**Publication history:**

Originally the book was just a serial I posted a chapter at a time to my website. Once the book was done, people started requesting that I make an e-book version so they didn’t have to read it in a web browser. So I did and posted it to my site. Then other people emailed saying they want to read the e-book, but they aren’t technically savvy and don’t know how to download a file from the internet and put it on their e-reader. They requested I make a Kindle version they could just get through Amazon. So I did that as well. I set the price at Amazon’s minimum allowable price of $0.99. More people bought the book from Amazon than downloaded it for free from my website. Amazon has a truly amazing reach into the readership market.

The book sold very well and made its way up various top-seller lists on Amazon. That got the attention of Julian Pavia at Crown. He told his colleague David Fugate (a literary agent) about it. David ended up becoming my agent and Julian offered me a book deal. It was a whirlwind of activity because 20th Century Fox optioned the movie rights that same week.

**How I came up with the idea:**

I was imagining a manned Mars mission, putting it together in my mind. Naturally, you have to account for failure scenarios and have plans for what the crew could do. I realized those failure scenarios made for a pretty interesting story.

**Where did the idea for Mark’s personality come from:**

Mark is based on my own personality. Though he’s smarter and braver than I am and he doesn’t have my flaws. I guess he’s what I wish I were like.

**Why is Mark so optimistic / Why no breakdowns**

I wanted the story to focus on the problems and solutions. I didn’t want it to be a dark and depressing tale of a man’s struggle with crippling loneliness and constant stress. That’s just not the story I wanted to tell. So I decided Mark is made of sterner stuff than most people. After all, he was chosen to be on a manned Mars mission, so he’s not just some guy off the street. He beat tens of thousands of other people for that position.

**My advice to writers:**

1) You have to actually write. Daydreaming about the book you’re going to write someday isn’t writing. It’s daydreaming. Open your word processor and start writing.

2) Resist the urge to tell friends and family your story. I know it’s hard because you want to talk about it and they’re (sometimes) interested in hearing about it. But it satisfies your need for an audience, which diminishes your motivation to actually write it. Make a rule: The only way for anyone to ever hear about your stories is to read them.

3) This is the best time in history to self-publish. There’s no old-boy network between you and your readers. You can self-publish an ebook to major distributors (Amazon, Barnes and Noble, etc.) without any financial risk on your part.

**Next Novel**

I'm working on my next book now. It's a more traditional sci-fi novel with aliens, faster-than-light travel, etc. It’s tentatively titled “Zhek”.

**How much research did you do to be able to write the book?**

That’s hard to quantify, because I did the research while I was writing. It took me three years to write the book, and a large percentage of that was spent doing math and research.

**Research process**

The research effort ended up being tons and tons of Google searches and a bunch of math. I didn’t know anyone in aerospace at the time I wrote the novel, so I was on my own. But I like researching, it’s fun for me. So it wasn’t a problem.

**How involved are you in the movie process?**

Mostly my job was just to cash the check. Though they did send me the screenplay to get my opinion. They weren't required to listen to anything I had to say. They kept me updated on the production because they’re cool. And in the end, the film is very true to the book, so I'm happy.

W**ho are your favorite Authors/Books**

I grew up reading my dad’s sci-fi paperback collection, so my favorite books are the classic 1950’s and 1960’s sci-fi adventures. My favorite authors are Heinlein, Clarke, and Asimov. If I had to pick a single favorite book, I’d say “I, Robot” by Asimov.

**Balancing Science and Narration**

That was one of the biggest challenges for me. I needed the reader to understand the science behind what was going on, but I didn’t want to deluge them with facts and figures. I didn’t want the book to read like a Wikipedia article. So it was a constant balancing act to make sure the reader understood Mark’s problems without boring them to tears. I think I got away with a lot of exposition that would have been boring because of Mark’s personality and wit.

**Favorite authors**

I grew up reading Dad’s sci-fi collection, so I’m a huge fan of Heinlein, Asimov, and Clarke. They’re the writers I look up to and aspire to be like. Yes, I know, their books often don’t stand up to modern social standards of gender equality. But you have to accept they were written in a different era.

**Book Recommendations**

I recommend “Ready Player One” by Ernest Cline. For classics, I like “Tunnel in the Sky” by Heinlein, “Rama” by Clarke, and “I, Robot” by Asimov.

**Sequel**

No plans for a sequel. There’s really nowhere to go with it. Putting him in trouble again would be ridiculously implausible. Having him as a supporting character for someone else in trouble would be unsatisfying.

**Sandstorm Force**

The atmosphere of Mars is only about 1/200th the density of Earth’s. It does get 150km/h windstorms, but the inertia from the thin atmosphere is so small it would feel like a gentle breeze. So there’s just no way a storm could do that kind of damage. I knew this at the time I wrote it. I had an alternate beginning worked out where an MAV engine test causes an explosion that leads to all the problems, but it just wasn’t as cool. The Martian is a man-vs-nature story and I wanted nature to get the first punch in.

**Why no YA version:**

Random House considered a YA edition (basically the same as the current version, but with softer words in place of the profanity) but decided against it. It's a nightmare for a publisher to manage multiple versions of a title. Retailers order the wrong version, reviewers review version A but post the review for version B, etc. It creates brand confusion across the board.

**Why go to Mars:**

I believe we should have a self-sufficient human population somewhere other than Earth. So long as our entire species is on one planet, we have a chance of going extinct. It could be an asteroid, a virus, a war, or something we haven’t even imagined. But right now humanity has all her eggs in one basket. Once we colonize another world, our odds of extinction drop to effectively zero.

Mars is an ideal candidate for colonization because it has the critical elements for life in abundance: Carbon dioxide, water, and nitrogen. That, plus human waste, is all you need to grow crops and maintain a population. And it would allow that population to grow their colony indefinitely.

25 years as a computer programmer has taught me the value of backing things up.

**Why did Venkat’s Ethnicity change**

Originally, they had Irrfan Khan set to play Venkat. But he backed out at the last moment because an unexpected clause in a prior Bollywood contract made him unavailable to film during the time The Martian was being made. This happened just three weeks before they were set to start shooting. So Fox had to scramble to get a replacement for the film’s second-most-important character. They no longer had the luxury of targeting a specific ethnicity. They just had to find the best actor they could who was available for that shooting schedule. Fortunately, Chiwetel did a fantastic job as “Vincent Kapoor”. As for ethnicity, they explain in the film that he’s half-black, half-Indian. So it’s a compromise to stay as close to the source material as they could and still be plausible.