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MOVIES

Girl talk

Two bright new British actresses shine in 'Starter for 10'

BY MICHAEL GILTZ



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THESE TWO RATE A '10' "Starter" stars Alice Eve (l.) and Rebecca Hall.

In the British romance "Starter for 10," opening Friday, U.K. It Boy James McAvoy (also seen in "The Last King of Scotland") is torn between two women: the blond beauty on his college quiz team and the politically active "best friend" who is clearly meant for him.

But who can blame his confusion when the women are played by charmers Alice Eve (the teammate) and Rebecca Hall (the activist). Sitting on a couch together recently, casually leafing through a gossip magazine and chatting merrily, Eve and Hall are quite comfortable with each other, with their burgeoning careers and with the idea that men can sometimes be downright foolish.

"The unrequited-love scenario," sighs Hall, 24, the daughter of stage director Peter Hall and opera singer Maria Ewing. "My character's quite wise, though, to sit there patiently and wait and see through all this silliness and wait for him to grow up one day. As opposed to screaming and crying about it."

So, he's a bit boneheaded. Are men stupider in the U.S. or the U.K.?

"They're stupid everywhere," jokes Hall, who co-starred in "The Prestige."

"That's Rebecca talking," the 25-year-old Eve says into the tape recorder, laughing. Her parents are both successful actors in the U.K., with her mother the star of the Taster's Choice coffee commercials with the ongoing romantic story line that were seen worldwide. "I've never kissed an American guy," she says, turning to Hall. "Have you?"

"No, I haven't," says Hall, who says she grew up on a steady diet of American movies thanks to her mother's passion for classic Hollywood films starring the likes of Joan Crawford and Bette Davis. Movies, naturally, provided her first crush.

"The film 'Labyrinth' was actually the moment I realized what sexuality was all about," says Hall, who has an upcoming TV miniseries co-starring Michael Gambon. It seems she's not alone in appreciating the campy 1986 David Bowie-Jennifer Connelly-Jim Henson Productions fantasy.

"Me, too!" says Eve, who next stars in a David Schwimmer comedy, "Big Nothing," and comes to Broadway this fall in Tom Stoppard's "Rock and Roll."

"Bowie has got very tight trousers on in it," explains Hall, "and I just remember finding myself thinking, 'Why am I so wanting you to be on the screen all the time and really love watching you and also find you really, really terrifying?' And suddenly it dawned on me that that's what it's all about." ♦

Men? They're stupid everywhere, jokes Hall.