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## The Good Shepherd - DVD

Can De Niro impress with his latest directed offering

by Dan Hall published on 29 June 2007

Edward Wilson (Matt Damon) is a high flyer at Yale University in 1939 when he is recruited to join the American secret service.

His hidden life gives him first hand experience of the Second World War and the Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe while his beautiful wife, Clover (Angelina Jolie) and only son, Edward Junior (Eddie Redmayne) suffer in ignorance.

By 1961, Edward is involved in a failed invasion of Cuba. "A stranger in the house" has leaked the plan to the Russians and the search is on to find the double agent. His family life in ruins and his loyalties severely stretched, Edward discovers that friends can be enemies and enemies can be friends.

The Godfather it ain't but in only his second movie as a director, Robert De Niro has come up with something pretty impressive.

OK, it's long and very slow moving - it has an elegant and stately tread in slow 2/2 time - but it is stylish and absolutely refuses to compromise.

Spies don't usually come from exotic Mafioso families. They are anonymous, silent and secretive. This, of course, is Robert De Niro's problem. He has set out to dramatise the deafening silence of counter intelligence without falsifying a world where very few cards are ever put on the table and where it is not wise to wear your heart on your sleeve.

And, in case we Brits think we have a monopoly on stiff upper lip, the movie's CIA agents make Jeeves look like Jade Goody on a bad day.

You will hate it if you were one of those kids who kept asking "are we there yet?" but if you are prepared to enter De Niro's tightly organised,



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beautifully shot and carefully orchestrated world then you will be moved by its humanity and, when the shocks do come, you will be stirred beyond your expectations.

Matt Damon, who has never had Jim Carey's facial elasticity or Jet Li's rubber limbs, brings all his sober and solid charms to the central role of Edward Wilson, the perfect spy who has the stiffest upper lip anywhere outside of a mortuary.

It is a tough call with most of the acting concentrated around his mouth which can be kept resolutely shut as required by the job, but which can flicker with emotion or tension and very occasionally and most movingly, burst into life when he allows his real self to emerge.

When he falls in love with the profoundly deaf Laura (the excellent Tammy Blanchard) who has to lip read his usually deadpan face, he is forced to move those lips and the screen virtually explodes. This film is very good on the slow burn.

Robert De Niro has drawn some mightily impressive names into his cast - it would have been an impossible dream for any other trainee director to assemble such a line up.

Joe Pesci's brief cameo reprises, wittily, his long line of dodgy Italian Americans whilst Michael Gambon delivers another of his magnificent human ruins.

William Hurt demonstrates his ability to impersonate nice guys with troubled interiors and De Niro finds time for a powerful performance as the tough but fair general.

It isn't just the big stars that shine. Some of the best acting comes from lesser names such as John Turturro as a no nonsense CIA operative and Eddie Redmayne as Wilson's neglected and vulnerable son.

Angelina Jolie is the problem casting here.

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## At a glance

### What is it?

World War II spy drama

### Good

De Niro has created a tightly organised, beautifully shot and carefully orchestrated world, entertaining supporting turns from Joe Pesci and John Turturro, Matt Damon brings all his sober and solid charms to the central role

### Bad

The gargantuan 167 minute running time, Angelina Jolie is horribly miscast as the dowdy housewife, dramatising the deafening silence of counter intelligence is a tricky proposition

### Verdict

Bob De Niro's latest is long and slow but, if you give it a chance, it brings its own rewards

**Price** £20

**Our score**

**7/10**

**Your score**

**?/10**

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Beautiful, gorgeous even, she is just too exotic for this movie with its varying shades of grey. We just don't get why she would fall for a guy like Wilson. If she can fancy him then none of us are safe from marauding screen goddesses whenever we go out at night.

Her other problem is that, while Matt can get away with the tricky age range from fresh faced eighteen to baby faced forty, Angelina just can't get away with young any more. She has wrinkles now, sexy ones for sure, but wrinkles just the same and her hands have "gone". Looks like she's been hand washing too many of Brad Pitt's smalls.

For a film that puts such a premium on detail and commitment it's rather a surprise to see that there are only a handful of deleted scenes included in the special features package, with no contribution from De Niro whatsoever. As normal, these scenes add nothing to the movie - which is why they were omitted in the first place - making their inclusion here all the more baffling. Some sleep-inducing information about cryptography is about as good as it gets, and only die hard Jolie fans will be eager to see more of her playing the dowdy housewife, surely one of the worst casting decisions in recent memory.

## **VERDICT**

If you don't like your films slow and long then stay away, but if you are interested in a thoughtful and skilled movie about the secret world that still controls our lives then go to a cinema with comfortable seats and allow it to work its magic.

Rating: 15

Staring: Matt Damon, Angelina Jolie, Robert De Niro, Joe Pesci, Alec Baldwin

Directed by: Robert DeNiro

Extras: 15 minutes of deleted scenes