

# Entertainment Outlook

## 'Total Recall' is stylish, violent sci-fi

### FILMETER



ROBERT DIMATTEO

**TOTAL RECALL (R)** There is room in this world for good, quiet, sensitive movies like "Driving Miss Daisy," and good, loud, basically insensitive ones like "Robocop" and "The Terminator." Some of us have an appetite for both.

Paul Verhoeven's "Total Recall" is sensational fun of the loud, insensitive variety. Verhoeven is the playfully perverse Dutch director who proved in "Robocop" that a traditionally reactionary action genre could be used for something akin to progressive satire. He is up to similar genre-bending tricks in this visually hypnotic expansion of a short story by the late, great sci-fi fantasy writer, Philip K. Dick.

The movie is set in the future, at a time when the planet Mars has been colonized. A corporate tyrant (Ronny Cox) controls the flow and sale of oxygen to the citizens — made up increasingly of mutants and rebels.

On Earth, we meet Quaid (Arnold Schwarzenegger, in his best action role since "The Terminator"), a construction worker blessed with a good life and a sexy, smiling, blond dream-wife (Sharon Stone). But Quaid has a problem — repeated nightmares of being caught in a live-or-die situation on Mars with a fiery brunette (Rachel Ticotin).

One day, the bulky Quaid goes to ReKall, Inc., a futuristic travel agency that offers mental vacations — happy hallucinations that provide an internally generated holiday without any of the headaches. For his ReKall fantasy, Quaid chooses Mars and the character of a secret agent — then starts to go bananas. Apparently, the mental projection process has triggered an actual set of memories of an entirely different life — a life that has

been erased from Quaid's mind. Is his current identity actually a dream fabrication? Then who is he? A real trip to Mars may offer the answer.

Verhoeven and his writers have concocted a narrative that folds in on itself at every possible point. The result is an enjoyably preposterous construction that has plenty to say about how reality can be overwhelmed by a world of images and simulations. At the movie's center is Quaid, a muscular cipher who must decide if action or memory makes the man — all the while eluding pursuers who keep changing the rules of the reality game.

The movie does have its flaws. Dick's short story focused on ReKall, Inc., and that remains the most suggestive part of the film. The second half of the movie gets a little out of hand, settling for stunning set-pieces: a sleazy Martian red-light district, wild makeup effects and dazzling — if extremely bloody — fight and chase scenes.

Also, the movie's characterization of its two main women is unfortunate: Both are meant to be male fantasy figures, but each would benefit from a little nuance. But one gets Verhoeven's idea: As with Nancy Allen's butch cop in "Robocop," the lead females here handle themselves with the macho ease of the men, karate-chopping and knife-wielding their way through potentially deadly situations. So much for equal rights.

This is sci-fi with bite and a brutal beauty. It may be the most violent movie that you could ever love. **GRADE: ★★★★★**

**BACK TO THE FUTURE, PART III (PG)** Not as satisfying as the first in the series, but better than the second. Doc Brown (loony Christopher Lloyd) is stuck back in the old West, and Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) journeys back to save him. So, this ingeniously designed time-travel adventure-comedy becomes primarily a Western.

Mary Steenburgen turns up as a love interest for Doc Brown, and she's

beguiling. And the movie doesn't feel as frantic and over-produced as it might: It has an amiable, giddy spirit. But enough is enough. **GRADE: ★★**

### New Home Video

**SALAAM BOMBAY!** (not rated) Virgin. Mira Nair directed this richly textured, lower-depths view of street life among the hookers, hustlers and druggies of Bombay.

The central character is a dark-eyed, 10-year-old urchin (Shafiq Syed, a non-professional) — a country boy who learns the harsh ways of the city. It's not as lacerating as the somewhat similar "Pixote," but vivid and moving nonetheless. With subtitles. **GRADE: ★★★**  
(Film grading: ★★★★★ — excellent, ★★★ — good, ★★ — fair, ★ — poor)



QUAID (Arnold Schwarzenegger, right) flees from strangers who are trying to kill him in the new science fiction thriller "Total Recall."

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**TODAY'S QUOTE:** "We do not seem to be finding ... tomorrow's Toscas." — James Levine, on shortage of great operatic voices.

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**BY PHIL PASTORET**  
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