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BRITISH BEAUTY

## Kate Beckinsale

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IN LOVE & FRIENDSHIP

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# England's *Finest*

KATE BECKINSALE'S GOT STAR POWER, THANKS TO A LIST OF ACTION-PACKED MOVIE ROLES IN WHICH SHE GETS TO COMBINE BEAUTY AND BRAINS. THIS MONTH, SHE CONTINUES THAT STREAK, BUT IN A MORE CEREBAL ROLE IN THE JANE AUSTEN VEHICLE *LOVE & FRIENDSHIP*.

**BY ROBERT PIPER**

PHOTO: Ross McDonnell



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Kate Beckinsale plays Lady Susan Vernon in *Love & Friendship*; as Selene in the *Underworld* movies and as Ava Gardner in *The Aviator*. BELOW: Beckinsale as Carrie Stetko in *Whiteout*.

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ate Beckinsale is one of the most photogenic, intelligent, fashion-forward actresses

in Hollywood. It seems that almost every week there is a photo of her in a fashion magazine or online showcasing her latest outfit. But the actress—who's appeared in *Pearl Harbor*, *The Aviator*, *Whiteout*, *Contraband*, and of course in the extraordinarily successful, reprised mainstay role of Selene in the *Underworld* series—doesn't trade on her looks. In fact, her next big project takes her from ass-kicking to bringing a literary character to life onscreen.

This May, Beckinsale is playing Lady Susan Vernon in *Love & Friendship*, a period drama based on Jane Austen's novella *Lady Susan*. Historians aren't certain exactly when *Lady Susan* was written, but they estimate it was sometime in the 1790s. Her nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, published the book in 1871, after Austen's death.

The movie was a perfect fit for Beckinsale, considering she studied Vernon in school. "I grew up in England, so it's very much a part of the curriculum in English [class]—you read Jane Austen," Beckinsale explains. So the actress had no problem projecting herself back in history to tackle the 1790s oldfangled lines in her role





PHOTO: Doug Curran

Beckinsale landed her first movie role early on. “I went to a British school, and I was in a school play, and somebody’s mother was a casting director and said, ‘Will you go up for this movie?’ And I did. And I don’t think I got the first thing I tried, but then I was asked to go to something else, and it sort of started off like that,” explains Beckinsale, who was 18 at the time. “My first summer at Oxford, I did *Much Ado About Nothing*,” she adds. She would later drop out of Oxford to pursue her true passion—acting. In 1996, she had the good fortune of familiarizing herself with Austen’s style of writing. “I had been in a production of *Emma* before, so I studied that pretty hard. I’m definitely a Jane Austen fan.”

That’s not something that might be apparent to fans who came to know the badass beauty that hit the public’s radar first in 2003, when she played Selene in *Underworld*. She reprised the role in *Underworld: Evolution* (2006), *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans* (2009), *Underworld: Awakening* (2012), and next in *Underworld Blood Wars*, which hits theaters in October. The role has shown consistent gains at the box office, never performing under each successive film’s budget. Beckinsale has garnered a loyal fan following for the series, and is an absolute rock star at Comic-Con every year, which started in 1970 in San Diego for lovers of comic books and movies but has since spawned into a massive festival of sorts where scores of A-list actors go to promote upcoming projects. “They come dressed up as you, or whatever your character is for the movie,” Beckinsale

says of attendees. “They’re very respectful; very involved. I’m very lucky with those fans,” she continues. “I have to say, I will support anyone who will go out Saturday morning dressed up as Wolverine or whatever—hit the streets—and take all their kids. I just think, that’s my kind of person.” **IA**

as Lady Susan Vernon, a manipulative character always ready with a quip and who’s got a penchant for the finer things in life. “It’s one of the most dialogue-heavy movies I’ve ever done,” the actress says.

For the Lady Susan Vernon character, Beckinsale had to make several costume changes through a host of different time periods, some of them not the most comfortable. “You have to learn some special skills, in terms of keeping a hat on that weighs 300 pounds,” she notes. And of course, the role required some research. “[Austen] wrote it, and what we can gather is that it was a bit sort of frivolous and not serious enough, which is actually part of what I think makes it turn into such a funny and interesting Jane Austen film,” Beckinsale says. “But it’s not typical. It’s not a love story; you know, a lot of her famous work is very romantic. This is isn’t very romantic at all. It’s funny, and the characters are a lot more hard-edged.” The book is written as an epistolary novel. “It’s all in metaphor, and it’s really, really short. But it’s incredibly in-depth in terms of character.”

