

The Merit of English Section

Senior Division

Name of Winner : Leung Chun Hin

Name of School : Cheung Sha Wan Catholic

Secondary School

Book Title : *The Martian*

Author : Andy Weir

Publisher : Crown Publishing Group

“Curiosity is the essence of our existence.”

Space has always invoked mankind’s curiosity, where *The Martian* leads us on this exploration. The fictional space novel documents the journey of Mark Watney, an astronaut who is abandoned on Mars due to an oncoming sandstorm by his crew. When his crew thought he was dead, he miracally survived. The novel continues with him documenting his plans in growing food, managing

supplies and exploration. After days of cleaning and repairing, he got the base back to normal condition. Upon reviewing old archives inside NASA, he found the location of an old communicator which could be connected back to NASA. A uranium core is also dug up to keep him warm during rides in the rover to save battery. With NASA contacting him with an escape route, he proceeded in plotting the route to the Mars Ascent Vehicle, using the rover that he heavily modified to its needs. With joint efforts by NASA and Mark, he arrived at the Mars Ascent Vehicle, which could bring him up to orbit. He modified the ascent vehicle while the crew slingshot from Earth back to Mars to pick him up. Their distance was too far apart when he was up in orbit, but he managed to use the air in his suit to propel himself like Iron Man towards the space craft. At last, he arrived safely home back to Earth and told the story to many others in University.

Being one of the New York Times Bestsellers, the key to its success is the perspective in how the story is told. With each of the subheadings starting with “LOG ENTRY: SOL 6”, this perfectly illustrates the novel as a first person narrative. It also logically explains the background of the endeavor through these entries since whoever sees the entries would need to know what happened to him. After the first quarter of the book, the perspective from NASA starts to emerge, how they observed the satellite photos, found out his existence, plans and arguments throughout the mission in between the log entries. Being the backbone of the mission, this really fills up the holes in the reader. The two story lines eventually merge as Mark Watney escapes Mars and returns back to Earth.

The mixed humor in the novel also elevates the quality of the story, with Mark Watney’s unique personality. Though in a dreadful situation, where he has

almost no chance of surviving, he still acts like any person with humor. The comedian mixed with the desperate environment brings out a huge contrast, which also keeps the reader engaged in the story and laugh from time to time. One of my favorites is how he is bragging on the things he is doing being the first, the first to technically colonize Mars, drove a rover that long and survived on Mars that long. His unique sense of humor not only keeps himself motivated, but also prevents the viewer from feeling hopeless in this situation.

Another award winning feature I would like to highlight is the amount of detail and realism injected into the novel. The author Andy Weir, different from other science fiction writers, did extensive research in orbital mechanics, conditions on Mars, botany to ensure that the story is as accurate as possible. As a space enthusiast myself, I found the details astonishingly precise, with how the food is rationed logically, how the space

mechanics allows the crew to sling shot back to Mars, how the whole rescue mission could go wrong and so on. Every part of this novel is scientifically accurate, creating a one of a kind immersion experience for the readers. It is safe to assume that this novel would attract both adventurous readers and scientific enthusiasts.

From another perspective, this immense realism made me realize that this could actually happen in the real world. The story took place in the very near future, where NASA planned six Ares missions to Mars to explore, evaluate and plant the first drop of civilization. There are a lot of dangers in such a mission and this could be a potential hazard. Bases can be blown up with just a leak and a crewmate could be stuck on Mars without any comprehensive rescue plan. If one thing was off in the whole story, for instance the employee not checking the satellite photos, or another explosion happened during his stay, he would be straight up dead.

This novel reflects the potential danger a Mars exploration could bring, and how NASA or other space agencies should better prepare for all possibilities in order to ensure the safety of all explorers.

In essence, this Bestseller is the perfect fusion of reality and science fiction, using a first person narrative to illustrate the dire situation with a bit of dark humor as embellishment. Will space travel be generalized to the public in the near future? Will it be dangerous? Will humans be possibly trapped in space? I guess these are the questions we should really think about before we continue our endeavors into space.