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# Los Angeles Times | ENTERTAINMENT

## The Sunday Conversation: Rachel Weisz

In taking on the true story of former U.N. police monitor Kathryn Bolkovac in 'The Whistleblower,' the actress tries to capture the spirit of a woman who uncovers corruption and misconduct.



Rachel Weisz at the Andaz Hotel in San Diego. (Kirk McKoy / Los Angeles Times)

By Irene Lacher, Special to the Los Angeles Times

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Rachel Weisz, 41, digs into intense territory in her latest film, "The Whistleblower," opening Friday. Weisz, who recently married James Bond, a.k.a. Daniel Craig, plays the real-life Kathryn Bolkovac, a U.N. police monitor in Bosnia who exposes a sex trafficking ring involving employees of private military contractor DynCorp.

### **How did you get involved with "The Whistleblower"?**

I was first sent it by Amy Kaufman, the producer of "The Constant Gardener." And it must have been a while ago, because my son is now 5, and I was pregnant. I remember reading it and thinking that this was one of the most brilliant pieces of material, but I think that being pregnant, I just couldn't get my head around it. And the strange thing was, about two years later, I still hadn't forgotten it. And I called Amy up and I said, "Listen, I haven't been able to forget this material. Has it ever been made?" She was like, "Hmm. Hold on a minute." I don't know where it was at that moment, but she got it back for me. I was very haunted by it.

### **So it came to you and then you went after it.**

That's right. I think people would say it's dark — I don't know what the right word is — but at that time it was too intense for me to deal with.

### **Did you meet Kathryn Bolkovac?**

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I did, only after we started filming. She came to the set in Romania, and I spent every waking moment I could with her. There was also a lot of footage of her, which Larysa [Kondracki], the writer-director, had made when she interviewed her about the whole story. So I had a sense of Kathy's accent and of her spirit. We look different. She's blond and much more voluptuous than I am and much taller. But I wanted to be able to capture her spirit.

**There are only a couple of users' reviews on IMDB, and one assumed the film was fiction. Obviously that person wasn't paying attention, but part of it may also be that what she did was larger than life. You don't meet many people who are that brave.**

That is exactly it. That's why I wanted to make this film, because she's extraordinary. She thinks she's ordinary. When I met her she said, "Look, I was doing my job. I saw injustice, and I was doing my job." You think of the other thousands of people there — of whom I would have been one if I were there, I'm not that brave. I would have turned a blind eye. But what's extraordinary about Kathy is it wasn't that she was trying to do something good or important, this is her nature. It's a thriller, but to me it's a character study, because it's her character that led her to do what she did. If she sees something she believes is wrong, she doesn't have a choice. She just has to go after it. I think it's probably an affliction. It

must be hard to be like that.

**You won an Oscar for playing another humanitarian, albeit fictional, in "The Constant Gardener." Do you think art should inspire action?**

Gosh, I would never make that statement. I think it's wonderful if art can inspire people, but I don't really see it as a piece of dogma or a call to action. I see it as a celebration of this human being, who is more noble than most of us, who in circumstances where most people would turn a blind eye didn't. There's something about inspirational stories that give me hope that on planet Earth there are these extraordinary individuals who will make a difference, who will stand up for what is just and right. I personally find their stories inspiring. They don't inspire me to act. Listen, drama can be completely apolitical and inspiring, but if it happens to be about something important too plus a character study, for an actor it's like, whoa, it doesn't get any better.

**I thought it was interesting that Vanessa Redgrave, who's known for her commitment to human rights, plays a U.N. human rights official in the film. When you were growing up in the business, did you look up to her?**

Yes, she's one of the greats. She's a very inspiring actress. She's quite a dangerous actress, I think.

**What do you mean by that?**

Her acting is wild. Just being in a scene with her is a deliciously dangerous place to be. You just don't really know what she's going to do next. She's just very free and forceful. She's very powerful.

**How does portraying real people compare for you to playing a fictional character?**

In "Enemy at the Gates," I think [Weisz's character, Tania Chernova] was an amalgamation of a few different people, and of course none of them was living, so that was in the realm of fiction set in the Second World War, so there were things that would have been accurate. It wasn't fantasy, exactly. This was very different because it's such recent history — it's the late '90s, it's someone who's alive to tell me her story. It felt very vivid. It was a minute ago historically. I'd never done anything like that. She's not a household name. I wasn't playing someone who everyone knows who that is. There's a responsibility — the more I got to know Kathy, the more I wanted to honor her. She's got a real sense of humor, and I think there's a line in the film where my co-worker says, "Why did you come here?" And I said, "I heard the food was really great." Obviously the food isn't great in war-torn Bosnia. That was an improv because I just tuned into Kathy. She's very dry and kind of fun.

**The next film you have coming out is "Dream House," which is being released at the end of September. And that's directed by Jim Sheridan? That's a surprise because it's a horror film, right?**

It's not like "Dawn of the Dead." It's not like horror, horror, horror. It's a suspense thriller with kind of horror traits. I'm good at selling tickets, aren't I? It is a kind of horror film, but it's a Jim Sheridan. It's not a schlocky horror film.

**I wouldn't think you'd be in a schlocky horror film.**

I might do. "The Mummy" was kind of schlocky. It was fun. I loved that movie.

**And you filmed a Terrence Malick film. That's in the can, right?**

Yes, that's being edited. And it's untitled. He's one of my heroes.

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