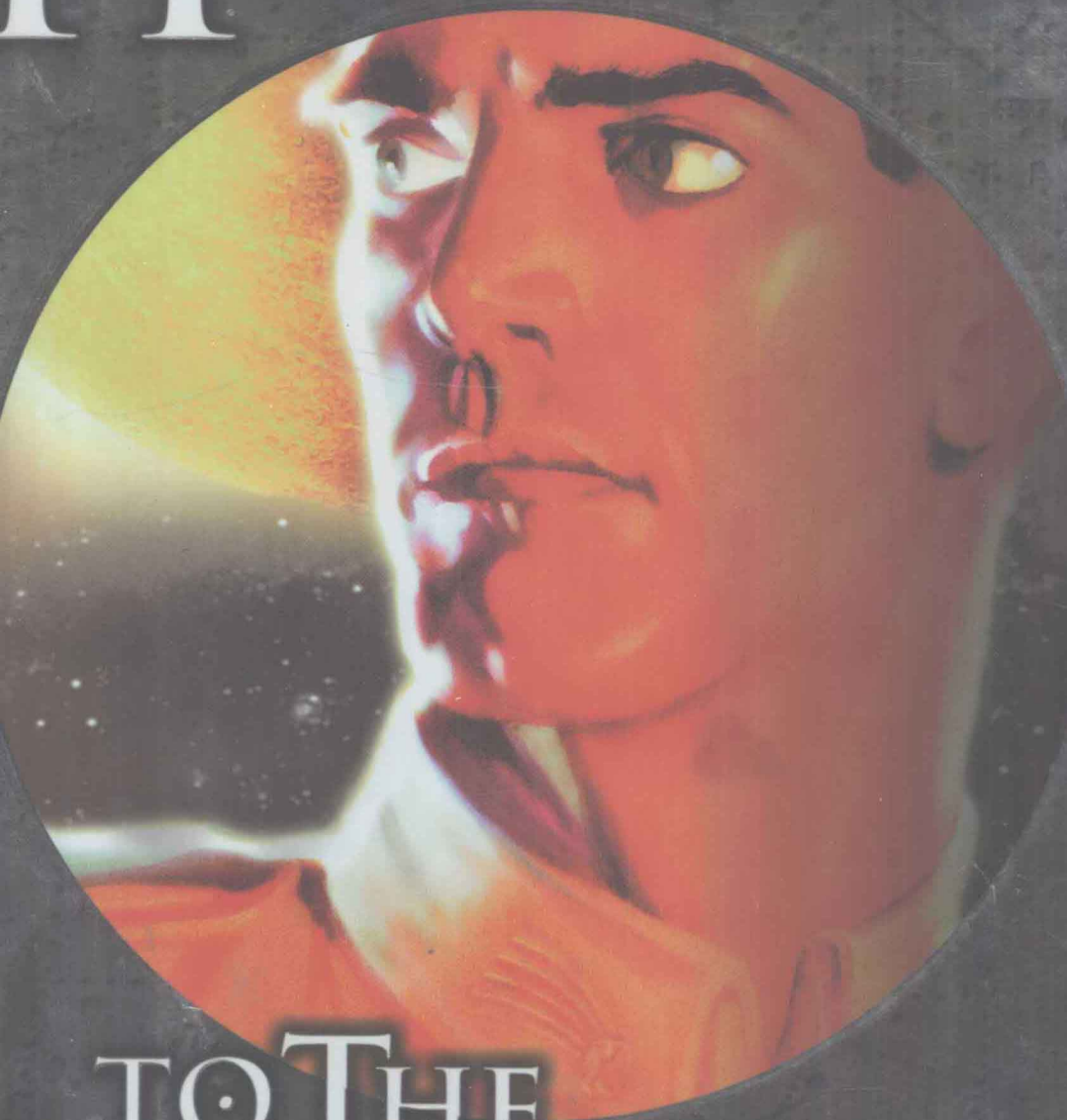


#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

L. RON HUBBARD



TO THE STARS

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INTRODUCTION

In the December 1949 issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*, editor John W. Campbell, Jr., announced that the magazine would publish "a new, remarkably powerful novel" by L. Ron Hubbard, starting in February of the following year. Campbell promoted it again in January 1950, writing, "It's a two-parter, and a beautiful development of the theme based on the time-rate differential of ships traveling near the speed of light."

The reaction of readers was an unmistakable indication that the novel *To the Stars* more than lived up to Campbell's praise and endorsement. Each month *Astounding* would hold a readers' poll, a tabulation of the popularity of stories in the previous issues, based upon cards and letters from fans. And by the June 1950 issue, Campbell was announcing:

To the Stars took top place in the March issue; judging from the character of the letters, it deserved it. And the sequence of stories seems to follow neatly, and exactly, the degree of thought required to appreciate the tale. The plot of *To the Stars* called forth a number of technical letters and evidently stirred a lot of thinking.

The story not only stimulated technical speculation but also inspired a considerable amount of reader enthusiasm,

such as this from William N. Austin of The Wolf Den Book Shop in Seattle, Washington. After criticizing another story, Austin went on to say:

Hubbard's conclusion for *To the Stars* is quite another matter. At first glance it seemed that Part One was merely a prologue, so powerful by comparison was the conclusion. But in retrospect—a very short retrospect, true—the parts fit very well together, producing a whole preeminent worthiness. And because of its smoothness in delineation, its excellence in characterization and mood, its solidity of ideas, I do not hesitate, even at this short range, to classify it as good literature as well as excellent science fiction, deserving the posterity of hardcover publication.

To the Stars went on to achieve just such posterity, and was later published in Great Britain, Germany, Japan, Sweden, Denmark, France and Italy, a number of times in hardcover and usually in these foreign editions under the title *Return to Tomorrow*. Yet whatever the title, the story has left a lasting impact on the genre as pointed out by one of the field's most distinguished authors, Jerry Pournelle:

To the Stars, by L. Ron Hubbard, is one of the greatest science fiction novels that has ever been written.

Ron wrote *To the Stars* circa May 1949, probably in Washington, D.C. And, during this period, he also wrote a number of other stories, including the final yarns in the famous *Ole Doc Methuselah* series, and "Beyond All Weapons."

Although "Beyond All Weapons" is considered by critics to be the pioneer story in modern science fiction for its

original use of Einstein's time-dilation theory, *To the Stars*, published just a month later, is considered a much fuller development of the theme: "Seminal in scope, technical depth and influence," according to the official bibliographer of *The Fiction of L. Ron Hubbard*.

It was a theory Ron was intimately familiar with. When he had enrolled in the engineering school of The George Washington University (GWU) in the early 1930s, he had attended the first classes on nuclear physics, then called Atomic and Molecular Phenomena. Apparently, the claim to fame of the professor holding the chair of mathematics at the university was that supposedly he was one of only a few men in the entire country who understood Einstein's theory of relativity at the time. And as Ron related in the following anecdote, the man took himself quite seriously:

I went in to see him one day to interview him for the college paper. I wanted him to tell me something about this theory of relativity this fellow Einstein was kicking around with and so forth. And I never had such sneers, contempt or was turned out on my ear quite so fast.

Still, Ron wrote his article.

I said that one of only twelve people in the United States who understood Einstein was in the mathematics department of GW. I wrote this up as a very nice article, and then explained the Einstein theory in full so everybody understood it.

Now, it wasn't that he never forgave me—he was so taken aback, he never dared speak to me crossly thereafter!

In *To the Stars* Ron expresses the time-dilation theme in this manner:

Space is deep, Man is small and Time is his relentless enemy.

And he continues by summarizing the problem in terms of an equation:

AS MASS APPROACHES INFINITY, TIME APPROACHES ZERO.

Two mathematicians derived the equations first—Lorentz and Fitzgerald. And a theoretical philosopher, Albert Einstein, showed its application. But if Lorentz and Fitzgerald and Einstein gave man his Solar System, they almost denied to him the stars.

Yet although tackling some of the ramifications of one of the primary scientific theories of our time, L. Ron Hubbard did what he had always done, ever since first entering the science fiction arena in 1938: he gave science fiction a human face, peopling it with real individuals struggling with real problems and facing real choices.

The power of *To the Stars* lies not only in its original approach to theme but in its characters—travelers on the “long passage” through time. Turn the page and prepare to meet them. First will come Alan Corday, a young and naive engineer-surveyor whose entire life is about to irrevocably change, and second, one of the most impenetrable and fascinating characters of modern science fiction, Captain Jocelyn, master of the *Hound of Heaven*. So belt yourself in and get ready for blastoff with these “people of the long passage.”

The Editors



PROLOGUE

Space is deep, Man is small and Time is his relentless enemy.

In an ancient and forgotten age, he first discovered the barricade. Before space travel even began he knew the barricade was there. It was an equation. Without that equation, the basic equation of mass and time, man could not have progressed. But he did progress and he used fission and his mechanics became mighty and his hopes large. But the terms of his salvation were the terms of his imprisonment as well.

AS MASS APPROACHES INFINITY, TIME APPROACHES ZERO.

Two mathematicians derived the equations first—Lorentz and Fitzgerald. And a theoretical philosopher, Albert Einstein, showed its application. But if Lorentz and Fitzgerald and Einstein gave man his Solar System, they almost denied to him the stars.

And yet, despite the difficulty derived by these

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great men and confirmed first by nuclear physicists and then by actual use, there were still those who accepted and yet defied the law, a small cohort of ships and men who, throughout the ages, have kept the routes alive. The outcasts and pariahs of extra-atmosphere travel, the cursed and shunned by man, they coursed their lonely ways, far-bound but prisoners too, shackled fast by Time.

Knowing well their waiting fate, who would volunteer to become part of that thin group, knowing well their fate?

But amongst the societies of man there are always those who are outcasts from character or force of circumstance and there are adventurers who will not heed equations. And so the stars were reached and partially explored despite the fate of those who made the runs.

They called it the long passage, though it was not long—to the ship or its crew. It was only long to Earth. 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 passage left Earth and the Solar System to gather years in their absences.

The economic value of the long passage was small.

A six-week cruise to Alpha Centauri[†]—which had very little to give, unlike the further stars—brought back a crew to an Earth aged many years. Star commerce was not a venture of finance, it was only for the “benefit” of the crew.

Intersystem vessels could be geared to the high drive. And sometimes when port authorities waited with arrest, a liner would slip away from the gravity of the Sun and would lose itself to the stars. Or a criminal would steal a vessel in the hope of eclipsing years. But the results were the same.

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. And what may have begun as an adventure for a crew invariably ended in the same way—another passage out, while behind them further age accumulated while the crew stayed young.

The only fraternity was within the ship.

The only hope was that someday someone might discover another equation, a solution to the barricade:

AS MASS APPROACHES THE SPEED OF LIGHT,
TIME APPROACHES ZERO.

The outcasts of the long passage, those that stayed alive, never ceased to hope.

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[†] Glossary included at back of book



CHAPTER 1

Alan Corday stopped, momentarily blinded by the flash of a Mars-bound liner getting free from Earth. For an instant the skeletal racks had flashed red against the ink of sky and the one used now pulsated as it cooled. Corday did not like to be blinded here in this place, even for a moment. He wiped a tired hand against his blouse, carefully reassuring himself that his papers and wallet were still in place.

To the north glowed New Chicago, a broad humming city hiding beneath its five stages its hungry, its sick and its uncared-for lame. Civilization was mushroomed up from a mire; the columns were pretty, the fountains in the rich gardens played in many hues, cafes winked their invitations to the rich and under it all was the beggar's whine, a shrill, lost note, but steady enough to someday bring these towers down in wreck.

To an engineer-surveyor of the tenth class, New

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Chicago was a grave in which he could bury all his years of school and field work for a pittance and eventually wander out of this life as poor as he had entered it. To an engineer tenth, people were polite because of his education and breeding, and distant because a man in need of a job must be poor.

He had heard vaguely that the new duke of Mars was employing men in public works and he knew certainly that an engineer tenth would be a rarity in that newness. But it took money to get to Mars unless one could work his way and Alan Corday had need to save his money.

In five years, her father had said, she could marry him, providing he had enough to start his own offices. Chica had wept a bit and he had tried to cheer her.

"They say there's work on Mars and that the new duke has an open hand. Don't cry, it won't be very long. I'll go for two years and two years will soon pass. Don't cry, honey. Please don't."

But two years would be long enough and five years were unthinkable. If his father had not seen fit to die a bankrupt— But it wasn't his father's fault. It was his own for dawdling his time away on special courses.

"Two years and I'll be home again, I swear it. Here,

look at me. Have I ever broken my word to you now? Have I? There. That's better. We'll make it yet—"

And he had painted a fine word picture for her of the house they'd have when he came back and how his purchased business would hum, and he had left her cheered. But he was not so sure himself. Mars was an uncertain place to go at best, even if the pay was high. And his going was even more uncertain now, for he had asked four ships so far this night and not one of them would haul without cash.

"You're a queer bird," the last captain had said. "What's a swell doing with a passage-beg? Thought you engineers was rolling in it."

What use to explain bankruptcy to this gnarled spaceman? Even the tenth class could go broke—and could retain its class standing providing it did not beg.

"Sell a couple of polo ponies and go cabin," the old skipper had said. "What's the world comin' to with a tenth class askin' to swab decks? Adventure ain't all it's cracked, sonny. You come for a lark. Go home and read a book."

Alan Corday felt the depth of the shadows now that the rocket afterglow was gone. It wasn't healthy here on

the flats. He rubbed his knuckles nervously. He did not mind fighting but he had a job to do.

All the rebuffs he had received made him feel like a fool. A tenth class without two thousand for a passage was conspicuous. He wished he had worn dungarees and that he had sometime learned to lie. But a gentleman didn't lie and, broke or not, he was still a gentleman.

Lights flickered unevenly through the filter of a garbage-strewn alley. He was getting down near the stews now, out of the officers' neighborhood. He didn't have a gun and he was a fine target for a footpad in this white silk jacket. But he picked his way toward the lights.

A black cat leaped with a startled squall from his path, crossed it and vanished; Alan laughed nervously at the way the sudden noise had made his hand shake. Jumping from a cat!

Then he heard the first notes of the melody. Strange, eerie notes, haunting and terrible, were being plucked from an ancient piano—slow music, simple and yet complex. One could expect many things on the flats, he had been led to believe by a lurid press, but not a melody like that. Alan knew something of music but he

had never heard such a thing before. The floating notes were like a magnet and without knowing that he had moved he found himself standing outside a cheap glass building looking intently at the door.

It was just a common stew. A drunk lay sprawled on the walk, the side of his head covered with blood, a series of snores wheezing between his teeth. And over him floated the eerie song.

Alan stepped into the yellow light and thrust back the door. Because of its stillness he had expected to find the place empty of all but the player. But below a bluish haze which crawled twixt ceiling and floor, a jammed mass of men sat hushed, their drinks arrested in their hands.

It was tribute, Alan thought, and certainly the music was of a quality to do this even amongst such a crew as this. But then he saw they were not listening. They were waiting and they were afraid.

Far across the reeking place sat the player, engrossed in his moving hands, oblivious of any audience. The piano was battered and chipped with blasts; three members of a string orchestra, almost equally misused, crouched with the rest of the room, waiting and afraid. And the young man played.

He was a strange young man. In this bluish light his face looked too sharp, too white, too handsome. There were strange qualities mingled in that face, raptness uppermost now. A helmet and spaceman's gloves lay to hand on the piano top. A shirt and trousers, startlingly white, gave no clue to any age but certainly not to this. And about the young man's waist was a wide belt of gold metal from which hung a weapon Alan had never seen before. And the room waited, hushed.

The hands strayed for the final notes and then hung in memory of the melody dying away now in the strings. Then the young man stood and Alan saw that he was not young. Gradually the reverie left his face, gradually other expressions began to combine in it. The man was nearing fifty and his eyes were hard. His mouth was cynical and his whole thin face was cruel. But he was handsome to the point of beauty, handsome and diamond hard.

The proprietor cringed up to him. "Your worship . . . may we serve again . . . the men—"

The man swept down a languid, cynical eye and then stepped from the musicians' platform. He knew what he had done to them. And he knew he had done it with music. His smile told that, if a smile it was.

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