

'Ocean's' pushes crime caper to intricate level

By Kam Williams

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Upping the ante in terms of intrigue while toning it down in terms of action, "Ocean's Thirteen" is a relatively cerebral affair which offers an absorbing alternative to the summer blockbusters of the over-stimulating, special effects-driven variety.

All the boys are back in this cast crowded with male matinee idols, starting with George Clooney as ring-leader Danny Ocean, and including Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, Bernie Mac, Don Cheadle, Carl Reiner, Casey Affleck, Elliott Gould, Shaobo Qin, Scott Caan and Eddie Jemison. Meanwhile, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Julia Roberts have opted out of this installment in favor of Ellen Barkin who's flying solo, here, as the fetching femme fatale.

The film also introduces a new villain in Al Pacino as Willy Bank, a particularly ruthless mobster who has just bilked Reuben (Gould) of the millions he was set to retire on.

The rest of the rat pack prove that there is still honor among thieves when they decide to reunite for the sake of their apoplectic mentor currently confined to bed in critical condition due to the stress of the double-crossing.

With Bank about to launch a new casino on the strip in Las Vegas, the gang agrees to bankrupt him by rigging the games so that the house will lose \$500 million on opening night. Furthermore, since they are aware of the cocky kingpin's fondness for diamonds, they conspire to relieve him of a quarter billion in precious stones hidden away in a presumably impregnable, penthouse vault.

In it more for revenge than for the money, they even hope to embarrass Bank for good measure by having the hotel receive low grades from the fussy inspector

(David Paymer) assigned to rate the quality of its services.

After brief prefatory sequences show the team's reunion and establishing the above premise, masterminds Danny and Rusty (Pitt) discover that to succeed they must map out a strategy to defeat a state-of-the-art surveillance system capable of reasoning like a human being.

As the details of the scheme are finalized, they realize that their elaborate plan is going to be much more expensive than anticipated, since it involves everything from simulating an earthquake to infiltrating a Mexican dice factory.

Therefore, they grudgingly make strange bedfellows with former adversary Terry Benedict (Andy Garcia), offering the cut-throat crime boss a share of the profits in return for a sizable investment. He agrees, and at this juncture the story divides into numerous parallel plots as each participant gets his assignment and prepares for D-Day in his own inimitable fashion.

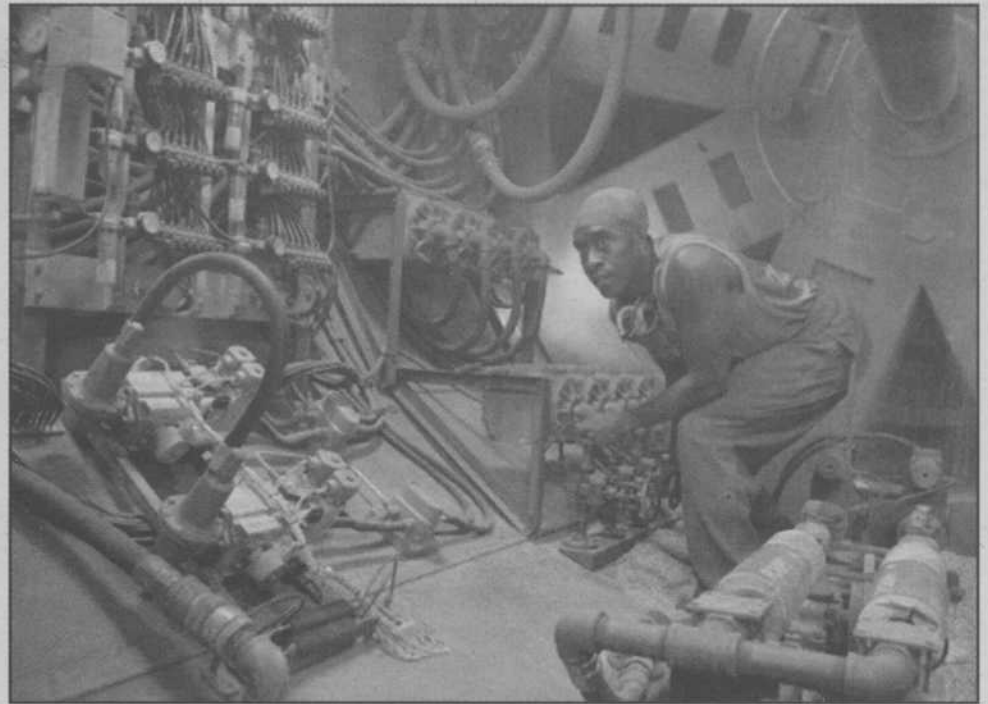
Ladies' man Linus (Damon) wines and dines Abigail (Barkin), Willy's conniving confidante. Siblings Virgil (Affleck) and Turk (Caan) go undercover to sow seeds of discontent among employees on an assembly line in Mexico. Saul (Reiner) masquerades as a high roller from London, while Basher (Cheadle) the Brit is put in charge of creating the artificial earthquake. Each of the rest infiltrates the casino somehow, as either an employee or guest, before patiently awaiting to drain the place of every penny at the appointed hour.

The appeal of "Ocean's Thirteen" rests not in the execution of the patently preposterous crime caper, but in the easygoing badinage among the members of the ensemble. Even though there are few surprises as the plot marches inexorably to its

predictable finale, there's something nice about being in on the joke at certain likely improvised moments, such as when a clowning Clooney breaks from the script to suggest to Pitt that he ought to settle down and have a couple of kids.

A downright comfortable diversion in male bonding that doesn't ask anything of you except to sit back, relax and eat some popcorn.

Very good (3 stars). Rated PG-13 for brief sensuality.



Don Cheadle is part of an star-studded cast in Vegas casino heist film 'Ocean's Thirteen.'

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Book Review

(Continued from Page 8)

rubberstamp the efforts of his fellow Republicans on the Supreme Court to overturn all the hard-fought, historic civil rights decisions of the 1950s and '60s.

A brilliant bio of a baffling hypocrite who revels in eliminating those equal protection measures which had afforded him his opportunity to make it in a society which had previously been perfectly comfortable completely marginalizing people who looked like him.

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