

Sparks, Bullets Fly Between Pitt, Jolie in `Smith': Rick Warner

(Review. Rick Warner is the movie critic for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

By Rick Warner

June 10 (Bloomberg) -- Judging from all the tabloid stories and gossip columns, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie hit it off quite nicely during the filming of ``Mr. and Mrs. Smith,' ' their new film about a handsome suburban couple who just happen to be paid assassins assigned to kill each other.

Their chemistry is evident on the screen. Despite its faults -- and there are plenty, including too much cartoonish violence, too many whiplashing plot twists and a story that runs out of steam long before the movie ends -- ``Mr. and Mrs. Smith' ' has undeniable star power and sex appeal.

Pitt and Jolie may not be the best thespians on the planet, but they're certainly two of the best-looking. And while they try to blast each other into oblivion in the movie, they obviously share fonder feelings in real life.

Their on-screen dynamic is crucial because, as the title implies, ``Mr. and Mrs. Smith,' ' is essentially a two-person film that examines the philosophical question: ``Can a couple that slays apart stay together?'

In this case, the answer is yes, though only after repeated efforts to end the marriage with a bang -- the kind caused by machine guns, high-powered rifles, bazookas and other weapons of mass destruction.

#### Tango in the Rain

Their relationship, as relayed in flashbacks from a therapist's couch, starts out peacefully when they meet in Bogota while on separate search-and-destroy missions. Blissfully ignorant that they share the same profession, John and Jane immediately click and end up dancing a sultry tango in a thunderstorm before heading to bed. Astaire and Rogers never looked so good.

Eventually, the Smiths marry and settle down in a posh New York suburb where they keep their true identities secret as he commutes to a phony engineering job and she serves dinner every night and fusses over the drapes.

Not to be confused with Ozzie and Harriet, the Smiths go about their business of killing for dough with ruthless efficiency: John breaks up a friendly poker game by gunning down all the participants, while Jane dresses up like a dominatrix and pleasures her customer with a whip before breaking his neck.

Trouble arrives when they're both assigned to kill the same person in a desert near the Mexican border. Jane fires away at John, who retaliates by demolishing her hideout with a shoulder-fired missile. Soon, they discover they've been assigned by their rival agencies to eliminate each other by whatever means necessary. The resulting mayhem includes flying knives, smashing cars, an exploding elevator and enough gunfire to please Charlton Heston, not to mention a no-holds-barred wrestling match that would do Hulk Hogan proud.

#### Pun and Fun

It's all in good fun, of course. Brad and Angelina gleefully mug for the camera and deliver pun-filled dialogue, such as this exchange when they return home after their shootout in the desert. ``Honey, I missed you,' ' John deadpans. ``I missed you, too,' ' Jane replies.

At no time does the story seem remotely believable or particularly original, though that's beside the point. (The hit-man-loves-hit-woman angle was covered by Jack Nicholson and Kathleen Turner in ``Prizzi's Honor,' ' and the warring couples theme has been around forever, from ``Adam's Rib' ' with Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn to ``The War of the Roses' ' with Turner and Michael Douglas.)

Doug Liman (``The Bourne Identity' ') directs with frantic pacing, but the movie works primarily because the two stars appear to genuinely like each other and want to share that good feeling with the audience.

``Mr. and Mrs. Smith,' ' from 20th Century Fox, opens today in the U.S. and U.K.

--Editors: Schatz, West.

Story illustration: For more information on ``Mr. and Mrs. Smith,' ' see <http://www.mrandmrsmithmovie.com>. For more cultural news from Bloomberg, see {MUSE <GO>}.

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