MOVIES

'Ghosts of Mars' won't keep you in suspense long

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Mars

Hollywood has defiled our orbital neighbor with last year's Mission to Mars and Red Planet and now with John Carpenter's Choists of Mars, by far the worst of this Martian threesome.

Ghosts of Mars is a mind-numbingly had movie. It has the dark, campy look of some of Car-penter's previous B-movies but none of the suspense or black-hearted vigor.

The movie feels like a survey, cobbling together elements from past Carpenter films: The blood-

lust of Vampires; the who goesthere factor of The Thing; the nocturnal fisticuffs of Escape From New York; the mysterious mist of The Fog.

mist of The Fog.

And its futuristic premise – a tough female leader teaming with a cold-blooded criminal to fight an alien menace – was done to great effect last year in Pitch Black, making Gloosts of Mars look that much flimsier.

Natasha Henstridge (the alien invader of Species) plays Lt. Melanie Ballard, a cop on Mars in 2176, when human colonists are converting the planet to a breathable atmosphere.

patched to a mining outpost to pick up James "Desolation" Williams (Ice Cube), charged with mass murder.

with mass murder.
Desolation (and we are not making this nickname up) insists he's innecent, that someone or something else chopped off all those heads and hung the victims upside down like ment on hooks. Ballard naturally believes him.

With her commander quickly, gruesomely exiting the movie, Ballard and her team join with Desolation and his band of really dumb thugs against a common enemy – long-dormant lifeforms that had been sealed below the surface of Mars.

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VIII.

These bloodthirsty, gaseous ghosts take over the colonists and begin to renovate their bodies with decorative self-mutin-tion. The ghosts are remanats of a warlike Martian civilization hellbent on ridding their planet of invaders, though Carpenter and co-writer Larry Sulkis neglect to explain how these creatures wound up locked inside Mars.

The tribal behavior of the non-

inside Mars.
The tribal behavior of the possessed humans is so willy it should be hysterically funny. But it winds up annoying and gross and not remotely frightening watching these brutes skewer their faces, lop off heads and beliow incomprehensible syllables of their own "language."

of their own "language."

Basically, Ghosts of Mars is a giant street rumble between the human gang and the Martian rabble. The endless sequences of hand-to-hand fighting are limp, surpassed by almost any episode of Xena: Warrior Princess.

The movies unsatisfying conclusion feels like something Carpenter tacked on for lack of a real ending.

Carpenter, wrote, his own

Carpenter wrote his own music, a grating onslaught of repetitive, industrial Muzak.

repetitive, industrial Muzak.
The apscial effects and miniatures are cheesy, which is excusable in B-movies that offer quality in script and story. Here, the
cheap look simply reinforces the
fact that this is a low-class movie
presenting little more than severed heads and limbs and a lot of
slit throats.

Too bad, because Henstridge and Ice Cube have decent rap-port that occasionally rises above the dreadful material. Jason Statham also has some personal-

On another planet: Ice Cube stars as James "Desolation" Williams in "John Carpenter's Ghosts of Mars."

cop, but Clea Duvall as a rookie officer and Joanna Cassidy as an archaeologist are wasted in

Suggestion to Hollywood: Go pick on Venus for a while.



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Film mixes sci-fi with romance

BY CHRISTY LEMIRE AP ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

AP EXTERIABLEST WRITER
NEW YORK (AP) – You won't
believe me if I tell you. You
couldn't possibly – It's too riduo.
But here goes: I'm a movie
critic from the future, and I've
traveled back in time to keep you
from wasting your money at the
multiplex on cinemntic dreck.
I could have told you a long
time ago not to see Pootle Tang.
"But Chris Rock's in it!" you
would have said. 'It's gotta be
funny!" Look who's laughing
now.

now.
You don't buy it? At first, neither does Marisa Tomei's character when her boyfriend tells her
he's a time traveler in Happy
Accidents, a quirky mix of sci-fi
lick and romattic comety from
writer-director Brad Anderson. And it's not a complete waste of

And it's not a complete waste of money.

Tomei stars as Ruby Weaver, a co-dependent, psychobabbling, single New York City woman who thinks she's finally found the right guy after slogging through a sea of losers – until he tells her he's from the year 2470 and he's traveled through time to prevent her from thy the in an to prevent her from dying in an accident.

accident.
Vincent D'Onofrio plays her
mysterious boyfriend, Sam Deed.
And she wants to believe him she really does. Because
although he's a little odd - he's
deathly afraid of small dogs, he
has no idea what red wine is,

he's secretly taking Dramamine
- Sam is warm, sweet and
thoughtful.
We learn through flashbacks
during Ruby's sessions with her
therapist (ffolland Taylor) that
she and Sam met cute in a park
and courted quickly. They moved
in together about a week later,
and soon afterward, she started
noticing some inconsistencies.
Sam said he didn't talk to his
family anymore, yet there are
pictures of people who look like
his parents and sister in his wallet. He said he'd never left his
home in Dubuque, Iowa, before
moving to New York, yet he's fluent in several languages. Then
here are the drawings of a beautiful brunette named Chrystie
Delancey.
Furious, Ruby suspects Sam's
chenting on her and confronts
him with he's from the future, he
saw her photograph and "backtraveled" to save her. And he has
an explanation for every one of

an explanation for every one of her doubts.

her doubts.

Just like Ruby, either you'll suspend all disbelief and go with this story or write it off as ridiculous soon after the opening credits. I went with it — I'm from the future, just trust me — even though D'Onofrio's weirdness is a bit mannered, even though Tomei is a bit too squeaky and

cutesy.

It's reminiscent of another movie that plays with time and

space, The Purple Rose of Cairo, Woody Allon's 1985 romanticomedy about a movie star who walks off the screen and enters the real world. Both situations are surrenl, yet they're played totally straight, and that's why they're funny.

Anderson made Happy Accidents in 1999, it appeared at Sundance in 2000 and is just now seeing the light of day. It couldn't be more different from his other movie opening this month, Session 9, a psychological thriller set in an abandoned mental institution.

The only thing they have in common is that they were both shot on digital video, the preferred medium du jour, which makes thom crisp and accessible. Anderson tinkers with time in the script and on screen, with several stylized sequences in reverse showing Sam's often confused state of mind.

The one time element Anderson didn't now enough attention.

fused state of mind.

The one time element Anderson didn't pay enough attention to was the movie's length – it's about 20 minutes too long, and Ruby and Sam's discussions, about who Sam really is get

about who Sam really is get repetitive.

But when you're from the future, everything's repetitive after a while. I'm getting really sick of seeing Sean 'P. Diddy'. Combs win Academy Awards.

Happy Accidents, an IFC-Films release, runs 110 minutes.



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