Lensing Up

May 1, 2000 By Angelo Ragaza

We always knew that former *POZ* cover girl Rebekka Armstrong's rise, fall and redemption—from Playboy centerfold to poz speed queen to inspirational speaker and activist—would make natural screen fodder. But as director Antonia Bird puts it, the making of Rebekka is turning into an epic of its own. "I thought we had 100 percent of the financing for the film in early January," says Bird, who, with the controversial Priest and last year's cannibal costume comedy Ravenous, earned a rep as a renegade moviemaker. "I think there's an attitude that 'Oh, AIDS movies—they've been done.'" The indie director–and–playmate alliance began in 1995, when power-producer Steve Tisch (Forrest Gump) optioned the rights to Armstrong's story and introduced her to several directorial candidates. It was Bird's fearless cinematic style that got the playmate all excited. "It's just amazingly in your face," she gushes. Over the next five years, Rebekka became grist for the best-movies-never-made mill. "It's been scripted out, changed hands, had funding, lost funding, somebody lost their job at Fox, this and that," Armstrong says. But now the project is a living Lazarus, thanks to an upcoming E! True Hollywood Story about Armstrong (check local listings), as well as Bird's move to scrap the Hollywood studio route and shoot Rebekka as a digital docudrama. Armstrong—originally relegated to cameo status—will now star.

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