

5 everyday technologies inspired by sci-fi

October 8 2012, by Joel Willans

Sci-fi is more than just a popular genre of fiction. It can also give an amazingly accurate insight into the future.

Science fiction isn't all phalanxes of tentacled aliens and star ship battles. In fact, from the creative brains of science-fiction writers and directors have come some of the 21st century's most important technologies. Engineers, it seems, sometimes need the imaginative spark of the non-scientist to germinate an idea.

Lasers

Take lasers. We use them in DVDs, eye surgery, forensic fingerprinting, printers, hair removal, industrial processes and weapons; they're a staple of modern science. Einstein wrote about in 1917, but way back in 1898, science-fiction author HG Wells described a familiar-sounding 'heat-ray' in *War Of The Worlds*. What's more, in 1925, Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov wrote, in *Fatal Eggs*, about an intense red light that stimulated growth – long before the first experiments into laser bio-stimulation took place in the late 1960s.

Satellites

Then there's Arthur C Clarke, science-fiction God, the man behind the film and book, *2001: a Space Odyssey*, as well as a stack of other brilliant things, and all-round genius. Back in 1945, Clarke wrote an article for the magazine *Wireless World*, outlining a new idea – which turned out to be the geostationary communications satellite. So thanks to

Clarke, we got long-distance phone calls and satellite television. These days, geostationary satellites allow people in very remote areas access broadband internet.

Tablets

Clarke also, in *Space Odyssey* (1968), came up with a gadget called a newspad – a flat-panel screen that allowed its users to read Earth's newspapers from afar. [Tablet computer](#) or e-reader? You decide!

Debit cards

Even the humble debit-card has its roots in [science-fiction](#). In 1888, Edward Bellamy published *Looking Backward*, a novel that described 'a piece of pasteboard' that corresponded with the monetary holdings of its owner and was accepted by shop-clerks in lieu of cash.

Smartphones

Finally, smartphones aren't light-years away from the handheld communicators that used to wow us geeks on *Star Trek*. These devices certainly inspired mobile phone developers to create clamshell designs like the Nokia 7200. While the locator functions on *Star Trek* communicators are also very similar to smartphone mapping software we all take for granted. And if this wasn't proof enough of *Star Trek*'s influence, in 2009, Nokia actually designed a mobile phone prototype to exactly resemble the communicator. Sadly, for us Trekkies it never made it to market.

Source: Nokia Conversations

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