
Director: Steven Soderbergh
Duration: 122 minutes
Classification: PG
We rate it: 3 stars.

It’s certainly the season for third-in-the-series sequels, with Pirates of the Caribbean 3, Shrek the Third, and now Ocean’s Thirteen hitting our screens in – fittingly – the last three weeks. The latest in the spate of releases, Steven Soderbergh’s third entry in the “Ocean’s” series, while by no means as awful as Pirates 3, is roughly the same kind of going-through-the-motions exercise as Shrek the Third. It’s reasonably charming and quite proficient, but at the end of the day all it really does is remind us just how good the first entry in the series was.

It was late 2001 when Ocean’s Eleven (itself a remake and updating of a 1960 Ratpack outing) was released in America. With a cast glittering with A-list power and a director as smart as Hollywood money could buy, Ocean’s Eleven was bound to be the success it turned out to be. The key, though, as we so often forget, was a witty and polished screenplay; just like the first Pirates of the Caribbean film, the first of Soderbergh’s Ocean’s movies was written like a dream. It managed to be wonderfully entertaining, light and inoffensive, sly, witty and charming all at once. While the Vegas heist the original plot described was complex and filled with twists and turns, the film itself managed to be utterly beguiling rather than confusing and confused. Sadly this is not the case for this third instalment.

For Ocean’s Thirteen, the boys head back to Las Vegas in order to avenge the double-crossing given to their friend and mentor, Reuben Tishkoff (the always-wonderful Elliot Gould). We meet our heroes engaged in various not-entirely-legal undertakings happening around America, when Danny’s phonecalls summon everyone to Vegas. New villain Willie Bank (Al Pacino), a mega-rich hotelier, has duped Reuben out of his rightful earnings and given him a heart-attack to boot. With Reuben lying incapacitated in an hotel room, the boys rally to his side and concoct the mother of all schemes to get Reuben his money back and teach Bank the lesson of his life.

Without recounting much more of the film’s way-too-convoluted plot, I’ll simply say that the suave cast is put through fairly familiar paces again, and the Vegas locations are made to function as interesting enough eye-candy when the Armani-clad actors

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aren’t on screen. The female side of the equation isn’t terribly visible, however; both Julia Roberts and Catherine Zeta-Jones (likeable members of the first two films’ casts) are absent, and this time the only notable female presence is Ellen Barkin, who really looks to me like her heart isn’t in this one. While mildly diverting and polished to a reasonable shine, Ocean’s Thirteen utterly lacks the snappy interplay and witty dialogue that made the first film such a delightful concoction.

Nick Prescott