

Film Notes

TERMINATOR SALVATION

DIRECTED BY: McG

STARRING:

CHRISTIAN BALE (JOHN CONNOR), SAM WORTHINGTON (MARCUS WRIGHT), MOON BLOODGOOD (BLAIR WILLIAMS), HELENA BONHAM CARTER (DR SERENA KOGAN), ANTON YELCHIN (KYLE REESE), JADAGRACE (STAR)

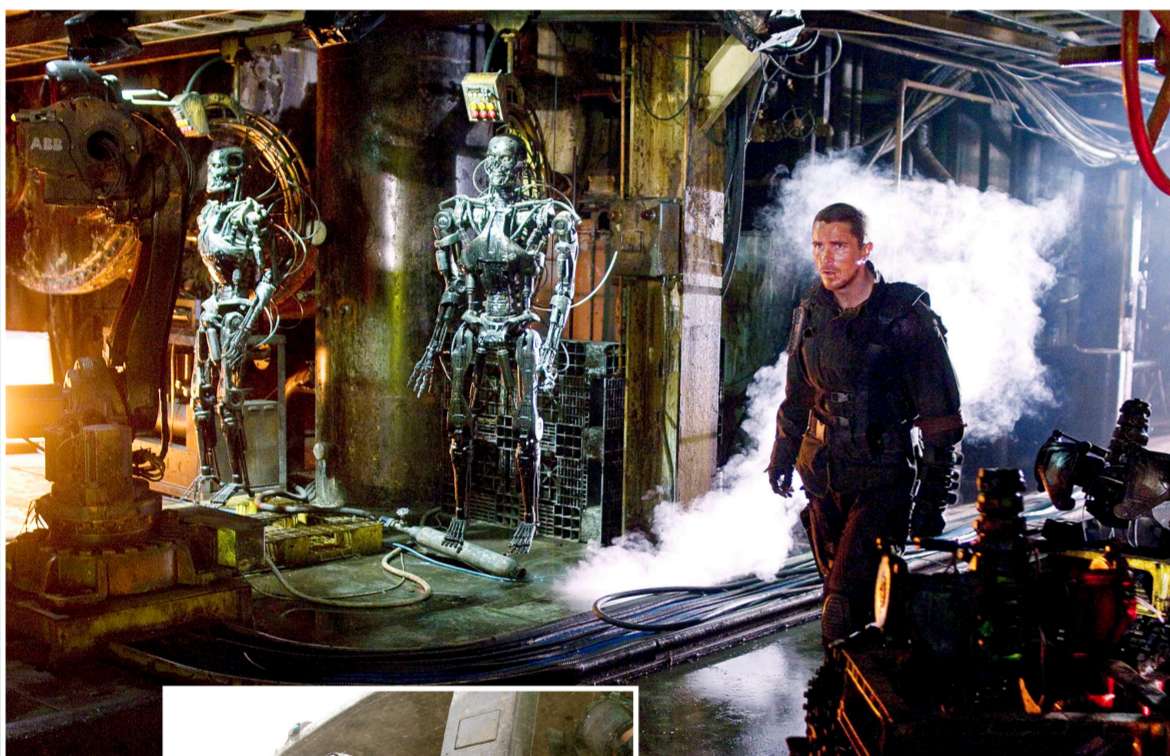
RUNNING TIME: 130 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: CURRENTLY SHOWING

The war between mankind and machines continues apace in the uninspiring 'Terminator Salvation'

Interminable Terminator

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER



Christian Bale stars in *Terminator Salvation*, directed by McG.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BU/SONY

The T-600 terminator is heavily armed and an ungainly creature, capable of releasing enormous firepower, but as a single-minded attack machine, it is a little bit dim. It just keeps going until it gets completely blown apart. *Terminator Salvation*, in which the T-600 Terminator features, is a little bit like that. On the big screen and through the powerful sound system of the Ambassador Cinema in Ximending, it certainly packed a powerful punch during the industry and press screening on Monday, as the T-600s and their more sophisticated brethren made life hell for humans. It's also hell for the audience, who get beaten back into their seats by the relentless onslaught of devastation. For an action thriller, *Terminator Salvation* is a remarkably depressing affair.

Another similarity that *Terminator Salvation* shares with the T-600 is that both were made on an assembly line. It's just a case of putting the components together. This accounts for the sense of déjà vu that crops up every so often throughout the film. There are robots, fashion accessories and lines of dialogue that seem to have escaped from the *Matrix* trilogy. Throw in some ideas from *Total Recall* and plot points from *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. Bring in characters from *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. And then, of course, there is the back catalogue of the previous three *Terminator* films to comprehensively cannibalize. Assemble according to the easy-to-understand diagram shown in the "How to Make a Big Budget Blockbuster" brochure that is included in the pack.

In the end, what you get is a perfectly serviceable blockbuster. Unfortunately, despite the frenetic action and high-flown language about what it is to be human, the film lacks any kind of cohesive logic or emotional foundation. It's all about fitting the bits together, and given that there is time travel involved, this process can get pretty fraught. The ghost of René Barjavel's "grandfather paradox" hangs over the film, but it wasn't long before I gave up trying to work out the logic of it. The director didn't seem to care very much, and there was more than enough action to keep the eye and the mind distracted.

The action is spectacular and pretty much unrelenting, focusing largely around the character of Marcus Wright (Sam Worthington), a convicted murderer whose heart and brain are incorporated into a mechanized endo-skeleton of some virtually indestructible material (Wolverine without the claws), who teams up with Kyle Reese (Anton Yelchin), the character who comes back in time in the first *Terminator* movie. They go looking for John Connor (Christian Bale), the leader of a human resistance movement, the protagonist of the second and third *Terminator* movies. The meeting will either save the world for humanity or destroy it: just hang on to your seats.

Director McG's world of post-apocalyptic chic blurs dangerously with the world of Zion in *The Matrix*, though McG favors a grimmer, grimmer look. Fashion suffers, and not much is gained. Bale, who is no stranger to the role of misunderstood world savior, looks convincingly harrowed by the complex choices he faces to maintain both his own humanity and save the world, but well, the world of *Terminator: Salvation* really doesn't seem worth saving.

Much better to focus on the budding romance between Marcus Wright and hot fighter pilot Blair Williams (Moon Bloodgood). Fortunately, the production team was too busy with blowing things up to get her to take her kit off (this is reserved for a digitized version of Arnold Schwarzenegger who makes a cameo appearance in one of the film's most embarrassingly inept scenes). The budding relationship has some sparks of life, but this is quickly overwhelmed by innumerable conflagrations.

Even the one laugh out loud moment in the whole 130-minute running time was borrowed from the first *Terminator* film. John Connor makes use of the Schwarzenegger tag line: "I'll be back." It kind of works, even without the Austrian accent. Sad to say, there are suggestions that a *Terminator V* film may be in development.



OTHER RELEASES

►► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS



Amal

Perhaps trying to capitalize on the success of *Slumdog Millionaire*, this Canadian-produced film from 2007 is enjoying an arthouse release. Life on — or near — the skids is the setting and virtue is the theme as Amal, the driver of an automated rickshaw in New Delhi, goes well out of his way to help an unfortunate woman involved in an accident. Meanwhile, a different kind of millionaire to the game show variety has the humble driver in his sights. This colorful melodrama has won several awards and will appeal to those who long for goodness and decency in their movie diet.



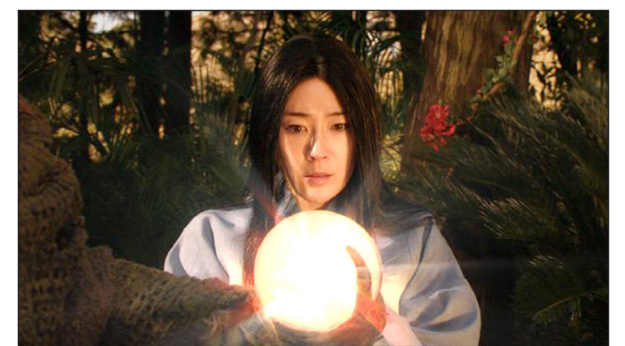
A Widow at Last

When her husband dies in a car accident, a woman suddenly finds that life is much more enjoyable without the old coot. But a desire to keep up appearances means that she can't bring herself to admitting as much to her family, friends or even her long-time lover. This French comedy, which occasionally flirts with farce, is also known in English as *The Merry Widow*.



Dance, Subaru!

Subaru is the name of a Japanese teenager who, like so many dance movie heroines, must overcome family tragedy and other formidable obstructions to realize her goal of becoming a professional dancer — a ballerina, in fact. But this film is a much more mature and sober affair, with anguish much closer to the surface than Hollywood might tolerate, while the range of dance scenes reflects as much the necessary rigors of training and gaining expertise as throwing eye candy at the viewer. Which is to say, this is not *Flashdance*. Based on a manga.



Kitaro and the Millennium Curse

Pop idol Eiji Wentz is back as Kitaro, the famed half-human, half-spirit monster who has had an impact on Japanese popular culture for decades. Originally a manga, this *Kitaro* is a live-action sequel with lots of strange characters and amusing elements as our hero, Hercules-style, embarks on a mission to wrest five divine items from their monstrous protectors and so lift a curse affecting both the realm of the spirit monsters and the human world.