

= Mars Attacks ! =

Mars Attacks ! is a 1996 American comedy science fiction film directed by Tim Burton and written by Jonathan Gems . Based on the cult trading card series of the same name minus the punctuation , the film features an ensemble cast consisting of Jack Nicholson (in a dual role) , 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 Smith , and Sylvia Sidney . The film is a parody of science fiction B movies with elements of black comedy and political satire .

Alex Cox had tried to make a Mars Attacks ! film in the 1980s before Burton and Gems began development in 1993 . When Gems turned in his first draft in 1994 , Warner Bros. commissioned rewrites from Gems , Burton , Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski in an attempt to lower the budget to \$ 60 million . The final production budget came to \$ 80 million , while Warner Bros. spent another \$ 20 million on the Mars Attacks ! marketing campaign . Filming took place from February to November 1996 . The film was shot in California , Nevada , Kansas , Arizona and Argentina . The soundtrack became famous for the Martians ' quirky speech pattern , which was created by reversing the sound of a duck 's quack .

The filmmakers hired Industrial Light & Magic to create the Martians using computer animation after their previous plan to use stop motion , supervised by Barry Purves , fell through because of budget limitations . Mars Attacks ! was released on December 13 , 1996 to mixed reviews from critics . The film grossed approximately \$ 101 million in box office totals , which was seen as a disappointment . Mars Attacks ! was nominated for the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation and earned multiple nominations at the Saturn Awards .

= = Plot = =

In Kentucky , a family watches in confusion a herd of cattle running past their home , on fire . A spaceship explodes before it returns to Mars , and hundreds of other Martian ships leave Mars and head towards Earth .

President James Dale along with his aides addresses the United States concerning the historic event . People around the country follow the story . The President 's science aides set up a first contact meeting with the Martians in Pahrump , Nevada as President Dale watches the development on TV with his wife Marsha and his daughter Taffy .

Using a universal translator , the Ambassador of the Martians announces that they intend to colonize the Earth . To prevent this intention from causing panic , the translator is reprogrammed to say that the Martians " come in peace " . When a hippie releases a dove as a symbol of peace , the Ambassador shoots it , then he and the other Martians slaughter a large number of people at the event including General Casey , news reporter Jason Stone , and Billy @-@ Glenn Norris before capturing chat show host Nathalie Lake and her pet Chihuahua Poppy whose heads they transpose .

Thinking that the Martians assumed that the dove was a symbol of war , President Dale tells Professor Donald Kessler to negotiate with the Martians , whose ambassador is invited to address the United States Congress . At this meeting , the Martians massacre most of Congress . Donald begs the Martian Ambassador to stop , but is rendered unconscious and taken aboard their ship where he is later shown with his body parts dismembered and his disembodied head remaining animated . General Decker tries to convince President Dale to retaliate with nuclear warfare , but he refuses .

After an attempt to assassinate Dale fails , The Martians invade Earth , starting with Washington , D.C. As they attack the White House , the Secret Service tries to rush the President and the First Lady to the bunker . Dale makes it , but Taffy is separated from them during the chaos and Marsha is crushed to death by the Nancy Reagan chandelier . After the U.S. government unsuccessfully attempts a nuclear attack on the mother ship , the Martians exact revenge by defacing world landmarks for amusement . That night , the Martians infiltrate the bunker where Dale has been taken

and the leader reduces Decker to the size of an insect before killing him . The Martians kill everyone else in the bunker except for Dale , who makes an impassioned speech in an attempt to plea for peace and his life . The Martian uses a false hand to kill Dale .

As the Martians ravage Las Vegas with Art Land being one of their victims , Byron Williams , a casino employee and former world champion boxer , leads a small group of survivors consisting of Barbara Land , Tom Jones , a waitress named Cindy , and a gambler to an airfield in the hopes of flying a small jet to safety . They barely make it , losing the gambler in the process , but discover a large group of Martians stationed there as they are preparing to take off . Byron creates a diversion by challenging them to a fistfight . While he succeeds in killing the Ambassador , he is outnumbered and overwhelmed , but Tom , Barbara , and Cindy escape .

Billy @-@ Glenn 's brother Richie discovers that the Martians ' heads explode when they hear Slim Whitman 's " Indian Love Call . " He and his grandmother Florence drive around town , using the song to kill Martians . The military thereafter broadcast the song around the globe , killing most of the Martians and their leader , and causing the few remaining survivors to either flee from Earth or surrender . Nathalie and Donald kiss while drowning when the Martian spaceship crashes into the ocean .

In the aftermath , Richie and Florence are awarded the Medal of Honor by Taffy , with her being the only surviving member of the government . Byron , who survived his Martian brawl , arrives in D.C. to reunite with his former wife and their two sons (who saved Dale 's life in the White House using two guns they stole from a dead Martian) as the devastating is being cleaned up . Barbara , Cindy , and Tom Jones emerge from a cave with some animals to see a crashed Martian ship in the adjacent Lake Tahoe .

= = Cast = =

Jack Nicholson as President James Dale , the President of the United States .

Jack Nicholson also portrays Art Land , a developer in Las Vegas .

Glenn Close as First Lady Marsha Dale , James Dale 's wife .

Annette Bening as Barbara Land , Art Land 's wife .

Pierce Brosnan as Professor Donald Kessler , a science expert who works for President Dale and is later captured and experimented on by the Martians .

Danny DeVito as Rude Gambler

Martin Short as Press Secretary Jerry Ross

Sarah Jessica Parker as Nathalie Lake , a talk show host who is later captured and experimented on by the Martians .

Michael J. Fox as Jason Stone , a news reporter who is killed during the Martians ' first attack .

Rod Steiger as General Decker , a US Army general who works for President Dale .

Lukas Haas as Richie Norris , Billy @-@ Glenn Norris 's younger brother .

Natalie Portman as Taffy Dale , James and Marsha Dale 's daughter .

Jim Brown as Byron Williams , a Las Vegas casino employee and former boxer .

Lisa Marie Smith as Martian Girl , a Martian posing as a human female .

Sylvia Sidney as Florence Norris , Richie and Billy @-@ Glenn 's grandmother .

Tom Jones as Himself

Christina Applegate as Sharona , Billy @-@ Glenn 's girlfriend .

Pam Grier as Louise Williams , Byron 's former wife .

Jack Black as Billy @-@ Glenn Norris , a US Army private who is Richie 's older brother and gets himself killed trying to stand up to the Martians .

Paul Winfield as General Casey

Janice Rivera as Cindy , a co @-@ worker of Byron .

Brian Haley as Mitch , a Secret Service agent .

Joe Don Baker as Mr. Norris , Billy @-@ Glenn and Richie 's father .

O @-@ Lan Jones as Sue @-@ Ann Norris , Billy @-@ Glenn and Richie 's mother .

Ray J and Brandon Hammond as Cedric and Neville Williams , Byron and Louise 's sons .

Jerzy Skolimowski as Dr. Zeigler , a scientist who created a device that (badly) translated the Martian language .

Barbet Schroeder as Maurice , the President of France .

Joseph Maher as White House Decorator

Steve Valentine as TV Director

Frank Welker as Martian Vocal Effects

Roger L. Jackson as Dr. Zeigler 's translator (voice uncredited)

= = Production = =

= = = Development = = =

In 1985 , Alex Cox pitched the idea of a film based on the Mars Attacks trading card series as a joint @-@ production to Orion and Tristar Pictures . He wrote three drafts over the next four years , but was replaced by Martin Amis before Orion / Tristar placed Mars Attacks in turnaround .

Jonathan Gems , who had previously written multiple unproduced screenplays for director Tim Burton , came up with his own idea for a Mars Attacks film in 1993 . The writer pitched both concepts of Mars Attacks and Dinosaurs Attack ! to Burton , who both decided that Dinosaurs Attack ! would be too similar to Jurassic Park (1993) . Burton , who was busy preparing Ed Wood (1994) , believed that Mars Attacks ! would be a perfect opportunity to pay homage to the films of Edward D. Wood , Jr . , especially Plan 9 from Outer Space (1959) , and other 1950s science fiction B movies , such as Invaders from Mars (1953) , It Came from Outer Space (1953) , The War of the Worlds (1953) , Target Earth (1954) , Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956) and Earth vs. the Flying Saucers (1956) .

Burton set Mars Attacks ! up with Warner Bros. and the studio purchased the film rights to the trading card series on his behalf . The original theatrical release date was planned for the summer of 1996 . Gems completed his original script in 1994 , which was budgeted by Warner Bros. at \$ 260 million . The studio wanted to make the film for no more than \$ 60 million . After turning in numerous drafts in an attempt to lower the budget , Gems was replaced by Ed Wood writers Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski .

Gems eventually returned to the project , writing a total of 12 drafts of the script . Although he is credited with both the screen story and screenplay of Mars Attacks ! , Gems dedicates his novelization of the movie to Burton , who " co @-@ wrote the screenplay and didn 't ask for a credit " . Warner Bros. was dubious of the Martian dialogue and wanted Burton to add closed captioning subtitles , but he resisted . Working with Burton , Gems pared the film 's 60 leading characters down to 23 , and the worldwide destruction planned for the film was isolated to three major cities . Scenes featuring Martians attacking China , the Philippines , Japan , Europe , Africa , India , and Russia were deleted from the screenplay . " Bear in mind this was way before Independence Day (1996) was written , " Gems commented . " We had things like Manhattan being destroyed building by building , the White House went and so did the Empire State Building . Warner Bros. figured all this would be too expensive , so we cut most of that out to reduce the cost . " Howard Stern claimed that the film 's climax , where an attack by Martians was thwarted by playing Slim Whitman songs to them , was originally created by him when he worked at WNBC in 1982 , in a sketch named " Slim Whitman vs. The Midget Aliens From Mars . " As Burton listened to the sketch while being interviewed by Stern , he dismissed it as mere coincidence .

= = = Casting = = =

The decision to hire an A @-@ list ensemble cast for Mars Attacks ! parallels the strategy Irwin Allen used for his disaster films , notably The Poseidon Adventure (1972) and The Towering Inferno (1974) . Warren Beatty was the original choice for the role of President Dale , but dropped out . Paul Newman replaced him , but then considered playing another role , and left the production

over concerns about the film's violence . Michael Keaton was also considered . Jack Nicholson was then approached , who jokingly remarked he wanted to play all the roles . Burton agreed to cast Nicholson as both Art Land and President Dale , specifically remembering his positive working relationship with the actor on *Batman* (1989) .

Susan Sarandon was originally set to play Barbara Land before Annette Bening was cast . Bening modeled the character after Ann @-@ Margret 's performance in *Viva Las Vegas* (1964) . Hugh Grant was the first choice for Professor Donald Kessler , which eventually went to Pierce Brosnan . Meryl Streep , Diane Keaton and Stockard Channing were considered for First Lady Marsha Dale , but Glenn Close won the role . In addition to Nicholson , other actors who reunited with Burton on *Mars Attacks !* include Sylvia Sidney from *Beetlejuice* (1988) , Sarah Jessica Parker (who signed on before reading the script) from *Ed Wood* (1994) , O @-@ Lan Jones from *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) , and Danny DeVito from *Batman Returns* (1992) , continuing Burton 's trend of recasting actors several times from his previous works . *Mars Attacks !* is also notable for one of the few times that Johnny Depp turned down a role in a Burton film . He was approached to play reporter Jason Stone . Michael J. Fox was cast instead .

= = = Filming = = =

The originally scheduled start date was mid @-@ August 1995 but filming was delayed until February 26 , 1996 . Director Tim Burton hired Peter Suschitzky as the cinematographer because he was a fan of his work in David Cronenberg 's films . Production designer Thomas Wynn (*A Beautiful Mind* , *Malcolm X*) intended to have the war room pay tribute to *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) . During production , Burton insisted that the art direction , cinematography and costume design of *Mars Attacks !* incorporate the look of the 1960s trading cards .

On designing the Martian (played by Burton 's then @-@ girlfriend Lisa Marie Smith) who seduces Jerry Ross (Martin Short) , costume designer Colleen Atwood took combined inspiration from the playing cards , Marilyn Monroe , the work of Alberto Vargas and Jane Fonda in *Barbarella* (1968) . Filming for *Mars Attacks !* ended on June 1 , 1996 . The film score was written / composed by Burton 's regular Danny Elfman , to whom Burton was reconciled after a quarrel occurred during *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) , for which they did not co @-@ operate in producing *Ed Wood* (1994) . Elfman enlisted the help of Oingo Boingo lead guitarist Steve Bartek to help arrange the compositions for the orchestra .

= = = Visual effects = = =

Tim Burton initially intended to use stop motion animation to feature the Martians , viewing it as a homage to the work of Ray Harryhausen , primarily *Jason and the Argonauts* . Similar to his own *Beetlejuice* , Burton " wanted to make [the special effects] look cheap and purposely fake @-@ looking as possible . " He first approached Henry Selick , director of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* , to supervise the stop motion work , but Selick was busy directing *James and the Giant Peach* , also produced by Burton . Despite the fact that Warner Bros. was skeptical of the escalating budget and had not yet greenlit the film for production , Burton hired Barry Purves to shepherd the stop @-@ motion work . Purves created an international team of about 70 animators , who worked on *Mars Attacks !* for eight months and began compiling test footage in Burbank , California . The department workers studied Gloria Swanson 's choreography and movement as Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard* for inspiration on the Martians ' movement .

When the budget was projected at \$ 100 million (Warner Bros. wanted it for no more than \$ 75 million) , producer Larry J. Franco commissioned a test reel from Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) , the visual effects company he worked with on *Jumanji* . Burton was persuaded to change his mind to employ computer animation , which brought the final production budget to \$ 80 million . Although Purves was uncredited for his work , stop @-@ motion supervisors Ian Mackinnon and Peter Saunders , who would later collaborate with Burton on *Corpse Bride* , received character design credit . Warner Digital Studios was responsible for the scenes of global destruction , airborne flying

saucer sequences , the Martian landing in Nevada , and the robot that chases Richie Norris in his pickup truck . Warner Digital also used practical effects , such as building scale models of Big Ben and other landmarks . The destruction of Art Land 's hotel was footage of the real @-@ life night @-@ time demolition of The Landmark Hotel and Casino , a building Burton wished to immortalize .

= = Reception = =

= = = Release = = =

Warner Bros. spent \$ 20 million on the movie 's marketing campaign ; together with \$ 80 million spent during production , the final combined budget came to \$ 100 million . A novelization , written by writer Jonathan Gems , was published by Puffin Books in January 1997 . The film was released in the United States on December 13 , 1996 , earning \$ 9 @. @ 38 million in its opening weekend . Mars Attacks ! eventually made \$ 37 @. @ 77 million in US totals and \$ 63 @. @ 6 million elsewhere , coming to a worldwide total of \$ 101 @. @ 37 million .

The film was considered a box office bomb in the US but generally achieved greater success both critically and commercially in Europe . Many observers found similarities with Independence Day , which also came out in 1996 . " It was just a coincidence . Nobody told me about it . I was surprised how close it was , " director Tim Burton continued , " but then it 's a pretty basic genre I guess . Independence Day was different in tone ? it was different in everything . It almost seemed like we had done kind of a Mad magazine version of Independence Day . " During Mars Attacks ! theatrical run in January 1997 , TBS purchased the broadcasting rights of the film .

= = = Critical reaction = = =

Mars Attacks ! drew mixed responses from critics . Based on 63 reviews collected by Rotten Tomatoes , 52 % of the reviewers enjoyed the film , with an average score of 5 @. @ 9 / 10 . By comparison , Metacritic calculated an average score of 52 / 100 from 19 reviews . Roger Ebert observed the homages to the 1950s science fiction B movies . " Ed Wood himself could have told us what 's wrong with this movie : the makers felt superior to the material . To be funny , even schlock has to believe in itself . Look for Infra @-@ Man (1975) or Invasion of the Bee Girls (1973) and you will find movies that lack stars and big budgets and fancy special effects but are funny and fun in a way that Burton 's megaproduction never really understands . "

Kenneth Turan of the Los Angeles Times wrote that " Mars Attacks ! is all 1990s cynicism and disbelief , mocking the conventions that Independence Day takes seriously . This all sounds clever enough but in truth , Mars Attacks ! is not as much fun as it should be . Few of its numerous actors make a lasting impression and Burton 's heart and soul is not in the humor " . Desson Thomson from The Washington Post said " Mars Attacks ! evokes plenty of sci @-@ fi classics , from The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951) to Dr. Strangelove (1964) , but it doesn 't do much beyond that superficial exercise . With the exception of Burton 's jolting sight gags (I may never recover from the vision of Sarah Jessica Parker 's head grafted on to the body of a chihuahua) , the comedy is half @-@ developed , pedestrian material . And the climactic battle between Earthlings and Martians is dull and overextended . "

Richard Schickel , writing in Time magazine , gave a positive review . " You have to admire everyone 's chutzpah : the breadth of Burton 's (and writer Jonathan Gems ') movie references , which range from Kurosawa to Kubrick ; and above all their refusal to offer us a single likable character . Perhaps they don 't create quite enough deeply funny earthlings to go around , but a thoroughly mean @-@ spirited big @-@ budget movie is always a treasurable rarity . " Jonathan Rosenbaum from the Chicago Reader praised the surreal humor and black comedy , which he found to be in the vein of Dr. Strangelove and Gremlins (1984) . He said it was far from clear whether the movie was a satire , although critics were describing it as one . Todd McCarthy of Variety called Mars Attacks ! " a cult sci @-@ fi comedy miscast as an elaborate , all @-@ star studio

extravaganza . "

= = = Awards = = =

Mars Attacks ! was on the shortlist for the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects nomination , but the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences chose Independence Day , Dragonheart and Twister instead . The film was nominated for seven categories at the Saturn Awards . Danny Elfman won Best Music , while director Tim Burton , writer Jonathan Gems , actor Lukas Haas , costume designer Colleen Atwood and the visual effects department at Industrial Light & Magic received nominations . Mars Attacks ! was nominated for both the Saturn Award for Best Science Fiction Film (which went to Independence Day) and the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation .