

“The Hustle”

By Helen Lutz

While I was in college the movie “The Sting” headlined theaters starring Robert Redford and Paul Newman as con artists Johnny Hooker and Henry Gondorff. The play that they put together took strategy, cunning, timing and a whole lot of luck. It is one of my favorite films of all time; I enjoy watching the con come together and all the twists and turns that are involved in the eventual outcome.



The new movie “The Hustle” pits two very different types of con artists against one another. The lovely Josephine Chesterfield, played by Ann Hathaway, shines in her haut couturier, style, grace and charm. While on a train in Europe she spots a hustle in the works by a lackluster Penny, played by crude and crass Rebel Wilson, involving a story about the trafficking of her beautiful sister – if only... The two don’t hit it off and Josephine immediately goes to work dissuade the dumpy Penny from encroaching on her turf.

Josephine has set up housekeeping very comfortably in the south of France with a fabulous home, staff and even a police sergeant who has her back. Her sultry look can melt a man’s heart as well as his wallet. Observing Josephine at work, Penny decides that she wants a piece of the action; however, is the fictional French Riviera town of Beaumont-Sur-Mer large enough to accommodate competing cons?

Penny blackmails Josephine into teaching her the finer arts of the business while Josephine schemes to get Penny to vacate the area. Everything comes to a head when the two meet tech mogul/inventor Thomas Westerburg (Alex Sharp) and strike a wager. Who can con him out of half a million dollars first? The loser vacates the area. The stunts that the two play on one another and on him come up a little short on my intelligence scale of strategic, cunning, etc. Hathaway’s part is much shrewder, while the ‘blind’ Penny borders on slapstick.

“The Hustle” provides around 90 minutes of pure silliness but lacks the story line of an “Ocean’s 8” or “The Italian Job” or “The Sting.” In the beginning of the movie Josephine explains to Penny that women make much better cons than men because “No man will ever believe that a woman is smarter than he is.” I really liked that comment and was interested to see just how it played out in their capers, but director Chris Addison never developed the idea opting for Keystone Kop antics and cheap laughs. On a scale of one to four Hart Beats I give “The Hustle” ♡♡. It’s a funny 90 minute escape from the daily routine that you’ll probably not spend 90 minutes of your life watching a second time around.