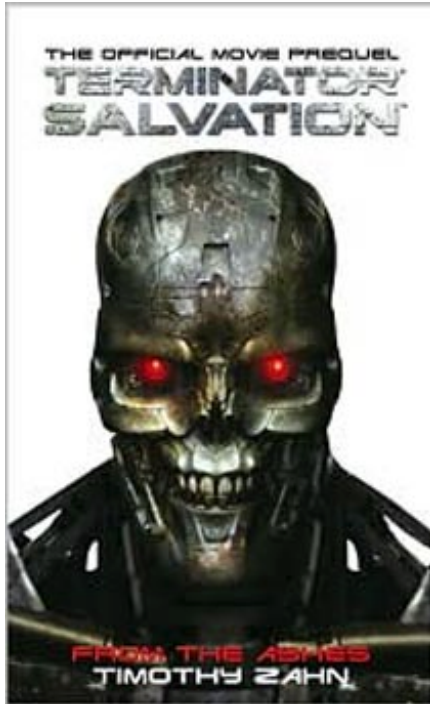


'Terminator' flashback: 'Terminator Salvation: From the Ashes' (2009)

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Even as Fox deemed the "Terminator" franchise not popular enough to renew "Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles" for a third season, the movie wing of the franchise was betting the TV network was wrong. From the ashes of "Chronicles" rose the "Terminator Salvation" franchise, which would eventually rank second only to the "T2" franchise in pumping out the most spinoff materials. I personally don't think it was better than "Chronicles," but apparently it was more commercially successful, or at least more aggressive. ("TSCC" spawned no spinoff materials at all.)

Timothy Zahn's prequel story, "[Terminator Salvation: From the Ashes](#)" (March 2009), launched the novel line, which continues the story from "Terminator 3" (but not the "T3" sequel novels, as I'll explain below). Around the same time, a different story – like this book, dubbed "The Official Movie Prequel" – launched the comic line.

"From the Ashes" isn't exactly "Thrown Trilogy"-level Zahn. It's a serviceable novel that illustrates what life is like in the Future War for fighters and civilians who are trying to eke out a living. There's a notable "Walking Dead" vibe to the proceedings, as different groups of humans meet – there's some trading, some attempted recruiting, some threats, some fighting – and lots of suspicion.

But the logistics of the humans' fight against an embryonic Skynet outpost are confusing and not particularly fun to read, perhaps in part because there's no back-and-forth – we never get Skynet's perspective like we do the Empire's in Zahn's "Star Wars" work.

The novel's main value is to introduce us to most of the "Salvation" movie characters, and

here, Zahn's ability to write distinct personalities comes in handy. I suspect I'll latch onto these people more quickly on my movie rewatch having read Zahn's book. In terms of continuity, "From the Ashes" chronicles the mission where John Connor and his group prove themselves to the Resistance structure and are therefore absorbed into it. But there's something noticeably missing: We don't learn how John became a strong leader in this timeline. (Remember, Sarah died and John needs to be protected by a T-850 in "T3," where Kate arguably shows superior – or at least equal -- fighting and leadership skills.)

CHARACTERS

Sarah Connor: Not even mentioned in this book. She died between the events of "T2" and "T3," in 1997.

John Connor: He's a skilled leader of a group of fighters and civilians here, although we don't learn how John learned war strategy or leadership skills. They are not formally part of the Resistance until the end of the book, when they are invited to join after taking out a Skynet hub. Because this book takes place in 2018 (see the calculations under "Continuity and Contradictions"), and because John was born in 1980 in the "T3"/"T4" movie timeline, he's about 38 in this book.

Kate Connor: John's wife and one of the best medics among the group, as she has apparently supplemented her veterinary knowledge since the time of "T3." She's irked that John refuses to let her join him in the field, but she goes out on the final mission anyway and proves herself. As this is fairly early in the war, we're starting to see a transition from the old stereotype where men do the fighting to the era when the women of the future are "good fighters," as Kyle doesn't hesitate to say in "T1." Kate is pregnant at book's end with the Connors' first child. Perhaps she'll be named Kyla, as per "T3: Terminator Hunt," although this is a different timeline.

Kyle Reese: A 16-year-old lad here, he is holed up with a group of civilians at Moldering Lost Ashes (formerly the Moldavia Los Angeles hotel). A dedicated contributor to the makeshift family, he often has lookout duty. He's good at making pipe bombs (Chapter 11), a skill he'll reprise in the first "Terminator" film. Although Kyle and John nearly cross paths and do help each in this battle -- which marks the first time Kyle sees a Terminator up close (11) -- they don't actually meet yet. "From the Ashes" includes no references to Kyle's family members such as his brother Derek, a big tipoff (if readers didn't already know) that this is a different timeline from "TSCC."

Star: A few years younger than Kyle, she follows him everywhere like a kid sister, although they aren't related and we don't know how they met. They communicate with hand signals (perhaps American Sign Language, although it's not explicitly stated), since Star doesn't talk. On the Now Comics timeline, Kyle's younger brother Tim Reese is also mute; Star's muteness is probably a coincidence rather than an homage, unless one imagines the writers of "T4: Salvation" poring over obscure and not particularly good "Terminator" lore.

Blair Williams: A female pilot in John's group. Flying her A-10, she often engages HKs (Hunter-Killers) in aerial dogfights.

Barnes: John's top ground soldier, he's somewhat of a loose cannon.

Tunney: John's demolitions expert.

General Olsen: The man who invites John's group into the Resistance at book's end.

Sergeant Orozco: This former Marine witnesses Judgement Day (presumably in 2004, as per "T3") in the prologue, then joins Moldering Lost Ashes. He's a father figure to Kyle and Star. After turning down an invitation to join the Resistance, he reluctantly becomes the guardian of several teens and kids who survive the battle. Unlike the aforementioned characters (minus Sarah), he's not in "Salvation."

Chief Grimaldi: The leader of Moldering Lost Ashes, he's a former corporate bigwig who naively believes the Terminators will leave them alone, and who often clashes with Orozco.

TERMINATORS

T-1s: The mini-tanks, as revealed by the U.S. military in "T3" (1).

T-600s: The classic endoskeleton (like on the book cover), but they are often covered with rubbery skin (11). This matches up perfectly with Kyle's description in "T1." From a distance, these early Infiltrators (although that term isn't used here) look like humans, but up close they are easy to distinguish. Their rubber skin gets blown off quickly in firefights, but they are hard to kill. Indeed, their limbs have close-range electromagnets that allows them to return to the body for re-assembly (9). They can also self-repair with tools (12) a la the T-800 in "T1" and Cameron in "TSCC."

T-400s: Briefly mentioned in by a trader who notes "I haven't seen one in ages" (11), so we can presume they are obsolete. T-400s are similarly described as "ancient" in "T3: Terminator Hunt."

Water-based Terminator: Mentioned by a trader, but without much description: "All we know is it's metal, travels in water, and has lots of big teeth" (5). This is perhaps a teaser to the "Salvation" movie. Traditionally up to this point, Terminators do not fare well in water, with the exception of liquid metal T-1000s, as seen in "TSCC."

CONTINUITY AND CONTRADICTIONS

"From the Ashes" definitely takes place before "Terminator Salvation" (aka "T4"), as it says "The Official Movie Prequel" on the cover. At first blush, it seems to spring from the events of "Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines." Ultimately, I believe it does. However, it can't be on same timeline as the two "T3" sequel books, "Terminator Dreams" and "Terminator Hunt."

We know "From the Ashes" is on a different timeline from "T3: Terminator Hunt." We learn in Chapter 8 that Grimaldi had been leading the Moldering Lost Ashes group for "at least 10 years." Since J-Day is in 2004 in "T3," that places "From the Ashes' " primary action no earlier than 2015. In "Terminator Hunt," Kyla Connor is 17 in 2029 and therefore is born in about 2012. In the "From the Ashes"/"T4" timeline, she'll be born no earlier than 2016.

We already know that "T3: Terminator Dreams" is on a different timeline from "T3," due to John's birth year being 1978 instead of 1980. It's possible that "Hunt" shares "Dreams' " branch of the timeline. It's also possible that "Hunt" continues from "T3" on one branch,

and "From the Ashes"/"T4" continues from "T3" on another branch.

As I review "Salvation's" ancillary materials, it'll be the latter branch that we'll follow (barring the introduction of more contradictions), known as the "T3"/"T4" movie timeline (which, as I explained in my post on the "T3" movie, is different from the "T1"/"T2" movie timeline because John's birth year changes from 1984 to 1980, although the same major events carry over).

From northern Mexico, Orozco witnesses Judgment Day (presumably in 2004). He sees San Diego, Mexicali (or Twentynine Palms) and Hermosillo wiped out (prologue).

Los Angeles was "lucky" compared to obliterated cities such as New York, Chicago, Washington and Paris (3). It is home to a Skynet base, John's group of fighters and civilians who take on Skynet, holed-up civilians and fighters like Orozco's Moldering Lost Ashes family who hopes Skynet will leave them alone, traders, and dangerous roving gangs. "From the Ashes" explains why so much action in "Terminator" lore happens in L.A.: Skynet didn't successfully wipe it out on J-Day, thus leading to an interminable mop-duty and battles against the Resistance in the City of Angels. This differs from the Now Comics timeline, where Skynet kept some humans alive to amuse itself with warfare.

The idea of human-on-human conflict had been touched on in several previous stories (notably the Luddites of Stirling's "T2" book trilogy), but the most explicit example so far comes when Orozco, Kyle and Star fend off a gang of teenage boys (6).

After battles or massacres, Skynet collects human corpses for unknown purposes (12). This is a teaser to the "Salvation" movie.

Orozco declines to join the Resistance, as he equates them with the people who created Skynet and caused Judgment Day in the first place (20). Fair or not (the Resistance features different individuals from those who launched Skynet), Orozco does have his train of continuity correct: The Resistance in the "T3" timeline is a direct continuation from the U.S. military, which explains the use of U.S. flags in the victory montage at the start of the "T3" movie.

In this timeline, the Resistance seems to be not only a more direct continuation of the U.S. military compared to other timelines, but it also holds some powerful war machines of its own to counter Skynet, including Apache combat helicopters (19) and Black Hawk troop carriers (20).

At book's end, John's group is transported to a safe, thriving Resistance base outside of Los Angeles, although we're not told its location (20).

TIMELINES AND TIME TRAVEL

Thank goodness! There is no time travel and no references to other timelines in this book beyond John's standard reflections on what Sarah (via Kyle) and the good T-800 and T-850 had taught him in the movies.