

A filmed record of stage magic doesn't make a lot of sense, if you think about it. An illusionist needs a live audience to conjure deep feelings of mystery and wonder, because it's all happening in the room right in front of you, and you can study the performers and the stage to try to figure out how they did the tricks—and be delightfully mystified when you can't. In movies (and on TV), the magic tricks themselves can't actually impress you, because editing and visual effects can do just about anything.

That means that the only magic trick left is staying a step ahead of the plot guessers in the audience, whose primary source of pleasure is figuring out where things are going before the movie gets there. To its credit, the "[Now You See Me](#)" trilogy, about magic experts tricking powerful bad guys, understands this principle and conveys it with humor and a light touch. That understanding, plus a strong cast, is the only thing preventing the films from turning into jumbled, giant bags of arbitrary plot twists, eager to outsmart viewers into nonsense.

The third entry in the series, "Now You See Me: Now You Don't," stays on the right side of that risk as it reintroduces the Four Horsemen, a quartet of conjurers and other tricksters, and throws them into a plot to steal the world's biggest diamond. [Jesse Eisenberg](#)'s J. Daniel Atlas, the erstwhile leader of the group, is even more confidently forceful now (Eisenberg has aged out of *wunderkind* arrogance, his onscreen superpower in films like "The Social Network" and Zack Snyder's DC films, and into something more grounded). As in the other movies, a lot of the fun comes from watching his equally egotistical team resist his authority, bicker, and insult each other. It's all overseen by new-to-the-series director [Ruben Fleischer](#) (reunited with his "Zombieland" stars) and four credited writers. The team tries to balance giving audiences something old and something new, while simultaneously laying the track for the series to continue with younger characters if the returning players get tired or ask for too much money to appear in a fourth installment.

The aforementioned huge diamond is the property of glamorous international crime syndicate boss Veronika Vanderberg ([Rosamund Pike](#)), a South African. In this one, the ever-morphing quartet is rounded out by [Woody Harrelson](#)'s porkpie-hatted mentalist Merritt McKinney; [Dave Franco](#)'s card shark Dave Wilder; and [Isla Fisher](#) (who replaced Lizzy Caplan in the second movie as the group's sole female member) as Henley Reeves, an escapist who used to be Danny's assistant and girlfriend. [Morgan Freeman](#) makes a brief return appearance as Thaddeus Bradley, the retired ex-magician turned debunker, and once the Grandmaster of The Eye, the secret society that has (some) authority over the Horsemen. And there are some other surprise appearances that we won't divulge here, even though they're listed on IMDb.

The opening sequence seems like an anniversary celebration of the Horsemen's founding, but it turns into a debut for a trio whose illusions serve charity and social activism: Justice Smith's Charlie, Ariana Greenblatt's June, and Dominic Sessa's Bosco

Leroy. After the trio outs a crypto huckster and redistributes his wealth, Danny is so impressed that he recruits them to join the Horsemen in a mission to Antwerp, where Veronika is cultivating her network of diamond aficionados to maintain her real business, money laundering, and steal the diamond, which is displayed to wow the crowd.

From there, it turns into an everything-plus-the-kitchen-sink comic thriller where the seeming pinball-machine randomness of the story evokes the Pink Panther films and Bob Hope and Bing Crosby's "Road" series more so than a standard heist picture. It doesn't add up to much, and it evaporates from the mind as soon as it's over, but that was true of the other two movies, which made over \$700 million globally despite mostly lukewarm reviews. At a time when nothing but familiar IP films seem to be able to get any traction ("Sinners" notwithstanding), that's another kind of magic trick.