

In step with Lena Headey, TV Terminator's Sarah Connor

by Eirik_Knutzen

"I met the man I would marry, Peter Paul, at one of my girlfriends' weddings when I was a bridesmaid - our eyes met across a crowded boat cruising on the Thames," said Lena Headey, 34, the British actress who took over Linda Hamilton's job on the American television series "Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles."

LENA HEADEY - Lena Headey plays Sarah Connor in the sci-fi drama 'Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles.' CNS Photo courtesy of Jill Greenberg. The romance between the comely actress and handsome musician took off on a glorious spring day, yet accelerated when Headey became entangled in heavy competition for the Sarah Connor role of the TV version of James Cameron's blockbuster feature film trilogy featuring his then-wife, Hamilton, and California's current governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

During the first stage of the arduous casting process just before Christmas 2006, Headey auditioned twice in London - first on videotape, then via a live satellite feed two weeks later. Impressed, the suits at C-2 Picture and Warner Bros. Television in Hollywood sent her a first-class, round-trip airline ticket to L.A.

"It was a tough round of auditions in California and after I met with all the studio heads involved with 'Terminator-Sarah Connor' they asked, 'Do you want to be in it?' I said, 'Hell, yeah!'" laughed Headey. "We shot the pilot in January - in Albuquerque, New Mexico - then waited for a network pickup. With a summer commitment to start shooting in L.A., Peter and I were married on May 19, 2007."

As her husband failed to obtain a work visa in the U.S. on the first try, several options were closed in a flash after they rented a lovely home in Los Angeles.

"It's sad to see someone as talented Peter just hanging out, but he's also my mate in a very simple life - which I think is beautiful. After working crazy days, it makes me feel really calm and connected to return to my husband, my animals and my bed."

And Headey is working lots and lots of crazy days on "Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles" because that's what one-hour U.S. television action series require, especially when driven by CGI and special effects. Still, 14- to 16-hour workdays on the set are not unusual Hollywood standards. Especially when the contract calls for 22 episodes per season.

Yet British actors are clanging on Lotusland's studio gates in the hopes of landing their own well-paid starring roles on American television shows, just like Hugh Laurie, Alex O'Loughlin, Minnie Driver, Eddie Izzard, Kevin McKidd, Michelle Ryan, Gordon Ramsay and a half-dozen others.

"It's fun," Headey admitted, "but it's very hard work. I've never done anything like it in my life."

It's so different from British telly because doing 22 episodes means a 10-month commitment of mainly six-day weeks, yet leaves you with a very short time to shoot each scene and you give up your life to do it.

"I wish the (producers) would indicate that more before one signs the contract," she sighed.

"But the British keep coming and are working in lots of U.S. shows this season because they come cheap and didn't know what (the work) entailed," laughed Headey. "I made that comment slightly tongue in cheek, but ... in the end, I guess it's all about money."

A serious fan of the "Terminator" movie franchise since she was a teenager, Headey still feels lucky to be a part of the massive entertainment vehicle.

"I'm not Linda Hamilton, who created an iconic character; I haven't even met her, so I'm doing my own thing.

Creating my version of the character is really exciting.

"I also look at 'Sarah Connor' as a unique concept for television based on intelligent scripts and a very smart show runner," she continued, "particularly since we are trying to push American commercial television to its limitations. I like the idea of playing a woman who isn't struggling about being loved and adored."

She's a woman who is trying to keep her son, John (Thomas Dekker), from being killed every day, according to Headey, and she has some help in the deadly fight between humans and evil machines from the future in Cameron (Summer Glau), an attractive high school student sent to protect the Connors from automatons resembling Arnold Schwarzenegger and Robert Patrick. FBI special agent James Ellison (Richard T. Jones) also comes in handy occasionally.

Born in Bermuda while her father served a five-year stint there as a policeman (her parents now run their own wholesale and distribution company), she grew up in Yorkshire, watched lots of old movies on television and finally joined a local youth theater for seven years. Lacking an acting education, she made her professional debut in the British film "Waterland" (1992) and never looked back.

Headey was most recently seen as Queen Gorgo in the bloody film "300" and will have massive exposure through such upcoming 2008 releases as "The Red Baron," "The Broken" and "St. Trinian's." Her long list of movie credits already includes "The Remains of the Day" and "The Brothers Grimm."

"I've been lucky," she said, "because I've always remained under the radar."

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