

Artemis: A Portrait of Life on the Moon

Artemis is the latest work of science fiction from the author Andy Weir. Weir also wrote *The Martian*, which I loved when I read it for the first time in high school. Given how incredible I thought *The Martian* was, I was really looking forward to diving into this new world that Weir had created. In a lot of ways, *Artemis* is very similar to *The Martian*, but it is also a unique story in its own right.

Artemis is a city on the moon that is comprised of four dome shaped structures, and it is the backdrop of the story. Weir does an excellent job of painting a vivid picture of what life on the moon may look like in the future. A perfect example of this is transportation. Because of the reduced gravity on the moon in comparison to the earth, walking is a lot less strenuous than it normally would be. Consequently, within the domes, walking has become the primary mode of transportation for most people. Instead of having winding roads and streets, Artemis has underground hallways that people can use to travel from one part of a dome to another or to a different dome entirely. Another interesting part of life on the moon is food. In the book, scientists have not yet figured out how to cultivate regular food on the moon. Because of this, the foods that most of us eat on a regular basis such as vegetables, fruits, and meat all have to be flown onto the moon from Earth. As you can imagine, this is a very expensive and time-consuming process, so real food is priced very highly on the moon. So highly that a large percentage of the inhabitants of Artemis can't afford to buy real food on a regular basis. Instead, they eat something called gunk, which is a combination of dried algae and flavor extracts. Since gunk can be mass produced on the moon, it is priced much cheaper than real food. Unfortunately, as the name may suggest, gunk also tastes awful. This is one example of how the wealth divide on Artemis vastly changes the experience of its inhabitants. One might assume that the majority of people that live on the moon would be rich, but that notion would exclude all of the everyday workers who are vital to building and maintaining the infrastructure of a city. Though these people make up a large percentage of the city's inhabitants, they don't make nearly enough money to afford to live in the luxurious parts of Artemis. Instead, they are forced to reside in the overcrowded areas of the city in cramped apartments with communal bathrooms.

We experience the world of Artemis through the eyes of a 26-year-old woman named Jasmine, or Jazz for short. Weir has a talent for crafting very likeable characters, and Jazz is no exception. From the inception of the book, it quickly becomes clear how charming and charismatic Jazz is. Another notable characteristic of Jazz are her witty quips and comebacks. Though these are amusing at first, they gradually become stale simply due to the frequency with which they're used. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that virtually all of the characters in the book also feel the need to employ the same brand of witty humor as Jazz. Although I understand that Weir wants to keep the tone of the book generally lighthearted, I think that his decision to use the same types of jokes over and over again was a very uncreative one. Excluding this issue, I found Jazz to be a very interesting character. She works as a delivery woman, which helps her to carry out her more illicit job as a smuggler. Because of the safety regulations of Artemis, there are certain items that are either strictly prohibited or only allowed to be used in very specific scenarios. One of these materials are items that can start a fire or that are highly flammable. If a fire starts and gets out of control in one of the domes, it would be a major problem because there are only a limited amount of areas of safety given that people can't just run out of the dome onto the moon's surface. Nevertheless, some people love to smoke, and they will pay handsomely to be able to enjoy a cigar while they're on the moon. Jazz takes advantage of this desire for people to enjoy the things that they did back on earth, and this is how she gets involved in the main conflict that takes place in the book.

The plot summary of this book describes it as a "heist story set on the moon," but I think it's more accurate to categorize it as a story of corporate sabotage. I'm not going to speak in depth about this aspect of the book in order to avoid giving away major plot details, but I will say that this part of the story is extremely compelling and engaging. The majority of the book is dedicated to this plot point, and once things start moving, they never slow down. Consequently, the book had a great pace to it that made me want to keep reading for hours and hours on end. In a lot of the books that I've read, the author will end a chapter on a cliffhanger so that the reader is left in a state of suspense and feels more compelled to read the next chapters. Although Weir does this to a certain extent, before each new chapter he dedicates a few pages to letters that Jazz and her friend who still lives on Earth, Kelvin, regularly send to each other. At first, I worried that these letters would break the momentum of the story, but the opposite turned out to be true. Even though Jazz is 26 years old at the beginning of the book, the letters begin when Jazz and

Kelvin first started talking to each other, which is when they were both 9 years old. Through the use of the letters, Weir provides key details about Jazz as a character and why she has become the person that she is. Furthermore, these letters introduced a new level of tension and intrigue into the plot without negatively affecting the pace of the story that was taking place in the book's present day.

The last aspect of *Artemis* that I'd like to discuss is the use of science in the book. I've always been deeply interested in science, and I found the scientific explanations in this book very fascinating. Although they were often very detailed, they were explained in a way that I could easily understand without feeling the need to rely on outside sources for further clarification. The most exciting explorations of science in the book take place when Jazz has to problem solve in order to give herself the best chance of sabotaging one of the corporations that operates on the moon. The book follows her thought process as she devises her plan step by step, and each page dedicated to this endeavor is both scientifically rich and enthralling. I'd also like to commend Weir for striking a near perfect balance between character development and scientific explanations. Though science is an integral part of this book's plot, the characters are what drive the story, and Weir spends ample time fleshing out the characters and revealing their strengths and their vulnerabilities.

I thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent reading *Artemis*, and I can't wait to see what Andy Weir writes next.