

Martians, multi-star cast make movie magic

By CLIFF HICKS
Movie Critic

Director Tim Burton doesn't believe in doing anything halfway and "Mars Attacks!" only proves it.

Burton's talent for the surreal is legendary. He's directed such films as "Batman," "Beetlejuice," "Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas," "Edward Scissorhands" and "Ed Wood."

So, when Burton decided to make a movie based on the Topps card series "Mars Attacks!" everyone knew it was going to be big.

The key in making a film as big as Burton wanted was the cast. As it turned out, Burton pretty much got everyone he wanted to do "Mars Attacks!" from Hollywood legend Jack Nicholson, who plays two parts, to musical legend Tom Jones.

It's a fairly simple storyline: Martians come to Earth, talk about peace, try to annihilate everyone, do bizarre things with monuments and have a fun time ruining the planet.

Burton doesn't approach "Mars Attacks!" as a serious film for a single moment. It shouldn't be any other way.

The cast is monumental and everyone has fun with their parts. Nicholson puts in dual appearances, one as the president of the United States who hasn't got a clue and the other as a shady Las Vegas real-estate dealer.

Glenn Close is the first lady and Natalie Portman is their daughter. Rod Steiger and Paul Winfield are the President's two top generals. Martin Short is his press secretary. Pierce



PRESIDENT JAMES DALE (Jack Nicholson) finds himself under the gun after the alluring Martian Girl (Lisa Marie) reveals her true identity.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WARNER BROS.

Brosnan is the White House's scientific adviser. Annette Bening is the real estate dealer's new-age wife. Sarah Jessica Parker and Michael J. Fox both play reporters. And Tom Jones is, well, Tom Jones.

All of the performances are outstanding, but it's Nicholson's president that is the most comic, as we see one of Hollywood's finest do slapstick comedy at its best.

The cast travels the length from Marx-Brothers witticisms to Three Stooges schtick. The film leans more toward the less subtle, but there are still sly jokes that the younger audiences won't catch.

The best performers, however, aren't the live actors — the real stars of this film are the Martians.

To breathe life into the Martians, not one but two special effects studios were used — Industrial Light & Magic and Warner Digital Studios.

All of the Martians in "Mars Attacks!" try to top each appearance with the next one. They blow people up, they do weird experiments/practical jokes on abductees and they wear boxers beneath their press-on suits.

For comedy, the Martians rank at the top as masters of the art form. They're like 9-year-olds with an immense amount of power. The world is their playground.

"Mars Attacks!" is about as B-filmesque as movies can get. All the colors are bright, the dialogue is campy, the storyline is farcical but still vaguely plausible.

The Facts

Film: "Mars Attacks!"

Director: Tim Burton

Cast: Jack Nicholson, Glenn Close, Annette Bening, Pierce Brosnan, Danny DeVito, Martin Short, Sarah Jessica Parker, Michael J. Fox, Rod Steiger, Tom Jones, Lukas Haas, Natalie Portman, Jim Brown, Lisa Marie, Sylvia Sidney, Paul Winfield, Pam Grier

Rating: PG-13 (cartoon-like violence, language, Tom Jones)

Grade: A

Five Words: The Martians vs. everyone else

New film plays at Ross Theater

From Staff Reports

Students searching for a way to spend their weekend before finals week can check out the new movie now showing at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater.

"Cold Comfort Farm," a critically acclaimed English comedy based on a 1932 novel by Stella Gibbons, began its run at the Ross last night, and will continue through Finals Week.

Also showing is the animated

short, "The Abductees," which will precede the film.

"Cold Comfort Farm" and "The Abductees" are showing tonight through Sunday, and again on Thursday through Dec. 22. Screenings are at 7 and 9 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays; at 1, 3, 7 and 9 p.m. on Saturdays; and at 3, 5, 7 and 9 p.m. on Sundays.

Admission is \$4.50 for students, \$3.50 for senior citizens and children and \$5.50 for everyone else.

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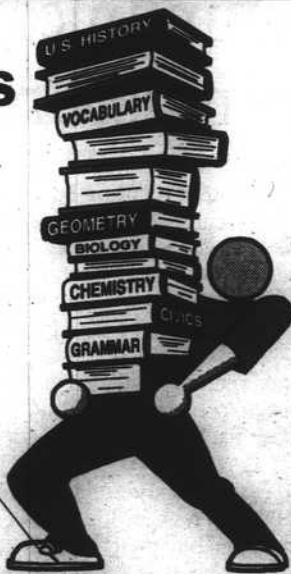
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First Kid (PG)
(12:45) 3:00-5:10-7:25-9:40

Phenomenon (PG)
2:00-4:45-7:10-9:30

Time to Kill (R)
2:20-5:20-8:20

Crow 2 (R)
(1:30) 3:30-5:30-7:30-9:30

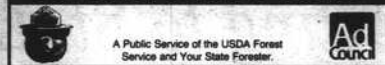
The Island of Dr. Moreau (PG-13)
(1:10) 3:10-5:10-7:10-9:10

The Chamber (R)
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Ovitz resigns as executive for Disney

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Hollywood power broker Michael Ovitz is stepping down as Walt Disney Co.'s No. 2 executive after trying for a year to share power with his boss, Michael Eisner, at the world's biggest entertainment company, sources said Thursday.

Entertainment industry sources inside and outside the company said Disney was to announce Ovitz's departure after the close of the stock markets.

It was not immediately clear whether Ovitz quit or was fired, or whether he had another position lined up. Earlier in the day, a spokesman for Sony Corp. had denied reports he was heading for that company, which owns the troubled Columbia and TriStar studios.

Before joining Disney, Ovitz was considered Hollywood's biggest power broker as the head of Creative Artists Agency. His relationship with Eisner, an old friend, has been watched closely since he became Disney's president in August 1995.

It had been unclear whether two such forceful executives could work out a power-sharing arrangement, and some recent reports had Eisner questioning Ovitz's job performance.

Ovitz, Eisner, and Eisner spokesman John Dreyer were in New York and did not immediately return calls seeking comment. Ovitz and Eisner earlier in the day had been scheduled to appear at a luncheon in New York honoring ABC News President Roone Arledge, but did not attend.

For all its considerable success, Disney has had trouble keeping its top management team in place since its former president, Frank Wells, died in a plane crash in 1994. Eisner is notoriously control-minded, a trait many believe has frustrated other talented executives.

Several have since left, most notably Jeffrey Katzenberg, who had run Disney's studio operations and quit in 1994 after being denied the president's job at Disney. Katzenberg later founded the Dreamworks SKG studio with Steven Spielberg and record mogul David Geffen.

Another well-regarded executive, Richard Frank, quit as chairman of Disney's television and telecommunications unit in 1995 following reports that he was frustrated by Eisner's close supervision of his work.

Ovitz has had talks with Sony Corp., the Japanese electronics and entertainment company, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, the New York Post and Daily Variety reported Thursday.

But Sony spokesman Peter Wilkes in Culver City flatly denied

Please see **DISNEY** on page 17

MCI abandons music retail

MCI from page 15

When the service was launched, people were able to listen for free to one of some 20,000 15- to 20-second music clips. Selections fell into 14 formats, including rock, country, pop, gospel, and children's.

MCI sold CDs for between \$11.99 and \$16.99; older ones, for \$7.99. Those prices were not out of line with retailers, but stores often offered better deals.

MCI also charged \$2.69 to ship the first CD or cassette plus 49 cents for each additional product. Overnight shipping cost more.