

## movie mystery

# Cliffhanger resolved

'Italian Job' left its cast stranded, but contest produces a way out

By Raphael G. Satter

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Some of Britain's brightest minds have resolved one of the country's biggest cinematic cliffhangers: How the robbers could have gotten away with the gold at the end of *The Italian Job*.

The 1969 heist film ends with the robbers' gold-laden bus teetering over the edge of an Alpine road, with their loot — and their lives — in doubt.

Friday, the Royal Society of Chemistry offered fans a little closure, announcing the winner of a competition to find a scientific solution to their predicament.

"Like many people, I watched the film from when I was a young boy," said John Godwin, the winner. "It's one of those classic British films, with great actors — Michael Caine, Noel Coward, Benny Hill — and a great car chase, and at the end of the day they've done all the hard work and it seemed a waste to leave them hanging on that mountainside."

*The Italian Job* follows Charlie Croker, played by Caine, as he assembles a crack team of likable crooks to pull off a complex plan to steal a stash of gold in the Italian city of Turin.

The ensuing car chase — which cuts across the rooftop test track of Fiat's Lingotto building and down the steps of Turin's Gran Madre di Dio church — ranks among the most gripping in movie history.

But things end badly when the gang's getaway bus slides halfway off a mountain road on its way to Switzerland.

The bus seesaws precariously, with the men gathered at the front and the gold weighing down the back, which is hanging over the cliff. A wrong move could send the bus tumbling into the chasm below, but Croker says, "Hang on a minute, lads — I've got a great idea."

Then the credits roll.

Royal Society of Chemistry Chief Executive Richard Pike said the competition to find an ending to the movie that preserves both the gold and the men was aimed at "promoting science and chemistry to a wider audience in an entertaining way," adding that about 2,000 people had tried their

## On the Net

See contest submissions and diagrams: <http://prospect.rsc.org/blogs/rsc/in-pictures-italian-job-entries>



hand at extricating Croker's gang. The more novel solutions included burning the asphalt to glue the bus to the road and dissolving the gold with acid, he said.

Godwin said his fix took him an afternoon to work out:

- Break the windows at the back to reduce weight.

- Break two windows at the front, hold one gang member upside down out of the window to deflate the front tires and stabilize the vehicle.

- Drain the rear fuel tank through an access panel at the bottom of the bus.

- Gang members leave one by one from the front, collecting stones to replace their weight.

- Keep adding stones until someone can safely go to the rear to retrieve the gold.

Godwin said gathering the data he needed for his equations, such as the fuel efficiency of a 1964 Bedford VAL14, the weight of a window and the price of gold in 1968 — needed to establish the weight of the haul — was fairly easy. "The Internet's a great place," he said.

He isn't the first to suggest a solution.

Caine himself proposed a much simpler idea in a British Broadcasting Corp. documentary six years ago — albeit one that leaves the hapless gang short of their precious haul.

"The next thing that happens is, you turn the engine on," Caine said. "You all sit exactly where you are till all the petrol has run out, which changes the equilibrium. We all jump out and the gold goes over the cliff."



Michael Caine

