

Cult favourite revels in anything but the girl next door

April 13, 2012 - Jake Wilson

Summer Glau is known for playing extraordinary characters: brainy, deadly, not much like anyone you'd meet in the real world.

In Joss Whedon's beloved space adventure series *Firefly*, she was the damaged, precocious River Tam, forced by the evil Alliance to serve as an invincible assassin. In *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, she was Cameron, a cyborg sent from the future to protect the young hero. Then there was her eerie turn on *Dollhouse*, the most divisive but fascinating of Whedon's shows, where for a change she played a programmer rather than one of the programmed: the vengeful scientist Bennett Halverson, responsible for implanting personalities in "dolls" who agree to have their minds temporarily wiped.

Glau, 30, has become a cult figure among science fiction fans - and a regular at conventions such as the Supanova Pop Culture Expo, to be held this weekend in Melbourne and next weekend on the Gold Coast.

"It's a real honour," she says by phone from the US. **"I feel grateful to have these conventions to go to for a million different reasons, but one of the main reasons is that I'm getting to say thank you to people who have supported my career."**

This is how Glau sounds throughout our interview: upbeat, earnest, and eager to please, though quite aware of her faintly other-worldly quality.

How does she find an imaginative connection with terminators and misfit geniuses? **"For some reason those characters are more comfortable for me than playing the girl next door,"** she says.

"Part of it has to do with the way I was raised. I was a very serious ballerina when I was growing up, and I never went to regular school, and I pretty much just was working full-time when I wasn't at school and I didn't have a lot of friends my own age."

Glau's dance training has stayed with her. **"I always approach each character from a physical place,"** she says, citing River's trapped-animal body language and Cameron's inhuman calm.

Still, she's reluctant to elaborate on her technique. **"I read the material and then I just imagine myself as that character,"** she says. **"I don't really go into researching too much, or pre-planning how I'm going to do a scene."**

Does she worry whether the audience will like her? **"Oh, I do,"** she says quickly. With Cameron the Terminator, it was a particular problem. **"When I went into the series I had a lot of concerns about how I was going to make her relatable and likeable."**

As it turned out, she says, **"It ended up being really rewarding for me as an actress, because I thought people really did embrace Cameron, even though she was a robot. I really tried to find the vulnerability in that character and try and get people to care about her, and I did feel that character was loved."**

What about the sociopathic Bennett in *Dollhouse*? **"The only thing I knew to begin with was that Joss wanted me to come and be on the show. I would go to the end of the earth for him. I think he's the most brilliant writer, and I always find**

that when I work for Joss, and I'm playing one of these characters the way that he likes, immediately it strikes a chord."

Once she starts talking about Whedon, Glau's enthusiasm knows no bounds. She describes him as a genius and a crucial mentor: "**I compare every other experience to him, and I'd say that he was able to inspire the best out of me.**"

More than anything, she admires the way his shows portray women. "**River was incredibly sensitive and incredibly vulnerable, but she was also really, really strong. And I think that Joss writes that contrast really well.**"

Taken from theage.com website:

<http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/cult-favourite-revels-in-anything-but-the-girl-next-door-20120412-1wwd5.html>