

'Terminator' flashback: 'The Sarah Connor Chronicles' Season 2 (2008-09)

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["Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles"](#) Season 2 (2008-09) is a decompressed stretch of low-key epic storytelling that continues to chronicle central "Terminator" ideas. John and Sarah ferret out organizations that might be the proto-Skynet, and resistance fighters and Terminators pop up in time bubbles on specific missions relating to Skynet or the Connors.

Thematically, we get more of the broad strokes from the movies about how John has to live with the burden of people dying for him. Meanwhile, Sarah worries about her cancer and the idea of having John properly trained for his destiny. But the biggest theme – and something I didn't pick up from the original airing – is John's relationship with Cameron. The writers do a neat trick of flipping the "T2" script of John having a T-800 for a father figure, and also teaching that robot some humanity. "Sarah Connor Chronicles" Season 2 explores the dark side: What if reprogrammed Terminators can't fully be trusted, and even more interesting, what if John starts to appreciate the company of robots more than humans?

The first half of Season 2 delivers a lot of great "Quantum Leap"-style episodes where the show uses its mission-specific time travelers to tell self-contained stories (while also inching the main narrative forward). My favorite is "Self-Made Man" (11), where Cameron befriends an after-hours wheelchair-bound library clerk and researches a Terminator who popped up in the 1920s. It has a lot of small bits of humor where the clerk is baffled by what he thinks is a cute but socially awkward girl.

The show tailspins a bit in the second half as it gets more serialized. There's nothing wrong with the serial story – this is classic "Terminator" stuff, after all – but it's a bit redundant. "Earthlings Welcome Here" (13) is a low point of the series, largely because the guest star is a man posing as a woman, but the performer is a female, thus making the whole thing into an unnecessary mind-trip.

In terms of storytelling logic, Season 2 is convoluted, but it comes together fairly well. The big surprise in the series finale is that the T-1000 (Garbage frontwoman Shirley Manson, in

a cool turn that deliciously contrasts with her fiery stage persona) that runs one of the proto-Skynets, Zeira Corp, does not actually have villainous intentions. Presumably because of the show's early cancellation, we didn't get the specifics about how this is possible, although there are intimations that John teams up with a T-1000 in the future.

This season is best enjoyed as a style piece, from Lena Headey's Sarah Connor voiceovers to the intentionally off-kilter chemistry between John and Cameron to the mesmerizing Bear McCreary music that builds upon the movie scores. It's obvious that the TV series lacks the films' budgets, but it still works within its confined space thanks to its knack for style, and it does occasionally splurge on a liquid-metal effect.

By series end, it had become an internal trope to show violent shoot-'em-ups scored to incongruous music, starting with Garbage's "Samson & Delilah" in the season premiere of the same name, something that was itself a followup to the Johnny Cash song that closed Season 1. Beloved Charley also bows out in a flurry of stylized violence in "To the Lighthouse" (20), but in a shockingly effective twist in "Adam Raised a Cain" (21), Derek is gunned down by a Terminator in one shot as if he's a side character.

Season 2 is a mostly satisfying package. But it's obvious that the writers had more stories in mind for Season 3, which would have begun with John integrating into a Future War where no one knows his name. In the real world, just after the series finale, "Terminator Salvation" hit theaters, showing Adult John in the Future War in a different timeline. So for the sake of avoiding confusion, maybe the cancellation was for the better. But in my head, largely because he played the role the longest but also because he did it with the right balance of angst and youthful hope, Thomas Dekker is the definitive John Connor.

CHARACTERS AND ACTORS

Sarah Connor (Lena Headey): Sarah continues to try to protect and train John, while also worrying that she might have cancer. Sarah's "Spanish is rusty" (4, "Allison from Palmdale"). Although a lump in her breast turns out to be a transmitter implanted by Kaliba Group (20), Cameron believes Sarah still has cancer due to her weight loss. Her aliases include "Sarah Baum" – a carryover from Season 1 -- and "Sarah Gale" (10, "Strange Things Happen at the One-Two Point").

John Connor (Thomas Dekker): In this timeline, John was born – via C-section (16, "Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep") – in the jungles of Central America (4); this differs from his birthplace in Odessa, Texas, in Dark Horse's "End Game." In 2008, John is 16 years old (8, "Mr. Ferguson is Ill Today") due to the time jump that launched this TV series. As always, John is the hallowed resistance leader in the future: "We died for you, John. We all die for you," Derek says (5, "Goodbye to All That"). But Season 2, more than any other "Terminator" story up to this point, digs into the idea that John is far from perfect. His soldiers are concerned with his close relationship with reprogrammed metal, namely Cameron: "If you're asking if everyone agrees with you all the time, of course not," Derek explains to John in 2009. "You lead, we follow, we rise and fall on your shoulders. But we're always watching, for you to be human." Young John (John DeVito) is seen in flashbacks to the Connors' time in Latin America (20). When John was a kid, he lived in a village in Mexico called Dejalo for a year and a half (8). John's upbringing in Latin American countries – and his fluency in Spanish -- is common throughout "Terminator" lore. When John jumps to the future (22, "Born to Run"), no one has heard the name John

Connor.

Derek Reese (Brian Austin Green): The reason why Derek was sent back by John was to "set up a safehouse (6, "The Tower is Tall But the Fall is Short"). He also sets up supply drops (9, "Complications"). Sarah doesn't fully trust Derek after learning of his secret relationship with Jesse (20). He's tragically killed by a T-888 while attempting to protect Savannah (21).

Kyle Reese (Jonathan Jackson): Jackson reprises Michael Biehn's famous speech about Sarah's photo (14, "The Good Wound"). Sarah visits Kyle's grave, which is just one unknown grave among those marked "1984" in a potter's field (21). Kyle is famous in the future John jumps into (22), contrasting with other timelines – including the original one -- where he's just an ordinary grunt.

James Ellison (Richard T. Jones): The former FBI man working the Connor case switches to the private sector and a job as Zeira Corp's head of security in Season 2. He's always well-meaning; he helps Sarah (8) because "I owed you one – the fire, Silberman's cabin." But he also works against them, digging up Cromartie's body for Zeira Corp (9), whom he thinks will give him answers to his questions. He continues to follow the rise of robotic/computer sentience in the form of John Henry, to whom he teaches morality and Christianity.

Jesse Flores (Stephany Jacobsen): She is an Australian Resistance fighter and girlfriend of Derek (they meet at Eagle Rock Bunker in 2027), who makes supply runs from Perth to Los Angeles (located on the far side of Australia, Perth is an inconvenient location to pick up supplies bound for L.A., but this is never explained). Jesse travels back to 2009 with the goal of getting John to hate Cameron. Jesse's scheme is to get John to like Riley, then Jesse will kill Riley, framing Cameron. After learning about her scheme, Derek – who believed that Jesse traveled back in time to escape the war -- thinks about killing Jesse (19, "Today is the Day, Part II"), but lets her run away.

Riley Dawson (Leven Rambin): A homeless girl in 2027, Riley is recruited by Jesse for a time-travel mission back to 2009. Riley's mission is to become John's girlfriend and keep tabs on Cameron. Riley is unaware that Jesse is using her, and ultimately, Jesse kills Riley (19). John gradually suspects Riley's secret, with his first clue being her lack of reaction to hearing the name "John Connor" (8), when she should only know him as "John Baum." However, he doesn't call her out on it, instead hoping that she'll come clean of her own volition.

Savannah Weaver (Mackenzie Brooke Smith): The daughter of the real Catherine Weaver, she is now being raised by the T-1000 posing as her mother.

Charley Dixon (Dean Winters): Sarah's former fiancé and a father figure to John, he's killed by Kaliba Group's T-888s (20). His wife is a victim of Cromartie (3, "The Mousetrap").

Time-traveling resistance fighter from episode 2, "Automatic for the People": Although he's unnamed, he's an important plot device for Season 2, as – in his dying act – he writes a bunch of notes in blood on the Connors' basement wall. The Connors follow these clues throughout the season (particularly the first half). The hoariest of these clues, the "three

dots" symbol, leads to a ton of red herrings; ultimately, the dots are a reference to The Turk computer hardware (22). Probably.

Allison Young (Summer Glau): She is the resistance fighter whom Cameron is based on (4). Some of Allison's memories come to the fore of Cameron's brain, thanks to a glitch in the chip. Cameron writes "Alison Young" on the form at a halfway house, contradicting the spelling in the episode's title. In 2008, Mrs. Young is pregnant with Allison; when Sarah calls Mrs. Young asking for Allison, she gives Mrs. Young the idea for the name – a classic example of "closed-loop" storytelling. In 2027, Cameron kills Allison after interrogating her.

Ed Winston (Ned Bellamy): The primary human villain of Season 2, he is a Kaliba Group enforcer. His bosses "fix him up" (16, "Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep") after Sarah presumably kills him (13). But then Sarah does kill him (16).

Charles Fischer (Richard Schiff): He's a "Gray," a human who works for Skynet. He oversees experimentation on Derek in the future that Jesse comes back from (9). His reward is that he gets to time travel back before Judgment Day.

Sydney (Haley Hudson) and Lauren Fields (Samantha Krutzfeldt): Sydney is a future resistance soldier who carries an immunity to a Skynet-released plague. Her family (her mom is pregnant at the time) is targeted by a T-888 (12, "Alpine Fields"). Lauren is a future resistance doctor, who as a teenager in 2009 helps protect her unborn sister.

Martin Bedell (William Brent): This young man – an Army recruit in the 2008 scenes – goes on to help John form the resistance (5). In the Future War, he sacrifices himself to save John and Kyle.

Danny Dyson: In an odd throwaway line, we learn Miles Dyson's son has been missing for three months (22). Perhaps this was part of the Season 3 set-up.

Sarah's dad: We get a bit more Connor family tree information when we learn he was a war veteran with PTSD (6).

TERMINATORS

Cameron (Glau): Cameron's shaky programming is a subtle threat all season. She almost kills John (1), crushes a pigeon (17, "Ourselves Alone"), and when John says "Down deep, you want to kill me," she admits "Yes, I do." To guard against the possibility that she might revert to her original programming, she gives John a self-destruct button for her chip. On the other hand, Cameron doesn't kill Riley even though she sees Riley sees her with her endoskeleton arm exposed. And an examination of Cameron's breastplate (22) reveals that it is cold, which – in addition to being a robot-heart metaphor – means she is functioning properly.

T-888s: Aside from the liquid-metal T-1000s, all the Terminators in "Sarah Connor Chronicles" are T-888s. A major revelation about this model in Season 2 is that each unit is based on an actual person. Cameron, based on Allison Young, is a notable example (4). Another unit looks like nuclear plant worker Greenway (2), and another looks like Ellison (7, "Brothers of Nablus"). Sarah says "These things can look like anything" about a T-888 that is pursuing the Fields family and might possibly be posing as their neighbor (12),

although her fears are unfounded in this case. T-888s can't swim, as we see when Cromartie sinks to the bottom of the ocean in pursuit of John (3); however, he can walk on the ocean's floor until he reaches shore. This portrayal is consistent with Dark Horse's "Secondary Objectives."

Catherine Weaver (Shirley Manson): This T-1000 leads Zeira Corp, and although a viewer assumes she has traveled back in time to restart Skynet, in the finale we learn that she is trying to stop Skynet. In scenes from 2027 (19), John asks a T-1000 "Will you join us?," and in 2009, Weaver and John Henry ask Cameron the same question (22). And Weaver tells John, "We have a common enemy – Skynet" (22). Early on, we're led to believe that Weaver has done evil things, notably killing the real Weaver and her husband, and she kills many members of the proto-Skynet Kaliba Group. By experimenting with John Henry, and helping to make him sentient, she perhaps inadvertently propagates Skynet anyway. However, she does not kill John and Sarah when she could easily do so (22), so in the final analysis, it seems she is not a villain – although why Skynet, or an individual T-1000, would ally with John is never explained. The concept of a T-1000 going back in time to oversee Skynet's creation was also broached in Malibu's "Cybernetic Dawn."

T-1000 in 2027: John sends a submarine to an Indian Ocean oil platform to pick up a box containing a T-1000 (19). It gets loose, kills some of the crew, leaves a message ("Tell John Connor the answer is no") and then swims away. We later learn that John's question for the T-1000 was "Will you join us?" It seems likely the writers intended this T-1000 to be the same as the Catherine Weaver entity, but we don't know for sure.

Cromartie (Garret Dillahunt): Season 1's main T-888 villain pursues the Connors until they finally finish him off in a Mexican church (9).

John Henry (Dillahunt): John Henry is the Cromartie body programmed with The Turk, taught morality and religious doctrine by Ellison, and housed in the basement of Zeira Corp. Weaver says she built John Henry "to fight Skynet." Weaver tells Sarah, "Your John may save the world, but he can't do it without mine." After a hack by proto-Skynet ("It uploaded itself" through a backdoor worm program) gives him self-awareness (20), John Henry jumps to 2027 (22), absconding with Cameron's chip, presumably to reunite with Skynet.

Queeg (Chad L. Coleman, Tyreese on "The Walking Dead"): A resistance T-888, he leads the John Connor-sanctioned submarine mission to acquire a box containing a T-1000 (18, "Today is the Day, Part I"). "To protect the crew and mission," Queeg kills one of the soldiers, who is behaving erratically. Jesse then kills Queeg, suspecting "compromise to his programming."

Myron Stark (Todd Stashwick): This T-888 accidentally travels all the way back to 1920 (11). His mission is to kill the Los Angeles mayor before 2010. Cameron investigates Stark via library archives and correctly guesses that he's hiding in the wall at the building where the mayor will give a speech in 2010. Cameron destroys Stark.

Rosie (Bonnie Morgan): This T-888's goal is initially unknown, since she has a new form of chip that self-erases when removed. In retrospect, it's clear she is attempting to kill Dr. Sherman, a psychologist who will later work for Zeira Corp (6). Contortionist Morgan's fight scene with Glau is among the most entertaining of the TV series.

CONTINUITY AND CONTRADICTIONS

"Sarah Connor Chronicles" Season 2 picks up immediately after Season 1, in 2008.

Surprisingly, we're told that less than 60 days have passed since the Connors moved from New Mexico to Los Angeles back in Season 1. John notes that they are still within the 60-day grace period to transfer their weapons permits to California (12). This seems to be a continuity error, though, as the group time-travels to 2007 in the series premiere, and Derek's tombstone says "2009" at the end of Season 2.

"Sarah Connor Chronicles" Season 2 features two competing proto-Skynets. The most obvious is Kaliba Group, which includes subsidiary fronts such as Desert Heat & Air and Western Iron & Metal and a sleep clinic that is secretly gathering humans' brain scans (16). Zeira Corp – which includes subsidiary fronts such as Babylon (1) and AutoMite Systems (2) -- also seems to be a proto-Skynet, since it is led by a T-1000 (Weaver) and one of its projects is to help a T-888 (John Henry) become sentient using The Turk, computer hardware that the Connors believed to be the root of Skynet dating back to Season 1.

Before he's killed (7), Cromartie represents a third Skynet faction – a one-robot mission to kill the Connors. A T-888 who looks like Ellison appears (7), presumably to infiltrate Zeira Corp for Kaliba Group. However, Cromartie kills the Ellison imposter because he thinks the real Ellison will lead him to the Connors.

Season 2 also features red herrings that Sarah thinks might be proto-Skynets: Dakara Systems (10) and Symdyne Cybernetics (12).

As always, Sarah doesn't want any Terminator parts lying around that might lead to the relaunch of Skynet. This is somewhat amusing considering that the proto-Skynet is already up and running. Still, she buries Cromartie's body (8) with the intent to burn it later, and burns Cameron's collection of spare parts (18).

Weaver's investigations into proto-Skynet technology (3) start with a "man with a robot leg ... eight years ago in Red Valley, New Mexico" (a reference to Cromartie's school shooting in Season 1), and a plane crash site where Terminator parts were found five years ago in the Sierras. Weaver says she has been trying to reverse-engineer the technology for five years and that she originally worked with her husband, who was tragically killed.

Reprogrammed Terminators – and the question of whether they can be trusted – are a central theme of Season 2, primarily in the form of Cameron. ("T3" likewise found the T-800 struggling with its programming, albeit more briefly.) "Connor's got a (reprogrammed Terminator) in nearly every major base," Jesse says (6). And he is even trying to form an alliance with T-1000s (19), although he fails, at least at first. Perhaps John ultimately achieves that alliance, though, and sends Weaver back to work against Skynet; we never find out the full story.

The T-800s in "T2" followed John's instructions, but Cameron does not, noting that he's not Future John yet and that "Future John has better information than you do" (17). In "T2," it is important to John that Uncle Bob not kill humans. In "Sarah Connor Chronicles," John has the same anti-killing values, but Cameron nonetheless kills humans. She kills three thieves (7) to protect the location of the Connor home.

John kills a human for the first time when he offs a thief named Sarkissian after a struggle. This actually happened in the events of the Season 1 finale; however, viewers aren't let in on the fact, or John's angst about it, until this season (6). Sarah thinks she kills a human for the first time when she shoots Kaliba enforcer Ed at Desert Heat & Air (13), then she actually does kill him later (16).

Human traitors who work for Skynet are called Grays (9). These people have other names in other timelines.

We learn about a Skynet work camp (15, "Desert Cantos"): "People working for the machines, monitored by other people working for the machines." Skynet work camps have appeared in other stories, most notably those on the "Terminator Salvation" timeline, but also in the Now comics and Stirling's "T2" book trilogy.

Resistance base locations in 2027 include the former nuclear power plant Serrano Point (2) and Eagle Rock Bunker (18). These sites aren't mentioned in other timelines, although the fact that they are in the L.A. area is typical in the lore.

T-888s can change their voices to sound like other people, a classic Terminator trick. To counteract this, when answering the phone the good guys try codes such as saying the date or hitting predetermined buttons; however, this only works if the Terminators don't know about the system. At one point, Cameron poses as Riley on the phone (18).

Before Nebraska (at the start of Season 1), the Connors lived in a town called Carborville, which John "hated" (19).

Skynet submarines are called "Kraken" (18). Another submarine-based Future War story is the Dark Horse series "Hunters and Killers."

Kaliba Group builds a Hunter-Killer drone (15) and uses it to attack Zeira Corp (22). Hunter-Killers have been Skynet's most famous aerial vehicle dating back to the earliest Future War scenes in "Terminator." But this is the only story where one appears before J-Day.

Sarah, John and the "unknown accomplice" (Cameron) are fugitives throughout the TV series. We're starkly reminded of this when a prosecutor lists Miles Dyson's death ("Terminator 2"), the bank vault explosion (the Season 1 premiere) and the kidnapping of Savannah among their transgressions (22).

Homages to the movies include:

- A Terminator instructs a victim to "Call to him" (1), a tactic the T-1000 tried in "T2."
- Quite conveniently, a time traveler finds a homeless person's extra pair of pants (2), so he doesn't have to steal them like Kyle did in "T1."
- The wrong Martin Bedell is killed (5), like how wrong Sarah Connors are killed in "T1."
- Cromartie's Mexican police station massacre (8) calls to mind the T-800's shoot-'em-up in "T1."
- Sarah hallucinates seeing Kyle, who serves as half of her conscience (14). She also

imagines Kyle was talking to her in a deleted scene from "T2." Sarah says "I'm gonna die," and Kyle replies "It won't be the first time" – this is perhaps an allusion to "T3."

- Weaver emerges from the fire at the Desert Heat & Air warehouse and morphs from liquid metal to human appearance (14), much like the famous scene in "T2."
- Dream sequences have often given Sarah harsh glimpses of possible futures, as in "T2." A smaller-scale example occurs when she imagines T-888s at the sleep clinic kill John (16).
- Sarah intends to destroy the Zeira Corp building, noting that "It's Cyberdyne all over again" (21).
- A T-888 does self-repair in the mirror a la the T-800 in "T1" (22).
- A T-888 visits a gun store to buy silencers, but in this case, he doesn't kill the proprietor (22).
- Cameron says "Hasta la wego" (22), similar to the T-800's "Hasta la vista" in "T2."
- John and Cameron's jail rescue of Sarah calls to mind the mental hospital rescue in "T2" (22).

TIMELINES AND TIME TRAVEL

Resistance fighters and T-888s pop up throughout the season with oddly specific missions relating to Skynet and the Connors. Although Derek and Jesse realize they are from different timelines, these mission-specific time travelers don't rock the timeline too much – the missions are never scuttled because they've jumped into a different (or different enough) timeline.

Derek realizes that the Jesse he reconnects with in 2009 is not the same Jesse he knew in 2027; this Jesse is from a different timeline. They were lovers in both timelines, though. He is tipped off to the different timelines when he realizes why he can't remember being experimented on by Charles Fischer and Skynet in the Future War (9). It wasn't because of memory loss, it was because it happened in Jesse's timeline, not his. Derek begins to realize what viewers of "Terminator" stories already know: When someone goes back in time, they necessarily start a new timeline. "Maybe I changed the future," Derek says. He also learns they come from timelines with different J-Day dates (17). Additionally, Billy Wisher – Derek's best friend – doesn't exist on Jesse's timeline (19). And when Derek learns the full scope of Jesse's twisted mission to frame Cameron for Riley's murder, he conclusively says, "You're not my Jesse; you never were."

Jesse and Riley come through a time bubble together (13) and emerge in an alley, presumably in Los Angeles.

2008 Charles Fischer is imprisoned for time-traveling 2027 Charles Fischer's hacking crime (9), thus creating a closed loop – and a rather tragic one for the young Fischer, since he did nothing wrong (or hadn't done anything wrong yet).

When the T-888 known as Myron Stark travels back to 1920 due to a "temporal error" (11), it marks the farthest point back in time that a being has traveled in any "Terminator" continuity. The idea of temporal errors was used often in the Dark Horse comics, although

in those cases, it was usually in regard to wrong locations rather than wrong dates, and the comics preferred the term "time-spatial slippage."

There's a time-bubble generator in the Zeira Corp basement (22), in the same room where John Henry lives. How it got there is unexplained. Perhaps Zeira Corp was building it all along, but this is never shown onscreen. Or perhaps the writers decided to rush the story when they learned of the series' cancellation. John Henry uses the time bubble to travel to the future (presumably 2027) with Cameron's chip, then Weaver and John Connor follow, emerging in the resistance tunnels. Young John also did some distant-future time traveling in the Blackford "T2" trilogy.

The fact that the Zeira Corp basement and the resistance tunnels are both underground suggests spatial consistency, something that was central to time-bubble lore early in the series but not as much in more recent works. Cameron's body does not go through, perhaps because too much metal was exposed from recent battle damage. When John emerges in 2027, no one knows the name John Connor, not even Derek and Kyle. A new timeline has somehow been created. In the show's final scene, it seems Sarah might've followed in another time bubble, but it's unclear; we see a flash of time-bubble-style lightning, and Sarah says "I love you, too."