread produced excellent movies, from the artistic point of view. Also, we might consider the high value of the hard social criticism expressed by the plots. Of course we cannot avoid to comment the poor, often anti-humanist, philosophical background.

5.1 The Pioneers of the Dark Wave (1970s–1980s)

This period established the visual grammar of the cinematic dystopia: crumbling infrastructures, overpopulation, corporate control, and desolate wastelands.

Ridley Scott didn't just direct sci-fi; he completely reinvented its aesthetic. He described a "used future"—places that were dirty, raining, industrialized, and decayed. “Blade Runner” (1982) is neo-noir cyberpunk film. Technology (genetic engineering) has created artificial humans (Replicants) who are treated as corporate property, while the wealthy have abandoned a deeply polluted, neon-choked Earth. “Alien” (1979), while famously a horror film, its background is highly dystopian: blue-collar space truckers are manipulated and treated as entirely expendable by a heartless, omnipresent megacorporation ("The Company").

George Miller, an Australian director, birthed the aesthetic of the modern punk-rock post-apocalypse. In his movies -- “Mad Max” (1979), “The Road Warrior” (1981), “Fury Road” (2015) -- Miller imagined a world where the collapse of the oil economy completely disintegrates global civilization. Technology is reduced to jury-rigged, smoking combustion engines, and human anthropology regresses into ultra-violent, tribal warlordism in a sun-bleached desert wasteland.

John Carpenter is the master of lean, cynical, anti-authoritarian B-movies that carried sharp political and social commentary. “Escape from New York” (1981) is a cynical vision of urban decay where Manhattan has been walled off and turned into a massive, lawless maximum-security prison island by a fascist American government. In “They Live” (1988) Carpenter develops a brilliant satire on late-stage consumer capitalism, where a hidden alien elite uses subliminal television signals ("OBEY," "CONSUME") to keep the human population docile, impoverished, and compliant.

5.2 The Technophobic & Cyber-Dystopia Masters (1980s–1990s)

As the personal computer and the precursor to the internet emerged, directors shifted their focus from ruined landscapes to the digital enslavement and bodily mutilation of humanity.

We owe to **Paul Verhoeven**, a Dutch director who weaponized sci-fi to deliver blistering, hyper-violent, and deeply satirical attacks on American corporate greed and military fascism, great movies like, e.g., “RoboCop” (1987) and “Total Recall” (1990).

While **James Cameron** loves technical innovation behind the camera, his early stories are deeply technophobic, warning about the existential threat of military tech and corporate arrogance. “The Terminator” (1984) and “Terminator 2: Judgment Day” (1991) belong to a classic "Frankenstein" narrative updated for the digital age: human dependency on military network systems results in the birth of Skynet, an AI that triggers a nuclear holocaust and reduces humanity to a hunted underclass. “Aliens” (1986) and “Avatar” (2009)[26], both feature a look at techno-industrial military forces ruthlessly exploiting ecosystems for profit.

David Cronenberg is the godfather of "Body Horror." Cronenberg explored how media, technology, and biotechnology mutate and degrade the human form and mind. “Videodrome” (1983) is a chillingly prophetic look at how television networks, mass media, and violent broadcasting literally alter the human brain, hallucinating a techno-organic fusion of flesh and television.

5.3 The Philosophical & Existential Modern Dystopians (1995–Present)

By the turn of the century and into the 2000s, special effects allowed directors to depict incredibly vast, deeply psychological, and philosophically complex societal collapses.

Lana & Lilly Wachowski authored “The Matrix” (1999), the cinematic pinnacle of cyber-dystopia. It updated the simulation hypothesis for the internet generation, depicting a world where humanity has been reduced to bio-electric batteries for an AI overlord, their minds trapped in a pristine, simulated 1990s reality while the real Earth is a scorched wasteland.

Terry Gilliam is known for his surreal, bureaucratic, and highly idiosyncratic visions of bleak societal systems. Some of his beautiful works include “Brazil” (1985), a nightmarish, hilarious, and deeply frustrating look at a hyper-bureaucratic, industrialized dystopia where a single clerical typo ruins a man's life, and terrorism is an everyday part of consumer life; “12 Monkeys” (1995), a post-apocalyptic timeline where a virus unleashed by humanity forces the remaining population to live like rats underground, using experimental, unstable time-travel technology to try and fix the past.

Alfonso Cuarón & Denis Villeneuve, are two modern masters who treat dystopian sci-fi with absolute artistic prestige, focusing on grounded, quiet, and bone-chilling human realism. “Children of Men” (Directed by Alfonso Cuarón, 2006), set in a gritty, near-future Britain following a global infertility crisis. Technology hasn't saved anyone; instead, the world has collapsed into xenophobic, military nationalism and complete despair. It is widely considered one of the greatest sci-fi films of the 21st century. “Blade Runner 2049 (Directed by Denis Villeneuve, 2017), is a masterpiece that expands on Ridley Scott's vision, highlighting a completely dead biosphere where agriculture is entirely synthetic, and corporations control the holographic desires of an isolated, lonely human populace.

6 The Dark Forest in futurological literature

In analyzing the ominous and all-encompassing "dark forest theory," it is necessary to recognize the various threads of a compelling narrative. Our understanding will include an awareness of both creativity and destructive impulses. The emergence of the unique potential of modern science in recent decades is set against the backdrop of profound, epochal change on Earth. Environmental degradation and serious factors such as the possibility of space warfare now pose unprecedented threats to civilization. Yet, beyond all the profound identities—political, cultural, social, and economic—what has been overlooked is the very fragility of the human continuum and, indeed, of our own consciousness. What are the innate fears we are projecting outward, toward the heavens, and what lies deep within our psychological makeup?

What ties these writers to the cosmic pessimism current is their rejection of the classic Star Trek or Star Wars tropes—the idea that advanced intelligence brings enlightened diplomacy, galactic federations, or universal peace. Instead, they view the universe through a terrifyingly bleak Hobbesian lens: Intelligence is a weapon. In a vast, silent cosmos where the speed of light limits communication and distances breed absolute distrust, a preemptive, genocidal first strike isn't evil—it's simply the ultimate, rational baseline of survival.

6.1 The forerunners of cosmic pessimism in sci-fi literature

Beginning in 1967 with his Berserker series, **Fred Saberhagen** introduced a terrifyingly dark answer to the Fermi Paradox[1]. He posited that an ancient, highly advanced interstellar war ended with the creation of the Berserkers—sentient, self-replicating space armadas whose sole, hardcoded programming is to destroy all organic life. In Saberhagen's universe, the natural evolutionary trajectory of top-tier intelligence led to the creation of the ultimate "first strike" weapon. Once unleashed, these intelligences operate on cold logic: any organic life, if allowed to develop intelligence, will eventually become a competitor or a threat, so it must be neutralized immediately upon detection.

Greg Bear is the Pioneer of Cosmic Paranoia. If anyone laid the literal blueprint for Cixin Liu's universe, it was Greg Bear in his seminal 1987 novel The Forge of God and its 1992 sequel, Anvil of Stars. Bear explicitly outlines a universe where civilizations must destroy others upon detection. In his myth, space is quiet not because it is empty, but because it is populated by automated, planet-killing "Seekers" sent out by advanced, hidden civilizations. Bear coined a phrasing that perfectly sums up cosmic pessimism: "There are baseline rules for the intersection of intelligent cultures... Think of humanity as a young child wandering into a tiger-infested jungle making loud, cheerful noises." In Bear's universe, intelligence isn't necessarily "evil" in a moral sense; rather, survival arithmetic mandates absolute ruthlessness. The only way to ensure your own survival is to eliminate potential threats before they discover you.

A master of modern space-opera cosmic pessimism, **Alastair Reynolds** heavily features the concept of Biological Obliteration in his Revelation Space universe (beginning in 2000). In his universe, humanity discovers the Inhibitors (also known as the Wolves). They are an ancient, machine intelligence that actively patrols the galaxy to suppress and exterminate any organic civilization that achieves spaceflight. Reynolds adds a deeply cynical, cosmic-pessimist twist to the motivation: the Inhibitors aren't doing it out of malice, but to save life in the long run. They calculated that a massive, unavoidable cosmic catastrophe will hit the galaxy in the future, and if there are too many competing, squabbling intelligent species when it happens, they will tear each other apart and drive life to total extinction. Therefore, the Inhibitors preemptively butcher any species that gets smart enough to leave their home planet.

6.2 Yet, sci-fi writers were mostly optimist or realist!

A systematic corpus analysis of 42 prominent speculative fiction authors spanning the last sixty years was conducted utilizing advanced data extraction frameworks (see Appendix B for full taxonomy), trying to summarize their prevalent feelings and attitudes, about their conception of the Universe. With the help of Gemini AI we have conducted a large investigation on writers who wrote during the last 60 years or they are still writing nowadays: Alfred E. Van Vogt, Andy Weir, Arthur C. Clarke, Carl Sagan, C. J. Cherryh, Clifford D. Simak, Daniel Suarez, David Brin, Dmitry Glukhovsky, Douglas Adams, Frank Herbert, Frederik Pohl, Greg Bear, Gregory Benford, Harry Harrison, Iain M. Banks, Isaac Asimov, Jack Vance, James S.A. Corey (Daniel Abraham & Ty Franck), John Brunner, Julian May, Kate Wilhelm, Kim Stanley Robinson, Larry Niven, Lois McMaster Bujold, Nancy Kress, Octavia E. Butler, Olaf Stapledon, Orson Scott Card, Peter F. Hamilton, Poul Anderson, Philip K. Dick, Philip José

Farmer, J. G. Ballard, Philip R. Harris, Ray Bradbury, Robert A. Heinlein, Robert Silverberg, Stanisław Lem, Tanith Lee, Ursula K. Le Guin, Walter Tevis.

The criteria used for the investigation were the following ones:

a) science fiction subgenre,
b) cosmic orientation: pessimist or optimist,
c) focused on social and anthropology or science-engineering or both,
d) enlightenment or romanticism or both,
e) libertarianism, liberalism or socialism or both,
f) faith in human intelligence,
g) utopian or dystopian or realist,
h) capacity to imagine future anthropology based on social changes and economic development,
i) their concept of the universe (related to the Dark Forest hypothesis): benign, malign, indifferent;
j) their orientation about ecology and environment: a) man has wasted the planet, let the nature recover, whatever the cost in human lives and quality of life OR b) our the failures (or slowness in understanding nature), our the responsibility, only science and space expansion can resolve the problem, saving both environment and humanity.

The authors were classified in an incredibly large number of subgenres, like: Afrofuturism, Biopunk, Comic Sci-Fi, Commonwealth Saga, Cosmic Horror-Sci-Fi, Cosmic Speculation, Cyberpunk Precursor, Dark Fantasy, Dying Earth, Dystopian Fiction, Feminist Sci-Fi, Future History, Gnostic Sci-Fi, Golden Age Sci-Fi, Hard Science Fiction, Hard Space Opera, Management, Melancholy Speculative Fiction, Military Sci-Fi, Near-Future Sci-Fi, New Wave Sci-Fi, Pastoral Science Fiction, Philosophical Sci-Fi, Planetary Romance, Pliocene Exile, Political Sci-Fi, Post-Apocalyptic, Post-Scarcity Sci-Fi, Proto-Cyberpunk, Psychological Sci-Fi, Satirical Sci-Fi, Science Fantasy, Social Science Fiction, Soft Sci-Fi, Solarpunk, Space Opera, Space Sociology & Behavioral Science, Survival Fiction, Techno-Thriller, Time Travel.

50% came up being ***cosmic optimist*** (criterium b), in various nuances, such as Optimist, Radical Optimist, Pragmatic Optimist, Absurdist Optimism, Grounded Optimist, Optimist/Hedonistic, Optimist, Optimist/Balanced realist. 16 on 21 like Enlightenment or both (criterum d). they have high faith in human intelligence (criterium f), and almost all think that only science and space expansion can solve the environmental issue (criterium J). Coming to the concept of the Universe 10 on 20 consider it benign, 10 indifferent, and only 1 malign. The authors classified at various title optimist: Alfred E. Van Vogt, Andy Weir, Arthur C. Clarke, Carl Sagan, Clifford D. Simak, Daniel Suarez, David Brin, Douglas Adams, Iain M. Banks, Isaac Asimov, Julian May, Kim Stanley Robinson, Larry Niven, Lois McMaster Bujold, Orson Scott Card, Peter F. Hamilton, Philip José Farmer, Philip R. Harris , Ray Bradbury, Robert A. Heinlein, Ursula K. Le Guin. Almost all of these authors are classified utopian or realist-utopian. Only one – Ray Bradbury -- was tagged as dystopian. 19 of them think that humans hold the responsibility to recover the environmental issue by means of their science, while only two of them – Philip Harris and Clifford Simak – are oriented to let Nature to do its work. The majority of the optimist authors own a high capacity to imagine future anthropology, and 2 of them -- Iain Banks and Ursula Le Guin -- are classified having supreme anthropological capacity.

35% were classified as ***cosmic pessimist*** (criterium b), declined as Pessimist, Pessimist>Realist, Mild Pessimism, Pessimist/Cynical Realist, Pessimist/fatalist. The majority of the pessimist writers also belong to Romantic orientation (criterium d). They also believe, in majority, that man has wasted the planet, and we should better let the nature to recover. In this list we find excellent writers, like

Dmitry Glukhovsky, Frank Herbert, John Brunner, Kate Wilhelm, Octavia E. Butler, Philip K. Dick, J. G. Ballard, Ray Bradbury, Robert Silverberg, Tanith Lee, and Walter Tevis. They share a low or moderate faith in human intelligence, and can be listed among dystopian writers. Yet, in this subassembly, we also find some writers more keen to Enlightenment (criterium d), and thinking that only science and space expansion can resolve the environmental issue, saving both environment and humanity (criterium j): Douglas Adams, Frederik Pohl, James S.A. Corey (Daniel Abraham & Ty Franck), John Brunner, Octavia E. Butler, and Stanisław Lem. All of the pessimists own a high or very high capacity to imagine future anthropology based on social changes and economic development (criterium h). All of them share the concept that the Universe malign (4 cases), or indifferent at best (11 cases).

To complete this raw classification based on optimism/pessimism, we owe to mention a small group, characterized by realist attitude, scoring 16% of the total: C. J. Cherryh, Gregory Benford, Harry Harrison, Jack Vance, Nancy Kress, Olaf Stapledon, Poul Anderson. Most of them like Enlightenment or both (Enlightenment and Romanticism). They have moderate faith in human intelligence, and think that the Universe indifferent, in one case malign (Benford) and in one case majestic (Stapledon).

6.3 Some modern sci-fi writers

At this point we feel the need to go a bit deeper into some authors' meaningful works. They can be considered modern sci-fi writers.

Daniel Suarez can be counted among the exponents of the modern science fiction genre, finally free from the dystopian bias of the last 60 years. His stories are set in the near future, and he can be defined a pragmatic optimist, as far as the Universe is concerned. He uses hyper-accurate current science/engineering (drones, blockchain, darknets) to catalyst radical shifts in human social and economic organization. Suarez leans towards the Enlightenment: he believes deeply in data, decentralized networks, and systems architecture, definitely a rational technologist. Reading his works we understand he's a libertarian socialist, praising decentralized liberalism. Suarez is highly critical of corporate globalization and centralized state power, advocating instead for high-tech, localized, open-source communities. His faith in Human Intelligence is high for the collective/crowdsourced individual, but low for centralized elites. He can be considered a realist transitioning to utopian. His books often start in a dystopian corporate reality but show how technology can build a sustainable, fairer society. Suarez owns a high capacity to describe future Anthropology: he maps out how gaming culture, automated logistics, and augmented reality can fundamentally alter human tribal structures and economics. His Universe is indifferent: his focus is firmly terrestrial; the cosmos is just the next physical frontier to build infrastructure within. His novels -- "Delta V"[27] is an example – besides being masterpieces of adventurous plots and narration, offer a view of possible industrial works and business in the Solar System, in the frame of fierce competition and very high stakes. As far as the environment is concerned, Suarez leans to human responsibility and active strategies: through tech-driven permaculture, automated recycling, and decentralized energy, science and engineering can—and must—save both humanity and the biosphere. Definitively a positive vision, in the frame of a modern science-fiction.

The last quarter of the twentieth century was not the exclusive preserve of "green" dystopian literature. There were also authors who dared to oppose this mainstream, writing about great humanist struggles for the progress of civilization.

David Brin is definitely one of them. Not easy to categorize him, an author who wrote modern science fiction even in times of dystopian wave. His cosmic orientation is optimist, and he dedicates equal attention to social issues and science/engineering. Between Enlightenment and Romanticism

Brin chooses Enlightenment, and is fierce defender of the scientific method and transparency. As a liberal-libertarian he strongly believes in individual accountability and open societies, and holds a high faith in human intelligence. He is a realist leaning utopian, holding a brilliant capacity to anticipate future anthropology. He conceptualized how humans might genetically alter other species and alter their own cultures. David Brin's Universe is benign. In his Uplift universe, the cosmos is tightly interconnected by an ancient galactic civilization, billions of years old, bound by laws, traditions, and a shared responsibility to raise animal species to consciousness. As a real-world scientist, Brin firmly advocates for transparency, ecological care, and using proactive engineering to fix the messes we've made without abandoning our industrial civilization. In several of his novels, Brin manifests his great humanist philosophical creed. In "Heart of the Comet" (1986)[28], co-authored with Gregory Benford, an international political group called the "Archists" is fighting to halt progress and stop humanity from disrupting "the natural order of things". The novel narrates the epic struggle of the Halley's colonists against the Archists to terraform Mars and to make the Solar System a more suitable place for human sustainable development. Humanism vs. Naturism is also very well represented in "Earth" (1991)[29]. An artificial black hole has fallen into the Earth's core, and the entire planet could be destroyed within a year. While scientists fight to save the world, a struggle begins between official science and various extremist groups who believe that the only salvation for the planet is the destruction of humanity, to reset the evolutionary clock and start over.

Besides being a champion of the Space Opera genre, **Iain M. Banks** (1954-2013) was one of the few writers who had the great anthropological capacity to speculating and writing about the *Post-Scarcity* age. Many science-fiction authors tend to project in the future our current global issues, e.g. unemployment, environmental crisis, lack of resources. In his "The Culture" series[30], Banks dares to describe a future where many of the above concerns were delivered to history, due to the great abundance of the space resources made resource wars and other dystopias obsolete. Banks was definitely a rational optimist: he believed that advanced intelligence will naturally tend toward cooperation, benevolence, and hedonic fulfillment. His attention was equally focused on meticulous megastructures and AI engineering, serving a deeply philosophical, sociological exploration of a post-scarcity society. Fiercely rationalist, anti-religious, and reliant on scientific materialism to solve human suffering Banks was devote to the Enlightenment, and politically a socialist. Specifically, techno-anarchist socialist. *The Culture* has no money, no laws, and no property, run by benevolent AIs so biological beings can live in complete freedom. His faith in human/organic intelligence was moderate on its own, but high when synthesized with artificial intelligence (the "Minds"). Banks was definitely an utopian, as shown in his work: *The Culture* is one of the few fully realized, functional, and un-satirical utopias in modern sci-fi, though it fights realistic brushfire wars on its fringes. The lesson we can learn by Banks: the Culture's utopia was realized thanks to human expansion in the outer space. His anthropological speculation capacity is supreme: he masterfully conceptualized how a society changes when work, gender/biological constraints, and death are entirely engineered away. The Banks's Universe is benign: he explicitly rejected the Dark Forest theory. In his universe, the older and more advanced a civilization gets, the more peaceful, inclusive, and civilized it becomes, eventually "subliming" into a higher state of peaceful existence. As far as ecology is concerned, Banks was the ultimate champion of the Promethean view. In the Culture, planets are rarely settled; instead, **billions live on artificial Orbitals and massive starships**. By moving civilization entirely into engineered space habitats, nature can be perfectly simulated or left entirely untouched on wild planets, **saving both humanity and the environment through supreme technology**. Banks's untimely passing in 2013 left a profound void in humanist futurism; his work remains foundational to the Space Renaissance philosophy.!

6.4 A recent wave of American female writers

A wave of American female writers arose during the last 1900's quarter, with a series of beautiful and socially engaged novels, including, for instance, Octavia Butler (1947 – 2006), Kate Wilhelm (1928 – 2018), Nancy Kress (1948-), and C. J. Cherryh (1942-). They lean to Enlightenment and Romanticism, showing that they don't accept the split between science and spirituality, and tend to realist dystopian attitude. Their Universe is indifferent or malign and, on the environmentalist side, they are split at 50%. Yet, the characters in their stories are anything but nihilistic and submissive to nature. The stories leave the reader with the feeling that humans can and should observe, think, understand, find solutions, try, learn from errors, and try again. The methodology of science, indeed. People that thrive, not just survive.

Octavia E. Butler (1947 – 2006) was considered an exponent of feminist science fiction. Her cosmic orientation is considered pessimistic realism. She believed that humans have a fatal flaw: a combination of high intelligence and rigidly hierarchical behavior. She focused on social and anthropology, and was oriented on both enlightenment and romanticism: harshly analytical about power dynamics, but deeply empathetic and focused on survival and adaptation. However, though her vision of the Universe appears rather dark, and she leans to judge humans for their harmful behavior toward nature, the "Parable of the Sower"[31] is everything but nihilist and surrender. Opposite, the key concept of the novel is "God is change", that sounds as a not guilty verdict for humanity: everything changes in nature, species have birth and dye, humans are just one actor in such a natural history, having more responsibilities, being endowed by intelligence and self-awareness, yet nature would keep changing however.

Nancy Kress

Nancy Kress's central theme, as demonstrated in her two masterpieces, "An Alien Light" and the "Beggars' Trilogy," is socio-anthropological. In both works, the author develops a profound analysis of the limits of any "perfect" or very evolved social context. In "An Alien Light," a highly evolved alien species, having achieved a sort of harmonious and perfect utopia, seeks to understand humanity's central paradox: the innate capacity for extreme collective violence coexists with the capacity for complex, high-level cooperation. In the "Beggars' Trilogy," Kress creates a technological utopia in which genetically modified individuals acquire the ability to avoid sleeping, thus earning themselves a 24-hour workday. In both stories, the author explains why any "perfect" condition lacks something essential, fundamental to evolution: struggle and competition in the first case, the dreamlike and irrational contribution of sleep in the second. Can we call Nancy Kress a dystopian writer? Absolutely not! We can say that she—inclined toward the Enlightenment and concerned about social inequality—recognizes the absolute relevance of utopias as a driver of progress, while remaining deeply skeptical (or realistic) about realized utopias. Her capacity for anthropological analysis of the future is undoubtedly remarkable. Kress's universe is indifferent: it operates according to the cold laws of genetics, physics, and economics. She treats ecological and genetic crises with rigorous realism. Her stories imply that once the toothpaste has run out of the tube, it can't be put back in: once the environment or the human genome is altered, one can't simply wish it back to its original "purity"—sophisticated science must be employed to manage the new paradigm.

6.5 Some more giants

Robert A. Heinlein can be referred here, in this classification of the cosmic optimistic and pessimistic writers, as the absolute leaders of the optimistic community! In his transversal huge frequentation of at least 3 subgenres – golden age, hard Sci-Fi, and social Sci-Fi – he told us stories of characters that never felt lost, whatever their contingent situation. If they happened to be broke, they were

sure that, through grit, engineering, and high mood, they could overcome any misfortune, and get back to a position where they had at least two choices, if not more. Heinlein's interest and focus was very broad, from social and anthropology to science and engineering, and his preference was definitely toward Enlightenment, with an associated interest for libertarian free-love romanticism. A great libertarian and anarcho-capitalist, he is often claimed by the right-libertarian sci-fi supporters. Famous his sentence, acronized in TANSTAAFL "There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch"[32]. However, he had great faith in human intelligence, specifically in the individual engineering and pragmatist capacities, less in the "masses". He can be considered a realist leaning utopian, with high capacity of anthropological futurist analysis: famously pioneered concepts like polyamorous communal families and corporate-colonial governance models. Universe is indifferent: the universe doesn't give a damn about human feelings, but it belongs to whoever is tough enough, and smart enough to reach it. On the environmental side he had zero time for back-to-nature philosophies. "The Earth is too small a basket for all our eggs.": if Earth gets crowded or degraded, you build a colony ship, terraform a moon, or homestead on a new planet. Science and expansion are the only noble paths forward. Should we mention the after-reading-impression left by any of the Heinlein's novels, we might say our moral in good and happy shape. He never needed to write "it will all be fine" in his novels: the readers know it.

Poul Anderson (1926-2001) can be compared, in some of his most distinctive tracts as a writer, to Robert Heinlein. He also is a champion of hard sci-fi and space opera. His cosmic orientation is optimist/realist, focused on both science-engineering and socio-anthropological investigation. On the latter he favored economics and finance, showing an acute and ironic look on space merchants endowed by great entrepreneurial and commercial capability, but also by a utilitarian-humanist attitude: "A corpse is never a good client" is a concept often mentioned and argumented by Nicholas Van Rijn, one of the Anderson's main characters[33][34], founder and owner of the Solar Spice and Liquor Company. Here's and example of how the anarchic-merchant arguments the concept in "The Book of Van Rijn - Margin of Profit"[35]: *"Revenge and destruction are un-Christian thoughts. Also, I have told you, they do not pay very well, since it is hard to sell anything to a corpse. The problem is to find some means inside our resources what will make it unprofitable for Borthu to raid us. Not being stupid heads, they will then stop raiding and we can maybe later do business."* Nicholas Van Rijn and David Falkayn move in a universe where decadent empires are engaged on wars for self-survival. In most of the stories, our heroes manage to make fun of the arrogant windbags of the moment, to save populations in danger, and all while making a "modest" profit from it. A lesson some of the nowadays big entrepreneurs might maybe learn and apply?… Anderson prized both, Enlightenment and Romanticism. Rational science is science is rigorously exalted I his novels, yet we can also read a deep love for Nordic sagas and romantic heroism. As Heinlein, Anderson was a classical liberal/libertarian, deeply skeptical of centralized states and empires. More than cold sharpened intelligence, he favored empathic and emotional intelligence, that his characters always use to achieve partners where possible antagonists were initially announced. His utopia is a world in which realistic evaluation of mutual interests and goals match to achieve a fruitful peaceful environment, where the immense abundant resources of the galaxies allow a perpetual win-win socio-economic model, and winners and losers can easily revert their roles in times, having no real reasons to fight, kill and destroy. Anderson was a great future anthropologist, using his deep knowledge of real human history to show how future interstellar trade organizations would rise and thrive. The Anderson's Universe is an indifferent immense ocean of physical laws and historical cycles. It contains rival empires and dangers, but it is fundamentally an open frontier for the daring trader or explorer. His ecological creed was a classic libertarian-technocrat perspective. He believed that wealth, space expansion, and industrial resource-gathering from asteroids and unpopulated

moons were the only practical ways to keep the home planet green without forcing humans into poverty.

James S.A. Corey is the pen-name used two authors, working together: Daniel Abraham & Ty Franck. It would certainly be limiting to categorize them in the realm of space opera, though their narrative recalls such genre, with meaningful hints in the political Sci-Fi, specially in their main work, “The Expanse”. Their cosmic orientation can be defined realist tending toward mild pessimism: the Universe contains terrifying, indifferent things, but humanity survives them. Corey focuses on both the physics of orbital mechanics and the tribal sociology of Earth, Mars, and The Belt. Between Enlightenment and Romanticism they prefer Enlightenment: problems are solved through investigation, empirical evidence, and political negotiation, not mystical destiny. Politically liberal, they show a profound skepticism of corporate monopolies and authoritarian governments; and deeply empathetic to the working-class labor movements of the Belters. Their faith in human intelligence is moderate: individuals can be brilliant and heroic (e.g., Naomi Nagata, Holden), but human institutions are prone to tribalism and shortsightedness. Corey shows a neutral or realist position between utopian and dystopian: their 2200 society presents a gritty, lived-in future where technology changes, but human nature remains fundamentally identical to today. As far as the capacity to figure future anthropology Abraham and Franck appear controversial. Their depiction of the "Belter" culture—complete with its own creole language, physical changes from low gravity, and distinct socio-economic class consciousness—is a deep look in future anthropology, yet their underestimation of the industrial revolution that followed the expansion of civilization in the solar system leaves us perplexed. Universe is indifferent: the *protomolecule* isn't malicious; it's just a tool left behind by an ancient civilization that views humanity the way humans view ants. They view Earth's environmental degradation as a failure of management, and see space expansion and resource distribution as the messy, necessary path forward. For sure “The Expanse” is, so far, unpaired masterpiece of modern science-fiction, developed in 9 books, so far, and a beautiful tv series.

Follow some considerations by Alberto Cavallo on Stanisław Lem.

Stanisław Lem is largely unknown or misunderstood in America since he wrote in Polish and was not translated much, until recently. He lived in the Soviet bloc and he was not a “dissident”, so he was considered somehow an enemy. His deep Middle-European culture was simply alien to the English speaking world – so Americans and even British authors and commentators confirmed an important thesis of his: aliens are difficult or even impossible to understand. This is classified as *pessimism*, but it is the only realistic stance on aliens: true aliens cannot be just humans with pointed ears... And Lem himself was sort of a true alien for Anglo-Americans. His theoretical work on AI is extremely interesting, but an American trained AI does not know...

His Cosmic orientation is considered pessimist or cynical realist: he believed the universe is ultimately beyond human comprehension, but this is an oversimplification. Lem appreciated meticulous science used to ask deep epistemological questions. Between Enlightenment and Romanticism he was closer to Enlightenment, being an hyper-intellectual rationalist, highly satirical of human romantic illusions. He wrote both novels and extended, complex essays on the future. His political leaning was socialist / critical realist. He lived under Soviet control; wrote scathing allegories attacking both Eastern state bureaucracy and Western consumer capitalism. In fact, he was deeply critical of both capitalism and (real) socialism. His position cannot be classified under the labels that are commonly used in politics. His faith in Human Intelligence was Low to Moderate: we are smart enough to build computers, but too egocentric to understand genuinely alien intelligence. Lem believes that evolution is always going on and studies where it may be going. Current human intelligence is not a static point, it is a step on the long path of evolution.

Lem was a futurologist studying the future of humanity and considering how to transcend human limitations. He can be considered somehow transhumanist, in the meaning that he indicates possible paths of development for the future, transcending humanity how it is now, even including the integration of man and machine. His most important work is Summa Technologiae, which discusses developments both on the technical and the biological side to create a rational vision of the future. He has a realistic vision of technology: it is essential but it may lead to unpleasant results if we misuse it. Lem was endowed by a very high capacity to figure future anthropology: he predicted electronic books, virtual reality, search engines, and the social paralysis caused by too much information. His concept of the Universe could be interpreted as indifferent tending toward malign. But that would be a very simplistic interpretation. Lem is not the king of cosmic pessimism. The universe isn't a Dark Forest of active hunters; it's an unmappable, radically alien labyrinth (like Solaris or Fiasco) where human intelligence struggles to communicate. The universe is extremely complex and cannot be reduced to our limited comprehension, which is not pessimism but awareness of complexity. Aliens are not hostile, they are very difficult to understand, in the "serious" stories. But there are many fantastic stories that are positive and amusing – but always significant. For instance "Cyberiad" and "Fables for Robots". "Memories of a space traveler" is one of the most humorous books I have ever read, not just satiric. All his stories have a significant philosophical background. Of all his novels, Solaris is the most known, probably due to the movies that were derived from it, but it is the least typical. Lem declared that Solaris is the most irrational of all his works. They are in fact very diverse, introducing many different themes and attitudes.

On ecology Lem leans to option B. Lem's characters use advanced geoengineering and cybernetics, but he constantly mocks the idea that we can cleanly "fix" nature without creating an even more absurd, artificial nightmare. Lem wrote several profound essays on futurology and expressly artificial intelligence. We do not see him as pessimist but as one who deliberately tried to turn futurology into a true science. He had a low opinion of most American Sci-Fi writers because they had good ideas but were unable to develop them adequately. He believed that the current level of human intelligence is not enough to understand the complexity of the universe, but this is considered "cosmic pessimism" just because he did not share the naive American view that we can understand all and fix all *without a deeper comprehension*. On the contrary, his focus is on future developments and where humanity is moving, in search of a positive future.

7 Cosmic pessimism and Philosophy, a short inquiry

7.1 The limits of human intelligence

The contrast has resurfaced between the golden age theoretically promised by technological progress and human inability to realize it, due to profound fears, greed, and excessive and ferocious competitiveness, caused by a failure to understand the enormous abundance of resources available in the solar system.

Isaac Asimov developed the theory of psychohistory to explore mass psychological dynamics and their effects on the fate of civilization, both short- and long-term. What stimuli and events shape psychological orientations? Is mass therapy possible when dynamics develop that are highly dangerous, even for the very survival of civilization?

The ethical development of space, as prescribed by the Outer Space Treaty, excludes the use of violence and weapons in space. Civilian development of space is now a necessary condition for an inclusive and sustainable recovery of Earth's development. Despite the existence of economic and human resources (scientific and technological know-how), humanity refuses to invest significantly in space expansion, preferring to spend three trillion dollars a year on weapons systems. Spending

on death rather than life. This is a sign that the dark forest philosophy is already widespread in various regions of our declining world, even before it concerns outer space.

As a non-territory, space could provide the necessary perception of the absence of boundaries and the consequent lack of need for any "defense." That could demonstrate the entirely illusory nature and inconsistency of the boundaries between nonexistent territories. Even more so, between different territories of the soul, psychological regions defined within each individual psyche. When the (inhabited) boundless space will clear the illusory concept of borders, we'll also understand psychologies and cultures differing for ethnic, cultural, ideological, or religious reasons, and the intrinsic richness outcoming from such vast differences… So let's what it might come from different galactic cultures.

What evolves now within the international space development forums will define the future world view. Science fiction often illustrates science fact better than *professional* philosophy, as a medium that can illustrate and describe the issues of the times for a large audience. The task for an evolving literary anti-corps might presently reach a somewhat different psychological orientation. The fear of unknown alien antagonism reflects an unresolved fear for our unknown internal aliens, in our human fragility.

7.2 The Philosophers

In this paper we are focusing on futurist literature. Philosophical cosmic pessimism has a huge part in it, yet it will be discussed later: this section is just a place-holder for future studies.

8 Debunking the Dark Forest Hypothesis (DFH)

Having tracked cosmic pessimism and optimism back in the futurologist literature's history, we move now to finally argue against the Dark Forest Hypothesis (DFH). We have tried to answer to some fundamental questions: why DFH is unrealistic, (it cannot be) from the points of view of: logic, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, psychoanalysis, ethics, evolution, military, risk analysis and mitigation, natural history; why DFH is a mental illness (paranoia); why DFH can be explained as a symptom of psychotic drift in the age of human growth in the context of the closed world (global crisis); why DFH can be seen as a totally extreme criticism of human intelligence, in the face of the global challenges faced by 8.5 billion citizens of the Earth; why DFH is de-facto stating that humans shouldn't expand into outer space, in this way denying the true solution to the crisis of the closed world, thus condemning our civilization to a likely irreversible implosion; how sincere humanists can contrast the DFH philosophy; and, finally, how AI can help defeating DFH and anti-humanist philosophical drifts.

Deconstructing Liu Cixin's Dark Forest Hypothesis (DFH)—the idea that the universe is a zero-sum, hyper-paranoid jungle where civilizations must preemptively destroy one another to survive—requires pulling threads from nearly every major human discipline. While DFH works brilliantly as science fiction suspense, it begins to fall apart when subjected to rigorous scientific, psychological, and philosophical scrutiny.

Whether the universe can be benign or malignant will depend on the culture and philosophical orientation of the different civilizations that develop within it. Likely there will be all possible different orientations, depending on their evolution, their culture, their scientific knowledge and they spiritual aims and feelings.

Yet, the supporters of the Dark Forest hypothesis think that, whatever the different cultures and evolutionary paths, there is only one binding element: intelligence. And more: according to the Dark Forest hypothesis, the higher the intelligence, the greater the paranoid. Could it be so? Could it be

that, in the whole universe, notwithstanding the different environmental and natural conditions, a single type of intelligence can develop, a paranoid one?? Also consider that, in an immensely vast universe, the majority of the civilizations are not aware of the others, so they cannot exercise any cultural influence on one another. Yet, even in small communities, where behavioral influence is normal, it is quite rare to have a unique orientation. Let's think about a school classroom, with 30 students. There may be a small percentage of bully, swindler, overbearing, arrogant individuals. If they are not contrasted, they could get to a dominant position, but it is definitely never possible that all of the 30 students will mature a unique bully attitude.

To eliminate potential dangerous civilization is not a safe strategy. Something can fail, and someone could survive. That individual would then devote his life to revenge, and so will do his children. For centuries, and millennia. Attacking that civilization, we would multiply the risk, not decrease it.

8.1 Why DFH Cannot Be

The "chain of suspicion" and the Inverted Fermi Paradox

According to the Logic & Game Theory, DFH relies on the "chain of suspicion" a Logical Fallacy: I don't know if you're hostile; you don't know if I think you're hostile, etc.). However, game theory shows that repetition breeds cooperation. The "Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma" proves that blind, preemptive destruction is a losing long-term strategy compared to "Tit-for-Tat" or open communication, which minimizes wasteful energy expenditure. To dismantle the pure logic of the "chain of suspicion" or Hobbesian traps on a galactic scale, some authors wrote on modern game-theoretic analyses specifically, in response to Liu Cixin's thesis. In a groundbreaking paper published in The Monist, researchers Karim Jebari and Andrea S. Asker directly address the DFH[36]. If a civilization discovers even one nearby Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (ETI), statistical probability dictates the galaxy is teeming with them. They introduce the "Inverted Fermi Paradox": if the galaxy is a dark forest full of hyper-advanced predators, why do we still exist? They mathematically model a scenario showing that a dense multitude of civilizations actually reverses the Hobbesian trap—preemptive unilateral aggression becomes too dangerous because it invites retaliation from unobserved third parties, forcing a risk-dominant equilibrium of peace and non-aggression. Also see the work made by Axelrod on the evolution of cooperation[37].

The Communication Paradigm Shift.

A philosophical critique published by Cambridge University Press highlights that DFH forces a presumption of permanent uncertainty that can actually be mitigated[38]. Instead of launching preemptive strikes, it is structurally more rational for civilizations to invest in long-range communications to build mutual visibility and eliminate uncertainty, because launching a weapon risks exposing the attacker's coordinates to the wider cosmos. Academic critiques emphasize that DFH relies on flawed inductive reasoning. Just because human history features bloody encounters, it is a logical leap to assume extraterrestrial interactions must follow human paradigms. Furthermore, even human history is heavily defined by trade, positive cultural exchange, and international treaties, meaning DFH ignores half of human anthropology to paint its dark picture.

In a comprehensive review of Liu's work, scholars note that designing hyper-hostile aliens functions primarily to "defamiliarize" the verities of humanism and criticize our own narrow, anthropocentric history (such as the scars of the Cultural Revolution or colonialism)[39]. Therefore, DFH is academically recognized not as an objective cosmic truth, but as a literary mirror reflecting terrestrial trauma and human concerns back at us.

The Cost of Universal Genocide is unaffordable.

Annihilating every detected civilization requires a near-infinite expenditure of energy and resources. Logically, a civilization would run out of resources trying to police the cosmos before it successfully sterilized it.

Cooperation outpaces conflict.

In Earth's natural history, mega-predators that destroy everything in their path eventually collapse due to ecological ruin. Human anthropology shows that isolated cultures do not inherently destroy each other upon first contact out of pure logic; trade, cultural diffusion, and integration are far more common because they are mutually beneficial.

Sociopathy is evolutionarily disadvantageous.

DFH assumes a universe populated entirely by high-functioning, sociopathic civilizations. Evolutionarily, empathy and altruism are not "weaknesses"—they are highly evolved survival mechanisms that allow complex organisms to form societies. A species incapable of internal cooperation would destroy itself long before achieving interstellar travel.

DFH maintains that in every civilization in the universe, only one psychological trait prevails: paranoid terror. This conception completely denies the principle of diversity existing in every manifestation of Nature. Yet, evolution works on growth and differentiation, along the whole natural history: DFH, by reducing cosmic variety to a single psycho-type, is denying the core principle of natural evolution.

Psychoanalytically, DFH can be viewed as the ultimate externalization of human guilt. We project our historical sins (colonialism, resource depletion) onto the cosmos, assuming aliens will treat us exactly how we treated indigenous populations.

Philosophy and Ethics

DFH is based on a unidimensional concept of "intelligence", where it translates substantially to "being able to produce more powerful devices, including weapons". Intelligence is a multidimensional characteristic. If we conceive intelligence as equivalent to rationality, we notice a substantial deficit: from a Kantian perspective, a fully rational entity must conceive the moral law (the categorical imperative) wich shows a universe operating on DFH as ethically unsustainable; it makes a universal law out of murder.

Even an utilitarian and selfish entity would find that the attempt to destroy all intelligent species with preventive attacks brings to certain failure, because if only one attack fails it is equivalent to suicide, since the species which survives the attack will retaliate. And if a species attacks all the others, it is certain that sooner or later it will find its match.

But intelligence is not just pure rationality, neither it is limited to making better tools. DFH assumes that there are no other sides of intelligence, but there are. Emotional intelligence is now recognized as the resource to be used as the base for smoothing conflictuality even in mainstream psychology.

DFH requires a complete lack of faith in life, reducing the grand tapestry of existence to a simplistic, base-level survival mechanic, an epistemic nihilism. According to DFH, Intelligence would "naturally" tend toward paranoia, that is, toward evil. This contradicts the very concept of intelligence and its multidimensionality, which—the more developed it is—the more allows to better understand the great stupidity and extreme non-convenience of evil.

Military risk analysis

Analyzing the risks in a military strategic perspective, we notice a high risk of a "Boomerang Effect". Launching a "photoid" or a dual-vector foil[40] to destroy a neighbor reveals the attacker's presence or, at the very least, alerts other sleeping giants. In military risk analysis, a preemptive strike that guarantees your exposure is deemed catastrophic. Furthermore, DFH assumes perfect execution of genocide. If a strike fails to completely wipe out a civilization, it creates an incurable, hyper-technological mortal enemy. The risk mitigation strategy here favors containment and observation over blind aggression.

The conclusion would be in favor of a preventive attack on any inhabitable planet, to prevent not just an attack but the emergence of an intelligent species. But this refutes the theory, because if there were just one civilization in the galaxy reasoning like this, our planet would have been annihilated long ago. We are here, so there is no paranoid maniac out there destroying all inhabitable worlds.

8.2 A Symptom of Psychotic Drift in the "Closed World", and an Extreme Criticism of Human Intelligence

As human growth collides with the ecological and geopolitical limits of Earth (climate change, resource scarcity, overpopulation), our collective psyche is experiencing a psychotic drift. DFH is simply Thomas Malthus's outdated resource-scarcity theory wearing a spacesuit. Because humans feel trapped in a "closed world" (global crisis), we project this claustrophobia outward, assuming the entire universe is also running out of room and fighting over crumbs.

An escapist Nihilism: instead of solving the complex socio-economic issues of our closed world, DFH offers a dark, comforting fatalism: "Why bother fixing Earth if the universe is just a meat grinder anyway?"

Viewing the universe through the lens of DFH is a profound insult to the collective intelligence of the Earth's 8.5 billion citizens. It assumes that advanced intelligence inherently fails to solve the problem of coexistence. It argues that no matter how smart, culturally rich, or technologically advanced a species becomes, it can never transcend its basest, reptilian-brain impulses of fear and murder. It reduces the pinnacle of evolution—consciousness—to a mere tool for galactic slaughter.

Intelligence is seen as an autoimmune disease, the more it develops, the less it can cure itself. That is, the only cure is self-suppression: using science to diminish intelligence itself, until, obviously, science itself is lost.

8.3 Denying the Solution to the Closed World (The Implosion Trap)

By stating that civilizations must remain hidden and isolated, DFH effectively argues that humans must never leave the cradle. If we expand, we become visible; if we become visible, we die. Therefore, DFH implicitly commands humanity to stay confined to Earth. This creates a terrifying paradox: it denies us the only true escape valve for our "philosophically closed world" crisis (space colonization, asteroid mining, Dyson spheres). By forcing humanity to stay bottled up on a single planet, DFH condemns our civilization to resource starvation, systemic collapse, and a likely irreversible inward implosion. DFH pathologizes expansion and traps humanity in an "inward implosion".

Open vs. Closed World

Classical open-systems thermodynamics (pioneered by thinkers like Ilya Prigogine) demonstrate our argument about the "closed world" crisis. A philosophically closed system (Earth isolated by fear) is mathematically bound to maximize entropy, leading to resource depletion and systemic collapse,

though, from the thermodynamic point of view, the Earth is an open system, because it receives heat from the Sun and irradiates heat to the cosmic background.

The Malthusian Trap of the Space Age

In futurologist literature, DFH acts as a cosmic extension of the Club of Rome's 1972 Limits to Growth thesis. By framing the universe as a zero-sum game of resources, it suffers from the same analytical errors that overlooked how technology and open boundaries (like space colonization) create post-scarcity dynamics.

The extreme totalitarian madness

Ultimately, DFH represents the ultimate totalitarian madness. If it fails, it will wear itself out in endless wars, but if it were to succeed it would be much worse. Exterminating all the potential dangerous competitors is nothing but an extreme tentative to simplify a complex society, that is likely composed by billions of distant civilizations, across the galaxies. As largely proofed by natural history, simplification is a killer of evolution, whatever the context – national, continental, planetary, galactic, or more. Pursuing a utopia – and absolute security can be seen as a utopia albeit a paranoid one – through extermination, is not only morally unsustainable, it is also mortally stupid. Deprived of competition, any society, even a utopianly perfect one, can only stagnate and decay.

9 A strategy to contrast DFH philosophy

9.1 Humanist outreach

Sincere humanists can wage a philosophical counter-offensive against this cosmic pessimism using four main pillars:

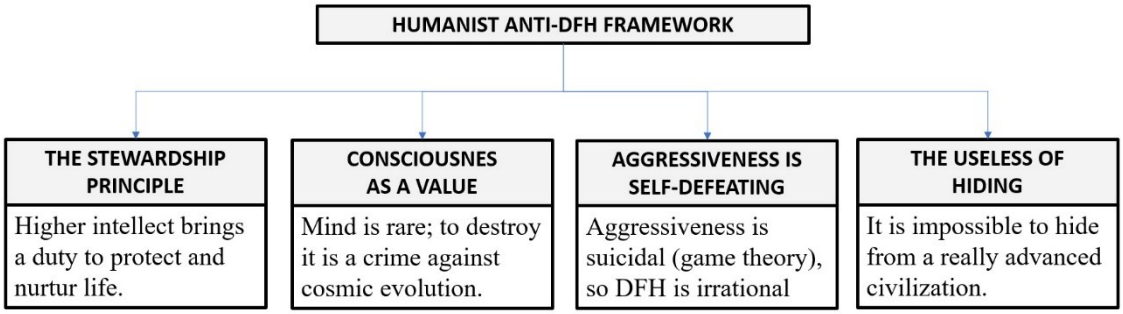

Figure 1. Humanist anti-Dark-Forest framework

- **The Principle of Cosmic Stewardship**: Humanists argue that advanced intelligence brings an ethical obligation to nurture, protect, and catalog life, not erase it.
- **The Rarity of Consciousness**: If conscious life is rare, it is the most valuable commodity in the universe. Destroying a civilization is not a strategic necessity; it is a permanent, irrecoverable burning of cosmic libraries.
- **The Aggressiveness is Self-Defeating**: as demonstrated above, being aggressive is suicidal even if we refuse all the other considerations, only out of a correct application of game theory, so DFH is irrational.
- **The Uselessness of Hiding**: it is impossible to hide from a really advanced civilization. The signatures of our presence on the Earth are already diffusing at the speed of light in the galaxy and we can do nothing about that. Therefore, it is better to signal our presence in a good way rather than leaving it to our unintended signals (and having aliens discovering the Earth through the television transmissions of the Third Reich, like in Carl Sagan's novel "Contact"). Even more,

a coherently paranoid entity would attack any planet suitable for being inhabited. But we are here, so no one attacked the Earth during its 4.5 billion years of existence.

About the last point, some believe that in fact one or more alien civilizations already know about our existence, and they have already been here for centuries or millennia, for scientific interest in us. Out of respect for our self-determination and due to our primitive status, they are not interfering with our life and business and they are letting us develop as we are able to. In recent years we have become more and more capable to see through their hiding techniques, so we are sighting some UFOs or UAPs. Possibly they will reveal themselves openly, when they deem it feasible without harming us. Or, hopefully, they may intervene if we are on the brink of self-destruction through a nuclear conflict. The latter hypothesis may be the reason why governments are so afraid to reveal what they actually know about the subject: the nuclear deterrent would vanish.

9.2 How can we defeat DFH using AI?

This is an open question. Answers will be greatly appreciated!

Appendix A: Statistical Corpus Breakdown

To contextualize the individual author matrix, the overarching alignment of the investigated corpus breaks down into three definitive macro-models of space-age philosophy:

Cosmic Orientation	Share of Corpus	Underlying Philosophical Anchor Points (Based on Research Criteria)
Cosmic Optimists	50%	Dominated by Enlightenment thinking, supreme to high faith in human intelligence, and an unwavering consensus that environmental crises must be solved via proactive scientific and extraterrestrial expansion (Criterion J-b).
Cosmic Pessimists	35%	Highly aligned with Romantic orientations, displaying lower/moderate faith in human reason, leaning heavily toward terrestrial dystopias, and viewing the universe as fundamentally indifferent or actively malign.
Cosmic Realists	16%	Balanced view synthesizing elements of both Enlightenment logic and Romantic scale; maintaining moderate faith in human capability while viewing the universe as a vast, indifferent frontier.

Appendix B: Taxonomy of the 42-Author Data Matrix

This formal table tracks the core classifications used in the study, including specific subgenres, baseline cosmic outlook, philosophical leaning (Enlightenment vs. Romanticism), ideological orientation, environmental management paradigm, and cosmic landscape assessment (Benign, Indifferent, Malign).

Author	Science Fiction Subgenre(s)	Cosmic Orientation	Philosophical Leaning	Socio-Political Profile	Environmental Paradigm	Universal Architecture
Van Vogt, Alfred E.	Golden Age, Non-A Philosophical SF	Optimist	Enlightenment	Liberal / Libertarian	Science & Space Expansion	Benign / Indifferent
Weir, Andy	Hard Sci-Fi, Near-Future Survival	Grounded Optimist	Enlightenment	Practical Liberalism	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Clarke, Arthur C.	Hard SF, Cosmic Speculation	Radical Optimist	Enlightenment	Humanist Socialism	Science & Space Expansion	Benign
Sagan, Carl	Hard SF, Cosmic Speculation	Optimist	Enlightenment	Liberal Socialism	Science & Space Expansion	Benign
Cherryh, C. J.	Space Sociology, Military SF	Realist	Both / Balanced	Liberal Realism	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Simak, Clifford D.	Pastoral Science Fiction	Optimist	Romanticism	Localist Liberalism	Let Nature Recover	Benign
Suarez, Daniel	Near-Future Techno-Thriller	Pragmatic Optimist	Enlightenment	Decentralized Libertarian	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Brin, David	Hard Space Opera (Uplift)	Optimist	Enlightenment	Liberal-Libertarian	Science & Space Expansion	Benign
Glukhovsky, Dmitry	Post-Apocalyptic, Dystopian	Pessimist	Romanticism	Socialist / Critical	Let Nature Recover	Indifferent / Malign
Adams, Douglas	Comic Sci-Fi, Satirical SF	Absurdist Optimist	Enlightenment	Cosmopolitan Liberal	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Herbert, Frank	Planetary Romance, Space Sociology	Pessimist / Realist	Romanticism	Ecological Libertarian	Let Nature Recover	Indifferent
Pohl, Frederik	Satirical SF, Golden Age	Mild Pessimist	Enlightenment	Democratic Socialist	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent

Author	Science Fiction Subgenre(s)	Cosmic Orientation	Philosophical Leaning	Socio-Political Profile	Environmental Paradigm	Universal Architecture
Bear, Greg	Hard SF, Cosmic Paranoia	Pessimist (Proto-DFH)	Both	Liberal Tech-Realist	Science & Space Expansion	Malign
Benford, Gregory	Hard SF, Cosmic Speculation	Realist	Enlightenment	Conservative Libertarian	Science & Space Expansion	Malign
Harrison, Harry	Comic Sci-Fi, Military SF	Realist	Enlightenment	Libertarian Socialist	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Banks, Iain M.	Post-Scarcity Space Opera	Radical Optimist	Enlightenment	Libertarian Socialist	Science & Space Expansion	Benign / Indifferent
Asimov, Isaac	Future History, Social SF	Optimist	Enlightenment	Liberal Humanist	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Vance, Jack	Planetary Romance, Dying Earth	Realist	Romanticism	Classical Liberalism	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Corey, James S.A.	Hard Space Opera (The Expanse)	Balanced Realist	Enlightenment	Pragmatic Liberalism	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Brunner, John	Proto-Cyberpunk, Social SF	Mild Pessimist	Enlightenment	Eco-Socialist	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
May, Julian	Science Fantasy, Pliocene Exile	Optimist	Romanticism	Liberalism	Science & Space Expansion	Benign
Wilhelm, Kate	Soft Sci-Fi, Melancholy SF	Pessimist	Romanticism	Liberalism	Let Nature Recover	Indifferent
Robinson, Kim S.	Hard SF, Solarpunk, Climate Fiction	Grounded Optimist	Enlightenment	Democratic Socialist	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Niven, Larry	Hard Science Fiction	Optimist	Enlightenment	Libertarian	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Bujold, Lois M.	Space Opera, Military SF	Optimist	Balanced	Liberal Humanist	Science & Space Expansion	Benign
Kress, Nancy	Biopunk, Psychological SF	Realist	Enlightenment	Pragmatic Liberalism	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Butler, Octavia E.	Afrofuturism, Feminist SF	Pessimist>Realist	Enlightenment	Socialist Humanist	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Stapledon, Olaf	Cosmic Speculation, Philosophical SF	Realist	Romanticism	Socialist Humanist	Science & Space Expansion	Majestic / Indifferent
Card, Orson Scott	Military SF, Philosophical SF	Optimist	Enlightenment	Communitarian Liberal	Science & Space Expansion	Benign
Hamilton, Peter F.	Hard Space Opera (Commonwealth)	Optimist / Hedonistic	Enlightenment	Technocratic Liberal	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Anderson, Poul	Future History, Hard Space Opera	Realist	Enlightenment	Classical Libertarian	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Dick, Philip K.	Gnostic Sci-Fi, Uchronic / Soft SF	Pessimist / Cynical	Romanticism	Anti-Authoritarian	Let Nature Recover	Indifferent / Malign
Farmer, Philip J.	Science Fantasy, Planetary Romance	Optimist	Romanticism	Libertarian	Science & Space Expansion	Benign
Ballard, J. G.	Melancholy Speculative Fiction	Pessimist / Fatalist	Romanticism	Nihilistic / Critical	Let Nature Recover	Indifferent
Harris, Philip R.	Space Sociology & Management	Optimist / Balanced	Enlightenment	Institutional Liberal	Let Nature Recover	Benign
Bradbury, Ray	Dystopian Fiction, Soft SF	Pessimist	Romanticism	Humanist Liberal	Let Nature Recover	Indifferent
Heinlein, Robert A.	Future History, Hard Sci-Fi	Radical Optimist	Enlightenment	Rad. Libertarian	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent
Silverberg, Robert	New Wave Sci-Fi, Soft SF	Pessimist	Romanticism	Liberal	Let Nature Recover	Indifferent
Lem, Stanisław	Philosophical SF, Satirical SF	Pessimist / Realist	Enlightenment	Critical Socialist	Science & Space Expansion	Indifferent / Malign
Lee, Tanith	Dark Fantasy, Dying Earth	Pessimist	Romanticism	Individualist	Let Nature Recover	Indifferent / Malign
Le Guin, Ursula K.	Feminist SF, Anthropological SF	Optimist / Realist	Enlightenment / Daoist	Anarcho-Socialist	Science & Space Expansion	Benign / Indifferent
Tevis, Walter	Soft Sci-Fi, Survival Fiction	Pessimist	Romanticism	Melancholy Liberal	Let Nature Recover	Indifferent

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