

KINO
INTERNATIONAL

THE ROBBER

A film by Benjamin Heisenberg



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Synopsis

A champion marathon runner leads a double life as a serial bank robber, sprinting between heists (and away from police cars) as many as three times a day.

Based on the real-life story of Johann Kastenberger (changed to Rettenberger for the film), Austria's most-wanted bank robber of the 1980s, Benjamin Heisenberg's thriller is a lean, visceral study of pathological compulsion, featuring a riveting central performance by Andreas Lust (REVANCHE).

Known as "Pump-gun Ronnie" because of his weapon and the Ronald Reagan mask he slips on during stickups, Rettenberger is portrayed here as an obsessive loner, more concerned with his lap times than other human beings. Once he falls into a relationship with his social worker, Erika (Franziska Weisz), it becomes impossible to hide his crimes, and the violence he reserved for his robberies starts seeping into his daily life.

Misguided in his dual search for love and freedom, the authorities finally begin to close in on the robber. Moved by an over-powering inner energy, he attempts to flee the largest deployment of police forces in Austria's modern history, but will his wit and athleticism give him the opportunity for one last escape?

Ending in an epic chase over highways and through the woods, *The Robber* is a thriller about reckless bank robberies, heart-pounding marathons, ill-fated love and dramatic escapes.

THE ROBBER (2010)

(DER RÄUBER)

Austria / Germany
In German with English subtitles
97 min / Color
35mm / 2.35:1
Dolby Surround



THE ROBBER

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Johann Rettenberger - ANDREAS LUST
Probation Officer - MARKUS SCHLEINZER
Hostel clerk - ROMAN KETTNER
Bank cashier - HANNELORE KLAUBER-LAURSEN
Young girl in the supermarket - TABEA WERICH
Labour exchange attendant - NINA STEINER
Erika's colleague - JOSEF ROMSTORFFER
Erika - FRANZISKA WEISZ
Erika's clients - WOLFGANG PETRIK, FLORIAN WOTRUBA
Physiotherapist - JOHANNES HANDLER
Sports doctor - KATHARINA HÜLLE
Shoe salesman - TONY NAGY
Kidnapped woman - MICHAELA CHRISTL
Jogger - GEORG MLYNEK
Stolen car owner - ALEXANDER FENNON
Strong-room employees - ALEX SCHEURER, FRIEDRICH STINDL
Chasier - WALTER HUBER
Treasurer with weak attack - LEOPOLD BÖHM
Switchboard operator without key - GERDA DRABEK
Man at cash dispenser - MARCUS BAUER
Police unit - HANNES IPIROTIS, ROBERT MÜLLNER, CHRISTIAN BUCHMAYR
Leading marathon-runner - MARTIN PRINZ
nurse - JÜRGEN KÖLLNER
First aid attendant - KARIN KÖLLNER
Fireman - MICHAEL STEINBRECHER
commissioner Lukac - JOHANN BEDNAR
commissioner Seidl - MAX EDELBACHER
cobra-application forces - COBRA
commissioner Welz - MICHAEL WELZ
Policeman in the woods - ERWIN REICHEL
Older man - PETER VILNAI
Man and woman at roadside parking - BERND-CHRISTIAN ALTHOFF, SWINTHA GERSTHOFER

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CREDITS

Director - BENJAMIN HEISENBERG
Screenplay - BENJAMIN HEISENBERG, MARTIN PRINZ
Producers - NIKOLAUS GEYRHALTER, MARKUS GLASER, MICHAEL KITZBERGER,
WOLFGANG WIDERHOFER PETER HEILRATH
Director of photography - REINHOLD VORSCHNEIDER
Production manager - GERHARD HANNAK
Line producer - MICHAEL KITZBERGER
Production designer - RENATE SCHMADERER
costume designer - STEPHANIE RIESS
Make-up artist - WILTRUD DERSCHMIDT
Sound designer - MARC PARISOTTO
casting director - MARKUS SCHLEINZER
Editors - ANDREA WAGNER, BENJAMIN HEISENBERG
Dramaturgy - WOLFGANG WIDERHOFER
Music - LORENZ DANGEL
Sound design - VERONIKA HLAWATSCH
Sound mixer BERNHARD MAISCH
Running coaches MARTIN AND JOHANN PRINZ

Production companies: NIKOLAUS GEYRHALTER FILMPRODUKTION GMBH
PETER HEILRATH FILMPRODUKTION E. K.

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FILMFONDS WIEN
FILMFERNSEHFONDS BAYERN
LAND NIEDERÖSTERREICH
FFA

In collaboration with ORF and ARTE
co-produced with ZDF/DAS KLEINE FERNSEHSPIEL

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ANNE EVEN / ZDF – ARTE
BURKHARD ALTHOFF / ZDF - DAS KLEINE FERNSEHSPIEL

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INTERVIEW WITH BENJAMIN HEISENBERG

The Robber is based on a book by Martin Prinz, which in turn is a literary reworking of an actual Austrian criminal case about the man known as "Pump-gun Ronnie". How did you come across this project?

At the beginning of 2006, producer Michael Kitzberger of Geyrhalter Filmproduktion called me and asked whether I would be interested in a bank robber story which they had the rights for. At the time I was living in Munich and read the book "The Robber" by Martin Prinz on the flight to the Berlinale. I was immediately hooked. I met Michael in Berlin and, after some consideration, made a firm commitment.

Did any images come to mind as you were reading the book?

The images were there straightaway. I had already been very fascinated by the bank robber as a character. When I was quite young, I made a short film about a bank robber as he was about to do a robbery. It dealt with a bank robber that did his robberies on a pushbike. At the time there was already one aspect I particularly liked: bank robbery as a sporting challenge. That took me away from the typical thriller, where there is usually a complicated plan for the robbery which is made well in advance. The pathologies of the Rettenberger character said a lot to me, too – I see him as a kind of natural phenomenon, driven by an inner energy which drives him to take bank robbery and running to their extremes. On the other hand, he also had a need for life, love, human contact and relationships. They contradict each other dramatically with a tragic outcome.

How much did you fall back on the book by Martin Prinz, which in turn went back to the original case of Johann Kastenberger, called Rettenberger in the film?

Martin wrote his book based on articles that appeared in the newspapers and developed a literary narrative from it. He even knew Kastenberger from his running career and met him once at a major event. In writing the screenplay, we familiarised ourselves with the existing sources and at the same time even collected new information about the real person. So a character emerged which I think says a lot about the real "Pump-gun Ronnie".

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Rettenberger is a man with little personality, so the character's motives for a criticism of society is not there, as he does not rob to get rich, or use his criminal activities to overcome a disadvantage.

I believe it closely corresponds to the real character of Kastenberger, that the robber is a social outcast. It is also assumed that he was well educated. It was his character which made him a robber, not his background. We shot the film in the year when Vienna had the most bank robberies. If my information is correct, by the summer there had been 78 bank robberies. The shortest lasted for only 19 seconds. Besides, the banks lost some credibility during the financial crisis, and so it follows that the money is not really significant to the robber, it is just about "doing" as many banks as possible. The man is a sportsman, so it is not about getting rich. He never uses the money; it just sits in a plastic bag under his bed.

The character of Erika (Franziska Weiss) is also striking in this context. She lives in a tenement flat in the film which she inherited from her family, but she seems to have no past.

Erika has, so to speak, been left behind. She is the last survivor of a family which was living comfortably in Vienna. This family had slowly crumbled and died out unremarkably. That is why Erika is now working at the job centre simply to earn money; she is no longer working in a job that fits her "class" and education. In that respect, she is relatively undemanding, but she is also completely self-determined and as a result, she is free to do exactly what she wants. At this point, she is open to someone like Rettenberger who, with his strong energy, promises the freedom she is looking for.

The keyword is energy, because of the main character; the film is almost constantly on the move. What problems did that create?

The shoot was a real challenge for everyone involved, as so much movement and relatively extreme situations had to be shown in the film. To be able to do that, for example, during the first production period we had to be in 44 different locations in three weeks, based on that you can work out how often we had to change locations every day. That was a real challenge for all of us. On top of that, we sometimes shot complicated scenes in public places such as the Vienna Marathon, on the motorway or in the Prater Park. That pushed the crew, the actors, the production team and me to the limits of our abilities. On the other hand, this method suited a film about a high performance sportsman and I think you get a sense of the spirit of the shoot from watching the film.

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(CONTINUED)

What was interesting for me was the juxtaposition between the “action” themes. My ideal was to create a form that was true to the story, so you can follow the characters easily but it is still told dynamically and attractively. That explains why we often change the perspectives in the film; however, the narrative generally remains with Rettenberger. This reinforces the fascination which his running and his performance generally holds for the audience and you get a kind of kick out of the movement.

Q: THE ROBBER is an unusual story. How did the producers approach it? Were they ready to take all the risk from the very beginning?

BH: The producers were very open-minded and contributed important elements to the film. Geyrhalter Film, which produced the majority of the film, specialises in documentaries and, as a result, brought a very open, exciting approach to this narrative feature film. Peter Heilrath, on the German side, had already co-produced “The Sleeper” and therefore we had a very close working relationship.

Q: In a key scene, Rettenberger runs in the Vienna Marathon – how was that actually shot?

Firstly, I think it’s an interesting aspect to the project that within this bank robber story we are also giving a very accurate depiction of the ordinary training and competitions that a semi-professional marathon runner goes through every day. Even while I was writing I learnt a lot about running and thought that it may be very exciting to those people watching the film who are interested in running and marathon runners. The Vienna Marathon was one of our most difficult shoots, because it was about showing a runner who keeps out in front with the best sportsmen. That day, a total of over 20 camera operators provided footage of the route for the film.

On top of that, we spent weeks working out a down-to-the-minute shooting schedule. We manoeuvred with a small convoy of cars and two motorbikes with mobile cameras through the marathon and so we were able to repeatedly use the same runners again and again. When we did this, naturally we always had to take care to stay out of the way of the real marathon. The speed of the top group is faster than you can imagine. The best athletes run a kilometer in three minutes or less, which means you have to be highly trained to run along with them even for just one or two kilometres. As you can imagine, on that day Andi Lust needed to deliver an excellent physical performance, something which he had spent months training for.

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How did Andreas Lust get this role?

I knew Andreas from his performance in REVANCHE by Götz Spielmann, in which he was very good. That is why we invited him to the casting session. Generally, for principal roles I look at quite a lot of people and do extended casting sessions with Markus Schleinzer, Martina Poel and Carmen Lolei. Throughout this process, Andreas always remained one of our favourites. In the end, we had three candidates. We worked very closely with these three on the acting and did running tests with a professional trainer. In the end, Andreas understood the role so well, interpreted it in such a compelling way and was also incredibly physically fit that the choice was not a difficult one to make.

How were things with Franziska Weiss?

I knew Franziska from HOTEL and DOG DAYS and we had also got to know one other in person. Although I found her compelling from the start, we cast in the usual way, and she played Erika in the casting session so well that I was already very enthusiastic. In a case like that, however, I tend to gravitate towards one person for the entire process of the casting session to be sure that I have not left out anything I want to be clear on. Working like this from the casting session alone, we find out a lot about the character and you can think of it as a worthwhile preliminary pre-shoot process.

The cameraman, Reinhold Vorschneider, is often associated with the Berlin school, therefore with quiet, meditative films and not with a thriller such as THE ROBBER.

For Reinhold it was a challenge, as it was for me, to make a film which is so constantly on the move. On the one hand, he was unable to shoot everything himself because we used several cameras and often shot with steadycam. On the other hand, we had to accept taking chances - much more than our first film together THE SLEEPER - which was dictated by the movement, and particularly the fast working method.

For our steadycam operator, Matthias Biber, it was also often like being on a rough sea crossing, following this fast runner upstairs, downstairs, through the narrowest passages, over meadows and through undergrowth. Nevertheless, Reinhold's clear vision and his incredible sensitivity for light and people within space can quite clearly be seen in the film.



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The soundtrack has two levels: a classic score and numerous numbers from the radio, mostly only used briefly.

The radio was already there in the screenplay. I didn't think Rettenberger was someone who watched TV. In cars he stole, he just turned up the radio, and didn't spend a lot of time looking for a station, but just listened to what came on. Even when writing, I found juxtaposing this very subversive character with the pop world very interesting. In the film, they are hits that you can really belt out. This produces a lot of comedy and drives the story. If you are on the run after a bank robbery and you hear "We don't need Guitars" by the 'chicks on Speed' at full pelt, then that is just brilliant.

So the actual film score takes a bit of a back seat because of this?

I have been working with Lorenz Dangel for a while. He is a very old friend of mine and writes amazing film music. I originally conceived a complete score for the film and Lorenz actually wrote 200 minutes of very compelling music and recorded it with real instruments as a layout track. Now only about ten minutes of score are in the film, not because something was wrong with the music, but because in my opinion and that of my editor, the film and the character of Rettenberger resisted music. It was as if this was jinxed and as a result it was the reason for many arguments in the cutting room between Lorenz and us. The current solution, which we only found late in the day, suits all of us very well. Only at certain points now, do you hear the orchestra music that was written. Where it does emerge, the score gives this really surprising emphasis and forcefulness to the story. In *THE SLEEPER* I had already used music so this decision simply came from nowhere. These were moments where it was like an afterburner and suddenly made the film a different kind of experience altogether.

How do you explain the ending which is very different from a classic show-down?

The ending gradually emerged while I was writing. The real Kastenberger was finally pursued on the motorway in the end. He drove through a road block, was shot once from behind and shot himself before the police got to him. We thought about this ending for a while. Having the character end his life with a suicide did not seem right to me. Martin Prinz had said from the beginning: the book and also the film deal with arrival. This person who always had to be on the move found peace in death. This is also a resolution and a kind of moment of happiness, sad as it is. He finds a resolution that he could not find in love. And that is also how it was produced.

Rettenberger managed to hold off the police and ended up in the drizzle somewhere on the motorway in Lower Austria. It was like taking a deep breath and then slowly releasing it.

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INTERVIEW WITH LEADING ACTOR ANDREAS LUST

Andreas Lust, can you remember “Pump-gun Ronnie”?

I can remember coming across the story as a child, how the police had been on his trail for weeks. Afterwards I had the feeling that at the time there was a kind of Robin Hood atmosphere to it. You get pulled in and carried along.

How did you approach the film project?

First of all I read the screenplay and then the novel. For me the real challenge was to become less preoccupied with the personality but to go through it in an abstract way. I did look through the material on Kastenberger and spoke to eyewitnesses and friends of his, but it was not about building a psychological profile or even recreating scenes from his childhood. Benjamin Heisenberg told me from the very beginning: we are making a wildlife documentary; we are observing a puma in its natural habitat. He is also aimless: he has to because he can. Rettenberger channelled energy into time and distance. I found this abstraction a great challenge, in any case, because I tend to fill out characters with content. Meanwhile, I saw Rettenberger not so much as a character or as a figure, but as a metaphor for pure energy.

Did you have to attend a casting session? What was tested there?

We tested dialogue scenes extensively during the casting session, but the physical component was very important too, even at that early stage. It was important not only to be able to play a marathon runner but to become one.

How did you train for it?

Martin Prinz was my running trainer. We not only worked on fitness but particularly on the running style. We had to move from jogging and get closer to certain marathon steps which are longer and more economical. But there is always that part of proper running you cannot force with all the will in the world, and you can only achieve by running, running and more running. That's something that you can't fake.

How did you find the day you did the Vienna Marathon shoot?

I really reached my limit there. I was very uptight on the day because everything depended on me. The logistical expense was considerable, because we had to go in at various points of the route again and again and run along for one or two kilometres. The last bit from the Opera to Heldenplatz was the greatest challenge. We found a gap in the runners and joined the race. I couldn't let the distance between me and the runners in the race get any shorter and ran the last 300 metres to the finishing line in front of 30,000 spectators who cheered as the announcement came: Johann Rettenberger for Austria. It gave me goose-bumps and I ran for my life.

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Filmographies

BENJAMIN HEISENBERG (Selected filmography)

2010 DER RÄUBER (The Robber)
2005 SCHLÄFER (Sleeper), director and screenwriter
 Official Selection "Un certain Regard" Festival de Cannes (2005)
 First Step Award (First Steps Award, Germany 2005)
 Prix Cinéma Tout Ecran (Geneva Cinema Tout Ecran 2006)
 European Special Jury Award (Angers European First Film Festival 2006)
 Max Ophüls Award & Screenplay Award (Max Ophüls Festival 2006)
2004 DIE GELEGENHEIT (short)
2001 AM SEE (AT The LAke) (short)
2002 MILCHWALD, screenwriter, (directed by Christoph Hochhäusler)
2000 DER BOMBENKÖNIG (short)

ANDREAS LUST (Selected filmography)

2010 DER KAMERAMÖRDER by Robert Adrian Pejo
2009 DER RÄUBER (The Robber) by Benjamin Heisenberg
2008 BALKAN TRAFFIC - ÜBERMORGEN NIRGENDWO by Vilan B. Puzic and Markus Stein
2008 REVANCHE by Götz Spielmann
2005 MUNICH by Steven Spielberg
2003 LE TEMPS DU LOUP (Time of the Wolf) by Michael Haneke
2001 ALL THE QUEENS MEN by Stefan Ruzowitzky
2001 FINNLANDIA by Eleni Ampelakiotou and Gregor Schnitzler
1998 SUZIE WASHINGTON by Florian Flicker
1997 DER UNFISCH (THE UNFISH) by Robert Dornhelm
1997 IN SCHWIMMEN ZWEI-VÖGEL (AT SWIM TWO-BIRDS) by Kurt Palm
1995 AUF TEUFEL KOMM RAUS (COME HEAVEN OR HELL) by Wolfgang Murnberger
1994 ICH GELOBE (FOR GOD AND COUNTRY) by Wolfgang Murnberger

FRANZISKA WEISZ (Selected filmography)

2010 HABERMANN by Juraj Herz
2009 RENN, WENN DU KANNST by Dietrich Brüggemann
2009 DER RÄUBER (THE ROBBER) by Benjamin Heisenberg
2009 DAS VATERSPIEL (KILL DADDY GOOD NIGHT) by Michael Glawogger
2004 HOTEL by Jessica Hausner
2004 CROOK by Pepe Danquart
2001 HUNDSTAGE (DOG DAYS) by Ulrich Seidl