



A Dash of Fresh 'Pepper'

'X'-person Rebecca Romijn lands in a prime-time comedy.

BY MARC PEYSER AND SEAN SMITH

ACTORS CAN BE FANS, TOO, and they're not above lifting a memento—a prop, a costume—from the set once filming is over. When she finished her third "X-Men" movie, Rebecca Romijn walked off with an unusual keepsake: a bottle of blue paint. Technically, it's called *Mystique blue*, because it's the color of her scaly character, Mystique. Even stranger, Romijn still uses the stuff. You can see it in her new WB comedy, "Pepper Dennis," in which she plays a hard-charging, ridiculously glam TV reporter. In one episode, Pepper arrives at the scene of a bank robbery and interviews the security guard about the exploding dye packs hidden to catch a thief. She reaches for a stack of bills on the ground when the guard stops her. "The bomb inside that puppy has not detonated," he says, which of course means in 15 seconds—boom. Pepper is splattered with *Mystique blue*. "It was such a nice little cathartic wink-wink, you know?" says Romijn. "And the shot of my feet in the shower with the blue paint going down the drain, it was, like, OK, now we can get started with our show."

Romijn probably didn't need to be so literal. The departure from "X-Men" will be obvious, and probably a little shocking, to fans who tune into "Pepper Dennis." Instead of playing a menacing mutant with

impressive cleavage but few lines, Pepper Dennis is a clumsy motor-mouth who wants desperately to succeed at work but fears that she'll never find love. The show has the barbed but wispy sweetness of "Gilmore Girls," which it follows on Tuesday nights, and for an actress who's known as an action hero and a former model, Romijn is remarkably nimble as a comedienne. She falls down or gets dirty or humiliated at least twice an episode, and she's an adorable, if stunning, klutz. "She is glamorous and gorgeous, but she really wanted to play against that," says "Pepper" co-creator Aaron Harberts. "We have an episode where her cameraman's cable gets stuck in a revolving door and she's wedged in there for the entire press conference. Rebecca is always game for the physical fun."

Despite being six feet tall and blond, Romijn says she never really bought into her own beauty myth. "I always felt goofier, just because I was so much taller than everybody else, especially when I was in school," she says. "My pants were never



CURING THE MOVIE BLUES: As Mystique (above) and the salty Miss Dennis (top)

long enough." Supermodels always insist they're just like everyone else, but in Romijn's case it seems to be true. She leaves her bras lying around her trailer and ignores her constantly ringing cell phone when she's got a visitor. She's got a lanky, carefree charm, like the kind of girl who'd laugh so hard milk would come out of her nose—her nickname when she was growing up in Berkeley was the "jolly blonde giant." Romijn obviously doesn't believe the conventional wisdom that beautiful women can't be funny, or that actors do TV only when their movie careers stall. Hers is on the rise, but if "Pepper" is a hit, she'll be doing it for seven years. "I do kind of feel like this is my first adult job. Doing movies is like going off to summer camp," she says.

Her movie career, she says, came with a price. She blames it, in part, for the breakup of her seven-year marriage to actor John Stamos. "To have to keep re-establishing that 'couple' rhythm if you've been gone for months on end is really, really hard," says Romijn. So is having to talk about it once it's over, especially since she and Stamos were so public about their relationship. "It was so complicated, and people wanted an explanation and there isn't one," she says. "It's deep and it's complicated and it's nobody's business but ours." She's learned to guard her privacy, especially since she's engaged to another actor, Jerry O'Connell. "I'd like to talk about Jerry all day long, but I just can't. It's

too private," she says. Still, she can't help herself from divulging a few sweet details. For instance, when he's on hiatus from "Crossing Jordan," O'Connell drives her to and from work every day. "It's an extra hour or two that we get to spend together," she says. "We run lines and bounce ideas off each other. And it's really fun." Carpooling with Rebecca and Jerry—that's what passes for excitement when you're working 18-hour days on a new show. "I've already gotten the speech from Jerry where he says, 'You have to be able to go out and have a glass of wine and get 'Pepper Dennis,'" she says. "Aft not pepper, is the spice of life."