

Movie Review: 'Flawless'

by Peter Rowe

In "Flawless," a pair of amateur crooks tries to snaffle a fortune by raiding an obscenely rich British institution. So far, so familiar. But near the film's unthrilling climax, we finally see something new: a 70-something janitor (Michael Caine) chasing a 40-something executive (Demi Moore) through London's sewers.

'FLAWLESS' - Michael Caine and Demi Moore star in the crime drama 'Flawless.' CNS Photo courtesy of Magnolia Pictures. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) He limps. She sprints - in heels. The suspense, like the pain in her feet, is excruciating.

Director Michael Radford's heist movie keeps you guessing, but most of time (105 minutes) you're wondering what-the-heck?

The story is set in 1960 at the fictitious London Diamond Corp., an equal-opportunity exploiter that abuses miners in apartheid South Africa and its lone female executive at headquarters. Laura Quinn (Moore) is brilliant, hardworking, an Oxford-educated Yank and, surrounded by the oldest boys in the old-boy network, unpromotable.

The firm's janitor (Caine) senses her dissatisfaction. He's a sly one, old Mr. Hobbs is, as deep as his Cockney accent is broad. Soon, he's enlisted Quinn in a crackpot scheme to pluck a tidy fortune in polished stones from LonDi's vaults.

How? Why, in Hobbs' thermos! LonDi's crack security team would never look there.

Or so Hobbs assures Quinn, whose credulity makes you understand why she's stuck in middle management. In fact, the janitor's plans are more complicated. Edward Anderson's script slowly reveals the larger scheme and rewards us with one good twist. That's not reward enough, especially given Quinn's mystifying behavior. She steals the vault's combination, then plays a crucial role in the robbery (which, while more complicated than Hobbs' original plan, still relies on negligent security guards).

Then, the deed safely done, Quinn threatens to turn herself in - and betray Hobbs.

Perhaps she's spooked by Det. Finch (Lambert Wilson), who's obtained a photo of Hobbs and Quinn at a dog track, days before the heist. But why was this innocuous duo under surveillance? No one seems to know.

Or care. Construct a cat's cradle of underdeveloped plot threads, and pretty soon your heroine is splashing through gunk, mucking up her Manolos.

"Flawless" veers from the baffling to the obvious. Cliches are 10 pence a dozen: a soundtrack that uses the "Blue Danube" and Dave Brubeck's "Take Five," both heard in umpteen better films; a plutocrat (Joss Ackland), his misdeeds exposed, drops a crystal snifter and drops dead - and is instantly surrounded by a pack of flashbulb-popping press photographers; an 'umble Cockney knows more than 'e lets on, guv'nor; a detective is distracted by his suspect's long legs.

Quinn and Det. Finch exchange meaningful glances, but little more. This neck of Swingin' London is no place for swingers, only strivers.

Inexpertly cut, lacking color and short on clarity, "Flawless" is no gem.

"Flawless." Running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes. Rated: PG-13. 1 1/2 stars.

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