The Sci-Fi Reader's Journal

Sample Pages

Free sample - three real pages from the journal: How This Journal Works - The Sci-Fi Method (p.3), The Book & The Big Idea (p.11) and The Debrief (p.12). Print at 100% on US Letter or A4.

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How This Journal Works - The Sci-Fi Method

Journal p.3. The whole system on one page, plus the two scales used everywhere later: the Hardness Dial and the Plausibility Verdict.

1. Open a log spread before the debrief fades.
One spread per book (Section B), filled in while the book is still warm: the Big Idea in one line, the tech or concept at the core, where the book sits on the Hardness Dial. Ten minutes, tops. A sci-fi reading life is an ideas life - this is where the ideas get written down before they evaporate.

2. Grade the science, not the effort.
The Plausibility Verdict (below) is this journal's signature judgement - and it is not a quality score. A book can be hand-waved and magnificent, or airtight and dull. Record what the book did with its science and whether it mattered. Both facts. Never a punishment.

3. Draw the timelines.
When a book makes time its puzzle - and the genre's best keep doing it - take it to Section C and draw the thing. Branch points, loops, the moment cause and effect shake hands. A drawn timeline settles arguments a paragraph of notes never will.

4. Record the rules and the Other.
Worlds get World & Tech Notes (Section D): the one big rule of the universe, the tech and what it costs. Aliens, machines and minds get their own logs in the same section - because how this book imagines the Other is the most revealing page you will ever write about it.

5. Shelve the idea, then survey your territory.
Every book that gives you a concept you'll keep goes on the Idea Shelf (Section E) - one line, dated, so the shelf becomes the map of your intellectual life. Once a year, the Annual Transmission (Section G) reads the whole year back to you, and the Called It pages (Section F) start collecting the future's receipts.

THE HARDNESS DIAL (used on every log spread):
5 - Diamond-hard. The maths is shown and it checks out. Orbital mechanics you could set a watch by.
4 - Hard. One granted miracle, honestly labelled; everything downstream of it plays fair.
3 - Middle orbit. A plausible core with the corners rounded for story. The genre's centre of gravity.
2 - Soft. The science is scenery: the future as a stage for very human drama.
1 - Gloriously impossible. Physics left the room entirely - and the book may be better for it. Dial position is description, never a grade.

THE PLAUSIBILITY VERDICT (used on every log spread):
[ ] Holds up - I checked, or could check, and it stands. [ ] Stretched - true-ish, bent for the story, honestly. [ ] Hand-waved - the book waves, I nod, we both move on. [ ] Gloriously impossible - it cannot work and the book knows it and so do I.

Then the only question that matters: DID IT MATTER? [ ] The book earned it [ ] It cost the book something [ ] Still arguing with it (the best outcome)

There are deliberately no star ratings in this journal. Stars flatten exactly the distinctions science fiction lives on - a book can be idea-rich and people-thin, and that is a finding, not a failure. The Debrief (Section B) grades the idea, the world and the people on three separate honest sliders instead.

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Log spreads are the engine - six are printed (pp.11-22); reprint or duplicate them freely. Everything else in this journal exists to catch what the spreads shake loose.

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The Book & The Big Idea

Journal p.11 - spread page 1 of 2; one spread per book. What a log spread is - and is not: it records what a science-fiction book is built on and what it did to your thinking. Plot, chapters and what happened in the middle are deliberately absent - plot memory, when a series needs rebuilding, is the Series Catch-Up Journal's entire job. This spread keeps the layer no other journal keeps: the idea, the rules, the wager.

Log #: _____ Dates read: _____ to _____

Title:

Author:

Year published: _____

The book's when: [ ] Past [ ] Present [ ] Near future (year: _____) [ ] Far future (year/era: _____) [ ] Off the clock ent

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Format: [ ] Print [ ] Ebook [ ] Audio - [ ] Standalone [ ] Series book #_____ (progress logged p.33) [ ] Award missio

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SUBGENRE - tick the home territory, asterisk any it visits (the sixteen from p.6):

[ ] Space Opera [ ] Hard SF [ ] First Contact [ ] Time Travel [ ] Dystopia & Utopia [ ] Generation Ship [ ] Cyberpunk & the Net [ ] Military SF [ ] Near Future [ ] Alien Worlds [ ] AI & Machine Minds [ ] Alternate History [ ] Climate & Eco SF [ ] Post-Apocalypse & After [ ] Hopepunk & Solarpunk [ ] The Far Shore [ ] Off the chart: _____

THE BIG IDEA

Every SF book is built to test one speculation. Name this one's, in ONE line - the what-if the whole book exists to ask:

THE CORE MACHINERY

The t

How it works, in the book's own rules (two lines, your words):

What it costs - every good SF technology has a price; this one's is:

The Hardness Dial (circle - scale on p.3): 1 Gloriously impossible 2 Soft 3 Middle orbit 4 Hard 5 Diamond-hard

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Who sent me here: [ ] My own chart (mission p.10) [ ] Recommended by _____ [ ] Award list [ ] The idea chase

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Before page one, I expected (one line - forecasts keep debriefs honest):

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The Debrief

Journal p.12 - spread page 2 of 2. Filled in when the book closes, while the argument with it is still warm.

Outcome: [ ] Finished (date: _____) [ ] Still aboard

Set aside at page _____ - why, in the book's terms not mine (idea exhausted / people never landed / future went dull / lif

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THE PLAUSIBILITY VERDICT (tick one - scale on p.3)

[ ] Holds up [ ] Stretched [ ] Hand-waved [ ] Gloriously impossible

Did it matter? [ ] The book earned it [ ] It cost the book something [ ] Still arguing with it

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Science-sense notes (what I looked up, what turned out to be real, what the book taught me sideways):

The moment the idea landed (the page/scene where the speculation stopped being furniture and became the book):

The sentence I would hand a stranger to explain why this book matters (or doesn't):

The book's wager - what this book bets the future (or the human) actually is:

THREE VERDICTS, GRADED SEPARATELY (sliders, not stars - mark the line)

The Idea: evaporated by breakfast ---------- still chewing on it at bus stops

The World: a painted backdrop ---------- a place I have been and could re-visit blindfold

The People: mannequins for the idea ---------- a crew I'd sign on with again

One-line verdict, for the index I keep in my head:

Cross-references (fill what applies - this is how the journal becomes one instrument): Timeline drawn - p.23/24 - World & Tech Notes - p.27/28 - Science Audit - p.29 - First Contact - p.30/31 - Machines & Minds - p.32 - Idea shelved - p.35/36 row _____ - Called It prediction - p.37/38 row _____

If I hand this book to one specific person, it's: _____ - because their chart needs:

This free sample holds three real pages of The Sci-Fi Reader's Journal (44 pages: the front matter and the Sci-Fi Method; the Chart Room - Mission Control, the Subgenre Explorer's sixteen territories and Explorer's

Log, the Hugo and Nebula Award Missions, Next Expeditions; six Reading Log spreads; the Timeline Pages, Paradox Ledger and Time, Ruled; World & Tech Notes, the Science Audit, the First Contact Log and Machines & Minds; the Ship's Log series trackers and the Idea Shelf; the Called It prediction ledger; and the Annual Transmission with The Signals and the Five-Year Return - US Letter, A4 and tablet editions). No star ratings anywhere, and no plot summaries by design: the journal keeps what the book made you think. Full journal at pagelyra.vercel.app

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