Science fiction became an important branch of Russian literature only during the Soviet period. During the Soviet Union, the party-state's total control over mass media and the low level of mass-communication technologies, literature was the privileged institution of communication in language. In the Soviet Union literature remained the most powerful, and potentially the most dangerous, forum for expression. Soviet Union’s governing ideology of science fiction was established in 1922, science fiction and many other types of literature were banned in the state since it was seen as a Western, decadent genre.

The book focuses on Soviet-era science fiction in literature and cinema and its impact on global culture, and is comprised of four sections. In each section there is a collection of chronologically arranged articles devoted to issues related to the emergence and development of Russian science fiction.

The first section, “From Utopian Tradition to Revolutionary Dreams”, examines what the author terms Russia’s “governing obsession” in the period between the 18th century and the October Revolution. The four articles in this section - “The Utopian Tradition of Russian Science Fiction” by Darko Suvin, “Red Star: Another Look at Aleksandr Bogdanov” by Mark B. Adams, the editor Anindita Banerjee’s previously published “Generating Power”, and “Imagining the Cosmos: Utopians, Mystics, and the Popular Culture of Spaceflight in Revolutionary Russia” by Asif A. Siddiqi – all focus on the subject of “how to power the future in both the material and ideological senses”.

The second section, “Russia’s Roaring Twenties” is dedicated to the decade immediately after the October Revolution. This was the period in which some of Russia’s early science fiction classics,
works that were sometimes regarded as controversial, were produced. The four essays in this section - “Soviet Science Fiction of the 1920’s: Explaining a Literary Genre in its Political and Social Context” by Dominic Esler, “The Plural Self: Zamiatin’s We and the Logic of Synecdoche” by Eliot Borensteing, “Science Fiction of the Domestic: Iakov Protazanov’s Aelita” by Andrew J.i Horton, and “Eugenics, Rejuvenation, and Bulgakov’s Journey into the Heart of Dogness” by Yvonee Howell – provide a detailed analysis of some of these important works.

“From Stalin to Sputnik and Beyond”, the third section examines limited number of science fiction works written in the period between the early 1930s and the late 1950s, a period in which the editor Banerjee claims that “the utopian aspirations of earlier decades had gone into complete hibernation”. The articles “Stalinism and the Genesis of Cosmonautics” by Michael G. Smith, “Klushantsev: Russia’s Wizard of Fantastika” by Lynn Barker and Robert Skotak, “Towards the Last Fairy Tale: The Fairy-Tale Paradigm in the Strugatskys’s Science Fiction, 1963-72” by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and “Tarkovsky, Solaris, and Stalker” by Stephen Dalton make up this section.

The fourth, and final, section “Futures at the End of Utopia” is comprised of three articles that examine the themes of disillusionment with the present and nostalgia for those futures previous envisaged. This section’s articles are “Viktor Pelevin and Literary Postmodernism in Soviet Russia” by Elana Gomel, “The Forces of Kinship: Timur Bekmambetov’s Night Watch Cinematic Triology” by Vlad Strukov, and “The Antiutopia Factory: The Dystopian Discourse in Russian Literature in the Mid-2000s” by Aleksandr Chantsev.

This collection of scholarly articles related to the chronological history and development of Russian science fiction in film and literature is a valuable contribution to a little-studied genre. However, despite the quality of the articles in this book, the fact that Russian science fiction has previously attracted limited scholarly attention means that the reader will need a fair degree of background knowledge to be able to fully appreciate this fine work.

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