

The **BABYLON 5** saga is reborn in the US Sci Fi channel's new spin-off, **THE LEGEND OF THE RANGERS**. In a unique conversation, **Frank Garcia** quizzes six of the TV movie's cast members about life and death in the B5 universe...



Starlight Club

When Babylon 5 creator J. Michael Straczynski began work on the new spinoff TV movie *The Legend of the Rangers* (subtitled *To Live and Die in Starlight*), one of his first decisions was to hire unknowns to play all the principal roles. This should give viewers the opportunity to instantly accept the actors as their characters and embrace the universe. With four cast members delivering their performances under elaborate prosthetic make-up, the illusion of a fantastic, futuristic universe is propelled under an even sharper light.

To mark *The Legend of the Rangers*' US debut, six members of the TV movie's cast join *dreamwatch* for an entertaining, thoughtful and revealing conversation that displays the strong bonds forged between the actors as a result of their involvement with the project...

dreamwatch: Can you tell us about your roles in *Babylon 5: The Legend of the Rangers* and why you became actors?

Warren T. Takeuchi: My character is Kitaro Sasaki, navigation, communications and translation specialist aboard the *Liandra*. He's a very earnest character. He's intelligent and very good at his job. He's military; a guy that you would feel extremely confident that he would



carry out his job properly.

[Being an actor] actually was something that I never aspired to be. *Star Wars* was actually what got me really interested in the business. I was a huge fan and saw it 13 times when I was about 10 years old. I just fell into it.

Enid-Raye Adams: I play Firell, who is the healer. She's a Minbari. She doesn't have the finest of bedside manners, and is a bit shy, a bit aloof. I actually fought becoming an actor: I did it all throughout elementary school and my mom was an actor. I sat there, watching her up on stage, fell in love with it and proceeded to spend the rest of my life deciding against becoming an actor, because you never make any money and there's no stability in it. I'm an actress against my will, dammit!

Dean Marshall: I play Malcolm Bridges, covert operations and infiltration specialist. He's a weird human from Beta Colony. The reason why I got into acting? Well, I really do believe that it chose me. I was six years old, me and my brother got up in front of the school and sang *We Wish You A Merry Christmas* in our pyjamas! I always wanted to do it.

Gus Lynch: I play Tirk, the only Drazi Ranger. I'm the first of my race ever to be recruited into the Rangers, which is the same with Jennie-Rebecca Hogan - she plays the first ever Narn recruited into the Rangers. I think that has a significance in the larger scale of the *Babylon 5* universe.

Why I got into acting? I don't have any other marketable skills! [Laughs] It's really pretty easy.

Alex Zahara: I play Dulann, the first officer of the *Liandra*. I was always interested in acting as a little kid: my mom tells me I was always putting on sock-puppet plays when I was three years old. I credit old films: *Bogie*, *Cagney* and *Bacall* and *Bette Davis*. I just put my heart into it.

Bernard Cuffling: I play [the Minbari] Sindell. All I remember was that during the audition there were two characters I went for, and then they decided to combine them into Sindell... I



had two very bad vices as a young man in London. I was a gambler and I was an actor, and neither of them paid [laughs]. I moved further into theater and became a professional actor and came to Canada more than 30 years ago...

Can you summarise *The Legend of the Rangers*' storyline?

Lynch: Well, first of all, there's this guy named Tirk... [All laugh] The series is based around the Rangers, the warrior-priest group that was formed about a thousand years ago. We're on the front lines. We're the ones that implement the orders that come from above. The captain of our ship, [David Martel, played by] Dylan Neal, has kind of a chequered past and there are some funny ideas about honour and sacrifice. He gets dressed down by the Grey Council, and as punishment gets assigned to this ship, the *Liandra*, which is supposedly cursed and is a 20-year-old bucket of bolts.

Appropriately, since he [Martel] feels a bit of an outcast and a misfit, he assembles a crew of those he'd served with, other misfits - a Narn Ranger and a Drazi Ranger. Nobody else is giving these guys a shot.

Zahara: It's classic sci-fi. It opens up a whole new chapter in the *Babylon 5* world.

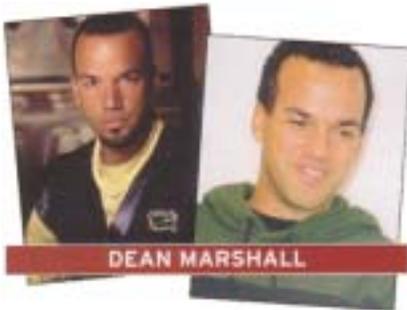
Lynch: The pilot is a prologue to a huge story.

It's possible that the audience is going to be left with more questions than answers at the end, which is great! You're going to meet them all for the first time and be thrown into a whirlwind of events.

What memories do you have of the first day of shooting?

Cuffling: I went into make-up and Andreas [Katsulas, G'Kar] had been there for an hour. He looked tremendous with his red eyes. That put me into total unreality. I was very nervous, but when they put the make-up on me, I was hiding behind the mask which was great for an actor. I looked in the mirror when they finished: it was a work of art! I'd never worn make-up like this before. It was fascinating!

Lynch: I was worried: "So, I'm going to be the big guy behind the mask, and the make-up does all the work?" As soon as I got it all on, I worked on it. I went back to my trailer, I looked in the mirror and made faces and everything reads! It was amazing. When I cocked an eyebrow, you see the eyebrow go up. I grinned, I frowned. It was not a hindrance.



What was it like to walk on the set for the first time?

Zahara: I walked on stage - not in character. I just went for [a] costume fitting - and the ship wasn't even finished yet... I just couldn't believe it! It blew me away, I was like, "This is incredible."

Lynch: The bridge layout is something, it's really cool - a communal table, a communal console that the executive crew sit around, so they're facing each other. I can't remember the last sci-fi thing I saw where people were looking at each other as they were flying the ship, instead of looking forward at the screen in front of them.

Cuffling: When I went on the set, it was very simple, there was a circle of black drapes and grey carpet, and I was in a monk's robes, and then suddenly, seven of the Minbari appeared in seven shafts of light... it was so simple, so effective, visually. Certainly, it helped me enormously. I was amazed. It didn't cost millions, but it looked tremendous.

How was it working with Andreas Katsulas as G'Kar?

Zahara: We were just sitting on the make-up chairs one day, just talking away: "Yakety-yak,



blah, blah..." I turned to Andreas and said something and he said [voice gets quiet], "Actually, if you don't mind, I'm working..." Here we'd just been going on about drivell. Andreas came up afterwards and said, "You know, it wasn't meant to be anything other than just to let you know I was working." He's got pages of dialogue... Being that long at make-up you just want to distract yourself, but I took that note from him. I went into myself and I tell you, I think my performance was better because of it. I thank him for that. I felt privileged to be with him,

Cuffling: I found Andreas very charming, and incredibly supportive. It's easier when you have one or two lines, but when you have speeches, you've got to concentrate. He would come up to me and just say a few things, and I would say a few things to him. Absolutely charming man.

Adams: He always called me a big spitfire, because I couldn't be more opposite from my character if I tried: I'm a troublemaker! He just said, "You're a spitfire, aren't you? You're always getting yourself into trouble." I didn't get to do many scenes with him, but... remember the one on the bridge? [Chorus of approval from the others.] Holy dynamite! Like, I'm talking as a person who's never watched Babylon 5, at all, and in walks this fellow, and he just makes the scene come to life. It's amazing to work with an actor like that.

What was it like working with Joe Straczynski?

Zahara: Coolest guy I ever worked with in my life. I continue to work with him on Jeremiah now [as a guest star]. The most approachable, generous, giving, nice... respectful, all around great guy.

Adams: He's like this silent force that walks around. For the first couple of days shooting, he was taking pictures. I'd forgotten what he looked like from the audition, because it had been such a long period of time. I'm watching this guy, and he's taking these photographs, and he came up to me and very quietly said, "I hope you don't mind that I've been taking pictures. I don't want to get in your way." Then he proceeded to share with me a few gems about my audition and how pleased he was about it.

Takeuchi: At the cast read-through, one of the first things he said was that he has an open-door policy for anyone who wants to come up to his office. Joe really means it, he welcomes it. Originally my character's name was Li Chen, which is obviously Chinese, and my background is Japanese, and he was respectful enough to accommodate my ethnicity, to change the

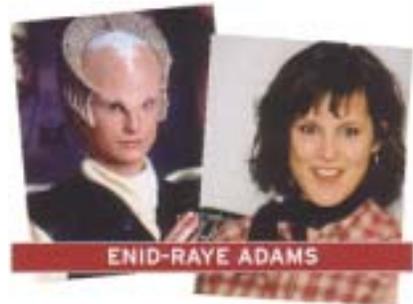
character's name to Kitaro Sasaki. He came up to me after the cast read to see if I was okay with the name.

Adams: Myriam [Sirois, who plays weapons specialist Sarah Cantrell] was up in the harness [which depicts the VR environment] and she was so sore the next day. She was a trooper up there tirelessly working in her scene, and the next day, Joe brought her a fruit basket. That's the kind of guy he is.

What's been the most memorable aspect of working on The Legend of the Rangers so far?

Takeuchi: I'm just honoured being around this exceptionally talented group of performers, crew and production.

Adams: I had not met any of these folks before, and from day one it was like I was working at a family reunion with all my favourite cousins. We all hang out together now, months after we finished filming. Dylan and I email, Myriam and I email back and forth. It's amazing.



How was the final day of shooting?

Cuffling: I did the last day. It was going very well, with no tension, no frayed nerves or people shouting. You know you've walked into something that's quite amazing [when it's] like a family reunion. From my knowledge of working in the business, these things don't happen that often.

Adams: A friend of mine, John Murrell, a playwright, said to me when I was in college, "You know, what we do is work. Sometimes you gotta pay the bills, and hopefully you get to be better at your craft. This is a job and only one in about every five or so projects is magic." You define magic in your own way, and it sits with you in your own way, and this one [is]... magic. •