

THIEF

Synopsis/Pitch

Jeff Thelen



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OVERVIEW

TITLE: Thief

GENRE: Action Thriller / Drama

LOGLINE: When a young thief stumbles upon a double murder in a house he is burglarizing, he takes a stolen painting worth millions, and finds himself under the gun.

WRITER/DIRECTOR: Jeff Thelen

RATING: PG-13 (projected) for violence and language

ESTIMATED SCHEDULE: 20 Days (Principal Photography)

BUDGET: 20k+

LENGTH: 80 minutes, estimated

WHAT IS "THIEF?"

"Thief" tells the story of Cliff Sanders, a young man who turns to burglary when his life falls apart after his young daughter is taken--"stolen"--from their home.

As the film opens, Cliff is living in a cheap one-room apartment. He is a broken man who has given up on life, a man who has hit bottom and surrendered to despair and nihilism. He barely scrapes by delivering pizzas on his motorcycle.

One night Cliff delivers a pizza to a house, but no one answers. The door is open, so Cliff steps inside and finds a man and woman lying on the floor, shot dead.

Having nothing left to lose, Cliff takes a look around the place. He stumbles upon an old Russian painting of the Madonna and Child. Unaware of its worth, Cliff takes it. It means something to him.

Then, hearing a ruckus upstairs, Cliff realizes that the killer is still in the house, ransacking the place. Cliff flees, but not before the killer catches sight of him.

This incident sets off a Hitchcockian thriller as the killer starts to track down Cliff and the painting.

Cliff is interviewed at the pizza place by police detectives, who suspect he may have seen something at the murder house. Cliff denies seeing anything. Nevertheless, he is fired.

Angered by his firing, Cliff drives out into the country and breaks into a house.

Thus begins his career as a thief, driven in part by money, but also for the sheer exhilaration of it, as well as a desire to enter the lives of others. Night after night, Cliff breaks into houses and apartments--preferably in the dangerous dead of night while people are asleep--often taking personal items that could only be valuable to the owner.

Cliff's land-lady, Karla, is a single mother of a young daughter. Karla is attracted to the quiet young man. His mysterious, lonely existence intrigues her, and the story of his tragic marriage excites her sympathy. Despite his career as a thief, Cliff is a quiet, gentle man. He helps Karla around the place and takes an interest in her young daughter.

The spark of a romance, the possibility of redemption, of renewed purpose and meaning in life--a reason to get out of bed--is soon snuffed when the killer--and one of the police detectives involved in the case--kidnap Karla's daughter, demanding to exchange the girl for the painting.

Cliff must stand up, seize control, lift himself up out of the muck of nihilism and self-misery, be a man, *and take action*.

NOTES

"Thief" is a projected low-budget film. The story was tailored to be shot with minimal production values, locations, and actors. Despite the low budget, we think the intense, near-constant suspense of Cliff's burglaries, and his trajectory from a broken man to one who has to stand up and take positive (and violent) action, is compelling in ways low budget films rarely can afford to be.

It is, of course, imperative that Cliff be a sympathetic character. I am confident that given his tragic story and gentle nature, as portrayed by a skilled actor, audiences will not view Cliff as perverse or contemptible, but rather as a man who has made the wrong choices. Many criminals in the movies--even murderers--have succeeded in the same way at securing the audience's sympathy ("Bonnie & Clyde"), or, in the worst case, their rapt interest ("Taxi Driver"). And like many movie criminals, Cliff must pay the price.

"Thief" is partially inspired by two films, and borrows a bit from each. Much of Cliff's character is inspired by Bresson's "Pickpocket" (1959), a masterpiece of "transcendental cinema." The story of a lost, lonely pickpocket and his ultimate redemption through love has echoes in "Thief"--although its "happy" ending is not duplicated in our story.

Rather, our ending is more similar to that in "Drive" (2011), wherein the flawed criminal hero loses the girl, in part because of his violent actions. "Drive" is another film that seems a cinematic heir of "Pickpocket"--at least in so far as its hero is a lonely criminal who finds redemption in the love of a woman.

Cliff shares alot with the heroes in "Pickpocket" and "Drive." He is a soft-spoken, *silent* man, whose still nature hides a rage that threatens to burst forth any moment. In fact, the two movies, like our proposed film, are very much silent movies, preferring a moody atmosphere, visuals and understatement to talky, theatrical scenes.

CHARACTERS

Cliff. 28-35. An average young man who has hit bottom. A young father of a missing child. Thin, almost scrawny. A brooding, silent presence. One senses under the still surface is a dangerous raging force, waiting to explode. Models: Ryan Gosling.

Karla. 25-30. Mother of a young daughter. A warm, loving woman with a sweet disposition. Her husband is just a distant memory. An artist who has not had any success. She

manages an apartment building. Model: Carey Mulligan.