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Chennai Palani Mars, Co-Written By Vijay Sethupathi And Biju Viswanath, Is On Zee5: A Rewind Of This Nicely Trippy Stoner Dramey

This is already an absurd genre. But the premise amps up the absurdity levels to the stratosphere. Sample line: "Simbu CM aana eppidi irukkum?"



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Is [Vijay Sethupathi](#) better at writing lms than picking them? The thought came up while watching [Chennai Palani Mars](#). He has made a whole bunch of solid-to-good-to-great movies, no doubt: I belong to the camp that thinks *Rekka* is a criminally underrated entertainer. But there are *so many* other lms of his that make you wonder WTF: not *what* the fuck, but *why* the fuck! Why on earth is this actor doing these lms and diluting his brand equity? Every actor does his share of why-the-fuck lms — it's a job, a er all. But this question comes up more with Vijay Sethupathi because he does... *so many* lms! If he is capable of co-writing [Orange Mittai](#) and [Chennai Palani Mars](#), both directed by Biju Viswanath, he surely has a good grasp of script and storytelling! Then... why the fuck!

Remember that godawful stoner comedy-wannabe called [Oru Nalla Naal Paathu Solren](#) starring Vijay Sethupathi? [Chennai Palani Mars](#) is that movie done right. Okay, it's far from perfect, so let me tweak that line: [Chennai Palani Mars](#) is that movie done *better*. (Vijay Sethupathi doesn't appear in this, though.) There's a similar structure: two slackers set out on a crazy quest and get involved in crazier shenanigans. But at least some of the jokes catch the stoner-comedy vibe (none of them did in [Oru Nalla Naal...](#)), and there is a genuine vision at work here. The director (and co-writer) isn't just stringing together a bunch of trippy lines and situations. He knows what he is a er.



He knew what he was a er in *Orange Mittai*, too. Recall the stretch where the Vijay Sethupathi character appears to have suffered a heart attack, but when the ambulance arrives, he makes the medical technicians wait. He has to rest powder himself, then comb his hair... But the gag didn't quite burst out in that film because it was grounded in very real and very serious issues, like father-son estrangement. It would have worked in *Chennai Palani Mars*, which is exactly about what the title suggests: a journey from Chennai to Palani to (gulp) the Red Planet. If the stoner comedy is already an absurd genre, this premise amps up the absurdity levels to the stratosphere. Sample line: "Simbu CM *aana eppidi irukkum?*"

Going by their two films together, Biju Viswanath and Vijay Sethupathi already have some auteur-istic traits. Zero interest in melodrama. A really *o* sense of humour, which is not going to work for everyone. (Did you know that if you bang yourself against a wall, you will expend 150 calories?) Terrific instinct for fresh-sounding dialogue. (A motorcycle that gives great mileage is fondly described as "*Karthar-aal aaseervathikka patta bike*".) A deflection for road-movie tropes, filtered through the vibe of a stoner comedy. And yes, fathers and sons. *Orange Mittai* showed us that it's easier to be a good son to someone else's father, and a good father to someone else's son. In *Chennai Palani Mars*, a science-obsessed

father passes on his "I can go to Mars" obsession to his son, Akash (Praveen Raja).

How does he hope to do this, without the help of ISRO, and with just a silly-looking space suit and helmet? He thinks the human brain is enough. He thinks "*sindhanai-oda sakthi*" is enough. He thinks the speed of thought is faster than the speed of light (Is it, really? Doesn't matter. For the purposes of plot, I bought it.) We don't see the father as a young man. He is shown from the back, or as a silhouette — the son, a little boy, stands behind him wondering if this time, at least, will result in success. CUT TO... the father takes off the helmet, and we see an old man, with tufts of white hair. And the son is now an adult. The entire passage of years is condensed into a series of repeating visuals.

The mission, now, is handed over to the next generation, but with a twist. Akash, as his name suggests, isn't just hoping to ascend to the skies. He is also perpetually above the clouds. He has a cocaine habit. He's always high. Usually, in a road movie, the protagonist is the straight guy, and the people he runs into along the way are the nutters. Here, Akash is himself a nutter — and not just in the "cutely eccentric" sense. The drugs have scrambled his mind and he behaves like a crazed man. I was shocked at what he did to the IT employee who keeps trying to commit suicide. His reaction after a tragedy is weird, too — as is a confession about the actual

relationship between him and his father. Some of you will ask why we need this *dramatic* revelation in a movie that is not really a drama. Is there such a thing as a stoner *drame*? Others will say: Why the fuck not!

Chennai Palani Mars Official Trailer | Vijay Sethupathi | Biju | Niranjan Babu

This scene is a beauty. Akash ambles along trying to come to terms with his grief and confusion, and the camera moves with him without a break. The long time the shot is held gives us a sense of the *driving*, the frustrating rootlessness in this man. There's another shot held for a long time, when two men are mowed down by a truck. Two cops peer down at the lifeless bodies. Again, the time we spend on this shot changes what it must have seemed like on paper. It gives us a sense of "is that it?" and "what a waste!" plus "maybe there's something about to happen". (Maybe they'll just wake up with a start?) This is how you separate the films that do not work from the films that do not work *as well as they should have*. With the latter, it's not incompetence. It's just that they have aimed high. They have reached for Mars and fallen short.

Of course, one cannot praise a movie just because it... *aimed high*, just because it *tried*. But again, there's the vision thing. Underneath the apparent randomness, there's a pattern. We think the disappearance of Akash's best friend is going to amount to something, but... We think the crazy guitarist-hallucination is going to amount to something, but... We think the drug mule under pressure to shit out the cocaine he has ingested in a balloon is going to amount to something, but... Or even the dark comedy around that suicide-prone IT guy, named Karthik Krishnamurthy (Paari Elavazhagan)! It's a running gag — even if it occasionally runs out of steam.

Would I have been as invested in *Chennai Palani Mars* — or as forgiving about its many flaws — if I'd watched it in a theatre, and not on an OTT platform? I think... yes. Because I really dig this flavour of humour — not haha humour, but sad humour, bizarre humour, black humour. Akash's companion is a singer named Aandava Perumal (Rajesh Giriprasad), and he has a tendency to launch into classical music whenever stressed or unhappy. One of the most mindfucked stretches of cinema I have seen in recent times is *Enna thavam seithanai* echoing amidst a land fill, as Akash searches for drugs amidst garbage. The imagination is so out there, it could be from... Mars.

Even the haha humour is tinged with a touch of the out-there. This time, it's a pair of cops, the gloriously named Thiruparkadal Kannan (Vasant Marimuthu) and his sidekick, Velu (A Ravikumar). Velu gets his kicks by exploiting the gullibility of his senior, and a bit based on *A Beautiful Mind* made me crack up like crazy. The two actors are fantastic together. The end is nuttier than anything that came earlier, though it brings with it the Tamil cinema curse of summing up with a message or a statement. But if you've bought in this far, that's really the smallest of issues. If you can catch the film's vibe, it's a trip.