



PITCH DECK • SPACE & CULTURE

# Science Fiction and the Future of Civilian Space

*Does modern science fiction accelerate civilian space development — through inspiration, policy discourse, and the economics of “New Space”?*

---

Victoria Ustimenko

## The Argument

# A common global language for imagining the future

Science fiction is not mere entertainment. It is a performative force that shapes real-world space-sector actors through three interconnected mechanisms.



01

### Inspiration & Recruitment

Narratives spark interest in STEM careers and draw talent into the space workforce — from engineers to astronauts.



02

### Public Discourse & Policy Shaping

Stories become a testing ground for debates on governance, labor, and social organization beyond Earth.



03

### Economic & Commercial Modeling

Depictions of private enterprise in orbit shape public perception of “New Space” capitalism and its leaders.

# From the screen to the launchpad

- Decades of research link science fiction consumption to interest in STEM education and aerospace careers.
- Fictional astronauts, engineers, and explorers offer accessible role models long before formal training begins.
- Iconic franchises function as a recruitment pipeline — normalizing space work as an attainable, desirable future.



Why it matters

## Talent Pipeline

*Fictional missions precede real ones —  
shaping who imagines themselves  
working in space, and why.*

# A rehearsal space for space governance



*“Science fiction is a place where debates play out about what the future of space should entail — a reflection of our relationships with current law and policy, and a way of building future generations’ thoughts and perspectives on shaping policy.”*



## Governance

Who sets the rules off-world? Sovereignty, jurisdiction, and shared resources.



## Labor

Who works in space, under what conditions, and for whose benefit?



## Social Organization

How do communities, cultures, and conflicts evolve beyond Earth?

## CASE STUDY

# Calibrating hope and fear

Science fiction explores both utopian possibility and cautionary failure — helping the public calibrate expectations for civilian space ventures.

HOPE



FEAR



## Star Trek

A utopian vision of multicultural cooperation — exploration driven by curiosity, not conquest, modeling a unified spacefaring civilization.

## The Expanse

Interplanetary tension, corporate domination, and resource conflict — a cautionary lens on power and inequality among space-faring factions.

# Writing the rules of “New Space” capitalism

- As private companies take on launch, logistics, and resource extraction, fiction increasingly depicts space as a marketplace, not just a frontier.
- Salvage crews, mining contracts, corporate hierarchies, and labor disputes appear as central plot drivers — not background detail.
- These narratives offer the public an early mental model for how a commercial space economy might actually function, for better or worse.



## Private Enterprise

Launch providers, orbital logistics, and salvage operations recast as everyday commercial activity.



## Public Perception

Fictional founders and moguls shape how audiences read real entrepreneurs and their ventures.

*“New Space” = fiction’s newest frontier*

## CASE STUDY

# New Space, dramatized

Recent screen narratives translate the dynamics of private space enterprise into stories audiences can relate to — and project onto real founders.



## Space Sweepers

A scrappy debris-salvage crew operates on the margins of a corporatized orbital economy — dramatizing labor, ownership, and survival in commercial space.



## Salvation

A tech billionaire races to avert catastrophe through a private space venture — blurring the line between visionary entrepreneur and existential gambler.

*These narratives **both reflect and influence** public perceptions of real industry figures and the broader space sector.*

## SYNTHESIS

# Fiction as a performative force

Science fiction does not simply predict the future of space — it actively shapes the imagination of the people building it.



*The loop closes: cultural legitimacy built by fiction feeds back into new narratives — and new ventures.*

## IMPLICATIONS

# Why this matters for the civilian space sector



### **Build the workforce of tomorrow**

Support and partner with creators on stories that depict realistic, diverse pathways into space careers.



### **Engage with policy-relevant fiction**

Treat speculative narratives as an early-warning system for the governance and ethics questions a growing space economy will face.



### **Manage the New Space narrative**

Recognize that public trust in commercial space ventures is shaped as much by screen portrayals as by mission outcomes.



# Science fiction doesn't just imagine the future of space — it helps build it.

*Through inspiration, public discourse, and economic modeling, the genre helps create the cultural conditions under which civilian space initiatives gain legitimacy and support.*

---

Thank you — Victoria Ustimenko