



# Science Fiction

A brief encounter...

Part 1:

Towards a definition of Science Fiction

Where to start reading within the genre?

Three approaches:

- Spacecraft
- Aliens
- Robots

Part 2: Textual analysis

Part 3: Creative Exercise

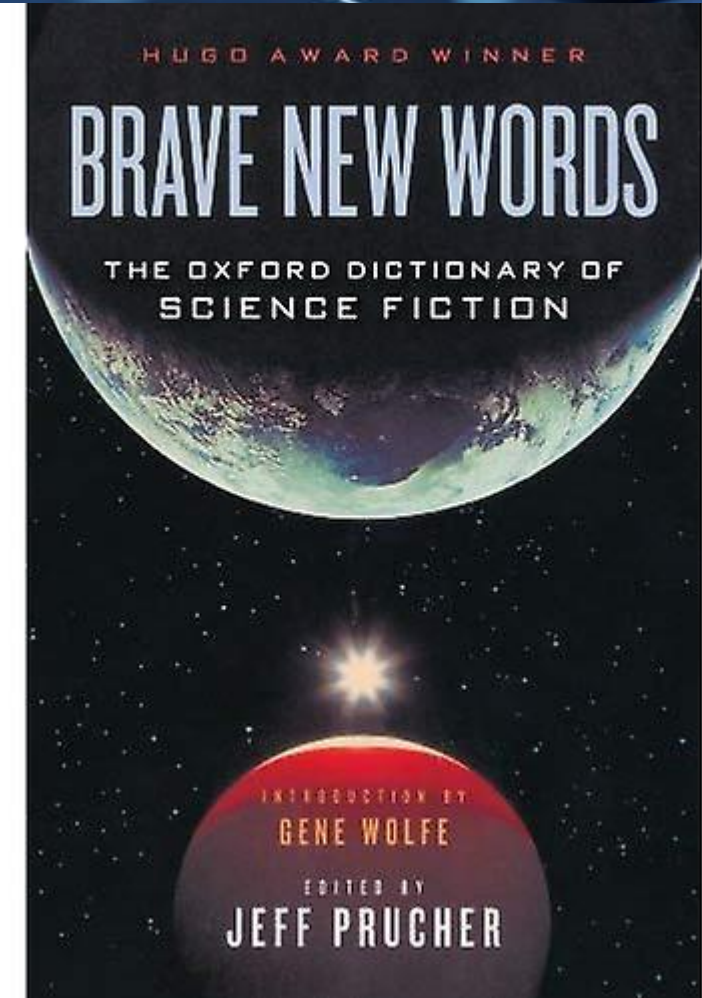


# What is Science Fiction?

## science fiction *n*

- **1** a genre (of literature, film, etc.) in which the setting differs from our own world (e.g. by the invention of new technology, through contact with aliens, by having a different history, etc.), and in which the difference is based on extrapolations made from one or more changes or suppositions; hence, such a genre in which the difference is explained (explicitly or implicitly) in scientific or rational, as opposed to supernatural, terms.

Compare [FANTASCIENCE](#), [PSEUDO-SCIENCE](#), [SCIENCE FANTASY](#)<sup>2</sup>, [SCIENTIFIC FANTASY](#), [SCIENTIFIC FICTION](#), [SCIENTIFICTION](#), [SPECULATIVE FICTION](#)



# Suggested Reading...

HG Wells (1866-1946) – War of the Worlds

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) - Brave New World

Robert Heinlein (1907-1988) - Starship Troopers (1959)

Arthur C. Clarke (1917-2008) - A Space Odyssey, We Can Remember it for you Wholesale (1990 movie: Total Recall), Minority Report, A Scanner Darkly

Frank Herbert (1920-1986) – The Dune Series (1965 on)

Isaac Asimov (1920-1992) - Foundation Series / Galactic Empire Series Robot Series / I Robot

Ray Bradbury (1920-2012) - The Martian Chronicles (1950) / Fahrenheit 451 (1953)

Octavia Butler (1947-2006) – Lilith's Brood

Ursula Le Guin (1929- present) – Earthsea, The Left Hand of Darkness, The Dispossessed

Ted Chiang (1967 – ) – Story of Your Life and Other Stories

**Margaret Atwood (1939 –) Oryx and Crake (the Maddaddam trilogy)**

**Tananarive Due (1966 – ) My Soul to Keep**

**Nalo Hopkinson (1960 – ) Brown Girl in the Ring**

**Andy Weir (1972- ) The Martian**

“Before they quarrelled, the two scientists invented a wonderful projectile, capable of travelling through the millions of miles of ether that separated Ikon and the world, swearing a solemn vow that neither would use it except in the interests of the earthmen. But crazy, planning diabolical schemes of world rulership, Swarfsmidt travelled, aboard his starship, to Ikon, where he obtained supreme power.”

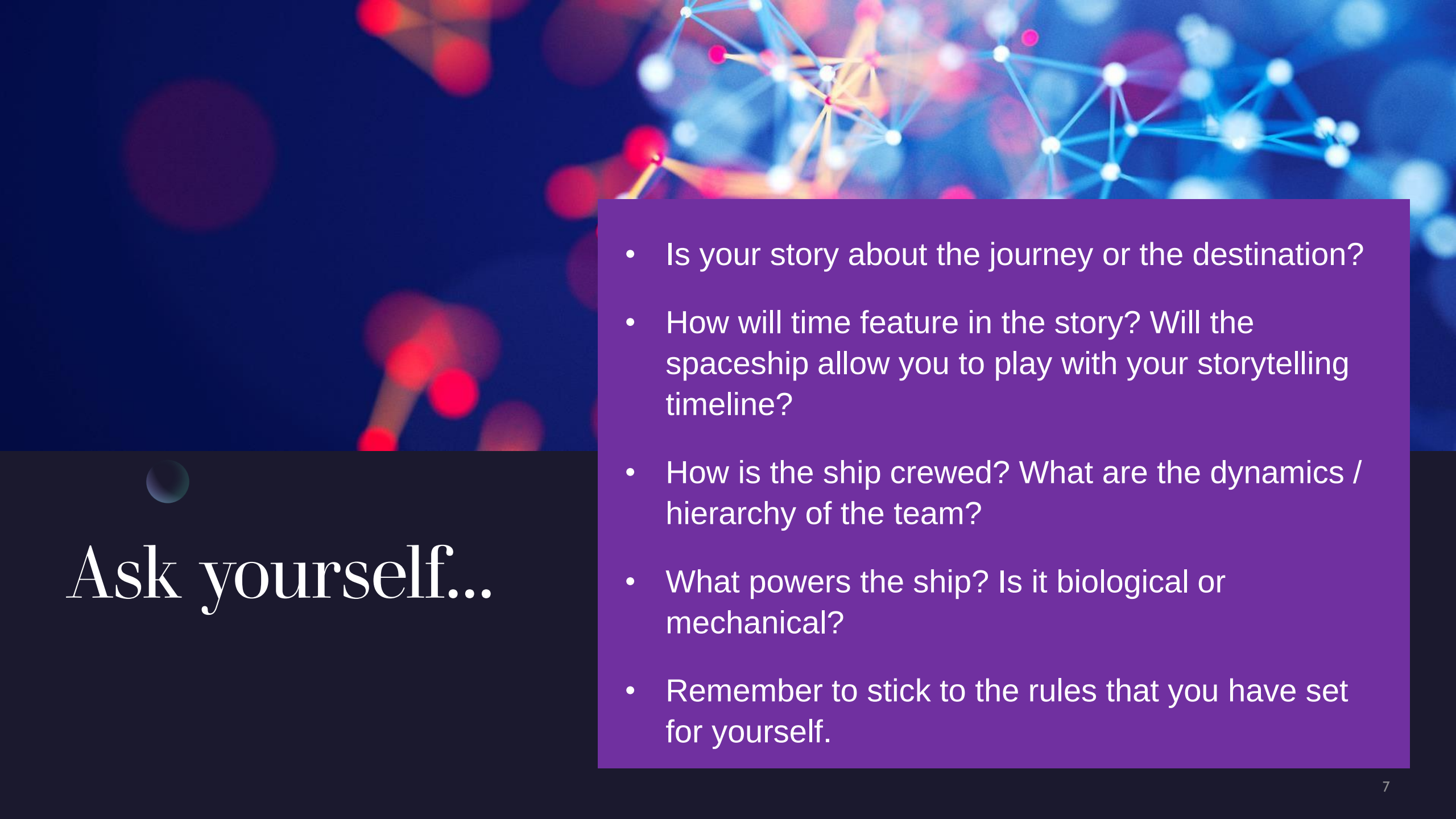


‘War in Space’ by Raymond Quiex, *Boys’ Magazine*, 1926.



# Spacecraft

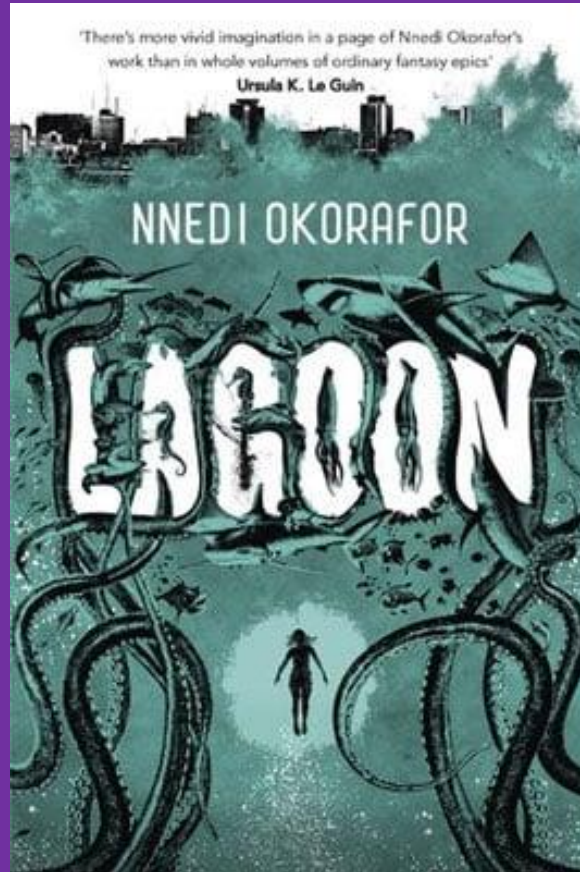
- The Sleeper Ship: Carrying passengers and crew in some sort of suspended animation – think of the movie Alien.
- The Generational Spacecraft: Crewed by generations of people born and trained on board who may never actually arrive at their destination.
- Faster-than-light craft: the dominant storytelling vehicle (Star Wars etc) where wormholes for example allow the heroes to jump through space and time.
- The old Clunker: The hunk of junk is a classic trope and can be a useful vehicle for the underdog.



Ask yourself...

- Is your story about the journey or the destination?
- How will time feature in the story? Will the spaceship allow you to play with your storytelling timeline?
- How is the ship crewed? What are the dynamics / hierarchy of the team?
- What powers the ship? Is it biological or mechanical?
- Remember to stick to the rules that you have set for yourself.

“I am the unseen. For centuries I have been here, beneath this great city, this metropolis. I know your language. I know all languages. . . . My cave is broad and cool. The sun cannot send its heat down here. The damp soil is rich and fragrant. I turn softly on my back and place my eight legs to the cave ceiling. Then, I listen. I am the spider. I see sound. I feel taste. I hear touch. I spin this story. This is the story I’ve spun.”





Water Bear



Ocean Worm



Blob Fish



Himalayan Jumping Spider

# Aliens on Earth

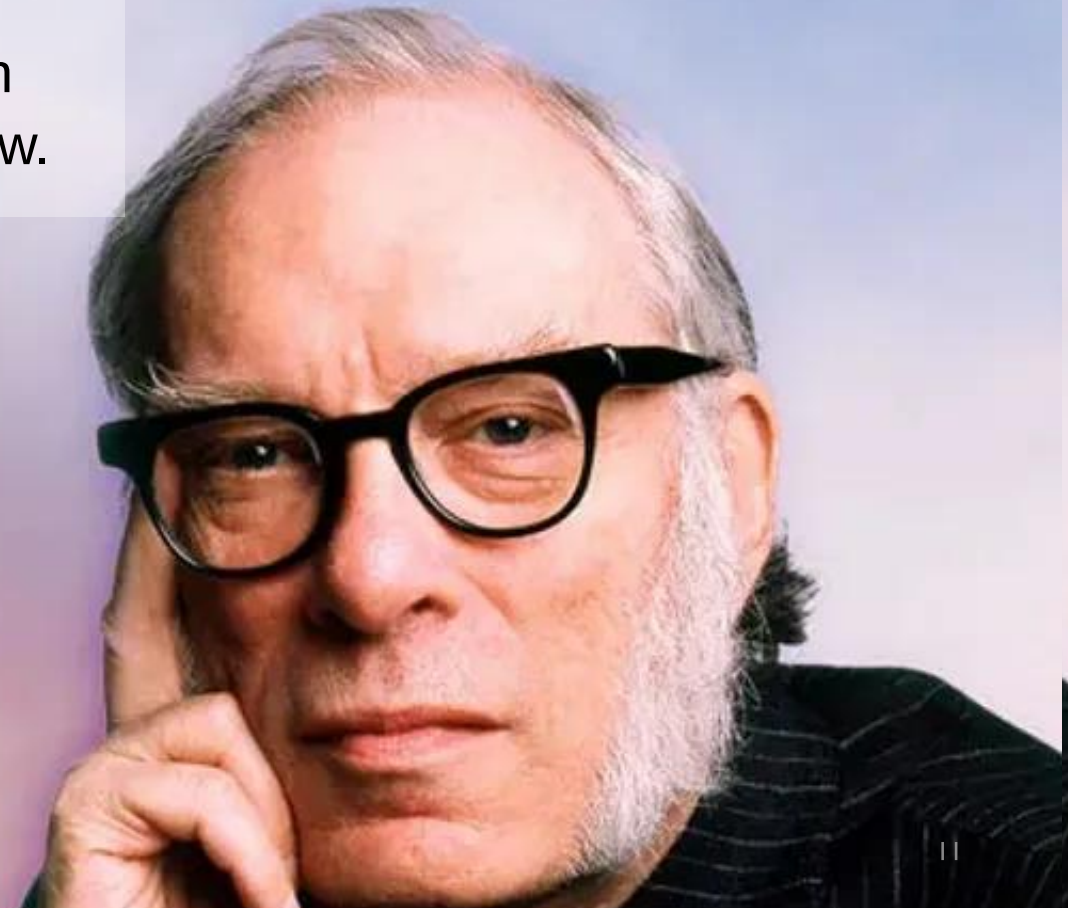


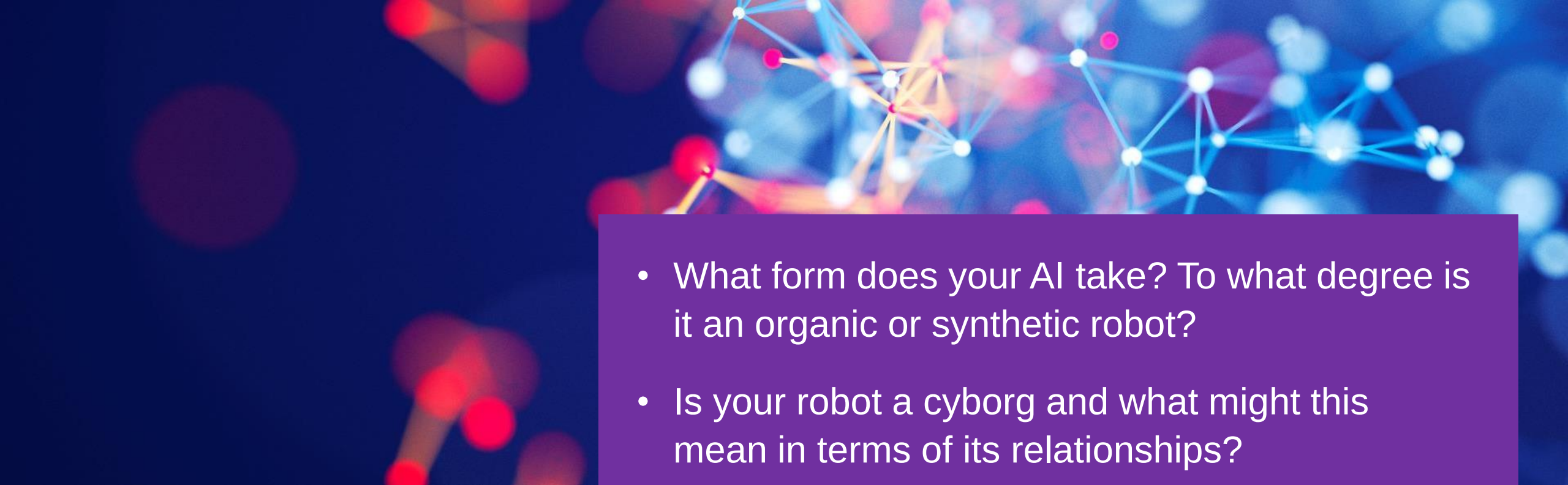
# Ask yourself...

- Where has your alien evolved? How will this have affected its biology / society / way of conceiving the world?
- If your aliens have diverged from humans in some way – when and where? Is there a common evolutionary moment?
- Does your alien have perceptual abilities that are beyond human comprehension?
- Don't forget to make your aliens as diverse as humans. Explore the dynamics of hierarchy / appearance / selfhood / age / ability.
- Avoid clichés such as... making your alien species responsible for human technology.

## Isaac Asimov's Three Laws governing Robot Behaviour

1. A robot may not injure a human being or through inaction allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey orders given to it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence, as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.



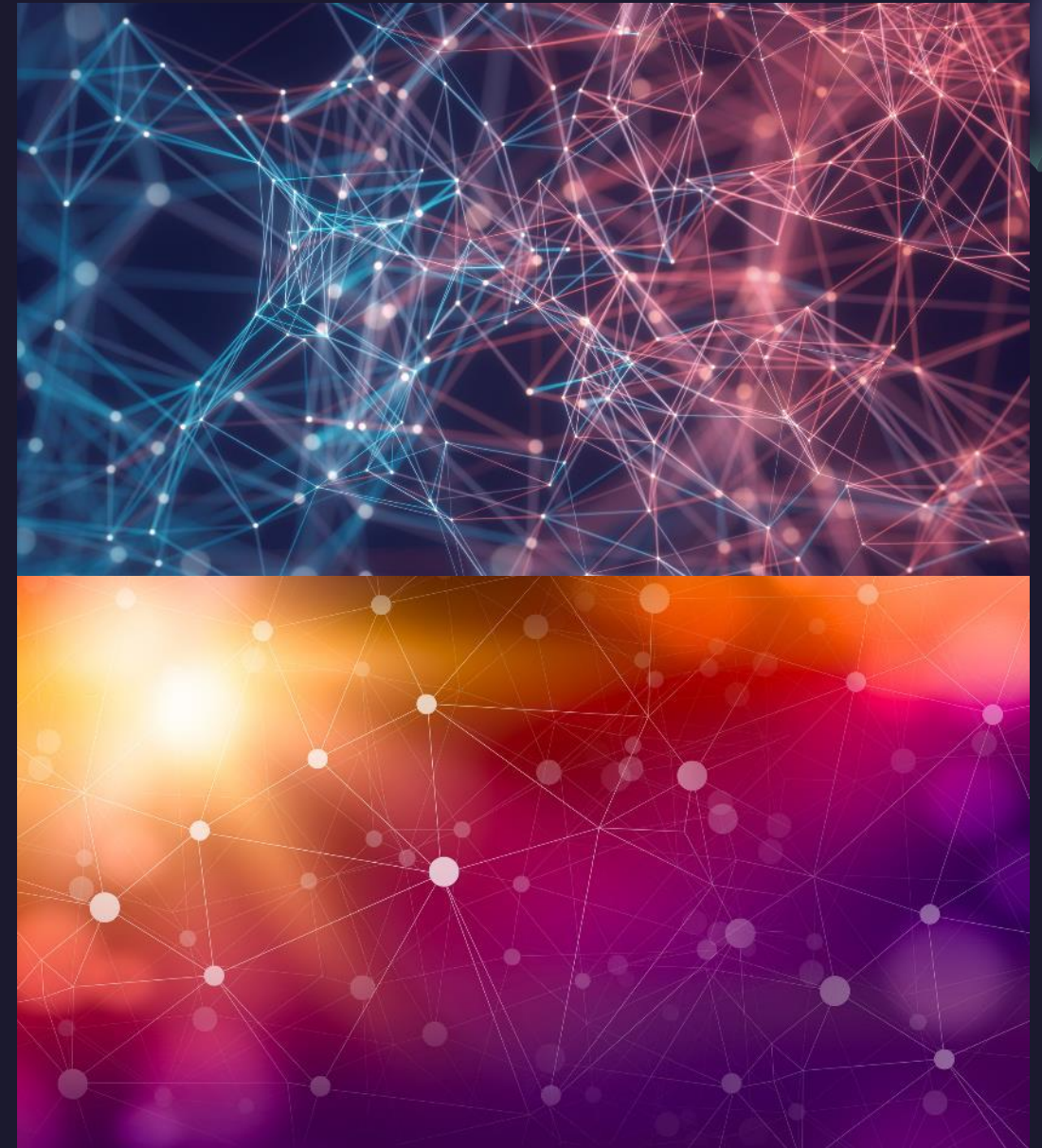


Ask yourself...

- What form does your AI take? To what degree is it an organic or synthetic robot?
- Is your robot a cyborg and what might this mean in terms of its relationships?
- How does your robot relate to Asimov's three laws?
- What are the benefits of being a robot? What are the drawbacks?
- What does your robot most desire?

# Part 2: Close Reading

- In what ways do you think that the text might interact with 'primary world' ideas or themes?
- Does the text include familiar SF tropes and if so, which ones?
- How is the narrative constructed in terms of storytelling time and space?
- Identify aspects of writing craft that are particularly effective e.g. imagery, sensory language, narrative structure (is there a twist?)



# Part 3: Creative Exercise

Choose one of the following prompts:

- Describe a spaceship from the point of view of someone who calls it home.
- Write a short piece from the POV of a self-aware household robot that is left alone while the family it's assigned to is away on holiday for a week.
- Imagine you're an alien who lives on Earth. Every month you meet in a local restaurant with a small group of other aliens from across the galaxy to discuss your experiences of interacting with humans. (You might build upon the previous exercise in which you wrote about an alien's perspective of Earth.)