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Review: *The Wolf of Wall Street*

By [Jordan Gass-Poore](#) on December 24, 2013 - 3:00pm in [Reviews](#) | [New Releases](#)



Director [Martin Scorsese](#) reunites for the fifth time with actor [Leonardo DiCaprio](#) in the true-to-life black comedy *The Wolf of Wall Street*, based on Jordan Belfort's 2007 unapologetic, if not embellished, memoir of the same name.

Both the movie and memoir trace the rise and fall of stockbroker Belfort, played by a greasy, dark-haired DiCaprio (when is his hair not greasy?). In the spirit of wolf puns, *The Wolf of Wall Street* chokes on the metaphorical hairball.

Belfort begins his foray into the amoral world of Wall Street in 1987, when he starts working at Rothschild. There's an uncomfortably humorous scene in the movie where he's having lunch with his boss, a spraytanned Matthew McConaughey, who gives him hackneyed advice about the industry, one that breaths fantasy and illusion.

After the stock market crashes on that fateful Black Monday, Belfort learns about penny stocks (in which borkers get a much larger percentage of commission) and eventually co-founds the firm Stratton-Oakmont. The Queens native assembles a ragtag team of blue-collar types who are looking to grab a slice of the American Dream, operative word *grab*, to work for him and his shifty-eyed right-hand man, Donnie Azoff ([Jonah Hill](#) with ghoulish prosthetic teeth).

Azoff's and Belfort's hairbrained "pump and dump" stock scheme and the office parties they reign over prove to be the stuff of legends: little-person tossing, sex, sex, orgies, goldfish eating, lots (and lots) of drugs. Jordan rattles of lists of the decadence during his bouts of character narration, often breaking the fourth wall and providing omniscient voiceovers. It's a wonder any work -- fraudulent or not -- was ever done at Stratton-Oakmont, and that Belfort, at 26, and some of his compadres became multimillionaires.

The audience goes along for the year-round spring-break ride, but there's only so many fraternity-esque antics that one can take, especially when the characters become progressively so unlikeable it's hard to look at them on screen -- and for three, yes, *three* hours.

But maybe this is what *The Wolf of Wall Street* is supposed to be about: we all have the capacity for greed and megalomania, attributes that can push us over the edge if not quelled. This movie is another one of Scorsese's character studies of people with God complexes, and DiCaprio always does a fine job -- his squints and impish grins evoke the right mix of charisma and delusion that allows audiencegoers to empathize with him.

Or maybe *The Wolf of Wall Street* wants, no screams, to be taken seriously as a commentary on societal woes with its irreverent look into the world of finance. Maybe Belfort is supposed to be a modern-day Caligula, allowed to live to prove the ruin of himself and all men.

The real-life Belfort did ruin people's lives -- investors in the 1990s lost about \$250 million to his firm -- a fact that's hard to decipher through the movie's bawdy humor (and made my skin crawl ... after the film). But were those investors -- and are we -- really any different than Belfort and his gang?

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