

Burn After Reading (2008)

Rated R. Our ratings: V- 3; L- 3; S/N-3. Running time: 1 hour 35 min.

*A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil,
but a fool throws off restraint and is careless.
Proverbs 14:16*

Directors Joel and Ethan Coen Linda and Chad are the two leave the somber land of Nobumblers who set things in Country For Old Men and re-entertainment in this Coen brothers goof-ball territory in their spy spoof.

latest flick, set in Washington, D.C. I don't know whether or not its release was intended to coincide with the current political campaign, but the foolish antics of the characters seem to reflect some of the real world dumb remarks and antics of supporters of the two candidates, many of the latter disappearing after making dumb remarks harmful to their candidate.

2008 Focus Features

Chief fools in this spoof of the spy and political genres are Linda Litzke (Frances McDormand) and Chad Feldheimer (Brad Pitt) who work at the fitness gym where Osborne Cox (John Malkovich) is a member. The latter is fired from the CIA because of his drinking problem, so the angry analyst starts writing his tell all memoir, dictating into his computer. When Linda and Chad obtain the computer disk by accident (Osbourne was carrying it around in his duffle bag), they try to sell it to the Russians, her price being the cost of the four plastic surgery operations that she wants to slim down her figure.

This sets off a chain of events that lead to chases, hiding in a closet and two deaths, one of them a very gruesome one via a hatchet.

There is also adultery aplenty, with Osbourne's inattentive wife Katie Cox (Tilda Swinton) carrying on an affair with former Treasury agent Harry Pfarrer (George Clooney), and the latter shacking up with anyone he becomes attracted to, including Linda. These people are as foolish as any in Fargo or Raising Arizona, but nearly as likable. Still, there are many funny moments in the film, such as Clooney's spoofing the fearless agent he played in Syriana. His Harry several times mentions the gun that he still packs, saying that he never once fired it in the line of duty. Then, when he is surprised to come upon an intruder in an upstairs closet and accidentally shoots him, he is so shaken with fear that he stumbles toward the stairway, tumbling helplessly down it. Funniest of all, however, are the scenes in which Osbourne's boss at the CIA tries to explain the most recent events of the Osbourne Case with its potential leak to his chief. Each event is so bizarre, with the story becoming more and more convoluted, that at one point the chief stops him and says to get back to him when more of the facts are in. This is not vintage Coen brothers, but all of the actors are so good, especially Clooney and Pitt, that the film will make us forget our own cares for an hour and a half. I believe that those who wrote the proverbs of the Bible, had they seen the film, would be saying, "See what we mean!"