

Chicago Sun-Times

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

WEEKEND

blues

SEPTEMBER 7, 2001

NC

Odd couple pairing a hit in 'Runway'

MOVIES

By Bill Zwecker

Many filmmakers love creating comedies inspired by "odd couple" forced relationships. Two characters from separate, but parallel, universes certainly can strike comedic chords. Yet often, as was the case in the 1997 picture, "Kiss Me Guido," the final product is nothing more than an obvious collection of one-liners tying together a script that is neither believable nor satisfying outside the realm of TV sitcom mediocrity.

In "Hit and Runway," as with the failed "Guido," we again are presented with two New Yorkers—one gay, one straight—who could not seem more different. However, this time there is a wonderful marriage of truly hilarious writing, coupled with delightfully engaging performances that are both convincing and sensitive.

Writers Christopher Livingston and Jaffe Cohen call the script for this film (also directed by Livingston) "semi-autobiographical"—based on their long-time writing partnership. That clearly has contributed to why we believe the story about a very heterosexual Italian-American young man who finds



Alex (Michael Pardo, left) and Elliot (Peter Jacobson) discuss the finer points of writing in the comedy "Hit and Runway."

himself working with a mousy, Jewish, gay playwright on a screenplay for one of the world's leading action heroes, Jagger Stevens.

By day, Alex Andero (Michael Pardo) works in his family's Greenwich Village cafe. By night he dreams of making it big as a Hollywood screenwriter. He spends his hard-earned money taking evening school screenwriting classes, but with little success. Then suddenly, his uncle—who works for a big talent agency—arranges for Alex to write for Stevens, but there is a catch.

HIT AND RUNWAY

★★★

Alex Andero
Elliot Springer
Gwen
Jagger Stevens
Joey
Ray

Michael Pardo
Peter Jacobson
Judy Prescott
Hoyt Richards
Kerr Smith
J.K. Simmons

Lot 47 Films presents a film directed by Christopher Livingston. Written by Jaffe Cohen and Livingston. Running time: 105 minutes. Rated R (for language, sexual content). Opening today at Three Penny Cinema.

He needs to supply writing samples, which is a problem for a guy who clearly cannot construct a cogent sentence.

When frustrated playwright Elliot Springer (Peter Jacobson) meets Alex in his restaurant—only because Springer is obsessed with a handsome waiter ("Dawson Creek's" Kerr Smith)—two insatiable needs collide.

Alex needs someone who can write—and "write funny"—and Elliot needs someone who can get him a date with the

man of his dreams.

The best and funniest scenes in the film revolve around the initially strained sessions where Elliot attempts to translate Alex's idea of an international male model who is really a secret agent into a script. (Hence explaining the "Hit and Runway" title.) Jacobson and Pardo play off each other with great ease, moving from the stiltedness one would expect at the beginning of such a relationship, to a growing sense of trust, brotherly affection and yes, even love. While the glasses Jacobson wears in the film truly transform him visually into a gay Woody Allen-type, he avoids falling into the easy trap of aping Allen's easily mockable neuroses and mannerisms. Jacobson makes Elliot his own, presenting us with a collection of human insecurities that are endearing to behold.

In similar fashion, Pardo carves out a new, sexy, yet very sweet macho man in Alex. He does a great job in not taking us down that "How ya doin' " road, so often regurgitated by actors portraying stereotypical Italian-American studs.

While "Hit and Runway" loses steam with its somewhat silly ending, it is a film that by and large is a delight to watch.