

Galactic Journeys: The Quest for Home in Science Fiction Television

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Home is a term that can evoke powerful emotions and speaks to our need for ontological security, self-identity, and relationships with others. Being stranded far from home – especially in the cold darkness of outer space – can create feelings of existential anxiety, if not outright despair. We seek someone who can show us the way home; lead us to a place of comfort and safety. Science fiction television series depict these stories of exploring the universe while seeking home and the important leader/follower relationships that are constructed during the journey.

For this paper, I looked at *Battlestar Galactica*, *Stargate: Universe*, *Farscape*, and *Star Trek: Voyager* as sf narratives that explore the challenges of journeys through space in the quest for home. Each series has a different outcome; from actually returning home (*Voyager*) to continuing an indefinite journey (*Stargate: Universe*) to redefining home (*Farscape*) to the creation of a new home (*Battlestar Galactica*). Importantly, each series also presents a different model of leader/follower relationships within the journey and at its end.

What we find within this exploration are the ways in which sf narratives express our desires and fears about ‘home’ and the role leader/follower constructs play in our understanding of ontological security and self-identity.

. Annison (2000) considers home as a space of psychological well-being achieved through physiological and safety needs and a place that allows us to fulfill our need for love, and a place to express self-esteem and social respect (p. 256). Beyond this understanding is a larger notion of *ontological security*, the “confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of their social and material environments of action”

(Giddens, 1990, as cited in Hawkins & Maurer, 2011, p. 144). Sixsmith (1986) offers 20 categories of meaning about the concept of home, including happiness, belonging, self-expression, permanence, privacy, and relationships with others. In essence, home becomes the base from which our “individual and community identities are constructed” (Hayes & Maurer, 2011, p. 144).

Cowan (2010) offers the understanding of a “transcendent value of a homeland in a time of desperation and diaspora” (p. 159). Being absent from one’s home world not only stimulates mortality salience, but “experiences of displacement, diaspora, and migration evoke fundamental questions of home and identity...an accentuation of the existential anxiety which lies at the core of all human experience” (Hayes, 2007, p. 3). Within the four narratives being discussed, there are differing views of what constitutes home and identity, as well as the role of the leader or leaders in achieving “home”.

What I discovered within the narratives was a similarity of equating home with family. Each of the narratives specifically invokes the concept; reinforcing the idea home is a more of a relational construct than physical or territorial. At first glance, this seems a rather reasonable – if not simplistic – paradigm. And yet, the idea is problematized through relational complexities and leader actions.

Stargate: Universe explores the need to get home/create home through the depiction of dysfunctional relationships. Colonel Everett Young has a tenuous hold on leading the inhabitants of the Destiny, suffering one mutiny and repeated threats of another. Young is comfortable leading military personnel, but seems to be at a loss for how to handle civilians who do not simply obey his orders. His leadership seems to be compromised from his initial injury and unconsciousness when they found themselves aboard the ship. He didn’t have the

opportunity to coalesce the group during the first moments of their fear and anxiety and alleviate their terrors.

Interestingly, the series presents a story arc of an alternative future where the characters find a life-sustaining planet, get married, have children, create a community and leave a legacy that speaks to the higher ideals of human values. However, there is still dysfunction. The group divides into those who accept their fate and future on this new planet and those who expect to be rescued and continue the journey to return to Earth. Colonel Young is a revered leader in this alternative, as is Eli Wallace – much different from the main storyline.

In the final episode, the major characters share a meal prior to placing themselves into stasis for a long, slow journey between galaxies. Again, the idea of family is evoked both through the dialogue and the visual of people contentedly sharing a large meal around a table; relaxed, happy, communal. Though the narrative denies them the journey's end of returning to Earth, they have created a home for themselves within the relationships developed over time and through crucibles of death, mistrust, and selfishness.

Farscape also explores the concept of a journey to get back home and the creation of home through familial relationships. The leadership model for this series relies more on shared leadership, though the characters of John Crichton and Khal D'Argo emerge as referent leaders and often – though not exclusively – practice a participatory leadership style. Numerous times in the narrative, group cohesion falters when the characters are offered an opportunity to return to their individual home worlds. Yet, each of the characters is in some way an outcast from their society – whether a deposed monarch, a criminal, or non-conformist. Even Crichton becomes an outcast through his relationships with the 'alien' species and although his relationship with his

father is very strong, he realizes he must essentially sacrifice himself and his ability to return home to keep Earth safe from those who would subjugate and exploit the people and planet.

The importance of acceptance and self-identity is threaded throughout the narrative. Yet, group affiliation allows for the fulfillment of self-identity for the characters. As their relationships develop, they regulate their emotions and actions, are able to gain cohesion and understand what Kurt Lewin described as “interdependence of fate” and “interdependence of task”. They are placed together by a fate not of their own choosing and must depend upon each other for survival and everyone must do their job – their task – to ensure they survive. Much like a family... Indeed, the end of the narrative shows Crichton and Aeryn Sun with their son and the promise of a new family history and a new home among the stars of an unknown galaxy.

Battlestar Galactica also presents a concept of finding a new home in an unknown place. After an apocalyptic destruction of the planets of their solar system, a group of humans led by Commander William Adama and President Laura Roslin journey through space to find the mythical planet Earth. Early in the narrative, there is a division between Adama and Roslin for control of the fleet. As the conflict lowers morale and places people in danger, Adama specifically states he will “put this family back together”. In fact, he often treats his subordinates as family members and acts as a benevolent but tough-love father. Roslin also enacts a version of a mother-figure through her understanding of prophetic destiny and being the dying leader who will lead the people to their new home. The physiological and security needs of the fleet cause both Adama and Roslin to make difficult and often unethical decisions to protect their ‘family’ on the journey.

They do find Earth, but it is a charred rock that suffered nuclear holocaust thousands of years in the past. Anxieties and despair tragically erupt in the fleet and are demonstrated through

suicides to lack of productivity to Roslin essentially being absent as a leader. Nevertheless, the series ends with the fleet finding a new world. Interestingly, the surviving members of the fleet reject the idea they will create a new civilization based on the one they lost. The followers leave their leaders. It may signify the concept of children leaving their parents and coming into their own – in some respects, the ancient Greek notion that children must kill their parents in order to become an adult and survive, which is mentioned by one of the Cylons early in the series - but it could more easily indicate that the ends did not justify the means. They retract their followership for “a clean slate” where they can create purpose and meaning in harmony with their social and physical environment on their own terms and beyond the reach of their leaders/parental figures.

The series I looked at where the characters actually returned home was *Star Trek: Voyager*. Yet, even within this narrative there are complexities as to how the leader, Captain Kathryn Janeway, accomplishes the mission of getting everyone home. The initial conclusion of the narrative shows the crew on Earth during an anniversary celebration of their return, but there have been several crew member deaths and Tuvok is incurably ill. An older Janeway decides to change the past and embarks on an illegal – if not perhaps unethical – scheme to break the Temporal Directive and go back in time to convince the younger Janeway to make different decisions and get the crew back home earlier and intact. My interpretation is this is less of a utilitarian perspective of meeting the needs of the many as it is in meeting the need of Janeway to be not just a leader – but a heroic leader. She regrets her decisions that caused the deaths of 19 crew members and exacerbated Tuvok’s condition, and this weighs heavily upon her sense of self. Her self-identity script as a great leader is challenged by her misplaced sense of overarching responsibility as a leader and she seeks to change it.

The Voyager is faced with a Borg threat and Janeway uncharacteristically allows the crew to have a say in whether or not they should fight. She calls the Voyager their home and implies their relationships over the years of their journey have been transformed from a working relationship to one of family. Harry states they should fight even if it does take them longer to get to Earth because it is the journey that matters – not the destination.

The younger Janeway agrees and they decide to fight the Borg. However, the older Janeway no longer thinks that was the correct decision and tries everything she can to “fix” the past. She does convince her younger self to act in specific ways and plays upon her sense of responsibility in wanting to keep her crew alive. Interestingly, her older self does battle with the Borg Queen – the quintessential antithesis to self-identity – and defeats her through her own death. The Voyager arrives back to the solar system years earlier than before, with no lives lost, and Tuvok will be able to get medical care for his condition.

Within each of these narratives, we see the concept of a journey across galaxies in the quest for home and the different leader/follower constructs that complicate achieving the goal. Importantly, we find that home is not a spatial or temporal place, but an environment in which relationships flourish and meaning is created. It is the creation of a place – not the arrival at a place that becomes the important learning within these narratives. As Rowles (2008) argues, “Meaning can be discovered, nurtured, and, most important, facilitated through the creation of place” (p. 128). However, the creation of home suggests a deeper need or longing than simply investing ontological meaning in a specific locality. In her discussion of Heidegger and building-dwelling, Hayes (2007) states:

there is a possibility of *becoming* at home through the grasping of one’s freedom, the clarification of one’s life purpose, and a respectful attitude to one’s relationships with others. Building-dwelling is a creative act of defining one’s home as an expression of one’s authenticity... the fulfillment of our potential. (p. 6)

Hayes (2007) puts forward the understanding of “an authentic process of (be)coming home to ourselves is one of continually creating and recreating home within ourselves and between ourselves and others” (p. 16). Madison (2006) concurs that the concept of home becomes more than a place and develops into an interaction with self and others. The way in which leaders and followers construct their relationship is critical to the way in which these groups can ‘become home’ and alleviate their anxieties to project a positive future.

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