

What happens in The Loft stays in the loft

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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The plot is the star in *The Loft*, an erotic thriller of "how desire and secrecy can spiral out of control and go to a very dark place."

Five unhappily married men, one secret loft, two beautiful blondes: What could possibly go wrong?

The bloody answer to that question proved irresistible to movie-goers in Belgium, who flocked to the 2008 Dutch-language film in record numbers, making *The Loft* the biggest box-office hit in the nation's history.

After directing the original version, Erik van Looy realized the erotic thriller would translate beautifully for a worldwide audience.

"The team at Woestijnvis who produced *The Loft* felt that Bart de Pauw's fantastic screenplay deserved to be discovered across the whole world," explains Van Looy. "*The Loft* is not an art-house film. We all wanted it to reach a broad global audience and the only way to achieve this was through an American remake."



Tightly plotted storyline

For the R-rated US remake, Van Looy had no desire to tinker with the tightly plotted storyline. As in the original, *The Loft* follows the story of five married men who share a penthouse loft in the city as a clandestine love nest. But when they discover a beautiful dead woman in the apartment, the husbands' scheme implodes, leaving in its wake crumbled marriages, broken friendships and a police investigation that will end in a murder charge for one of them.

When Wesley Strick came on to write the English-language adaptation, the director had only one directive. "My instruction to the screenwriter was: 'Remain true to the original!'" the director recalls.

Van Looy is hardly the first to remake his own movie. Alfred Hitchcock directed two versions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. More recently, Michael Haneke followed his German-language *Funny Games* with an English-language adaptation. Even Cecil B DeMille shot *The Ten Commandments* twice.

"Every movie I've directed leaves me with the feeling that it could have been done better," says Van Looy. "After making the original *The Loft*, I felt like it could have been sharper and the camera movements even snappier. With the remake, I knew exactly what I was aiming for, so I really feel like *The Loft* is an upgrade of the original movie."

Born and bred in Europe

Although the story of *The Loft* was born and bred in Europe, Van Looy is confident it will feel right at home in cinemas worldwide.

"Bart de Pauw wrote the screenplay in an attic in town of Lier outside of Antwerp, but I've always felt like this story would work even better in an American context," says Van Looy. "Not because more adultery is committed in the US - or because there are more lofts here - but simply because we are used to seeing thrillers in a Hollywood context."

Eric Stonestreet expects audiences to have the same kind of reaction he had upon reading *The Loft*'s script for the first time. "I was in the middle of shooting *Modern Family* and my girlfriend says: 'You have to read this', but she wouldn't tell me anything about the story. Usually, when I watch a movie, I sit there thinking - 'I've got this figured out'. With *The Loft*, you don't know what's going to happen next and that's something I think audiences will really respond to."

In assembling the English-language cast for *The Loft*, Van Looy put together an entirely new ensemble, with one exception: Matthias Schoenaerts.

Before the fast-rising Belgian actor appeared alongside Marion Cotillard in *Rust and Bone*, in the Oscar-nominated *Bullhead* or the English-language thriller *The Drop*, he played hothead Filip Willems in the original *The Loft* film.

Schoenaerts speaks fondly of his volatile, cocaine-snorting character. "Filip's the youngest, most impulsive member of the group," he says. "He had a troubled childhood, so he's got anger issues. Filip's like this little piece of dynamite, ready to go off at any minute."

The fact that Schoenaerts already knew his character inside and out was a big advantage, according to Van Looy. "He went at it with his usual energy from the first day."



On-set intensity

Schoenaerts' on-set intensity inspired visceral performances from the other actors as well, says the director.

"American actors have a tendency to analyse and talk a lot about their characters, which is understandable at the beginning, because acting puts you in a vulnerable position, but once you're on set, the attitude has to become: 'Let's get going! Just play the part and we'll see what happens.' And that's Matthias' style. When the other actors saw Matthias really go for it, they got very focussed."

New Zealand actor Karl Urban jumped at the chance to play Vincent Stevens, who sets the story in motion by handing out keys to a luxury apartment to his four friends for secret trysts.

"None of these characters is what they appear to be," Urban says. "Each one has his own dark side and, to me, as an actor, that was really interesting because it adds another dimension."

The Loft gave Urban an opportunity to shift gears from the many successful action movies he's appeared in, including Star Trek into Darkness, Riddick, Priest, Dredd and The Bourne Supremacy.

"As an actor I like to do something different from what I've just done," he explains. "The character of Vincent appealed to me because he's not running around with a gun. He doesn't have some kind of gigantic, epic dilemma. Instead, the movie touches on marriages and infidelity and friendship and ambition and weaves it all into this very rich kind of tapestry."

A complex character

Wentworth Miller plays the low-key Luke Seacord. "He's a complex character and I enjoyed finding the shades of grey in Luke," says Miller, a Princeton University graduate who starred in the hit TV series Prison Break. "The Loft is about five people who think they know each other, but come to discover that they may not know each other that well after all. Nobody in this movie is entirely black or white, but for my character in particular, I had to walk a very fine line."

Miller especially appreciated the film's careful and clever plotting. "The script is constructed like an intricate puzzle," he says. "When I first read the screenplay, I didn't see the end coming at all."

While all the men in The Loft have flaws, James Marsden sees his character, psychologist Chris Vanowen, as the closest thing to a hero. "I think Chris is the most morally grounded person of the five," says Marsden. "He's the conscience of the movie and struggles with infidelity more than anyone else. If there's any big decision that has to be made, the other guys

look to Chris to make the right choice."

"There's a very Hitchcockian element to The Loft and I don't know think Hollywood is making those types of movies anymore."

Marsden welcomed the chance to make a movie that uses a time-honoured approach to suspense in a thoroughly contemporary setting. "I feel like there's a very Hitchcockian element to The Loft and I don't know think Hollywood is making those types of movies anymore," he says. "They're mostly either big giant comic book movies or little independent films, so it's nice to be part of a movie like The Loft. It's a classic thriller."

Multiple flashbacks

Keeping track of the film's deceptions and multiple flashbacks required intense concentration on set. Marsden muses: "What clues are we putting out there? What does my character know, or not know? What is he faking, what is he doing for real? How are we manipulating the audience with the timeline?"

Marsden observes that the taut structure of The Loft requires each actor to serve the story. "The plot is the star."

For Eric Stonestreet, the role of philandering Marty Landry offered a departure from his role as Cameron Tucker in the Emmy-winning sitcom Modern Family. "In The Loft, people make mistakes on top of mistakes on top of mistakes that keep spinning out of control," Stonestreet says. "As an audience member I love watching movies where you just know it's not going to turn out well."

Stonestreet figures the film's infidelity theme will resonate with movie-goers. "I think there will be a lot of conversations between girlfriends and boyfriends and husbands and wives after they have seen this movie," he says. "Every woman is going to ask the man: Would you accept a key? Would you do that to your friends?"

Stonestreet provided plenty of comic relief during filming, according to cast mate Miller. "When you work with material as intense as The Loft, you want to counterbalance that with humour, and Eric's a riot," Miller says. "He always had a joke to tell or a magic trick to show. He's the first to be sarcastic and silly, and if there were moments that felt awkward or over-acted, he'd be the first to point it out. In between takes, it was nice to be able to laugh."

Adult themes

Australian actress Rachael Taylor embraced her role as Chris' mistress Ann with a full appreciation of the film's

complicated adult themes.

"The French playwright Jean Anouilh has a great quote: 'There is love of course. And then there's life, its enemy.' The script articulates relationships in a very modern, realistic way. American men are often asked to suppress their sexual appetite and I thought that was an interesting idea for a movie to explore."

Taylor, who previously portrayed an intelligence analyst in Michael Bay's 2007 Transformer blockbuster, says: "In The Loft, I play a prostitute hired to seduce the Chris character. But in the end, we fall in love with each other. That's probably the most complex relationship theme in the film."

The actress says she had no problem generating chemistry with Marsden. "I have the biggest crush in the world on James Marsden," she says. "James has so much natural charisma and as an actor, he's incredibly generous."

Isabel Lucas, the Swiss-Australian actress who portrayed Greek goddess Athena in 2011's Immortals, plays Sarah Deakins in The Loft. "The film is a picture of how desire and secrecy can spiral out of control and go to a very dark place," she says. "All the universal themes are there: betrayal and infidelity, jealousy, control and love, lust, passion."

The Loft will be showing nationwide from 13 November.

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