

AFTER A SLOW PATCH, SARAH CONNOR'S COMING BACK FULL THROTTLE

By Charlie Jane Anders, 2:42 PM on Sun Mar 1 2009

The final six episodes of Sarah Connor season two will be a crazy ride, judging from the clip reel we saw. And producer Josh Friedman explained exactly what went wrong with the lackluster two most recent episodes.

Friedman and co. showed off a "sizzle reel" of scenes from the last six episodes at the show's panel. And it was just bursting with crazy shit, including a dozen episodes' worth of gunplay and weird twists.

We saw Savannah, Catherine Weaver's daughter skipping and playing hopscotch in ominous gray tunnels, until she comes upon the mysterious room where the artificial intelligence John Henry is. "Would you like to play hide and seek?" John Henry says. Later on, Ellison is demanding to know where Savannah is, and John Henry won't answer. John Henry asks Catherine Weaver what would happen if people knew she wasn't Savannah's real mother, and Catherine asks if she's being threatened.

There's also a lot of stuff over whether the Connors can trust Cameron, Summer Glau's Terminator. John insists "Cameron didn't do it," and Sarah asks how he knows that. "Because she said so." And then Sarah lists all the stuff Cameron has lied about, including whether she's destroyed all the parts they salvaged, and also whether Cameron loves John.

Ellison is telling Catherine he's sorry, and she says he should be. And then John Connor is decking Ellison and yelling that he'll kill him. And Sarah meets Jesse, but doesn't seem to know who she is. And Sarah meets Catherine Weaver(!). And there's a Terminator water-delivery guy who tasers somebody.

And then there's just some bugfuck action, with Summer Glau walking and shooting with her face torn up. And some glimpses of Jesse on board her nuclear submarine (with the Terminator captain) in the future, and someone talking about her being in a tin can under the ocean. And Sarah Connor defibrillating herself. And lots and lots of gunplay. And Sarah holding a Terminator arm. And lots and lots of people crying (including Riley) and then some voices singing the Scottish folk song "Donald Where's Your Trousers", including a child's voice.

And then there's a shot of John Connor in bed with Cameron - and John is lying on top of Cameron, and it looks like they're about to kiss. Dude!

The season finale is wrapped, and Friedman wrote it himself. It does end on a bit of a cliffhanger, but it answers a lot of questions from the past two years - and then raises new ones. Fans would be upset if the show gets canceled either way, so Friedman chose to be "optimistic" and write an open-ended finale. "The last six episodes are fantastic, and they're among the best episodes" of the series, said Friedman.

We sat down with Friedman, plus stars Summer Glau and Shirley Manson, for roundtable interviews at Wondercon, and Friedman explained what happened this season.

The show was way ahead in its writing, and the writers had put together episode 14, "The Good Wound" (the midseason premiere), near the end of the first 13 episodes. "But then we thought we were canceled, and we thought we weren't going to get it back on," Friedman said. "The writers had already been contracted to write episode 14." But everybody thought they were never actually going to shoot "The Good Wound," and all the writers were commiserating about how that script, with Kyle Reese and everything, was never going to get filmed.

The show actually shut down production and closed the writers' room, and then at 10 PM on a Friday, Friedman got a call saying the show was back on in the spring. The writers' room needed to be open first thing Monday morning, and they needed another script in less than a week. That was "Desert Cantos," the funeral episode. He wanted to show the aftermath of terrible things happening, and he was in love with the idea of a whole town that's struck by tragedy. Unfortunately, the execution wasn't as great as it could have been.

"Don't feel bad about not liking 'The Desert Cantos,'" Friedman told me.

Friedman said the writers wrote down all 22 of the season's episodes on a white board, and then went through and erased the weakest episode, and then the next weakest, until they were left with the best, by common consent. "The Desert Cantos" was the first episode to get erased, said Friedman.

The good news is, the remaining six episodes are among the best, according to all the writers. And the last three episodes of the season are all in the top four episodes of the season according to the writers' room consensus, said Friedman.

It was also unfortunate that the show came back, and moved to Fridays, with episodes that were slow and contemplative. On the other hand, the show's ratings have stayed basically flat for the past two years, says Friedman. Even when it moved to Fridays, the ratings went down statistically the amount that ratings always go down from Mondays to Fridays. No matter what the show does, whether it features more action or more Summer Glau, it still has the same ratings.

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