



## “THE TERMINATOR” (1984)--CAMERON’S FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND

Retrospective by Dr. John L. Flynn

### Introduction

At the core of “The Terminator” (1984), James Cameron's derivative low budget thriller, lay two of science fiction’s most enduring themes, the Frankenstein story and time travel. Saddled with a meager \$6.5 million and doubt on behalf of the Hollywood establishment, Cameron still managed to crank out a motion picture that transcended its humble origins to best “2010: The Year We Make Contact” and “Dune” as the season's biggest box office feature. The film also broke new thematic ground which would have a long-range influence on science fiction productions. By making the villain a sympathetic

character, in much the same way that Frankenstein's monster generates sympathy, the adaptation demonstrates considerable insight into the movie-going public's hunger for a new kind of anti-hero. For the real strength of the production lies with the inimitable performance by Arnold Schwarzenegger as the unstoppable robot from the future that stomps and crashes his way through almost every scene. Audiences would settle for nothing less in future films, and though today it may appear limited in light of its bigger budget sequels, "The Terminator" still thrills as both a thought-provoking and action-packed motion picture.

### **Origins**

In approaching the story of "The Terminator," James Cameron relied on two favorite chestnuts of the science fiction genre, the Frankenstein story and time travel. One of the most enduring themes in all of fantasy and science fiction dealt with the creature that turns against its creator. The theme goes back hundreds of years before Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus (1818) to the mythic fable about the Golem. In that Eastern European tale, which was a familiar one to Jews and Gypsies, the Golem was a creature made out of clay to assist the people of its small village, but predictably the creature goes berserk and must be destroyed. Similarly, the creature in Frankenstein is created for noble purposes; Dr. Victor Frankenstein wants to put an end to the notion of death, but when he beholds his creation for the first time, he is horrified by its appearance and he rejects it. At first, the creature doesn't know right from wrong; but it soon learns, by reading Milton's Paradise Lost, about man's fallen nature, and chooses to avenge itself upon its creator. The Frankenstein monster became a symbol of

technology out of control, representing everything from the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s to the Atomic Bomb in the Cold War.

Science fiction authors have retold the story of Frankenstein many times, often linking the monster to robots and computers. In Karel Capek's "Rossum's Universal Robots" (1921), the artificial beings revolt against their masters, and take over the world; while the great machine that controls the world in E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" (1922) breaks down, and brings about the end of the world. C.C. Campbell's "The Avatar" (1935) imagines the perfect artificial man, but when that man becomes dictator of the entire world, he must be destroyed. Dozens upon dozens of like-minded stories dominated the golden era of pulp science fiction, from 1926 to 1946, and in every case, the outcome was the same. No matter how good intentioned the creator might be, he always tended to create a monster. In the Forties, at the behest of editor John W. Campbell, Isaac Asimov tried to counter this "Frankenstein complex" with his Three Laws of Robotics, and for a time, robots became humble servants to man. Asimov's "Robbie" (1940), "Liar" (1940), and other tales explored the benevolent behavior of robots once their positronic brains had been stamped with his three commandments. But two decades later, when Arthur C. Clarke's HAL-9000 killed most of the crew and took over the *Discovery* mission in 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), the spectre of Frankenstein's monster had again raised its ugly head. D.F. Jones's Colossus (1967), which may have been the model for Cameron's Skynet in "The Terminator," and Harlan Ellison's "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" (1973) reinforced the notion that machines were still in charge.

Time Travel, the second most popular of science fiction's literary themes, formed the other cornerstone of James Cameron's story. The notion of being able to touch the future or affect the events of the past has fascinated mankind for many thousands of years, going as far back as the ancient prophets of Egypt and the oracles of Greece. In fact, speculations about temporal shifts and time paradoxes have occupied scientists, philosophers and poets for centuries, fueling countless stories, articles and debates on that arcane subject. But the concept of shuttling back and forth in time (at will) is a modern one, with its many aspects and conventions tied to a very simple principle. If time is a fourth dimension, along which the other three dimensions travel from second to second, then time travel is a means whereby a human being (or alien) can project his consciousness or body into the past or future. Best illustrated by one of the earliest excursions into the genre, Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol (1843) provides the perfect template for time-travel stories. When the miserly Scrooge is taken by spirits on a journey into his past and possible future, he is both an observer and participant in the events. The ghosts (specifically the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come) give him a chance to reshape that future by changing key elements in his present life, or face a cold, lonely death. Later temporal excursions, utilizing sleep-induced suspension, cryonics, specialized machines, dreams or other involuntary twists of fate, would provide dozens of other protagonists with similar dilemmas.

When H.G. Wells created a device for travelling in time, with The Time Machine (originally published as "The Chronic Argonauts" in *Science Schools Journal*, 1888; expanded and revised in 1895), man was suddenly able to control his journeys

backward and forward. By taking his anonymous time traveler on a trip into the distant future, then returning him safely to the present, Wells established the pattern for most modern time-travel stories. Though it would take another thirty years, or so, for the notion to finally take root, Wells' invention not only gave time travelers mobility but also changed the way in which many other writers would approach the subject. Pulp writer Raymond Cummings was the first to expand upon Wells' theories with "The Man Who Mastered Time" (Argosy, 1924). The popularity of stories utilizing time machines grew very quickly during the golden age of the pulp magazines, as a great many writers realized the potential of Wells' marvelous invention. Murray Leinster, Wilson Tucker, John W. Campbell, and others followed with their own time travel stories.

The dangerous possibility of accidentally changing some past event (and thereby causing a rift in the space-time continuum) also gave rise to a variety of time-travel stories which dealt with paradoxes. In "The Brooklyn Project" (Planet Stories, 1948), William Tenn's time machine precipitates changes in the present by its mere presence in the past. In Ray Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder" (1952), a dinosaur hunter unwittingly steps on a butterfly in prehistoric times and changes his own future world. Some travelers in time actually try to alter the past with their own actions. The hero, in Silverberg's "Assassin," (1957) tries to prevent Lincoln's assassination, while the time traveler, in Maurice Vaisberg's "The Sun Stood Still" (1958), attempts to kill Joshua at the battle of Jericho. Similarly, the crazed director, in Harry Harrison's The Technicolor Time Machine (1967), decides to shoot his latest epic (about the Viking discovery of North America) on location in the past; but when the Vikings fail to appear, he imports them thus setting into motion the actual events. The most popular time paradox

deals with a man who returns in time to kill his own grandfather, and was first introduced to readers in Nathan Schachner's "Ancestral Voices" (1933). Since then, many time-travel stories have wrestled with that perplexing problem, including David Daniel's "The Branches of Time" (1935), Robert Sheckley's "A Thief in Time" (1954), Robert Heinlein's "All You Zombies" (1959), and "Slaves of Time" (1974).

In the 1960s, Harlan Ellison wrote two time travel stories for the highly regarded television series "The Outer Limits." In his award-winning script "Soldier" (1965) Ellison relates the story of a 21st century warrior who is inadvertently yanked from his nuclear, war-torn world and thrust into the present. He is befriended by a scientist and his family, but ultimately sacrifices his life to kill an adversary sent back through time to eliminate him. In "Demon with the Glass Hand" (1965), Trent is sent back from the future with little knowledge of his own origin beyond five days before. While battling with alien invaders intent on enslaving the earth of the future, he discovers that he is a robot which contains valuable knowledge about mankind's salvation. He must destroy the aliens, and return to his own time in order to save the world. George Pal's big-budget production of "The Time Machine" (1960) and Franklin Adreon's low-budget quickie "Cyborg 2087" (1966) explored similar territory, and paved the way for future cinematic adventures in time travel.

### **The Screen Story**

From the nuclear war-torn future of 2029, the Year of Darkness, a cyborg (part man, part machine) has been sent back to present-day Los Angeles. Representing a world that has become dominated by mechanized intelligences, the Cyberdyne Systems Model 101 (nicknamed "The Terminator" by Resistance leaders) has been programmed to kill a

young woman named Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), whose life could alter the course of history. Her unborn son may be the next century's only hope against the computer technology that rebelled, wanting all human life exterminated. This "killing machine" (Arnold Schwarzenegger) feels no pity, no pain, and no fear, and is capable of leaving behind him an unspeakable path of destruction. A brilliant flash of light and an earsplitting explosion mark the arrival of this mechanical monster in the unsuspecting world of May 12, 1984.

At the same time, just moments after the machines have dispatched their emissary of death, the human resistance manages to overthrow its enemies and take command of a secret military base. Their victory over the machines is far from complete, however. Skynet (the central machine intelligence) has used time-displacement equipment to send a terminator back in time to reshape the future by changing the past, and John Connor knows that his unsuspecting mother is the likely target. Forced to make the difficult decision of sending one of his own men to face certain death, the leader of the resistance looks to them for a volunteer. (Yet secretly, deep down inside, he already knows who the volunteer will be.) Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn), a young-but-hardened guerilla fighter from the trenches, steps forward to accept the suicide mission, knowing that, against all odds, he must locate and eliminate the Terminator before it can fulfill its deadly mission.

Reese, too, emerges through the same time warp, but finds himself immediately hunted by the police for several murders that his predecessor has caused. Resorting to his unusual combat training, the time traveler manages to temporarily evade the Los Angeles police and arm himself with a shotgun. Once back on the street, he mingles with the other lost souls of the night. Somewhere in this dark city lives the woman he must

protect and a relentless murderer that he must stop!

Leaving a double path of destruction in their wake the two future warriors struggle to find the young woman before the other. Meanwhile, a baffled police force are somewhat confounded by two unconnected killings, until they realize the murdered women share the same name and follow each other in the telephone directory. Sergeant Vukovich (Lance Henrickson) and Lieutenant Traxler (Paul Winfield) attempt to warn the third Sarah Connor, but she has just left her apartment to eat dinner. Fearing that Sarah may yet be targeted by the "phone-book killer," Traxler decides to release a statement to the press. His televised speech reaches Connor at a pizza joint, but is much too late to save Sarah's roommate Ginger and her boyfriend Matt from the Terminator. His superior programming has already led him to her apartment and, subsequently, onto the restaurant where she is hiding.

As the terrified young woman dodges the Terminator and Kyle pursues him in a deadly game of search and destroy, the cyborg executes a number of the patrons at a dance club called Tech Noir. Reese springs to her rescue, shouting, "Come with me if you want to live," and pulls Sarah Connor from the clutches of the mechanized murderer. Stealing a car, the two fugitives race away into the night with the Terminator (and the police) in pursuit.

Confused, and frightened out of her mind, Sarah demands to know what's going on and the reason why anyone would want to hurt a simple waitress like herself. Kyle Reese (Sergeant Tech Com DN38416) reveals that he has traveled back in time to protect her from the killer cyborg, but she refuses to believe him. "The Terminator is an infiltration unit--part man, part machine," he continues. "Hyper alloy combat chassis,



microprocessor controlled and fully armored . . . It can't be bargained with. It can't be reasoned with. It doesn't feel pity or remorse or fear. It will not stop, ever, until you are dead!" Reese further explains that a nuclear war, started by the machines, destroyed the world because Skynet (a computer defense system built for SAC/Norad by the Cyberdyne Systems) believed that all humans posed a threat to its basic programming. He grew up in the rubble after the war, while humans were being rounded up for orderly disposal in death camps. The human race was very close to extinction when one man stepped forward to teach others to fight back, to storm the wires, and to smash the machines into rubble. His name was John Connor--Sarah's son. The young woman is troubled by his story, but cannot accept what he is saying without proof. (The fact that she is being pursued by a Terminator is not proof enough.) Similarly, when Reese is arrested by the police after a high-speed chase, the court psychologist dismisses him as insane.

Badly damaged from his various encounters with Reese, the Terminator returns to a rented room for some makeshift surgery, then arms himself for a possible assault on police headquarters. When he is unable to gain access to his target through diplomatic means, the Terminator warns the desk sergeant that "I'll be back." Moments later, he crashes into the station with a four-wheel drive truck and begins to kill everyone in sight. Against a murderous force of such magnitude, the police stand little chance of survival. (Even Traxler and Vukovich are gunned down in the attack.) But Sarah and Reese manage, once again, to slip through the cyborg's destructive fury and steal away into the night.

Hours later, the two fugitives seek sanctuary first at a highway underpass, then at a flea-bitten motel just off the interstate. There, Reese completes his tale of the war-torn

future and tells her that each person has the responsibility to make a difference. Sarah binds his wounds, and the two people - from vastly different worlds - share an intimate moment of lovemaking (which will ultimately lead to her conception). Kyle Reese is, in fact, John Connor's father.

The Terminator is not far behind them. By making use of Sarah's address book, the cyborg has tracked her mother down to a mountain cabin and, subsequently, thanks to an unauthorized call, the fugitives to the motel. But Reese is ready for him with homemade explosives. They flee the motel, with the Terminator in pursuit, and race through the darkened streets of Los Angeles. While Sarah pilots their vehicle at breakneck speeds, Kyle Reese hurtles several pipe bombs at their pursuer. He manages to time one just right to explode in the tail pipe of an oil tanker. Though the warrior from the future is mortally wounded, the massive explosion temporarily stops the Terminator, melting away its human form.

Within a few moments, though, its chrome exo-skeleton rises from the flames to continue pursuit, chasing the two lovers into Cyberdyne Industries. Reese sacrifices himself in an attempt to blow the robot to little pieces, but his sacrifice is a hollow one. Simply broken in half, the Terminator once again resumes its pursuit of Sarah through the deserted factory. Alone, and totally isolated, she turns to face the deadly machine and finally destroys it in a hydraulic press. When we last see her, months after her deadly struggle, Sarah is headed for the mountains in Mexico to wait out the nuclear war and give birth to her son John.

## **The Dark Side of Superman**

More than two years before, while completing post production on his first film, “Piranha II: The Spawning,” James Cameron (then 27 years old) wrote a simple screen treatment for “The Terminator.” The treatment, which contained no dialogue or breakdown on special effects sequences, told the story of a battle-weary soldier from the future who must prevent an unstoppable robot (also from the future) from assassinating a distant relative of the resistance leader's family. While the story reflected familiar elements from science fiction's pulp heritage, it was also just the right kind of subject matter that a former art director of Roger Corman's New World Pictures would select as a breakaway project. But somewhere between that early screen treatment and the completed motion picture, Cameron's sense of visual action and inferential plot development came together to make “The Terminator” an entertaining and thoroughly unique film experience.

Both Cameron and his collaborator Gale Anne Hurd had learned the pragmatic side of filmmaking, including the importance of efficiency and budgetary control, from their mentor Roger Corman. Cameron met Hurd when he was working on the production design and special effects for John Carpenter's “Escape from New York” (1981), and they later worked together on “Galaxy of Terror” (1981) for Corman's New World Cinema. They knew that “The Terminator” would work if they wrote the film with a low budget in mind.

"I worked backwards, in fact," Jim confessed, remembering how conscious he was about the budget. "I knew that I wasn't going to be entrusted with \$35 million to do a far-flung futuristic epic, and I was writing this for the specific purpose of directing it.

Therefore, I considered, how do I get a futuristic set piece like this robot, which couldn't exist now with our technology, into an environment of conventional locations which we can shoot on a much lower budget than if I have to create sets and so on? I thought time travel, obviously . . . comes from the future . . . he's sent back in time to do something, changing history and what that does, creating an elliptical cause and effect cycle. It was classic science fiction."

Jim Cameron's inspiration for "The Terminator" came while he was completing work on his first film in Rome. He was sick with the flu, and during a fever dream, he was inspired by a single image—that of the Terminator robot emerging from a conflagration. "The image I started out with was of him stepping out of the fire--smoking, red-hot, metallic," Cameron continued his description. "I visualized him as skeletal, yet more massive than a skeleton." His forty-five page treatment was crafted around that single image, with actor Lance Henriksen in mind to play the role of the cyborg. Since the Terminators were supposed to be infiltrator units, he envisioned them to be identical to the scrawny, hungry freedom fighters of the future. At this point in the development of the project, Cameron never pictured someone as massively built or perfectly sculpted as Arnold Schwarzenegger in the role.

When he returned from Rome (where he had been finishing "Piranha II: The Spawning," 1982) with his treatment, Hurd began shopping it around to the various studios. Most of the studio executives liked the premise but didn't want her or Cameron involved in the project. No one seemed willing to surrender so much creative control to these two relative neophytes in the business. She was determined that they would retain control. "In retrospect," Hurd remembers, "it probably turned out to be a blessing. Since

no one wanted to pay us to write the screenplay, we did it ourselves, and used it as our calling card."

Jim Cameron settled down and transformed his treatment into a first draft screenplay, which he gave to Hurd for a polish. With a fundamentally complete script in hand, she began hitting the major studios again and found many of her former contacts (while at New World) helpful. She managed to get a copy to Orion Pictures, where both the senior head of production and a chief executive were people with whom she had once worked. Hurd also sent a copy of the script to Hemdale Productions. Their "calling card" also opened a number of doors that had been previously closed to Cameron and his collaborator. Soon, he was receiving numerous offers to write other screenplays, with the option for Hurd to produce. To pay the bills, he accepted the assignment to co-write a screenplay (with Sylvester Stallone) for "Rambo: First Blood, Part II" (1985), and he was called into Brandywine Productions to discuss several ideas for a sequel to "Alien" with Walter Hill and David Giler. Before he could actually complete a finished script for them, however, Jim received word from the executives at Hemdale Productions that they wanted to talk with him about his project.

Cameron credits much of the appeal of his simple story to the way in which he first presented the project to Hemdale Productions. "It's fun to fantasize being a guy who can do whatever he wants," he paraphrases his original pitch to the director of development. "This Terminator guy is indestructible. He can be as rude as he wants. He can walk through a door, go through a plate glass window and just get up, brush off impacts from bullets. It's like the dark side of Superman, in a sense. I think it has a great cathartic value to people who wish they could just splinter open the door to their boss's

office, walk in, break his desk in half, grab him by the throat, and throw him out the window, and get away with it. Everybody's got that little demon that wants to be able to do whatever it wants, the bad kid that never gets punished." While Jim was busily pitching his idea to the studio executives, Lance Henriksen kicked his way through a production meeting door, dressed in a leather coat, with foil teeth and slicked-back hair as the Terminator. The film's distributor was suitably terrified and impressed, and ultimately helped sell the idea to them. (Unfortunately, the studio was interested in casting a "name" actor in the role of the Terminator, and Henriksen was demoted to a police officer.)

In December of 1982, Hemdale, in association with Orion Pictures and HBO Entertainment, gave tentative approval to Cameron and Hurd, contingent upon a revised script and final casting approval. James Cameron obliged by turning in a 122-page script which, with the exception of a romantic encounter between Sarah and Reece, was approved. HBO insisted that a deep-felt connection between the two central characters was essential to sell the completed film, and Cameron agreed with their assessment, adding the scene which would later add almost mythic proportions to the scope of his project.) Several other sequences were dropped during filming much to the disappointment of the director. Cameron obviously had a vision of a larger film in mind when he said, "We had to cut scenes I was in love with in order to save money."

### **The Terminator Cast**

With a completed script in hand, Cameron and Hurd began shopping for actors to play their principals, Sarah Connor, Kyle Reese, and the Terminator. Since the studio executives had already dismissed Lance Henriksen as the robot, they first considered the

possibility of casting pro-football legend-turned-actor O.J. Simpson. But when Arnold Schwarzenegger—at the urging of one of the execs to play the part of Reese—agreed to do the picture, their casting budget was shot. Schwarzenegger didn't really see himself (at that time in his career) as a romantic lead, and soon developed an affinity for the title role. "I have read a lot of action-adventure scripts," Arnold stated, "and this definitely was one of the best. I knew that I wanted to play the part of the Terminator as soon as I started reading." Cameron and Hurd realized the complexity of their story would be changed with that particular piece of casting, but also knew that Schwarzenegger's name above the title would help assure the film's success.

From his earliest screen appearance as Hercules (in the low-low budget “Hercules in New York,” 1970) to his sword slinging roles in “Conan the Barbarian” and its sequel “Conan the Destroyer,” Arnold had been routinely cast as the "good guy." The three-time Mr. Universe and seven-time Mr. Olympia was born on July 30, 1947, in Graz, Austria, and spent the earlier years of his life perfecting his body like some great sculptor. At the height of his career as a body-builder, Arnold retired to become a movie actor. He first gained attention as the subject of George Butler's documentary about body-building, “Pumping Iron” (1977), and earned a Golden Globe Award as best newcomer for his role in Bob Rafelson's “Stay Hungry” (1976). Following lackluster performances in “The Villain” (1979), “Scavenger Hunt” (1979) and “The Jayne Mansfield Story” (1980), Schwarzenegger was hired by Dino De Laurentiis to play the comic book hero, Conan the Barbarian. His limited acting ability made his characterizations of the Cimmerian dead-on, and won him an enormous audience. In the course of twenty years, he has become one of the world's leading box-office attractions,

married into one of America's foremost families, and built a thriving business and real estate empire. He followed "The Terminator" with a series of blockbuster performances in "Commando" (1985), "Predator" (1987), "The Running Man" (1987), "Red Heat" (1988), "Twins" (1988), and "Total Recall" (1990). Recognizing the enormous challenge that the role might offer, Schwarzenegger felt the idea of playing a super-villain would be a refreshing change of pace.

"In every film I've been in, I always play the hero," explained the former bodybuilder. "In this one, I finally get to play a real bad guy. It's quite a bit different for me, and I'm enjoying it a lot."

The character change also meant that producers Cameron and Hurd would have a difficult task finding an actor large enough to compete against Schwarzenegger. They eventually decided to cast Michael Biehn, the veteran of numerous television series and stage roles, against type as the young-but-hardened guerilla fighter from the future. Born in 1957 in the small Southern town of Anniston, Alabama, and later educated at the University of Arizona, Michael had specialized in psychotics, racists, weirdos, and other nasty characters, in films as diverse as "The Fan" (1981), "The Lords of Discipline" (1983), and "Deadly Intentions" (1983). He would later capitalize on his experience in "The Terminator" by playing a number of action roles in "Aliens" (1986), "The Abyss" (1989), and "K2" (1992). Biehn also agreed to appear in a cameo as Kyle Reese in Cameron's big-budget follow-up, "Terminator Two" (1991).

For the role of Sarah Connor, the shallow coffee shop waitress who becomes a seasoned warrior, the producers chose Linda Hamilton. Born and raised in small-town Salisbury, Maryland, Hamilton followed her actor boyfriend to New York City and



studied for three years at the renowned Lee Strasberg Institute. Following her professional debut on the soap opera “Search for Tomorrow,” she began to draw critical notice from performances in several television movies, including “Rape and Marriage: The Rideout Case,” and a recurring role on “Hill Street Blues.” Her feature film career began with “T.A.G.—The Assassination Game” (1980) and Stephen King's “Children of the Corn” (1981). Hamilton, who later went onto play Catherine Chandler in the popular television series “Beauty and the Beast” (1987), was somewhat critical of the film's leading star prior to shooting. "I didn't take Schwarzenegger very seriously as an actor at that time. I said, 'Oh, Lord, why cast a man who looks like a machine as a machine? Cast somebody who's very thin to do these superhuman acts.' And I was wrong. He was used tremendously effectively, and he was served very well in that film."

Paul Winfield, a favorite to science fiction fans for his roles in “Damnation Alley” (1977), “Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan” (1982) and “Star Trek—The Next Generation” (1987), was cast in the small but pivotal role of Lieutenant Traxler. Born in 1940, and educated at the University of Portland, Stanford University and UCLA, Winfield was a most accomplished thespian. He first appeared on JULIA (1968), starring Diahann Carroll, and gained international recognition opposite Cicely Tyson in “Sounder” (1972), for which he received an Academy Award nomination as Best Actor. He has worked in both the theatre and on television, but his finest performance (to date) was as the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in “King” (1978). Other roles in “Conrack” (1974), “Twilight’s Last Gleaming” (1977), “On the Run” (1982), “Go Tell It On the Mountain” (1984), and “Mike’s Murder” (1984) have made him a favorite character actor for many directors.

To round out his cast, Jim Cameron called upon Lance Henriksen to play Sergeant Vukovich and Rick Rossovich to essay the part of Sarah Connor's friend. Hurd recommended Earl Boen to play the police psychiatrist (who certifies that Reese is mad). Dick Miller, the gunshop owner, and Bill Paxton, a punk who is one of the Terminator's first victims, were also added to the cast.

### **Production Details**

Jim Cameron and Gale Anne Hurd had originally thought about shooting “The Terminator” in Toronto, Canada, during the summer of 1983. The exchange rate between American and Canadian dollars would have helped secure a better production value. They also feared a potential strike of the Screen Actors Guild, and felt they could avoid problems if they shot outside the United States. Hurd had even convinced the city government of Toronto to shut down a five-mile section of their major freeway so they could film a key sequence. Unfortunately, Schwarzenegger had a prior commitment to Dino DeLaurentiis to film “Conan II.” When delays forced that project into overtime, Cameron and Hurd had to rethink their shooting schedule.

Principal photography in and around Los Angeles was then scheduled to begin on March 19, 1984 and run until the end of May. But two weeks before shooting was to take place, Linda Hamilton broke her ankle. "There was some question then whether we should recast her part or whether she'd be up the physical demands," Hurd recalled. "We finally decided to stay with her and postpone the start two days so we could reschedule the more physical scenes to the end of the shoot. This, of course, played havoc with our locations and our art department. They were planning on creating scenes which were originally boarded for earlier in the film, but were now going to be shot later. So some of

the most horrendous and complicated sets, which were supposed to be done later, were now needed."

"The Terminator" finally began production in Los Angeles on March 21, 1984, with a planned release date sometime in November. Jim Cameron worked roughly twenty hours a day, shooting sometimes thirteen hours straight, then working another seven hours on rewrites. Hurd also got less than four hours a sleep each night. Both of them shepherded the film through its thirteen-week shoot, including seven weeks of complicated night filming in Los Angeles.

Since director Cameron did not have the luxury of multiple cameras, he was forced to make each shot count. (For the most part, what audiences see in the final film is what he shot with a single camera.) Post production was a mere three months, through August, and Cameron had to fight for every penny to complete his vision. "They were extremely hesitant about going over \$4 million," the director said. "We convinced them this movie could not be made for less than \$6 million, especially with Arnold Schwarzenegger starring, because he commanded a significant salary; the final shooting budget was actually \$6.5 million."

To complete the film "on time and on budget," Cameron and special effects coordinator Ernie Farino turned to the specialists at Fantasy II. Many of the effects, including the flash-forwards which depicted the war-torn society of the future, were accomplished by Gene Warren, Leslie Huntley, and Peter Kleinow with cleverly designed miniatures on a shoestring budget. Kleinow also produced the stop-motion effects of the chrome robot skeleton of the Terminator as it fights on even after its outer

body has been burned away. Working closely with Stan Winston's designs and Doug Beswick's superior miniatures, the Fantasy II staff produced over ninety different special effects shots for "The Terminator." Even though the work was very difficult and the budget was extremely limited, most of the effects are superior to those in films costing three or four times as much.

By early in September 1984, Cameron and Hurd had completed the final cut, trimming the film to a mere one hundred and eight minutes, and were ready to test their motion picture on the public. Orion was so happy, in fact, with the rough cut of the footage that they decided to move the film's release up several weeks.

### **The Film's Release**

Even before "The Terminator" was released on October 16, 1984, word-of-mouth had spread quickly from those who had seen the sneak previews. "The Terminator" was a spectacular surprise, a good old-fashioned "B" movie that harkened back to the simpler days of double-features. "Thrill-packed." "Fast and Furious." "Astounding." Both audience members and critics alike praised Jim Cameron's nightmare vision as the best film of 1984. The Washington Post favorably wrote that "Schwarzenegger creates an inimitable villain, an unstoppable killing machine, part metal, part man." Variety termed the film "a cross between 'The Road Warrior' and 'Blade Runner'"--yet concluded that Cameron had managed to avoid most of the trappings to create a totally original work. By the end of the year, after "The Terminator" had successfully beaten Dino De Laurentiis's overblown production of "Dune" and Peter Hyams's sequel to "2001: A Space Odyssey," the motion picture was voted by Time Magazine as one of the ten best films of 1984. Later, the film won the "Grand Prix" award at the Avoriaz Film Festival

in France. The film went onto gross a respectable \$30 million in domestic rentals, and was a huge hit on home video.

Following the immediate critical and box office success of “The Terminator,” however, Cameron and Hurd were charged with copyright infringement by Harlan Ellison. Ellison, the award-winning author who almost single-handedly launched the New Wave of science fiction in the Sixties, claimed that the film's storyline had been taken from two of his scripts he had written for “The Outer Limits” (Daystar Productions, 1965) some twenty years before. “Soldier” and “Demon With the Glass Hand” both told stories of characters sent back through time to the present time whose very existence threatened the natural order. Ellison successfully sued Hemdale and Orion Pictures for proper acknowledgement, and all future prints of the film, including cable-television prints, video cassettes and dvds of “The Terminator,” give the noted science fiction author a special credit line.

Undaunted by the lawsuit, writer-director James Cameron discussed the possibility of a sequel with The New York Times weeks after the film was a bonafide success. "He's a machine," Cameron reasoned, "and machines are mass-produced, so there might be another one in the warehouse. . ." But before he could undertake another Terminator film, the twenty-nine year-old auteur (and his partner Hurd) had contracted with Twentieth Century Fox to direct and write a sequel to “Alien.” He would later helm “The Abyss” (1989) for Fox before beginning work on “Terminator Two: Judgment Day” in 1990. A third Terminator film, “Terminator Three: Rise of the Machines,” debuted in the summer of 2003, with Cameron producing.

## Critical Commentary

The film owes much of its strength to writer-director James Cameron and its appeal to Arnold Schwarzenegger. Prior to "The Terminator," James Cameron was a struggling filmmaker who had an eye for art direction and special effects. Like veterans Stanley Kubrick and Ridley Scott, he sought to prove that motion pictures could provide a narrative approach through its visual medium. His film generates high premium excitement from the opening frame, dispensing with the need for traditional story-telling in favor of explosive action and nerve-jangling adventure. When it is absolutely necessary, his witty and well-written script provides the essential information to keep the pace moving. His direction is superb with a nice eye for sharp detail. But Cameron views the film as more than a basic action-adventure thriller, citing the theme as being "strictly human and personal." Sarah is forced into a situation where she has to take responsibility for her own fate as well as the fate of the planet. That represents high drama for the director and screenwriter. Juggling all of these elements at once, Cameron combines plot, characterization, hard-hitting action, and special effects to create a truly unique film experience.

Part of the appeal of "The Terminator" also comes from watching a slimmed-down Schwarzenegger stomping and crashing his way through almost every scene. His screen persona as a gentle-giant has been stripped away to show Arnold as a dark, relentless killer. Any awkwardness from lengthy conversation scenes that he may have shown in the Conan movies has been eliminated as he has few lines. The Terminator never says more than a few sentences throughout the course of the film, yet his cold

presence permeates every scene. Very carefully written one-liners—like the classic "I'll be back." or "Faach yu, ahs-hole."—are delivered with such grimness and precision that the audience is both frightened and amused. He also perfects deadpan expressions which are befitting a robot, and he moves with determined menace. Schwarzenegger told People magazine that "it's much more challenging to play a robot than a human," and if that is true, then Arnold certainly deserves an Academy-Award for his performance. He's terrific in the fight scenes, and monstrously powerful and charismatic in sequence after sequence. "The Terminator" marks the real turning point in the bodybuilder-turned-actor's career. (In retrospect, it's really hard to imagine any other actor—including Lance Henriksen—in the role of the Terminator.)

"There were various stepping stones in my career. One of them was 'Conan' because it was the first time I did a film with that kind of budget and I had the title role. The next big stepping stone was 'The Terminator,'" Arnold Schwarzenegger confessed in a 1990 interview. "With 'The Terminator,' I think people became aware of the fact that I didn't really have to take my shirt off or run around and expose my muscles in order to sell tickets. After I did 'The Terminator,' and we had seen it be more successful than the Conan films, people then sent a variety of different kinds of scripts -- all in the action-adventure genre, but they were not muscle movies or Viking movies or pirate movies or anything like that . . ."

To their credit, both Linda Hamilton and Michael Biehn perform admirably opposite the muscleman. In fact, Hamilton gives what may be the performance of her career as Sarah Connor. By turning in a masterful portrayal of a character who changes

from a frightened, bewildered waitress to a seasoned warrior, she shakes off many of the lackluster roles that have typecast her career. None of them have better displayed her strengths. Michael Biehn delivers such a highly powerful performance as Kyle Reese that one wishes he would survive to challenge the killer robot in future installments of “The Terminator” film series. Henriksen and Bill Paxton, two future alumni of Cameron films, and Paul Winfield also contribute winning performances that help to make the motion picture special.

Admittedly, the juxtaposition of a war-torn future into our present is not a new idea in science fiction. Writers have been creating alternate futures (as well as imaginary time-lines for the present) since H.G. Wells first penned The Time Machine. Harlan Ellison may have felt personally justified in filing his lawsuit, but “Soldier” and “Demon With the Glass Hand” bare only a modest connection to “The Terminator.” Michael Rennie's low-budget thriller “Cyborg 2087” (1966) actually resembles James Cameron's motion picture in more details. In that earlier film, Rennie as the titular cyborg Garth must locate and persuade the creator of a revolutionary device (which enslaves men's minds) to cease experimentation, or terminate him, before robots from the other side can stop his desperate mission. Directed by Franklin Adreon and written by Arthur C. Pierce, the 1966 film was made for television, but released theatrically with an eighty-six minute running time. Like Cameron's Terminator, Garth has traveled back in time from a totalitarian world run by technocrats; his mission is essentially a noble one, whereas the Cyberdyne Model 101 desires to continue machine rule by altering past events. But all comparisons aside, Cameron's film succeeds on the strength of its hard, fast-paced style and not its narrative content.



“The Terminator” was derived from two of the most enduring themes in science fiction, and could have died at the box office like countless low-budget thrillers before it. But thanks to the boundless energy and enormous creativity of James Cameron, working with Arnold Schwarzenegger for the first time, the film has truly become a classic of the science fiction genre.

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