



We're in the jailhouse now: Danny Ocean (George Clooney), Rueben Tishkoff (Elliott Gould), Rusty Ryan (Brad Pitt) and Basher Tarr (Don Cheadle).

Ensemble Heist Movie

Outfoxed

OCEAN'S TWELVE: Directed by Steven Soderbergh. Written by Soderbergh and George Nolfi. Produced by Jerry Weintraub. Executive produced by John Hardy, Susan Ekins, Bruce Berman. Cinematography, Steven Soderbergh. Production design, Philip Messina. Editor, Stephen Mirrione. Costume design, Milena Canonero. Composer, David Holmes. Starring George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Julia Roberts, with Andy Garcia, Don Cheadle, Bernie Mac, Casey Affleck, Scott Caan, Vincent Cassel, Eddie Jemison, Shaobo Qin, Carl Reiner, Elliott Gould. Warner Bros., 2004. PG-13. 120 minutes.

itself seriously. A slight vehicle, *Ocean's Twelve* may turn out to be one of the better films of the holiday season, since some of the most anticipated offerings won't play Eugene until January and February 2005.

Director Steven Soderbergh doesn't like to make the same film twice, and he hasn't. His best caper film will always be *The Limey*, and here he doesn't waste his ener-

gy tying up every conceivable plot strand. Writer George Nolfi brings into the film a mysterious European thief nicknamed the Night Fox, played by French actor Vincent Cassel. Now the story becomes one of rival jewel thieves Ocean and the Fox competing for a priceless Fabergé egg and the right to be called the world's greatest thief.

Actor Don Cheadle as Cockney Basher

Tarr adds his laconic quirkiness to the production as the crew's explosives man. Cheadle has made many memorable screen performances, my favorite being the cynical but devoted DEA agent in Soderbergh's award-winning *Traffic*. I'm looking forward to Cheadle's star turn in *Hotel Rwanda*, which captured Toronto's Audience Award in September.

Tiny roles are played by other actors I admire, notably Albert Finney in an uncredited role as super-thief La Marque, and Scottish actor Robbie Coltrane, the original "Fitz" in the British TV series "Cracker," as an Amsterdam eccentric named Matsui. Hard to miss though onscreen only briefly are Carl Reiner (Saul Bloom) and Elliott Gould (Reuben Tishkoff), two great actors who prove again there are no small parts.

Ocean's Twelve won't win any prizes, but it's a lot of fun, and so what if you can't quite remember the plot by the time you exit the theater? Soderbergh leaves you with a few wonderful images — reflection of the Eiffel Tower in Brad Pitt's sunglasses; the split-second recognition between Pitt and Catherine Zeta Jones as he sprints from the police while she sits at an outdoor café; an abashed Damon after he fluffs the encounter with Matsui; and Cassel practicing the contortionist moves of the exotic dance he will perform to avoid the laser rays that guard the golden egg.

Now playing at Cinemark, *Ocean's Twelve* gets high marks for its unabashedly confident entertainment value. Kudos! **EW**

Ocean's *Twelve* is funnier than the original, which was a remake of a Rat Pack movie from the 1960s, an era of hard booze, gentlemen crooks and fast cars. The thieves who stole millions from two Vegas casinos in a daring heist in the 2001 movie and got away with it have scattered to various European locales or retired in style in the states.

Now mobsters on Terry Benedict's (Andy Garcia) payroll are hunting them. Benedict is the can't-take-a-joke, Vegas entrepreneur, who was fleeced \$160 million and lost his girlfriend to Danny Ocean (George Clooney). He wants the money back. Plus interest.

Ocean calls the old crew together after Benedict's men show up at his California home and hassle his wife, Tess (Julia Roberts). The casino's money is long gone or tied up in investments, but the guys realize Benedict's threats are real. There's nothing for it but another heist. But how can they come up with \$20 million in two weeks?

The heist itself is not the subject of the film. The characters are. The camaraderie between the actors as well as their generosity in working for reduced wages in return for a piece of the show is crafty. Clooney, Brad Pitt as Rusty Ryan, second in command, and Matt Damon as wannabe leader Linus Caldwell dominated magazine covers and talk shows before the movie opened. If *Twelve* busts blocks, they will make a lot of money.

What you pay for at the box office is watching this outstanding, professional cast have a great time in the upper-crust environs of Amsterdam, Paris, Monte Carlo, Lake Como, Rome and Castellamare del Golfo in Sicily. The actors' off-screen pranks and friendships spill over to create trust and intimacy between the fictional characters, with the result being a movie that doesn't take

Ahistoric Nonsense

No chemistry, no smarts

HEAD IN THE CLOUDS: Written and directed by John Duigan. Produced by Michael Cowan, Bertil Ohlsson, Jonathan Olsberg, Jason Piette, André Rouleau, Maxime Rémillard. Executive producers, Julia Palau, Matthew Payne. Cinematographer, Paul Sarossy. Editor, Dominique Fortin. Production design, Jonathan Lee. Costume design, Mario Davignon. Starring Charlize Theron, Penélope Cruz and Stuart Townsend. With Thomas Kretschmann, Steven Berkhoff. Sony Pictures Classics, 2004. R. 124 minutes.

What possible reason is there to make a romanticized war movie at a time when combatants and civilians alike are being killed, brutalized, blown up and tortured in several grim wars across the planet?

There was never a good war. Since *Saving Private Ryan*, most of the movie-going public in this country, at least, has put that crappy cliché to rest. The Spanish Civil War — heavily idealized in John Duigan's new film — was a miserable, lopsided affair that led to countless deaths, bitter reprisals and 30 years of dictatorial repression. World War II was an unrelenting bloodbath. *Head in the Clouds* fails to acknowledge such facts.

Watching this film one may not notice that Paris is occupied by the Nazis, food is scarce, dissidents are hunted down and cruelly dispatched, and people are freezing in their apartments. Duigan doesn't deal with such messy details.

Duigan's main character, Gilda (Charlize Theron), sails through the 20th century's worldwide depression of the 1930s, the rise of Fascism, the militarization of Germany and Italy, and Hitler gobbling up his neighbors. The film's only reference to Hitler is a brief radio rant. A free spirit, Gilda tries to party on even as her best friends and lovers, Guy (Stuart Townsend) and Mia (Penélope Cruz), follow their consciences to the doomed fighting in Spain. But even Guy and Mia's war experiences are air-brushed with romance.

There are opportunities for the film to examine conditions favorable to war, such as Gilda's rich French father (Steven Berkhoff) with his far-right loyalties, but Duigan doesn't pursue them. I can't believe a rebellious woman such as Gilda would have been politically neutral during WWII's continental convulsions.

But as far as her snooping neighbors can see, she's sleeping with a Nazi officer (Thomas Kretschmann) and living high.

This is a movie so flawed at the center it can't be fixed. What's worse is that Duigan and the producers who helped create this film don't see its myriad problems. Here is a summing up of the film from its production notes: "'Head in the Clouds' reminds us that as much as we want to pursue our own desires and nurture our passions, we cannot hide from the real problems of history that continue to define our time."

Reality check, please: Does that sentence make you feel infantilized? Patronized? The unctuous, meaningless phrasing of "the real problems of history" alone makes me want to slap some suit silly. This is a bloodless movie, and Duigan has no one to blame but himself. Pity the poor suckers he brought into this debacle.

The actors cannot overcome such obstacles. Charlize is bright and brittle, while Stuart is boring and ineffectual. Only Penelope brings a suitable gravity to her role, but she still has to do silly things such as a sexy tango with Charlize — a torrid scene-stopper in Salma Hayak's *Frida*, but merely a hedonistic gesture here. Even the appropriation of the historic musical figure of Django Reinhardt (John Jorgensen) seems gratuitous to me.

Don't waste your time on *Head in the Clouds*. Wait for something better, or see *Sideways* or *Closer* again. This really bad movie opens at the Bijou on Dec. 17, hopefully for a short time. **EW**



Mia (Penélope Cruz) and Gilda (Charlize Theron) in tango embrace.