

The 'Swinger' Director Doug Liman never pulls a punch

By MICHAEL GILTZ

DIRECTOR Doug Liman has quietly become one of Hollywood's most successful directors, but not because he keeps his mouth shut. The 40-year-old New Yorker has been an outspoken observer of Hollywood ever since he broke through with 1996's "Swingers."

He followed that up with 1999's "Go," and then came 2002's blockbuster "The Bourne Identity," starring Matt Damon. His streak might have ended among the whirlwind of distracting publicity surrounding the stars of his latest film, the action-comedy "Mr. & Mrs. Smith," out on DVD Tuesday.

Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's romance got more attention than the movie, but it turned into a massive hit. And in the middle of all that, Liman executive-produced and shot the pilot for a little TV show called "The OC."

"Mr. & Mrs. Smith" is all about marital strife, and it never gets easy.

There was encouragement from the studio to really resolve the film and have them live happily ever after. And I felt very strongly

that when it comes to relationships, there is no happily ever after. You live to fight another day.

You're not married. How do you know it's so tough?

I've had some doozies of fights in my relationship life, and they're all-consuming. I have an outsider's perspective; which can be more honest than somebody in the middle of it.

One reviewer said Jolie's Mrs. Smith could wipe the floor with Pitt's Mr. Smith. Do you agree?

I do believe "hell hath no wrath like a woman scorned." In the minivan when she's just finding out that he's been married before, that's going to pump her up and give her the edge. Brad got upset at me, but I always thought she was a slightly better assassin.

Did the gossip make doing the movie more difficult?

No. I like to flirt on the edge of danger. I ended up amusing myself a little bit with

how close to the edge of talking about their relationship I could go. I do a lot of adventurous sports, and it kind of tapped into that part of me. For people like Brad, Angie, Jennifer — I just can't imagine anything worse.

Do you still oversee "The OC?"

We're done. We were involved the first two years. Now

I'm directing a pilot for NBC in a couple of weeks.

Are you glad when people say "Bourne" should inspire the Bond franchise to reinvent itself?

First of all, you have to know I love James Bond. That's my fantasy — to direct a James Bond movie. It's in my soul. They would never even entertain talking to me. It is a little surreal that this untouchable, golden franchise might actually change as a result of "The Bourne Identity."

Why didn't you direct "The Bourne Supremacy?"

I personally hated the script.

And the "Mr. & Mrs. Smith" sequel?

Any other studio would immediately churn out a sequel. I've met with New Regency and we left without a great story. They said, "Let's reconvene in a month and see if we have a great story idea." This studio will not just churn out a sequel. It was refreshing.



Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's relationship "amused" Liman.