




 RADAR

## WOMAN TO WATCH: HEATHER DOERKSEN



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Talking to actress **Heather Doerksen**, you realize that confidence, the key to any measure of success, is more craft than trait — if you want it, you have to work at it.

Like any good artist, Doerksen chose the rabbit hole over the beaten path. After discovering that science was for normal people, she switched majors and began her life as an actress at Simon Fraser University. Doerksen's training, though, was loaded with surprises.

"It was hard. It was actually hard on my body," Doerksen tells TORO. "I thought acting was just walking around and saying lines."

Theatre at SFU is physical. The school believes that a strong body — a committed body — is the central instrument needed to channel and create a fully realized character. Giving way to screaming and rolling on the floor fosters conviction, after all.

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"The training reiterated the fact that this was the right path for me to go down," Doerksen says. "I really do like a challenge; I want my brain and body to feel like there's something to overcome."

Indeed, Doerksen has overcome a bunch — failed auditions, botched roles, and, of course, the brutal scrutiny Hollywood loves to throw at young actresses.

"There are bizarre reasons why you don't get roles: 'You're too tall,' 'Your nose isn't the right shape,' 'You're not as pretty as the lead,' etc.," she says. "You have to learn how to let things roll off your back."

It's an absurd business model for recruiting talent, one that undermines the craft Doerksen speaks of so fondly. But Doerksen insists that acting, as a profession, is not about becoming hardened. Rather, it's about understanding your abilities and taking the industry for what it is.

"I have no control over who likes me and who doesn't," Doerksen says. "I only have control over how hard I work."

Doerksen has acted opposite, and garnered praise from, some of the best, **William H. Macy** and **Kathy Bates** among them. More than anything, acting is learning and appropriating, and most young actors would throw their friends off a bridge to lift from masters like Macy and Bates. But establishing yourself as a talent also means approaching a role without peripheral vision.

"There's a part of me that will just want to watch great actors work, because it's so fascinating, but then I say to myself, 'No! You're in a scene, you're acting, get into character!'" Doerksen tells us. "You have to get over that hump and recognize other actors as your peers."

But how does one know if you're getting better as an actor?

"It's a feeling; it's not necessarily watching the final product and being pleased with it," says Doerksen. "It's a feeling that I have where I'm less likely to second guess my initial impulses. I don't have to apologize for that anymore — it's a confidence."

This week, you can watch Doerksen act in the biggest role of her life. In **Guillermo del Toro's** \$180 million *Pacific Rim*, she plays the Russian pilot of a giant robot that kicks the shit out of giant monsters. (Think *Power Rangers* for adults.) It's a childhood fantasy that gleefully indulges in the basic action movie principles: make it loud, make it fast, blow stuff up.

Now Doerksen is ready for (even) bigger things.

"I have the qualities necessary to carry a film if that opportunity comes along in the future," she says. "It's been about finding my own feet on the ground rather than skyrocketing somewhere right out of the gate. It's been about working in the film industry for eight years."

And it's about time.