

high-tech / low life

an overview of cyberpunk



cyber · punk

—a portmanteau of “cybernetic” and “punk”, cyberpunk is a major subgenre of science-fiction which has its origins in the late 1970s / early 1980s. The word “cyberpunk” was coined by the science-fiction writer Bruce Bethke in 1980 but it is William Gibson’s 1984 novel *Neuromancer* that is generally seen as the trope codifier and cultural blueprint for nearly all cyberpunk. Arguably, cyberpunk peaked as a genre in 1999 with the mega-blockbuster film *The Matrix* and at present most writers consider cyberpunk to be a dead genre (or at least a genre whose time has largely passed).



Character types

Alienated techno-genius loner
Amoral corporate executive
Crazed cultist
Criminal (almost always a thief)
Cyborg
Detective
Femme fatale
Luddite
Sentient robot
Street samurai

Settings

Dystopia
Earth
Environmental collapse / decay
Mega-cities
Multi-cultural / multi-ethnic
Near future
Noir
Oligarchy

Themes and tropes

Artificial intelligence
Asia is the next superpower
Bodily augmentation
Computers are everywhere
Cyberspace
Digital or disembodied consciousness
Dehumanization
Information is the new currency
Mega-corporations are the new governments
Social inequality
Technology is never evenly distributed
There are no heroes, only protagonists
Wetware



Film noir (literally “black film” in French) is a genre of stylish crime dramas from the 1940s and 1950s. Shot with plenty of shadows and often featuring private detectives, *femme fatales*, and murder mysteries, these films had a profound cultural impact. Cyberpunk is a direct descendent of film noir.

