

Sci-Fi series brings together local talent, local voices



By Brock Weir

It's not every day that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) handles cases of shape-shifting aliens, time portals, and strange phenomena spanning millennia, but it's all in a day's work for special agent Ace Galaksi.

Ace is the brainchild of Aurora author ? and now playwright ? Maissa Bessada. A sci-fi writer, her new leading man initially found life on the pages of a novel, but all that changed when Ms. Bessada was prompted to think outside the box while listing to a podcast courtesy of the CBC.

The public broadcaster was looking for pitches for a new series and, immediately sensing she had just the right thing with her latest creation, she stripped back her story and reimagined it as a series of plays.

Although seemingly impressed by her efforts, she hit an impasse when the CBC told her they simply weren't interested in sci-fi programming, she simply decided to take matters into her own hands.

The result is a six part podcast serial sending up the sci-fi genre, but also raising questions about humanity and the world.

The Destiny of Special Agent Ace Galaksi will be officially launched this Thursday, May 2, at Newmarket's Cachet Restaurant in the presence of its cast and crew who span the length and breadth of York Region including Ms. Bessada's own son Will Patton, a 21 year old Carleton University Student, Theatre Aurora's Martin Buote, and Marquee Theatrical Productions' J.C. Pacquet.

?There I was with this half-done show and a friend says you have a really cool show here, don't stop,? says Ms. Bessada. ?It was like, ?We can do it!?, like one of those old Mickey Rooney-Judy Garland things. We finished up the scripts, we hired local actors, we did auditions here and then we launched.?

Making the leap from the page to the resulting podcast, Ms. Bessada says the finished product became like a ?whole other child? compared to how it was in book form. It has different narrators, different timelines, and their respective environments are beyond compare.

?It was like this brand new thing,? she says. ?I actually enjoyed the play better than the novel writing. I like the dialogue, the interaction between the characters, and taking that whole sound-scape to a whole other place and listening to it come alive.

?As it was coming to life, it was like watching a flower grow. Bit by bit it came and on the first cut, I wondered what I had gotten myself into. Then as we went back and forth, editing it after each take, and then adding the sound effects it became better. It was on to fine tuning and listening to it over and over, and the smallest thing, such as the sound of grabbing someone else's arm became all too important.?

The new experience has made her almost a firm devotee of the craft and she hopes to continue with this character as long as she can. When asked whether she would like to venture on beyond the world of science fiction, she simply called herself 'a nerd from way back.'

'I do write other things, but eventually somebody starts floating or shape shifting,' she says, somewhere between a sigh and a chuckle. 'I like the medium because there is so much possibility. It is sci-fi, but no matter what genre I would be writing, it always comes back to talking about topics that are prevalent anyway [such as] equality.'

'This is a really strongly Canadian voice, strong in Canadian humour, with a strong Canadian character. I hope people will listen to it, enjoy it, laugh, and also think about broader issues at the same time.'

For a sneak peek at Ace Galaksi, visit www.acegalaksi.com.