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Austin's Intergalactic Nemesis mounts a space invasion of all things awesome, from live radio plays to comic books (and sludge monsters!)

Raiders of a Lost Art

by RANDY FOX



Jason Neulander, producer, director and co-writer of the multimedia, pulp sci-fi production Intergalactic Nemesis, cites many of the usual suspects when he describes his inspirations for the show. "I was 7 when Star Wars came out and 12 when Raiders of the Lost Ark was released," he tells the Scene in a telephone interview. "Like so many people, I loved those movies as a kid, and as Intergalactic Nemesis evolved, I

went back to those movies and many of the things that inspired them, but it's the telling that makes this show so unique."

Billed as a "live action graphic novel," The Intergalactic Nemesis is a unique mash-up of old-time radio drama, theater and comic-book storytelling. A crew of three actors, a Foley artist and a keyboardist perform all the voices, sound effects and music in front of a live audience while more than 1,000 images flash by, illustrating the story on a huge screen. The year is 1933, and a hard-boiled female reporter, her research assistant and a mysterious librarian uncover a nefarious plot by alien masters from the planet Zygon to subjugate the Earth with an army of sludge monsters.

The evolution of the production's unusual format was its own multi-chapter serial. "The project got its start in a coffee house in downtown Austin, Texas," Neulander says. "My friends and I performed it as a thrown-together radio-style show. We did it serially, performing and recording two episodes a week for five Sundays. It really took off, and more people came out than would fit in the room. Then our local NPR affiliate picked it <http://www.nashvillescene.com/nashville/austins-intergalactic-nemesis-mounts-a-space-invasion-of-all-things-awesome-from-live-radio-plays-to-comic-books-and-sludge-monsters/Content?oid=4084736>

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up and aired it."

At the time, Neulander was also artistic director of the Austin-based award-winning avant-garde Salvage Vanguard Theater. "Between producing new plays," he says, "I kept coming back to Intergalactic Nemesis and every time we performed it, the following grew. In 2009, we were invited to bring it into Dell Hall at the Long Center for the Performing Arts in Austin. It's a 2,400-seat theater, and I thought the venue was way too big for the intimate experience of a radio-style play. Then I had a vision of comic-book artwork projected on a screen to create a spectacle that would fill the room."

But it's not just the "BAM" and "POW" of comic book artwork that gives Intergalactic Nemesis its snap and sizzle. "Chad Nichols and I did a major overhaul of the script in 2007," Neulander says. "By then, I was a huge fan of Golden Age Hollywood movies and they became a major influence. We studied the script of His Girl Friday to try to get that sense of really snappy dialogue."

Howard Hawks' classic screwball comedy of tough guys and fast-talking dames became a major influence in Neulander's tale of intergalactic hijinks. "The way in which that script was created was very inspirational," Neulander says. "They went on a weeklong retreat where they went through the script line by line to get the best bang for their buck. It totally paid off. There is not a line in His Girl Friday that is not awesome. I can't say what we created is as good, but we truly tried to make it the best thing possible."

Currently on its first international tour, The Intergalactic Nemesis rolls into the new OZ performance and event center in West Nashville this weekend for two performances. "We're so honored to be part of OZ's inaugural season," Neulander says. "You don't have to be a comic book fan to enjoy our show," he says. "If you're the kind of person who loves unusual storytelling and likes to laugh, I think it will be a total blast."



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