

TheTVaddict.com Interview: TERMINATOR'S Summer Glau

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When the opportunity came up to speak with Summer Glau, I jumped at the chance. She played one of my favorite characters ever on one of the greatest shows ever on TV, River Tam on Firefly, which was cancelled after too few episodes. So I was thrilled to get to ask her not only about Firefly but about her new character and show, Cameron on Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles.

If you haven't seen the show, Cameron has a very robotic (which makes sense, as she IS a robot), deadpan delivery and attitude. When asked about the character's persona and if that was hard to play her that way, Summer said,

Well, I always told Josh [Friedman, Executive Producer] it's just me trying to be as honest as possible as Cameron. I never want to ask the audience to laugh at me because then it just doesn't feel real, and so I just approach everything and try to be really sincere, as Cameron would be. She's so – I think that is what is so funny about her is just that she can't be anything but genuine. She's very open, like a child. She absorbs the behavior around her and tries to understand it as best she can, and sometimes it ends up being extremely funny.

At the beginning, Summer had to always keep in mind that she was playing a character that wasn't human. As she got more comfortable in the role, that was still hard but wasn't quite as challenging.

I think that as you do a series, you do sort of become your character in a way, and it does get much more comfortable when you read a scene. You kind of have an idea of how you want to do it. Whereas when you first begin a role, you're really exploring it and you're making big decisions about how you want to play her. But at this point, I think all of us in the cast have really gotten comfortable with how our characters would react in a certain situation.

But I would say that the hardest part is still looking at my scene partner who might be, you know, spilling their guts to me or crying or yelling, and I can't give anything back. You know, I mean I'm always giving something. I'm always giving energy back to my scene partner, but I can't respond in a way that I would if I was playing a human. That never quite feels natural to me.

Summer is a much more feminine Terminator than fans are used to, as in the movies, John's protector is the huge Arnold Schwarzenegger. Before the show even came out, producers wanted fans to realize how different Summer's character was, so they put out a poster featuring the nude upper half of Summer's body with the robotic wires hanging out underneath. Summer talked about how nervous she was when one of the producers brought up the concept to her and the reaction when she finally saw it.

You know, I remember when we were on set and James Middleton, who is one of our producers, was describing this concept to me about this awesome poster. I was going to be naked and I wasn't going to have any legs, and my guts were going to be hanging out. I was trying to act excited, but I was terrified. I thought, oh my gosh, this sounds so scary, and I'm going to be up on a billboard looking like that.

Then I said, oh, come on. Let's just use a picture, a normal picture, maybe Lena holding a gun and that sounds good. Then I saw the poster, and I thought, wow. I'm actually – I

understand the concept now. I thought it's really different. I think it's going to make people wonder. It's interesting. And I think it says a lot about the show.

But I remember they were talking about how they were going to start the campaign in LA in December, but I went home [to San Antonio, Texas] for Christmas and for New Years. And when I got home is when all the posters were up. I can't even describe how it feels. It doesn't feel like me. When I look at it, I just think about the team of people that put it together. It doesn't even really register that it's me, so it kind of represents all of us to me.

Also thinking about Arnold Schwarzenegger, we almost didn't get Summer playing Cameron. She didn't think she was right for the role.

I almost didn't go in on the audition because I just – I had such an idea in my mind of what a terminator should be, and I did not fit that mold in any way. You know, I'm short and I just didn't think that I had that terminator look. But I think that it is interesting because Arnold Schwarzenegger is such an icon. He's such an action hero that Josh Friedman decided to take the Terminator on a completely different path. We're not trying to recreate Arnold Schwarzenegger. We're doing a completely different Terminator, and that makes me feel safe because I don't have to try to follow in his footsteps. I'm just doing something different.

And it's been great, you know, as a girl playing a role like this. I always look for roles that make me feel good about being a woman, and that's not always easy. But I think on our show in particular, we're so empowered and we have a place of importance in the script. It's really gratifying as an actress.

When asked about playing a role that is new and not a recast of familiar characters (from the Terminator movies), Summer says that it was easier for her not having to play a recast of an already familiar character, but she admires what a great job Lena and Thomas have done as Sarah and John.

I think that Lena and Thomas have done an amazing job, and they're both very brave actors and very independent and strong. And so I completely trust their version of their characters. But for me, it was easier, I have to say. People still ask me about Arnold Schwarzenegger and how does that feel to be the new terminator. I can laugh about it because no one can possibly compare me to him. He is an icon, and I'm doing something really different, so it is a relief for me.

But I will say that I'm only one person who is working on this character. It's an entire team that helps me shape Cameron. Josh Friedman created her and then the writers develop her from episode-to-episode. And even Joel Cramer, our stunt coordinator, helps me decide how Cameron moves and how she fights. So I always take comfort in the fact that I have people around me who are helping me make decisions about who she is, and I'm getting more and more comfortable.

Summer's character, Cameron, has come back from the future to protect John. We don't know much about her other than that, and we don't know for sure if her intentions are true. Summer doesn't know much more than we fans do at this point either.

It's a mystery at this point if Cameron's intentions are what she presents them to be. I don't even really know what's going on with Cameron. I do know that maybe she has a mysterious past. And it's unclear what she ends up being in the future. But at this point, I think that all three of us, as far as what I know from the script, we are all fighting for

the same goal, but that might turn out to be sort of a front. Cameron might have come back from the past for a different purpose.

Fans might notice a difference between Cameron's personality in the pilot and in the episodes after. Summer said that there were definite changes and explained why.

We were experimenting with Cameron quite a bit, and we wanted her to be able to seem human. We wanted especially John to be fooled by her, so that he would let her into his life. And so in the pilot, I do act very human. And then as I go through the series, it appears that I've taken steps back and that I am acting more like a terminator would. We did that for several different reasons, but I know for me it's fun because I get to take more time for her development, her human development. I think that it also is funny and I think once her cover was blown with the Connors, she kind of was able to drop that persona and become who she really is around them.

Summer talked some about her previous role of River Tam in *Firefly*, saying in response to a question of a fight between River and Cameron,

Well, you know, I played River for a little bit longer. I think I know more of her moves at this point, but River was all about finesse and creativity and using her form as best she could because she wasn't the strongest person in the room, and she wasn't the biggest girl in the room.

Now playing Cameron, I don't really break a sweat because she just gets to pick things up and throw them and bash through walls. I don't know. I think it would be an ugly fight.

She also talked about the differences between her two characters and the training for both roles that she had to have.

It's funny because I actually see some similarities between them. They're both kind of foreigners in their surroundings. River was never good at being able to relate to people around her, and she always seemed to be somewhere else in her mind. And Cameron is the same way. She's from a different place. She's from a different time. She's not human. She doesn't really know how to relate to the people that she's living her life with now, so in that way they're similar.

But River was so emotional and so vulnerable, and Cameron can't really be those things. That was the biggest challenge for me when I first was cast in the role was trying to define how I could make her relatable and how I could relate to her as an actress, so it's been an interesting balance. I'm still finding out who she is, and I think that she's constantly growing. She's constantly changing from scene-to-scene and absorbing human characteristics, so I think that she will continue to become more relatable as time goes on.

When I met with Joel Cramer to talk about the fighting, I said I don't know how a terminator fights. He said, well it's going to be very different from what you did before with River. You're not going to be doing all these beautiful martial arts movements and it's not about being creative and having to use dynamic movement. It's just about brute force. It's been a really fun change of pace for me because I worked so hard on *Serenity*. I had to learn all that martial arts. I did it myself. I did it from start to finish, every fight scene, and it was incredibly challenging.

For Cameron, it's challenging in a different way because I can't – I have to constantly remind myself not to react humanly, not to move in a human way. Even things like crossing your legs, I can't touch my hair to move it out of my face. I have to really reprogram my mind. But as far as the actual fighting, it's really fun. Most of the training I did was just going to the shooting range with Joel. It was a great time.

Both *Firefly* and *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* are science fiction. Summer found it easy to transition from one sci-fi show to another.

Firefly was the first sci-fi show that I ever auditioned for, so I kind of got lucky, and I feel like once I became a member of the Joss Whedon family, [his fans] like to see [his] actors on other shows. It is sort of a small world. Those actors that are in sci-fi shows tend to make an easy transition into other sci-fi shows. It's interesting, and of course I've always been a fan of science fiction. I would say more of books. When I was little, my mom used to always read us science fiction, and I think that it did a great service to me in developing my imagination.

I think sci-fi actors have to have a very vivid imagination. Playing River was difficult because I don't know what it's like to be a psychic and I don't know what it's like to be a government experiment and live on a spaceship and fly around in space. You have to really go there as an actor, and it's not as easy as playing someone that might be your friend or someone that might be your sister. It's very different.

I think that sci-fi actors in general are very imaginative, creative people, and it's been really fun for me. I've loved it. I've loved being a sci-fi actress.

Fans are already speculating about a romance between Cameron and her protective charge John. Luckily for fans, that wouldn't be a problem for 27-year-old Summer, as Thomas Dekker, who plays John, recently turned 20. But is there hope for us fans that are dying to see some action between the two?

The writers are keeping me guessing. At this point, I can't tell. I know that it's a possibility. And I think that in her own way, Cameron does love John because, when I think about it, her entire existence is to protect him. Her purpose in life is to keep him safe and to be with him always. I think that she does love him, as best a robot could.

But at this point, their relationship is very complicated. John is still trying to figure out how he wants to treat her and what his relationship with her should be. It's really complicated, but I think that anything is possible at this point.

Because of the strike, there are only 6 episodes currently filmed left to air. Summer talked a little about what we can expect in those upcoming episodes.

I think people are going to be surprised at the direction of the show is going in. We have a lot of really strong subplots and a lot of great guest stars coming in constantly. I'm always amazed at what our writers come up with. I think people have a feeling of what they think the show is going to be, but there's going to be a lot of interesting twists because, when you take a concept from film and you put it into a television show, you can really take time to develop the story. So there are things that I think people haven't thought of.

A friend of mine, Amrie, who writes the My TV on TV column on TheTVAddict.com asked what Summer's favorite things were about her character and what she felt that Cameron

could learn. No surprise to me was that one of the things she loves is that they chose a girl to be John's protector.

I would say my favorite things about Cameron are I love the fact that I get to be very physical and that they've chosen for a girl to be John's bodyguard. I think that that's really exciting for girls and a great role for an actress. As far as her personality, if you could call it her personality, I love how open she is and how curious she is. That gives me a lot of opportunity, as an actress, to try different things and for her to grow and change.

But one of the interesting things that I've been thinking about, especially with ... Selena [Lena Headey, Sarah Connor] is, does the terminator understand what death is, and do they understand the value of life. I think that that's something that Sarah has a really hard time with because she needs Cameron and she keeps Cameron around because she understands how valuable Cameron can be to keep John safe, but I think that it constantly breaks her heart to watch Cameron and her coldness. That's something that Cameron is very curious about, I think. I love that part of their relationship.

Summer told about how she got into acting and also admits however that acting was not her first love.

When I was a little girl, I just had a feeling that I was going to be an actress. I don't know why. I just thought I think one day I'm going to be an actress, but I never did it. I danced since I was five. And I did it all day every day. I traveled, I danced, and I was in ballet companies, and I was a very serious dancer. Then I got hurt, and it's kind of the cliché story of the girl who put all her eggs in one basket and that's all I ever learned how to do. Then I got hurt, and I thought what am I going to do.

I ended up coming to LA to dance tango for a year, because I couldn't dance on point anymore. I started auditioning for acting jobs, and something just fit for me. And I felt this peace that I was supposed to be doing it, and I ended up, after a year, I got enough acting work where I could completely switch over. So I was very lucky, very lucky.

I asked Summer if she was getting to do the range of roles that she would like to play, since River and Cameron are similar in a lot of ways, while her roles on *The 4400* and *The Unit* were quite different from them.

You know, I have three goals, three new goals, and one of those is that I'd like to do a movie about dance, which is something that I'm working on right now, and I want to do a western. That's been one of my dreams. When I was a little girl and I thought about being an actress, I always wanted to do period films, you know, romantic, Jane Austin kind of movies. That's not what I'm doing right now, but I hope that I can do it all at some point.

There's a little something that I'm working on right now, but with dance. It's something that Joss Whedon is working on. He's had this idea for a while and we haven't had the opportunity where both of us were available, but it's something that we're working on as much as we can.

Fans will be glad to hear about Summer's favorite show and what she watches when she gets the chance.

My favorite show is Brothers & Sisters. I'm so addicted to that show. And the other shows I watch, I watch anything that Anthony Bourdain does. I love all of his shows, and cooking, the Food Network. I'll watch anybody cook.

She also talked about her time on the other shows, including summer show, The 4400, and about its sudden cancellation.

I was heartbroken. I love all of those actors. I have to say, I enjoyed my time there immensely, and I thought it was an excellent show. You know, they had a really long run though. The show was on for a long time, and I'm sure all those actors are going to do great in new projects. I wish I could have been there for the finale too because I had to leave before the last episode because I was shooting Sarah Connor, and I always thought, well maybe I'll come back. Now I don't know. Maybe some of those actors can come be on Terminator, so I get to see them.

When I asked her about the rest of the cast of Firefly and the possibility of another movie, she gave us fans hope!

You know, it's never over. We thought it was over after the series got cancelled and that wasn't the case. We're really close. I'd say I get to see Nathan [Fillion, Capt Mal] the most because he lives the closest. I still see everyone whenever I can. Jewel [Staite, Kaylee] lives in Vancouver and she's working up there [on Stargate: Atlantis], so I don't get to see her as much as I like, but we all have such a strong bond. I'd have to say, that was my first experience. I didn't even know how to stand on my mark. I lost the camera all the time. I ran into people, and they treated me like an equal and the family, so I think that we would all come back if we got the opportunity. And it's never over.

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