



Off-Earth: Ethical Questions and Quandaries for Living in Outer Space

Erika Nesvold

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Imaginative and captivating, Erika Nesvold's *Off-Earth* poses vital, wide-ranging ethical questions about the future of human communities in outer space.

While books on interplanetary travel typically focus on technology, this fascinating work probes more fundamental questions, as of whether people even have a right to build settlements in space and change planetary landscapes—and, if so, of what drives this expansion. It tries to envision a utopian society “free from the crowded territory and bloodied history of our terrestrial home.” It wonders who would design and control off-Earth societies, or whether they would be self-governing.

Integrating insights from dozens of experts across the sciences and humanities, from NASA administrators to space lawyers and fiction writers, *Off-Earth* also draws on lessons from history. For instance, the near collapse of the Jamestown settlement in 1609-10 demonstrates the importance of choosing the right mix of settlers with the right survival skills. And shifting US policies that briefly granted, then rescinded, “forty acres and a mule” to former slaves after the Civil War underscore the potential for exploiting a workforce with limited transportation and employment options. A stabbing incident among Russian engineers at an Antarctic research station poses questions about crime, punishment, and mental illness in remote environments. And a fictional scenario about a future Martian settler preparing for a hike raises questions about quality of life and environmental protection in future worlds.

At each point, the book proposes solutions that, admittedly, reflect Nesvold's own biases and priorities, while also suggesting that we may have “an obligation to improve as a society before we spread beyond our home planet.”

Brilliant and thought-provoking, *Off-Earth* will not only challenge your assumptions about future worlds, but will change your understanding of the values and desires that shape the world today.

KRISTEN RABE (March / April 2023)

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