

Schwarzenegger's *Total Recall* totally forgettable

by J.A. Stephan

Total Recall
directed by Paul Verhoeven
produced by Tri-Star

The year is AD 2084. Earth has survived its third world war. Two opposing government blocs rule the planet. Mars has been colonized and is wracked by political unrest. This is the backdrop against which the film *Total Recall* unfurls its confused story of Doug Quaid (Arnold Schwarzenegger), who is engaged in a mission to discover his true identity while rescuing Mars from an evil tyrant.

Rumoured to have cost a whopping 50 million or more, this fantastic spectacle is destined to be one of this summer's biggest blockbusters. Director Paul Verhoeven, encouraged by the success of his film *Robocop*, takes the audience on a maniacal roller coaster ride of shock, horror, and illusion.

Bullets to the forehead, axes to the stomach, and kicks to the crotch — no body part is safe from the non-stop, graphic battles. The violence often takes on a comic book silliness. One bystander is not only riddled by a machine gun, but also picked up and used as a shield to absorb flying bullets. When a foe's arms are severed at the elbows, Schwarzenegger gleefully returns the torn limbs with a joke. It is gruesome, but humorous.

The protagonist of this tale basically goes unscathed except for the attentions of his knife-wielding, karate-kicking wife (Sharon Stone, who gives a terrifically spirited performance). Schwarzenegger is a peculiar hero. Short on acting ability, he is not able to generate sympathy for the plight of his character; audience interest is sustained only by frequent bloodbaths and special effects wizardry.

There is hardly any sense in the ridiculously far-fetched and horribly muddled screenplay. It opens on Doug Quaid, a bored construction worker plagued by dreams of Mars. In search of an explanation, he ventures to ReCall Inc. This service provides him with



Arnold Schwarzenegger (centre) takes a look around Mars. After the release of *Total Recall*, he may wish he really was on the Red Planet.

an opportunity to travel to Mars through memory implantation.

Instead of answers, the experience triggers a murderous attack by secret agents from Mars. While fleeing from his pursuers, Quaid discovers his true memory has been manipulated to suppress valuable information in demand by the rebel force on Mars. Information he gained while acting as a

secret agent himself before betraying the government.

Quaid escapes to Mars where he hopes to unearth his past and regain his lost memory. Eventually captured by the power-hungry zealot of the planet (Ronny Cox), Quaid is confronted with his true origin. No longer sure of what is real and what is illusory, the champion of the rebel cause

must race against time to overthrow the dictator's perverted scheme and save the planet.

The absurdity of the story's logic becomes grossly evident at the cataclysmic ending, in which good triumphs over evil. Throughout the film, neither the audience nor Quaid are ever on solid ground. Who really is Quaid and is his adventure real or imagi-

nary? The premise of an altered mind is as clever as it is weird. The big cheat comes when it is used in the final revelation to explain everything that happened previously — an attempt to make sense out of nonsense.

Taken as is, the nonsense is entertaining. Much of the credit belongs to Dream Quest Images, which created the visual effects; and Rob Bottin, who originated the creatures and make-up effects. For example: a black screen which visualizes only moving bone structure, holograms that act as decoys, and faces which contort into a myriad of shapes.

Production designer William Sandell, who worked with Verhoeven on *Robocop*, fashioned a cold and utilitarian Earth. Buried deep within the rock, Sandell's city on Mars is less impressive. It fails to distinguish itself as an alien, futuristic community. The red-light district of Venusville stands out as a soundstage lacking mood or substance. Believability is clearly absent.

Bloody, vacuous, and forgettable: *Total Recall* is a terrific product for those undemanding moviegoers who are content more with spectacle than with substance.

Forget the stars — go to see the colours!

by Ira Nayman

Dick Tracy
directed by Warren Beatty
produced by Touchstone Pictures

Let's get the unimportant stuff out of the way right at the beginning: Madonna is a cartoon trying to be an icon. Either way, she's not much of an actor, and this film is not likely to give her dramatic career much of a boost.

While I'm on the subject: Warren Beatty is a good actor, and invests his role with some depth (not much by real movie standards, but more than I expected). He didn't really look the part — a bit too old to be really pretty, a bit too pretty to be really rugged — but, what the hell? It was, after all, his film.

So, let's talk about the real reason for going to see *Dick Tracy*, the film version of Chester Gould's old comic strip: the colours. Seven of them. Dark, threatening blacks. Heroic yellows. Vivid reds, blues and purples.

The opening shot, where the camera starts in one location, zooms and pans through a brightly lit, yet strangely ominous city, and picks up the action in another place, is masterful, and indicative of what is to follow. As filmed by Vittoria Storaro, *Dick Tracy* is the most sensuous movie to hit the screens in a long time, possibly ever.

The story, such as it is, pits Tracy (Beatty) against Big Boy Caprice (Al Pacino), who has plans to control all the crime in

DICK TRACY



the city (unnamed, time: probably thirties or forties). Along the way, Tracy is seduced by singer Breathless Mahoney (Madonna), forcing him to choose between her and Tess Trueheart (Glenn Headly).

It isn't much, and it has holes the size of Winnebagoes, but the cumulative effect of many small touches make *Dick Tracy* a fun film to see. Pacino's performance, for instance, is delightful, spouting pseudo-wisdom one moment, ranting psychotically the next.

Headly manages to give some dignity to what is essentially a third banana role. Dustin Hoffman (!) is hilarious as Mumbles, a small-time hood. Mandy Patinkin gives an interesting rendition of the piano player 88 Keyes. Charlie Korsmo, as Kid, both pays homage to and satirizes the "tough boy" characters of the period (The Bowery Boys, for example).

Many of Gould's most gruesome creations appear in this

film: Mumbles, Little Face, Flattop, Itchy, Pruneface and a host of others. Gould was not subtle: evil characters not only did ugly things, but looked that way.

Through the magic of prosthetics, the characters' looks are surprisingly faithful to the comic strip, although, when given the opportunity by the script, the actors usually go beyond the make-up to give the characters equally quirky personalities. (My only complaint is that, having killed off the most interesting Gould creations, who will Tracy have left to battle in the inevitable sequel?)

Ultimately, despite the violence, despite the sexual undercurrent, despite the efforts to tell an adult story, what most disarms the viewer is the fact that *Dick Tracy*, at heart, is full of innocence. Compared to *Batman*, its more cynical cousin, *Dick Tracy* is a breath of fresh air.

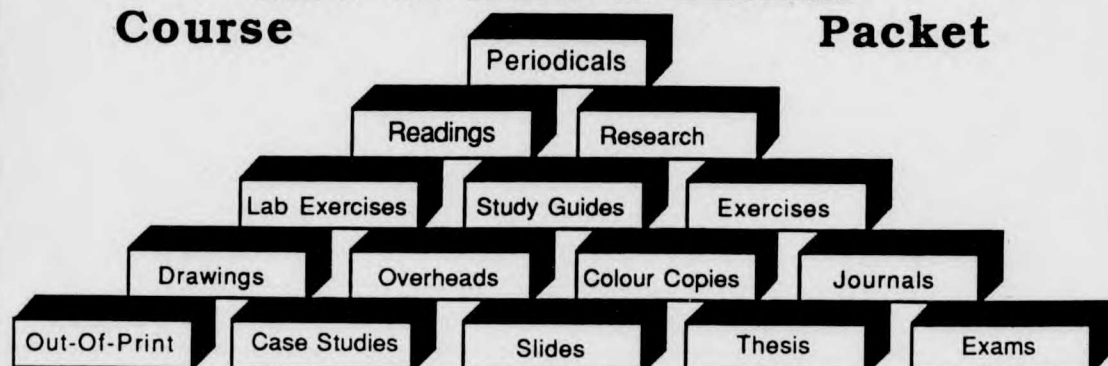
Dick Tracy is a cartoon of a movie. But, it's a highly entertaining cartoon of a movie.

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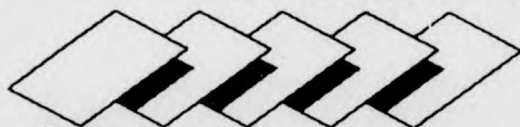
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