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Instead of 'Ocean,' plenty of other fish in the sea

Last summer's "Wonder Woman" set the gold standard for films featuring women in traditionally male roles. In it, there were none of the tone-deaf, casually misogynistic clichés that get a pass when women are excluded from the development process.

Armored bustier notwithstanding, the movie didn't pander to the male gaze. It was a rock-'em sock-'em action movie.

And it made a lot of money.

"Ocean's 8" employs the most densely woman-studded cast in recent memory to round out what could have been a feminist trifecta that included "Ocean's 8," "Bridesmaids" and "Wonder Woman."

Regrettably, "Ocean's 8" will not be standing in the winner's circle.

The "Ocean" producers seemed to have a winning formula. All they had to do next was parachute a lineup of ballsy women into the ladylike equivalent of a rat-a-tat Vegas casino: The Costume Institute Ball at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

They found a simpatico star to play an attractive thief with a believable plan and credible skills, then gave her a supporting team of felonious experts to help pull it off.

Even so, there's not a single moment in the earnest "Ocean's 8" that snaps, crackles or pops.

When Debbie Ocean (Sandra Bullock), sister of the (apparently) departed Danny Ocean, is released from prison, she emerges wearing the same sparkling evening dress she wore on the night of her incarceration. She had been set up by her cowardly art-dealer boyfriend, a handsome sleazeball.

Free but not flush, Debbie swindles a wardrobe from the toniest



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stores in Manhattan. Then she runs a con that provides her with a five-star hotel suite where she assembles a team skilled enough to steal a \$150 million Cartier diamond necklace at the Met Ball: Cate Blanchett as Lou, her long-standing partner in crime; Mindy Kaling as a jeweler whose job it is to dismantle and copy the jewels; Sarah Paulson as a suburban mom who sidelines as a fence; comedian Awkwafina as a sleight-of-hand artist and pickpocket; Rihanna as a

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computer hacker; Helena Bonham Carter as a fashion designer; and Anne Hathaway as the actress-diva who wears the necklace to the ball.

Awkwafina, who will star in August 2018's "Crazy Rich Asians," uses her small role to establish

herself as someone to watch. The movie also includes cameo roles for veteran actors such as Elizabeth Ashley, Dana Ivey and Marlo Thomas.

James Corden is vibrant and hilarious as the insurance inspector sent in to solve the crime, recalling Oscar Isaac's insurance inspector in "Suburbicon."

As thieves, men like Cary Grant ("To Catch a Thief") and George Clooney ("Ocean's 11") charmed and seduced their way through glitzy locations like Monte Carlo and Las Vegas. Elegant and rakish, eyes twinkling, they were untrustworthy in every way.

There's no equivalent posture for Sandra Bullock. She's America's sweetheart, and the moviemakers seem undecided as to whether they want her to be flinty or adorable in this role. (Blanchett gets to be flinty, period.)

Who is Debbie Ocean supposed to be? The bad-boyfriend subplot suggests she's a woman scorned, which could be fun if she extracted a satisfying revenge at his expense. But the movie never completely offers the burst of pleasure that one gets when movie-justice is administered to a deserving villain.

"Ocean's 8" spends little time developing its women characters and operates from the assumption that audiences will bring with them the same contextual associations to a female-friendly caper that they bring for the men. The movie doesn't respect such

characters well enough to develop them, making it difficult for audiences to invest in them as well.

The same film with a lower budget, an unknown cast or a weaker franchise pedigree, might have lingered on the shelf.