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Combine a creator who worked on *Grey's Anatomy* with a plot about a space mission, and critics were never be able to resist the moniker *Grey's Astronomy*. Viewers will decide if that's an appealing combination when *Defying Gravity* premieres Sunday, August 2 on CTV and ABC.

"A lot of people have latched on to *Grey's Anatomy* in space, and I don't think that's really what they're trying to do," cautioned Andrew Airlie.



Airlie plays Mike Goss, the flight director of the Antares. Stationed at Mission Control, Goss had been the commander of a Mars mission that left two astronauts dead, a mission that Antares flight engineer Maddux Donner (Ron Livingston) survived. But besides the interpersonal conflicts, politics of space travel, and a mystery involving the real mission of the Antares, *Defying Gravity* includes romantic entanglements, including Donner's past tryst with mission geologist Zoe Barnes (Laura Harris). Creator James Parriott – who also created the cult series *Forever Knight* and *Misfits of Science* – and executive producer Michael Edelstein of *Desperate Housewives* do have extensive experience in female-friendly programming.

"I don't think they went into it with the idea, 'OK, let's find something that will satisfy the sci-fi and the *Grey's* crowd,'" Airlie explained, pointing out the inspiration for the show was the BBC pseudo-documentary *Space Odyssey: Voyage to the Planets*. "They found the source material interesting on its own, and they dramatized it and boosted the production value."

But even apart from the pedigree of its creator, *Grey's* is the logical shorthand for a relationship-focused series. "There are a lot of couples where the guy might want to watch *Battlestar Galactica* and she might want to watch *Grey's Anatomy* and he's not interested," Airlie acknowledged. "I think there's something for everyone."

"Only a third of it is truly set on the spaceship. A third is told in flashback where you're following the astronauts through their five or six year training program for the mission.

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That's where you see all the interpersonal dramatic stuff. The rest is set at mission control, where they're either dealing with the astronauts or politics. It's not a traditional science fiction narrative."

In part, that comes from the fact that the show is set less than 50 years in the future.

"It's pretty soundly grounded in possibility, the real possibility of 40-50 years time,"

Airlie said. "All the stuff we do on the ship and on the ground, Jim has run his ideas by people at NASA and they say we're actually well down that road."

He joined the cast a week before filming began in January, before reading the complete script, and calls it one of the most positive experiences of his career. "Jim Parriott and Michael Edelstein producing and Ron Livingston attached as the lead was enough for me. I had to get in on it." He feels fortunate his bosses at *Reaper* agreed to release him from his contract — his zombie dad character didn't appear to have much of a future, and it turned out the series didn't either.

It's a slight exaggeration to say Airlie has appeared in every series ever filmed in Vancouver, but it must be close. The Glasgow-born actor said he's felt no temptation to move to Los Angeles. "I love it here. I want to raise my family here. I've done pretty well for myself basing myself from here."

Unlike *Reaper*, *Defying Gravity* was not simply filmed in Vancouver — it's a co-production, with broadcaster CTV and Omni Film Productions the Canadian partners.

"Our second lead Laura (Harris, a Canadian) is equal with Ron. There's 14 of us in the main cast and 10 or 11 of us are Canadian. It's all Canadian directors. I think we can say we're a proudly Canadian show."

He's full of praise for the producers and crew, many of whom are veterans of *Battlestar Galactica*, as well as for the visual aesthetic of the series. He's equally complimentary of Parriott and his small writing staff (who include at least one Canadian).

Given the Antares' six year mission, it's no surprise the plan is for a six-year series.

"Jim has the whole first three seasons — if not written in some form, certainly the plots for each episode for the season already in his book. He's planning for it to be a six-year run, so each episodic year will coincide with a year of the mission."

That kind of planning might come as a relief to audiences wary of elaborate serialization that doesn't add up as a series goes along. "As each script came along during the season I'd say, 'What? Really? This much this soon? That's great!' I'm not a fan of the genre that teases you for too long with a plot, or makes it too byzantine and you never know where the thing is going," Airlie said, laughingly declining to name names.

"You're delivering every week, you give a bit more every week, you don't feel like the rug's going to be pulled out and there's going to be some bizarre explanation that you never could have contemplated," he said of this series he's obviously proud of. "You

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don't feel like they're making things up. Jim's got a really tight plan for the storyline and he's executing it."