



TRANSCRIPT

Cinema

Burn After Reading

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The Coen brothers may have become movie-making legends in their own lifetime but their productions don't always hit the mark. Perhaps this feeling of inaccuracy is a result of their rather weird view of the world or perhaps it's to do with them trying to pump out their movies too quickly. One thing is certain: when you sit down to watch a Coen brothers movie you can expect – well – the unexpected.

In my case this *unexpected* element of the Coen brothers' style usually results in a form of irritation about what might have been. I come away thinking: "Well, that was *almost* an interesting movie. Sure it had its moments, but those moments didn't make up for the really dull bits. Perhaps if they'd allowed a good script editor to have a peek at the project before they rolled the cameras it might have been tighter and more satisfying."

Well, that's just what I think. But I don't think the Coen boys will change their attitude or their inevitably quirky style any time soon. When they accepted the Oscars this year for best movie and best director for *No Country for Old Men* they made their attitude quite clear in their acceptance remarks. They made a point of thanking their financial backers for, as they put it: "Allowing us to play in our corner of the sandbox." *No Country for Old Men* was an absolutely first rate thriller and I talked about it on this program back in March. This movie was polished and as taut as a bowstring. There was not a wasted word or a superfluous action and I sat through it on the edge of my seat literally shivering with the tension.

"Ah ha" I thought," Joel and Ethan Coen have finally got it together and got it right."

So when their next movie *Burn After Reading* arrived I went along with high hopes of another good experience. Uh oh. My high expectations ought to have been tempered by the knowledge that this flick had hit the screen only about eight months after *No Country for Old Men*.

A long time ago, in a Hollywood far away, a well-organised B-movie director could make a one-hour Western every two weeks or so – provided he didn't eat or sleep much. However, those times have faded into history, and these days it's unusual to find a movie that's worth looking at that hasn't taken many, many *years* to produce.

So you have to harbour a suspicion or two about a flick that pops out in under a year.

And, in the case of *Burn After Reading*, your suspicions would be well-founded.

This black comedy deals with the bed-hopping antics of a group of diverse characters who live in and around the town of Langleys, Virginia – where the CIA has its headquarters. The first two thirds of the movie unfolds at a snails pace while the characters are defined and set-ups are established so that the pathways of the characters can eventually intersect. If you manage to stay awake long enough to catch the third act you'll be rewarded with a couple of surprises, some chuckles and even one or two laughs.

But is it worth the wait? I really don't think so. The tedium is only eased by the performances of the star-studded ensemble cast. George Clooney is amusing as a thick-headed womaniser and Tilda Swinton is riveting playing Clooney's mistress as the bitch-he-deserves. Brad Pitt is cast against type as a gay fitness coach who is much too dumb for his own good. John Malkovich plays a foul-mouthed CIA analyst with a drinking problem and Frances McDormand – the wife of one of the Coen boys – plays an office worker who is prepared to sell state secrets in order to pay for a surgical body makeover.

You see? It *sounds* like it should be a lot of fun doesn't it? And a good script editor might have been able to fix it. But who is going to tell the Coen boys what to do? Therein lies the problem. I gave *Burn After Reading* two stars – for the good performances of the ensemble cast.

Now, if you want to have some *real* fun, get along to see *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* in 3-D. It's a great yarn which very cleverly uses the Jules Verne classic as its starting point. The plot puts the proposition that the Jules Verne story was not fiction but was, in fact, a true story based on the diary of an explorer who had actually found his way to a hidden world at the centre of the earth. With that concept as background a group of three modern-day people fall into this Jules Verne-world and much adventure ensues. Swashbuckling Brendan Fraser heads the small cast which includes youngsters Jock Hutcherson and Anita Briem.

It's an engaging enough story but with the additional appeal of three-dimensional special effects it becomes a totally enthralling cinematic experience. If you haven't seen 3-D since the old days of the red and green cellophane goggles then you haven't seen 3-D. The current digital process achieves quite magical results. And you get the effect by wearing a pair of clear-lens, polarised spectacles which are provided when you buy your ticket. Every frame of the movie creates the illusion of depth and, in addition, every so often an object – be it a fluttering bird or a terrifying dinosaur – appears to travel outside the bounds of the screen and to be near enough to touch. The experience is simply breathtaking.

Unfortunately not all cinemas are equipped to screen 3-D so you might have to be prepared to travel a bit to find your way to an appropriate theatre. But, believe me, it's worth it. However, be aware that *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* is also screening in a *non-3D* version in some cinemas so make sure before you set out that you're going to the right one. Either way you'll enjoy it, but the 3-D process literally adds another dimension to the enjoyment of this four-star movie.

Bye for now – I'll see you in the back stalls.

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