



## The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

In **THE DREAMS OUR STUFF IS MADE OF: HOW SCIENCE FICTION CONQUERED THE WORLD** Thomas M. Disch displays a breadth of knowledge and an unsparing, insightful wit as he confidently guides readers through the development of the genre. He moves effortlessly from assessing the giants and eccentrics in the genres mainstream to the second-rate hacks and half-baked philosophies at its fringes. On the way he discusses a wide variety of topics, from fads such as the nineteenth century fascination with mesmerism and entries in the “I was taken on a UFO by aliens” subgenre, to more substantive, perennial themes such as the diverse treatments of aliens in science fiction, from the predatory, frightening enemies of **WAR OF THE WORLDS** (1898) to the all-too-recognizably human “immigrants” of **ALIEN NATION** (1990’s).

The book’s structure is both chronological—he starts with the eerie, pseudoscientific tales of Edgar Allan Poe and moves forward—and thematic. He includes chapters on feminism, politics, and religion as each of these topics shape the genre and are reflected in it. His assessments, while convincing, are idiosyncratic and difficult to pin down. At times he sounds like a conservative (as when he blasts Ursula Le Guin for turning the anthology she edited into “a one-volume affirmative action campaign” by excluding writers with whom she has ideological differences), at times like a liberal (as in the chapter titled “Republicans on Mars—Science Fiction as Military Strategy”). Disch pulls no punches when dealing with what he considers sub-par writing or thinking, as when he unsparingly debunks L. Ron Hubbard and the science fiction origins of Scientology. Perhaps the book’s greatest virtue is the way Disch holds nothing about the genre as sacred and above criticism; his praise rings truer because it is applied judiciously.

Disch has impeccable credentials in the field of science fiction, and what he doesn’t know about the genre probably isn’t worth knowing. In this wide-ranging book he displays an encyclopedic knowledge seasoned with a willingness to puncture myths and assail reputations, and the result is an honest, unabashedly opinionated mix of respect for the genre and recognition of the less savory aspects of its practitioners and influence.

### Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:  
<http://www.enotes.com/dreams-our-stuff-made-salem>