Martian Adventure

Mars is very much in the news! A recent announcement by NASA informed the world that there is evidence of water on the planet. And this month sees the premiere of the new sci-fi movie ‘The Martian’. It’s a film about a future manned mission to the surface of the ‘Red Planet’.

*(Photo: Genre Films)*

For more, see pages 9 & 10

Also in this issue

The SNP — the political party aiming to restore Scottish independence is growing in popularity

Refugees — desperate men, women and children are fleeing the violence and chaos in the Middle East

Scandinavian Exile — James Hepburn, the husband of Mary, Queen of Scots is buried in Denmark. Why?
We have created a Subject Index for our subscribers in printable & searchable PDF format. It allows you to find articles on any of 23 subjects from our online archives dating back to 2003. Login to download and print our Subject Index.
THESE days the Space Age is a normal part of modern life. As you read and listen to these words astronauts are living and working on board the International Space Station, orbiting high above the Earth, and trips to and from the station are now routine. Most school children are able to tell you the name of the very first man to orbit the Earth (Yuri Gagarin) as well as the names of the first men to walk on the Moon (Neil Armstrong and Edwin ‘Buzz’ Aldrin).

The next great challenge for manned spaceflight is a journey into ‘deep space’. Even though the Moon is almost half a million kilometres away it is still relatively ‘near’. As far as the cosmos is concerned it’s in our own back garden. However, plans are already being made for a manned landing on the planet Mars some time in the 2030s.

A key part of these plans is the new Orion spacecraft currently being tested by the US. Recently, a first unmanned test flight of the new vehicle was carried out. And on board it carried a small symbol of its ‘Mars’ future. This was not a scientific experiment — it was something to do with the new sci-fi movie, ‘The Martian’! You see, in early December 2014, as the first-ever Orion spacecraft took off, the ‘cover page’ of the film script for ‘The Martian’ was placed inside the spacecraft. It was, of course, just a publicity stunt. And yet, it was also a symbol of what Orion is ultimately about.

According to 20th Century Fox, the new sci-fi film is about a manned mission to Mars sometime in the future. Astronaut Mark Watney, played by Matt Damon, is thought to be dead after a violent Martian storm, and so his fellow crewmembers leave the planet without him. But Watney is not dead! He survived, and finds himself stranded and alone on the hostile planet. With only a few supplies, he must draw upon ‘his ingenuity, wit and spirit’ to survive. He must also find a way to signal to Earth that he is alive!

The film is based on a best-selling novel and the plot involves a team of international scientists working tirelessly to bring ‘the Martian’ home. Adding to the drama, Watney’s own crewmates also plan a seemingly impossible rescue mission.

‘But Watney is not dead! He survived, and finds himself stranded and alone on the hostile planet’

continued on page 10
The idea of astronauts being stranded far from Earth is not unique. In fact, during the very first manned landing on the Moon in 1969, plans were made about what to do if the mission failed. There was a very real risk that the astronauts would crash onto the surface, or be stranded if their return rocket motor failed to start. The US president actually had a short speech prepared if the astronauts were killed or became trapped on the lunar surface. The message that was never used began:

‘Fate has ordained that the men who went to the moon to explore in peace will stay on the moon to rest in peace.

‘These brave men, Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin, know that there is no hope for their recovery. But they also know that there is hope for mankind in their sacrifice...’ And the message ended with these lines: ‘Others will follow, and surely find their way home. Man’s search will not be denied. But these men were the first, and they will remain the foremost in our hearts. For every human being who looks up at the moon in the nights to come will know that there is some corner of another world that is forever mankind.’

The film ‘The Martian’ will be in cinemas from October 2015.

For more on Mars see The School Times, February 2004 (Exploring Mars) and March 2013 (Mars by 2018?)

For more see Worksheet 2

WORDS
deep space – far from Earth orbit and our Moon
hostile – in the text, harsh
unwelcoming
ingenious – cleverness; skill
orbiting – circling; travelling round
ordained – destined;
plot – story line; film action
publicity stunt – a trick or ‘gimmick’ to grab people’s attention
sacrifice – give something; offer something (in this life itself)
stranded – trapped; cut off
survived – stayed alive; endured
symbol of – something that stands in place of something else
unique – one of a kind
vehicle – machine, especially one used for transport (in this case, a spacecraft)
wit – humour; intelligence

Questions on the text

1 What facts about manned spaceflight can most schoolchildren tell you?
2 When in the future is a manned landing on Mars planned for?
3 What ‘Martian’ object was on board the first unmanned test flight of the new Orion spacecraft?
4 According to the photo caption, when was the first ever sci-fi movie about Mars made?
5 What happens to the main character of the film ‘The Martian’? What difficult situation does he find himself in?
6 What plan was made during the first manned Moon landing in 1969?
7 As there was a risk of astronauts being … on the Moon a speech had already been prepared
8 A manned … to Mars will be far more difficult than to the Moon because of the distance and the fact that Mars has an atmosphere
9 Sending the cover page of the … script into space was a unique publicity stunt!
10 Did you know that ‘sci-fi’ is short for ‘science …’?

Key word (11 Down)

(Something to travel in)
 Feeling Heroic

Woof from Sheba!
Hello everyone, the School Times Cats are washing their paws (and coats and tails) so are far too busy to write to you. Isn’t it odd that they like washing themselves at least half of the day? Of course, that’s the half of the day when they’re not sleeping. But still, all that washing and yet they hate water, especially rain. Me, I don’t mind rain or any amount of water. In fact, the thing I like best in the whole world is swimming. The sea is such a challenge. People ask, ‘But why go into the sea? It’s so wet!’ I suppose I’m like people who climb mountains. I go into the sea ‘because it’s there’!

But, let me tell you a secret. There is another reason why I go into the sea — to rescue things. Humans have the odd habit of throwing sticks into the sea. Now, we dogs like sticks very much, especially biting them with our teeth. So sticks need to be rescued. But there are other things in the sea that need to be saved — stones. Did you know that there are lots of interesting stones under the water? Many of them are just big enough for me to bring back to shore. Doing this makes me feel good. Actually, I feel really ‘heroic’, as though I’ve done something really helpful and useful for others. I show how ‘heroic’ I feel by lying on my back and rubbing it on the stone. This is to make sure it’s dry. And sand feels good on my coat, too.

I think this all goes back to when I was a puppy and I was scared of the sea. Then one day my human went out. I didn’t like that. What if he drowned? That was the day I learned to swim and the first day I felt ‘heroic’. Oops, I’m off to the beach! See you, bye! Sheba

Questions on the story

1. What are the School Cats so busy doing that they can’t write?

2. What do the cats also spend half of their day doing?

3. What two things does Sheba like to ‘rescue’?

4. How did Sheba feel about the sea when she was a puppy?

Jumbled Words

1. A human who swims under the sea: IVDRE
2. A rather odd sea creature: SCOTPOU
3. At sea, these are big in windy weather: VESAW
4. A seaside meal in Britain: SHIF & SPIHC
5. Special type of boat: INAREBUMS
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