

# Marooned on Mars



By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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Extreme solitude tests human endurance in *The Martian*, with Matt Damon as an astronaut who becomes a spaced-out Robinson Crusoe on Mars when his crew leaves him behind for dead.

An ultimate trip to Mars turns into man's worst nightmare when Damon has to find a way to survive or become a statistic. Damon, who shot to fame after his role as a paratrooper who went missing in action during World War II in *Saving Private Ryan*, and turned action-hero as Jason Bourne in the Bourne series and the war thriller *Green Zone*, steps into familiar territory as man who is lost and on a mission.



Director Ridley Scott has always been a man on a mission since changing the face of science-fiction film with *Alien*, directed the landmark science-fiction classic *Blade Runner*, and plunged a team of explorers to the darkest parts of the universe in *Prometheus* (a prequel to Scott's *Alien*).

This time there's no creepy face-hugging organisms, weird mechanical beings or a race of benevolent godlike beings, but just an astronaut, lost in space.

Tom Hanks had to find a way to survive and combat ultimate isolation in *Cast Away*, and now Damon has to brave the

cosmos. At a running time of two-and-a-half hours, *The Martian* is a challenging prospect that succeeds in holding our attention, allowing us to share the intimacy of loneliness, and grasp the fear of dire desolation. And as Damon's character proclaims in *The Martian*: "I'm going to science the shit out of this planet," and he does, with several daredevil stunts filled with humour and pathos.



*The Martian* allows us to question our mortality and the importance of loyalty towards those who share our dreams. Don't spoil the adventure by knowing the ending or too much about the story. Just take a trip to Mars. It's well worth it.

## Behind the scenes

Sitting among the rocks and dirt on Stage 6, Matt Damon is about to complete the final days of shooting at Korda. It's late February, and every other cast member wrapped two weeks ago. "It's just been me and Ridley on Mars," Damon jokes.

The unusual dynamic of working alone in nearly all of his scenes was a new experience for Damon, who comments: "This movie is essentially three separate but connected storylines. Watney is a Robinson Crusoe figure. I really like the character and admire the way the story celebrates the courage and ingenuity of these astronauts. As Drew (Goddard) said to me, it's a love letter to science."

Working in the gravitational orbit of Ridley Scott was another irresistible lure for Damon, who says Scott has elicited performances from actors that are "too good to be an accident. He's willing to break a rule if it buys a bigger emotional connection from the audience. He paints on a much bigger canvas than most people, and it's exciting to do things on that scale".

Damon mentions that Scott essentially had the movie in his head before shooting began, so was able to walk him through specific camera shots, coverage and set-ups. "He allows his actors to see the movie as he envisions it, which is incredibly useful for performance."

Throughout nearly five weeks of solo acting, Damon had been asked not only to carry the story, but at times a substantial amount of astronaut gear on his back. His unfailing high spirits and good humour buoyed the entire crew during some intense and strenuous moments.

Through much of shooting he says his mind would reflect on the touching lengths that people go to save Mark Watney.

"He represents more than just one life. He embodies humanity's pioneering instincts and our hopes for the future. It's been a privilege to play this character."

## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

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