

The Incredible Burt Wonderstone (2013)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V -3; L -5; S/N -2. Running time: 1 hour 40 min.

Pride goes before destruction,

and a haughty spirit before a fall.

*It is better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor
than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

Proverbs 16:18-19

*He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly I
tell you, unless you change and become like children, you
will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'*

Matthew 18:2-3

Two friends since childhood Burt Wonderstone (Steve Carell) and Anton Marvelton (Steve Buscemi) are world-class magicians in Las Vegas until street magician Steve Gray (Jim Carrey) best known through his cablecast act threatens their popularity. They also have not changed their act so that it is becoming stale, and Burt's giant-sized ego has eaten away at their friendship so much that they break up their act.

Burt continues the Las Vegas, but his days are numbered unless he can regain the wonder that first led him into magic as a boy—and also to reconcile with Anton. Steve Gray's magic moves beyond sleight-of-hand tricks to the masochistic. He modifies the old disappearing card trick to have it reappear beneath his skin: he has to slice through it to retrieve the card. (Thus beware of taking a child to this film.) In another trick he has pepper spray streamed into his eyes. These kinds of antics cause a surge in his popularity, people eager to see what bizarre trick he will do next. By comparison Burt's one-man show looks lame and lifeless to the dwindling number of people who attend his show, so that his boss decides to hold a

contest between the two, with the winner taking over the stage of his casino/hotel.

Best part of the talented cast is Alan Arkin as the now aged magician who first inspired Burt to take up magic. There is a subplot dealing with Burt's male chauvinist treatment of their assistant Jane (Olivia Wilde), who has bigger dreams than he realizes. However, this is not given much screen time. The ultimate illusion that Burt stages, involving the knocking out by a drug of the entire audience and transporting them to a remote location, is very hard to swallow, given the time that would be involved, yet it is a funny sequence. Many of the critics have panned the film, but it is mildly funny, with a good sequence of Burt's transformation into a human being again and reconciliation with Anton and Jane.

For Reflection/Discussion

1. What is the boy Burt's situation at school and among his classmates? In what does he find solace from his loneliness? Did you ever try a magic trick when you were a child? What about it is so fascinating to us?
2. Compare Burt with Anton and Jane. And with Steve Gray.
3. Especially compare the two approaches to magic of Burt and Steve. Which is based on innocent wonder—and what is the other based on? How is the latter akin to the fascination that draws so many people to blood and gore films?
4. How is the adult Burt's need similar to what Jesus says to his overly ambitious disciples?