

BOOKS

'The Martian' author Andy Weir speaks at UCSD



Erik Viirre, Andy Weir and Brian Keating at an Arthur C. Clarke Center for Imagination lecture, Dec. 7 at UCSD (COURTESY)

By WILL BOWEN

DEC. 20, 2017
12:35 PM



Andy Weir, *The New York Times* bestselling author of “The Martian” (a story about an astronaut stranded alone on the planet Mars that was made into a 2015 movie of the same name starring Matt Damon) was at UC San Diego on the evening of Dec. 7 to discuss his new work, “Artemis.” It’s a story set in the year 2084 on the first lunar colony, which is comprised of five interconnected domes erected near the site of the Apollo landings of the 1960s.

One critic called “Artemis” “an irresistible blend of science, suspense and space opera.” The story follows a group of characters, including a woman named Jazz, who works as a porter making deliveries around the moon colony, and a man named Bashar, who works as a porter making deliveries around the moon colony, and a man named Jazz, seeking her fortune, gets involved in a big-time heist involving control of the colony, where she just might be in over

By continuing to use our site, you agree to our [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). You can learn more about how we use cookies by reviewing our [Privacy Policy](#).

her head ...

Weir's visit, which was sponsored by the Arthur C. Clarke Center for Imagination, began with a meet and greet reception at The Loft night club inside the Price Center on UCSD campus. The reception turned out to be a "Who's Who" of local scientists, sci-fi writers and aficionados. Weir mingled with the crowd and was friendly and affable, engaging all who ventured up to speak to him.

Science-fiction writer David Brin, author of numerous novels including "The Postman," which was made into a movie starring Kevin Costner, was one of the many fans. Brin remarked: "Andy Weir is an immensely popular writer because he believes in us. He believes in mankind's ability to solve the problems, overcome the obstacles, and resolve the conflicts we face as a civilization."

ADVERTISING



inRead invented by Teads

Physicist and UCSD professor Andy Freedman, who teaches through the Center for Astrophysics and Space Science, was also at the reception. Freedman noted: "I enjoyed reading 'The Martian' and seeing the movie. What I especially liked is that Weir gets the science involved right!"

Also mingling were Sue and Steve Hart, members of the UCSD Founders' Club, who met when they were graduate students in mathematics at UCSD. "I appreciate the clear science involved in Weir's books," Steve Hart said. "He writes good, clean, clear prose. Although I love to read, in the case of 'The Martian,' I must confess the movie lived up to the greatness of the book."

Computer scientist Tanner Halicioglu, who was one of the original Facebook programmers and who recently gave \$75 million to UCSD, commented that he, too, liked the scientific aspects of Weir's writing.

Retired engineer Lee Oeth, who arrived wearing a T-shirt sporting an image of the 1957 Sputnik Russian satellite, said he found "The Martian" easy and great fun to read, adding, "I admire all the research Weir did to make this book scientific and realistic."

After the reception, all adjourned to the Price Center Theater where Weir was introduced by Big Bang physicist and Clarke Center associate director Brian Keating, who proclaimed: "The prodigal son has returned!" Keating went on to explain that though the campus was extremely proud that Weir was a UCSD computer science alumni, Weir had not officially graduated!

Keating also advised that there were some big changes in the works at the Clarke Center and in 2018, it would host a conference titled "Accelerating Human Imagination: Human & Artificial Intelligence" along with a tribute to the 50th anniversary of Stanley Kubrick's

movie “2001: A Space Odyssey.”

Keating introduced Dr. Erik Viirre, a neuroscientist who works at UCSD Medical School, who was there to interview Weir. Viirre began by noting that, in his opinion, Weir wrote: “Good old-fashioned science-fiction.” Weir agreed, saying he grew up reading his father’s extensive collection of science fiction, which included works by authors Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Heinlein.

From age 15, Weir said, he worked as a computer programmer for national laboratories. He attended UCSD for a time during the early 1990s, but wasn’t motivated enough to graduate. “I really did not know how to take very good care of myself until I was in my 30s,” he confessed.

But all the while, Weir said, he pursued his hobby of studying physics, mechanics and manned spaceflight. He wrote his first (still unpublished) novel while attending UCSD and later self-published and sold the intensively researched second novel, “The Martian,” on Amazon. It did well there and was noticed by a major publishing house that picked it up. Eventually it became a best-seller. “The publishers came to me!” Weir boasted.

About “Artemis,” which is the name of the moon colony where his next story takes place, Weir explained: “It was written from a woman’s point of view. The hero is a Saudi named Jazz Bashara, who has lived on the moon from age 6 to her current 26, so she has both her family’s Arabic culture and the new culture of the moon.”

Weir said one of the scientific technicalities woven into the novel is that moon dust must be thoroughly removed after entering the colony buildings (which are named after Apollo 11 astronauts) because “moon dust is extremely hazardous, due to its sharp edges, and can literally tear up the lungs if inhaled.”

Another technicality Weir worked out (borne of extensive dreaming about how people might live on the moon) was money or unit of exchange, which he calls “slugs.” (One slug is equivalent to how much it would cost to bring one gram of material from Earth to the moon.) Of course, the high cost of transport makes things very expensive on the moon, and that’s why the main staple is a chlorella algae grown there using hydroponics.

Weir ended his interview by discussing the big problem of space travel: The effect of long-term immersion in zero gravity. Zero gravity weakens astronauts by reducing bone and muscle density and restricting circulation in their extremities. Those things come back upon the return to regular gravity, but the macular degeneration that also occurs in the eyes, never gets better.

“If we are ever to colonize the moon or Mars, we must find a way to deal with zero gravity — either medically or by the creation of a gravity-generating device,” Weir concluded.

BOOKS

NEWSLETTER

Get the La Jolla Light weekly in your inbox

Please enter your email address

Subscribe