

The last time a science fiction movie was released that did not look silly was when Christopher Nolan came out with “Interstellar.” Long before and after it, science fiction movies were mostly about laser pew-pew, galactic villains, and re-launching once popular franchises like Star Trek. However, even in this gloomy kingdom of exploitation cinematography (no really, science fiction movies have become nothing but a way to demonstrate new visual technologies) there finally was a beam of light: Ridley Scott’s “The Martian.”

“The Martian” is a contemporary version of a probably forgotten tale by Daniel Defoe—“Robinson Crusoe.” The main difference is obviously the location where the main character—in our case the NASA astronaut Mark Watney—is stranded: Mars. Considered to have deceased in an accident, Mark is abandoned by his colleagues during a mission on Martian surface, and thus has to survive on the resources he has until the next mission arrives. That is all I can say about the plot—the rest you should watch for yourself. The plot is a classic for these kinds of movies, although in general I can say “The Martian” is an attempt to make a clever movie within Hollywood’s boundaries, which I both liked and disliked. Both for specific reasons.

I will start with the goodies. What I liked is that the script was partially written with the participation of NASA specialists. I never read the book (you do know that “The Martian” film was based a book, right?) so I cannot say how close to real science the source is, but it seems the movie is quite accurate in terms of science—except the parts when the director made obvious mistakes, like the one when Watney moves around space with the help of a gauntlet, the volumes of unused space on a large spaceship, or the color of Martian surface (it is grey, not reddish); not to mention the fact that solar radiation on Mars would probably kill Watney quickly.

What I also liked was the general idea of the film: even if the situation seems to be hopeless, do not lose your head, try to keep your mind clear, and eventually you will find a solution to any problem. This is what I believe too, and this is what helped Watney survive. Matt Damon was the best actor for playing this kind of personality, in my opinion—even though he looked like agent Borne in a spacesuit; nonetheless, he conveyed the feelings and behavior of a person stranded on a deserted planet perfectly. Generally, his duet with Jessica Chastain is among the things that I liked about “The Martian.”

Among other good things is probably the visual effects, but I guess it is almost impossible to make bad effects in the 21st century, so I will take this part for granted.

What I disliked, and what makes this film a typical Hollywood product apart from a traditional happy end, is the atmosphere. Sometimes it seems like Watney does not fully realize the scales of his situation. Like, “Yeah, I’m stranded on Mars, but I can still joke around with my buddies on Earth.” Of course, humor is crucial not only to keep one’s sanity in extreme conditions, but in regular daily life as well—but “The Martian” sometimes stops being serious with all those gags and small laughs. I do not want to sound like a snob, and I like humor in the movies, but “The Martian” sometimes jokes when it is not appropriate, and it spoils the atmosphere.

What is also annoying is that everyone on Earth seems to want to save Watney (why does the information about him even become a public phenomenon?). It is as if Earth revolved around Mark Watney, that unbreakable and sarcastic scientist temporarily stuck a bit far from home. Sometimes the NASA rescue operation looks like a reality show with Matt Damon that all of Earth watches.

Generally, the film is not bad—much better than the rest of the science fiction productions we are being fed regularly. The recent discovery of liquid water on Mars has also poured some gasoline onto the marketing flame, and made the possibility of the events described in the film a little bit higher. But it is still not at the level of “Interstellar,” and not even close to the level of Kubrick’s Space Odyssey (and the main characters of these movies spend quite a long time on their own as well). 7.5 out of 10; could be better, but still a solid job.