

WHAT IS STEAMPUNK, ANYWAY?

At its most basic, steampunk is historical science fiction. More specifically, it's historical science fiction where the 'advanced' technology is powered by steam engines or clockworks, or utilizes historical scientific theories in some fashion (even if those theories have since been debunked.).

DOES IT HAVE TO BE VICTORIAN?

Absolutely not. Steampunk is historical science fiction, and that history can take place at any point in time – it can be set in ancient Greece, pre-colonial Africa, the rise of the Mayan empire, the fall of a Chinese dynasty, a post-apocalyptic future-set America where all modern technology has failed...even a book set on different world can be considered steampunk. The critical element is the sort of technology used (steam and clockworks) not a specific period or location.



The term 'steampunk' was coined in the 1980s by author K.W. Jeter as a tongue-in-cheek reference to 'cyberpunk,' a science-fiction subgenre that was exploding in popularity at the time. The "steam" refers to the technology used in these novels; the "punk" refers to the social/political criticism that can often be found in them.

Because steampunk is *science fiction*, some writers and fans debate whether steampunk novels that include paranormal elements (such as vampires and werewolves) are truly steampunk. My opinion? Write a great book, and sort out the labels later.

WHO'S GIVING THIS WORKSHOP?

Meljean Brook is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Iron Seas steampunk romance series and the Guardians paranormal romance series. *The*



Iron Duke was one of *Publishers Weekly's* Best Romances of 2010 and a *RT BookReviews* Reviewers' Choice Award winner. *Heart of Steel* was named one of Amazon's Best Books of 2011. Meljean lives in Oregon, consumes too much caffeine, and can't spell *occasionally*.

For questions, comments, and more information about steampunk romance, e-mail meljean@meljeanbrook.com or visit her website.

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Writing

STEAMPUNK



WRITING STEAMPUNK ROMANCE

PASSION! ADVENTURE! MECHANICAL WHALES!

So you're thinking of writing a steampunk romance? You're in for a world of fun! But I know it can be a daunting task, so here are a few tips to get you started:

1) **Steampunk doesn't *have* to be anything** (aside from being historical science fiction). Don't let worries about what you "should" include bog you down. You don't *have* to have goggles. You don't *have* to have airships. You don't *have* to have automatons. You don't *have* to write about England. These are common in steampunk, but not necessary.

2) **Decide how to incorporate the steampunk elements.** If certain technologies didn't exist in 'true' history, how do you add it in? One option is creating an *alternate history*, where the world evolved differently from our own. Those differences might be large or small; the degree to which you change history is up to you. Another option is a *lost history*, where the events

simply weren't recorded. Perhaps your characters interact with real historical figures or influence real historical events. Another option might be creating another world entirely.

3) **Let the conflicts stem from the world itself.** Make the details of your worldbuilding do double-duty: whatever the differences between your historical world and ours, take advantage of them to provide the romantic and external conflicts. In this way, all of the fun inventions you create won't just be shiny gears pasted on a historical romance—your steampunk elements will be integral to the story, and *matter* when your characters find their happy-ever-after.



**AND MOST IMPORTANTLY...
HAVE FUN WITH IT!**

EXPECT TO RESEARCH EVERYTHING.

Every genre demands a certain level of research, whether you're writing contemporary romantic suspense or a Regency romance: occupations, locations, culture, history, dialect...the list often seems endless. With steampunk, remember that you're adding a technological component, as well. This doesn't mean that you need to learn how to build a steam engine from the ground up, but your characters might. If you familiarize yourself with the technology you're using and have a general idea of how things function, your characters and inventions will be more convincing to readers, even if the device could never work in real life. The same holds true for any fantastical creatures that you use in your world. You are your world's only inventor, its only anthropologist, its only natural biologist — and your reader's only guide. Study well.

EVEN THE KRAKEN.

DON'T FORGET THE PUNK

The 'punk' is a critical part of steampunk, and includes social/cultural criticism or a challenge to the status quo. The criticism can vary from overt to subtle, and the issues taken up can also vary, but should be present in any 'punk' genre.

Whatever issue you use will obviously be part of the novel and the characters' world, but the manner of the challenge/criticism and the resolution (if there is one) should reflect a more contemporary discussion — contemporary to the author and the readers. But that's often true of science fiction: whatever is being explored or examined has much more to do with current events than it does with whatever time the novel is set in.

QUACKS ARE WELCOME.

Even though steampunk is science fiction, there is often an element of fantasy to it—not necessarily supernatural-based fantasy, but the incorporation of pseudo-science. History is full of scientists and philosophers who thought they knew how the world worked and who operated on theories that have since been debunked. Today we know the heavens aren't really filled with æther...but why not pretend that it is? It's your world, and you can determine which scientific rules apply to it.

Steampunk Art & Inspiration

The science fiction novels of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, and stories like *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Graphic novels and webcomics like *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman* and *Girl Genius*. Any Google Images search for "Steampunk."

Steampunk Nonfiction

The Steampunk Bible
Jeff VanderMeer and S.J. Chambers
Steampunk: An Illustrated History of Fantastical Fiction, Fanciful Film and Other Victorian Visions
Brian J. Robb, James P. Blaylock, et al.

Steampunk Blogs & Websites

Beyond Victoriana - beyondvictoriana.com
Steampunk Magazine - steampunkmagazine.com
Airship Ambassador - airshipambassador.com
(Airship Ambassador has an awesome number of links and novels listed on its resource pages.)