

"WHEELMAN"

Original Screenplay

Written

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. SAN DIEGO CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

A large block-long piece of modern architecture sitting on San Diego Bay. On the street level promenade, various company offices. One in particular: "The Bank of Asia".

A late model, faceless sedan glides into a parking spot not far from the entrance to the bank.

SEDAN - CLOSE ON - STEVE CHALMERS AT THE WHEEL --

Mid-twenties, strongly built, cool and rugged. (If only Steve McQueen were still around).

PULL BACK TO REVEAL NED PEYTON

Sitting beside Chalmers. His features fail to conceal the cold meanness at the core of his character. He holds a walkie-talkie jumping with STATIC.

SCANLON (O.S.)  
He's turning into Harbor  
Street...

ANOTHER CAR A FEW BLOCKS AWAY - POV THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

The driver, LIAM SCANLON, follows a long, black Mercedes heading for the Convention Center. Scanlon is tall, stringy, buzzed; long face and etched cheekbones. He nervously rubs a small crucifix.

SCANLON (Cont'd)  
(mumbling to himself)  
Forgive me, Lord...

RESUME - CHALMERS & PEYTON

PEYTON  
(into walkie-talkie)  
Alright, cut that praying,  
Scanlon!

SCANLON  
The Indonesian is only a half  
block away now.

PEYTON  
We'll be inside waiting for him  
to open his box in the vault.  
Then we move in.

CHALMERS

Why can't we just wait until he leaves with the bonds?

PEYTON

Because he won't. As the new Finance Minister his job is to audit the contents and confirm it's all in there. In a few minutes it won't be.

Peyton motions to where three men -- JOHN FRAZIER, BOB TORSON and CARLOS are entering the bank... Scanlon's car finds a parking spot close by.

PEYTON (Cont'd)

Torson will be carrying the negotiables. Frazier, me and the wetback will make sure he's got plenty of time.

Peyton now gets out and casually heads for the bank, just as the intended Indonesian victim arrives in his Mercedes stretch with a uniformed Chauffeur at the wheel.

The smartly-dressed Indonesian official gets out and heads directly for the same bank.

Alone behind the wheel, Chalmers turns the ignition; it hums quietly as Peyton politely holds the bank door for the prosperous Indonesian.

... Nervously tapping the wheel, Chalmers checks the rear-view mirror, turning this way and that, looking for something:

CHALMERS

(through his teeth)  
Okay, Lomax, it's your move.

SCANLON (V.O.)

What?

Chalmers has forgotten the open walkie-talkie.

CHALMERS

Nothing. Just nerves I guess.

SCANLON (V.O.)

Yeah, I know. I got a little Smith & Wesson here helps calm me. You coulda had one too.

CHALMERS

You carry one, you use it.

Chalmers takes a long breath, looks up at his REFLECTION in the rear-view MIRROR. MOVE IN on Chalmers' eyes in the reflection.

DISSOLVE INTO FLASHBACK: HOW CHALMERS GOT HERE.

FLASHBACK: EXT. PACIFIC BEACH - SAN DIEGO - FOREIGN CAR GARAGE - DAY

An Auto Shop, "Gino's."

Chalmers works on the engine of an old Jaguar... His Boss tugs at his worksuit... Country & Western MUSIC blasts from an old RADIO.

GINO

That soapdish Porsche we got for sale. Guy wants for you to take him for a spin.

CHALMERS

Me? Why?

GINO

He asked for you. That's thirty-eight grand sittin' on four-wheels. Make sure he knows it.

Chalmers starts for the lot full of classical sports cars.

EXT. THE LOT - DAY

Looking over the beautifully restored Porsche is CARL LOMAX, early forties. He wears a nondescript business suit, is clean shaven and there's not a hint of expression on his face.

CHALMERS

You the buyer?

LOMAX

You drive. Take her onto the Interstate.

EXT./INT. PORSCHE - INTERSTATE 5 - VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY

It speeds toward the gleaming skyline of downtown San Diego, the blue-green Pacific off to the side.

CHALMERS

Don't you want to try her out?

LOMAX

Maybe later. Floor it!

CHALMERS

Ever hear of the Highway Patrol?

LOMAX

Not to worry. I'll handle the ticket.

Chalmers shrugs, pulls out of his lane - guns it. He owns the Porsche as it cuts across another lane and zooms toward...

LOMAX (Cont'd)

Impress me. Hit the final marker.

This is like a beagle challenging a greyhound. Chalmers takes off like an F-14. And we see how strangely relaxed he is, almost heady with the power of the machine under his control. Lomax sees this too, and likes it. Very much so.

Suddenly the WAIL OF A SIREN. Chalmers slows, pulls over.

A San Diego police car joins them.

LOMAX (Cont'd)

Relax. I said I'd handle it.

The Cop approaches.

HIGHWAY PATROL OFFICER

License and registration.

LOMAX

That won't be necessary, Officer.

Lomax leans past Chalmers, his hand holding an open wallet with his FBI ID visible. The Officer examines it:

HIGHWAY PATROL OFFICER

Okay. Have a good day, Agent Lomax.

(MORE)

HIGHWAY PATROL OFFICER (Cont'd)  
(to Chalmers)  
And drive more carefully.

NEW SHOT - INSIDE PORSCHE

As Lomax pockets his ID, Chalmers has gotten a good look.

CHALMERS  
What's the FBI want with me?

LOMAX  
Actually, we'd like you to sign  
on for that 'Indonesian Job.'

CHALMERS  
Never heard of it.

LOMAX  
You're well aware that Peyton and  
his friends won't make a move  
without you. Word is you're one  
of the finest 'wheelmen' in the  
business.

CHALMERS  
So how come I got caught before?

LOMAX  
Because you've got loads of skill  
and no fucking luck. Not until  
you met me. I'm about to change  
your life around, boy.

CHALMERS  
So you're setting them up?

LOMAX  
No. You are.

CHALMERS  
Not a chance. Forget it.

LOMAX  
It'd impress your parole officer.  
You see, consorting with known  
felons is a clear violation.  
You'll do another 14 months.

CHALMERS  
I can handle it.

LOMAX

And how do you think Lenore's going to make out -- doing hard time?

Lomax waves a snapshot of a strikingly beautiful young cocktail waitress smiling at camera.

CHALMERS

Leave her out of this.

LOMAX

How can I? She knows all about the illegal enterprise in question -- which makes her an accessory before the fact. She'll never be the same when she gets out.

Chalmers takes the snapshot, studies it hard.

CHALMERS

What's your offer?

LOMAX

Assist us in this sting and your parole is terminated. You and your lovely girlfriend start with a clean slate.

(a beat)

If you're considering tipping them you'll do a lot more than 14 months.

CHALMERS

You don't give me much choice.

LOMAX

None. Now don't start thinking about it. You're not good at that. Just say 'Thank you, Agent Lomax.'

Chalmers desperately wants to smash the federal agent's face -- but instead he nods. He's hooked and he knows it.

END OF FLASHBACK.

RETURN TO SCENE OF THE ROBBERY IN PROGRESS.

INT. THE SEDAN PARKED OPPOSITE THE BANK OF ASIA - DAY

As Chalmers anxiously awaits the arrival of Lomax and his FBI unit -- but there's still no sign of them.

Then a dark sedan slowly rounds the corner and edges forward.

It's only an old man and woman traveling at 10 MPH.

CHALMERS

Shit, Lomax -- where the fuck are  
your people?

Everything is too damn quiet. The silence is broken only by the crackling STATIC of the walkie-talkie, but no voice comes through.

CHALMERS (Cont'd)

Scanlon? Answer me! What's  
going on in there?

Suddenly, the silence is shattered. Muffled GUN SHOTS from the bank! The explosion of a SHOTGUN BLAST.

CAMERA WHIP-PANS to the front entrance of the bank.

... Frazier, wearing a nylon stocking mask like the others rushes out, with Torson running behind him. A BANK GUARD in pursuit.

... Scanlon whirls and guns him down. Peyton staggers out, limping, followed by Carlos.

... Chalmers is almost bouncing on his seat screaming to himself...

CHALMERS (Cont'd)

Lomax, you fuckup!

MORE SHOTS as Scanlon rushes to Peyton's aid while Torson reaches Chalmers and jumps in, holding a thick briefcase. Scanlon fires again hitting a second guard.

TORSON

I got the bonds. Step on it!

CHALMERS

What about the others?

TORSON

(pointing the gun)  
I said move it!

Chalmers steps on it and the car rips away, leaving the others behind to fend for themselves.

INT./EXT. CHALMERS' GETAWAY SEDAN - THE CHASE - DAY

(CHOREOGRAPHED STUNT DRIVING SEQUENCE)

Chalmers cuts across an oncoming traffic lane -- two cars heading directly at him -- and gets onto Harbor Drive heading north. As Torson rips off his nylon mask...

TORSON

One of the bank managers musta been gettin' ready for some hunting trip... had a piece like a fuckin' cannon! Frazier blew him away. Some mess!

CHALMERS

The mess is here -- coming right at us!

A POLICE CRUISER races at them, LIGHTS FLASHING, SIREN WAILING. Chalmers brakes, reverses and now is going against the traffic in his own lane -- Torson screaming for dear life!

His reversal causes various cars to brake, and the police cruiser slams headlong into one of them.

Chalmers suddenly cuts across a grass lawn and roars down a street of old warehouses, disappearing around a turn.

TORSON (O.S.)

Straight ahead. Peyton had a fall-back spot in case of trouble.

EXT./INT. CHALMERS' SEDAN (MOVING) - MOUNTAIN ROAD - LATER

as it winds its way up a narrow, rock-strewn road that borders a steep canyon somewhere between El Cajon and Calexico. Lots of trees, dense foliage.

CHALMERS

(suspicious)  
How come Peyton never mentioned any fall-back?

TORSON

Who expected it to go bad? I only knew because it was me carrying the bonds.

He taps the briefcase. There's a clearing up ahead.

TORSON (Cont'd)

That's it. We pull over and wait.

CHALMERS

If he shows.

NEW SHOT - CLEARING AT EDGE OF CANYON - DAY

Chalmers pulls in. Torson gets out with the thick briefcase. Hesitant, unsure of this "development," Chalmers takes a beat to check the area. Sees nothing. He gets out. Torson paces near the edge of the clearing. He seems unusually hyper.

TORSON

Four mil, Steve. Negotiable bearer bonds. We got it made.

CHALMERS

Torson, this is all bullshit, isn't it? Peyton's not coming.

TORSON

What do you say we fuck the bastard? He always treated us like shit.

CHALMERS

Then who are we waiting for?

As if in answer to the question, FBI agent Lomax steps out from behind dense shrubbery.

LOMAX

(to Steve)

I promised you I'd turn up.

TORSON

We're bringing you in on this, Steve. Fuckin' brilliant ain't it? It's just the three of us. Better cut than five ways, eh?

CHALMERS

(it hits him)

He two suckered me... that was a fake ID.

LOMAX

Wrong, I've got sixteen years invested in the Bureau. I'm just collecting my pension early.

Lomax takes the briefcase from Torson.

TORSON

Shit, I'd kill to see Peyton's stupid mug!

LOMAX

Sadly, you never will.

Lomax draws his gun, fires past Chalmers hitting Torson, who crumbles to the ground, dead.

LOMAX (Cont'd)

(to Chalmers)

Stay very still.

Holding Chalmers at bay with the gun, he checks out the briefcase, pleased with its contents.

LOMAX (Cont'd)

Personal question, Steve. Ever been shot?

CHALMERS

--- No.

LOMAX

Oh, I took a few bullets once in the line of duty. It's not like you'd expect. You don't even feel it for fifteen-twenty seconds. Till you see the blood running out of you.

(a beat)

That's when I was reborn. With all the Bureau bullshit bled out of me. I was a new man -- in business only for myself.

CHALMERS

You engineered this whole fucking thing.

LOMAX

Wrote the script -- cast all the sordid characters and now here comes the surprise ending.

Chalmers glances toward the parked car. If he could dive behind it, it might serve as cover. He takes one short step in that direction.

LOMAX (Cont'd)

Thanks for funding my retirement.

Lomax fires just as Chalmers drops and rolls behind the car. He gets to his feet and makes a mad dash for the wooded area some twenty feet away. A bullet ricochets at his feet, forcing him in the other direction.

He finds himself trapped at the very edge of the clearing, the steep, rocky ravine falling to the canyon floor below him. His back is to Lomax...

LOMAX (Cont'd)

(amused)

You drive better than you run.

He pumps a bullet into Chalmers' back. The force of the steel propels Chalmers over the edge, tumbling down this tall, sheer wall of rock to the canyon floor below, his body partially hidden by a jagged boulder. Lomax leans over, shoots again.

It looks certain that Chalmers is dead. Lomax begins to climb down in order to get in still another shot.

The rocks give way. Lomax almost slips himself -- a fall that might do severe damage.

Pulling himself back to safety, Lomax heads back into the trees where his own car is hidden. He drives off -- taking along the briefcase with the negotiable bonds.

ANGLE ON - CHALMERS

A terrible silence as his body lies crumpled in the dirt.

SCREEN GOES BLACK - JUMBLED IMAGES FROM THE PAST APPEAR:

FIRST FLASH (BEDROOM) DAY: Lenore in a towel, hot as they come, her hair up, just out of the shower. He rips her towel off, bites at her neck and pushes her naked body up against the wall...