'Reindeer Games' won't win over movie-goers

When a studio bumps the When a studio bumps the release date of a motion picture from crowded Christmas Day to the limbo of late February, that's like a platoon leader volunteering one of the soldiers for a suicide mission. Reindeer Games' has been sent to the front, and it won't be coming back.

Stars Ben Affleck, Charlize Theron and Gary Sinise are three of the more appealing per-formers on the big screen today. formers on the big screen today. Pluying, respectively, an ex-con and two sleaze buckets, their appeal in crime-thriller "Reindeer Games" is whittled down so extensively that only their biggest and most forgiving fans won't miss the money spent on seeing it.

seeing it.

Awaiting his impending release from a five-year prison sentence for grand theft auto, Rudy Duncou (Affleck) is envious of cellmate Nick (James Frain). Nick has been exchanging letters and life stories with a woman numed Ashley (Theron), whom he has never met. Pictures of the gorgeous pen pal adorn their cell wall.

Just before their parale, Nick

their cell wall.

Just before their parole, Nick is killed in a prison riot. When Rudy is released and Ashley mistakes him for Nick, Rudy takes one look at the girl in the flesh and deesn't argue. You don't have to have been a prisoner for five years to go along with him on that one.

But to cnjoy the benefits of Nick's future, Rudy must also assume the burdens of Nick's past. Having learned that Nick had worked at an Indian casino in northern Michigan, Ashley's brother Gabriel (Sinise) has been planning for months to rob the place using Nick's inside information. In too deep by now, Rudy is forced to continue the identity switch, despite having almost none of Nick's knowledge of the casino.

There are more twists and

casino.

There are more twists and turns in "Games" than on the snowy state roads they take to the casino. Who can Rudy trust, and how long can he stay one lie shead of those he can't? Oddly enough, the "surprise ending" may not be as surprising to some

as those in the film's middle. Once you've got the rhythm of the thing, you may just nod your head knowingly when the plot

head knowingly when the plot plays out.

Affleck is more than capable of playing the boob caught in his own deception. Wanting only to return home for some of mom's hot chocolate, he finds himself lacked in a motel room, trapped under a frozen pond and on the wrong end of a few million rounds of machine gun fire.

Through it all, his Steve McQueen-like chorm and charisma get him out of trouble both within the movie and in being in the movie in the first place.

Sinise and Theron don't fare as well. Scraggly baired Gabriel is an insult to seum everywhere; as a villain, his one-note cheracter seems an unnecessary and illadvised pit stop for the overly qualified Sinise. Theron is cute and convincing in her first scenes as the dupe in the story.

When her motives emerge, however, Theron can't pull it off as a
leather-tough moll. Her South
African accent comes out clearly
during her few emotional
moments.

Veteran director John
Frankenheimer ("The Manchurian Candidate" "Ronin") is at his
best chreegraphing the multiple
chases and gun fights. When the
characters have to speak, one
waits for the Uzis to drown them
out again.

Film blends horror, realism

glowalsiffee homeocommet
Here's the plot: A group of
young filmmakers goes into the
wilderness to investigate a terrifying local legend. They disap-pear and the only record of
their fate is found on the videotupes they made that are
uncerthed later.
"The Blair Witch Project,"
right?
Women

right?
Wrong.
This is the plot of "The Last
Broadcast," a film made a year
before "Blair Witch" began its
runaway success and which has
been causing some rumblings
among the horror film commupity was there is such a patinity (yes, there is such an enti-ty) that "The Blair Witch" is

mining the norror rinh commity (yes, there is such an entity) that "The Bloir Witch" is
nothing more than a royal
ripoff of the obscure "The Last
Broadcast. 'Is it?
Yes and no.
Consider this plot: A group of
young filmmakers goes into the
wilderness to invostigate a terrifying local legend. They disappear and the only record of
their fate is found on the film
that they took that is
uncarthed later.
Nope. It's the plot of "Cannibal Holocaust," a notorious Italian horror film made in 1978.
So everyone steals ideas. The
Blair Witch Project" folks were

master thieves. "The Last Broadcast" geng wore petty criminals.
"The Last Broadcast" has its moments, but ultimately falls to deliver the chills with the style or sheer horror factor of Blair Witch. But it's still worth checking out, especially if you want to make comparisons. And "The Last Broadcast" invites comparison.

want to make comparisons. And
The Last Broadcast" invites
comparison.
The similarities are abundant. In "Last Broadcast,"
which announces up front that
none of the persons depicted
are actors, filmmaker David
Leigh hinds the story together.
He leads us on a bumpy path
as he chronicles the vicious
murders of two hosts and the
engineer of a local cable show
called "Fact or Fiction," which
leans towards the sensational.
To boost sagging ratings they
hook up with a supposed psychic and go on location in the
wilderness Pine Barrens of
New Jersey to do a live broadcast about The Jersey Devil, a
murderous local legand. Only
the psychic survivos and is
pinned with the bloody murders
of his three companions.
But some videotape mysteriously turns up, which prompts
Leigh to piece together their

"The Last were petty cast has its attely fails to the thin the style claif yield ast." In the style claif yield ast." In the style claif yield ast. The dialogue appears to be off complete with fluibbed takes. The dialogue appears to be off the cuff and the scanes of the create the style style

about the film that is admirable until about the last 10 minutes.

Then everything falls apart as the plot takes a disastrous turn and completely undoes the tension so carefully crafted to that point.

And that is the biggest distinction between this film and the far more offective "Blair Witch Project." That movie left you hanging. This one drops you off a cliff.

On its own, "The Last Broadcast" is still interesting and at least somewhat original. But "The Blair Witch Project" shows what it could have been.

"The Last Broadcast" were written, directed and produced by Stefan Availance and Lance Weiter. It is evoluble only on videa. Check your neighborhood video store.

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ENTRY	FORM

☐ Michael Caine

☐ Tom Cruise in MAGNOLtA

Michael Clarke Duncan in THE GREEN MILE

REST PICTURE: DIAMERICAN BEAUTY

in THE SIXTH SENSE

In this substitution of the Angeline John in GIRL INTERRUPTED

In SWEET AND Chice Sentency in BOYS DON'T CRY

BEST ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE: ☐ Russell Crowe In THE INSIDER

☐ THE CIDER HOUSE RULES ☐ Richard Farnsworth in THE STRAIGHT STORY LI THE GREEN MILE Sean Penn in SWEET AND LOWDOWN

DITHE INSIDER THE SIXTH SENSE

☐ Kevin Spacey in AMERICAN BEAUTY ☐ Denzel Washington in THE HURRICANE Haley Joel Osment in THE SIXTH SENSE BEST ACTRESS IN A SUPPORTING ROLE:

In GINE INVESTIGATION

Catherine Keener
In BEING JOHN MALKOVICH

Samantha MONTON
IN SWEET AND LOWDOWN ☐ Lasse Hallstrom in THE CIDER HOUSE RULES

BEST
DIRECTINO:
U Sam Modes
In AMERICAN BEAUTY
U Spike Jonze
IN BEING JOHN MALKOVICH
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MAIISTORM

in THE CIDER HOUSE

Michael Mann
in THE INSIDER

M. Night Shyamalan
in THE SIXTH SENSE

BEST ACTOR BEST ACTRESS IN A SUPPORTING ROLE: IN A LEADING ROLE: Michael Caine
in The CIDER HOUSE RULES in AMERICAN BEAUTY

☐ Janet McTeer in TUMBLEWEEDS

☐ Julianne Moore ☐ in THE END OF THE AFFAIR ☐ Jude Law In THE TALENTED MR RIPLEY ☐ Meryl Streep in MUSIC OF THE HEART

LI Hilary Swank in BOYS DON'T CRY

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OCREENPLAY:

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for AMERICAN BEAUTY for AMERICAN DEACH :
) Charlos Kurfman
for BEING JOHN MALKOVICH
) Pauf Thomas Anderson
for MAGNOLIA
DM. Night Shyamalan
for THE SIXTH SENSE
UJ Mike Leigh
for TOPSY-TURYY

Send or fax entries by 5 p.m. Monday, March 13, 2007
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