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Author: Mr. Rafael Moro Aguilar
Orbspace Engineering, Spain

SPACE LAW AND THE MEDIA: SCIENCE FICTION MOVIES ON THE MOON

Abstract

Science fiction is a literary and cinematographic genre that is characterized by its capacity for anticipation. Most analyses of science-fiction works tend to focus on the scientific and technical predictions, such as Verne's many accurate predictions concerning travelling to the moon (1865-69). However, science fiction novels and films have also made some striking anticipations of a more social nature. In a number of cases, this has included confronting problems of a legal nature, some of which are currently addressed by international space law, in particular the 1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST).

The present paper will focus on four critically acclaimed sci-fi movies showing moon exploration or colonization, either as their main topic or as a side topic. Two of those movies: Fritz Lang's classic "Woman in the Moon" (1929), and the more recent independent movie "Moon" (2009), touch upon the issue of mining lunar resources. These movies provide us with the occasion to make some reflections on the issue of exploitation of lunar resources, which is currently unsatisfactorily regulated by international space law. Another classic sci-fi movie, "H.G Wells' First men on the Moon" (1961), raised the issue of the harmful biological contamination of celestial bodies, a hazard that should be prevented according to Art. IX OST. Finally, Kubrick's and Clarke's masterpiece "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968), although not directly devoted to the Moon, at some point touches upon two important legal issues of lunar exploration: 1) the duty of States to inform the international community about their activities conducted on the Moon (Art. XI OST); and 2) the right to visit moon stations and other lunar installations by representatives of other States (Art. XII OST). My presentation will use some clips from these movies to illustrate the discussion.