

## Familiarity of 'Terminator Genisys' Also its Flaw

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 1, 2015 - 11:30am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The “Terminator” series means so much to so many film fans. What began as a modest sci-fi “what if?” morphed into now four sequels, billions of box office dollars, and the cementing of Arnold Schwarzenegger as an action film titan. It’s all mixed together again in “Terminator Genisys.”

What is most enticing about a reboot of this series is the possibilities for creating a new universe tied into the Terminator legend, which the film succeeded at in some regard, and missed opportunities in other areas, like the story. What is most frustrating about the film is the co-opting of the series previous films, and re-imagining them with a less talented cast in key roles, with a mix of time lines and alternate realities that simply become a way to fix everything in every moment. Savory performances and narrative cohesiveness are lost, amid a more spectacular computer generated landscape and multiple Terminators, most of whom are portrayed by the legendary Arnold in various ages.

Kyle Reese (Jai Courtney) narrates the film prologue, telling of the 1997 Judgement Day – a nuclear war calamity – that bombed the United States into oblivion. The world plunges into a desperate war against Skynet, the company that launched the missiles, and their thinking and killing robotic machines are fighting against what ever humanity still exists. Kyle is adopted into the human resistance army by John Connor (Jason Clarke).





Sarah Connor (Emilia Clarke) and Her Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) in 'Terminator Genisys'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

The ultimate battle in 2029 is on for the resistance, and moments after a big victory the soldiers realize that Skynet has sent a Terminator back to 1984 to kill John Connor's mother Sarah (Emilia Clarke) – which was the situation of the first Terminator film. When Reese follows the Terminator to 1984, he finds the timelines have been skewered. Sarah Connor has been protected by a Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) since she was nine years old, and Judgement Day has been moved up to 2018.

It is a strange twist of Hollywood weirdness that this film borrows from "Back to the Future 2," which addressed the same time travel continuums and alternate universes – I half expected Marty McFly to be the entertainment at a rock bar in 1984. This use of time/space manipulation becomes an extreme slippery slope. Had the story stuck with just Sarah Connor being trained from an earlier age, and the prevention of Judgement Day still happening in 1997, then the focus might have been a bit easier to digest. But when 2018 was thrown in, everything became off kilter and hard to fathom, especially the abrupt ending.

The character of John Connor has always been the bedrock of the Terminator series. He was a far flung mystery in the first film, and his personification in the next three films made him both a confused innocent and mythic warrior. Well, in this chapter he becomes something completely different, and I don't think it was the right decision, given his status as a central character. It seemed more of a way to keep his presence flexible. Jason Clarke does a reasonable job with the role, given all he had to do, but Connor's mystery was shattered and that didn't strike me as a wise choice.

But what about the other bedrock, the Terminator himself? It is a credit to Schwarzenegger that he honors the character once again, this time in many phases of the Terminator's looks (through make-up and CGI). He fights his younger self (the 1984 Terminator) and explains that the Terminator organic shell does age – as Sarah's protector he's nicknamed "Pops." He never wavers from the machine's robotic presence – except for a bit of comic relief – and his performance is enjoyable throughout, in both a present and nostalgic sense.



Resistance Warrior (Matt Smith) and John Connor (Jason Clarke) in 'Terminator Genisys'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

The rest of the casting had problems, as the actors that stand in for the key characters of Sarah Connor and Kyle Reese can't hold a candle to the originals (Linda Hamilton and Michael Biehn), and were hired more for their looks (hotter) than their gravitas or presence. Granted, the story made them almost inconsequential, more like props with familiar names to be dragged through the timeline confusion. But Hamilton and Biehn have nothing to worry about, since they gave those characters life, and Emilia Clarke and Jai Courtney better go back to that framework if they're expected to be memorable in what is the sure-to-come sequels (already announced).

Inevitably the question becomes, what does this series mean? When the initial story can be manipulated in hundreds of different ways, the past and the future becomes meaningless, and the anticipation of what's next is lost. Even the key catchphrase – "I'll be back" – may be replied to as "So what?"

*"Terminator Genisys" opens everywhere on July 1st, in 3D, IMAX and regular screenings. See local listings for 3D/IMAX theaters and showtimes. Featuring Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jason Clarke, Emilia Clarke, Jai Courtney, J.K. Simmons and Courtney Vance. Written by Laeta Kalogridis and Patrick Lussier. Directed by Alan Taylor. Rated "PG-13"*

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