

July 12, 2013 6:15 PM | By Norman Wilner

Heather Doersken suits up in Pacific Rim

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It might be difficult to recognize Heather Doerksen in *Pacific Rim*.

In full costume as Sasha Kaidanovsky, the Russian co-pilot of the giant fighting machine Cherno Alpha, the Winnipeg-born actress – who's had recurring roles on *Stargate: Atlantis*, *Battlestar Galactica* and *Fringe* and appeared in *The Uninvited*, *Ambrosia* and *The Cabin in the Woods* – is made up in a stylized fashion that makes her look like she's escaped from a Japanese manga. Her character doesn't say much, but she doesn't have to.

"We had limited dialogue, for sure," Doerksen says over the phone from Los Angeles, where she's getting ready to attend the film's premiere with director Guillermo del Toro and his international cast. "The Russians were always more of a visual element that were necessary in terms of Guillermo's imagistic world that he'd created. Just that kind of imposing power that's violent and stoic and doesn't need to say much in order for the impression to be made."

Though Doerksen and her co-star Robert Maillet were often in the background of the story, she says del Toro paid as much attention to them as any of his actors.

"He was super-animated, super-involved; he'd come up between almost every take, unless it was a massive set and we were up really high," Doerksen laughs. "But he was right in there, talking about the characters, talking about the scene, making jokes, making light of things when they were getting physically difficult for us – just bringing a lot of levity to the set."

That's a quality one imagines is sorely appreciated when your job requires being built into a giant robot. The suits worn by *Pacific Rim*'s Jaeger pilots aren't just fancy onesies.

"We had the undergarment and then the under-armor," Doerksen explains, "and then each piece of the armor was meticulously crafted to [fit] our bodies, that had to be adjusted and strapped in. And then add to that being strapped into the actual head of the Jaeger, which was physically built for us, was another 25 minutes."

Getting out of costume was just as complicated.

"In order to get unstrapped out of *just* the armor, it took like 25 minutes," she says. "It was a 45-50 minute undo of everything in order to go to the washroom ... so you just kind of held it. And meditated."

The scale of *Pacific Rim*'s production was such that although Doerksen only shot about 15 days, she was contractually obliged to be available for shooting for six months – just in case a camera setup might require her character.

"They could call me in at any moment," she says. "Any time that I wasn't on set, I was either on hold or I was at the gym working out [and] planning my meals for the week. It was really my life for eight months – six months of shooting, and two months prior."

Pacific Rim's Toronto shoot was Doerksen's first time working in that city – she's been based in Vancouver for most of her career – and she says she landed the job by a lucky accident. "I just happened to have flown there for a month to do some acting training with David Rotenberg," she says. "And my second audition [for the film] came on the weekend I was supposed to be in New York. I cancelled my trip, took the audition and got the role – and then I was in Toronto for eight months! It was crazy, really crazy. Life is nuts."

With the movie about to open, Doerksen finds herself looking forward to the premiere – and to seeing some other projects she's worked on since finishing *Pacific Rim* reach screens.

One of them is *Hidden*, which she describes as "a smaller-budget Warner Bros. flick that follows a single family as they try to meander their way and survive a zombie apocalypse."

The family is played by Alexander Skarsgård, Andrea Riseborough and Emily Alyn Lind; "my character kinda floats in and out of their lives throughout the film," Doerksen says. "I think it'll be exciting for audiences; I like zombie movies, and I like horror, and I think the zombies have interesting characteristics that [are] gonna draw people to the theatre."

Doerksen will also be heard in a number of *Marvel Knights* animated projects. "I'm doing some miniseries that are coming out in the fall," she says. "I voice Psylocke and Betty Ross and She-Hulk, and Emma Frost – a whole bunch of characters, a range."

And she's looking forward to a rare comedic project – an appearance in CityTV's new sitcom *Package Deal*.

"It's an all-Canadian cast, guest-starring Pamela Anderson and Eugene Levy," she says. "I make a guest appearance in one of those episodes. It's gonna be really funny."