

Amusing sequel fires away with gags galore

By Gerri Pare
Catholic News Service

The Jerry Zucker, Jim Abrahams and David Zucker team that brought us "The Naked Gun" and the wacky "Airplane" movies continue the misadventures of bumbling cop Frank Drebin (Leslie Nielsen) in "The Naked Gun 2 1/2: The Smell of Fear" (Paramount).

This time Frank is unleashed on an unwitting Washington and nearly knocks off first lady Barbara Bush while being honored by the president for killing his 1,000th drug dealer.

Stumbling onto the middle of a plot to wreck the president's proposed energy policy, Frank finds that the villain Quentin (Robert Goulet) is none other than the new beau of his former flame, Jane (Priscilla Presley).

Sparks again fly between Frank and Jane, but before wedding bells can peal he must discredit Quentin and rescue the kidnapped energy expert, who has been replaced with a dastardly double (Richard Griffiths in a dual role). Leave it to Frank to confuse the two, but it's all part of the merry mayhem.

Fast-paced fun is the hallmark of co-writer/director David Zucker's latest fun flick. The zanier the better as the move is littered with sight gags and snappy one-liners.

In addition to Nielsen and Presley, George Kennedy and O.J. Simpson reprise their original roles in a series of impossibly silly sketches as long-suffering fellow cops and handy foils for fearless Frank.

The self-mocking tone of the movie makes the harebrained plot all the more of a lark with enough pratfalls, background nonsense, recycled jokes and carefree non-sequiturs to make the time fly. The stunts are similarly well-staged and fast-paced with less crude humor this time around.

As a parody of hard-boiled detective and macho cop movies, this one's all lighthearted looniness and sure to bring summer smiles.

Because of intermittent sexual innuendo, mildly vulgar humor, comic-book violence and minimal rough language, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.



Theo Westenberger/Paramount Picture
Leslie Nielsen stars as Lt. Frank Drebin in *The Naked Gun 2 1/2: The Smell of Fear*.

Fiery special-effects star in predictable 'Backdraft'

The conflicts of two estranged brothers intensify when one, a rookie fireman, comes under the command of his older brother in "Backdraft" (Universal).

Sons of a hero fireman killed in action, Steve (Kurt Russell) unwaveringly follows in his father's footsteps while Brian (Wil-

liam Baldwin) — who as a child witnessed his father's horrible death — never sticks at any job too long. Returning to Chicago after six restless years, Brian becomes a firefighter but resents that he is assigned to his brother's firehouse and put under his harsh scrutiny. The two siblings have al-

ways mixed like oil and water, and Steve makes matters worse by saying that Brian can't cut the mustard in an emergency.

Steve's opinion is apparently justified when Brian hesitates on the job with near disastrous results. Doubting himself, Brian transfers to a job assisting a wily arson inspector, Shadow (Robert De Niro), in the investigation of several deaths by fiery explosions — known as backdrafts — that may be related arson murders. Their investigation links a local alderman (J.T. Walsh) with the three victims, but the actual "torch" remains elusive.

As the two brothers warily eye the possibility of burying the hatchet, Brian begins to suspect the unthinkable about the identity of the torch.

Fire is the best performer in director Ron Howard's big Hollywood production. Insidious, velvety and all-enveloping, the fires take on lives of their own in a way that is simultaneously terrifying, mesmerizing and repulsive.

Few movies have better captured what it can be like for a fireman to step into an inferno and dark, deadly smoke, aware that

the floor might collapse at any moment.

But this special-effects effort tends to bite off more than it can chew by situating the action in both a heavy relationship drama and a murder mystery.

As the unproven and insecure younger brother, the character played by Baldwin is finely understated while Russell goes to the wall with his hothead macho character. The plot here is all predictable formula.

Donald Sutherland's small role as a crazed pyromaniac is a carbon copy of Anthony Hopkins' insane doctor in "The Silence of the Lambs," right down to the prison interview where he demands highly personal information from Baldwin in exchange for his help.

"Backdraft" has more excitement and less violence than the average action movie and gets across the image of firefighters as intensely loyal, unsung heroes. Too bad the family drama gets watered down in the blaze of big Hollywood stunts and special effects, which don't make a movie worth getting heated up over.

Because of some grisly charred body shots, very brief nudity, fleeting sexual innuendo, occasional fisticuffs and intermittent rough language, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

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