

Movie Review: 'The Old Man & the Gun'

NEW YORK — A career criminal as a jaunty old coot is the conceit that propels “The Old Man & the Gun” (Fox Searchlight).

Perhaps the idea was to show Robert Redford as a weathered Sundance Kid in a series of montages speeding around the American Southwest, with a vague lesson about the importance of enjoying the present. Instead, the result is soporific.

Adapted by writer-director David Lowery from David Grann’s New Yorker magazine profile of Forrest Tucker, who died in prison in 2004, the film is billed as “mostly true.”

During a wide-ranging spree of heists in 1981, Tucker (Redford) works with two partners, Teddy (Danny Glover) and Waller (Tom Waits), and their modus operandi is always nonviolent. Tucker approaches tellers or bank managers, indicates that he has a firearm, they quietly fill up his briefcase, and he speeds away, with his victims mostly recalling his good manners.

Eventually the trio moves up to more elaborate schemes, such as stealing gold bars. But banks are their main preoccupation.

So the robberies, along with a decades-long string of breakouts from penal institutions, including from San Quentin State Prison in an improvised sailboat, are shown to result more from compulsion than a rage against societal norms.

Tucker is charming enough to have been married a couple of times and begun at least one family, all of which bonds he abandoned. By the early 1980s, he’s chastely wooing Jewel (Sissy Spacek), a widow who is struggling to hold on to her horse ranch. She eventually realizes his long rap sheet, but for most of the story, she at least pretends to ignore it.

On his trail is police detective John Hunt (Casey Affleck), who slowly uncovers and connects Tucker’s past and stays on the case even after FBI agents arrive to take

over, mumbling something about how the FBI has always gone after bank robbers: “Ya know, like John Dillinger.”

There’s also something in there about how devoting one’s life to a cause is the energy that drives us all to succeed. But that sputters out in yet another montage of highly illegal account withdrawals.

Viewers hoping to identify a point or moral to the story won’t locate one, but they may enjoy the loping drive.

The film contains benignly viewed larceny and fleeting rough language. The Catholic News Service classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Copyright ©2018 Catholic News Service/U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.