

Summer Glau, 2006

By Jason Nahrung

Summer Glau is one of the stars of the television series Firefly and the spinoff movie Firefly. She visited Brisbane for Supanova 06 in April and returns to Sydney in October.

Over the phone from LA, Summer Glau doesn't sound Texan. Not until she drops a y'all into the conversation.

Softly spoken and laughing easy, the twenty-four-year-old sounds spookily like her on-screen persona River Tam, who has attracted an international fan base through television series *Firefly* and its movie spin-off.

That's probably – hopefully – where the similarity ends, though. River, for all her elfin stature, is a loopy killing machine, genetically modified as a telepathic assassin. It is Glau's ability to present both sides of River – the deadly machine, the vulnerable little sister confused by her own parlous mental state – that has helped gain her a loyal following.

Firefly melded the Wild West with space opera, and established a firm fan base although only 11 episodes made it to air. A DVD package provided all 14 episodes which had been shot. The story involved an ensemble cast of nine crew who called the spaceship *Serenity* home, led by civil war veteran Malcolm Reynolds (Nathan Fillion). The storyline about River's past as a government experiment, her rescue from incarceration by her doctor brother and their subsequent joining up with Reynold's crew is a major plotline in *Firefly* and forms the core story of *Serenity*.

But the fans and the show's creator, *Buffy* and *Angel* guru Joss Whedon, wouldn't let it rest easily. Backed by strong sales of *Firefly* on DVD, the movie *Serenity* hit big screens to provide some closure last year.

Now Glau finds herself a science-fiction pin-up invited to conventions, including this weekend's Supanova in Brisbane.

"It's a special opportunity to get together with the people who made it possible for us to keep telling the story," she says. "After we were cancelled I thought it would just fade away, so it was such a shock to go online and see people rallying in support, saying 'we're not going to let this die'. The movie wouldn't have been made without the fan base so conventions are an opportunity to say thank you."

Glau's life had been spent as a dancer until injury left her chasing work as an actress. Her dance experience, aired in an episode of *Angel* in which she played a ballerina, came into play during action sequences in *Serenity*.

"Six months before shooting I started doing a martial arts session a week and then for the three months before, I worked out every day for hours. I pushed myself further than I thought I could go. I was a dancer, I knew what it was like to push myself to the limit... I could mimic the shapes, I could get my foot up there, but then I had to put it up there and use power and bring it down again so quickly, to kick the guy as fast as you could, like a snake. I didn't have that snap."

That martial arts training was put to the test, with one of *Serenity*'s crew bearing the brunt of River's martial arts skills: the mercenary Jayne, played by Adam Baldwin, a good 20cm taller than Glau.

Glau laughs when asked about getting to knock out Jayne – twice. "It's so funny, I was just watching it today putting together a new demo reel, and the bit I've taken out is when I attacked Jayne in the Maidenhead (a club in *Serenity*). Adam is one of my favourites, he's full on, he told me 'you just go for it girl, you won't hurt me'. It's great to beat up on him, it never gets old."

Taken from Jason Nahrung's website:
<http://www.jasonnahrung.com/summer.html>