

MOVIE REVIEW

Garner's sex appeal can't save superhero saga lacking plot development



Jennifer Garner returns to the big screen for her role as Elektra, a superhero adapted from a Marvel Comics character. "Elektra" is the first action movie of the year.

PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

"Elektra" ★★ out of ☆☆☆☆

By JENNIFER FREEMAN THE MIX EDITOR

Comic-book movies are becoming the hottest ticket in Hollywood. With the "X-Men" and "Spider-Man" movies having achieved box-office success, Marvel is attempting to recreate more of its comic books into movie form. This success is not guaranteed, however — a certain amount of creativity and originality is necessary. The trailers for "Sin City" and "The Fantastic Four" look like they might achieve that combination and go beyond the standard fare. Unfortunately, "Elektra," the "Daredevil" spin-off, does not achieve any such greatness.

The makers of "Elektra" depend too much on special effects and cinematography, and hope the "eye

candy" factor will overcome the lacking storyline and acting abilities.

There is obviously an interesting story behind the Elektra character, as evidenced by the numerous flashbacks to her childhood. Unfortunately, the film does not explain these flashbacks, and the audience is left wondering about the factors that shaped this superhero. Jennifer Garner doesn't give much depth to Elektra. Her mediocre acting abilities don't allow for any range beyond the tortured soul of a superhero. In fact, the first half hour of the movie is spent drilling into the audience's head that Elektra is a tortured soul, she is all alone in the world, she kicks major butt and she's hot. These points were driven into the ground throughout the entire movie, but the reasons behind this character were never really explained.

The film's main storyline involves a young girl Abby, who has the potential to become an even greater force than Elektra. This girl, known as The Treasure, was the best character in the movie. For a

young actress, Kirsten Prout fleshed out the role as best as she could with what she was given. Once again, the script didn't allow for much explanation of Abby, so the audience was left wanting to know more of The Treasure's mythology.

Elektra is a hired assassin at the beginning of the movie, so it is hard to determine where the line is, but if Elektra is considered the "good guy" of the movie, the evil villain organization called The Hand would be the "bad guy." This group is made up of people named for their various abilities. Typhoid causes disease in anything she comes into contact with. Tattoo can make his tattoos, like a falcon or a wolf, come out of his skin and come to life. This group is searching for The Treasure to use her for evil, and Elektra is trying to protect her.

As a hired assassin, Elektra was sent to kill Abby and her father, Goran Visnjic. Of course her conscience prevails, and she ends up helping them. This wasn't revealed right away, but it was extremely obvious and there was no suspense in the

film at all. The audience always knows what is going to happen.

The problem with comic book movies is that they are so popular, studios are trying to churn them out as fast as possible. This makes for movies lacking in quality and riddled with holes. There are cool special effects and sexy characters, but the reason comic books are popular is because of the lore surrounding them. When they are recreated into movies, the audience wants to know the story along with the action. "Elektra" misses out on the opportunity to make a detailed interesting movie, and takes the easy route by focusing on the visuals.

In the last scene of the movie, Abby thanks Elektra for saving her life by saying, "You gave me back my life." Elektra responds with, "No, you gave me back mine." I was left wondering, "Who is going to give me back the last two hours of my life and my \$7?"

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecockfeatures@gwm.sc.edu

Chef adds dash of flair to TV

By HEATHER McPHERSON KRT CAMPUS

Alton Brown is the science teacher you dreamed about in high school: funny, yet focused; intense, yet far from irrational; and a bit wacky, yet focused on procedural protocol.

As host of the Food Network's popular "Good Eats" (8 a.m. Saturday and Sunday; 7 p.m. Monday through Friday; 10 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday), Brown is one part culinary instructor and one part mad scientist. Add a touch of Mel Brooks, and that formula is gold.

His audience ranges from children, to teens, to young adults and to seasoned cooks.

"I don't think too hard about why kids or adults enjoy the show," Brown said. "I'm just glad the show works and they watch. Some things are just plain voodoo, and kids are one of those things. Kids respond very well to information and knowledge. They aren't threatened by it. And I believe the more a kid gets invested in the cooking process, the more the kid might eat the food."

Brown — who is touring to promote his new book, "I'm Just Here For More Food" (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, \$32.50) — is not the typical Food Network host.

It's the science that sets him apart from the other Food Network stars. He doesn't just demonstrate recipes, he intricately and wryly explains why the bread crescendos or cracks, why the meringue wimps or weeps, and why the sauce curdles or coalesces.

A former cinematographer and video director, Brown spent much of his time between shoots watching television cooking shows, which he found to be as pallid as an uncooked roux.

The formulas for the shows he saw were accurate, but the programs lacked flair and flavor in production. Like a roux, things needed to be heated to get things going.

Convinced that he could do better, Brown trained at the New England Culinary Institute in Montpelier, Vt. Then, using his newly refined culinary skills, he developed "Good Eats." His new book is a "Good Eats" text that focuses on baking — well, actually mixing if you want to truly grasp the science.

"Everything that happens in baking is science, some of it is physics," Brown said. "The art of baking comes after you have made peace with the science."

The book took Brown much longer to write than expected.

"Halfway through I started over again," he said. "My approach was wrong. I realized I didn't know how to bake. Not that I didn't know how to actually bake, but from the perspective that I didn't have my head around the concept of baking."

"I realized that I was actually writing a book about mixing. When I started categorizing things by mixing methods, the baking book became clear."

This approach is part of the Alton Brown charm. Home cooks can have stacks of recipes, but without the respect for the process, it's a lot of words on paper and very little dinner.

"There's a lot of bad baking because elements of the recipe are difficult to describe. The (baking) recipes are not so much about ingredients as they are procedures," he said. "Actions matter and that's a hard thing to put into words."

These edible equations are a lot more than supper to Brown. As an adult, he came to understand how cookery can be a great teaching tool.

"I wish they had offered home economics when I attended high school, I might have done better in science and math. The science of baking gives equations context," he said.

"In biology they made me dissect a fetal pig — a skill I have never needed since. However, if they had made the class dissect a whole chicken — now there's a life skill."

Brown recently signed a three-year

contract with the Food Network to continue making "Good Eats" and handling play-by-play commentary on the new "Iron Chef America," which airs 9 p.m. Sundays. He also will start work on a two-hour special about road food.

"I'm going to travel Route 66 on a motorcycle — my other great passion — from coast to coast," Brown said. "Road food used to define American cuisine. It showcased the country's diversity. We're losing more and more of these places, and I'm going out in search of what's there."

But he's not veering off his well-fed, mad-scientist course. Even the new Iron Chef America will have the Alton Brown touch.

The original Japanese cult classic delighted foodies with bad overdubs that rivaled "Godzilla & Mothra: The Battle for Earth" and ingredients such as sea urchin that were churned into everything from ice creams to savory custards. In "Iron Chef America," Brown revs up the interpretive dance to a rumba with live reports on the action in progress. Think Dick Vitale calling Mario Batali's moves: no script, just a game called on the fly with lots of splatter, sizzle and shtick.

"Each chef is

provided a basic pantry," Brown said. "They can bring a certain amount of stuff as well, but (Iron Chef Masaharu) Morimoto, for example, might bring 15 kinds of kelp. Fifteen kinds of kelp! That makes my job a huge cram session."

Before the show, Brown receives a list of what the competing chefs will work with so that he can correctly identify anything out of the ordinary.

"My show ("Good Eats") is not about strange, obscure ingredients. It's more like: 'Hey, we're making meatloaf.' On "Iron Chef," I instantly need to be an expert on some bizarre wrinkly food."

"I'm blown away by the ("Iron Chef") competition. These are master craftsmen competing against each other, the clock, the judges and themselves. There's no one coming in between takes to reset or restock. It's real food in real time."

Viewers can expect a not-subtle seasoning of education and the Alton Brown-style.



Alton Brown

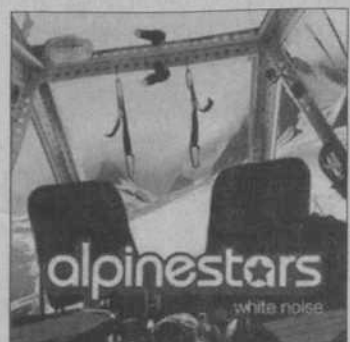
Pesto Dinner Biscuits

Yield: 18 (2-inch) biscuits.  
 Ingredients:  
 1 cup buttermilk, chilled  
 1/2 cup pesto  
 2 cups flour  
 4 teaspoons baking powder  
 1/4 teaspoon baking soda  
 3/4 teaspoon salt  
 3 tablespoons unsalted butter  
 1 tablespoon lard, chilled

1. Place rack in center of oven. Heat oven to 450° F. Measure all ingredients. Chill or freeze fats.
  2. Combine buttermilk, pesto; beat well. With 3-4 pulses, take flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt for spin in food processor. Place mixture in large bowl. Rub butter and lard into flour mixture until about half the fat disappears and rest is left in pea-sized pieces. Place in freezer to keep fat solid.
  3. Make well in center of flour mixture. Pour pesto mixture into well. Quickly mix using spatula. Dump mixture in center of lightly floured wax paper. Use paper to shield your hands as you fold dough into 1/2-inch to 1-inch thick rectangle. Fold in sides like tri-fold wallet. Repeat three times, as gently as possible.
  4. Using 2-inch pastry cutter, cut biscuits and place on ungreased baking sheet, just touching. Reshape leftover dough, kneading as little as possible. Continue cutting biscuits. Bake 15 minutes. Remove biscuits from oven and serve.
- Recipe note: Adapted from "I'm Just Here for More Food."

CD REVIEW

Alpinestars transcend keyboard gimmickry



"White Noise" Alpinestars ★★★★★ out of ☆☆☆☆☆

By SID THATTE THE GAMECOCK

The Alpinestars are Glyn Thomas and Richard Woolgar, a duo from the Queen's Land, the United Kingdom. Electronica is their realm. Their opus

"White Noise" would be classified as techno-pop music. It's got a good blend of popular music and techno-wizardry. The beats stand out. The lyrics, though, aren't very thoughtful. But then, one wouldn't expect poetry in dancemusik anyway. But this album has more than just keyboard-gimmickry.

Tracks 1, 2 and 3 are upbeat; they might get you tapping your feet. Track 13 is the video of Snow Patrol (track #1). It's a fantastic ride, great imagination, quality graphics, the works. Number 4 is sad and can be done away with; it's so unlike Alpinestars. It sounds more like a break-up song. Track 5 is melancholy but melodious. Pay particular attention to the skillful manipulation of the keyboard in track 6. Brotherhood, number 7, is an ambient instrumental. Groove number 8 is mellow, but has a firm rhythm. If slow dancing is your

thing, then it's for you. In fact, the music in this track has the likes of Dido and the Pet Shop Boys.

Number 9, Carbon Kid, is my personal favorite. It's basically electronica, but it sounds like classic rock heavily doped with elements of progressive rock. Fusion music would be the best way to label it. Carbon Kid resurfaces sometime later on the album in a remixed form (#12), but is only ephemeral. Track 14 is the video of Carbon Kid. The video's thematics involve a lab experiment in which a carbon copy of a human is created, which appears to be in an internecine race with the original. At the end of the video, they both end up destroying each other. It's a weird video, but typical of techno artists.

Besides music, Alpinestars are also into fusing words, such as "crystalnight" and "lovecraft." Crystalnight (#10) sounds smooth and

romantic. Slow dancing again? Perhaps. New Ice Age (#11) sounds like the kind of ambient music you hear at night on "Echoes."

Whether they sound like crying doves or laughing hyenas, Alpinestars sure do sound nice. I'd recommend "White Noise" if you like the Pet Shop Boys, Dido, Travis, maybe Interpol (to some extent), or any music with traces of brit-rock or shoe-gazing elements.

FCC-proof clean lyrics, coupled with pretty good music place this album at 4.5 points on my scale of 5.

Strangely, their website www.alpinestars.com will take you to a strange place that does not belong to them. You may actually check them out at www.astralwerks.com/alpinestars.

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecockfeatures@gwm.sc.edu

New Music For the week of January 25



"Knuckle Down" Ani DiFranco



"Before the Poison" Marianne Faithfull



"Digital Ash in a Digital Urn" Bright Eyes



"I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning" Bright Eyes



"Be As You Are" Kenny Chesney



"This Woman" LeAnn Rimes

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