



ariel mortman

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WHILE MOST PEOPLE SPEND THEIR early 20s just planting their feet in the real world, 24-year-old Ariel Mortman is already exploring the globe and thriving in her dream career as Hayley in Netflix's *Greenhouse Academy*.

Born in New York, Ariel lived

in the states until age 10, when her family moved to Israel. "My mom's Israeli and my dad's American, and they decided that they wanted to live here," she shares. Ariel discovered her love of acting in high school, but her career was postponed by mandatory service in the Israeli army. "At the age

of 18, everyone here is enlisted," Ariel explains. After completing a year in the intelligence, Ariel taught refugee preschoolers for another year before finally getting into acting professionally.

She moved to Tel Aviv and in 2014 landed her first major role as Maya in

the Israeli Disney series *North Star*. The show ended after two seasons, and while on a three-month backpacking trip in Japan, Ariel began auditioning for *Greenhouse Academy*. "I didn't really have anyone to self-tape with, so I would find random people at the hostels I was staying at," she admits. Although she first auditioned for the role of Jackie Sanders (played by Jessica Amlee), Ariel ultimately booked the role of Hayley Woods.

A unique amalgamation of teen drama and futuristic technology, *Greenhouse Academy* is perfect for the whole family to enjoy. After their mother's trip to space goes gravely awry, siblings Alex and Hayley Woods enroll in the prestigious academy their mom once attended, only to discover conspiracy within the walls. "Someone said that it's like *Gossip Girl* meets *Harry Potter*," Ariel recalls, and agrees is a good description. Along with Waldorf-esque drama, students are split into the Ravens and the Eagles, similar to Hogwarts houses.

An American remake of the Israeli series *Ha-Hamama*, *Greenhouse Academy* is set in southern California (although the show films in Tel Aviv). When cast as Hayley, Ariel watched some of *Ha-Hamama* for the plot but refrained from contacting the original actress because she "wanted to find my own way of playing Hayley and sort of understand the character on my terms," she explains. Though the American plot closely follows its predecessor, Ariel would love to see new characters introduced if *Greenhouse Academy* continues past *Ha-Hamama*'s three seasons. "Just having Reina (Hardesty)'s character, Aspen, come in made a good impact," she imparts. "Even though she's supposed to be the evil one, she's probably one of my favorite characters on the show."

Additionally, Ariel would love to see two houses mix and characters switch teams, if only for the ensuing drama.

Of all the cast members, Ariel is closest with Finn Roberts, who plays her brother Alex on the show. "We automatically connected even just through the audition process," she reveals. After the stressful final auditions, the pair went to a record shop together to detox. "We sort of bonded the second we met and we've been best friends ever since."

"The second season was definitely a lot more fun to shoot [than the first]," Ariel shares, because so many new relationships were explored. Throughout Season 2, Hayley grows closer to Brooke (Grace Van Dien), whereas "in the first season we barely interacted, we just sort of hated each other on the side."

In addition to working with more of the cast, Ariel adds that Season 2's plot was especially exciting to film. "The drowning scene that I had was actually the most difficult scene I've ever had to film," she recollects. Although there was a talented crew ensuring her safety throughout, "there's no fake way of drowning," and she had to spend 8 hours flailing in the ocean for the scene. Despite the trauma she went through, "it was definitely fun as an actor to get an opportunity to do something like that." The experience instilled in Ariel a love of stunt work and she aspires to one day expand her horizons to film, especially action movies.

Along with her career goals, Ariel hopes to spend more time traveling, as it is "one of the things I love doing the most," she remarks. Some of her favorite trips so far have been to London, Paris, and Japan.

As a seasoned traveler, the worldwide reaction to *Greenhouse Academy*

was the most exciting part of the experience for Ariel. The morning after its release, "I woke up to messages from kids saying they finished the show," she remembers. "I'm so grateful to all of the kids that watched it."

Despite her initial attraction to Jackie's character, "I'm probably a little bit more like Hayley," Ariel confesses, and while the role of reformed juvenile delinquent Jackie Sanders is certainly exciting, Hayley Woods is arguably just as cool. "She's very real," Ariel relates. "I feel like she represents something." On one hand, Hayley is a tough girl with strong convictions. "She's strong, and she's independent, and she's not afraid to say what she thinks." On the other, Hayley can be vulnerable and break down. "She lets herself feel what she feels, and I sort of like that," she elaborates. "Just because she feels sad or cries doesn't make her any less strong."

What makes *Greenhouse Academy* unique, Ariel articulates, is that "all the characters on the show have a lot of colors. I don't think that there's any one character who's the bad one [or who is] the good one." As the show progresses, she adds, viewers are able to look past a character's exterior to see his insecurities and where his behavior stems from.

The show's characters, she postulates, are what viewers love about *Greenhouse Academy*. "[Kids can] relate to it because everyone has different sides. Everyone could be a little bit mean sometimes," but still have a good heart and honest intentions. In addition to delivering dynamic characters, the show teaches important lessons like friendship and collaboration. "Even if it is a competitive school, you understand that in the end, they're all there to help each other." ■