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Author: Prof. Larry Martinez
International Institute of Space Law (IISL), United States, larry.martinez@csulb.edu

THE HARD OR SOFT LAW OF "GRAVITY"

Abstract

While the 2013 film "Gravity" brought the specific problem of space debris to a direct cinematic encounter for millions of moviegoers, in a larger sense the film's plot emphasized the international collaborative aspects of space exploration. Indeed, "Gravity"'s Mexican writer and director, Alfonso Cuarón, credited the 1969 science fiction film, "Marooned," for inspiring his "Gravity" screenplay. In Marooned, the U.S. crew is stranded in orbit after a retrorocket failure, but receive assistance from their Soviet Cold War rivals. Both of these Academy Award winning films used international collaboration as central tenets to their plots, but without reference to the international legal regime that has as its "hard" law goal the promotion of international cooperation in space, the "province of mankind." This paper focuses on the gap between Hollywood's predilection for "soft law" depictions of voluntary international collaboration in outer space exploration, and the ways films seemingly eschew plot twists incorporating the actual "hard law" aspects of the outer space legal regime stipulating such cooperation. The paper utilizes critical cultural theory to deconstruct elements of major outer space films to analyze the factors motivating the observed bias against the "hard" law space regime, juxtaposed against the more benign or positive depictions of "soft" voluntary collaboration in the final frontier.