

Space Flick Recalls Pleasure Of Low-Budget Sci-Fi Films

By JUSTIN WINTERS
Staff Writer

Working on a budget more apt for a direct-to-video movie than a box-office blockbuster, director and co-writer David Twohy's latest science-fiction funfest "Pitch Black" succeeds at what earlier sci-fi yawners ("Supernova" and "Lost in Space") failed at: it's loads of fun to watch.

Remember how jazzed you were to watch those low-budget, pseudo-scary B-movies that came on at the exact time your parents went to sleep as a kid? Twohy obviously did, and he trades in gore for suspense in a film that could be billed as this year's sci-fi "Sixth Sense."

With an opening shot that hearkens back to every space movie since the beginning of time, the first 15 minutes of "Pitch" are intensity-packed with the emergency landing of a spaceship carrying an array of personality-infused passengers (a sort of U-bus in space).

Once the ship crash-lands into the requisite barren planet, the remaining survivors are faced with the usual problems: lack of water, lack of food and the fact that there is a 3-to-1 guy-girl ratio.

Instead of relying so much on what the mean E.T.'s look like, "Pitch" turns

up the ante of suspense once the lights go out. The survivors land on a planet that happens to have an unfortunately long eclipse every 22 years.

Twohy pulls no punches in feeding on the possible fears of every red-blooded American: the fear of darkness, the fear of hopelessness and the fear of women taking control of the world.

"Pitch" is the type of flick in which the hero does all he or she can, gets close to succeeding, and then BAM — some higher space power decides to drop another wrench in the plans.

That wrench, a space criminal played with juice by Vin Diesel ("Boiler Room"), is so chill-inducingly kick-ass that his inclusion in the movie is worth the price of admission.

The hero here ain't too shabby either. Played convincingly by super-babe Radha Mitchell ("High Art"), she is the striking culmination of Nicole Kidman-like intelligence and a take-no-crap hot mama like Ripley from "Aliens."

Twohy should get a big pat on the back for this effort. He's made a living directing low-budget flicks that use time-honored basics of film and inject a good dose of Saturday B-movie fun. In this day and age, in which teen flicks and action-packed duds are the norm, that's a "pitch"-perfect breath of fresh air.

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MOVIE REVIEW

"Pitch Black"



Director Mocks Gangster Movies in Funny Film

By FERRIS MORRISON
Staff Writer

Sometimes you just have to kill people.

Whether you're a contract killer or a dentist, murder is just a simple fact of life in suburban Montreal.

Especially when people are trying to kill you.

In "The Whole Nine Yards," Bruce Willis stars as Jimmy "The Tulip" Tudeski, a contract killer on the

run from the Hungarian Mafia. Matthew Perry plays Nicholas "Oz" Oseransky, a man dissatisfied with his loveless marriage and unglamorous life as a dentist.

The film is the story of "The Tulip" and "Oz," two neighbors bonded together when hit men are hired to kill each of them.

Director Jonathan Lynn created this entertaining comedy as a melodramatic parody of gangster films. From the characters' terrible accents to the contract killer's seductively beautiful wife, each element of the film is carefully scripted to identify clichés in crime films.

When Tudeski's wife Cynthia, played by Natasha Henstridge, comes to Oz's

hotel room in Chicago, Oz opens the door as Cynthia lights a cigarette while jazzy, seductive music cues in. Al Capone would be proud.

Better known for his sarcastic antics as Chandler Bing of the T.V. show "Friends," Perry is sure to draw in a predominately female fan base and bring this movie significant financial success.

His role as Oz seems scripted for his character on "Friends." Perry's sarcasm and comedic antics are present in both roles. While Perry doesn't have a broad range of acting ability, at least he performs shtick well.

Oz's wife Sophie (Rosanna Arquette), is truly a bitch. Unfortunately,

Arquette's fake accent keeps viewers from fully enjoying her scenes. Mobster Yanni (Kevin Pollack) also has a terribly contrived accent, but he uses it in such a humorous way that it adds to his scenes.

Overall, "The Whole Nine Yards" successfully goes the distance, giving audiences a good laugh and a dose of the warm-fuzzies.

And there's no way to beat the old drums like befriending a contract killer. Sometimes you have to overstep the bounds of reason and live life on the wild side.

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MOVIE REVIEW

"The Whole Nine Yards"



'Holy Smoke' Smolders, Lacks Cinematic Spark

By JOANNA PEARSON
Staff Writer

Save the money you were planning to spend on hallucinogens and go see "Holy Smoke" instead — the experience will be just as bewildering.

Director Jane Campion, ("The Piano") delivers another gold-dusted, shadow-filled picture. Unlike "The Piano," with its clean, aching power, Campion's latest film is loose-jointed and wobbly.

Seeing Ruth's mother frantic in the colorful crowd of Delhi is one of the best parts of the movie. In fact, Campion's initial depictions of India, or what we would like to think of as India, interspersed with a number of fantasy sequences, is artfully dreamy.

This setting, in contrast with Ruth's family's trashy suburban realm, height-

ens the tension. Ruth returns home to discover her father's illness was a trick, and finds her mildly lunatic family ready to squelch her "enlightened" views.

Enter P.J. Waters (Harvey Keitel), famed American exit counselor hired by Ruth's family. From his first scene, P.J. Waters comes striding in like a craggy-faced Casanova.

He and Ruth head for an abandoned cabin in the Australian outback so P.J. can begin deleting the cult's ideologies from Ruth's psyche.

From here, the movie quickly degenerates into a manic, psychosexual show-down. Ruth and P.J. argue, break down, have sex and hallucinate, but never real-

ly make any headway.

Most impressive is Winslet's performance. She proves she knows how to do more than close her eyes as she stands on the prows of large ships. Her Ruth is petulant, sly and focused. For a bonus, Winslet's role has plenty of "Titanic"-like breast-baring.

Campion knows a little psychosis mixed with sex is a simple recipe for a film, but she gets a little carried away.

Still, the characters' outlandish situations and flouting of traditional morality can be a guilty pleasure for the curious.

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MOVIE REVIEW

"Holy Smoke"



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