

## **Why 'Firefly' and 'Jeff 1000' Star Summer Glau Loves Making Sci-Fi**

December 22, 2014 by Liz Shannon Miller

*If you've watched any television about spaceships, robots or superheroes in the last decade, you're probably more than familiar with Summer Glau. Glau joined the sci-fi elite with her breakout role as River in Joss Whedon's "Firefly" and has since starred or co-starred in a wide range of genre series, including "Terminator: The Sarah Conner Chronicles," "The 4400," "Dollhouse" and "Arrow." And even when playing herself, Glau can't stay away from sci-fi -- take the new digital series from Wired Magazine, "Jeff 1000," which features Glau as an actress whose best friend happens to be a nine-foot-tall robot. Below, Glau told Indiewire about the weirdest moments of life as a "science fiction actress," but why she's incredibly grateful to Whedon for changing her life.*

### **IW: How did you get involved with the Wired project?**

Summer: I was invited through Michael Karnow, who wrote our story. He was collaborating with Wired who had a relationship with Legacy Effects — they had this beautiful robot and they were trying to come up with a story for him. That's where I got on board. I have had a history of working with robots myself, so I was very excited to be on the other side of things.

We only had one day to shoot. We all collaborated, and we got Nick Copus — who is an amazing director who I've worked with quite a bit in the past on science-fiction television shows. He came on to direct, and we all had this amazing time collaborating and doing improv. It was a logistical challenge because the robot is nine feet tall, so there were some places we wanted to shoot that it couldn't fit. But we also wanted to try and create a look where, yes it is huge, but this happens to be a robot and the idea is that he and Summer are best friends and they just do everything together. So we tried to find creative ways to shoot him that would best represent him in our film. Those constraints ended up helping us creatively with a lot of improv, which we had a lot of fun with, cause I often do drama and don't get to play as much.

### **IW: Yeah, technically ["Jeff"] is in the science-fiction realm, but it's much more of a comedy than what you've done in the past.**

Summer: Yeah! I loved that part of it. I've always wanted to explore comedy more. When Mike and I collaborated in the past we always wanted to come up with new projects to do together. This was a really great segue because we're both comfortable in science fiction, but this is more of a story between two friends, and it's a funny satirical look at life in Los Angeles.

### **IW: How did you first connect with Michael?**

Summer: I worked with him on "Alphas," a series on the Syfy channel, and it was a really cool role for me that I loved. I just think that he's incredibly bright and really thinks outside the box. Sometimes when you do network TV, there's so many different people involved and it's just such a big production and the story has to go through so many different layers of collaboration, and we thought it would be fun to do something that was more barebones and more minimal, where it's really just us and we shoot it and we put it online for fans directly. That's what we got to do with Wired. This collaboration was very energetic in that way. We had limited time, so we got together a bunch of people that we love working with and did it in one day, and the product is great. It has that life and energy to it. I did another digital series this year for the first time and really loved the experience. I think it's great for our industry. We need more opportunities for digital.

**IW: Is this a situation where you would pick doing a digital series over something like "The Cape"? [A 2011 series that lasted less than a season before being canceled by NBC.]**

Summer: I'd love to do everything! [laughs] I'd love to never have to turn down an opportunity for a great role. But I think digital has definitely given actors opportunities. There's just more roles because there's all of these new ways of watching that have exploded. When I first started in this business, you didn't have that opportunity. Now we do. I also like that with digital, your fans can be more directly involved. You can tune in whenever you have time. Sometimes the episodes are shorter so you can access them quickly. You can send out an email and people can watch it at work or when they are on break. It's a fun way for us to get content out there that isn't as accessible. It's great for actors.

**IW: And digital content and science fiction tend to go really well together.**

Summer: I agree. Absolutely. Those fans are so connected in that way and always have been. I think that's been an advantage of being a science fiction actress, because there's always been an online presence too. The support is so strong.

**IW: You call yourself a science fiction actress. Is that how you think about yourself?**

Summer: Yeah, it is, in a way. When I first moved to LA, I had some preconceived ideas about what kind of actress I was going to be. I thought it would be Jane Austen and wearing corsets and doing period films. I had this romantic idea coming to me that, being a ballerina, I was going to do certain work. But throughout the audition process you never know who you're going to meet, and I met Joss Whedon, and he changed my life forever.

[Joss] tried to explain to me what it was like meeting your fans, how you have these opportunities to go to conventions and meet our fans and shake hands and sign autographs and he told me it was a powerful love. The science fiction community has a powerful love for their actors. I'll never forget my first experience going to these conventions: I got my first passport because it was in Europe. And the love and commitment and the devotion, the way that they follow their actors and are connected online to them, it is very special I think. I would call myself a science fiction actress because those fans have helped build my career, and they have supported me throughout the decade that I've been in the business. Science fiction has given me some of the best roles an actress can ask for.

**IW: Do you feel like there's been a diversity of characters that you've been able to play as a result?**

Summer: I absolutely do. When I first moved to LA there were a lot of auditions for the best friend or girlfriend or the high school girl, and then I stumbled across River Tam in "Firefly," and there was nothing conventional about her. There was nothing predictable about her. She was very complex. As an actress, if you get an opportunity like that, it's gold. Science fiction has done that for me a number of times.

**IW: I really enjoyed you on the second season of "Arrow" [Glau played a rival CEO/eventual villain]. That seemed like a really interesting range of elements you got to play.**

Summer: Yeah. When they first asked me to play that role, I couldn't believe it because I've never played a character like that at all. Maybe they just wanted to see me do something really different, and that was another example of science fiction giving me a lot to work with and giving me something different from what I've done before.

**IW: Are there still things outside of the science fiction genre that you want to try?**

Summer: Absolutely. I've done one Western -- "Firefly" was a science fiction Western, but they never left me off the ship because I was too crazy. I did another Western that was a beautiful experience. I love riding, and I love the look and the feel of being out in the country and the simple poetry of Westerns. Obviously I adore period dramas. That's what I grew up on and that's what I love and that's what made me want to be an actress. It's hard for actors to break into the more romantic period films, but it's still a dream of mine for sure.

**IW: Luckily the stuff you get to do in science fiction is really fun. What's the craziest thing you've found yourself doing?**

Summer: I think "Terminator" gave me a lot of those, "Oh my God, is this really happening?" moments. Like when there was a scene in "Terminator" where I was smashed between two semi-trucks and I was pleading for my life, that's one of those when you walk on set and they're like, "Are you ready to get in between these two trucks with your head sticking out?" and they give you all these different appliances glued on your face. You really do have this out-of-body experience where you're looking at yourself from above thinking, "This is my life today." I love that.

I felt that way with ["Jeff 1000"] too. I've never had the opportunity to do comedy before, so that was really fun for me. Standing there with this nine-foot robot and realizing that this is my collaborator for the day, that's another "this is my life" kind of moments. I connected with this nine-foot robot. That's the fun of science fiction.

**IW: What must be great is having those moments, and then still being able to dip deep and find the truth of the scene.**

Summer: Right. I found it easy, in a way. In the beginning I had that challenge playing Cameron [on "Terminator"] because I was playing a robot. There was an insecurity I felt about being able to get the audience to connect to her. You always want the audience to be interested in the character and then, over time, to feel attached to the character. I think in some ways that attachment grows from being able to relate to the character. I did feel some insecurities at the beginning as to how I would do that with Cameron. But it starts with you, and whether or not you connect with this character. I can say with confidence that I was completely attached to her emotionally and grew with her and felt honored by that experience.

When I started ["Jeff 1000"] it was all foreign to me, but by the middle of the first take on the first day all the reservations I may have had were just gone. I was touching the robot and interacting with him, and I felt attached and completely engaged. Rachel, our executive producer, came over to me at the end of the day and said, "You and Jeff have amazing chemistry," and we really did!

**IW: It seems that having Jeff there, having a physical robot there to connect with versus CGI, probably had a major impact.**

Summer: It was so much better. In the beginning it was logistically difficult to come up with scenarios for the storyline that we could actually shoot, because Jeff is so tall he doesn't fit into every room. We wanted for Jeff and Summer to just be friends, and not

have it be about him being a robot. He just happens to be a robot. Part of that is us telling the story in a way that feels intimate and real -- just a day in the life of these two people who live in LA.

But it's giving you another perspective about how we let technology into our lives and how comfortable we are with it now. We divulge everything about ourselves on our phones and our computers. I am a version of myself, becoming best friends with a robot in my real life. I don't have to give that a second thought. These first episodes are really light and funny, and Jeff is this kind of charming guy where it's easy to forget he's a robot. But in the future, if we get the chance to continue this project, we want to explore the idea that maybe there is a darker, more dangerous part to him.

**IW: That's definitely implied by the trailer.**

Summer: Yeah. We want to explore that more. Technology is a very complex slippery slope.

**IW: Is that a concept that comes out of collaborating with Wired on it?**

Summer: I think the people at Wired know as well as anybody that technology can be your best friend, but you also have to really respect it. They have the best of what technology can offer. They're cutting edge. All the exciting aspects of where we are in our culture are growing in measurement with technology. I don't know how to put it, but it's forward-thinking. There's an intimacy that humans inherently have and need -- I think we were really inspired by the movie "Her" as well, and how inseparable he becomes from his computer.

And this is a comedy. When me and Michael wanted to work with each other again, we wanted to try something that wasn't a straight drama. We wanted to focus on it being more playful and clever and being something you could come into by just watching it at work. It's a digital short where you can laugh, but also think for a minute.

Taken from indiewire's website:

[http://www.indiewire.com/article/why-firefly-and-jeff-1000-star-summer-glau-loves-making-sci-fi-20141222?utm\\_campaign=Indiewire&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_content=1419270041](http://www.indiewire.com/article/why-firefly-and-jeff-1000-star-summer-glau-loves-making-sci-fi-20141222?utm_campaign=Indiewire&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_content=1419270041)

