

Summer Glau Goes Corporate On "Arrow"

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From the start, one of the strengths of The CW's DC Comics-based superhero drama "Arrow" has been its ability to reinvent lesser-known comic book characters to fit its stories. In its second season, the show continued that trend, casting one of the best known faces of modern genre TV in the form of actress Summer Glau taking on the part of Isabel Rochev.

In the comics, Rochev, created by JT Krul and Diogenes Neves, was an out-and-out villain obsessed with controlling the legacy of Oliver Queen's father. But the "Arrow" take on Rochev is much closer to the Queens' own corporate life, as throughout the new season, Glau's character has clashed with Oliver about his stewardship of the beleaguered company. All that comes to a head in tonight's brand-new episode, "Keep Your Enemies Closer," which finds Isabel joining team Arrow on an overseas trip that's equal parts vigilantism and corporate intrigue.

CBR News spoke with Glau about the role and the episode, and the actress best known for her work on Joss Whedon's "Firefly" explained that Isabel Rochev is only the latest in her string of compelling female characters in the sci-fi space, shared some teases for how the character will mix it up with Felicity Smoak and looked forward to a major turning point for her part and "Arrow" as a whole.

CBR News: Isabel Rochev seems like a fun part to play, and it's certainly a fun name to say.

Summer: It is, absolutely. [Laughs] Every character on the show has a name where you just go, "That is a comic book character." I love it.

CBR News: You've played a lot of roles over the years that are either physical ass kicker, or on the opposite end, a more quiet and reserved type. This is different, as Isabel is more of an ass kicker in her personality. She's aggressive in the boardroom. Did you feel that was a bit against type for you?

Summer: It's funny -- my parents actually loved this show, and they had just told me, "You should check out 'Arrow.'" Not a week later, I got an e-mail offering me an arc on "Arrow!" I read the character, and I said to my manager, "This is such a different role for me. I'm surprised that they'd think of me for this kind of role." I thought, on a show like "Arrow," they'd want me to be more of an action heroine. So I went up there, and everything went by really fast -- the first day of shooting and getting my scripts and everything -- so I hadn't even really had a chance to learn that my character was in the comic books. Once I got on the set, Andrew [Kreisberg] came up to me and said, "Have you had a chance to look up the comic book?" When I looked at my character -- I could not believe how cool Isabel is. It's very interesting, the way that we've started out telling her story. We've started in the boardroom, with her as a powerful business woman, and it's been me working as an actress to convey that power and strength only through my demeanor and my words. It's different for me, but I'm loving it.

CBR News: These kinds of Gordon Gecko-esque corporate raider roles are rarely cast as women. Do you think part of the fun for you is that you're playing a rarity for TV in general?

Summer: Absolutely. And I think Oliver needs it, too. [Laughs] He's had so many women in his life and a lot of different relationship challenges, I think he needs a woman who's different. She's pushing him to put more energy into the business. She's forcing him to show up and make more decisions as the head of the company. I have really enjoyed that part of it in my work and my acting -- being able to hold my own against him and force him to stand up to her. The sparring and the power struggle is great.

CBR News: This week's episode is a bit of a departure for Isabel, because for the first time, they're plucking your character out of the boardroom and putting her out in the field with Oliver and his team. What's her overall role in this story?

Summer: At this point, she's really trying to assert her place in the company. Then, Oliver plans this trip to another country, but he's trying to get away with it without telling her. She shows up at the last minute and says, "Did you think that I wasn't going to find out?" She goes along with them to find out what's going on, but I think also she's getting very, very curious about Felicity. That character is always at Oliver's side and has his ear and has his back. I think Isabel is trying to see if she can wedge herself in the middle of that a little bit. I don't think she likes feeling like she's left out of the secret, and we'll see her pushing more and more into that relationship. She'll assert her dominance. I love all my scenes with Emily. They're a lot of fun, and it's great comedy.

CBR News: You've played a lot of roles where you're a fixture of the series from the get-go, or at least over a long period of time. Is it different for you to come in with a cast as established as this tryptic of "Arrow" leads and play off of them?

Summer: They're a super easy group to work with. They're so nice and fun to be with. But it is different from being a regular because there's a specific rhythm they have. That's the thing about working in TV and being with the same crew and the same cast for a long time. There is that rhythm, and when you recur, you want to be able to step right in and flow with them. It's something I enjoy, and I have done it before. I've recurred long term on other shows. I'm learning with "Arrow" that I really enjoy working with this cast. They're very fun and hard working, so I'm proud to be a part of that team.

CBR News: Over your career, you've returned to science fiction and action shows again and again. What's the continued attraction there? You mention your parents watching "Arrow." Did they raise you on sci-fi?

Summer: [Laughs] In some ways, yes. My mom used to read a lot of science fiction to my sister and I when we were growing up, and I think it really helped shape my creativity. I enjoy these larger than life stories. But another thing I get from this world is the characters that are available for women in genre. I feel like they're really great roles. I look back on what I've been able to do as an actress, and I really, really enjoyed being each one of these girls. Isabel, in her own way, is very powerful. That feels good as an actress. It's not necessarily that I always want to do science fiction or fantasy -- I always follow my heart on the material and the character.

CBR News: What are Isabel's long terms prospects for the show? It seems like this episode is set to change some things about her relationship with Oliver's team. How does that leave you for playing the part across the rest of Season 2?

Summer: Well, in the *next* episode the character appears in, there's going to be a big plot twist. What you've seen so far is just the tip of the iceberg.

I had a wonderful time in this last episode. I really like where they're taking it. They're still working on things in the writer's room and deciding exactly what they're going to do, but I think the audience is going to like the twist in Isabel's plot. Andrew won't tell me much more! [*Laughs*] But it's going to be a lot of fun.

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