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Author: Mr. Jason Batt
100 Year Starship, United States, jbatt@100yss.org

LET'S GO TO THE STARS: A SURVEY OF INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL IN POPULAR CULTURE TO
INFORM PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FOR FUTURE INTERSTELLAR MISSIONS

Abstract

To truly succeed in the large-scale mission of interstellar exploration, public engagement must be at the forefront. From interactive entertainment such as *Horizon Forbidden West*, film and television shows such as *The Expanse*, and a widely expanding list of novels, short stories, and graphic novels, interstellar travel has captured the public consciousness. Examining popular media of the last decade (and beyond) provides us an insight into the perception of interstellar by the public and helps answers several critical questions to engaging the population for future interstellar efforts: What is accurate in popular media? What misconceptions have developed? What barriers are there towards gaining wide acceptance and support of future interstellar efforts?

Science fiction has been a guidepost for space exploration from the early days. Adam Roberts, in *The History of Science Fiction*, states: "Stories of journeying through space form the core of the genre Are the trunk, as it were, from which the various other modes of SF branch off." On the threshold of interstellar exploration, what do today's science fiction creators say about interstellar exploration? What pitfalls do they see? What is the roadmap they present now? What challenges do they show? Is there an agreement upon the timeline? What technology captures public interest? What dangers do they predict out there? How does popular media reflect actual interstellar efforts?

The presentation will present a survey in review of current science fiction on the topic of interstellar space missions for the purpose of better public engagement of future interstellar travel.