

Terminator makes an explosive return

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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Thirty years after a new cinematic icon named Terminator changed the future of sci-fi films, it's time to reset the future with Terminator Genisys.

Producer David Ellison makes it clear that it is "not a remake, it's not a reboot, it's not a sequel - it's really a reimagining based on the Cameron source material. Viewers don't have to be familiar with any of the previous films at all - this is definitely a standalone film. But, that being said, for the fans who have seen the first couple of films, there are some great Easter eggs in there. Exploiting the inherent nature of time travel, we go off on a divergent timeline to take these characters that audiences and I grew up with in a completely new direction".



New T-800 terminator

In Terminator Genisys John Connor (Jason Clarke), leader of the human resistance, sends Sgt. Kyle Reese (Jai Courtney) back to 1984 to protect Sarah Connor (Emilia Clarke) and safeguard the future. An unexpected turn of events creates a fractured timeline and Sgt. Reese finds himself in a new and unfamiliar version of the past, where he is faced with unlikely allies, including a new T-800 terminator, the Guardian (Arnold Schwarzenegger), dangerous new enemies, and an unexpected new mission.

"The Terminator franchise - and really James Cameron - is a seminal part of why I got into filmmaking in the first place; to me, he's simply one of the greatest filmmakers of all time," says Ellison. I think Terminator 2 reinvented the modern day tent pole. So, for me to get to work on a franchise that is literally something I fell in love with as a kid, and which led to my wanting to become a filmmaker, is just a dream come true."

Screenwriter/producer Laeta Kalogridis (who wrote the screenplays with Patrick Lussier) was hesitant to tackle the iconic franchise.

"I had worked with Cameron for years-he's an inspiration to me personally and cinematically, and I did not want in any way, shape or form to do anything that would not be respectful of what he had created," says Kalogridis. "It's some of the most amazing science fiction ever, and he is certainly an inspiration to me, and not just me, he's one of the greatest living filmmakers, and possibly, ever."

When Kalogridis checked with Cameron himself, who not only granted his permission and gave his blessing, he started the 'idea bouncing' chain reaction inevitable in any great pre-production phase, advising Kalogridis: "Make sure you write a good part for Arnold!"



Before the fall of the Berlin Wall

Both the 1980s' worlds of global politics and filmmaking that gave rise to the original films have changed tremendously. The Terminator proclaimed "I'll be back" a full five years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and when the realisation of the full potential of computer generated imagery was still decades away. The light years that have passed since the first Earthly adventures of the T-800 opened up countless avenues of exploration to the Terminator Genisys filmmakers.

"The Cameron films to me were really Cold War-era films," notes Ellison, "where the analogy that was being laid on top of the story was very much the threats felt during that time period. The advancements in AI give us the ability to really update the franchise to today, to where Skynet no longer has to break free-we're actually lining ourselves up and giving away our privacy, our freedoms, our information. We're standing in line for the latest in technology and software. The canon lends itself to comment on what is actually going on today in a way that's new and fun and exciting - it comes across in a big entertaining way. To me, science fiction is at its most effective when it's actually taking real-world events and placing them in a fictional setting."

At the heart of it all, felt the Genisys filmmakers, were the 'dysfunctional family' and its love story Cameron placed at the centre of the films - among the Terminators, the potential obliteration of the entire human race, the filmic feats of illusion.

Sheer challenge

For director Alan Taylor (Thor: The Dark World) some of the appeal of making the film was the sheer challenge of working out how to do it: "There's so much to love in the Cameron mythology, and so much that the audience we're hoping to reach is already in love with. At the same time the story's moving forward - it's got to get bigger and go into new directions and unlike other sequels this felt like a whole new ball game and I wanted to see how we could pull that off."

Says Ellison: "The 1984 that our characters travel back to has been altered since the original movie - events have transpired that have driven it in a completely different direction. Also those films were always set in present day, not in the future, not in the past. Ours bends that set-up. And so, through a series of events, our characters find themselves travelling forward to 2017 in an attempt to stop Judgment Day from ever happening."

Filmmakers did get to delve into their inner sci-fi geeks, with a fairly meticulous re-creation of the initial sequence of Kyle Reese landing in 1984, down to the homeless man in the alley and the dog. But along with the familiar is a T-1000 - a huge signal of all expectations being blown sky high."

"This is the largest scale Terminator movie that's ever been made," Ellison concludes. "There are bigger action sequences in Genisys than any prior Terminator film. You're going to see the fully rendered future war, which nobody has ever been able to do yet, and you're going to see new Terminators that will hopefully have exactly the same impact as when you saw the T-1000 back in 1991. We have set the bar incredibly high, and we're going for it."

Terminator Genisys opens at cinemas on 3 July, so make sure to take a trip back to the future!

Five lucky Bizcommunity readers can win a Terminator Genisys drawstring bag by sending an email to daniel@writingstudio.co.za.

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Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit www.writingstudio.co.za

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