

Summer Glau - An Extraordinary Summer

August, 24, 2012 by Steve Eramo

The sun is shining this Thursday afternoon in Ancaster, Ontario, where the cast and crew of Syfy's hit series *Alphas* are on-location filming scenes for the season two episode *Alphaville*. Joining them today is a very familiar face to Sci-Fi fans, Summer Glau. The warm and engaging actress is reprising her role of Skylar Adams, who made her debut in the first season episode *Catch and Release*.

An acquaintance of Dr. Lee Rosen's and Nina Theroux's, Skylar's *Alphas*' ability allows her to design and build complex devices using even the most common of items. She has passed on her superhuman DNA to her little girl Zoe, who can compute mathematics at a level far beyond that of the human brain. Needless to say, the idea of playing a supercharged techie as well as a parent was one that instantly attracted Glau.

"They [Alphas producers] approached me with the character and once I read about her I was immediately excited," she recalls. "I'd never played a mother before and it's something I had wanted to do for a long time. So I felt like it would be a wonderful [acting] challenge for me, and I particularly liked the fact that Skylar is a mother but an unprepared mother and it's something that doesn't really come natural to her. I found that very moving.

"My image of Skylar is that she's been a loner for several years. I also don't think she has that strong of a family support system, so I find it interesting that Skylar has a daughter and isn't really sure how to react to her. At the same time, I also feel like it's her and Zoe against the world, and that she finally has someone to love as well as protect and someone to belong to. Skylar is a genius, though, and she understands machines a lot better than people, so that has made her a fun character to try to figure out."

In season one's *Catch and Release*, Skylar Adams is on the run from the National Security Agency (NSA) for sending encrypted messages to a contact known only as "Z." The agency assigns Dr. Rosen (David Strathairn) and his team to find her, and in doing so, they also learn that Skylar's daughter Zoe has created a method of super encryption that the government would be extremely interested in. Rosen decides to let Skylar and her daughter go in exchange for a device that she has created that can detect the presence of *Alphas*. Glau has nothing but fond memories of shooting her first *Alphas* episode.

"First off, I really loved the people I worked with," says the actress. "David Strathairn is such an incredible actor and someone I've admired for several years, so it was quite surreal as well as thrilling to have him in my very first scene that I shot for the show. Laura Mennell [Nina Theroux] was in that scene, too, and right from the beginning I thought she was a very, very special actress and person.

"What else stands out for me about that episode? Oh, the fact that I was playing a very hard-edged punk character with tattoos. I had never done anything like that before and I really enjoyed that. I also liked getting to work with a child. Coincidentally, the real name of the little girl who played my daughter is also Skylar. I just loved having that child energy on-set. It was really fun."

Prior to *Alphas*' season two premiere, Syfy announced the names of several guest-stars slated to appear on the show, including Glau. What did the actress think when she was

initially approached about returning to the Alphas fold. "I was thrilled," she says. "I don't believe we really talked about this season when I worked on the series last year, but after they got their pick-up, I heard that they wanted to have me back. I'm going to do, I think, three episodes this year, which I'm really excited about.

"In this episode we're currently working on, I'm wearing the same shoes as I did in season one," notes Glau with a smile. "I love them and they're a perfect fit. I worked with [series costume designer] Susie Coulthard on my characters clothes. I wanted to bring back a few of the pieces I wore last year because I felt like it made sense. Then I saw little Skylar and they had bought her the same dress that Zoe wore last year, only the next size up. That was really sweet and it just makes this all feel much more real.

"Although my character is wearing some of the same things that she did in season one, we've gone ahead and changed her overall look. She's living in Alphaville now, which is a game-changer for her. So you're going to see a different look to Skylar this time around because she wants to blend in. It's always a surprise with her, and it's going to be interesting to see how she reacts to being part of a community. Skylar has always been alone, on the run and hiding, so this is quite a different scenario and it's going to be, I think, an exciting episode for the viewers."

From the time she was five years old, the actress loved to dance, and at the age of 12, began working with a professional dance company until she turned 20. However, as committed as she was to dancing, it was not to be Glau's ultimate career choice.

"I had a feeling when I was a little girl that one day I was going to be an actress," she says. "I used to put on plays by myself and pretend that people were watching. I would also write plays for me and my sisters to perform in front of our parents. I was a dancer, though, and when you're a professional dancer, you just want to carry on dancing before you run out of years. However, I tell young girls all the time that it's always good to have a back-up plan just in case, because I got injured. So I tried acting and, thank God, I've managed to make a career out of it. There were all sorts of twists and turns, but I think I've ended up doing what I was supposed to do."

Glau's first big audition, which led to her TV debut, was for writer, producer and director Joss Whedon, who is best known for creating the TV series Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Firefly and Dollhouse. ***"I was playing a Russian ballerina in an episode of Angel [Waiting in the Wings], and I was so green,"*** notes the actress. ***"I didn't really know who Joss was at the time, and my first take ever was with David Boreanaz [Angel]. After the take, Joss came up to me and said, 'See that piece of tape on the floor, that's where you're supposed to stand.' I didn't even know what a mark was, so I stood a foot away from it for my first take. I was so embarrassed in front of David, but he was really sweet.***

"That was my first acting experience and it was magical because I got to dance Giselle on TV. It's my favorite ballet and I'd never danced it in real life. All I could think was, 'How can this be happening?' After we finished shooting the episode, Joss decided that he wanted more ballet, so he wrote some more scenes and I came back and filmed them. It was a wonderful, thrilling and amazing experience. Then, of course, I became one of Joss' actresses and he really created my career."

Hot on the heels of Angel, the actress auditioned for and booked the role of River Tam in Whedon's short-lived, Sci-Fi TV series Firefly. ***"I was still incredibly green, and the***

show was my school,” says Glau. “Everyone else on that show had been working for many years and they taught me everything. One day Adam Baldwin [Jayne Cobb] said to me, ‘I just want you to know, kid, that it’s not always going to be like this.’

“Back then, this was all I had ever experienced as far as a set life and working with a cast. It was truly a family, and after the show ended I started to realize that Adam was right. I’ve had wonderful experiences on other shows, but, again, Firefly really was like a family. Joss was my mentor and he gave me a really safe working environment to make mistakes and take risks. I was such a ball of energy, and that worked really well for the character of River. She would have all these crazy outbursts from out of nowhere, and was kind of insecure and out of her own universe. That was where I was at back then in my life, so I felt very vulnerable but safe at the same time. It was such a blessing that I walked into Joss’ office when I did. It truly was.”

Glau later reprised her role of River in the 1995 Firefly feature film Serenity. Back on the small screen, the actress has appeared in a variety of made-for-TV movies as well as guest-starred on such shows as Cold Case, CSI: Crime Scene Investigation and Grey’s Anatomy. She has also had recurring or regular roles on The Unit, The 4400, Dollhouse, Chuck, The Cape and Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles, which was a role that she almost passed on.

“I did not want to do to the audition,” says the actress, “but I remember I was on the phone with my Mom and she said, ‘You get dressed and go,’ so I did. I didn’t know my lines, though, and I had this vision in my mind of who they were going to want for the role [of Cameron Phillips]. I thought, ‘They’re going to want a six-foot blonde or someone really striking. They’re not going to want someone like me.’

“When I walked into the audition room, [executive producer] Josh Friedman was there. I didn’t know that he was involved in the series. I had auditioned for him before and when I saw him, I really wanted the role. The funny thing is, I had never seen any of The Terminator movies, so once I was cast, my Dad bought me all three DVDs and we watched them over that Christmas holiday.

“Even though I hadn’t seen any of the films before, I knew what Terminator was, because it’s such an American classic. However, I was worried because we were taking it and turning it into a TV format, and fans don’t like you messing around with something they already love. I was as far from Arnold Schwarzenegger [the big screen Terminator] as you could get, which was a plus. I wasn’t trying to re-create something he had already done, but rather make something different and add to the story.

“So that was my first challenge, and my second challenge was trying to find a way to make people feel like they understood and cared about Cameron. We took the show’s pilot to Comic-Con that year and I thought, ‘Will people take this the wrong way? Are they going to dislike my character?’ However, they really embraced it, which was so gratifying for me as an actor. I loved the challenge of playing a robot that the audience could relate to and feel for.”

When asked what has so far made a career in this industry rewarding for her, Glau once again looks to the viewer. *“I think the greatest reward is when, for example, someone writes to me and says, ‘When I was stuck in the hospital for a month after surgery I watched DVDs of your show and it helped keep my mind off*

what I was going through,' or, 'Your show is one that we watched as a family,'" says the actress.

"I had those types of shows growing up, too. I once saw Jane Seymour at the airport and I couldn't help myself. I walked over to her and said, "I've loved you ever since I was a little girl because I grew up watching Dr. Quinn.' That was our family show. We watched it every Saturday night and she was my hero. So that's the gratifying part, when maybe your show brings comfort to someone or was a family show that brought people together. There are a number of difficult things about being an actress and a lot of things that can hurt you because it's very personal and you feel very exposed, but I'm so lucky to be doing what I do. I really am."

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