

EXCLUSIVE

# Underneath

*BANSHEE*'s badass beauty,  
**Ivana Milicevic**,  
gives us the uncut version

WORDS BY VANESSA PASCALE

PHOTO CREDIT JIM JORDAN



it All



As Ivana Milicevic walks through the front door of SoHo's Mercer Kitchen, I walk toward her and introduce myself. Bundled up in a coat, Ivana is fresh-faced with her long cappuccino-colored hair loose. We find out that the kitchen is no longer serving --it's a couple of hours before dinner-- so we go across the street to Lure Fishbar. We settle into a comfortable crescent-shaped booth, remove our coats, and immediately order hot toddies, per Ivana's request. I tell her that I just finished watching the second season of *BANSHEE*, the Cinemax original series she plays the lead in, right before I got here. "Do you like the show?" she asks, "It's crazy." Her face is aglow at the mention of it.

*BANSHEE* is a dark drama where the sexual liaisons are as prevalent as the blood shed. Ivana plays Ana/Carrie Hopewell, who is on the run from her father Rabbit after a diamond heist gone bad. She relocates to the corrupt Amish town Banshee to start a new life, while her accomplice/lover Lucas Hood takes the fall and goes to prison. Fifteen years later, Lucas is released and finds Carrie, who is now a mother of two and wife. "I feel like my character's primary objective is love, so I can relate to that because I love, love so much. Other than that I don't like violence. I don't like to beat people up. However, I could if I had to, but I've never had to. I'm a lover," Ivana comments on how she relates to Carrie.

Ivana credits her toughness to being a combination of an immigrant, a "big sister" and eastern European, the latter meaning, "I got a little crazy in me." And once you see her in action on *BANSHEE*, you will definitely want to stay on her good side. Her most physical and dramatic role to-date, Carrie is a grand departure from her small sexy-girl-roles in films like *Love Actually*, *Paycheck*, *Casino Royale*. In *BANSHEE*, Ivana wields weapons and launches into her combat scenes like a trained assassin. In other words, she is completely badass and looks amazing doing it. *BANSHEE*'s multi-dimensional characters are gripping and evocative -- you will cringe during their beatings, and shed tears over their injustices.

Our hot toddies arrive. "You've never had one?" she asks me. I haven't. "Mark my words, this is going to be your jam all winter long." She lifts up the snifter to admire the golden elixir garnished with cloves, an orange wedge and cinnamon stick, and jokes with our waiter about wanting to offer him a taste of the fanciest, most glorious hot toddy she has ever encountered. We order salmon avocado rolls and several pieces of spicy tuna on crispy rice, which is what Ivana had initially wanted from Mercer Kitchen. "How good is that crispy rice situation?" she asks. We prattle on about our affinity for the dish and our favorite Los Angeles sushi spots, then make our way back to *BANSHEE*.

Comfortable in her skin, Ivana has no qualms about nudity or rolling around in the sheets to keep Carrie true to form, as an unrestrained, passionate woman. "I'm more surprised with how people have a bigger problem with the sex than the crazy violence. I don't get it. Look, its racy

all across the board," she points out. "So, how do you feel about it?" she asks me --the first of many questions. She is so taken with this character that she had to share it with her family. Yes, she watches it with her mom, dad and younger brothers, Filip and Tomo (guitarist in Thirty Seconds to Mars). "I just prepped them," she says nonchalantly.

As we talk about season two, I tell her I haven't seen season one yet. "Oh, no way. You gotta see season one. Season one is my favorite because we were so fucking wild. You could see the love story," she coos. "If you enjoyed just seeing season two, you've got to see season one. Do you have a boyfriend? 'Cause this is totally a thing that boys and girls watch together." When she finds out that I am single, the focus turns to me. "We'll find you one. Actually, I might have someone for you." I give her a skeptical look. "I'm serious..." She lingers on the subject for awhile, asking me questions --seemingly genuinely interested in playing matchmaker. I am amused, yet incredulous as many people have good intentions but fail to follow through. Unlike many of my interviews, we have an actual conversation versus me peppering her with question after question and her simply answering. Her inquisitiveness is both refreshing and charming.

Our conversation finds its way to astrological signs. The 40-year-old beauty is a Taurus like her boyfriend, whom she met in New York after season one. "All we do is cuddle," she says, suggesting that being affectionate is a trait common with Taurians. She attributes her proclivity for astrology to living in Los Angeles for about 22 years. She lived in New York partially during that time, she adds. This year, more of her time has been spent in New York (where her boyfriend lives) versus L.A., aside from when filming on location. The mention of L.A. prompts her to pull out a bottle of digestive enzymes from her purse. She swallows the pill and offers me one. "It just helps you digest your food. It's good for you," she says as she hands me the pill. "I always get accused of being "L.A." with that."

The topic transitions to favorite TV shows, queried by Ivana. I laugh as it's a question I planned to ask her. Hers include, *Game of Thrones*, *Mad Men* and *Orange is the New Black*. There is a bit of struggle to get our words out over the large pieces of fish and crispy rice, which we both find comical. "I've never actually had an interview while we eat, but it kinda makes it also more, I dunno, natural. I feel like I'm on a blind date," she says. From there it's onto favorite movies. Ivana lists them off: *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Her*. "I love *Her*! So much. I'm also happy that they're tackling subject matters like that: consciousness. In this case it was artificial intelligence, but just consciousness and levels of consciousness. I loved it."

She asks for mine, and I name *Just Like Heaven* -- the film she appeared in with Reese Witherspoon and Mark Ruffalo. Ivana's character, Katrina plays the sexually charged neighbor of Mark's character who doles out hilarious, random lines like, "I'd get on the phone and I'd be like, 'Hello,

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Osama! Communism is so over. Give your people toilet paper!” Knowing that she started out doing improv and stand-up, I ask if any of these lines were improv. “She has no idea what she’s talking about,” Ivana says about Katrina. “That stuff was actually improv. All improv’d. Things like, ‘Every time I meet a guy. Lesbian.’ All that. That director [Mark Waters] I’d worked with before in *Head Over Heels*, and he just let me have my own takes.”

Her stint in comedy, before transitioning into acting, was short-lived, due to its over-the-top competitiveness. But Ivana is not averse to working hard --citing that everything is competitive. “I’m not very competitive though; I really believe that what’s meant to be yours is yours... As much as I love this business, it’s not the most important thing in my life. This is my job, which I love and respect and I work hard. But I would never be interested in walking over someone to get what I wanted... If I didn’t get a job and some other girl got the job, good for her, it was hers to get,” she philosophizes.

None of that competitiveness exists on the set of *BANSHEE*. Ivana’s character primarily interacts with the men on the show. With the men, she sweats, bruises, bleeds, and cries, she tells me. Despite the fact that the women don’t spend time together onscreen, they are extremely close off-screen. “We love each other so much that we’re dying for scenes together. We’re a bunch of really girly, girl-power, girl-love girls... The girls are my sisters. I love them. I don’t have any sisters and I’m the eldest one on the show, so I take them all under my wing. I just want everyone to be their most awesome on the show.” In season three, premiering January 9th at 10 pm on Cinemax, Ivana finally gets the chance to act with the women. This season, Carrie is not happy. “There’s not a choice Carrie can make that everybody’s happy with. Ever... She’s kind of mad at the world, because she can’t win. So, she’s going to make really bad choices...”

Ivana returns us to her matchmaking pursuits and devises a plan. “Are

you interested?” she asks --her eyes wide with excitement. She continues to ask me more questions. “See, I want to interview you. This sounds interesting,” she says about a story I’m telling her. What is interesting is Ivana’s year ahead, which not only brings season three of *BANSHEE*, but the release of two of her movies.

Ivana plays a biographer to Bill Murray’s “gabillionaire” character in Cameron Crowe’s still-untitled film starring Bradley Cooper and Rachel McAdams. “I got to play with Billy Murray a lot. I’m a little bit in love with Bill Murray, to be honest,” she says with a smile. “The movie is about space, and the future, but not the future as in sci-fi. It’s set in Hawaii on a military base... Every day I’d just show up and we’d improv some things or the camera would come up to me and say, ‘Say this.’ So I did. It was like that. It was pretty crazy.” And there’s also the indie film, *Alone*, in which Ivana plays a call girl.

Working as an actress never seemed out of reach to Ivana. There was never a Plan B. Her mentality is, why not? “People do this all the time. Why not me, too? Now, there might be a degree of success, a degree of fame, a degree of prestige. This is as hard as any other job,” she says humbly. “This is not harder than being a writer. That’s got to be hard, isn’t it?” I tell her that I believe that her field may be more challenging, and she throws out a few rational reasons to convince me that being a writer is just as tough. “Everyone is not doing that, that might want to be,” she says. “It’s degrees. I haven’t won an Oscar, but I am doing what I love,” she says thoughtfully. And we love watching her. Her self-effacing responses and concern for others is a testament to the type of person she is. Though intensely beautiful, sexy, and strong, she’s not the woman who will undercut you to get ahead, she’s the woman you want in your corner. Yes, to protect you, but mostly so she can rub some of that amazing confidence and wisdom of hers off on you.

Don’t miss season three of *BANSHEE* premiering January 9th at 10 pm on Cinemax and follow Ivana on Twitter @ivanamilicevic. **ML**

# These are a few of Ivana's Favorite Things

## BIGGEST INDULGENCE

"I can spend hours at the Korean spas in L.A. Also, beds. I always have these natural horse hair beds. My favorite bed is the Hästens bed. Whenever I'm in a store and somebody's trying it out I start selling them, because I really believe, I also believe in the company. And I love gold. Every year, I just got myself --you can't see it, 'cause it's freezing-- a body chain." She then shows me her Cartier Love Yellow Gold Bangle bracelet from her boyfriend.

## SWEET LIFE

Ivana grew up with her parents running a Dunkin Donuts in Detroit, Michigan, until they relocated to California. This self-proclaimed sugar addict, doesn't care for donuts anymore and says she isn't doing dessert these days, (she is in phenomenal shape!) but confessed to indulging in a spoonful or two of Nutella. "Just that or two. Not one, not a chance. I don't know if you thought a teaspoon, 'cause I didn't mean a teaspoon. I love it... I wish they had Nutella chocolate bars that are just made out of Nutella, but a little harder."

## MIAMI LOVE

"I love Miami. I love that's it warm and humid. I love the food and the music down there. It's the Cuban element, it's just so spicy. I love it. I stay at the Hilton Bentley 'cause it's off the strip, but you can still hit all of those places. There's that delicious ice cream 4D --the best sorbets you've ever had in your life. Nothing else is like Miami."

## CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

"Christmas Eve is a really big deal in my house; it's usually when we would open presents. Christmas Day would just be about family. On Christmas Eve we have fish. It's a very simple meal and I love it so much. They're very kind of peasant-y traditions. When I was younger in Bosnia, I remember having to put my shoes out for St. Nicholas to put things in but I don't know why he didn't come to America but he didn't." We did that, too, I tell her. We go back and forth about our experience with the shoe tradition. "I love it. I love it. You ask interesting questions," she muses.

