

LEGEND OF THE RANGERS

Alex Zahara

A Frequent Guest on SF TV Looks to Settle In as a Pious Warrior

Actor Alex Zahara was astonished. The very first day he walked in to participate in a cast read-through of *BABYLON 5: THE LEGEND OF THE RANGERS*, he was surprised to discover that a group of carefully selected strangers - all the actors who were cast in the film - were in sync with each other. "It was seriously great from the get-go!" said the actor. "We hadn't met. Everyone was prepared for the read, and I came in, last minute. I didn't get a chance to say hello to Dylan Neal and the others, but it didn't matter. We just sat down and it clicked. Right from the first day of filming, bang, it was literally like we'd all gone through training together. I think, all of us being actors, living day to day with the job and that lifestyle, we shared that common bond. When we stepped through that [starship] bridge, trust me, we'd already gone through our years of training and schooling to get where we are. We had an instant affinity with each other. We got on great and went out with each other to dinner a couple of times.

Zahara was in an envious position. He'd been cast as Dulann, the Minbari second-in-command of the starship *Liandra*, under the leadership of Captain David Martel, as played by fellow Canuck Dylan Neal.

To get the part, said Zahara, it was first necessary to know the character. "In my audition piece, I thought of him as a samurai/monk," said Zahara. "I carried Dulann around in my body."

The physical metamorphosis "took two and a half hours. I literally transformed, it sent me to another place, sent me to the land where Dulann lives. The makeup was like putting the last slab of cement to a building. I built the infrastructure, but the

makeup and costume were my edifice. We worked together very well. On the set, with complete makeup, playing the character, I felt many layers of Dulann. I even wrote a back-history for him before I auditioned."

Like fellow *B5* actor Andreas Katsulas, Zahara is a rare breed among actors; tolerant in working with elaborate, prosthetic makeup. "I had done a *STAR GATE* episode ["Foothold"], where I had done full facial and body prosthetics. It took me four and a half hours in the chair, every day. Dulann is only two and half hours a day. I got a little antsy in the chair once in a while, but it gave me time to reflect. It gave me a chance to calm down and give the makeup artists a chance to apply the makeup. I meditated during that time, I'd listen to classical music. Sometimes I even fell asleep.

To date, Zahara's racked up an impressive resume that includes extensive feature, theatre, and television credits. He was a Norseman in John McTiernan's *THE 13TH WARRIOR*, and won a 1998 Jessie Richardson theater award for *MOJO*. Notably, he's featured in Vancouver-filmed genre television such as *ANDROMEDA* ["Music of a Distant Drum"], *DARK ANGEL* ["Rising" and "Red"], *THE OUTER LIMITS* ["Tribunal"], and three *STAR GATE* episodes. Upon being cast in *RANGERS*, Zahara sat down and read Joe Straczynski's latest opus. "It really sucked me in. It really transported me somewhere else. I was enthralled - it was very, very good. I thought all the characters were very well-rounded. It's really great to read a script that well-written. It was like Greek drama."

As further research before



MEETING AT MINBAR: With a healthy roster of Canadian-based SF series under his belt, actor Alex Zahara delved into his character's past when prepping for his role as the Minbari Dulann in *LEGEND OF THE RANGERS*.

shooting started in Vancouver, Canada. Zahara studied *B5* episodes. "It's incredibly, intricately well-written. The people play it with such conviction and passion - there's emotional investment in it. [In other SF TV shows,] everyone's so cool all the time, in this show, they lose their cool. They blow up; they have fights; they get passionate about things; they laugh like crazy; they make mistakes. They're not trying to be cool. They're being their characters."

So how does Zahara envision Dulann's relationship with Martel? "David and Dulann are very complementary. They really balance each other; they're two sides of a coin. David has a lot going that Dulann wishes he could express. Dulann has a foot in both worlds. He's a Minbari but he also respects the way that humans express themselves. He admires that. Aboard the *Liandra*, David is a very expressive guy."

As second-in-command, Dulann acts as David's quiet advisor. "You can't run a ship without perspectives," said Zahara. "That's exactly what Dulann does. He doesn't tell David what to do. He [offers] David a path: 'You may wish to take this route or this other path here. You decide.' They provide support and options for each

other."

Once filming got underway, the cast chemistry surfaced again in a crucial ceremonial scene aboard the starship *Liandra*. In this scene, director Michael Vejar used a steadicam to slowly pan the circle of actors as they delivered their lines. According to Zahara, if anyone had flubbed their lines, the whole scene would have had to be reshot from the beginning. "It was basically all done in one take. They started on me and shot around the room with a steadicam. Then, after that, they just went into the over-the-shoulder coverage that they needed. For the most part, yeah, it was one take. They had a crane coming down to the middle of us and then panning around to us.

Having completed the film's arduous four-week schedule, Zahara looked back and remarked, "It was the best, most family-oriented feeling I've had. We worked long days. Oftentimes, you get stuck on a show and the people there are unhappy. Everyone on this show felt that they wanted to be there. I had so much fun; it was a pleasure. I would come and visit on days when I wasn't working and people would ask, 'What are you doing?' I'd say, 'Well, I want to be here...' I wanted to hang out with these people."

-Frank Garcia