NEWS LESSON

The Space Adventure That Makes Curiosity the Hero



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you rather explore space or the bottom of the sea?
2. What makes a film about science exciting?
3. Who would you want beside you when a plan goes wrong?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**stakes**	☐
2	**extraterrestrial**	☐
3	**extravagantly**	☐
4	**speculation**	☐
5	**sensibility**	☐
6	**domination**	☐
7	**affecting**	☐
8	**trade-off**	☐

A	a person's way of reacting to and judging things such as art or humour
B	what can be won or lost in a situation
C	control over other people or groups
D	guessing about something without knowing the facts
E	a loss in one area accepted in return for a gain in another
F	in a way that is exaggerated and goes beyond what is normal
G	coming from or existing outside Earth
H	causing strong feelings, especially sadness or sympathy

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Ryan Gosling's reluctant science teacher saves the world by testing ideas, not firing weapons. How much of the film's science is real, and does it matter?

1 Hollywood has destroyed Earth often enough for audiences to recognise the warning signs. The music swells and a reluctant hero must save civilisation. Project Hail Mary begins with similarly apocalyptic stakes, but its unlikely saviour is a science teacher who wakes aboard an unfamiliar spacecraft with almost no memory of his mission. Released in March 2026, the film adapts Andy Weir's 2021 novel and stars Ryan Gosling as Ryland Grace. His survival depends on the slow, messy work of figuring things out.

2 The crisis is extravagantly imagined. An extraterrestrial microorganism, known as Astrophage, is draining energy from the Sun and threatening Earth's future. Grace has been dispatched towards a distant star system in the hope of discovering why it appears to have escaped the same fate. Instead, much of the suspense lies in experimentation: forming hypotheses, making errors, checking measurements and occasionally discovering that an apparently clever solution has created an entirely new problem. Here, science is a way of responding to uncertainty.

3 That approach reflects Weir's reputation for painstaking technical research, established by The Martian. The filmmakers consulted NASA, and several astronomical details have recognisable foundations in reality. Tau Ceti and 40 Eridani, for instance, are genuine nearby star systems. Yet the central mechanism remains firmly in the realm of invention. Astrophage would have to capture and store quantities of stellar energy that, as astrophysicists have pointed out, are hard to square with established physics. The film therefore occupies an intriguing middle ground: scientifically conscientious about some details, gloriously implausible about the threat that sets everything in motion.

4 Its more compelling speculation concerns communication. Grace encounters an alien, nicknamed Rocky, whose physical nature and way of perceiving the world differ radically from his own. Their developing relationship supplies the story with both comic relief and an unexpectedly affecting emotional core. Rather than turning first contact into a contest for domination, the narrative treats it as a practical problem requiring patience, humility and mutual trust. Neither can assume that familiar methods will work for the other.

5 Directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller bring a playful sensibility to material that could otherwise become forbiddingly technical. The resulting film earned more than $680 million worldwide and prompted lively disagreement among critics. Admirers celebrated its warmth, intelligence and exuberant humour; detractors found the tonal shifts distracting and some of the sentiment overly emphatic. Adapting the novel also meant boiling down lengthy scientific explanations into visual sequences, an unavoidable trade-off between the pleasures of reading a calculation and watching a character discover its consequences.

6 For all its fictional physics, Project Hail Mary makes a serious argument about the value of intellectual curiosity. Its central figure is frightened, frequently wrong and dependent on knowledge he cannot possess alone. The film's optimism does not come from the comforting assumption that everything will work out, but from the conviction that people can make progress by testing their assumptions and learning to cooperate. Hollywood's latest attempt to save the world hinges on curiosity and cooperation, making it, among other things, a spirited defence of thinking before acting.

Sources: Scientific American. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Critics agreed with one another about the film's tone. T F NG
2. Grace could succeed using only his own knowledge. T F NG
3. The novel's scientific explanations were shortened for the film. T F NG
4. Andy Weir helped the directors adapt his novel. T F NG
5. The film takes more care over some scientific details than over others. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

apocalyptic **detractors** **dispatched** **emphatic** **hypotheses** **painstaking** **reluctant** **unwieldy**

1. Cataloguing the manuscripts was a _____ task that took the archivists three years.
2. Disaster films often show _____ visions of cities in flames and collapsing governments.
3. The minister gave an _____ denial, insisting the rumours were completely false.
4. Even the programme's fiercest _____ admitted that the acting was superb.
5. Rescue teams were _____ to the flooded region within hours.
6. Scientists form _____ and then design experiments to test them.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Weir's strict _____ to scientific detail is well known. (ADHERE)
2. The jokes seemed _____ to some viewers, given the extinction-level stakes. (APPROPRIATE)
3. Physicists have long pointed to the _____ of an organism storing so much energy. (PLAUSIBLE)
4. A scientist's _____ to admit a mistake can slow a whole project. (RELUCTANT)
5. The novel contains _____ explanations of every calculation. (EXHAUST)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many C1 phrasal verbs are fixed chunks with a following preposition (square with, shy away from). Learn the whole chunk, not just the verb.

apart **away** **on** **out** **over** **through** **with**

1. The film's treatment of the threat does not square _____ what physicists know about stars.
2. The drama hinges _____ the fragile partnership between a teacher and an alien.
3. Some viewers felt the film glossed _____ the technical difficulty of travelling between stars.
4. Few space missions in fiction pan _____ the way their planners hoped.
5. Unlike most blockbusters, the film does not shy _____ from long scenes of quiet problem-solving.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Would an ordinary person make a more interesting hero than a superhero?
2. What could make people trust someone very different from them?
3. Which everyday skill might be surprisingly useful in space?

9 Role-play: the book or the film first?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the reader
You want your friend to read the novel before you both see the film. Explain why the book is worth the time. Listen, then agree on a plan.

Student B · the film fan
You want to see the film this weekend, before people tell you the story. Explain why. Listen, then agree on a plan.

Useful phrases

I'd rather read the book first.
That's a fair point, but it's a long book.
What if we watched it and then read it?
I don't want anyone to spoil the ending.
I'm not sure the film can explain all the science.
Let's agree on a plan.

Afterwards, tell the class what you decided and why.

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 B · 2 G · 3 F · 4 D · 5 A · 6 C · 7 H · 8 E

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 F · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 painstaking · 2 apocalyptic · 3 emphatic · 4 detractors · 5 dispatched · 6 hypotheses

6 Word forms

1 adherence · 2 inappropriate · 3 implausibility · 4 reluctance · 5 exhaustive

7 Language focus

1 with · 2 on · 3 over · 4 out · 5 away

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