

OCEAN'S ELEVEN

Directed by Steven Soderbergh
Produced by Jerry Weintraub
Distributed by Warner Brothers Pictures
Released in 2001

In the chaos of the heist, the nonsense of it all is left obscured. The details of the robbery are brilliant, and demonstrate a real creativity in screenwriting. The break-in is laid out step by step as the film progresses, giving the audience time to consider the logic behind each step. However, because we are never told how the money will be removed, when the solution is finally revealed we have little time to process all we are seeing. Though obscuring the plans for removing the cash makes for good suspense, it may also hide defects in the plotting. The primary point of concern involves the video feed.

After Matt Damon's Linus and George Clooney's Danny meet up with Shaobo Qin's Yen in the vault, Brad Pitt's Rusty makes the call to casino boss Terry Benedict, played by Andy Garcia. He is told that he is being robbed. Looking at a video monitor showing his vault perfectly secure, he begs to differ. But a new image flashes up on the screen showing three men stacking cases of money. The deal Rusty proposes is simple. Help us remove \$80 million, or we'll blow up all the money, \$160 million. Benedict complies, and we see men taking six large bags off an elevator, removing them to a van. The van heads to the airport, followed by a score of security cars. The S.W.A.T. team is brought in to take back the vault before the robbers can detonate that money and the money now sitting in a van at the airport. The S.W.A.T team neutralizes the thieves and is ordered out. An explosion had ripped through the vault. Some money is left, and a lot of fliers for hookers. The van at the airport contains, it is discovered, only handbills for hookers. They soon realize that what they saw on the screen—three men robbing the Bellagio vault—was staged because on the original screen, showing everything calm, a Bellagio logo graced the floor. The footage of the robbery showed a bare floor with no logo. The S.W.A.T. team were the robbers. They have been conned.

First, let's consider some of the slippery details. Linus and Danny descend an elevator shaft during the blackout, which renders the laser detection system crisscrossing the shaft useless. Using winches-of-a-sort, they rapidly fall to the bottom but, dangling, are forced to cut the lines to fall the final ten feet. Just after they do, the power comes back on. Now, it may be their weight that keeps these lines descending. If so, once they cut the lines, they would quickly retract. But there was no sound of retraction. The lines just disappear. It seems they should still be there, dangling, to trigger the alarm system and end the entire operation.

Where did the six bags that went to the van come from? Since they were full of hooker fliers, they were not in the vault to start with. Danny and Linus carry nothing down with them. The bags may have been stored in the crawl spaces above the ceiling that they traverse effortlessly, but the origin of the bags is left unclear.

When Terry Benedict hurries down to the vault after the S.W.A.T. team has penetrated the area, he finds the debris and wreckage brought on by the incendiary bomb. But he does not

see the three robbers. Is he not curious? Danny is already on his ways back through the ducts to the sound-proof room where he is supposed to be getting beat up. Linus and Yen have probably donned S.W.A.T. gear brought down by the other guys in their huge bags that, upon their dismissal by Terry Benedict, carry out \$160 million. They would have had to work fast to get the money packed before Benedict got down there. And are they just betting that he will order them to leave? If he doesn't, what excuse are they going to make so they can get out of there before he wises up? And just how long after they leave does Terry call upstairs? It's only a few seconds until Benedict asks about the security tape. He realizes what happens, yet he does not call on his security to stop the S.W.A.T. guys. And if they have left, one call to the Las Vegas police will ensure that the money never gets anywhere. And...how is the money going to be distributed to the Eleven? They just walk away, but who is going to take the risk of trying to make drop-offs with Terry Benedict breathing down his neck? There are a lot of unanswered questions.

But...they do not have to be answered. Certainly if we knew every detail of the robbery the film would last five hours or more. What is inexcusable is the reckless wastefulness of the plan. Terry Benedict is made to believe a robbery is taking place, so he calls in the cops. A fake S.W.A.T. team that is supposed to be there cleaning things up performs the actual robbery and gets away.

All the problems with the nuclear device, with convincing Terry Benedict to store valuable goods in the vault, with lifting the secret codes in the gaming commission episode, could have been avoided. Make him think he is being robbed, drop the six bags through the ceiling into the elevator, have him call the cops, pose as cops, break into the vault, fake an assault, take the money. And aside from allowing Yen to test his jump, the copy of the vault they constructed is worthless. They used an older video feed to fool security into thinking everything was normal. If they were not going to break in until posing as a S.W.A.T. team, it would be necessary to establish a ruse and utilize the reproduction. But Linus, Danny, and Yen really do break in. And they can scurry about convincingly enough to incite Terry Benedict to call the 'cops'.

It's all a tangled mess. In any movie with an opponent or adversary, building him up to be a formidable man, a smart, decisive conqueror, is great; the final victory will be all the sweeter because it was hard-earned. But it also makes explaining how the opponent can be bested that much more difficult. The character of Terry Benedict is constructed as a ruthless casino owner. He is smart and savvy. And, at the end of the movie, he is duped. But the audience shouldn't be.