



The Name's Munn. **OLIVIA MUNN.**

That piercing stare says modern-day Bond girl, but make no mistake: She's nobody's sidekick. In *X-Men: Apocalypse*, Olivia Munn emerges—front and center—as one of the Marvel Universe's fiercest characters. Still, it's her off-screen evolution that's the stuff of legend.

By Dibs Baer



FASHION EDITOR: JACQUELINE AZRIA, HAIR: JOHN D FOR TRESEMME/FORWARD ARTISTS, MAKEUP: SHANE PAISH FOR DIOR/WALTER SCHUPPER MANAGEMENT, MANICURE: LISA PENA-WONG FOR DIOR VERNIS/OPUS BEAUTY, DUSKII CROP TOP

Every superhero has an origin story—a knotty, sometimes mysterious account of how she transformed from Average Jane to Almighty Ass Kicker. Through it, we discover what drives her (harnessing a supernatural ability, pursuing her destiny, enacting plain old-fashioned vengeance), and we can't help but be captivated as she struggles to reconcile her otherworldly powers with her humanity.

It's a dramatic yet fitting parallel for Olivia Munn's rise from hosting a campy variety show to her role as sword-wielding, telepathic assassin Psylocke in *X-Men: Apocalypse*. As the 35-year-old actress hits one steely-eyed pose after another during our Los Angeles cover shoot, she has the whole crew mesmerized. But the instant there's a break and the crowd disperses, Olivia's gaze softens and she becomes a quote-unquote Normal Person again, swapping house-buying stories with the photog as she throws a robe over her bikini.

Olivia's come a long way from her debut on G4 Network's dude-centric comedy series *Attack of the Show!*, where she once jumped into a chocolate-cream pie while wearing a French maid costume. It's easy to dismiss those cheeky stunts as objectifying, but as Olivia points out, every sketch subverted the gamer girl cliché: She wasn't there to be ogled—she was always in on the joke. “A big part of having a good sense of self-worth came from my time at G4,” she says of the now-defunct gaming channel. “You think of the stereotype of the male-dominated world, where they just want the girl to be bouncing on a trampoline. But we poked fun at that idea. It proved to me that you can embrace all parts of yourself without having to diminish another part.”

That revelation is why she's been able to slide seamlessly between lighter comedic gigs like *Magic Mike* and sharper turns in Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* and HBO's *The Newsroom*. And now, it makes her taking on Psylocke total kismet—both are bold, enigmatic, and keenly observant women who can't be pinned down. The character is one she's idolized since childhood, and it crystallizes the strongest parts of Olivia's own personality and talents. “Even though she's always drawn in a sexual way, she always has substantive plotlines,” Olivia observes. “What she looked like became secondary because she was lethal. She is such a badass. And smart.” Hmm, sounds like another lady we admire, now doesn't it?



VOL. 1: CRAFTING AN ORIGINAL

Without Psylocke's mind-reading prowess, Olivia had to rely on a different all-knowing authority to help hone her drive and instinct for success. As the second youngest of five, Olivia grew up in a thrifty military family headed up by her Chinese mother, who moved from Vietnam to Oklahoma (where Olivia was born) after the Vietnam War. The matriarch instilled a fierce work ethic early on. “All the kids in my family were honors students, but it was so natural for them,” she says, explaining that she didn't feel like her brain was wired for

schoolwork the way her siblings' were. She kept up well enough through middle school until a teacher called home to say she was failing honors algebra. Instead of going ballistic, her mom asked what it'd take to get Olivia that elusive A. “He said that I'd have to make 100 percent on every homework assignment, test, and pop quiz,” Olivia recalls. “Every day I'd come home and she'd say, ‘Did you do your homework?’ And I'd say, ‘Yes.’ And she'd say, ‘Let's do it again.’ By the end of the semester, I had an A. That stayed with me.”

Mama Munn also drove home a guiding principle that has helped Olivia avoid getting caught in the Hollywood trappings that screw over many burgeoning stars. “We didn't grow up with money, but she always said, ‘It's not how much you make; it's how much you save. Get your education, then have experiences,’” recalls Olivia. So when Olivia landed her gigs

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at G4 and Comedy Central, she stashed her paychecks instead of pissing them away. She'd seen actor friends take whatever parts were offered to them so they could have the funds to keep up appearances.

Her own financial savvy meant she could be picky with her next moves. She scored a plum correspondent spot on the award-winning *Daily Show* in 2010, and she knew that it was exactly the kind of experience her mom had been talking about, so any projects that would take away from her time on the program had to be worth it. “What I wanted to do was play strong, smart characters who were unapologetic,” she says. Despite being offered high-profile parts that came with butloads of money, she turned down anything that didn't feel right to her, leading to clashes with her reps. “They wanted me to play the girlfriend or the bad girl who takes another girl's boyfriend away,” she explains. “But I didn't want to do roles that only revolved around a man or were always in service of a man. Her energy was always about him. She only existed because he existed.”

Two years into her *Daily Show* tenure, Olivia heard Aaron Sorkin was casting the role of financial reporter Sloan Sabbith on *The Newsroom*, and she started passing on everything else in case she got called for an audition. When her resolve began to waiver, Jon Stewart issued a crucial reminder of why it pays to be confident in yourself: “He said to me, ‘If you bet on yourself and win, you win big.’ That conversation has been the compass for my career.” So she held tough, and whaddaya know, landed the part, which then teed up major opps like

GOOD TASTE Aaron and Olivia are on the same team re: healthy noshes. They devour organic smoothies and low-carb Mexican taco salads with lean ground turkey; he even drinks her homemade almond milk. “He's thoughtful about it, but he's not precious about it,” she says.

X-Men and developing a new show about 1970s female sportscasters. “I'm trying to create projects that are meaningful to me, that people will connect with,” she says of her producing ambitions. “Because I've been part of projects like that, and it's so satisfying.”

VOL. 2: FIGHTING EVIL

When you're a brainy bombshell like Olivia, you've got plenty of villains desperate to take you down a notch or 10. In preparing to play Psylocke, Olivia spent seven hours a day training—sword fighting, tae kwon do, stunt work—which caused the already lithe brunette to lose about 12 pounds. Strangers from around the Internet noticed her face seemed more angular and accused her of undergoing plastic surgery. “The weight loss was unintentional and happened in a healthy way. All I wanted to do was to learn how to fight,” she explains. But after a lot of horrible comments on her Instagram posts, she felt bullied into listing the exact reasons her face changed, like dark-spot-fading pads to even her skin tone and brow shaping to soften her arches. (Is *trollsplaining* a word yet? Who knew a little tweezing could be so scandalous?!)

Sadly, Internet randos are just the start. Last year, dozens of online sportswriters jumped on a tweet from an angry Packers fan, who blamed his team's losing streak on Olivia's relationship with their quarterback, Aaron Rodgers: “Ever since it came out about Olivia Munn and Rodgers, and her spouting off on TV about their sex life, Rodgers is *not* a good QB,” the cheesehead ranted. Before long, the Web was blowing up with headlines like “Some Packers fans are starting to think Aaron Rodgers has an Olivia Munn problem.”

The “news” stories infuriated Olivia, who, BTW, has a degree in journalism. “I called out Fox, ESPN, and the *Washington Post* and asked, ‘What happened to the vetting process?’ I sent them a link and said, ‘You gave this person a platform. You called him a fan and turns out he is a bigot.’” (She'd used her own reporting skills to track the guy down and found a blog where he'd posted racist and homophobic comments.)

Friends had warned Olivia that she'd face backlash if she spoke out, but she didn't care. “Men are not told to think twice before

attacking, but women are told to think twice before defending ourselves. I'd much rather go down and lose the battle being who I am,” she explains. Preach!

VOL. 3: PROTECTING THE INNOCENT

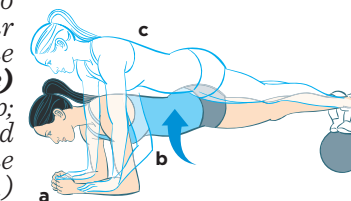
As awe-inspiring as superheroes are, part of what makes them so appealing—why we connect and empathize with them—is that they face very real, very human challenges. Sure, Olivia's steadfast and mighty in the way she stands up for herself, but she readily admits all that vitriol takes a toll on her, as does the stress of her increasingly demanding schedule. For her, it manifests in serious diagnosed anxiety, which in turn triggers her obsessive-compulsive disorder in the form of trichotillomania, in which she pulls out her eyelashes. “It's gotten bad at times—whenever my body is overstimulated, from both good and bad things,” she says. “And since OCD is coming from a place where you need to feel safe, it's harder to break the habit in somebody.”

She's visited a hypnotist several times but still struggles. In fact, at the shoot, there was a gap in her lashes that the glam team filled in with temporary ones. “The biggest misconception is that I can control it,” she says. “It's like telling somebody to go through a haunted house and not be scared.” Olivia knows one tool for creating more understanding is talking about her conditions openly. Recently, Olivia was at the doctor's office sitting in the waiting room and immediately keyed into the 10-year-old girl sitting next to her, who was also missing eyelashes. “Her mom was telling me she got picked on at school, so I took off my own fake lash to show her I had it too,” she recalls. “I think it's important to normalize anxiety and show it isn't some deep, dark secret.” ■

KILLER SHAPE This 20-minute workout from Olivia's *X-Men* trainer Karine Lemieux uses medicine and stability balls to increase core activation and fat-blasting potential. Follow this routine three times a week to torch cals and trim your waistline.

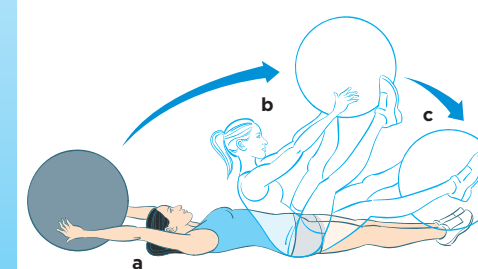
MEDICINE BALL UP-DOWN

Start in a plank position with your feet on a medicine ball and your forearms on the floor (a). Push up onto your left hand, then your right hand, pressing your arms straight into a pushup position (b). Reverse the movement, placing your left forearm on the floor (c) and then your right to return to start. That's one rep; do eight. (Make it harder: In the pushup position, add the same up-down pattern with your feet—place one on the floor, then the other, then lift them onto the ball.)



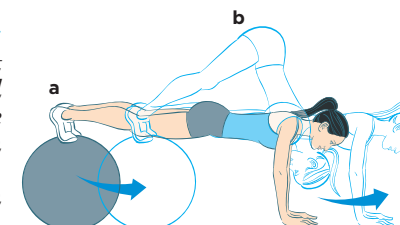
STABILITY BALL V-PASS

Start by lying faceup on the floor, holding a stability ball overhead, your legs together and extended straight on the floor (a). In one motion, brace your core and lift your arms and legs off the ground, placing the ball between your feet (b). Squeeze the ball with your legs and lower your arms and legs back to the floor (c). Repeat, passing the ball back to your hands. That's one rep; do 10.



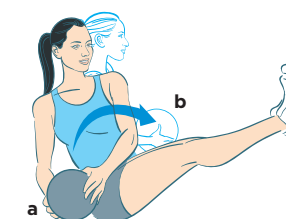
MODIFIED INCHWORM WITH STABILITY BALL

Start in a pushup position with your feet on a stability ball (a). “Step” your feet toward your hands by raising your hips to bring the ball closer to your torso until your legs are in a pike position (b). Keeping your legs straight, walk your hands away from the ball to return to a pushup position (c). That's one rep; do five.



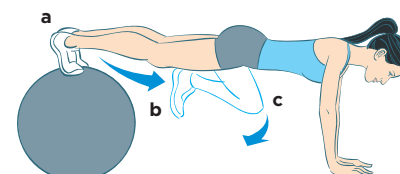
MEDICINE BALL V-SIT WITH ROTATION

Grab a medicine ball and sit on the floor, then lift your legs off the floor, keeping them straight and together. From that position, rotate your shoulders to lower the medicine ball to one side of your body (a); that's one rep. Reverse the movement to bring the ball to the other side (b), and continue alternating for 30 total reps. (Make it easier: Bend your knees to 90 degrees or place your feet on the floor.)



CROSS-BODY MOUNTAIN CLIMBER WITH STABILITY BALL

Start in a pushup position with your feet on a stability ball (a). Lift your left foot off the ball and bring your knee toward your chest, keeping your back flat (b), then twist your hips to bring your knee toward your right elbow (c). Pause, then slowly reverse the movement to return to start. That's one rep; do four, then repeat on the other side.



VICTORIA'S SECRET BIKINI TOP, LISA MARIE FERNANDEZ WETSUIT, FASHIONABLE HALF CIRCLE NECKLACE, SCOSHA CHARM NECKLACE, MOVADO WATCH