The Art of Stealing

It is fascinating that in a world that ridicules many forms of crime, you will find noticeable soft spots for films glorifying illegal activities. Hollywood's depiction of defying the law has bounced around from genre to genre for over a century. From Classical Westerns in the John Ford era to the widely popular Fast and Furious franchise, I tend to wonder why we as viewers are so attracted to the art of violence and stealing? These tropes vary from film to film, like high-speed chases in stolen cars through big cities to vengeful bounty acquisitions in a parched mid-western town. Do we all secretly long for that sweet taste of satisfaction after evading the law for self-betterment? One may see these films as facades of authentic crime situations. However, by artistically disguising these endless variations of crime, we as moviegoers have the privilege to experience various illegal acts in visually appealing cinematic ways.

The art of stealing is an unmistakable idea present in all of these films. Within this selection of narratives, you will find a heavy focus on money and the cost of life itself. Stories like these mimic crimes in the real world; although, the average moviegoer incessantly feeds on the overdramatization. For example, directors will demonstrate control from a higher power, like the government, or from a more privatized entity like a casino owner. By introducing powerful individuals or groups, and their plan that develops throughout the film, the audience has an exclusive look at their path to success. *The Italian Job (1969)* wastes no time by showing the main character, Charlie, leaving jail and meeting with a recently murdered thief's wife, Mrs. Beckerman, in a hotel room. There she provides him with extensive details for a heist. Contrastingly, in The Harder they Fall, we get a snippet of the old West and a heavy focus on the release of the main villain Rufus Buck and the hero Nat Love's mission to seek revenge for his late parents. Each of these films is thematically linked. They relate to the end goal of profiting from capital or the reacquisition of life.

Though varying in subject matter, this selection of films emphasizes the importance of recognizing what is forcefully removed or unwillingly taken and making an effort to solve this complication. On one hand, a group of nitwit blokes will find themselves with hundreds of gold ingots, while a group of cowboys formulates a plan to dynamite a cart full of stolen money. Each storyline provides the audience with a distinct view into the art of stealing.

Winding up a vibrant mountain pass, the audience is introduced to a brilliant flash of an orange Lamborghini. The sleek Italian sports car zipping through the curvy roads reveals the infamous title sequence of *The Italian Job (1969)*. Directed by Peter Collinson, this quirky British heist film is a healthy balance between *Austin Powers* and *James Bond*. Crowded Italian piazzas, souped-up mini coopers, and a group of needy English men are the perfect combo for the classic slapstick crime flick. The ambitious protagonist Charlie, played by Michael Caine, sets off on a mission to steal four million dollars while causing the biggest traffic jam in history as a distraction. There seems to be almost no negative effect from the completion of this heist as the film ensued. This act was clearly for the profit of the individuals involved, especially Charlie. From tumbling cars, spaghetti western-like zoom shots, and run-ins with the Italian mafia, you'll notice that there are so few obstacles that the characters have to overcome. However, if you are in the mood for a feel-good adventure through the crowded streets of Italy in search of a multi-million-dollar bounty, this is the movie for you.

In the arid desert city of Las Vegas, one may find themselves testing their luck at the slot machines or playing a hand at the poker table. Although one man who bears the name Danny Ocean prefers elaborate theft schemes starting with rallying his star cons. *Ocean's Eleven* (2001) is a brilliant modern remake of the original heist film from 1969. The film consists of an all-star cast consisting of George Clooney, Julia Roberts, Matt Damon, Brad Pitt, Don Cheadle, to name a few. Danny, played by Clooney, is the leader of this suicide-like mission to rob $160 million from the menacing multi-casino owner, Terry Benedict (Andy Garcia). Danny meticulously compiled a highly detailed heist blueprint, an expert pickpocket, and a compact and agile grease man to liken the odds of a successful mission. However, it is up to you to decide if Danny's urgency in obtaining the lump sum of money is just an elaborate scheme to win back his wife Tess (Julia Roberts) from the slimy casino owner. His relentless drive to break the rules and steal from such a rich and powerful individual fuels the plotline concerning both money and human affection.

During the groovy era of the late 1970s, Hollywood was a bustling town full of art, culture, and crime. In the film *The Nice Guys*, you will find yourself entranced by this twisting and turning buddy-cop-like adventure. The disgruntled hired emissary Jackson Healy (Russell Crowe), and the quick-witted private detective Holland March (Ryan Gosling), find themselves in a pickle searching for a lost girl. The wild goose chase that ensues consists of burned-down porn studios, a wild Hollywood Hills shindig, and mistrust from the police. The comedic relief present throughout the film, especially true for March, rivals that of Will Smith's character in *Bad Boys*. The usage of this type of playful buffoonery provides the audience with a healthy amount of humor, even during such suspenseful scenes. In this film, you'll find that during their hunt for a kidnapped girl named Amelia, Healy and March discover the information that she had hidden is a prominent reason why she was taken. Contrasting in approaches to solving mysteries, the two men find that their desired claim to fame, in the end, is a result of their tandem use of critical yet personal detective skills.

Recently added to the ever-growing repertoire of Netflix Originals, *The Harder They Fall* is a beautifully executed, slow-burning, revenge film mimicking products of the Western genre's golden era. Though staying true to many beloved tropes of cowboy flicks, this new age rendition was refreshing thematically, cinematographically, and regarding their choice in casting. The all-star cast consisted of Idris Elba, Zazie Beetz, Regina King, Jonathan Majors and LaKeith Stanfield, and many more talented actors. Each character, as a person of color, challenged this whitewashed genre. It was simply incredible to finally see these high-caliber actors finally acquire screen time in this sect of film. Similar to *Django Unchained,* you see the unmistakably gory blood splatters after every single bullet leaves the revolvers and ruthlessly penetrates an unsuspecting character's skin. In the initial scenes of the film, a young Nat Love, the main protagonist, is held down against his will as he watches a mysterious cowboy gun down his parents with two gold-plated revolvers. This traumatizing loss of life initiates Love's vengeful journey to make the villain pay for the peaceful life forcefully taken from him. Love and his crew find themselves face to face with the gold-wielding Buck and his evil gang in a battle over stolen money and the cost of saving a life. Overall, the two-hour film may feel sluggish at times; however, the high-energy hip hop-influenced modern soundtrack and innovative acrobatic cinematography make up for those fewer interesting segments.

In the realm of mafia-themed motion pictures, you may know of the infamous *John Wick* trilogy. Similar to these Reeves films, *Nobody,* plays along perfectly with the grungy cutthroat and absurdly amusing violence from a middle-aged man. In the beginning, the audience gets sucked into a seemingly endless repetition of coffee brewing, Metrobus card scanning, and endless excel spreadsheets. The main protagonist, Hutch, exemplifies the grueling life living nine to five. Played by Bob Odenkirk, it is prevalent that life sucks for his character. He is a gruff and vulnerable middle-aged deadbeat, not to mention his sparse relationship with his wife and kids. Although, things take a dramatic turn in his boring life when two robbers break into his house steal a handful of petty cash and his daughter's beloved kitty cat bracelet. Disgruntled and full of rage after this attack, in a very *John Wick* fashion, a run-in with a gang of Russian mafia members sparks a one-man rebellion against the money hoarding syndicate. His daughter's stolen bracelet caused unrelenting self-strife; however, his fraying familial connection proved to be a defining reason for his ruthless outbursts. However, losing touch with his family was an unacceptable consequence Hutch did what had to be done. Although in the end, it may have taken some time for all the ashes to settle.

Imagine waking up with missing limbs, drifting in and out of reality with no recollection of how you got to this futuristic laboratory. In this exhilarating action film shot entirely in first-person, *Hardcore Henry* is a sleeper film that feels almost video game-like. As the viewers, we get such a unique perspective following only one character for the entire duration of the film. The main protagonist, Henry (Ilya Viktorovich Naishuller), is introduced to the audience via his wife/nurse, Estelle (Haley Bennett), who sweet-talks him, and assists the robots in installing his prosthetic limbs. With his superhero-like strength, he faces off the seemingly endless Russian gang members in the bustling streets of Moscow. Throughout the film, a friend of Henry, Jimmy (Sharlto Copley), provides him with information that reveals the truth about this violent syndicate. Although Henry's foggy memory becomes another point of view, as you find that the life, he lives is nothing far from a simulation controlled by a higher power. His existence is unequivocally stolen, but his mission is to reveal the truth about more than one stolen livelihood and identity.