



"THE BOURNE IDENTITY"



"MR. AND MRS. SMITH"



"PULP FICTION"



"THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE"

When life gets out of whack

Hollywood loves assassins, even if they're usually a little messed up in the head. That's why even John Cusack — one of the most likable actors around — has played cold-blooded killers at least twice. In 1997's "Grosse Pointe Blank," Cusack was a multitasking hit man headed to his old hometown for a job — while also taking time to attend his high-school reunion.

And in "War, Inc.," opening Friday, Cusack plays an assassin with issues who's ordered to eliminate a Middle Eastern oil minister.

Here are other films where hit men (and women) deal with marital problems, memory problems, mommy problems and even game-show problems.

THE BOURNE IDENTITY (2002)

The target: In this case, the target is the killer himself. Jason Bourne (an intense Matt Damon) is a rogue agent with amnesia who stills knows more than is good for him. And the government wants him dead.

Bull's-eye: The guy can incapacitate someone with a ball-point pen — do you really think a stodgy government can nail him down?

MR. AND MRS. SMITH (2005)

The target: Couples therapy was never this explosive. Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt play a bored married duo who are both assassins — and who don't realize they're each other's

main competition until they're ordered to off each other.

Bull's-eye: Brangelina has been together ever since this movie, the biggest hit of the stars' careers. They've adopted and had their own children — but have yet to spawn a sequel.

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE (2004)

The target: Diabolical agents (in the classic 1962 original, it was Communists; here it's Big Business) brainwash a war hero and congressman (Liev Schreiber) into serving as their on-call assassin. Plus, Mom (Meryl Streep) is a U.S. senator who is very, very fond of her son.

Bull's-eye: The good guys win one, in a bleak sort of way, with a mother-and-child reunion at the

finale brought on by the bullet of another assassin, the not-so-easily-duped Denzel Washington.

THE BIG HIT (1998)

The target: Hyper-polite Melvin Smiley (a very funny Mark Wahlberg) uses his job as a killer to take his mind off a pushy girlfriend and another who's plain annoying.

Bull's-eye: Smiley, who's framed for kidnapping a sexy schoolgirl, tries to dump two girls and win the heart of a third. Not difficult, since he's the kind of guy who can return overdue videotapes in the middle of a gunfight.

PRIZZI'S HONOR (1985)

The target: Ever complain about your spouse not appreciating how hard your job can be? That's exactly how hit man Jack Nicholson and hit woman Kathleen Turner feel when they meet in a bar and sparks fly.

Bull's-eye: Tempers flare when each is ordered to kill the other, which makes developing a relationship problematic.



PULP FICTION (1994)

The target: Two hit men (John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson) stop at a diner after completing a job and stumble upon a holdup.

Pop music, a gold watch, a needle plunged into a chest and some cool dancing ensue — not necessarily in chronological order.

Bull's-eye: Travolta sticks to his plan of retiring (made after a guy misses him repeatedly at point-blank range) and Jackson frees the holdup couple, though not before reciting a fiery biblical passage one last time.

CONFESSIONS OF A DANGEROUS MIND (2002)

The target: "The Gong Show's" Chuck Barris (Sam Rockwell) is absolutely fond of drugs, definitely a globetrotting game-show host — and possibly a trained CIA assassin.

Bull's-eye: It's hard to tell if Barris completes his mission, since we're not even sure he's on a mission. But Gene Gene the Dancing Machine will be there to comfort him with some nifty moves no matter what.

Michael Giltz