



The Roaring Twenties

The anniversary of *T2* – and a host of other things

In 1991, I saw *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* — not the week it came out, but months later when the Bijou showed it as a late-night feature. For years, all I remembered vividly about the movie, apart from Linda Hamilton's badass physique, were seemingly endless shots of the road from the hood of a car. I felt carsick, tipped back in my seat in the second row.

In 2011, when I try to talk about *T2*, the discussion veers, with a certain sense of inevitability, to the music of 1991. The 20th anniversary of *Nevermind* has been everywhere, overshadowing 1991's other releases. A quick search shows that only the metalheads are talking about Metallica's huge "black album." *Achtung Baby* appears to have lost our attention, maybe because U2 is still ubiquitous. In a *Village Voice* piece about REM's breakup, Maura Johnston points out that *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* also came out in 1991, and suggests, bravely, that the Red Hot Chili Peppers' dick-centric opus (my words, not hers) "probably went on to define the alt-rock landscape a lot more than Kurt Cobain's body of work ever did."

Terrible top 10 singles notwithstanding, is it the case that 1991 was more obviously influential and transitional in the rock universe — debut records from Pearl

Jam and The Smashing Pumpkins; Guns n' Roses' *Use Your Illusion* set; Nirvana knocking Michael Jackson out of the number one slot — than in film? Are we talking about the rest of 1991's box office hits? *The Silence of the Lambs*, sure. *Beauty and the Beast* is always relevant for its trivia, as the first animated feature to get a Best Picture nomination. But *Hook*? *The Addams Family*? I'd rather not talk about *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* if I can help it.

T2 is different, and I've been struggling to pin down why. You can talk endlessly about the legacy of the technology that created the T-1000. You could focus entirely on Arnold Schwarzenegger's career, and where it went afterward; you could look at the way Edward Furlong came from nowhere, became a teen heartthrob for a time, and then virtually disappeared into a series of minor roles, *American History X* aside. You could point out, as Ryan Lambie did at denofgeek.com, that *T2* is "a film about the rise of machines that ushered in a new age of ubiquitous computer effects." You could take apart the time travel issue: Did we learn nothing from *Back to the Future*, the definitive time-travel movie of a generation? When you change things in the past, the future changes, but if Skynet is destroyed and

John Connor's still alive, does he still get to a future where he needs to send a robot back? Should both Terminators have just disappeared, like Clark Duke does for a moment in *Hot Tub Time Machine*, or is this the kind of time travel that believes the future is written, and no matter what you do, it will find a way to take place? It's all a bit wibbly-wobbly timey-wimey, as *Doctor Who* would say.

You can see fragmented reflections of the film in the years that followed, as filmmakers reached for Cameron's sense of urgency and failed, cluttering their action sequences with too much information and focusing on the wrong things. *T2*'s nearly wordless semi/dirt bike chase has a poor echo in *T3*, sliced to ribbons and full of useless reaction shots, and the kinetic highway car chase in *The Matrix Reloaded*, but those scenes are more in love with the spectacle of destruction. You might hear *T2*'s soundtrack's insistence and doom in the BWAAAAH of *Inception*. And you might wonder about the cycle of robot doom that comes back around to haunt us every so often. Did Cylons influence the Terminator? Did the Terminator then influence the next version of *Battlestar Galactica*? Is your Roomba out to get you?

T2 wasn't the kind of movie that made me see myself in it. I didn't leave the theater wanting to still be in that world; it wasn't a horror movie, but it was scary. Just getting away from the bad guy was extremely difficult — and even then, there

was no guarantee you'd managed to save the world or the future. Despite Arnie's deadpan catchphrases and John Connor's frightened, high-pitched squeak, *T2* stays dark, and returns again and again to the fact that the humans can't blame the machines; the humans made the machines.

James Cameron isn't particularly prescient, and the idea of the rise of the machines isn't new. But Cameron's strength, whether you like it or not, lies in his talent for taking slivers from existing stories and melting them down into his own seemingly indestructible T-1000. *Titanic* was supposed to crash, but it didn't, even though everyone knows how it ends. *Avatar* was an insanely expensive undertaking, but Cameron's twist on the alien invasion trope — making humans the aliens; keeping the chosen hero of so many sci-fi stories — beautiful and flawed as it was, struck a chord with people who wanted to see some cinematic magic.

And that's what even my skeptical side can't hold against Cameron: He knows how to make magic, and when he doesn't know, he finds out (a less auteur-theory variant: he knows how to seek out and bring together people who can make magic). *The Abyss* is often overlooked yet fiercely loved by a few. People like to hate *Titanic*. *Avatar* is awe-inspiring and frustrating, tired and brand new. *Terminator 2* is the place where Cameron's detractors and fans can come together. Yes, some of the effects look dated now; yes, the movie is too goddamn long. But *T2* is more than the sum of its parts: This long chase movie about killer robots is also about humanity's twinned urges toward survival and destruction.

You know what else turned 20 this year, along with now-classic albums, deadly robots and Emma Roberts? Linux. Linus Torvald's "hobby" operating system is now everywhere. It was on the computers that brought Cameron's *Titanic* to life. Supercomputers run Linux. Welcome your robot overlords. Just don't make them look like us.

EW

Terminator 2 runs in late-night showings through Oct. 2 at the Bijou; info at bijou-cinemas.com

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7:00	5:30 7:40	3:00 5:30 7:40	3:00 5:30 7:40	5:30 7:40	5:30 7:40	5:30 7:40	5:30 7:40

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