

I had beginner's luck," smiles Alicia Vikander. She's talking about a night out with Matt Damon in Las Vegas, a town where luck can give – and luck can take away. "Buy the ticket, take the ride," preached Sin City's glorifier, Hunter S. Thompson, and Vikander, like everyone else, did – albeit on the studio's dime. "We get per diems [daily payments from the production company] and it felt like Monopoly money. So I put \$100 down and then I was like, 'Oh sh\*t.' But I won two nights out of four. I should have stopped, of course." How much did you win? "I won 22 times my money," she laughs. "But it was pure luck and no intelligence, really."

The Vikander I meet on a crisp, bright winter's day in Sydney is no beginner. She is a slight, smiling woman curled cosily into a sofa – a striking contrast to the stern-faced, sharp-edged CIA operative she plays in *Jason Bourne*, the latest instalment of the Matt

Damon juggernaut. Casual in charcoal Acne Studios jeans and a grey Rag & Bone knit, Vikander, 27, looks relaxed, nursing a cup of lemon and ginger tea and kicking off her shoes as she snuggles cross-legged into the corner of the couch. Perhaps it's a Scandinavian thing – although she's Swedish, she's perfected the Danish art of *hygge*, that untranslatable word meaning warmth, cosiness and simplicity.

The first thing she does is compliment my very low-tech notebook and pen: "Most people bring all these iPads and phones and I don't know what." Ironically, however, it's among such an array of technology that her latest character is most at home. In *Jason Bourne*, Vikander

is steely and driven as Heather Lee, the computer hacker turned head of the CIA's Cyber Ops department who's determined to finally flush out Jason Bourne.

Before I can suggest that a film Vikander herself describes as a "popcorn movie" seems a surprising move for a "serious" actor, she swiftly brings up its credentials as social commentary. "It's a hard thing making something that feels both gritty and real and a big franchise action movie, that can also have social and political elements, and I think they did such a great job," she says.

Political elements? In an action movie? Didn't we come here to watch Bourne do some bare-knuckle boxing? It might sound dry, but one of the film's central (non-bloody) conflicts is "personal rights versus public security". It's actually a hot-button

## "IF YOU CAN FIND A WAY TO KEEP A BIT OF MYSTERY, THAT'S GOOD"

topic: what institutions and companies do with all the data they collect about us. "It's the age of technology, and it's all about what morals you have and what decision you make about how to use your abilities," says Vikander. Those decisions all centre around one thing: "It's about the question of privacy and what we are or aren't willing to give in terms of social media."

When I ask where she comes down on these issues, at first she brings it back to the movie: "Paul [Greengrass, the director] was very clear that the film should bring these issues up, but not really take sides." But then, with a sigh, she admits, "It's difficult sometimes to be a small citizen in a big political world."

Privacy is, of course, more than a political issue for Vikander, who has reportedly been dating fellow actor Michael Fassbender since 2014. They met in Australia while filming *The Light Between Oceans*, and she's been spending time with him in Sydney recently as he works on *Alien: Covenant*. The pair have been snapped together going out to lunch, having dinner, going bowling and working out at Bondi. Neither has ever confirmed the relationship, despite the frequent pap snaps – and *that* kiss when her Oscar win was announced at this year's ceremony. (It's notable that, even amid her awards-ceremony joy, she was self-contained enough only to peck his cheek.)

True to form, today she keeps our conversation strictly business. All she will say on the topic of her personal life is, "When I go to the movies and see the actors and actresses I look up to, I like knowing as little

as possible about them, so I can see them becoming these different characters. If you can find a way to keep a bit of mystery, that's good for the work." To maintain that mystery, she stays off social media. "I tried – I got a bit stressed out that I had to post things. If you enjoy doing it, it's a great way to keep in touch with audiences. But I didn't have that drive to do it just privately with my friends, so I wouldn't be very good at it."

Her drive might not extend to social media, but it's certainly evident in her workload. This is a woman who, at 15, moved nearly 500km away from her home town of Gothenburg to Stockholm, living alone to study full-time at The Royal Swedish Ballet School. After years of ▶

# Lights, camera, Alicia!

*She's taken Hollywood by storm and won an Oscar in the process, but there's more to Alicia Vikander than meets the eye, says Hannah James*

Photography **Steven Chee** Styling **Marina Afonina**



**ALICIA WEARS**  
Ellery dress, elleryland.com; Louis Vuitton earrings, and ring, 1300 883 880; Alicia's own bracelet (worn throughout).



ALICIA WEARS  
Louis Vuitton jacket,  
dress, earrings, and  
ring, 1300 883 880

“WINNING AN  
OSCAR IS LIKE  
SOMEONE  
TAPPING  
YOU ON THE  
SHOULDER  
AND SAYING,  
‘YOU’RE  
HEADING THE  
RIGHT WAY’”

HAIR: GEORGE NORTHWOOD; MAKEUP: KELLY COCHRAN/HELL; PHOTOGRAPHY: ENZO ANGILERI/MEDIA  
MARK; METAL FEELITY; IMAGES: UNIVERSAL PICTURES; KATRINA KONG/GETTY IMAGES

hard physical training for seven hours a day, six days per week, injuries and the dawning knowledge that she didn't want it enough led her to abandon the career. All that focus and energy wasn't going anywhere, however, and her love of the stage meant that she channelled it into films. It's not a decision that came entirely out of left field: her mother, Maria, is an actor, and her father, Svante, a psychiatrist – a perfect hothouse for a budding thespian.

She still sends her parents many of the scripts she's considering, and so far their combined decisions have steered her towards the art house. *Bourne's* tense car chases and viscerally bloody fight scenes are certainly a far cry from the period costumes and tear-drenched tragedy of Vikander's global breakthrough role in *The Danish Girl* (2015). Her performance as Gerda, the wife of transgender woman Lili (Eddie Redmayne), was subtle, but layered enough to hold its own against Lili's more visually dramatic arc. In February it won her acting's ultimate accolade: an Oscar.

Although she doesn't see it that way. For Vikander, it seems, an Academy Award is less a mountain peak of achievement, more a signpost. "It's like someone giving you a really nice tap on the shoulder and saying, 'You're heading the right way.'" But she's aware it's generally seen as rather more than that. "It's such an honour. I'll remember that night forever – it's pretty surreal still. Matt [Damon, who won an Oscar in 1998] gave me some advice: he said, 'Just remember to have fun.' The afterparties were incredible, but the highlight of the night was meeting my family and friends backstage, going to this little room with a TV, and all dancing in this tiny space. I have this amazing photo of me and my mum and dad, and they were like [she makes a victorious, cheering face]."

Where is her Oscar now? "I haven't seen him since that night! I left two days later to go back to work, and he was too heavy to take – he's *so* heavy. You get up there and you realise why you need two hands to hold him." She has no idea where she'll put him when she finally returns to her north London flat, but laughs when I suggest that thespian favourite, the bathroom. "It's a very good place to put it. People can have their alone time with it!"

Now she's conquered the worlds of fashion, as a Louis Vuitton ambassador, costume dramas (she was critically



**A STAR IS BOURNE**  
(clockwise from top left)  
Alicia Vikander with Matt  
Damon; in *Jason Bourne*;  
as Ava in *Ex Machina*; in  
*The Danish Girl*; with  
Michael Fassbender; that  
kiss at this year's Oscars.

acclaimed for 2012's *Anna Karenina* and 2014's *Testament Of Youth*), the near future (she was unforgettable as an icily perfect robot in *Ex Machina*), and camp spy flicks (as a cartoony heroine in *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*), joining one of cinema's most loved action-movie franchises is undoubtedly a canny move. The sheer scale of the production, however, took her aback. "Even Paul and Matt said the scene we shot at the convention [in Vegas] was by far their biggest ever," she says. "I think there were nearly 2000 extras. Even just to get them logged in every morning...!"

But career progression in her industry isn't quite so simple, says Vikander. "No," she insists when I ask if it's possible to plan your course. "I would never have believed anybody – I would've laughed if someone had told me [where I'd be now] a few years ago. I never thought I would work in English-speaking films or abroad. When you're from a small European country, it's not really part of your vision of possibility."

But now the impossible has happened and she's scaled Hollywood's dizzy heights, what's next? It was recently reported that, on one end of the spectrum, she'll be stepping

into Angelina Jolie's combat boots as Lara Croft in a new *Tomb Raider*, which is currently in pre-production, and on the other, she's in ruffs and taffeta for period drama *Tulip Fever*. But the project that has her really excited is *Euphoria*, the first film from her production company, Vikarious Productions. "I really love the making of films, the actual process," she says. "Of course you care about the end result, because you want people to watch your films, but it's the whole idea of the work and doing great art with people you enjoy collaborating with that means the world."

*Euphoria* will star Vikander herself and Eva Green, with the recently announced addition of Charlotte Rampling, whom Vikander reveres. "I met her at the start of the year at one of these lunches during the [awards] season. She said, 'I heard your office is sending me a script.' I felt like I was 12! I said, 'Yeah, I am – I hope you have time to read it.' I pinch myself that I get to work with these actresses."

Wanting to see such talented women continue to work was one of the drives behind creating Vikarious. "As an actor, you want to be involved earlier on, in the script process. I got more interested in making sure certain stories that need to be told can get told." Those are often women's stories.

Gender equality is the air Vikander breathed, growing up in socially progressive Sweden, and it's something she's determined to promote in her industry. "Last year I realised, 'Oh my god, I've done four films and I've never played opposite another woman.' And I was embarrassed for myself, because I thought of myself as being very aware. That's how far it's gone, that it's so much the norm. Over all the films I've made it has been very rare, I can count them, the scenes with women I've had. It's quite rare – except in comedy."

She's not the only actress to snap back against the male-dominated movie industry by forming her own production company. Reese Witherspoon, Drew Barrymore and Elizabeth Banks, among others, have done the same, allowing them not only to tell women's stories, which have a guaranteed – and underserved – audience, but also to give their creators control over their careers.

So she's smart, passionate and talented, too. Maybe Vikander's success is down to beginner's luck. Maybe not. 🍀  
*Jason Bourne* is in cinemas on July 28.

👉 FOLLOW HANNAH ON TWITTER @HFJAMES.