This course will provide an overview of the major themes, tropes, and interpretations of contemporary Japanese science fiction and fantasy. As we establish a foundational knowledge of the history and structural formulations of genre fiction in Japan, we will cover topics such as folklore, high fantasy, apocalypse, dystopia, magical realism, posthumanism, video games, transnational media franchises, and cross-cultural marketing.

In our discussions of Japanese fiction and media, we will situate representative works and writers within a broader context while making comparisons with stories told in different cultures and in different media formats. This course is designed to strengthen proficiency in the methods of formal literary and media analysis while developing an intellectual toolkit for culturally sensitive contextualization. Students will also be encouraged to expand their critical thinking skills by means of creative expression, which will be fostered by prompts based on the course texts.

By the end of the semester, students will possess a deeper understanding and appreciation of the role that science fiction and fantasy play in shaping contemporary media cultures in Japan and around the world.
Instructor

Dr. Kathryn Hemmann
khemmann@gmail.com

Course Texts

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, Vol. 1, by Hayao Miyazaki
The Memory Police, by Yoko Ogawa
The Ancient Magus’ Bride, Vol. 1, by Kore Yamazaki
Log Horizon, Vol. 1: The Beginning of Another World, by Mamare Touno
Land of the Lustrous, Vol. 1, by Haruko Ichikawa

Grading and Assignments

Twelve Weekly Quizzes: 35%
Ten Short Responses: 35%
Final Project: 20%
Final Project Proposal: 10%

Weekly Quizzes

A short digital quiz will be given every week for the first twelve weeks of the class, from the first week of September to the week before Thanksgiving Break. Each week’s quiz will go live on Monday at noon, and responses will close the following Friday at noon. Although students are expected to be responsible for their own work, all of these quizzes are completely open-book, and none of them are timed. Each quiz should take about five to ten minutes.

Weekly Responses

Discussion questions for every week will be distributed via email and posted on Canvas on Friday afternoon. Students will have until the following Friday to post a short response to that week’s reading, discussion, or other course material. A response can be either analytical or creative. Each response should be about a paragraph (200 to 250 words) long, or a corresponding amount of work in the artistic medium of the student’s choice (a twenty-minute digital sketch, for example). Only ten responses are necessary, meaning that it’s up to the student to decide which weeks they will submit a response. Responses will receive full credit upon receipt.

Final Project

Students have two options concerning the final project. The first option is a six-to-eight-page research paper that draws on a minimum of three academic peer-reviewed sources. Your paper may address any topic relating to Japanese fantasy and science fiction, including but not limited to novels, short stories, movies, graphic novels, movies, anime series, visual novels, music
videos, and video games. Topics not addressed in class and comparative approaches are welcome, but your project must relate to Japan in some way.

The second option is a creative project that explores the themes covered during the semester. Students are encouraged to expand any of the in-class writing prompts into a full short story of 2,000 to 2,500 words (roughly five to six single-spaced pages). An original science fiction or fantasy story will be accepted if the student is able to demonstrate how it relates to the course themes in their project proposal.

Creative work in media other than prose fiction is permissible if it relates to the course themes, but such creative projects will be graded on the basis of skill and originality and are not recommended for students with limited experience in their chosen artistic medium. For the purpose of this assignment, PowerPoint presentations are not considered an “artistic medium” and will not be accepted in place of a paper.

Although students are encouraged to share their ideas with one another, each student is responsible for his or her own work. Group projects are not allowed for the research paper option, and group projects will only be allowed for the creative option in exceptional cases (such as small game development teams, for instance). The final project should be emailed to me by 5:00pm on Wednesday, December 16. Deadline extensions must be requested in writing by the end of the day on Sunday, December 13.

Final Project Proposal

The goal of this proposal is to explain the questions and issues you wish to explore in your final project. If you are writing a research paper, your proposal should contain a thesis statement and a brief outline of the structure of your argument and how you will approach your topic. If you opt for a creative project, your proposal should state your artistic medium, provide at least one theme you wish to explore through your work, and specify the proposed length of your project (in terms of pages, blog posts, canvases, minutes of video, and so on). No matter what form your project takes, you are required to include a formal bibliographic list of at least three secondary sources (using whatever citation style you’re most comfortable with). Your proposal should be approximately one page (about 250 words) in length, not including the list of works referenced. Please email your proposal to me by 5:00pm on Wednesday, November 4.

This assignment will be graded on a pass/fail basis, with a “fail” grade resulting from a failure to follow the guidelines explained in the preceding paragraph. Students who do not receive a “pass” will be required to submit a revised proposal by Wednesday, November 11.
Course Policies

Attendance and Participation

This class will “meet” on Zoom during the scheduled class time every Wednesday. Attendance and participation are encouraged but not mandatory. Students should feel free to mute their mic and video at any time (or for the entirety of the session) to accommodate their situation and level of comfort.

Required Readings

Students must purchase (or otherwise acquire) the five books required for this class, but all of the short stories will be available on the course site on Canvas. Students are required to complete all assigned readings. Supplementary reading and viewing material will be provided for your reference and enjoyment, but none of this will be necessary for the class.

Disability Accommodation

Each student is required to submit all of the coursework in a timely manner, but I will make every effort to accommodate the circumstances of every student, regardless of whether a condition has been formally diagnosed. If you feel that I am not being sensitive to your disability or situation, please let me know. I’m on your side, and I want you to succeed in this class.

Plagiarism

I have a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. You are being graded on your good faith effort and engagement with the course material, and multiple deadline extensions are permitted, so there should be no need for you to submit work that is not your own.

Respect

Each student is expected to be respectful of the instructor and their peers. No speech or behavior demonstrating or encouraging discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, age, body shape, or disability will be tolerated.

Content Warnings

As many of the assigned readings contain content suitable only for a mature audience, students should be aware that we will encounter violent and graphic imagery. Students are encouraged to alert me to any specific triggers or other concerns, and I will make every effort to warn for content and provide alternative assignments.
Week One: Introduction to Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Japan
Wednesday, September 2

Susan Napier, “Introduction,” from The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity, pp.1-20

Week Two: Fantasy and Folklore
Wednesday, September 9

Kunio Yanagita, The Legends of Tono, pp.5-21

Kenji Miyazawa, “The Restaurant of Many Orders,” from Once and Forever, pp.115-125

Week Three: Robots and Monsters
Monday, September 14 · Wednesday, September 16

Frederik L. Schodt, “A National Icon,” from The Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, Manga/Anime Revolution, pp.3-15

William Tsutsui, “The Birth of Gojira,” from Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters, pp.13-42

Week Four: Postwar Science Fiction
Monday, September 21 · Wednesday, September 23

Sakyo Komatsu, “The Japan Trench,” from Japan Sinks, pp.1-26

Kobo Abe, “The Bet,” from Beyond the Curve, pp.183-212

Week Five: Swords and Sorcery
Monday, September 28 · Wednesday, September 30


Ryo Mizuno, Record of Lodoss War: The Grey Witch, Chapter I: The Adventurers, pp.7-32

Week Six: Postapocalyptic Science Fiction
Monday, October 5 · Wednesday, October 7

Hayao Miyazaki, Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, Vol. 1
**Week Seven: Slipstream Fiction**  
Monday, October 12 · Wednesday, October 14

Haruki Murakami, “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo,” from *After the Quake*, pp.91-114

Hiromi Kawakami, “Summer Break,” from *The God of Bears* (handout)

**Week Eight: Dystopian Social Horror**  
Monday, October 19 · Wednesday, October 21

Yoko Ogawa, *The Memory Police*

**Week Nine: Urban Fantasy**  
Monday, October 26 · Wednesday, October 28


**Week Ten: Other Worlds**  
Monday, November 2 · Wednesday, November 4

Mamare Touno, *Log Horizon, Vol. 1: The Beginning of Another World*

**Week Eleven: Posthuman Science Fiction**  
Monday, November 9 · Wednesday, November 11


**Week Twelve: Video Games**  
Monday, November 16 · Wednesday, November 18


Miyuki Miyabe, “As the Priest Says,” from *Ico: Castle in the Mist*, pp.11-63

***THANKSGIVING BREAK***  
November 23 – November 29

**Week Thirteen**  
Wednesday, December 2

Course content to be decided by students

**Week Fourteen**  
Monday, December 7 · Wednesday, December 9

Course content to be decided by students