

Once again, movie bank robbers lose out

By CAROL HASKIN
Bank robbers never go to the movies. If they did they would choose another occupation. As every moviegoer knows, the cops always win. It may take hours, it may take years, but the robber always gets it in the end.

The thesis is supported once again in Sidney Lumet's "Dog Day Afternoon," the screen version of a Brooklyn heist that kept New York City television viewers spellbound for one August day in 1972.

The perpetrators of the deed were a mentally-sluggish ex-con named Sal,

and Sonny, a harried ex-Vietnam veteran trying to support two wives—one of each sex.

Despite the fact that Sonny, the brains behind the operation, was a former bank employe, the operation was plagued by foibles from the start. Sonny scheduled the robbery for closing time and found most of the money had been sent to a central bank.

WHEN ALL the hostages were finally herded into the vault and the registry burned, getaway was impeded by a legion of NYPD officers surrounding the bank.

In "Dog Day Afternoon," Director

Lumet has taken an event with limited action and an even more limited setting and has made a suspenseful tragic-comedy. He uses humor to increase tension in the potentially explosive situation that never quite explodes but instead ends with a dull misfire. As in his 1974 hit, "Murder on the Orient Express," Lumet has every aspect of the film under control in a well-oiled piece of cinema artistry.

Al Pacino, who worked with Lumet in "Serpico," is the soft-hearted Sonny who jeopardizes his escape by letting the tellers visit the ladies room

before being caged in the vault. Holed up the bank surrounded by police for eight hours, Sonny insists on personally paying for the pizzas ordered for the hostages.

Pacino's Sonny has the darting eyes and quick wits of a caged animal, yet succumbs to the drug of his own instant fame. He is a street hero, star of the six o'clock news. His instant status transforms him from a quaking humbler to a confident man-in-charge. This mistaken confidence plays into the hands of police and the FBI.

SONNY GETS more trouble than support from his partner Sal (John Ca-

sale), a somber, smoldering gunman who, when asked in which foreign country he would like to take asylum, replies "Wyoming."

If Sal gives Sonny headaches, they are nothing compared to the ones he gets from his two wives, Angie (Susan Ferret) and Leon (Chris Sarandon). It is for the love of the self-indulgent Leon that the robbery is committed in the first place—to get him money for his dreamed-of sex change operation.

The only people really on Sonny's side are his hostages, led by bank manager Sully Boyar and head teller Penny Allen. When the street au-

dience turns hostile at the news of Sonny's bisexuality, the bank personnel continue to stick by him.

As a piece of recent social history, "Dog Day Afternoon" touches on such topics as police brutality, homosexuality, hijacking and media manipulation. Lumet draws no conclusions, satisfying himself with depicting a series of bizarre events through the point of view of the characters involved.

AS A PIECE of entertainment, "Dog Day Afternoon" is exciting, engaging and bitterly funny.

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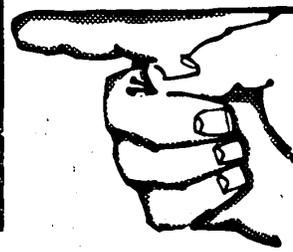
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