

Exclusive Interview: SUMMER GLAU FROM 'FIREFLY' TO 'TERMINATOR: THE SARAH CONNER CHRONICLES'

The actress, who is best known as River Tam, now tackles a brand new iconic science-fiction role

By SEAN ELLIOTT, Senior Editor (Published 8/7/2007)

Summer Glau is recognized around the world as being part of the the universe of Joss Whedon's FIREFLY and SERENITY portraying the troubled teenage stowaway River Tam, who was smuggled on board the freighter Serenity by her brother to escape becoming a brainwashed killing machine. Now, in her new series, Fox's Midseason science-fiction entry TERMINATOR: THE SARAH CONNER CHRONICLES, Glau gets to be a killing machine all the time in the guise of a Terminator named Cameron. iF MAGAZINE chatted with the actress and found out just what to expect from her surprisingly human performance as a soulless machine.

iF MAGAZINE: What can you tell me about Cameron? Is she named in homage to James Cameron?

SUMMER GLAU: Yes I believe she is. That would be a question for Josh [Friedman, the show's creator] but as far as I know she is.

iF: Does Cameron heal, does she require stitches to facilitate healing?

GLAU: I heal. If it's a big cut, then I have to be stitched back up.

iF: How familiar were with the TERMINATOR universe before you got this role?

GLAU: Not at all, I hadn't seen any of them yet.

iF: So did you go back then and watch the movies after you were cast?

GLAU: Yes. I watched the movies. I loved them. I know I've said this before, but I knew about the action and the iconic symbols we think of when we think of TERMINATOR, but I was surprised by how touching it was in terms of the relationships. I got into it because of a mother's love for her son. I understood on a different level and I loved how human Arnold [Schwarzenegger in the movies] was and I loved how much I cared about his character.

iF: You're no stranger to stunt work, how much of your own stunts did you perform for the pilot?

GLAU: I got to do quite a bit, but the thing about TV that is different from film is the fact that you don't have a lot of time. I worked for months and months on SERENITY to learn the fight scenes. When you do TV, you might not get the script until the night before you shoot it, so that's going to be a challenge. I don't know how that's going to go, because I haven't done a big action TV show yet. I'm hoping we can all do our own stunts, I know that we're all really into it, and we're all really pumped. It's going to have to be a team effort.

iF: Did you have any accidents filming the action in the pilot?

GLAU: Actually before, I was in one. I have a scar on my face from when I was shooting. I was at a shooting range and a shell flew back and burned my face, so [director] David Nutter let it show all through the pilot, and if you watch you can see it all through the episode. I thought that was great because she is supposed to be human.

iF: River Tam in SERENITY and FIREFLY is basically a bundle of uncontrolled emotions and Cameron is a terminator with no real emotions, but she mimics emotion. So what have been some of the acting challenges in pulling yourself back from your own humanity to play this part?

GLAU: That has been complicated for me. The first time I read the sides I was really intimidated by the idea of playing this character. I've never come to a role with these stipulations, I play more normal characters than this usually, and I am still working on it and figuring out how I want her to be. I really want people to relate to her. I want people to care about her and I'm trying to find different ways to go about doing that. As she grows and the series continues, I think she'll become more human. Who knows how far I can take it? I don't even know yet.

iF: In the other TERMINATOR films, the terminators became more human as the story progressed.

GLAU: Yes, yes! Exactly.

iF: Well, depending on how many seasons the series has, the sky is the limit in terms of Cameron's evolution?

GLAU: I hope so. I am so into this!

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