



TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX, 2005

Chemistry Set

Jolie and Pitt light up the summer movie scene.

MR. AND MRS. SMITH. Directed by Doug Liman. Written by Simon Kinberg. Produced by Arnon Milchan, Akiva Goldsman, Lucas Foster, Patrick Wachsberger, Eric McLeod. Executive producer, Erik Feig. Music, John Powell. Cinematography, Bojan Bazelli. Editor, Michael Tronick. Production design, Jeff Mann. Costumes, Michael Kaplan. Starring Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, with Adam Brody and Kerry Washington.

It's very tempting to be glib about a movie — an action adventure romance thriller comedy, if you believe the hype — which stars two of the mysteriously appointed Most Beautiful People in the World as two beautiful people who are not only bored with their stunningly perfect marriage, but ... they're both assassins! How delicious!

But to be *too* arch about it would be unfair to *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, a surprisingly endearing popcorn flick. True, the movie's plot is not so much a story as a way to get the characters where the writer wants them: at each other's throats. Thankfully, it's while at each other's throats that the Mister and Missus display enough chemistry to fuel a half-dozen of the usual simpering romantic comedies.

The Smiths aren't happy. Jane (Angelina Jolie) cooks, John (Brad Pitt) pours himself a martini, they argue about the curtains and they make nice with their suburban neighbors (including *About a Boy* director Chris Weitz in a sweetly clueless cameo). Then they go to work and kill people.

Innocuous cover careers aside (she's a computer whiz, he's in construction), the Smiths suffer from serious marital dishonesty when it comes to their jobs. Jane works for an oddly *Charlie's Angels*-like assassin-for-hire company staffed entirely by women but apparently ghost-run by an off-screen voice the employees refer to as "Father." John works out of a run-down office with a bossy secretary and a fast-talking sidekick (Vince Vaughn, rehashing a bit of his *Swingers* character); it's unclear who runs the show on his side of the gunslinger pond.

Eventually, the two impossibly attractive, unscarred assassins are sent out on the same hit, a slightly confusing hand-off involving a hostage nicknamed "Tank" (*The O.C.*'s Seth Cohen — er, Adam Brody). Much angst and drinking follows the inevitable reveal, as husband and wife come to terms with two things: She/he has been lying all along! And now I have to kill him/her!

The scenes — and the banter — that follow are what make this movie so much fun. The whiz-bang explosions and high-tech weapons are cool, sure, but not nearly as cool as the pat-down the couple give each other on a dance floor or the believably juvenile insults they fling when they feel defensive in ways that don't involve guns and knives. (Jane's apparent love for sharp edges is, as a nod to Jolie's professed attraction to knives, funnier than it really should be.) As John, Brad Pitt plays up his somewhat bland, blond handsomeness, to the point of making a certain goofy, all-American-boy charm part of his approach to his work. Jane, hard-assed and aloof, takes another tack. It's Jolie who makes

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this movie. Her characteristic intensity keeps the most throwaway lines from being too cute and gives her emotional moments a much-needed touch of gravity. Jolie delineates Jane's elegant ennui with every raised eyebrow and flat response to her husband, and she lights up when it comes to her work: No-nonsense and inventive, Mrs. Smith is clearly the deadlier breadwinner in this household.

Despite its flimsy story and slightly unsatisfying ending, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* is undeniably enjoyable. It succeeds on many levels at being the multi-hyphenate movie it wants to be: Funny, dramatic, action-packed, at heart it's still a movie about one couple who find a decidedly atypical way to put the spice back in their relationship. Director Doug Liman doesn't work quite the same action-romance magic here that he did in *The Bourne Identity* — the action tends to be slick and bloodless, and often too muddled to impress — but he's created a winning summer flick that rises well above the things the tabloids are trying to make it about.

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