

FILMETER

By GEORGE ROBINSON

'Terminator 2' is an explosive sequel

In Movie Theaters

TERMINATOR 2: JUDGEMENT DAY (R) What does \$100 million look like on a movie screen? If you really want to know, see "Terminator 2," because director James Cameron has managed to get most of it into his film. (Except for the Hum-vee vehicle that Arnold reportedly received as part of his fee.)

No doubt about it, "T-2" is a great-looking movie. As you would expect from the director of "Terminator," "Aliens" and "The Abyss," the action sequences are top-notch. The biggest surprise, though, is that the film is genuinely funny, albeit in a deadpan, macho style.

The plot is simple (in a complicated sort of way). Two Terminators have been sent back from the post-nuclearwar world of 2029 to seek out the young John Conner, whose conception took place in the first "Terminator." One of them, good old Arnold, is a reprogrammed version of the first film's juggernaut, sent to protect John (Edward Furlong), now a troubled adolescent.

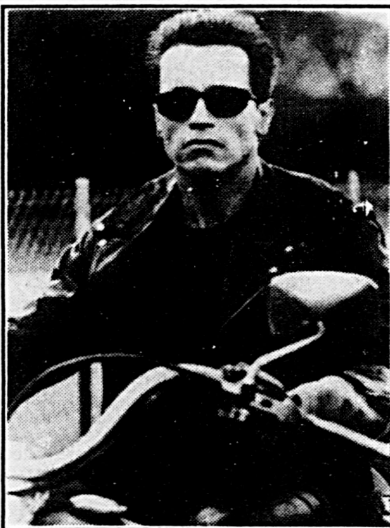
The new Terminator (Robert Patrick, who looks like a slim-line Arnold crossed with a young Martin Sheen) is more advanced. Made of liquid metal, he is able to change shapes to imitate other life forms and inanimate objects. (He does a mean impression of a linoleum floor at one point.)

Out of this recipe for an extended chase, with a little ponderous preaching against violence, Cameron has fashioned the most entertaining action film of the year, a superbly paced and ingenious piece of work. The sentimentality that turned the last 10 minutes of "The Abyss" into sugar-coated mush is present again, but Cameron is able to give it more resonance, in no small part thanks to an excellent debut by Furlong and a surprisingly hard-edged performance by Linda Hamilton, reprising her "Terminator" role of Sarah Conner.

GRADE: ★ ★ ★ 1/2

New Home Video

AFTER DARK MY SWEET



ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER is a reprogrammed Terminator sent back from the future to protect a boy from an advanced killer cyborg in "Terminator 2: Judgement Day."

(R) LIVE / THE HOT SPOT (R) Orlon. Why the sudden obsession with re-creating '40s and '50s film noir? Beyond mere nostalgia for a simpler era of moviemaking, alluding to earlier models of film-making has obvious appeal in these days of post-modern self-consciousness.

James Foley, who directed "After Dark My Sweet," and Dennis Hopper, who made "The Hot Spot," clearly know their '40s film tropes. Moreover, each adds a nice twist on the rain-soaked-urban-streets milieu, setting the films in the sun-drenched Southwest. (And if you don't have the kind of money at your disposal that James Cameron does, a noir thriller is easier to put together.)

Also, film noir's brooding cynicism, bordering on nihilism, certainly resonates in an era of S&L corruption and government deceit. It may be clichéd to say that we are a less trusting people since Vietnam and Watergate, but you can surely see it in films like these two.

Hopper and screenwriters Mona Tyson and Charles Williams (adapting his own novel) string together blackmail, bank robbery, arson and adultery in a convoluted, over-

elaborate mix that features such a brutally cynical ending that even this practiced aficionado was a trifle appalled.

Foley, in his turn, grabs, another Jim Thompson tale ("The Getaway," "The Grifters") about people who lie even to themselves — this time an ex-prizefighter mental patient and his accomplices in a kidnapping scheme.

The genre's most basic appeal for some filmmakers, I suspect, is its division of the world's women into virgins and killer sluts. Hopper's films have tended toward that division as far back as "Easy Rider," although the tension has seldom been less interesting than in "Hot Spot," where the contrast between Virginia Madsen's sleaze

and Jennifer Connelly's purity borders on the ludicrous. In the best film noir, that tension often coexists in one character, as it does in the Foley film; too bad that particular character is under-written and under-acted by Rachael Ward.

But at the center of the noir universe is usually a man who isn't nearly as smart as he thinks he is, and it is here that these two films diverge sharply, to the detriment of "Hot Spot." Don Johnson, the protagonist of Hopper's film, is certainly smug, but he seems incapable of a passion grand enough to take the risks demanded by the film's plot. By contrast, Jason Patric is delightfully loopy for much of "After Dark, My Sweet," particularly when he is bouncing off a hilariously mannered Bruce Dern or the unctuous George Dickerson.

GRADES: "After Dark, My Sweet": ★ ★ 1/2; "The Hot Spot": ★ 1/2

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