



Popularity: ★★★★★☆



## The lion of Mars (Jan 2021)

Review: EBSCONovelist

Author: [Holm, Jennifer L.](#)



**Description:** Bell has spent his whole life - all eleven years of it - on **Mars**. But he's still just a regular kid - he loves cats, any kind of cake, and is curious about **the** secrets **the** adults in **the** US colony are keeping. Like, why don't have contact with anyone on **the** other **Mars** colonies? Why are they so isolated? When a virus breaks out and **the** grown-ups all fall ill, Bell and **the** other children are **the** only ones who can help. It's up to Bell - a regular kid in a very different world - to uncover **the** truth and save his family ... and possibly unite an entire planet.

**Genre:** Science fiction; First person narratives

**Themes:** Space colonization

**Character:** Likeable

**Storyline:**World-building

**Writing Style:**Attention-grabbing; Richly detailed

**Min/Max Grade level:**3 - 6

**Lexile:** 530 **Accelerated Reader:** IL: MG, BL: 4, AR Pts: 6

**Persistent link to this record (Permalink):**

### **Booklist:**

Grades 3-6 /\* Starred Review \*/ In the year 2091, 11-year-old Bell leads a mundane life in America's small, underground settlement on Mars, along with a handful of adults and other orphaned children. He knows little of Earth and its various life-forms and cultures, a fact not helped by his home's self-imposed isolation from the nearby settlements of other nations, sparked by a mysterious incident, years before, that resulted in an American's death. Holm moves slowly in the first half, exploring Bell's quiet, day-to-day existence on the red planet as he worries over friendships, does chores, and begins to ask questions about his expanding awareness of the universe he inhabits. The excitement ratchets up when the children make an unauthorized excursion in a rover, curiosity driving them to peek in on neighboring settlements and voice growing doubts about their separation. The point comes to a head when a virus infects all of the American adults, forcing the kids to seek aid from their neighbors. The plot and setting are elegantly simple, yet the story proves completely engaging, driven by a charming cast of gentle characters and, more so, by Holm's lean, measured prose, which moves briskly and seems to strike a resonant note on every page. An unexpectedly cozy work of sf—celebrating science, community, and cooperation—that will have readers feeling right at home on Mars .HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Best-selling, three-time Newbery Honor Book author Holm is as popular as ever in the wake of her Sunny graphic novels, and her dip into sf—with a plot that happens to feature an unchecked virus—is timely. -- Ronny Khuri (Reviewed 1 /1 /2021) (Booklist, vol 117, number 9, p74)

### **Publishers Weekly:**

/\* Starred Review \*/ Peppered with such intriguing scientific details as the pervasive nature of Mars dust, Holm's (The Evil Princess vs. the Brave Knight) absorbing speculative novel is anti-isolationist at its core. Though 11-year-old Bell has always lived on Mars, he's a pretty regular kid: he loves cats, worries about friendships, and asks a lot of questions. Bell and four teenagers live with six adults and cat Leo in a homey, self-sustaining underground settlement "held together with duct tape," sharing chores (harvesting algae to manufacture toilet paper, for example) and learning about a perplexing Earth through digi-reels and the adults' memories. There are only a few rules in the Mars Settlement Mission, the most important being "no contact with foreign countries, ever," the result of a deep rift between various countries' settlements. When a serious virus strikes the adults, though, Bell and the other kids realize that the policy might become deadly. Holm's science fiction setting is rendered with a keen sense of place grounded by identifiable sociofamilial relationships (as the youngest, Bell is occasionally pressured into dangerous situations) and a clear philosophy

about the power of cooperation: "Lions who are rejected by their pride do not survive long." Ages 8–12.  
Agent: Jill Grinberg, Jill Grinberg Literary Management. (Jan.) --Staff (Reviewed 12/07/2020) (Publishers Weekly, vol 267, issue 50, p)

### **Kirkus:**

Eleven-year-old Bell is basically a normal kid—except for the fact that he lives on Mars .Bell is the youngest of the children in America’s Mars settlement. Life on Mars is pretty good; all the adults are caring, and although there are a lot of responsibilities, there are just a few strict rules, including a ban on contacting other nations’ settlements. The arrival of a shipment of supplies from Earth is a cause for celebration, but soon the adults in the settlement begin getting deathly ill. Bell and the other children have to break the rules and seek out help before it’s too late for all of them. Holm puts care and thought into her worldbuilding, dropping hints about what is happening on Earth while indicating that there is a whole universe to be explored and leaving the details to readers’ imaginations. She borrows from real science to create her vision of the future, something that will intrigue science-minded readers and maybe even make it a gateway to science fiction for some. The characters are endearing, the story is compelling, and the book has a positive but not didactic message, although the conflict is resolved a bit too easily. Bell is part of a community on Mars that is without racial categories; he describes his skin tone as being in the midrange of those around him.A delightful space adventure. (author’s note, additional resources) (Science fiction . 8-12) (Kirkus Reviews, December 1 , 2020)

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First person narratives

Science fiction

### **Storyline**

World-building

### **Writing Style**

Attention-grabbing

Richly detailed

**Location**

Mars (Planet)

Space

**Theme**

Space colonization

**Subject**

Eleven-year-old boys

Friendship

Isolationism

Near future

Secrets

Space colonies

Survival

Viruses

**Character**

Likeable

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