

'Terminator' misses the mark

By Neil Myers

Some movies take a futuristic theme and make it believable, engrossing and entertaining. "The Terminator, a current box office smash," makes a valiant attempt but gets zapped by its own high-tech show.

"The Terminator" stars Arnold Schwarzenegger of Mr. Universe fame as an android from the future, where machines fight for control of the earth against a dedicated band of human rebels. Schwarzenegger has a single-minded obsession—to kill Sarah Connor, an unobtrusive young Los Angeles waitress.

Sent from the future to protect Connor is Kiel Reese, a young hero-type with average hero-type ambitions: to save the future by saving the soon-to-be mother of his rebel group's leader, John Connor.

This, of course, is no easy task when you're fighting a superhuman machine, and a good part of the movie is spent following Reese, Connor and the Terminator around Los Angeles as the android emotionlessly attempts to carry out his programming.

Wonders could be worked for this movie by cutting out the opening scene, where two objects that are supposed to pass for spacecraft with laser weapons shoot at a band of sorry-looking humans. The problem is that the machines look like they came from the toy department at McCrory's, and they appear only briefly before the plot jumps back to the present and the audience is left wondering what the scene means in the scheme of the movie.

I suspect the director and the writers intend to tease the adolescent audience with the high-tech display, and perhaps

to set some basis for the rest of the movie. They may accomplish the first task with some success, but they also lose any critical viewers and create more problems than they solve.

A lot more could be done to increase the film's plausibility by delving into Kiel Reese's character. As it is, Reese's supposed life-long love for Sarah comes as a surprise, and the one fleeting love scene seems incongruous given Reese's cardboard nature.

Sarah, meanwhile, at least manages to be incredulous at her selection as the victim of a murderer from the future. We see a little more of her than Reese, and her growth from an anonymous boopsie to the mother of humanity can almost be swallowed, albeit with a large dose of sugar.

Schwarzenegger's character, on the other hand, has no dimension, which just about suits his acting abilities.

Unlike the shark in "Jaws," which takes on an almost demonic invulnerability, Schwarzenegger's Terminator takes on an almost comic persistence. Despite Connor's and Reese's attempts to blow it up, burn it, shoot it with automatic weapons and run it into a wall, the robot lives on, defying the laws of physics. Moreover, there's no human aspect to the character—a key ingredient in successful "non-human" science-fiction personages like "Star Trek's" Mr. Spock or Hal the computer in "2001: A Space Odyssey." As he is, the Terminator would make a bad stand-in for Wile E. Coyote and offers even less as a dramatic character.

Throughout the movie I found myself wanting to believe the premise that a future society would include a battle between men and machines, but I kept searching for more background and detail. All of the careful chronological infor-

mation of movies like "Planet of the Apes" is missing here, and the movie suffers.

I also kept wondering why Schwarzenegger was bent on killing Connor; I didn't find out until half way through the movie. And I was put off by the imbecilic characterization of the police. It would have helped to include at least one intelligent cop who could think for himself and fight beside Reese and Connor, but that is apparently asking too much.

"The Terminator" is not an inherently bad movie. Lots of other films have dealt successfully with futuristic societies, cybernetics and seemingly unstoppable creatures. This one, unfortunately, treats its subject with an almost cartoon-like simplicity. The shallow characterization, oversimplified plot and mediocre special effects make "The Terminator" a movie you can afford to miss.

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