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## **May the Force be with Space Criminology**

*On Space Criminology's "deviant knowledge," demonization, and rebellion (editorial introduction to the special issue)*

Yarin Eski

### **Abstract**

This editorial introduction to the special issue for the *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Criminology* on Space Criminology frames the emergent field as a crucial critical, theoretical, and philosophical engagement with crime, policing, governance, and ethical challenges beyond Earth. Using *Star Wars* metaphors, it addresses the field's early struggles with ridicule, mainstreaming, and epistemic gatekeeping. Moreover, it emphasizes how hope, trust, and speculative inquiry could function as scopes and tools for resisting entrenched power within mainstream criminology, also because they enable imaginative and collaborative criminologies. Finally, an overview of the special issue contributions is provided that altogether illustrate Space Criminology's forte in collectively and diversely advancing conceptually imaginative horizons of Space Criminology while maintaining a critical and reflective dialogue.

**Keywords:** Space Criminology, *Star Wars*, seductions of criminology, mainstreaming, resistance

## 1. “I find your lack of faith disturbing”: Introducing the ridicule of Space Criminology

One of cinema’s most iconic villains is without a doubt *Star Wars’* Darth Vader, whose voice is as instantly recognizable as it is menacing. In *Episode IV: A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977), he demonstrates his formidable powers with calm precision, almost with a hint of sophistication, when he Force-chokes Admiral Motti, a high-ranking Imperial officer, who had criticized Vader (Odman, 2023), making Vader punish him by gripping his throat telekinetically and delivering the now-famous words as cited in this section’s heading.

Much like the Rebel Alliance in *Star Wars* confronting seemingly insurmountable odds of raw authoritarian power as embodied by Vader, Space Criminology emerges in a galaxy of disciplinary skepticism, political pressures, and methodological traps. This editorial introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Criminology* on Space Criminology draws heavily, intentionally, on the *Star Wars* universe and its heroes, villains, and cinematic lessons, functioning as a guiding metaphor for the imagination, critique, and courage the field requires; something science fiction has done so since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when Johannes Kepler embedded his radical heliocentric ideas within the dream narrative *Somnium* to cloak deviant knowledge from the authoritarian power of the Church (Eski, 2026).

Indeed, deviantly and defiantly knowledgeable Space Criminology has emerged in recent years as a novel, provocative yet necessary sub-discipline of criminological thought, studying frontiers of crime, policing, law, ethics, and governance beyond Earth (Eski & Lampkin, 2024; Lampkin & White, 2023; Rothe & Collins, 2025; Takemura, 2019). As with anything that is new and despite its scholarly potential, the field could risk becoming marginalized at its current premature status, both by the space industry and within criminology itself. Such a lack of faith in Space Criminology already reflects itself in particular the giggle-factor, as areas of space science have experienced (Akin, 2012; Borradaile, 2012; Kaku, 2002), sometimes reducing Space Criminology to speculative fantasy and dismissed as “not scientific” without actually engaging with its methodological or theoretical foundations, even when – or especially when – done with a hint of criminological “sophistication.”

Whether the space industry takes crime in space as a serious issue, should be part of space criminological inquiry (Eski, 2023, 2025a; Eski & van Sintemaartensdijk, 2024). However, what is interesting as well and epistemologically relevant for this editorial introduction and Space Criminology as a whole, is that the criminological dismissals reflect a deeper resistance within criminology to interdisciplinary and speculative inquiry that challenges established epistemological boundaries; as it has done so many times before (Burnam-Fink, 2015; Eski, 2025a; Eski & Ugelvik, 2025; Friedrichs, 2013; Johnson, 2011; Rothe & Collins, 2023; Truman, 2026).

Arguably, the skepticism directed toward Space Criminology is not simply a matter of academic difference but a form of criminologically epistemic gatekeeping (cf. Ajani et al., 2025; Mutanga, 2025; Tomaszewski, 2026), threatening the evolution of Space Criminology and criminology as a whole. This is even more remarkable as humanity stands on the brink of sustained criminal activity in outer space, ranging from resource exploitation to interplanetary settlement (Rothe & Collins, 2025), as this special issue will unpack. Meaning, Space Criminology should be able to develop conceptual, methodological, empirical and ethical insights and tools to address questions of harm, governance, and justice in off-Earth environments where conventional laws and norms (may) not apply, without having to deal simultaneously with the burden of having to justify its existence and protect itself against skeptic, un-scientific criticism coming from the scientific communities themselves.

However, it seems Space Criminology has to “rebel on” while maturing into a serious criminological field of inquiry, tackling first and foremost the mainstream criminological understanding of what counts as science that privileges especially statistical-empirical,

laboratory-based knowledge while undervaluing interpretive, speculative, and theoretical-conceptual work, as has been the case with many more, in particular progressive and critical criminological epistemes and fields (Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016; Sykes, 1974; White, 2025; Young, 2011, 2016).

It is, however, the theoretical, interpretative, and speculative where Space Criminology's strengths lie. As space criminologists, we therefore should consider mainstream skepticism as a rhetorical tool that, in case we subject ourselves to it, could initiate a self-policing of Space Criminology that downplays its own disciplinary strength and legitimacy before it has had the chance to fully mature. So, acknowledging the demonization of Space Criminology through skepticism demands a critical response and, indeed, rebellion. In fact, the label of Space Criminology as "deviant" criminological knowledge (Walters, 2013), should be embraced while the seduction of mainstreaming our knowledge should be resisted.

## 2. "It's a trap!": The seduction of mainstreaming Space Criminology

Viral for a while in 2010, the "It's a trap!"-meme was used to humorously signal deception or an obvious setup, stemming from *Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi* (1983), where Admiral Ackbar of the Rebel Alliance warns of an ambush while leading the final attack against the second Death Star. As Ackbar and his fleet arrived at a typical, climactic *Star Wars*-battle, they discovered the adversary, Emperor Palpatine, expected them all along (Odman, 2023).

Perhaps that is the lesson that Ackbar is admiring Space Criminology, which is not to fall into a trap, especially when it is not obvious and hidden within mainstream criminological narratives and rhetoric reflecting zealous empiricism. Jack Katz' seductions of crime (Katz, 1988) come to mind, specifically the "seductions of criminology," as Turk (1991), who reviewed Katz' pivotal work, delved into and warned that criminology is repeatedly drawn into conceptual traps of its own making (Turk, 1991, pp. 189–192), specifically: the uncritical acceptance of official definitions by governmental and policing authorities; the individualization of deviance and crime; and the neglect of broader structures of power and inequality that often tie into those (empirical) definitions.

Turk's reading of Katz is useful for thinking about the challenges that Space Criminology faces today and could face tomorrow. In fact, as an inherently critical project (Lampkin, 2020), Space Criminology could risk reproducing traditional criminology when it is seduced into prematurely mainstreaming itself, forming a trap for a landlocked, thus planet Earth-locked, Space Criminology that merely projects itself onto the stars. There are a few seductions in particular that will be discussed here, making sure these are preventatively addressed now, allowing Space Criminology to consider them seriously on its future off-Earth trajectory.

The first and most persistent seduction is the temptation, as noted, to project Earth-bound criminologies onto outer space, using specifically classical, crystallized, and positivist crime theories, familiar and intellectually incestuous, and applying especially statistical, methodologies and epistemologies, and well-worn, or rather hollowed-out, "evidence-based" topics; easily lifting them from terrestrial criminology and redeployed beyond Earth. While Space Criminology may already display a tendency to anthropomorphize space crime (Eski, 2025b, pp. 5–11), its potential mainstreaming, driven by what could be seen as a misplaced desire for disciplinary recognition within criminology, risks treating orbital realities, microgravity, planetary distance, and the many more fundamentally different space ecological conditions, as mere contextual variables rather than as constitutive and truly profoundly altered conditions. Space Criminology would then function primarily as yet another criminalistic tool, treating crime as a "neutral" concept, which it is anything but (Hulsman,

1986), this time for studying the cosmos as an extension of existing social orders, infused with a politics of space optimism (Eski, 2023, pp. 74–75) and continuity rather than rupture.

A second, closely related seduction is that of legalism, in which Space Criminology might allow existing space law, national legislation, or emerging regulatory frameworks to define the research problem in advance, rather than critically interrogating the laws and the powers that produce them themselves. As Turk cautioned criminologists on Earth against uncritically accepting non-scientific, legalistic definitions of crime (1991, p. 190), Space Criminology, even while addressing questions of power, access, enclosure, and governance in orbital and extraterrestrial environments already, must still avoid becoming tethered to compliance-based understandings of cosmic harms. This is especially important in today's radical right-wing populist times of austerity, which often threaten academia (cf. Casey, 2025), when Space Criminology is starting to gain momentum. Securing research funding under such conditions could exert pressure to conform to prevailing political (especially neoliberal) legal or regulatory priorities (cf. Muzzatti, 2022; O'Sullivan, 2023). It is such compliance-oriented approaches, however, that risk obscuring the very questions of power and governance that Space Criminology seeks to illuminate and answer.

A third, more specific seduction lies in methodological transplantation, because in the absence of space criminological empirical data (Eski, 2025a), as is typical for any emerging field, there may be a perceived pressure to model space crime on terrestrial analogues, including aviation, maritime, and cybercrime, in order to justify, anticipate, and eventually generate datasets that do not yet exist. The danger, however, is not speculation itself, but the normalization of inherited research strategies that would foreclose more imaginative, critical, and theoretically generative approaches.

Finally, and although there are many more seductions of mainstreaming Space Criminology to consider here, the young field ought to remain cautious about being seduced by prematurely normalizing its potential practical applications. As an emerging field seeking legitimacy, space criminologists may feel compelled to look like "proper" criminology too soon by promising – perhaps synthetically deliver – coherent, predictive, policy-ready space criminologies that are "purchased" by governmental or corporate organizations (Walters, 2013). Yet, in line with Turk's warnings (1991, pp. 190–191), the rush to respectability often comes at the expense of critical independence, meaning for Space Criminology, whose object of study – outer space – is still actively being constructed by states, corporations, and military actors (Rothe & Collins, 2023). This implies that space criminologists may need to navigate the tension between gaining legitimacy and staying critical of emerging space harms, while facing the risk of losing funding if it does not conform to mainstream expectations.

In sum, the trap for Space Criminology may be far greater than what Ackbar saw happening in fighting the second Death Star. Beyond the obvious dangers of mainstream methods, legal compliance, and borrowed landlocked, vis-à-vis planet Earth-locked analogues, lies the subtler yet more fundamental seduction that can turn even well-intentioned defenders into what they seek to oppose, much like how Anakin, who in trying to fight the Dark Side, was eventually drawn into it by Emperor Palpatine, becoming Darth Vader. In navigating these challenges, Space Criminology should always, intellectually – that is, epistemologically, theoretically, and methodologically – choose the higher ground, as Obi-Wan did in his confrontation with Anakin in *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005). Meaning: only by maintaining a strong stance can Space Criminology study emerging space harms on its own terms while contributing meaningfully to debates about crime, harm, and justice beyond Earth, choosing critical distance over disciplinary comfort.

### 3. “May the Force be with you”: An overview of this special issue

When in *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (Kershner, 1980) Lando Calrissian and Chewbacca initiated their search to locate Boba Fett, trying to rescue Han Solo, imprisoned in carbonite, Luke Skywalker spoke the legendary words: “May the Force be with you” (Star Wars Fandom, 2026). Hopefully, the Force may be with Space Criminology as well, enabling us to identify and resist seductive traps, while practicing what we preach. Space Criminology is not simply an exercise in caution; it is also a rebellious open space for *sharing* and *inspiring* the space criminological imagination among contemporary criminologists and future generations. As Jyn Erso reminds us in *Star Wars: Rogue One* (Edwards, 2016), “Rebellions are built on hope” (Odman, 2023). Here, hope is not merely naïve optimism; it is the epistemological condition that enables Space Criminology to resist premature mainstreaming and confront entrenched power.

Indeed, Space Criminology, albeit as a small band of rebels, should confront overwhelming state, corporate, and criminological power, challenging entrenched assumptions, anticipating harms, and questioning governance and ethical norms beyond Earth. Hope should then be deliberate and critical, subversive even in a Baumanian sense (Giroux, 2004); one where Space Criminology embraces, uses, and brings forward speculative, theoretical, and imaginative inquiry as essential tools for understanding off-Earth realities, neither fearing the developing of its own methodological and empirical knowledge, nor allowing it to turn Space Criminology into another crystalized, inward-oriented and incestuous criminology. Space Criminology should therefore be based on trust between one another, thriving through friendly competition while resisting criminological careerist motives that have insidiously harmed criminology before (Rock, 2005) and could divide Space Criminology prematurely while it is only just a young, bright star. We should also give hope and inspire aspiring students through critical pedagogies (cf. Abreu, 2020; Barton et al., 2010; Beckmanna, 2012; Catello, 2025; Long, 2022; O’Sullivan, 2023; Thurgood, 2020; White et al., 2025). Not just by teaching them critically about problematic state-corporate worldviews on outer space, but also by remaining open to their critical, especially otherworldly views on the space criminological phenomena we might otherwise overlook. If anything, Space Criminology should always remain a dialogue.

This might matter more than we as “rebel scum,” as a criminological Darth Vader would have it, may realize. In fact, paraphrasing the original rebel, Luthen Rael in the series *Star Wars: Andor* (Haynes et al., 2022-2025), season 1, episode 10,<sup>1</sup> as some of the first space criminologists, we might have to come to terms with the idea that we have to symbolically burn our academic career to create the space criminological sunrise we may never witness, carrying the ego that initiated a critical fight destined never to find reflection, audience or academic recognition.

Such humility yet starfighter spirit characterizes the different, theoretically, and philosophically rich contributions this special issue accommodates. In first name alphabetical order, the contributions to this special issue illustrate the breadth, depth, and ambition of Space Criminology. **Alex Simmonds** examines interstellar travel, highlighting how technological constraints, the ethics of Intergenerational Starships, and gaps in space law create unprecedented moral, legal, and criminological challenges for human life beyond Earth. **Antony Pemberton**’s contribution follows and develops a space victimology that combines phenomenology, posthuman critique, and hauntological insight to interrogate intentional injustice, relationality, and the moral dimensions of harm in extraterrestrial contexts. **Dawn Rothe and Victoria Collins** situate space expansionism within the broader climate crisis, unpacking the (il)logics driving rocket launches, neocolonial imaginaries, and

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<sup>1</sup> Original quote: “I burn my life to make a sunrise that I know I’ll never see. And the ego that started this fight will never have a mirror or an audience or the light of gratitude.”

the continuing environmental impacts of off-Earth activity. **Jack Lampkin** traces the development of astro-green criminology, showing how early environmental frameworks for outer space have matured into broader space criminological inquiry, inspired by foundational work from Noriyoshi Takemura. **Noriyoshi Takemura** himself extends his astro-green criminology into a *quantum* astro-green criminology, exploring the entanglement of dark energy, cosmology, and superintelligence to anticipate and prevent catastrophic environmental harms on cosmic scales. Finally, I develop a prospective space criminological imagination, framing humanity's expansionist Freudian drive in terms of an 'Astrothanatos', or stardeath drive, that risks repeating the terrestrial patterns of genocide and ecocide in outer space as astrocidal destruction.

Together, these papers form a small but determined rebel fleet, imaginative, critical, and willing to confront unprecedented challenges. And as with any rebellion, even the smallest acts, whether of insight, critique, or defiance, can push the frontier forward, or, as Keris Nemik, a young, idealistic member of the Rebel cell in, once more, *Andor* season 1 (this time episode 12), inspiringly reminds us:

There will be times when the struggle seems impossible. I know this already. Alone, unsure, dwarfed by the scale of the enemy. Remember this. Freedom is a pure idea. It occurs spontaneously and without instruction. Random acts of insurrection are occurring constantly throughout the galaxy. There are whole armies, battalions that have no idea that they've already enlisted in the cause. Remember that the frontier of the Rebellion is everywhere. And even the smallest act of insurrection pushes our lines forward. And then remember this. The Imperial need for control is so desperate because it is so unnatural. Tyranny requires constant effort. It breaks, it leaks. Authority is brittle. Oppression is the mask of fear. Remember that. And know this, the day will come when all these skirmishes and battles, these moments of defiance will have flooded the banks of the Empire's authority and then there will be one too many. One single thing will break the siege. Remember this. Try.

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