



James Caan is a highly skilled thief, who breaks into a sophisticated safe in "Thief."

the movies

Louise Snider

'How to' movie gives lowdown on safecracking

Browse through a bookstore, check the best-seller lists, survey magazine contents and it's clear that people crave information (as opposed to ideas).

How to do it. That's what everyone wants to know. How to lose weight, grow mushrooms, beat inflation — you name it. What about "How to crack a safe" or "How to break into a vault"? If you're a layman seeking this kind of information, "Thief" is for you.

Scene after scene shows our anti-hero hard at work. Sparks from his torch fly through the midnight-blue shadows. Beautiful. Success. The vault is penetrated, its contents removed — hundreds of little white envelopes, each one filled with loose diamonds.

OF COURSE, you can't expect to learn everything from one movie. You do get a general idea of professional requirements, however.

You will have to be in good physical condition. You may not work regularly, but when you do, you must be capable of long hours of sustained labor under stressful conditions. Also, you should have some kind of combat training so you're prepared to protect your cache.

Finally, you're going to have to study electronics, industrial arts and metallurgy. Years of schooling and apprenticeship are involved.

James Caan, who plays Frank, the thief of this movie's title, got his education the hard way, 11 years in Joliet Prison. Still, he has something to show for it. He's a P.D. among thieves, a specialist who only goes after big scores in diamonds or cash.

His success proves his undoing. It's just so hard these days for the independent businessman. Develop a good track record and all those greedy outsiders take notice.

THE LOCAL POLICE muscle him because they want to make his operation a joint venture. The big crime-boss in the area is interested in a corporate takeover.

Frank throws in with Leo (Robert Prosky), the organized crime figure for a few big jobs, but once in, he finds he can't get out. In Frank's case, it's not stock options or pension plans that keeps him locked in. It's a baby.

Frank's wife (Tuesday Weld) couldn't have children. The couple went to an adoption agency, but the social worker frowned on Frank's prison record. Leo, however, saw a prison record as an asset, not a liability, and with his connections, he was able to get a lovely little baby for "straight-arrow, true-blue" Frank.

The charade ends when Frank wants to quit, and he finds that the mob owns him and his family. Leo tells him so in the movie's harshest, most riveting speech.

ROBERT PROSKY is wonderfully menacing as Leo; whose grandfatherly smile quickly turns into the set features of a vicious criminal. Tuesday Weld starts out in what appears to be a promising part that just never develops.

Willie Nelson is around for even less time. He makes a cameo appearance as an old prison inmate who befriends Frank.

James Caan is capable as Frank and manages to win some sympathy for the character. Michael Mann, who wrote and directed "Thief," has put together a well-paced, handsomely photographed movie. Now, if only he had something to say.



Frank resists the impulse to slap Jessie (Tuesday Weld) during a lovers' quarrel.

what's at the movies

New releases

ALL NIGHT LONG (R), Gene Hackman and Barbra Streisand in romantic comedy about an ordinary man who loses his job and his wife and lives lavishly ever after.

ALTERED STATES (R), Ken Russell's science-fiction film about a man's exploration of altered states of consciousness. From a novel by Paddy Chayefsky.

AMERICAN POP (R), Ralph Bakshi's latest animated venture tells the story of four generations of an American family whose lives turn on the beat of pop music.

THE COMPETITION (PG), Music and romance tangle in this bright film as Richard Dreyfuss and Amy Irving vie for first place in a piano competition.

THE DEVIL AND MAX DEVLIN (PG), Elliott Gould is the manager of a rundown apartment building who bargains with Satan's assistant (Bill Cosby) for a peculiar exchange of souls.

EYEWITNESS, Classy mystery in which television reporter (Sigourney Weaver) becomes involved with romantic young janitor (William Hurt) who may have witnessed a murder.

FORT APACHE, THE BRONX (R), Paul Newman and Edward Asner in powerful drama about embattled police precinct in New York's violent and devastated South Bronx.

NINE TO FIVE (PG), Comedy with Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin and Dolly Parton as three secretaries who scheme to get rid of their boss.

TESS (PG), Thomas Hardy's classic novel ("Tess of the D'Urbervilles") of Victorian society captured in brilliant film directed by Roman Polanski.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

G General audience admitted.
PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.

Last show, new season announced

The musical revue "Starting Here, Starting Now" will open a four-week run at Meadow Brook Theatre at 8:30 p.m. on April 23 on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

The revue features lyrics by Richard Maltby Jr. and music by David Shire. When it was performed in Manhattan, Martin Gottfried of the New York Post wrote, "We're presented with songs that are musically and lyrically sophisticated... songs that present the feel and quality of the Broadway musical theater at full strength."

Maltby and Shire have been collaborators since their undergraduate days at Yale University in the late 1950s. "Starting Here, Starting Now" is a collection of their best songs. Each number is like a small, one-act play, with its exposition, development and a conclusion.

Barbra Streisand has recorded five of the songs from Maltby/Shire scores over the years. The title song of this

production, "Starting Here, Starting Now," was the finale to her Emmy-Award-winning television special, "Color Me Barbra."

SEE ALSO has recorded "What About Today" and "Autumn," two other numbers from "Starting Here, Starting Now." Other individual Maltby/Shire songs over the past years have been recorded by Shirley Bassey, Robert Goulet, Andy Williams and Roberta Flack.

David Shire has written extensively for films. His work includes music for "All the President's Men," "Farewell, My Lovely," "Raid on Entebbe" and "Saturday Night Fever."

Shakespeare's "Othello" will lead off the 1981-82 new season for Meadow Brook Theatre on Oct. 8.

Terence Kilburn, artistic director of Meadow Brook Theatre, recently announced the line-up of plays the local professional theater will present.

"OTHELLO" (through Nov. 11) will be followed by the Michigan professional premiere of the family comedy, "On Golden Pond" by Ernest Thompson (Nov. 5-29).

Noel Coward's sophisticated comedy, "Hay Fever," will welcome the holiday season (Dec. 3-27). "A View from the Bridge," Arthur Miller's character study of a simple man caught in the grip of an obsessive passion, will be the next attraction (Dec. 31 through Jan. 24).

Charles Nolte, who wrote the 1980 production of "A Summer Remembered," has written a new comedy-drama, "The End of Ramadan," which

will have its world premiere at Meadow Brook (Jan. 28 through Feb. 21).

The turbulent times of Henry VIII will be explored in Robert Bolt's drama "A Man for All Seasons," winner of the Tony and New York Drama Critics' awards (Feb. 25 through March 21).

"Wait Until Dark," a suspense drama by Frederick Knott, will follow (March 25 through April 18).

The new season's final offering will be "Chapter Two," Neil Simon's alternately touching and comical autobiographical play (April 22 through May 16).

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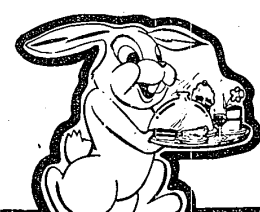
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