

## **IGN Interview: Summer Glau**

**The Firefly star talks about her current role on The Unit, whether she'll be back on The 4400, working with Joss Whedon, and more.**

by Eric Goldman

*February 12, 2007 - Joss Whedon fans first were introduced to Summer Glau in her role on Angel as a ballerina, trapped in time and forced to perform the same routine over and over. She then forever cemented herself as a sci-fi icon thanks to her role as River Tam in Whedon's TV series Firefly and its theatrical follow up, Serenity. Since Serenity, Glau has had a notable recurring role on The 4400 as Tess, a young woman with the power to mentally control others. And this season, she has had a recurring part on The Unit, as Crystal, the wife-to-be of new recruit Jeremy (Daniel Wisler).*

*The last episode of The Unit was a big one for Glau. Crystal was dealing with a major tragedy, as Jeremy was severely injured on a mission. In the aftermath, she ended up in a tryst with Mack (Max Martini), another married member of the unit. This event will no doubt have major repercussions on this week's episode, airing Tuesday, February 13th, in which Glau returns.*

*Last week, I talked to Glau about her role on The Unit, for an exclusive chat with IGN. We also discussed Glau's work on The 4400 and Firefly. Glau spoke to me from the Texas set of a new television pilot she was filming, though she was wary of saying too much about the project. However, we've since learned that it's the Terminator spinoff series, The Sarah Connor Chronicles.*

**IGN TV: Thanks for taking some time today. I know you're busy shooting.**

**Summer Glau:** Sure! Sorry, I'm a little bit blurry. We had night shoots last night.

**IGN TV: How late did you have to shoot till?**

**Glau:** We were there until 5 or 6 in the morning. But it was fun! We were doing fun stuff.

**IGN TV: What are you shooting right now, by the way?**

**Glau:** Well, I'm not supposed to say yet. It's supposed to be a surprise. But it's killing me, because they've announced some of the other characters, but I'm not supposed to say. My character is a surprise. It's a pilot.

**IGN TV: Can you say what the project is at all, without giving away your character?**

**Glau:** No. It's going to be on FOX. It's a FOX pilot.

**IGN TV: Okay. Well, I'm very curious about it now!**

**Glau:** [Laughs] I'm really excited about it. I think it's going to be awesome. I'm having a wonderful time.

**Glau:** Not at all. I think when I first signed on to do the show, they had mentioned that maybe I would be in three episodes. And I fell in love with the character and with the cast and the crew right away, and I really wanted to stay, and do as much as I could. It was a very different character from anything I'd done before. But they didn't tell me, and to be honest, I don't know if they really knew for sure where they wanted to take my character or the character of Jeremy. And we would just get the script a few days before we would come in to shoot, and it was always a surprise. But I was definitely not

counting on what they actually did with my character! It was a surprise. It's been fun, because all of my friends and family down home are really big fans of *The Unit*, so everybody's going to be really surprised to see what happens to Crystal.

**IGN TV: Well, it's certainly gotten interesting, especially with what happened this past week.**

**Glau:** [Laughs] Yes!

**IGN TV: What do you think of the situation she's in? Can you understand how she could be fooling around with Mack, while so much is going on with Jeremy?**

**Glau:** I had a hard time with it. I did. I thought that Crystal and Jeremy's love story was so sweet, and I was so happy doing it. The reason I can relate to Crystal is because she is so young. And the way that I play her, I think that Jeremy was her whole life. They were living in this trailer park, and he's getting this job that he's getting better and better in. You know, she counts on him so much, and they only have each other. And then when he's in this terrible accident, then I think she is just shocked by how weak it makes her feel and how scared she is. And over the course of my time on *The Unit*, I feel like she's really bonded with the people around her. And for me, I just think that it was her way of reaching out and trying to connect with these people that she feels are becoming her family. And I don't know what's going to happen. I know that I'm supposed to go back for one more [episode]. There's one episode I did, that hasn't aired yet. But what she did with Mack was sad for me at first. I didn't want to see Crystal do that to Jeremy, and I know that I heard the crew talking about it too and saying, "I can't believe Mack did that, and I can't believe Crystal did that." And I think it was a hard episode for both of us, but I think they're just two, really shaken people, who made a mistake.

**IGN TV: As you said, this is a pretty different character for you. Was that fun to explore as an actress, even if you didn't always think you'd do the same things as Crystal?**

**Glau:** It was. I remember when I first got the script that said I was going to have to cheat on Jeremy, I had a really hard time with it. And I talked to my agent about it, and I talked to my mother about it and my boyfriend, and you know, we just thought that it was kind of exciting for me. I've played mostly young girls, who are very different from Crystal. And it was exciting for me to get to push myself in a new direction, especially in this next episode, that hasn't aired yet. It's definitely very different from anything that I've done. It's definitely more sexy. She's more aggressive. She's manipulative. And it was actually really fun for me! After I finished the episode, I called my agent, and I said, "I had no idea I was going to have so much fun playing a bad girl!" And it was! It was one of my favorite days that I've had on *The Unit*. I enjoyed it a lot!

**IGN TV: Well they did have that scene in one of your first episodes, where they had you in a bikini, sitting in a kiddie pool.**

**Glau:** [Laughs] I know! I couldn't believe that. It was so funny. They kept filling it up with hot water for me, because we shot it so early in the morning.

**IGN TV: On *The Unit*, the guys all get to run around and do the big action scenes. Since you've done a lot of that stuff in the past, are you glad to take a break, or do you envy them?**

**Glau:** I do envy them, and on this new pilot that I'm working on, I get to go back to doing more of what I'm used to with the action, and guns and things like that. It's so important to me when I'm starting my career and I'm trying to establish myself that I keep trying to choose roles that are completely different from each other, because I've

found already that people tend to want to put you in one category. And as fortunate as I've been with characters like River, I'm a girl who has a little bit of all these characters in me. And so a part of me is Crystal. I'm really happy to get to explore that part of myself as an actress. It was so much fun, and I hope to do more roles like this in the future, or come back and do more *Unit*!

**IGN TV: Both you and [Unit Executive Producer]Shawn Ryan have worked with Joss Whedon, though not at the same time. Was that purely coincidental when you were cast on *The Unit*?**

**Glau:** Actually, I don't think so. I think that Shawn called Joss when he was wanting to cast the role, and asked Joss what he thought about me coming in and doing the part. So I called Joss right after I was offered the role, and I said, "Thank you for being nice to me!" I think he said something like, "I told them you were difficult and illiterate." [Laughs] "Thanks Joss!"

**IGN TV: Will you be returning to *The 4400*?**

**Glau:** Oh yeah... There's been some talk about me going back. I don't know what's going to happen now that I'm doing this pilot, but I know that I have a span of time where maybe I could go up there and do some more. And I've been thinking about it a lot lately, because I really had a great time with that cast, and playing that character, because Tess kept just changing and changing and getting more and more interesting to play. And I of course love working with Jeffrey Combs.

**IGN TV: I wanted to ask about him, because he seems like a fascinating guy.**

**Glau:** Oh, he is. He's so intense, and he's present and he cares about what he's doing, and it rubs off on the people around him. He's a very powerful actor, and a wonderful man, and I've enjoyed my little journey with him on *The 4400*. It's been a big blessing, and I'd really like to go back and do more, if it's possible.

**IGN TV: On paper, the relationship your characters have might sound creepy, but it comes off as very sweet on the show.**

**Glau:** [Laughs] I think so too! My character might be creepy, but I think our relationship is sweet. It's different; so different, you know?

**IGN TV: Did that storyline also surprise you in terms of where your character went?**

**Glau:** Definitely. I was concerned, when I first started doing Tess. I wanted to make sure that it was different from River, because there are some similarities. And that was back when I was just getting started and people were just starting to recognize me from TV and things, and I didn't want anybody to think I was doing a character that was just like River. I called Joss, and I said, "If you watch the episode, please know that I tried to be a good actress, and make it different!" But then, they really let her grow and change, which is so exciting for an actor. I love that about TV - That you have a character for a long period of time, and that character can grow so much. I've been really lucky. On *4400* that happened to me, and on *The Unit*.

**IGN TV: *Firefly* had a very short life, but has had a continuing fandom beyond what anyone could have expected. Why do you think that is?**

**Glau:** You know, my feeling is that Joss writes characters in a way that makes people care about them more deeply than most characters on TV. The way that he writes relationships, and the way that he wrote all the relationships on *Firefly*, it seemed so

real. I think that people related to it so intensely that they got attached and they just couldn't let go. And I think he's done that with all of his shows. I remember when we were cancelled, it was just before Christmas, and my mom would get online, and she would read about all of our fansites. And I remember telling her, "Oh, well those will be disappearing this week." And she just got on every day, and it was amazing how faithful our fans were to keeping us alive. I've just experienced that being one of Joss's actors. I remember when he started telling me about things like Comic-Con and conventions, where fans get together and talk about his work, and I couldn't understand it when I first got started. But now I realize just how deep the love goes for Joss's fans.

**IGN TV: What's it been like for you go to those conventions and have direct interaction with the fans?**

**Glau:** Well it never gets normal to me. Every time I go, I think, "Nobody's going to recognize me. Nobody's going to know who I am." And it's always a shock to me, every time I go, that, wow, these people, they like me! It's a great blessing for his actors to be able to go and be face to face with these people and be able to go, "Thank you for giving me a job. Thank you for letting me do what I love to do. You know, when *Firefly* got cancelled, we were all at Nathan's [Fillion] house, and we were sitting around and crying and really distraught to see it go. We thought that we wouldn't see each other again, and we thought it was over. And our audience, our fans, just brought it back to life. And then when we got to make the movie, it was on this bigger scale than any of us got to imagine, and it's just due to the love of our fans and their determination.

**IGN TV: You had some incredible fight scenes in the movie. What were those scenes like to film?**

**Glau:** It was one of the most intense things I've ever done in my life. I worked so hard to do those fight scenes myself and to make it look real. My stunt team was amazing, but we worked really hard on that. I went every day. I started going about six months before principal photography, and I would go a few times a week. But then, three months before we started shooting, [I'd go] every day, and we choreographed these fight scenes like dances. They were choreographed down to the slightest detail, because Joss really had this idea that he wanted it to look real. He didn't want wires. He didn't want fancy camera moves. He just wanted the camera, and the fight. And that's a lot harder to do, because you can't fake it. You have to do it all the way through. And my stunt guys actually let me hit them! And I learned how to hit them the right way, but I had to actually make contact, because we weren't doing fancy camera angles. So it had to look as if every hit and kick was a contact hit. It was amazing. It was hard, hard work.

**IGN TV: Obviously the fans would love to see more adventures in the *Firefly* universe. Are you hopeful we might someday see more of River and the rest of these characters?**

**Glau:** I am. I'm always hopeful. How can I not be after what happened to us, after we got cancelled? I believe in anything now! Because when our show got cancelled, we were thinking, "Okay, well, maybe we could have a comic book or an animated series. Or maybe we could go back to TV." And then, to make this big, beautiful, expensive feature... was a bigger dream than we had imagined. So I think Joss is capable of anything.

**IGN TV: What are your memories of when you first worked with Joss, on *Angel*?**

**Glau:** My first memory of him was that I thought he didn't like me at all, and I thought he was making fun of me. In my first audition with him, when I walked out the door, I thought, "I'll never see him again." And then he called me back in. When I read the ballerina role for *Angel*, it was the first job I ever booked, where I actually dressed in my

ballerina clothes. And he looked at me, and he said, "Wow, you are just really prepared, aren't you?!" Because you don't usually do that. You don't dress like your character, really, when you go in and audition. But I didn't know any better! And he turns over my resume and I didn't have any credits. I remember he said, "Oh, so you did *Paint Your Wagon* down in San Antonio. How was that?" And I talked about that a little bit, and then he sent me out. I did the audition once, and then he brought me back and he asked me to do it with an accent. I ended up scrambling and thinking, "Oh, I guess British is the easiest." So I did my British accent. And when I was done, he said, "Where have you been?" I looked at him, and he said, "Well, I guess you were doing *Paint Your Wagon*."

I got the part, and I just fell in love with him from the beginning. I've never had a mentor like him. He gave me my first TV role. He gave me my first series regular [role]. He gave me my first lead in a feature. To have somebody look at you, when no one else has given you a chance, and say, "I'm going to take a chance on you..." It gave me my career, it really did. Because in this business, it is close to impossible to get somebody to take a chance on you. Everybody wants what everybody else wants, you know what I mean? So for him to be brave, and to see something in me, was just the greatest gift I've had in my career, and I would just love to work with him again.

**IGN TV: I imagine that must have made the comfort level very good, especially in scenes like the *Firefly* pilot, where he's saying, "Okay, I want you to be naked inside a box."**

**Glau:** I know! I trusted him. I trust him completely. There were days on set where he'd have these ideas, and I was scared a lot. I was just getting started. I didn't know anything about standing on a mark. I didn't know anything about lights. And he just made me feel like I was supposed to be there, and made me feel safe. I would follow him into anything, I trust him so much.

**IGN TV: You're a part of *Firefly* and a part of *4400*. Were you a fan of that sort of science fiction growing up?**

**Glau:** I've always been a fan of science fiction. All through my life, my mother read a lot of those kinds of stories. Me and my sisters were very into fantasy, and it was a natural fit for me. TV and film is all about escaping. It's about living in a different world. You sit down, and you're in someone else's life. And one thing that I love about what Joss does, is he takes characters that seem so real. They seem like you or me; they're so human. But then he puts them into extraordinary situations. Like [on *Firefly*], we were this crew of people on a spaceship, but it was so real, because the characters are written in such a way... They're very relatable. But I like that he puts them in fantastical situations. I've always loved that genre, and I'd love to keep going with science fiction, and I think there are some really, really great stories out there right now. It doesn't always have to be really far off, like *Aliens* and things like that. Science fiction is a really, really wide spectrum.

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