

Film Close-Up: Jennifer Garner

by Joey_Berlin

Jennifer Garner worked as a double agent for the CIA while going to college, reconnecting with her spymaster dad and chasing down bad guys as agent Sydney Bristow on TV's "Alias."

JENNIFER GARNER - Jennifer Garner portrays forensic examiner Janet Mayes in the thriller 'The Kingdom.' CNS Photo courtesy of Frank Connor. Now Garner is a mom, but the lovely actress can still dish it out to the bad guys. In her new film "The Kingdom," Garner plays a member of an elite FBI team dispatched on a secret and politically sensitive mission to Saudi Arabia after a housing complex for Westerners there gets attacked by a suicide bomber. In the course of their investigation, Garner and her team are thwarted by Saudi police and targeted by religious fanatics. Directed with gusto by Peter Berg, "The Kingdom" is an action thriller co-starring Jamie Foxx, Chris Cooper and Jason Bateman.

Garner, 35, met her husband Ben Affleck when they co-starred together in the 2001 film "Pearl Harbor." They reunited in 2003 for "Daredevil," and they now have a daughter, Violet Anne.

Garner's next film is the offbeat dramatic comedy "Juno."

Q: Sometimes you can have tough living conditions when you go to a remote filming location. What were your digs like while you made "The Kingdom" in Arizona?

A: Honestly, we were so spoiled. As hard as the conditions were on the set, where it was 138 degrees with the asphalt heating you up from below and the sun above, it was really hard in that way. But we stayed at The Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain, which is a spa in Scottsdale, and it was ridiculous! It was so, so nice. Ben came and started editing his movie there and just said, "This is the best thing that ever could have happened to me." It was great for Violet. She had room to crawl around. She learned to crawl there, I think.

Q: You really flew through the air in your big fight scene. What did Ben say when he saw that?

A: He was there the day we shot this huge fight. It just happened to be a day that he visited the set, and he was sitting there and I would come out and talk to my stunt double, Shauna. You know, you think to yourself, "I'm a mother now. I should be more responsible. Maybe I won't do the thing where I'm thrown up against the wall and crash on the floor. I don't need to do that. I have a stunt double, this is what she's there for." But she's one of my best friends. And she and I, we've worked together for six years, so that if she tells me something is safe and it's just going to kind of bruise, and if she says it's fun, then I want to do it too. And also, I want Pete to have everything that he needs to make the fight scene as real as possible. It was the most real fight scene she and I have ever done.

Q: Did you or the other guy get injured in that fight?

A: We had scratches all over our faces, and I bit his ear and he had a scab on his ear for two weeks. We just killed each other. It was so fun! So Shauna was thrown up against the wall and I was like, I want to do it too! I said to the guy, "Go ahead, heave me. I'm fine. Let's do it!" So he just slung me. This guy was huge. It was awesome. It was so fun. And Ben didn't even blink. I actually would have liked for him to have been a little more nervous, but he didn't even blink.

Q: Your character is not a soldier, she is an evidence specialist with the FBI. How did you approach playing her?

A: What I loved about her is that she's still a woman. She's not a soldier, she's somebody who's put into an extreme situation. And unless you go into this situation completely with combat on your mind, you can't help but be touched by whatever things are happening around you. I love that Pete was open to us playing those things. I mean, she's not sexualized at all. I didn't wear makeup, I didn't have my hair done. We weren't trying to make me look pretty. But we were trying to make her look real. And to me, that was necessary for her to be a 360-degree person.

Q: You are headed to Broadway next, to play Roxanne in "Cyrano de Bergerac," with Kevin Kline in the title role. How do you feel about going back to do theater now?

A: I am so excited. I grew up in West Virginia. We didn't have money to go to movies and things like that, and my parents weren't really into us watching TV. But they made it a priority to give us what they didn't have, like piano lessons and ballet lessons. And any time there was any performance that we could see, whether it was sitting through the symphony or the ballet or a play, we were there. I grew up with this intense love of theater. My mom tells me this story of when I was 5 or 6, we went to Washington, D.C., and saw "Flowers for Algernon" at the National Theatre. And she said at the end I stood up on my chair and they were kind of wondering what I was doing. And I clapped my hands over my head and just yelled, "More! More! More!" because I loved it so much. And I still feel that way.

Q: Do you and Ben plan to have more children after Violet?

A: I hope so. I so loved my time off with her and I need to work a little bit now, so there's no rush.

Q: Ben is a really hilarious guy. Has it made you try to be funnier yourself?

A: No. It just makes me realize how lucky he is to have found someone funnier than him!

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