



DAEGAN FRYKLIND: SHE'S LEADER OF THE PACK

By Katherine Brodsky

Daegan Fryklind, showrunner for Space's popular werewolf series, *Bitten*, has been a writer for as long as she can remember. Still, writing — who makes a living from writing?

So, she had Plan A: To become a lawyer. Writing was Plan B.>>



Whether she'd be scribbling poetry at home in Vancouver or daydreaming of becoming a foreign correspondent, Fryklind knew writing was in the cards. Every aptitude test she took confirmed this. After a brief flirtation with pre-law, Plan B kept kicking at the door. There was nothing left to do but to answer; she enrolled in the University of Victoria's creative writing program. Fryklind immediately felt that "these are my people," so much so that she went on to do a master's degree at Concordia University in Montreal, also in fiction. "For my thesis, I wrote a novel which about six people have read, including my thesis board," recalls Fryklind.

As fate would have it, a whole lot more people were about to discover her work.

Upon returning to Vancouver, Fryklind got her first break when her sister-in-law hired her to work as a researcher on a documentary. "It was just this fortuitous entry into the world of film and television, when I met (producers) Christine Haebler and Louise Clark." Haebler hired Fryklind to work on a feature she was producing called *Tail Lights Fade*; the film turned out to be a training ground for Fryklind. There, she learned production, budgeting and "sort of the machinations of how to make a film and the Canadian film environment."

Fryklind never imagined herself working in television. "I had always loved the medium but I never knew what the point of entry would be and

that's why I was pursuing fiction," she said. "I figured I would go on to be an editor or write novels or something of that nature."

For a while, she pursued the ivory tower of academia instead. The years Fryklind spent in creative writing programs, mimicking other writers, weren't for naught. They helped her find her own voice and hone her skills. "You read a lot of other writers, so it's like in mimicking other writers you crack through what their voice is to find your own," she says.

In discovering her own voice, Fryklind credits the strong showrunners she worked alongside on series like *Cold Squad* (Pete Mitchell) and *Robson Arms* (Susin Nielsen). "Pete took a huge flyer on me by hiring me in the first place," she recalls. "I hadn't done live-action before, let alone a dramatic hour. But he's someone who builds a room based on potential rather than pre-existing credits, which is a smart way to do it." Fryklind would go on to borrow that approach when it came to building her own writers' room for *Bitten*. "Pete was also generous about allowing me, as a baby writer, to explore and learn the workings of the show — visiting [the] set, being in meetings, watching casting — everything was available, which can only help hone your skillset as a writer."

Similarly, Nielsen also introduced Fryklind to a supportive, "true family" environment, where the best idea would win: "Susin ran the show with such diplomacy and support that, as a writer, you never

got the sense of any producing politic. Maybe there wasn't any. Or, if there was, it never trickled down into the writers' room."

Both series had already established a firm tone by the time she came on board, but still allowed Fryklind to bring her own voice into the mix. On the other hand, working on shows like *Being Erica* and *Motive* during their first seasons gave her the chance to help shape those voices from the get-go.

"It's an interesting thing," says Fryklind, "because in the case of *Bitten*, a lot of times the show is what the show is, and you're bringing yourself to it; you're bringing your experience and your own personal stories."

Bringing her own sensibility to the story is what ultimately won her the job.

For Fryklind, *Bitten* presented the first opportunity to showrun. "It seemed like it happened overnight," she recalls, "but it was one of those overnight things that [was] ten years in the making."

Those years were spent moving up the ladder: she began working in the story department, then became a story editor, before moving up to co-producer, producer and co-executive producer.

During that time, she learned valuable lessons about being flexible when a story goes sideways, yet stubborn when "protecting the path." Then there are basic but essential things like trying to walk the dog a few times a day, not neglecting to eat (or use the bathroom), skipping (most) parties, and never forgetting to have fun. That sense of balance is a characteristic she took from her mother, a businesswoman and a boss first and foremost, but also a woman who managed to raise three kids on her own. The lessons she has learned from her mother could fill 10 volumes, says Fryklind. There's one piece of advice that's been particularly instructive: "If it comes down to working with a mad genius who's an asshole or a competent artist who is kind, choose the former if it's short term and the latter if it's long, but always choose the latter because life has a way of taking you on a course you never expected, so try to be with decent people for the ride."

She particularly credits *jPod* for catapulting her career. J.B. Sugar, an executive producer on *Bitten*, first served as her producer on *jPod*, the first show where she was really encouraged to go to the floor with her episode, to work with the director one-on-one and to work with the cast.

Ultimately, working on shows that empowered her and afforded her an opportunity to go to the floor with her own episodes gave her a taste of what it's like to showrun. "So, when I made the leap to showrunner," recalls Fryklind, "there were a number of things I already understood in terms of how the production machine moved."

And then it finally happened; she got her own show.

As the story goes, *Bitten*, based on the popular book series by Canadian author Kelley Armstrong, was originally in development as a feature film starring Angelina Jolie. But, when the rights expired, *Hoodwinked's* John Barbisan and Patrick Banister scooped them up and brought them to Sugar. Together, through No Equal Entertainment, they took the project to Space, where the commissioning executive, Rebecca DiPasquale, happened to be a huge fan of the books.

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"We loved the idea of taking a fresh look at the werewolf genre, putting a strong female protagonist front and centre," recalls DiPasquale.

A lengthy search ensued and a number of potential showrunners were asked to give their take on what the series would be if they were to adapt it. Since Sugar had already worked with Fryklind on *jPod*, he invited her to take a stab at it, too.

"At that time, I was doing a lot of living in Vancouver and working in Toronto," she recalls, "and this [character] was somebody who was trying to live two lives at the same time, so that really spoke to me; trying to keep the two worlds in play and the complications of that. Also, she's the only woman, surrounded by men and that's sometimes the reality in story rooms as well. So, I understood her as a character."

The decision was unanimous. Fryklind was the top contender and the rest, as they say, is history.

The show has caught on with audiences and has risen to become Space's top-rated original series. Fryklind attributes that success to cohesion of vision. "Everybody just gets the show and is really right in the pocket of what the show wants to be and how to move it forward."

She admits she was nervous taking the reins. "It's a big leap to go into that chair," she admits, "and

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