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TO THE STARS: L. RON HUBBARD'S MAN OUT OF TIME

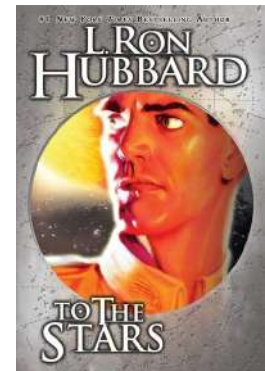
Guest blogger Bob Bly

Few science fiction stories explore the emotional toll of space travel like *To the Stars* by L. Ron Hubbard.

In this article, we examine what *To the Stars* and other science fiction classics say about the theme of time dilation, and the human tragedy of taking men and women out of their own time and into an era not their own.

To the Stars

In *To the Stars*, the protagonist, Alan Corday, is a spaceman making a "long passage" by traveling



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velocities approaching the speed of light, time aboard their spacecraft moves forward at a tiny fraction of the pace at which time passes back on Earth.

As Hubbard explains in his novel:

“According to Einstein’s theory of special relativity, as an object’s velocity increases, its mass appears to increase as well, while its length seems to contract in the direction of motion, and the passage of time for the moving object slows down relative to a stationary observer.

“Essentially, the faster you move, the heavier you become, the shorter you appear, and the slower time passes for you, with these effects becoming increasingly noticeable as you approach the speed of light.”

Einstein said the speed of light, denoted by a lowercase c , is a constant 186,000 miles per second and is the maximum possible velocity in the universe.

“They called it the long passage, though it was not long to the ship or crew. It was only long to Earth.”

Ron Hubbard first encountered Einstein’s theory of special relativity in the early 1930s when he took one of the first courses in nuclear physics at the

and writer, he took a fascinating science fact and turned it into compelling science fiction about humanity's journey to the stars.

“The” Classic Science Fiction Treatment of Time Dilation

Sam Moskowitz, science fiction critic, says that “*To the Stars* came close to being the classic story on the time-dilation effect.”

Critic William J. Widder opines that *To the Stars* “is a story seminal in scope, technical detail and, by reader consensus, the classic science fiction treatment of the time-dilation effect.”

(Since it was released in 1950, *To the Stars* has been published in 36 editions, distributed in 20 countries, and translated into 18 languages.)

“A man out of time” is an expression that describes someone who feels out of place in the present era.

In *To the Stars*, LRH explains how a space voyage at near light speed soon puts the crew out of their own time:

“For those who approached the speed of light also approached the zero of time. At various high speeds, the time differential upset men's lives. For they who lived weeks on the long

attainable speed, these space travelers who choose to explore deep space on the long passage will, because of time dilation, all become men and women out of time.

LRH then explains the human consequences of time dilation in poignant terms:

“He who is gone for a century cannot well return. He knows too little. His people are dead. He has no place, and he does not fit.”

Time dilation is the trope that causes Alan Corday to become a man out of time, but many science fiction writers have used other plot devices to displace characters temporally.

One such device is erasing the past. In Robert McCammon’s novel *The Border*, Earth is devastated by two warring alien species.

The solution: a “lightpath” machine that can travel back in time to before the arrival of the dangerous aliens.

But another alien, who has given humans the lightpath technology, warns:

“Your minds are such that the reversal of that much time may cause memory holes. Some will be able to remember and some not.”

A more common plot device for creating men out of time is longevity: the protagonist outlives everyone

A Man Out of Time: The Human Cost

In *The Avengers* motion picture, Captain America (aka Steve Rogers) is “a man out of time.”

Frozen as a young soldier when his plane went down into the Arctic ice cap, he awakens 66 years later.

Though he is chronologically in his 90s, physically, he remains youthful; a super-soldier serum in his bloodstream allowed his body to survive the freezing without aging.

Revived after being in suspended animation for two-thirds of a century, Cap finds himself in a new era that is not his own.

Sometimes, the longevity is not even greatly extended. For instance, in Stephen King’s novel *The Green Mile*, Paul Edgecomb, a prison guard, is endowed with an anti-aging metabolism through supernatural means.

He tells his lady friend that he is, in fact, 108 years old and laments:

“Oh, I’ve lived to see some amazing things Ellie. Another century come to pass. But I’ve had to see my friends and loved ones die off through the years. And you Elaine; you’ll die too. And my curse is knowing that I’ll be there to see it.”

mysterious Dutchman and falls asleep.

Rip wakes up 20 years later, only to find the world has changed in many ways; for one thing, he has slept through the American Revolution.

The classic science fiction novel *The Boat of a Million Years* by Poul Anderson tells the story of 10 immortals, all born long ago with the gifts of immunity and healing.

They have spent what seems like an eternity trying to understand their abilities, searching for others like themselves and for the meaning of a life that goes on forever.

A Future of Time-Lost Travelers

When Alan Corday returns to Earth after taking the long passage, he finds himself truly a man out of time.

His parents are gone. Where their house used to be, a paper box factory stands. The local church is in ruins. His family crypt is all but gone, save for one broken piece of slab marked only "ay."

His girlfriend is now eighty and has gone mad while Alan has hardly aged.

And Brightpark, once an upscale community, has become an area with only dilapidated shacks.

real-life “men out of time” will not likely be science fiction for much longer.

Now consider that with the privatization of space exploration and Elon Musk’s plans to colonize Mars and other planets, long passages and time dilation may soon become a reality.

Future generations of space travelers may all become, like Alan Corday, men and women out of time.

To get the *To the Stars* book or audiobook, click [here](#).



Bob Bly holds a BS in chemical engineering and has been a full-time freelance writer since 1982. His more than 85 books include *The Ultimate Unauthorized Star Trek Quiz Book* (HarperCollins), *The Science in Science*

Fiction (BenBella), and a collection of science fiction short stories *Freak Show of the Gods and Other Tales of the Bizarre* (Quill Driver Books). Bob has written over 100 articles for publications

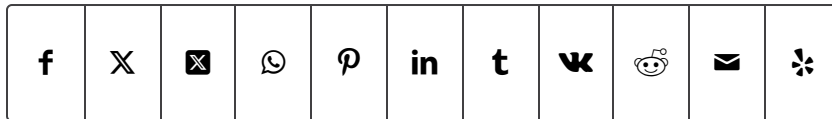
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