

MOVIE REVIEW

The Boston Globe

Killers

'Killers' is a dead end for Heigl, Kutcher

By Wesley Morris, Globe Staff | June 5, 2010

You can tell a studio just doesn't care when it releases a movie called "Killers." That's a title you could affix to 90 percent of the release schedule. It could be about the rock band or sharks. But, no, "Killers," which Lionsgate decided not to screen for critics, is about married love and contract assassins — and, nominally, it's a romantic comedy, one whose star looks baffled. Katherine Heigl has been here before, it's true: uptight, clueless, freshly single, and named Jen. But this time the man she meets and marries has a secret. And since that man is the Nikon Coolpix pitchman Ashton Kutcher, you're eager for his confession: Babe, I sell cameras. Instead, she discovers that he's a killer for hire and that the \$20 million bounty on his head has made their friends and neighbors eager to kill him.

The movie begins in Nice then moves to suburban America (with lots of scenes for Catherine O'Hara, as Heigl's alcoholic mother, to put in her pocket). The license plates say Georgia but those generic multimillion-dollar houses on small winding streets say Wisteria Lane. There's a car chase between Kutcher and the comedian Rob Riggle that takes place in an unfinished home construction area, which, given the housing crisis, may eventually replace the empty loading dock as bad movies' new climax location. It's a sequence as dull and dutifully executed as everything else in this movie. Who is Kutcher killing? And why, after he's left the business, does his death retain such high value?

There are many other details and plot twists that fail all logic tests. The screenplay has pages I imagine remain only half-filled. Not long after Heigl and Kutcher meet in an elevator, they share this exchange. She: "Huh-huh." He: "Huh." She: "Huuuuuh." This is the language of love for two people coming out of a coma. I wouldn't blame Heigl if she decided to slip into one. Just as she was beginning to find her footing in plain-old lousy romantic comedy, the genre mutates into action and peril and shootouts. Just as I was beginning to hope that she'd find a part that called for intelligence and sophistication and backbone, she plays another uptight naif.

It hardly seems fair. Heigl could be at peace with a part that asks her to shoot a gun. But is that what we want from her? Is that what she wants for herself? One Angelina Jolie is plenty. Heigl recently left "Grey's Anatomy," whose brainlessness had finally embarrassed her enough to resign. Sadly, the movies, which are already full of underemployed women of Heigl's mid-level wattage, don't have more to offer her than what she's already done in "Knocked Up," "27 Dresses," and "The Ugly Truth," which, like "Killers," was directed by Robert Luketic via remote control. Yes, she drinks too much on her first date in "Killers" and spends a great deal of time fretting over a pregnancy test. After she completes it, she does wind up impaling a bad guy on a hanging-antler sculpture. So there is something she hasn't done before. I stand corrected.

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