

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD \_\_ 7/10

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### *Human costs of spookdom*

Written by Eric Roth  
Directed by Robert De Niro

Matt Damon ...	Edward Bell Wilson
Angelina Jolie ...	Clover/Margaret Ann Russell
Alec Baldwin ...	Sam Murach
Tammy Blanchard ...	Laura
Billy Crudup ...	Arch Cummings
Robert De Niro ...	General Bill Sullivan
Keir Dullea ...	Senator John Russell, Sr.
William Hurt ...	Philip Allen
Timothy Hutton ...	Thomas Wilson
Joe Pesci ...	Joseph Palmi

Candidly, I was looking for a damning expose of the most 'successful' secret society of the 20th century, the CIA (the Cartel's Insulation Agency). And we do get some of that. Robert DeNiro, playing the General "Wild Bill" Donovan originator of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) which became the CIA, says:

*"I deeply worry about the agency becoming not the eyes and ears of the country but its heart and soul."*

The story centers on the Matt Damon character, Edward Wilson, who becomes the prototypical CIA agent, then the HMFVIC (head modular footlocker what's in charge) of Agency operations. We open with footage of the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, compromised by an intelligence leak.

Wilson's career being in jeopardy, he endeavors to find the source of the leak.

As the main story moves along in the present (the early 1960s), the movie flashes back to key points in his life. In the early 1920s, his father (Timothy Hutton) implores the boy Edward to always tell the truth. When Edward leaves the room, his father proceeds to shoot himself, leaving a note; Edward quickly reenters the room before the adults arrive and secretes the note away.

This fatherly admonishment to tell the truth gives deep irony to the profession Edward later chooses... as does the note, which Edward does not open until nearly the movie's end.

The essence of the flashbacks is to flesh out the character of this unremarkable remarkable man who comes to represent the quintessential agency guy. In the years leading up to WWII Edward attends Yale and joins the Skull and Bones (S&B) secret society. (Both presidential candidates in 2004 were members of S&B.)

Through a friend at the S&B—the impression is virtually anyone powerful in the political establishment is a member—Edward gets the attention of General Sullivan (the Wild Bill Donovan character). The General picks Edward to be his main OSS guy in London, then follows that up with a postwar elevation in the CIA.

Edward falls in love with a woman named Laura who is hearing impaired, but because of an indiscretion with the aggressive sister, Clover (Angelina Jolie), of his S&B friend he leaves Laura. Back then, especially if you have political ambitions, you marry what you impregnate; Clover turns out to be a longsuffering thorn in Edward's side.

The boy the Wilsons raise turns out to worship yet fear his father. As he grows to adulthood he insists he, too, wants to be an agency man. Yikes. Edward loves his son. Indeed, a primary focus of the movie seems to be the workings of Edward's shutoff personality as it experiences the heights of love and depths of despair over key people in his life.

The acting challenge for Matt Damon is tough. He steps up admirably. The movie is a character study, or studies—not what I expected, but rewarding. The actual espionage, though interesting, is only a subtext to me.

The Good Shepherd flows quickly through its three hours and satisfies the patient viewer with an understanding of what makes an "ideal" Company man tick... or at least according to the screenwriter's Hollywood CIA mythology. And I'm sure there are many like Edward in the fold.

It's a great story. However, I'm convinced the actual CIA—the first American spy agency retained in peacetime—is a bit more nefarious than this. I.e., starkly evil and antithetical to freedom.