



Pacific Rim - Heather Doerksen Exclusive Interview

By [Rebecca Murray](#), About.com Guide June 26, 2013

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Heather Doerksen is keeping busy doing voice work for Marvel Knights Animation and working on a sitcom (*Package Deal*), but it's her role as one of the few female Jaeger pilots in [Guillermo del Toro's](#) *Pacific Rim* that has the beautiful Canadian actress in the news. Doerksen plays Sasha, a Russian Jaeger pilot (those big robots you've seen in the trailers and clips) who is one of humanity's last hopes in the battle against gigantic creatures known as Kaiju. *Pacific Rim* opens in theaters on July 12th and in our exclusive interview, Doerksen discusses what it was like on the set, training for the role, and her work on another Warner

Bros Pictures project: *Hidden*.

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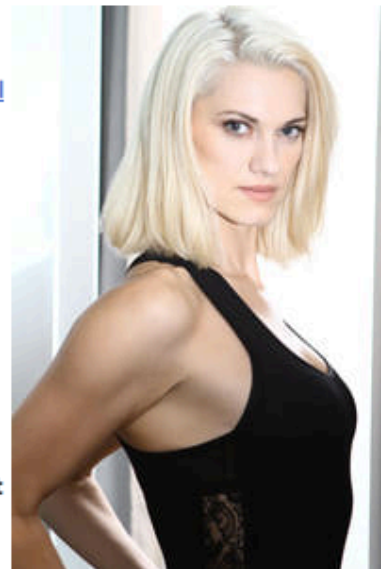
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How did Guillermo del Toro run his set and direct his *Pacific Rim* actors?

Heather Doerksen: "He had a really specific vision for my character, especially at the very beginning. He was very specific about the look and so with our costume designer, Kate [Hawley], and the hair department and the makeup department, he was very specific about it. He was really hands-on from the beginning. He was there while my hair was getting done. He was there while we were discussing the style. He had a specific vision for it. He was open to my suggestions as well, but really, he had a very specific idea and was like,

'Heather, you can play that character perfect.' That is pretty much how it went."

Did he incorporate any of your suggestions?



Heather Doerksen: "Yeah, it was quite a back and forth kind of environment. He was very, very open. He really has a sense of all the different parts of what everybody is doing. He started out doing small films himself, so he kind of was used to do everything from PA work to special effects to shooting with a camera. He knew how to step into each other's shoes and get in there with us, which is great."

In some of the behind-the-scenes videos, Guillermo del Toro says the robot scenes were like putting the actors in a "torture chamber" to shoot. What was it really like?

Heather Doerksen: "By the time that myself and Robert [Maillet], my co-pilot, stepped into the robot - I believe we were the second to last of the team of pilots to try them - by that point they had ironed out the glitches that was the torture for the first people to try them out. Even so, when we got in them it was super difficult. They weighted them down. They had the water pouring at us so the suits got even heavier as we hung there. Once you are strapped in, you could not really leave. It took 45 minutes to undo everything and get out. It was really physically strenuous, but they kind of ironed out the kinks by the time we got in."

When a scene is that physically strenuous and you are having to exert that much energy, how do you then stay in character and deliver your lines?

Heather Doerksen: "I think it actually aided the process for me because it was like I got out of my head and got totally into my body and totally into the moment. I didn't have to think about the threat of the Kaiju in front of me; it was actually physically difficult for me to work through it and to work through the choreography. I was able to just be in my body and really be in the moment. I think it will have a very realistic effect when the movie comes out. I think all of us were really feeling it."

Can you describe how the robot was constructed and what you were actually inside of on the set?

Heather Doerksen: "Well, the head itself was actually constructed. Everything that you see where the camera is facing toward the back of the head, that was all actually created. It was just literally the opening of the head of the Jaeger that had not been constructed and had to be green screened. Anything you see in front of us is obviously green screened, but the rest of it was physically done. For instance, we had to climb up the stairs to get on top of the head which was on hydraulics and raised above everything so that it could move and shake. That was quite awe-inspiring."

How much did you train before you started filming?

Heather Doerksen: "The shoot was six months and they had asked that we get into really great shape. They said, 'Heather, could you get buff?' I started training a month prior to the actual official training time. I was in the gym for a month every single day of the week and then the official training happened where they flew in a trainer from L.A. We trained with him pretty much every day for a month as well. Then we started shooting for six months and I was working out during the six month shoot as well. It was lots of solids, lots of proteins, lots of food to get the muscles."

Is this the hardest role physically you've ever tackled?

Heather Doerksen: "Yes, it was."

Is it something you would want to do again?

Heather Doerksen: "I love physical challenges. I try to do my own stunts whenever possible. I have a dance background and a movement background so I really love it when I can incorporate that into things. I love feeling really powerful so if I can do my own stunts I feel like I have ownership over the character. I would totally do it again."

Do we get to know much about Sasha as a person, not just as a pilot? Do we find out who she is?

Heather Doerksen: "You will get a sense of who she is in the actual film. Guillermo had some discussions with me and Robert about our relationship and what that was about. He kind of left that in our hands. Robert and I have a very clear idea of who we are and our relationship. In terms of our backstory, a little bit is revealed in the film but then there is also the prequel graphic novel that has come out and a few more that are coming out that will probably explain a little bit more about where Sasha is coming from."

How tough is it to be Canadian and play Russian?

Heather Doerksen: "Oh, that is funny. I actually played a Russian in a stage play, probably about six years ago and the entire play I had to do with a Russian accent. I actually went and took Russian lessons and learned how to speak it. I took that up a little bit so it was actually pretty easy for me to get into it because I lived it six years ago. I wonder why that stuck with me like that, but it really did. It is pretty simple. Well...not *simple*. I needed to brush up on things."

Was Guillermo aware you were really good at Russian accents?

Heather Doerksen: "No. In the audition itself, we arrived the day of, we got the sides in that moment and then we had to do the audition like half an hour later. They required a Russian accent and they had not told us that prior to. It was just lucky that I had that in my arsenal."

Are you a fan of robot, big creature, alien-type movies? Is this something that you would normally go pay to see?

Heather Doerksen: "I totally would. I really like big Hollywood blockbusters along with the really simple character-driven indie films. I like a whole range. I grew up watching these kinds of movies and big action movies with my younger brother growing up. I love them still. They are quite nostalgic."

Has Guillermo shown you any of the completed scenes completed yet, other than what we've seen in the trailers?

Heather Doerksen: "I saw a few with Guillermo a couple months ago. It was a few of the fight scenes and they are epic. They are incredible and they are going to be even more amazing in 3D. I cannot wait to see them in 3D."

On the set could you actually picture what it is going to look like or were you just basically putting your faith in Guillermo's hands?

Heather Doerksen: "That is the thing, the screenplay would change here and there while we were shooting, so I think in the final process - because Guillermo keeps his hand in all parts of it, including the editing - I am not sure what he will have kept, what he will have edited out. That is why he listens to the feedback of people who have already viewed it and the screening. He really takes into account fans and feedback. He has altered it according to the feedback he has gotten as well. I think that makes him as successful as he is. He is very open to what people have to say about his films and how they feel about them."

Normally Guillermo del Toro movies have lots of bonus features included on the DVD release. Did they have you filming a lot of extra material just for the home video release?

Heather Doerksen: "They had behind the scenes crews working for sure, and they did some behind the scenes interviews as well. I am pretty sure that some of that footage is going to be included in the DVD release."

Any bloopers?

Heather Doerksen: "There might be some bloopers. There might be some of us in the torture machine."

You also have [Hidden](#) coming up, which is totally different. That's definitely a smaller film, budget-wise.

Heather Doerksen: "Yeah, it was. Well, because it focuses on one small family, a father and a mother and their daughter, and their journey through a [zombie](#) apocalypse, I think the budget was smaller. It takes place in a bunker mostly, in a bomb shelter. I play Jillian, their friend. I come in and out throughout the movie. It was a smaller film but really intimate and a really beautiful experience to work on."

That was directed by a brother writing/directing team. How was it to be directed by siblings?

Heather Doerksen: "I have been directed by two brothers in *The Uninvited* as well. That was awesome actually because usually when there are two people they are already pretty in sync, and it just happened that these two brothers pretty much thought identically. If one was giving you a direction, the other one was nodding their head. It was lovely. It was not like there were too many cooks in the kitchen at all. It was a nice, unified feeling."

They weren't tearing you apart by making you go different directions.

Heather Doerksen: "No, they were not. I had a broken hand at the time...it was so crazy. My hand was in my cast and we would take it off right before shooting. I would take off my splint and we would make sure that the blocking was done so that my hand was kind of protected during the shoot."

How do you forget you have a broken hand when you are acting?

Heather Doerksen: "I did five years of theatre training in college so a lot of that was how to fake something if you need to. I would look like I was carrying something very heavy but I would be using my other hand that was very healthy and using the other one to support it and vice versa. You use little tools, and the camera has little tricks to hide those things."

Why do you think zombies are currently so popular?

Heather Doerksen: "It is a really good question, but I think when we proposed the idea of the end of the world, which *Pacific Rim* also addresses, I think people like to think about who they would turn to, how they would survive, who their community would be. I think the human experiences, how do we survive, how do we get through tough experiences, and how do we bond together in order to get through things, and put aside our individual differences that we can fend off something that is coming at us on force. *Pacific Rim* is that way too. The Kaiju, the monsters are rising up from the ocean and human kind has to put aside our individual orders and our differences of countries and find a way to combat the Kaiju."

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