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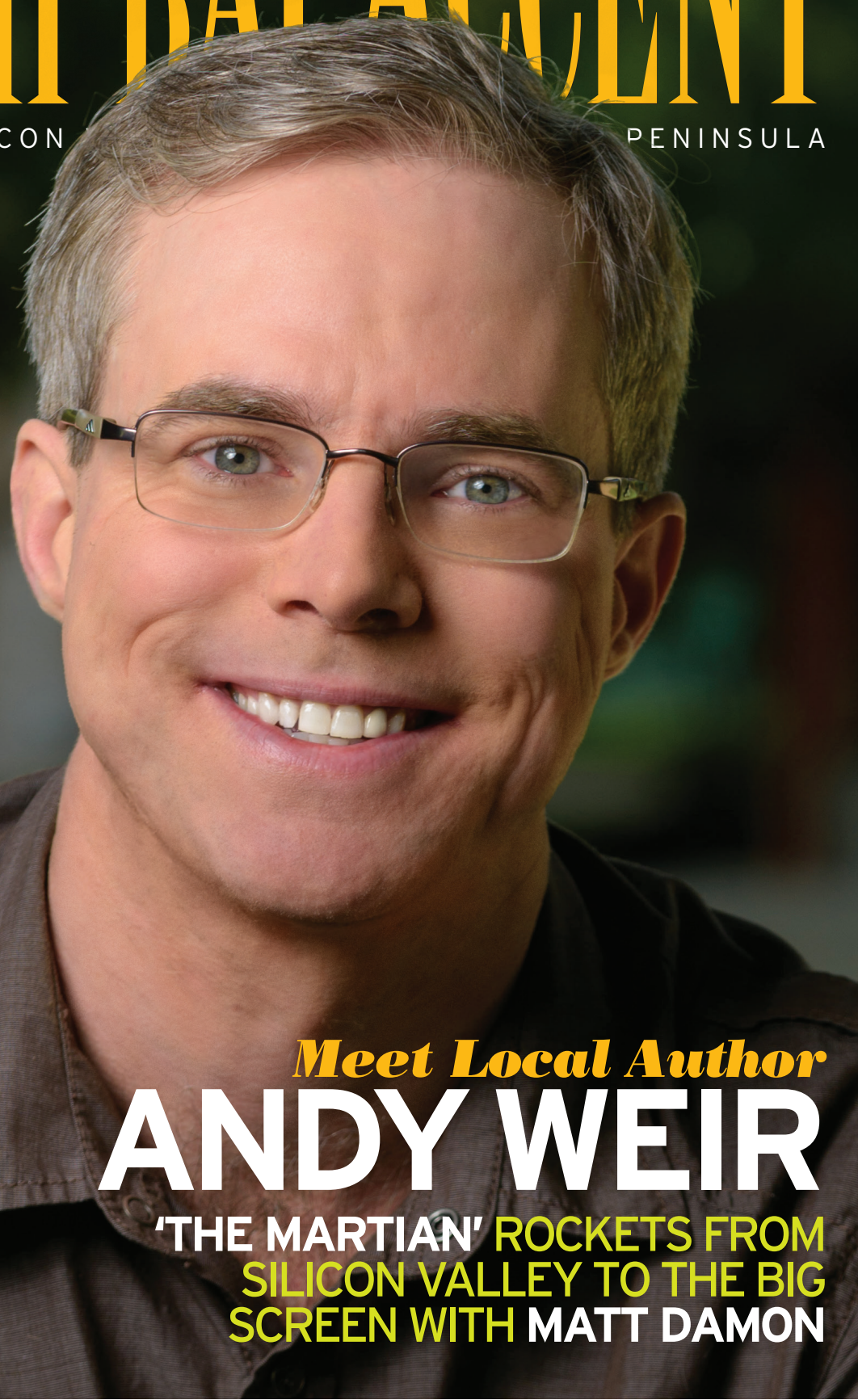
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Meet Local Author

ANDY WEIR

'THE MARTIAN' ROCKETS FROM
SILICON VALLEY TO THE BIG
SCREEN WITH MATT DAMON

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THE MAN FROM MARS

MOUNTAIN VIEW AUTHOR **ANDY WEIR'S**
"THE MARTIAN" GETS A BOOST FROM
MATT DAMON

Long before he became a top-selling author with a big-budget Hollywood contract in his back pocket, Andy Weir was a kid with a known knack for solving problems. His mother, Janet Tuer, fondly recounts a time when 11-year-old Weir's MacGyver-like skills particularly came in handy. One day, while living in Milpitas, Tuer locked her keys in the car. As Tuer stood around considering her options, Weir looked at the Honda Civic and announced, "Wait, I think I can fix it." »

BY JULIE VALLONE

PORTRAIT BY CHRIS SCHMAUCH | GROOMING BY ROSE HILL





“HE WAS A **HANDFUL**. HE WAS THE KID WHO WANTED TO **CROSS THE STREET**. HE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT WAS **ON THE OTHER SIDE.**” -JANET TUER, ANDY WEIR'S MOTHER

“Andy runs around, sees a little part of the window open, and says, ‘OK, cool,’” Tuer recalls. “Then he gets a stick and gets another longer stick and somehow uses them to open the driver-side door. I thought ‘Wow, I don’t have to call triple A! Andy was always a problem solver.”

Weir didn’t know when he created the protagonist for his debut novel, “The Martian,” he was writing for Matt Damon’s next starring role. Based largely on himself, Weir shares many traits—including a wry sense of humor—with his lead character, Mark Watney. His sarcasm, combined with heavy doses of suspense and hard science, helped “The Martian” skyrocket to the top of the New York Times best-seller list. It also piqued the interest of an A-list cast, including Jessica Chastain and Jeff Daniels, as well as executives at 20th Century Fox who optioned the film.

With seasoned screenwriter Drew Goddard (who penned the script for 2013’s

“World War Z”) and space-centric director Ridley Scott (of “Alien” fame) on board, the Oct. 2nd release has been cleared for liftoff.

In the book, Watney finds himself stranded on Mars, left by his crewmates, who thought he was dead. Through remarkable intelligence, resourcefulness and a whole lot of math, Watney devises a series of innovative strategies to survive in hopes of one day being rescued. He communicates his struggles through log entries, which give detailed accounts of the day’s activities. Most of the entries, along with his dialogues with scientists at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory, are seasoned with Watney’s offbeat wit:

JPL: What we can see of your planned cut looks good. We’re assuming the other side is identical. You’re cleared to start drilling.

WATNEY: That’s what she said.

JPL: Seriously, Mark? Seriously?

Judging from a recent interview with Weir and accounts from friends and family, Watney’s sense of humor is a lot like Weir’s.

“The sarcastic wit has always been there,” says Casey Grimm, who has been friends with Weir for almost three decades. “As teenagers, we were the only ones who could tolerate each other. But he’s gotten much easier to be around now.”

Weir acknowledges that Watney is a version of himself, or at least the self he wants to be.

“His personality is pretty much based on my own real-world personality, but he’s the idealized version of me,” says Weir. “He has all the qualities that I like about myself and none of the things I don’t like about myself. He’s kind of the person I wish I were.”

“I think that’s a general theme in fiction,” Weir adds. “Every main character is someone the author wants to be, or someone the author wants to screw. For the record, I want to be Watney.”

It’s been quite a whirlwind for Weir, with interest from publishers and studios all surfacing within the past couple of years. But initially, it all sounded just too good to be true, he says.

“At first, all these things were just phone calls and emails, not meetings or anything like that,” Weir says. “In the back of my mind, all I could think was, ‘Is this a scam? Is it just like a bunch of people pretending to be Fox and Random House?’”

Weir, who now lives in Mountain View, was not about to give up his day job and longtime, successful career as a computer programmer without being sure.

“I was waiting for the other shoe to drop, for them to say ‘Oh, we just need 10,000 bucks for ... whatever.’”



But then the book and movie people started sending him checks, “and I thought ‘Well, if it’s a scam, they’re not very good at it.’”

Today, Weir, who has been writing science fiction as a hobby since he was a teenager, says he doesn’t have many dreams left to come true.

“Well,” he reconsiders, “I’m not dating Anna Kendrick yet. I could work on that.”

NO INSTANT SUCCESS

Dreams aside, Weir was not exactly an overnight success.

Even before starting “The Martian,” Weir started attracting a following on his

Martian” by publishing a chapter at a time as a serial on his blog. At the request of fans, he decided to publish it as a Kindle book for 99 cents.

That’s when it really started to take off. The book quickly made it to the Kindle best-sellers list, where it attracted the attention of Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House, and later, 20th Century Fox.

Weir, who describes the book as ‘Apollo 13’ on steroids,” says he got the idea while just sitting around one day, imagining how a manned mission to Mars would work.

“It wasn’t for a book or anything. I was just wondering how we’d do it with

an electrical engineer (mom). His parents divorced when he was 8 years old.

It was obvious early on that Weir was no average kid.

“He was a handful. He was the kid who wanted to cross the street. He wanted to know what was on the other side,” Tuer recalls.

“He was always curious, always intelligent. Very verbal, energetic and interested in everything,” she adds. “And quite early he started being really funny.”

Tuer remembers Weir being surprisingly good at just about everything. She’d take him to the ice rink for the first time, and he’d put on his little pair of skates and

Author Andy Weir’s new status earned him an invitation to Mars Week at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas where he toured Mission Control.



WEIR DIDN'T KNOW WHEN HE CREATED THE PROTAGONIST FOR HIS **DEBUT NOVEL, "THE MARTIAN,"** HE WAS WRITING THE BASIS FOR **MATT DAMON'S** NEXT STARRING ROLE.



blog site with works like “The Egg,” a short story that inspired a number of YouTube videos.

“People say, ‘This guy came out of nowhere.’ But I actually spent 10 years building up an audience,” says Weir. “I had accumulated about 3,000 readers, and they were the kernel that started the snowball on “The Martian.” I don’t think there’s really a shortcut. You need a large enough group of people to start the word-of-mouth stuff. That was absolutely critical.”

Weir introduced his readers to “The

today’s technology. Then I said ‘OK, what if this broke? How do we make sure the crew doesn’t die? And then what if these things break? Well, I suppose they could repurpose this.’ And with all these failure scenarios, I thought, ‘Hmmm. This might make a pretty interesting story.’ So I created an unfortunate protagonist and subjected him to all of them,” Weir explains.

SMART AND RESTLESS

Weir arrived on Planet Earth in 1972, the son of a particle physicist (dad) and

scoot across the ice with no fear. She says he also has a beautiful singing voice, plays keyboard and composes music.

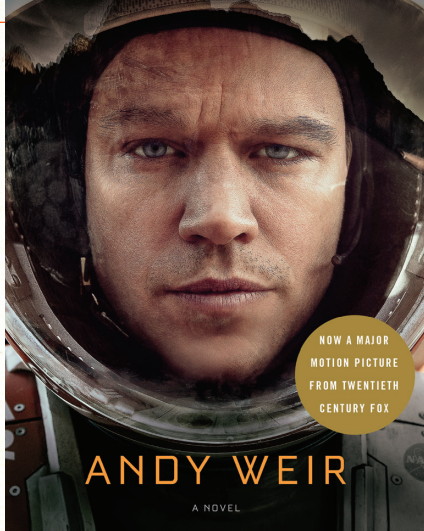
“He’s interested in a lot of things, not just the nerdy science stuff,” she says.

Weir was usually at the top of his class, and in junior high, he was selected for his school’s gifted and talented program, but he was also the guy who always talked in class and got restless pretty easily. It was then that he found longtime friend Casey Grimm, who was of a similar ilk.

“We were both creative sorts, and

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

THE MARTIAN



X EXCERPT

LOG ENTRY: SOL 6

I'm pretty much f****d.

That's my considered opinion.

F****d.

Six days into what should be the greatest two months of my life, and it's turned into a nightmare.

I don't even know who'll read this. I guess someone will find it eventually. Maybe a hundred years from now.

For the record . . . I didn't die on Sol 6. Certainly the rest of the crew thought I did, and I can't blame them. Maybe there'll be a day of national mourning for me, and my Wikipedia page will say, "Mark Watney is the only human being to have died on Mars."

And it'll be right, probably. 'Cause I'll surely die here. Just not on Sol 6 when everyone thinks I did.

Let's see . . . where do I begin?

The Ares Program. Mankind reaching out to Mars to send people to another planet for the very first time and expand the horizons of humanity blah, blah, blah. The Ares 1 crew did their thing and came back heroes. They got the parades and fame and love of the world.

Ares 2 did the same thing, in a different location on Mars. They got a firm handshake and a hot cup of coffee when they got home.

Ares 3. Well, that was my mission. Okay, not mine per se. Commander Lewis was in charge. I was just one of her crew. Actually, I was the very lowest ranked member of the crew. I would only be "in command" of the mission if I were the only remaining person.

What do you know? I'm in command.

I wonder if this log will be recovered before the rest of the crew die of old age. I presume they got back to Earth all right. Guys, if you're reading this: It wasn't your fault. You did what you had to do. In your position I would have done the same thing. I don't blame you, and I'm glad you survived.

I guess I should explain how Mars missions work, for any layman

who may be reading this. We got to Earth orbit the normal way, through an ordinary ship to Hermes. All the Ares missions use Hermes to get to and from Mars. It's really big and cost a lot so NASA built only one.

Once we got to Hermes, four additional unmanned missions brought us fuel and supplies while we prepared for our trip. Once everything was a go, we set out for Mars. But not very fast. Gone are the days of heavy chemical fuel burns and trans-Mars injection orbits.

Hermes is powered by ion engines. They throw argon out the back of the ship really fast to get a tiny amount of acceleration. The thing is, it doesn't take much reactant mass, so a little argon (and a nuclear reactor to power things) let us accelerate constantly the whole way there. You'd be amazed at how fast you can get going with a tiny acceleration over a long time.

I could regale you with tales of how we had great fun on the trip, but I won't. I don't feel like reliving it right now. Suffice it to say we got to Mars 124 days later without strangling each other.

From there, we took the MDV (Mars descent vehicle) to the surface. The MDV is basically a big can with some light thrusters and parachutes attached. Its sole purpose is to get six humans from Mars orbit to the surface without killing any of them.

And now we come to the real trick of Mars exploration: having all of our shit there in advance.

A total of 14 unmanned missions deposited everything we would need for surface operations. They tried their best to land all the supply vessels in the same general area, and did a reasonably good job. Supplies aren't nearly so fragile as humans and can hit the ground really hard. But they tend to bounce around a lot.

Naturally, they didn't send us to Mars until they'd confirmed that all the supplies had made it to the surface and their containers weren't breached. Start to finish, including supply missions, a Mars mission takes about three years. In fact, there were Ares 3 supplies en route to Mars while the Ares 2 crew were on their way home.

The most important piece of the advance supplies, of course, was the MAV. The Mars ascent vehicle. That was how we would get back to Hermes after surface operations were complete. The MAV was soft-landed (as opposed to the balloon bounce-fest the other supplies had). Of course, it was in constant communication with Houston, and if there had been any problems with it, we would have passed by Mars and gone home without ever landing.

The MAV is pretty cool. Turns out, through a neat set of chemical reactions with the Martian atmosphere, for every kilogram of hydrogen you bring to Mars, you can make thirteen kilograms of fuel. It's a slow process, though. It takes 24 months to fill the tank. That's why they sent it long before we got here.

You can imagine how disappointed I was when I discovered the MAV was gone.

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WEIR INTRODUCED HIS READERS TO "THE MARTIAN" BY PUBLISHING A CHAPTER AT A TIME AS A SERIAL ON HIS BLOG.

we were immensely bored with everything high school had to offer," explains Grimm. (The two have been friends for 30 years. Aspects of their lives are even chronicled in Weir's online comic strip, "Casey and Andy.")

Weir got his first job at age 15, working at Sandia National Laboratories in Livermore. It was part of a community relations program where he went to school for half of the day and work at Sandia for the rest. He loved it.

"I learned all the important stuff about how to socially interact with people in the office, so by the time I got out into the workforce, I was more skilled at that than many of my co-workers," he says. In fact, Weir based many of his NASA scenes and dialogues on the workplace dynamics at Sandia.

After high school, Weir studied computer science at UC San Diego but did not graduate. He was later a programmer for several software companies, such as AOL and Blizzard Entertainment, where he worked on Warcraft 2. He also worked at Palm in Sunnyvale, where he met friend and fellow engineer Wade Brown, who admired Weir's work ethic and dedication to learning new things.

"Andy is very focused, even when not writing," Brown says. "In his spare time, he's done things like writing a random orbital dynamics program. His hobby is learning, and I guess his writing helps him apply that learning."

Grimm agrees, and adds that, in some cases, Weir's superior technological abilities have given him a certain power in his work situations.

"For instance, I don't particularly like meetings, but Andy has specifically negotiated em-

ployment contracts where he can only be invited to one meeting a week," Grimm explains. "I wish I could pull that off."

READING AND WRITING

Weir came from a family of readers. His dad had a large bookshelf crammed full of science fiction books that Andy devoured, spurring his early interest in writing.

"I like daydreaming, and I thought 'I can write stories.' So I started writing crappy short fiction," Weir recalls. "I always wanted to be a writer, but I also wanted to eat regular meals and live somewhere other than under an overpass. That's why I became a computer programmer."

When writing "The Martian," Weir got feedback from both his parents. He passed many of the technical aerospace details by his physicist father and would rely on his mother as a general sounding board, calling her up and reading her new parts of the story.

"That's probably about the only thing

I contributed," Tuer says. "That and the potty mouth. That's definitely me."

That "potty mouth," whether Tuer's, Weir's or both, is an integral part of Watney's character and is present from the first line of the book ("I'm pretty much f---ed") to the end. It also provides some of the novel's most entertaining log entries and exchanges with NASA.

"I was surprised when I first read the book that there was so much swearing in it," Tuer says. "I think in real life, you hear people swear more than you see it written down, so it's more shocking when you see it written down."

To add to all his talents, Tuer says that Weir has always been "a really good guy." Evidence of that is the fact that Weir is taking Tuer as his plus one to the premiere of "The Martian" in Toronto.

But there is one problem with that: Weir is terrified of flying. That's probably the biggest difference between him and Watney. *(continued on pg. 104)*

Weir got friendly with a dextrous humanoid robot, dubbed Robonaut 2, designed at NASA Johnson Space Center.



BEST BITES

Reposado, 236 Hamilton Ave., Palo Alto. 650/833-3151. A chic backdrop is well served by such popular Mexican culinary favorites as adobo marinade steak and tortilla soup. \$\$

Sancho's Taqueria, 491 Lytton Ave., Palo Alto. 650/322-8226. Adam Torres, formerly with Village Pub, serves up an assortment of veggie, meat, and seafood burritos, plus other Mexican favorites. \$

Vive Sol, 2020 W. El Camino Real, Mountain View. 650/938-2020. Mountain View boasts this popular spot that showcases the heady moles indigenous to the Puebla region. \$\$

Zona Rosa, 1411 The Alameda, San Jose, 408/275-1411. Honoring the cookery of Mexico and featuring hand-pressed tortillas and fresh, locally grown ingredients. \$\$

MOROCCAN

Dishdash, 190 S. Murphy Avenue, Sunnyvale. 408/774-1889. Astute service, a warm atmosphere, and exceptional Middle Eastern cuisine. \$\$

Menara Moroccan, 41 E. Gish Road, San Jose. 408/453-1983. Delicious, authentic Moroccan cuisine, complemented by exotic cocktails and belly dancing nightly. \$\$

SEAFOOD

Blue Water Seafood & Crab, 860 Willow St., San Jose. 408/289-8879. East Coast-style crab house with a wide selection of seafood specialties as well as plenty of choices for land lovers. \$

Driggy's Seafood, Sports Bar & Grill, 1150 Murphy Ave., Suite D, San Jose. 408/437-1986. Traditional American-style food and drinks served up in a spirited atmosphere. \$\$

Fish Market, Palo Alto, 650/493-8862; Santa Clara, 408/246-3474; San Jose, 408/269-3474. Fresh, high-quality seafood comes from the restaurant's own fishery and partnering seafood farms. \$\$

McCormick & Schmick's Seafood Restaurant, 170 S. Market St., San Jose. 408/283-7200. More than 30 species of fresh seafood are on a menu that changes daily. \$\$

Old Port Lobster Shack, 3130 Alpine Road, Portola Valley, 650/561-9500; 851 Veterans Blvd., Redwood City, 650/366-2400. Fresh lobster dishes and other seafood selections served in a New England-style lobster shack. \$\$

Sawa, 1042 E. El Camino Real, Sunnyvale. 408/241-7292. Fresh fish and seafood, including delightful prix fixe sushi-focused entrees. \$\$\$

Steamer's Grillhouse (in Old Town), 31 University Ave., Los Gatos. 408/395-CRAB. Steamer's features a variety of steaks, chops, seafood and Mediterranean-inspired dishes and more. \$\$

The Sea by Alexander's Steakhouse, 4269 El Camino Real, Palo Alto. 650/213-1111. Blend of contemporary cuisine and Japanese sensibility. \$\$\$

SINGAPOREAN

Shiok! Singapore Kitchen, 1137 Chestnut St., Menlo Park. 650/838-9448. An exciting fusion of Malay, Chinese and Indian cuisine. \$

Straits, 333 Santana Row, Suite 1110, San Jose. 408/246-6320. Serving up fine Singaporean cuisine, this sleek and sophisticated spot is well-suited to its posh Santana Row locale. \$\$\$

SOUTHEAST ASIAN

Mint Leaf Cuisine, 14420 Big Basin Way, Saratoga. 408/872-3763. Eatery features fusion cuisine

including soft-shell crabs with peanut sauce and curry scallops. \$\$

SPANISH

Cascal, 400 Castro St., Mountain View. 650/940-9500. Spanning the globe with spectacular dishes from Spain and South America, Cascal serves up a menu of "spirited Latin cuisine." With over 25 tapas—small plates and tastes—divided into "old world" and "new world" choices, there's something for everyone. Try the classic Spanish chorizo in rioja wine or minted lamb meatballs in a saffron and almond sauce. For a full dinner, start with one of several ceviches and move on to an exquisite, traditional paella (including one for vegetarians). The casually elegant interior, with its bright, bold colors was created by renowned designer/architect Chuck Thompson. \$\$

Joya, 339 University Ave., Palo Alto. 650/853-9800. The hip modern décor mixes well with the contemporary Spanish and Latin tapas and the tasty variety of new age cocktails. \$\$\$

TapaOlé, 18818 Cox Ave., Saratoga. 408/379-1677. TapaOle brings a little taste of Spain to the South Bay with its unique take on traditional Spanish cuisine. The restaurant offers a wide selection of tapas, or small plates, as well as larger offerings for two. Compliment each dish with a classic wine, sangria or another beverage to rinse the palate. Centered with beef, pork, poultry, seafood or fresh vegetables, the tapas are enhanced with mouth-watering seasonings and sauces that accentuate their flavors. Adding to its traditional Spanish flair, TapaOle occasionally features live music and flamenco dancing. Catering services also are available. \$-\$\$

Zambra Tapas Bar, 250 Lorton Ave., Burlingame. 650/344-5655. Spanish-influenced dishes anchored with seafood, steak, chicken or pork. \$\$

THAI

Amarin, Mountain View, 650/988-9323; San Jose, 408/253-8424; Santa Clara, 408/988-2982. Fresh, contemporary Thai menu with traditional accents and vegetarian dishes. \$

Bangkok Cuisine, 407 Lytton Ave., Palo Alto. 650/322-6533. Charming ambience with lovely patio dining. The curries are especially tasty. \$

Siam Orchid, 496 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto. 650/325-1994. A menu that mixes traditional Thai dishes with more modern cuisine, all infused with the finest quality organic ingredients. \$\$

VIETNAMESE

Fuel Restaurant, 385 S. Winchester Blvd., San Jose. 408/248-0018. Stylish dining room sets the stage for tasty, contemporary Vietnamese fare. \$-\$\$

Tamarine, 546 University Avenue, Palo Alto. 650/325-8500. Elegantly presented dishes, such as crab wontons in a consommé of lime, coriander, lemongrass and coconut milk served in a warm atmosphere. \$\$

Three Seasons, 518 Bryant St., Palo Alto. 650/838-0353. Chic restaurant and bar offers fresh take on traditional Vietnamese flavors. \$\$

Vung Tau, San Jose. 408/288-9055; Milpitas. 408/934-9327. This authentic Vietnamese cuisine has a distinct focus on fish preparations. Be sure to try the shrimp cupcakes! \$

Xanh, 110 Castro St., Mountain View 650/964-1888. Trendy, upscale restaurant featuring Vietnamese cuisine that pleases both the eye and palate with creative combinations. \$-\$\$ ■

THE MAN FROM MARS

(continued from pg. 71)

FEAR OF FLYING

Houston, we have a problem.

"Getting him on the plane is the hard part," Tuer says of her son, adding that Weir didn't seem to be afraid to fly as a child.

Weir says it's not based on any bad experiences. "I just have a general problem with anxiety across the board, and the way it comes out is through fear of flying," he says. "But I'm getting better. I'm actively combating it.

"It used to be that it didn't affect my life so much. I'd say 'OK. I don't really like to fly. But I'm a computer programmer. I don't really need to go more than 5 miles from my house.'"

Now, with his newfound fame, Weir needs to be all sorts of places, "and some of these are pretty long drives," he says.

An invitation from NASA to visit its Johnson Space Center in Houston for four days of VIP tours kicked into high gear his efforts to deal with flying anxiety. Weir wasn't about to pass up the opportunity. Between therapy and anxiety medications, he managed.

"So I actually did it, and it was OK. I was on the plane. I didn't like it, but I wasn't terrified," Weir explains.

Despite making progress on his high-flying fear, Weir did turn down an invitation to visit the film's set. The movie was filmed in Budapest, Hungary, and he wasn't quite ready to fly over the ocean.

With this decision, he may have missed a chance to meet some of the "big famous people" associated with the movie, but luckily the opportunity wasn't once-in-a-lifetime. He'll meet them at the premiere.

Not to mention, he is fast becoming famous himself.

"It's been kind of strange. Almost overnight, I went from never really having a lot of responsibilities to being heavily booked all the time now. So it's the first time in my life that I'm having to tell people, 'Sorry, I can't do this thing.' It's weird for me. Man, they're running me ragged," Weir says.

Grimm and Brown, both of whom like to play board games with Weir and hang out with him in his spare time, have also had to come to terms with the change in Weir's life. "It has taken a long time for this to become real, even in my head," says Grimm. "I can't imagine what it's like for Andy."

For Weir, the explanation is easy: "It's been a wild ride." ■