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Rocket debris reenters atmosphere

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Debris from the recently launched Chinese Long March 5B carrier rocket fell back to Earth early on Sunday morning, with most of the remnants burning up during the reentry process, the China Manned Space Agency said.

The debris' atmospheric reentry took place around 12:55 am (Beijing time), the agency said in a brief statement, noting that it eventually landed in Pacific Ocean waters located at 9.1 degrees north and 119 degrees east. It did not provide additional details.

Based on the coordinates given by the agency, the site is in the Sulu Sea,

close to Palawan Island in the Philippines.

The return put an end to Western media speculations on the possibility of debris crashing over an inhabited area in what they called "an uncontrolled reentry" of the Long March 5B.

Zhao Lijian, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, said on Wednesday that China had been closely tracking the movement of the used rocket in orbit and continued to publish its information online.

He noted the Long March 5B rocket model is designed and has devices to neutralize its debris and impact on the Earth, and that most of its components would be destroyed during reentry.

Blasting off on July 24 from the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province, the rocket was used to send China's Wentian space lab module to dock with the country's Tiangong space station.

A Long March 5B is 53.7 meters long with a core-stage diameter of 5 meters. The rocket is propelled by liquid oxygen, liquid hydrogen and kerosene and has a liftoff weight of about 849 metric tons.

The rocket model is the most powerful Chinese launch vehicle in terms of carrying capacity to the low-Earth orbit. It is essential to China's space station program because it is now the only Chinese launch vehicle capable of carrying large space station parts to orbit.

LIFE

The specter of an astronaut stranded on the moon might arouse a sense of panic in many people. However, Mañua Funage — one of the country's most popular comedy tropes — has turned the idea into a story full of joy.

Moon Man, Mañua's latest outing in cooperation with China Film Group and Alibaba Pictures, made debut at mainland theaters in multiple formats, including Imax, on Friday.

Despite the sporadic resurgence of COVID-19 in the country, the film grossed more than 210 million yuan (\$31.1 million) to top China's box office charts on its opening day, indicating the potential of the domestic market, according to movie information tracer Beacon.

Adapted from South Korean illustrator Cho Seok's popular comic series *Moon You*, the movie shot with a localized script shows Dugu Yue, a spacecraft maintenance man, unintentionally left on the moon after the evacuation of the crew of Lunar Shield, a moon-based project aiming to rescue the Earth from an asteroid strike but ending up in failure due to an unexpected issue.

Witnessing the catastrophic hit from the moon, Dugu believes the Earth is completely destroyed and he's the last human in this universe.

However, little does he know that the surviving humankind, including the crew's leader, a woman who Dugu has had a secret crush on for eight years, are all watching his every move from the Earth.

One of the movie's top draws is that it reunites Shen Teng and Ma Li, two of Mañua's top comedian stars, respectively as Dugu and Ma Lanxing, the commander of the Lunar Shield project.

The reunion occurred seven years after *Goodbye Mr. Loser*, a dark-horse blockbuster that raked in 1.4 billion yuan to become one of the highest-grossing Chinese movies in 2015. The smash hit has seen Shen and Ma join an elite of the country's most sought-after comedian stars.

Shen has accumulated a huge fan base as he can easily tickle the funny bone of his audience. But his intense schedule — with most of his working time occupied by several popular variety shows — has seen him appear in several films just as supporting characters.

His appearances in these movies are short, for example, five minutes in *Never Say Die* (2017), three minutes in *Hello, Mrs. Money* (2018) and 10 minutes in *Warm Hug* (2022). However, the movies casting him all hooked lots of theatergoers, thanks to his popularity.

Starring Shen as the stranded maintenance man, the 122-minute *Moon Man* marks the longest and even the "loneliest" movie Shen has shot during his career spanning nearly 20 years.

"I shot the movie for nearly five months, spending most of my time in soundstages with the walls covered by green cloth (a practice to replace backdrops)," Shen says.

The majority of the film's around 1,800 special effects scenes were made by artists from More VFX, a visual effects company known for *The Wandering Earth* and *A Writer's Odyssey*. The shooting lasted nearly five months in 15 soundstages which covered an area of 40,000 square meters in Qingdao,

Space odyssey

A new comedy about a maintenance worker stranded on the moon could see the sector launch back to previous popularity, **Xu Fan** reports.



Above: Soaring as China's latest box-office champion, the sci-fi comedy *Moon Man* stars actor Shen Teng as a stranded astronaut in outer space, and actress Ma Li as the commander of a moon-based project. **Top right:** The movie's poster features its major character, a grumpy kangaroo. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Shandong province, according to the producers.

Shen says he was very excited to meet Ma, the lead actress, during the shooting.

"It was like reuniting with a relative who has been missing for a long time."

In the movie, Shen's character discovers a grumpy kangaroo when he attempts to get a bottle of medicine from the Lunar Shield project's base on the moon. The kangaroo becomes the only creature that accompanies him on the moon, and even becomes a "friend" that assists him in his efforts to return to the Earth.

The anthropomorphic kangaroo, depicted in the movie as capable of understanding the protagonist's sorrows and joys, is played by Hao Han, a 30-year-old comedian actor, also with Mañua Funage. The movie blends digital motion-capture technology and the actor's performance.

Director Zhang Chiyu reveals that Hao prepared for his role — also marking his acting debut in a big-budget movie — for almost a year, by doing many things such as renting an apartment near the Beijing Zoo to observe the kangaroos there for four months and installing wires to practice hops like a kangaroo on the film set.

Despite the movie employing advanced virtual technology, including using virtual cinematography to make the preview scenes easier for actors and actresses to understand their roles' responses and emotions, the director says the core of the movie is "a comedy."

"All the tech elements are just the backdrop of the movie. Comedy is a difficult genre, heavily relying on excellent performers' competence in improvisational roles," says Zhang, adding that actors Shen and Huang Cailun, also a Mañua Funage comedian, contributed some good jokes.

As a tribute to some influential Hollywood movies, the new Chinese movie, with a popular cast and a captivating plot, is estimated to become the next blockbuster that will help revive China's struggling film industry amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

For some cinema operators and industry insiders, the new Chinese movie, with a popular cast and a captivating plot, is estimated to become the next blockbuster that will help revive China's struggling film industry amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Zhang Chiyu, director of *Moon Man*