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## Catch Me If You Can by Steven Spielberg: Critical Response

Catch Me If You Can is a 2002 movie directed by Steven Spielberg with a nonlinear plot that revolves around Frank Abagnale, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, forging checks and posing as various people in Europe. Abagnale is pursued by Carl Hanratty, an FBI agent until he is finally caught. This film is based on the true story of Frank Abagnale Jr.'s infamous cons occurring in the 1960s. The various scams included impersonating as a doctor, pilot, lawyer, and substitute teacher among other things. This movie is one of my favorites because of the plot but more importantly because it is simply amazing that someone had gotten away with such huge frauds in reality. I agree with film critics who have rated the movie as a success because the plot does not get boring, there is enough comedy and drama to keep it interesting without overshadowing the scams, and because the diegetic film elements pull the audience into sympathizing with the antihero.

Catch Me If You Can is a hybrid color film, between a documentary and a narrative, with a screen duration of 141 minutes. Because it is a documentary movie, its mise-en-scene is very crucial. Everything from the characters' costumes to the location and dialogue needs to look like the 1960s since that is the movie's setting. Catch Me If You Can starts in medias res at a French prison in 1969 and then the next scene is a flashback to 1963 where Frank Abagnale is sitting with his parents while his father, Frank William Abagnale Sr. is being recognized during a Rotary International event. Throughout the course of the movie, we see that Frank acts as a substitute teacher for a class he was supposed to be attending. His parents divorce and when Frank runs out of money, he produces fake Pan American payroll checks on a million-dollar scale. The FBI start tracking Frank so Frank pretends he is a U.S. Secret Service agent to avoid being arrested. Throughout the next few years, Frank poses as a doctor and a lawyer, all the while running from place to place to avoid arrest.

Catch Me If You Can has mostly positive reviews from famous film critics. David Edelstein is one of the many critics who is a fan of this movie. Edelstein says the movie overall "moves nimbly, breathlessly, from incident to incident as if the director himself were staying one step ahead of the law" (Edelstein, 2002). This is very accurate as the movie never fails to keep the watcher's attention. The constant action of Frank trying to avoid arrest and being alert every minute keeps the audience's attention while the transitions between each scam is effortless. Edelstein further says, "the story is neither a comedy nor a tragedy - it's arrested halfway between a breezy, finger-popping lark and a tale of woe. It has you giggling all the way through - and feeling simultaneous dread at the certainty of its hero going down" (Edelstein, 2002). The movie focuses on the scams long enough for the audience to understand the situation but short enough that the audience is still interested. Every time I watch this movie, I feel anxious about the numerous close encounters Frank has with Carl, the FBI agent. A great example of a very close call is when Carl tracks Frank to his hotel room. Frank is in the bathroom and when he comes out and realizes that Carl is an FBI agent, Frank pretends to be a Secret Service agent and, through dialogue, fools Carl into letting him escape. Frank is so witty that he even takes one of the rare evidences Carl had – the machine that Frank used to forge the fake checks.

Another critic with an overall positive review was James Berardinelli. He says how even though

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the movie is serious, there are parts of it that are funny. I agree because in certain situations, there is slight humor, such as during dinner. Berardinelli also states, "the final fifteen minutes are protracted and arguably unnecessary. In his attempts to redeem Frank, Spielberg may go too far and let the movie continue past the point where it begins to run out of steam" (Berardinelli, 2002). I disagree that the last part of the movie is not important. The last 20 minutes of the movie is when Frank is shown to finally be caught. This is crucial because it actually shows the protagonist being caught, which I would argue is the point where the audience is most sympathetic to Frank. Frank is shown to be exiting the factory with Carl after giving up as he had no other option. Even at this point, the audience still hopes that Frank can escape because he has done it previously numerous times. The audience is not wrong; Frank actually does escape even after being captured at the factory and runs to his mother's house. This is one of the most emotional scenes in the movie for me because as he looks through the glass, he sees his mother and her new husband. He also meets his half-sister who is standing on the other side of the window but is soon caught again by the FBI. It is then shown that Frank is convicted and is frequently visited by Carl who takes Frank's help in order to identify and recognize fraudulent checks. Frank is later released and continues a normal life helping to identify scams involving checks. Without these last crucial fifteen minutes of the movie, we would not know what happened to Frank's mother. The audience would also not know about Frank's life after being captured and arrested because of the scrolling text at the end, which is a nondiegetic film element. Thus, to me, I think the last 15 minutes are arguably important to the movie and far from being unnecessary.

A famous third critic, Roger Ebert, liked the movie but stated, "this [the movie] is not a major Spielberg film, although it is an effortlessly watchable one" (Ebert, 2002). Though some of Spielberg's other movies may be more famous, such as the Indiana Jones series, in my opinion *Catch Me If You Can* is still a great movie. As Ebert says, the movie is "watchable", and in my opinion, has all the elements that a good movie needs. Its cinematography is good, consisting of various types of camera shots. The overall story and plot are both kept interesting with Frank constantly fleeing to escape capture. There is also an emotional side to the movie in regards to Frank's relationship with his parents.

Overall, I agree with the film critics who have rated the movie as a success. The movie's plot remains interesting throughout the film and humor in the movie does not overshadow Frank's cons. Furthermore, the diegetic film elements pull the audience into sympathizing with the antihero. *Catch Me If You Can* is rated positively by numerous critics and is one of my favorite movies.