



Mars, Inc.: The Billionaire's Club

Ben Bova

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How do you get to the Red Planet? Not via a benighted government program trapped in red tape and bound by budget constrictions, that's for sure. No, what it will take is a helping of adventure, science, corporate powerplays, a generous dollop of seduction—both in and out of the boardroom—and money, money, money!

Art Thrasher knows this. He is a man with a driving vision: send humans to Mars. The government has utterly failed, but Thrasher has got the plan to accomplish such a feat: form a “club” of billionaires to chip in one billion a year until the dream is accomplished. But these are men and women who are tough cookies, addicted to a profitable bottom-line, and disdainful of pie-in-the-sky dreamers who want to use their cash to make somebody else's dreams come true.

But Thrasher is different from the other dreamers in an important regard: he's a billionaire himself, and the president of a successful company. But it's going to take all his wiles as a captain of industry and master manipulator of business and capital to overcome setbacks and sabotage—and get a rocket full of scientist, engineers, visionaries, and dreamers on their way to the Red Planet.

The man for the job has arrived. Art Thrasher is prepared to do whatever it takes to humans on Mars—or die trying!

Mars, Inc.: The Billionaire's Club Details

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Author : Ben Bova

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From Reader Review Mars, Inc.: The Billionaire's Club for online ebook

Patrick Tucker says

This book is an interesting but sometimes boring and predictable character piece on a man's quest to get people to Mars. I picked this up without any knowledge of what the story was about and was only slightly disappointed. It was not really exciting and some of the science and business was not very sound but I would call it a passable possibility for humanity getting to Mars.

This is not a bad book but do not go in to reading it thinking you will be on the edge of your seat. There is a lot of "boardroom action" and "business dealings" plus some pretty interesting ideas on rockets and space flight.

Kami Neely says

At times it seemed as good if it had been written in the 50's and simply had some updates on modern technology, particularly in regards to women. More disappointing was the lack of depth to the story. The events simply tracked; not enough emotion or background to make me care about any of the characters.

Charlie says

Pretty good book - author is super sexist, though.

Chris says

My introduction to Ben Bova was 'Mars', and I've been slowly working my way through the Grand Tour books. Although this book isn't part of that story it caught my eye at the bookstore.

Absolutely loved reading every page. While the story was serious, I enjoyed the lighter tone the book had.

Tsana Dolichva says

Mars, Inc (subtitle: The Billionaire's Club) by Ben Bova is a new standalone novel not set in the same universe as his Grand Tour solar system books. There were a few confusing moments where I wasn't sure about the universe, particularly as someone called Yamagata showed up and didn't do anything that went against the Yamagata in the Grand Tour books. But maybe it was an homage. Or something.

I had previously only read Grand Tour books by Bova and I was hoping that Mars, Inc would be as sciencey as some of those were, particularly the Mars trilogy, which I enjoyed. Alas, it was not to be. It's not that the

science in Mars, Inc is soft, but it's not a book about science or scientists. It's a book about a businessman. It's a how-to guide for funding and organising a crewed mission to Mars. I am firmly of the opinion that science is significantly more interesting than business, so I can't say I found this an overly interesting read. It wasn't boring enough for me to stop reading, but still, fans of science fiction beware.

Being a book primarily about rich businessmen, it is heavily populated by old white guys and packed full of much of the unpleasantness that entails. And why couldn't there have been even one female billionaire in the mix? Oh, that's right, women can only be secretaries and journalists. It's a very sexist book, with references to tokenism sprinkled throughout. Calling a black woman a "two-for" (or however it was spelled) and a "dark-skinned Latina" a three in one is distinctly not cool. I could almost have forgiven it if it was clear that the characters were the ones being dicks, but there was too much of that sort of thing in the narration (as in, the parts not clearly in Thrasher's head). There was no need, for example, to point out that in a meeting with the US President and others, the President's secretary was the only woman in the room. Obviously it wasn't necessary to set the scene up that way in the first place, but pointing it out did not help. Far too often the (very minority) presence of women is pointed out in a self-congratulatory way by the characters. They "even" have two female astronauts (out of seven). Someone give them a medal.

(Also aren't secretaries in the sense of assistants and organisers usually called PAs or EAs these days? They certainly are in Australia.)

Thrasher is a "reprobate", which is the euphemism of choice for sleaze in Mars, Inc. There is a supposedly wholesome romantic relationship "developing" throughout the book but I found it nauseating, especially when it was the female character hero-worshipping him for no clear reason, before he'd even begun to think of her as an option. (And then he keeps calling her "kid" even after they get together? Ewww.)

There are a lot more instances of rankling sexism, but it's been a few days since I finished reading (I kept using jetlag as an excuse to put off writing this review) and the reading was done on Kobo which doesn't lend itself to easy highlighting. Suffices to say, what I've mentioned in this review is not at all exhaustive.

It's not that I didn't have previous evidence of Bova writing sexist stuff, but I had the futile hope that, since not all of his other books (that I've read) were that bad, maybe this wouldn't be either. (I mean, Saturn and Titan made me a lot angrier than the other Mars books, for example.) I was wrong. The Old White Man aspect of the plot didn't help either.

Rampant sexism aside, the plot was fairly readable, despite being about businessmen rather than scientists. There's an organisational aspect and the quest for funding, there's a bit of intrigue thrown in, there are Thrasher's personal issues with which woman he wants to sleep with which night, there's a side story about rocket powered commercial flight... (the latter being driven by Thrasher's desire to not spend too much time flying between cities, a sentiment I found myself sympathising with deeply as I sat in a jet and crossed threeish continents.) Plotwise there's a lot going on, enough to offset the fact that it's not science-based SF. It's the variety of the plot that stopped me throwing the Kobo aside in frustration. Well, that and the fact that most of the ARCs I actually wanted to read were PDFs and those don't Kobo well.

If you've gotten this far through the review, you'll have gathered that I didn't enjoy Mars, Inc. Because of the problems with it, I feel I can only recommend it to readers interested in a how-to guide for getting to Mars in the near future. Although I've said it's low on science, what science there is is accurately described. I don't think I'll be picking up any more Ben Bova books, and certainly not in the near future.

You can read more of my reviews on my blog.

Cynthia Dalton says

Tech billionaire pressures others into funding private exploration of Mars.

Joseph says

Quick read, nicely paced. Reminds me of Heinlein's "The Man Who Sold The Moon", which may explain why I liked it so much.

Sarah says

So should you read Mars, Inc.? Sure. While this might not be SciFi enough for some readers, the ideas that Bova plays with and presents to readers are pretty priceless. Mars, Inc. left me thinking about our space industry and wondering what the future holds for it. I think that is probably the point of the novel. Bova wasn't writing some huge manifesto regarding space exploration, nor was he trying to write the next SciFi masterwork. I think he was taking our space industry and looking at it from a different perspective to try to get readers to do the same thing. It's kind of clunky, kind of weirdly paced, and I think the characterization leaves a little to be desired, but the guarantee is that it will make you look at things a little differently. Agree or disagree, sometimes a different perspective is refreshing and exciting.

Read my full review here:

<http://www.bookwormblues.net/2013/12/...>

Koeur says

<http://koeur.wordpress.com/2013/10/15...>

Publishers Description: How do you get to the Red Planet? Not via a benighted government program trapped in red tape and bound by budget constrictions, that's for sure. No, what it will take is a helping of adventure, science, corporate powerplays, a generous dollop of seduction—both in and out of the boardroom—and money, money, money!

Review: First off, the cover art is really sad. Poor showing for the Scifi genre with Bova's name attached. A behemoth ship being built above Earth or hovering over Mars would have been much better. Instead we have a suit in a boardroom with a picture of the Mars landing. Weeeee!!!!

This was a pretty fun read. Thrasher is just great throughout the novel. Well developed in a shallow skirt

chasing sort of way. The billionaires were presented as forming a set of very eclectic personalities, but we never saw the development of these personalities which would have made for a very interesting novel. Instead we follow Thrasher around the world on his forays to unite the world in his quest to realize a Mars landing with a live crew. Throw in some hot chicks here and there, either as virtual eye candy or for Thrashers pleasure and we start to get one-dimensional.

There have been some really good scifi novels that embraced the visual antics of sex, kind of like being there too. Bova intimates that sex is occurring without the descriptors. Like, you just have to take his word that it happened. If your going to spend a fair amount of time describing women that Thrasher interacts with or goes to bed with, then go all the way with the scene development. It will not cheapen the novel. If Thrasher has a mild love interest and is not as focused on women, then play it thin on the scenes.

This novel is in the Scifi genre but I would say that it is fiction. There is no culmination with the actual landing of Mars. There are no aliens, bacteria, ancient structures or hidden water caches underground. It is an entertaining novel about the fiscal/political construct to achieve Mars. It is fun and insightful with good writing but not awe inspiring.

Julie says

Not much plot and the tension was forced. Disappointing.

Specialk says

Wow. Never thought the day would come that I DNF'd a Ben Bova book halfway through (pg. 167).

I think I understand what Bova was trying to do - emulate the sci-fi style of the 60s and 70s, but with a present day setting, cast, and plot. And it could have worked...if I cared.

The catch is that this book isn't sci-fi. It's Business Fiction. We don't get to talk much about even the science of getting to Mars, we get to talk about the business of the science of getting to Mars. Which I suppose in today's climate is the more poignant topic, but since we're skimming and moving at a fast pace in the book, we don't get anything of interest. Just a chauvinistic character (which didn't bother me in and of itself, we don't need every main character to be politically correct), whining about how much money and paperwork he's going through to get to Mars. And for no good reason. Even when the character mulls over why he's doing this, he doesn't come up with anything of substance.

Bova didn't phone this one in. He texted it. Maybe dictated it to Siri, or gave her the basic premise and said "Now flesh it out to a 300 page novel".

Spoiler alert here - we don't even GET to Mars. Oh we get to launch. But that's it. So if you thought this would at all be Andy Weir's superb "The Martian" with a business-flaired start on how we got the program going....you are going to be really, really disappointed.

Scratch that. You're going to be disappointed no matter what.

Stephen Deane says

Wasn't really what I was hoping for. It was a much longer version of *The Man Who Sold the Moon* by Heinlein, without the payoff of the return voyage. It really didn't make me wishing for the return of the Golden Age, and wasn't something that kept me gripped. All in all, an ok read, but I expected much more from Ben Bova.

Bob Milne says

With a title like *Mars, Inc.* and the name Ben Bova attached to it, you would think you'd know what to expect. Personally, I was excited to get my hands on an ARC, and went into this with high hopes. As much as I tried to hold onto those hopes, though, the 'real' story I expected to find beginning in the next chapter never materialized.

This was so very much not what I was expecting from a master like Ben Bova. It felt like a throwback to 60s and 70s pulp sci-fi, but not in a good way. It was cheap, sexist, and almost as lazy in respect to its business and its politics as it was smart in respect to its science - and we don't get nearly enough of that. What's more, there's no payoff, no grand spectacle, just the fact of a launch to end the book that we don't even get to see, much less experience.

Disappointing in just about every respect. I do wonder if there's a sequel to come, but I have neither the patience nor the interest for that.

Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins

Jennifer says

The best science fiction is actually just a few steps away from reality. Communication with aliens, warp drive, inter-species wars...all that is fine for movies, but when it comes to reading science fiction, I want to read the stories that could happen. Given Ben Bova's reputation as a science fiction writer, I expected this to actually BE science fiction. I've never read his work before, so I don't know if this is indicative of his other books, but I don't think I'm going to jump in to find out.

Mars, Inc. tells the story of Art Thrasher, a man determined to send humans to the red planet so that he can let those back on Earth experience their adventures via virtual reality, thereby making millions through selling his company's VR equipment.

Mars, Inc. starts off sensibly enough, with Thrasher getting the money men together and assembling the team to make his vision into reality. There are a few references to the design of the ship that will make the trip. Beyond that, the book barely touches on the mechanics of the Mars mission or even on the astronauts and scientists involved. Instead, we get sabotage, an attempted corporate takeover and political wrangling over where to do the launches. All of this might be more interesting if Bova had created Thrasher as any kind of

sympathetic protagonist. Instead, we get a man whose main concern is how he's going to get laid each night.

The novel seems to be written at about a sixth-grade level, and there are several typos. In one glaring continuity error, the fifty-five-year old Thrasher remembers back to sitting as a child in his college professor father's lecture hall, where students were texting as his father talked. Really?

Despite the cover work portraying men planting flags on Mars, the book ends with the launch. The subtitle makes me wonder if this is meant to be the first novel in a series. I doubt I'll return for more.

Daniel says

I received an electronic advanced reading copy of this from the publisher through NetGalley.

The genre denoted SF is most commonly called science fiction, but some prefer speculative fiction instead. Either way, a precise definition of what constitutes science fiction can be as elusive as defining what constitutes life. As a scientist, I've always wanted more fiction that simply took place in the world of science, with scientist characters and problems - nothing far-reaching in speculation, nothing out-of-this world. Not even focused on astronomical issues per se, as a lot of sci fi is, causing some, like Margaret Atwood, to eschew the genre term merely due to this connotation of spaceships and intergalactic exploits.

Mars Inc. comes close to being a science fiction book about getting the process of science done; it may be more accurate to say that Bova's new novel is about technology more than science. Sadly, the cover as I see it here (the electronic edition has no cover) brings to mind far more cliched science fiction space-faring than is in this novel. Instead the action is all on Earth. It is about getting to space again, about finding a way to move human enterprise and human exploration in the universe forward in a society that is increasingly hostile (at least politically) to doing this through public means, ie the government.

Bova's protagonist is a wealthy businessman with a soft spot and dream for increased space exploration, and he is committed to getting private sources (other rich men) to get it done, rather than the 'damned government.' This set up is intriguing and Bova uses it to explore all the difficulties his character has in getting this dream to come to fruition amid hostile and greedy business that is not out for the benefit of humanity. Despite the character's hatred of government and belief that private capital can do better, in the end success is more due to his own tenaciousness against adversity and one gets the sense that if he were more open about governmental public works, and a little more familiar with that system as he is for private enterprise, he could have fought just as hard in that sector and gotten similar results.

The novel therefore is not about the triumph of private income over public works, but rather the triumph of this particular character in using his own unique position and talents to get a job done and realize his dreams of scientific/technological possibilities - getting human beings to Mars. In these general respects Bova succeeds really well, and the novel's plot is both captivating and believable.

However, on the negative side, the novel suffers from being a bit too simplistic in the non-scientific or business aspects of the plot, it fits assuredly into the 'genre' mold. The characters are primarily all male, one major female character is a secretary, the other is a scientist. Both are primarily used as predictable love interests, and in the case of the scientist, that is pretty much her only role. The novel doesn't pretend to be anything other than what it is however, and what Bova is setting out to do here, he manages to accomplish well.

If you like SF heavy on the process of getting science and technology to move forward or have an interest in the space program then this is assuredly a novel you'd want to check out. If you are looking for action on an alien world or something more complex than simple genre fare that emphasizes technology over other matters social, then it's best to look elsewhere.
