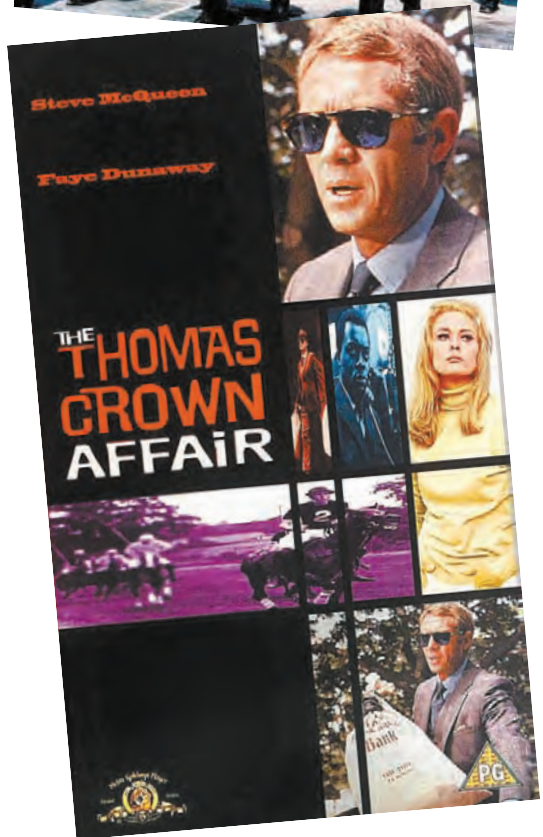


Kevin
Williamson's

BEST HEIST FILMS

This list of capers includes more than the Usual Suspects



KEVIN WILLIAMSON
Sun Media

LOS ANGELES — Their schemes hinge on clock-work cunning.

They're predictably amoral, routinely ruthless, and easily lured by the promise of instant wealth.

And they leave few backs unstabbed or loyalties intact.

Bank robbers?

Diamond thieves?

Try moviemakers.

Like that's a surprise.

"It's a little bit like a heist," says screenwriter Brian Helgeland of the nail-biting orchestration that goes into any film, including *The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3*. He penned the Tony Scott-directed reworking of the 1974 Walter Matthau-Robert Shaw original for Denzel Washington and John Travolta.

Opening today, the thriller, about a subway train hijacking, should play like gang-busters to eager crowds. Film-goers, after all, have long flocked to high-stakes heist flicks, with their tempt-ing scores, duplicitous hoods and carefully-attuned cons.

No wonder. The voyeuristic kick of watching these anti-heroes win and lose is unquestionable — as is the enduring appeal of the genre itself.

Here are 10 of the best, from iconic classics to overlooked indies.

Heat (1995)

Michael Mann's sprawling crime saga pits Robert De Niro and Al Pacino against each other as existential adversaries: one a calculating career criminal, the other a relentless detective. For all the spectacular action — a shoot-out in the streets of Los Angeles is a blistering standout — the drama is at its most incendiary during the famed coffee shop exchange between the dueling legends.

Reservoir Dogs (1992)

Colour-coded cons. A robbery blundered. And a rat among the crew of crooks. Quentin Tarantino's career-defining debut is as stark, profane and weirdly comic as the black-suited hoods at the centre of his tricky non-linear screenplay — propelled by effortless snark, startling bursts of bloodletting and an affinity for pop culture that leavens all the underworld brutality.

The Thomas Crown Affair (1968)

Not to be confused with the Pierce Brosnan-led remake, which is remarkable mostly for the revelation of Rene Russo's crown jewels. Rather, Norman Jewison's debonair caper is all 1960s cool: Steve McQueen, Faye Dunaway, an irresistible heist — it's as single-malt smooth as these movies get.

Bottle Rocket (1996)

Owen Wilson and Luke Wilson starred in this early outing from director Wes Anderson, pre-*Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*. A cult following quickly developed — one that included Martin Scorsese who declared *Bottle Rocket* one of his favourite films of the 1990s.

A Fish Called Wanda (1988)

Kevin Kline won an Oscar for his role as dim goldfish-gobbling crook Otto, but the whole cast is brilliant: from sexy Jamie Lee Curtis to hapless John Cleese to stuttering pet lover Michael Palin. A note-perfect farce — spilling over with hilarity and cruelty.

The Bank Job (2008)

This under-viewed but rightfully-lauded thriller (don't let the on-the-nose title dissuade you) stars Jason Statham — a B-movie actor for once benefiting from A-plus material. Tight, controlled, no-frills direction from Roger Donaldson (*No Way Out*) makes for a pulp fiction pleasure.

The Usual Suspects (1995)

"Who is Keyser Soze?" is the question at the core of Bryan Singer's terrifically convoluted underworld fable about a group of low-lives — including Oscar winner Kevin Spacey — assembled by a mysteriously omniscient kingpin. Endlessly copied but never equaled.

The Killing (1956)

Mythic filmmaker Stanley Kubrick (2001, *The Shining*, *Dr. Strangelove*) is best renowned for channeling the abstract, impenetrable and absurd. But as this early noir about a heist at a race track aptly proved, he was just as skilled at telling crackling earthbound entertainments.

Flawless (2007)

This sleeper, about a diamond heist in 1960s London, isn't perfect, but it deserved far better than the non-release it received, despite stars Demi Moore and Michael Caine. Both are very good in this caper about a nighttime janitor and a gorgeous executive — her career stunted by sexism — who conspire to slip a fortune in jewels out from under the watchful gaze of their superiors.

Inside Man (2006)

Denzel Washington, Clive Owen and Jodie Foster are the gleaming chrome hood ornaments, but the real star of this cinematic Caddy is the motor underneath: a twisty, revving V8 about a crime that isn't what it seems. Bracingly directed by Spike Lee, it's got the goods: smarts, style and political sass to spare.

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