

Total Recall ★★★

Year of Release: 1990

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: See It

The Arnold Schwarzenegger thriller *Total Recall* explodes onto the screen with extravagant action, eye-popping special effects, spectacular sets, and gallons and gallons and gallons of blood. The film is literally an assault on the senses, and yet, it is much more than a mere roller coaster ride. *Total Recall* is also an intriguing mystery, a throwback to the film noir tradition where nothing is as it appears.

Total Recall asks the eternal question: is it live or is it Memorex? The movie is set in the year 2084; Mankind has developed "recall," a technology for implanting memories into a person's brain. For example, if you can't afford a vacation to Saturn, you can get the next best thing: the *memory* of a vacation to Saturn. In the film, Schwarzenegger plays a construction worker who is haunted by nightmares about Mars, which in the 21st century is a politically unstable mining colony. Schwarzenegger has never been to Mars so he wonders where these nightmares are coming from: are they just dreams or are they partially erased memories bubbling into his subconscious? He travels to Mars to unravel the mystery.

Like *Aliens*, *Die Hard*, and *The Terminator*, *Total Recall* rarely surfaces for air once it plunges into the action. *Robocop* director Paul Verhoeven has

achieved the ultimate in wham-bam, rock 'em-sock 'em, rip-roaring movie-making. *Total Recall* is a violent and gory tour de force, a virtual blood-bath with stomach turning makeup and special effects. Fortunately, the film has a captivating story line which offsets the gratuitous gore. The elaborate and intricate plot is full of double crosses, triple crosses, and even quadruple crosses, with mind games galore.

In the tradition of *Blade Runner* and *Brazil*, *Total Recall* offers a vivid vision of the future. Verhoeven creates an entire society on Mars, complete with a sleazy red-light district. The ornate sets reflect both a fertile imagination and a loving eye for detail.

As for the acting, Schwarzenegger is in his element, reaffirming his status as today's premier action hero. The rest of the cast, on the other hand, is somewhat pedestrian, except for Sharon Stone who makes for a deliciously bitchy villain. Unfortunately, *Total Recall* veers out of control at the end, providing science fiction which is heavy on fiction and light on science.

When all is said and done, however, *Total Recall* sets a new standard for action which should be difficult, if not impossible, to beat.