

Emotionally-barren sequel plagued by lack of character development

Written by Kam Williams



When you decide to shoot a Terminator sequel sans Schwarzenegger (sorry, a cameo of Arnold's head atop a body double doesn't count), and with an entirely new cast, you might want to consider devoting some quality time to character development in order to give your audience a chance to become familiar with and, thus, reason to care about the protagonists. Otherwise you'll probably end up with a superficial, sci-fi saga like *Terminator Salvation (T-4)*, a special effects indulgence in fight sequences, chase scenes, pyrotechnics and techno wizardry at the expense of emotional depth.

This post-apocalyptic adventure is as soulless as the defoliated expanse of barren landscape on which it unfolds. What's worse, the movie abandons the franchise's carefully-cultivated trademarks in favor of a lot of nondescript CGI action sequences which feel interchangeable with similar flicks like *Transformers* and *Doomsday*.

Blame for this departure in tone rests squarely on the shoulders of Joseph McGinty Nichol, aka McG, who has made a rocky transition to movies after directing award-winning music videos for both Smash Mouth and Sugar Ray.

McG's stock has gone down since his promising feature film debut with *Charlie's Angels* in 2000. Seems he has trouble just controlling his crew, judging by Christian Bale's having to apologize publicly about going ballistic to maintain decorum on the set.

Bale, by the way, heads a star-studded ensemble which also includes Sam Worthington, Helena Bonham Carter, Jane Alexander, Common, Terry Crews and Bryce Dallas Howard. *T-4*'s point of departure is 2003, the year in which

T-3 was released, but the story soon shifts to a flattened California in 2018 where we find the few folks still alive cowering in caves and makeshift shelters.

That's because a swarm of invading terminators, Skynet's T-600s, have practically decimated humanity. With less than four days until total annihilation, it falls to a chivalrous army vet named John Connor (Bale) to organize a resistance movement. Its goal is to get close enough to the cyborgs to shut down their computers by jamming their radio frequency with the help of a top secret weapon provided by General Ashdown (Michael Ironside).

Of course, this is easier said than done, especially since the aliens have a decided military

Emotionally-barren sequel plagued by lack of character development

Written by Kam Williams

advantage and a “take no prisoners” policy. But Conner is both desperate and game and enlists the assistance of a motley crew in his heroic endeavor. His impromptu posse includes his pregnant wife, Kate (Howard), a downed fighter pilot (Moon Bloodgood), his tight-hand man, Barnes (Common), a teenage soldier (Anton Yelchin), a mute toddler (Jadagrace) and Marcus Wright (Worthington), a very mysterious stranger whom Connor has good reason not to trust.

But keeping the various players straight on the scorecard is never as important here as simply sitting back and appreciating all the fireworks which ensue in this mindless, explosion-driven blockbuster. In sum, *T-4* is at best an over-stimulating concatenation of bells and whistles amounting to the cinematic equivalent of bubblegum.

To quote the Bard of Avon, “A tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” I couldn’t put it better myself.

Fair (1 star)

Rated PG-13 for profanity and intense violence.

Running time: 130 minutes

Studio: Warner Brothers

To see a trailer for Terminator Salvation, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcg5t0mT8V4>