

Upping her game

She's spent most of her teens in one of the biggest TV shows of all time, now she's taking on *X-Men: Game Of Thrones* star SOPHIE TURNER talks red-carpet phobias, rape scenes and crying in front of Barack Obama

Words by ELAINE LIPWORTH

It's a quintessential Hollywood scene. I am sitting by a swimming pool in which no one is swimming, on the patio cafe at the hip Sunset Tower Hotel with *Game Of Thrones* star Sophie Turner. Around us, a jaded-looking 'industry' crowd is huddled over drinks, but the 20-year-old British actress is all youthful energy and good humour, dressed in a pale blue Topshop T-shirt over ripped jeans, and snacking on a plate of sausage rolls (the current LA food trend). The state's legal drinking age is 21, so sadly a cocktail is off limits. 'It's really strange, considering that back in London I can go out and drink and party,' laughs Turner. 'At home, I would be down the pub with my friends ... though I don't actually like the taste of alcohol, so I would probably be drinking vodka and cranberry, something sweet.'

Growing up in Warwickshire with her parents, Sally, a former special needs teacher, and Andy, a businessman, plus her two elder brothers, James and Will, Turner started performing as a toddler. Then, at 13, her life changed forever when she was cast as Sansa Stark in the violent and utterly compelling *Game Of Thrones*. In between the show's six seasons, Turner has also made strides into Hollywood with films such as *Barely Lethal*, co-starring Hailee Steinfeld and Jessica Alba, and next month she'll join Jennifer Lawrence and Michael Fassbender as Jean Grey in *X-Men: Apocalypse*, the latest in a colossally successful superhero franchise.

The crush of attention surrounding *Game Of Thrones* has become so huge that upcoming plot lines are guarded like state secrets. At the time of our meeting, the media and fan forums alike are churning out theories about Season 6. Some say Sophie's character is pregnant after

being brutally raped by her husband, a scene we discuss later, and of course there's the mystery over whether Jon Snow (Kit Harington) is still alive – he appeared to meet a grisly end at the close of Season 5, but has since been spotted near the set in Ireland. 'He's dead...' is all Turner will say. Describing herself as a 'big blabbermouth', she tells me she's resorted to only reading parts of the script that involve her directly to avoid any inadvertent slips. Luckily there are plenty of other things we can talk about. **Congrats on your new X-Men role. How was it working with the great Jennifer Lawrence?**

'Despite being one of the most famous actresses in the world, she's so down-to-earth. One day I got sick and she was looking after me, constantly checking up on me, getting me tablets. She was like a big sister. I was also nervous about meeting Michael Fassbender, but [on my first day on set] I looked over and he gave me the middle finger, jokingly, and I thought, "We're going to get on."' **What did you do when you first heard you'd been cast?**

'I rang my mum and she started crying, then I started crying. It was crazy. Then my phone started blowing up!' **You've been acting since you were 13. Has it ever been tricky switching from being on set to ordinary life?**

'You really find out who your friends are. [When I started *Game Of Thrones*] people would appear out of the blue and say, "Hey, how you doing?" I remember coming back to school after filming one day and this girl, who was not my friend, took a photo of us and put it on the internet with the caption, "Me with Sansa." Not even Sophie! I was like, "Come on, are you kidding? We don't like each other!"' **Do you still have good friends from home?**

'I've kept all of my best school friends. They're all at university and none are interested in what I do. Only one friend, India, watches the show. It is really refreshing because when I come home we don't talk about work.'

Your Game Of Thrones character Sansa is having a terrible time at the moment...

'She's probably had the most brutal time of anyone ▶



on the show: attempted gang rape, being betrothed to a sadistic psychopath, then getting married to another sadistic psychopath...'

Was filming the Season 5 rape scene very difficult?

'It was awkward and there's no getting around that, whether you're best mates with the actor or not. It crossed a line of friendship and it felt so disgusting, because I felt I was really letting it happen. I can't even begin to imagine what it feels like to really be in that situation. I always felt like I was in a secure environment on set, but for those few seconds it was the most terrifying thing I've ever experienced. From an actor's perspective, though, those kind of scenes are so meaty and really exciting.'

What did you and Iwan Rheon [who plays Ramsay Snow] do after filming?

'We were like, "Let's go to the bar for a drink to get our minds off it."'

You've become an adult while playing Sansa. Do you feel merged with her?

'I feel like I know her better than I know myself, which is strange, because I totally don't know who I am at this point [laughs]. When I'm on set walking around, I find myself becoming her and then go, "Oh, that's the character. Step out of that." I am actually having an identity crisis at the moment.'

You recently posted a very funny Instagram picture of you sitting in front of Ryan Gosling at the Screen Actors Guild Awards...

'That was one of the greatest moments of my life. I'm now terrified that I'm going to do a project with him, though. Maybe he's seen the Instagram... I always do this. I'm never cool around celebrities.'

Has anyone else made you weak at the knees?

'I met President Obama at the White House Correspondents' Dinner last year. He said, "I love your show," and I was like, "I love you so much." I started crying, it was so embarrassing. Then he goes, "I hope you don't die [in the show]," and I was like, "Me, too." I was so overwhelmed, but it was amazing.'

How do you deal with the fame side of your job?

'I'm so bad on the red carpet. It's just not me. I find it terrifying, the most demoralising thing in the world. People are shouting at you and it's very uncomfortable. My stylist said, "Sophie, we're going to take you to the school of How To Teach Stars To Stand Well," because apparently I just can't pose!'

Do you ever feel that you've missed out on being a normal teenager?

'I definitely missed out on a proper education. I loved school but had to quit at 17. I wanted to go to university to study psychology and history. I'm not at a stage in my career where I can afford to stop acting and go to college, but hopefully I will when I've done a few more films.'

That's what Emma Watson and Natalie Portman did...

'But they're far more intelligent than I can ever hope to be!'



Clockwise from above: with Peter Dinklage (Tyrion) in *Game Of Thrones*; as Jean Grey in the forthcoming *X-Men: Apocalypse*; on the dreaded red carpet earlier this year at the SAG Awards



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You've bought a flat in London – that's not something many people your age can do.

'It's small and modest, but it's a place of my own and it's amazing. I worked hard for it and it's the first big purchase I've made. I love inviting friends round for dinner.'

Is it hard to have relationships if you're travelling a lot?

'It is difficult to date someone from home because I'm always flying all over the place and can't hold a relationship down. [Boyfriends] don't understand when I have to cancel dates, so it's easier to date people in the industry. But that's also difficult because you could be doing one project in England and another in Australia or somewhere.'

Are you seeing anyone now?

'I'm single... I have a date tonight!' ■

Game Of Thrones Season 6 starts on Monday 25 April exclusively on Sky Atlantic. X-Men: Apocalypse is released in the UK on 18 May.