

Brilliant Pitt's stellar performance in bedazzling space adventure



CHENNAI: American director James Gray has had a penchant for small, tightly knit stories circling crime and emotion.

His debut feature in 1994, “Little Odessa,” got a Silver Lion award at the Venice Film Festival. His later works, such as “We Own the Night” and “The Immigrant,” were moving studies of criminals and romantics.

But Gray arrived in Venice this year with a movie that was unlike any other he had helmed before: A spectacle called “Ad Astra” with Brad Pitt playing an astronaut.

Venice has had another space story, “Gravity” (2013), with George Clooney and Sandra Bullock – who get lost in the dark wilderness of weightlessness.

And Pitt, who has had a good run this year with his Cannes premiere and Quentin Tarantino's "Once Upon A Time In Hollywood" (which stops at nodding distance from the Manson murder of Roman Polanski's wife, Sharon Tate, in 1969), proves that he can be as good a space voyager as Clooney and Bullock were.

However, both Pitt and Gray admitted in media interviews that the movie was "incredibly difficult to make."

Pitt's character Roy McBride, an ace American astronaut, is sent to the furthest human outpost in space to probe a series of dangerous cosmic rays hitting Earth. Were they coming from McBride's father, H. Clifford (Tommy Lee Jones), whose work as a scientist and explorer had led him to journey toward Neptune to find out if alien life existed?

The space researcher had disappeared, leaving behind his young son, and abandoning his mission and country. The rays are emanating from a region close to Neptune, and it is felt that daring trouble-shooter McBride would be the best man to draw a

response from his father.



McBride's intrepid side is witnessed in the opening scene of "Ad Astra" (Latin for "to the stars"). While atop a space antenna, a sudden power disruption sends dozens of astronauts tumbling off. In an electrifying skydive, McBride escapes from the darkness of space to the blue warmth of Earth's atmosphere, finally opening his parachute to help him land safely.

There are more such scary adventures. One of them has him confronting scavenger pirates in shots which prove what a wonderful special effects team Gray had.

His film is as bedazzling and beckoning as it is terrifying. But with Pitt's utter brilliance – and he does not make a single false move – Gray pulls off a sheer delight, amazing and awesome.
