

Keeping her cool among men

Kate Beckinsale enjoys playing a strong female character, writes **Sally Browne**

SHE might be from chilly England, but nothing could prepare Kate Beckinsale for the minus 48C weather she experienced in remote Canada while shooting the film *Whiteout*.

"I totally arrogantly thought, I come from England, I know what cold is like, I'm just going to wear an extra pair of tights under my jeans. Sorted," says the statuesque star. "That didn't work out."

But since getting a film crew to Antarctica (where the film is set) was an impossibility, the cast, which included Aussie newcomer Alex O'Loughlin, had to head to the icy slopes of northern Manitoba.

The film, based on a graphic novel, is about a US marshal (played by Kate) working on a remote base. Trying to put her own difficult history behind her, she is called on to solve the continent's first murder. Beckinsale, 35, who has done her share of butt-kicking and gun-slugging in films like *Underworld* and *Van Helsing*, was attracted to the role, if not for its icy setting, for its strong female character.

"I think when I very first started in the movie business 105 years ago, the only one that I could think of at the

time was Sigourney Weaver (in *Alien*)," she says. "It seemed like a one-off. It was so brilliant as a girl to see a woman in a movie like that."

"I like to think I've done my bit." The ratio of women on a base in Antarctica is, apparently, 200:1. In winter, it's 400:1. That made for an interesting setting to tell a story. And the producer's enthusiasm was infectious, says Kate.

Having four brothers and often being one of the few women on a movie set, Beckinsale knows how to hold her own among blokes.

The movie is also a coup for graphic novel fans. Although Beckinsale is more likely to have her nose in a regular book, her husband, Len Wiseman, director of the *Underworld* series, is a big fan of comics.

"My husband's obsessed with comic books and graphic novels," she says. "I can't keep up. We have to go to a comic book store every week. There are piles and piles."

Her *Whiteout* co-star Alex O'Loughlin thinks that's cool.

"I loved comics as a kid, Phantom and Lobo," the 33-year-old says. "And then I got to 21 and the shame of carrying them around ... (I stopped), I'm not man enough."



Cold snap: Kate Beckinsale's latest movie is set in Antarctica

For O'Loughlin, *Whiteout* marks one of the Sydneysider's first major motion pictures. The NIDA graduate has already made himself a face to watch in CBS medical drama *Three Rivers* and is scheduled to play Steve McGarrett in the reboot of *Hawaii 5-0*.

He's used to putting on an American accent, but he gets to play an Aussie party boy in *Whiteout*.

"Most of the characters are not Australian, and when I play an Aussie I feel I'm cheating in a way," says the former squeeze of Holly Valance. "I prefer not to play Australians because

it's one step closer to me. I would prefer to be as far as I can from me in my work."

"So would I," jokes his colleague, Beckinsale.

The laughter was flowing on the *Whiteout* set and the cast and crew got to know each other well during filming in 2007. The isolated life of a base is something, as actors, they can relate to.

"It's something we do cope with working in this industry," says O'Loughlin. "Family time and times with loved ones becomes so sacred. When you do what we do you go away for six months at a time and you're in strange and isolated places like Gimli in Manitoba where there's one hotel which doesn't have a very good chef."

Beckinsale feels differently.

"I don't feel I have to be around people all the time," she says in her glossy English tones. "I think anyone who's had a baby, and looked after a baby that has been awake for about four years, doesn't mind a bit of time on their own. But I do agree with Alex to an extent, that you get that disenfranchised feeling where you're out of your element."

Beckinsale, who has been acting since the early '90s, says she would like to do a rom-com next, though the scripts she has been handed are more rom than com.

Whiteout is out now on DVD.

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