

The Heist

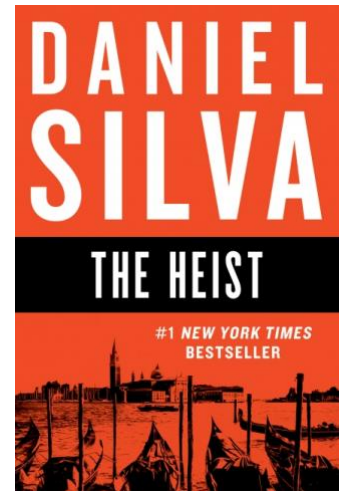
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By Daniel Silva

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Introduction

Gabriel Allon, art restorer and occasional spy, searches for a stolen masterpiece by Caravaggio in #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Daniel Silva's latest action-packed tale of high stakes international intrigue.



Sometimes the best way to find a stolen masterpiece is to steal another one . . .

Master novelist Daniel Silva has thrilled readers with sixteen thoughtful and gripping spy novels featuring a diverse cast of compelling characters and ingenious plots that have taken them around the globe and back—from the United States to Europe, Russia to the Middle East. His brilliant creation, Gabriel Allon—art restorer, assassin, spy—has joined the pantheon of great fictional secret agents, including George Smiley, Jack Ryan, Jason Bourne, and Simon Templar.

Following the success of his smash hit *The English Girl*, Daniel Silva returns with another powerhouse of a novel that showcases his outstanding skill and brilliant imagination, and is sure to be a must read for both his multitudes of fans and growing legions of converts.

Questions for Discussion

1. At the center of *The Heist* is the infamous painting *Nativity with St. Francis and St. Lawrence* by Caravaggio. In what ways is the subject of this painting relevant to many of the stories and relationships throughout the novel? How might Caravaggio himself be a particularly appropriate choice for the world of international intrigue?
2. Discuss the character of Julian Isherwood. What details from his past does the refined, “impeccably mannered” Julian Isherwood keep secret from the London art world? Why might he do this? How does his true history make him an important character?

3. In what ways might Julian Isherwood, the aptly named Oliver Dimbleby, and others in the London art scene be described as “Dickensian”?
4. Discuss the role of grief in Gabriel’s life. Can he ever be content? Can he ever be restored and at peace?
5. What makes art, in this case paintings, so valuable? Why are they particularly effective, once stolen, as “a form of underworld cash, traveler’s checks for the criminal class”?
6. Discuss the role of art and restoration in Gabriel’s life. Why is restoration such an important counterpoint to his work as a spy and an assassin?
7. Gabriel is in Venice to restore Paolo Veronese’s *Virgin and Child in Glory with Saints*. Why does he care—literally and emotionally—“for the work of the great masters”?
8. Consider the potent and complex image of Gabriel’s coffee table: “atop a pile of magazines having to do with pregnancy and childbirth...a Beretta 9mm...stained with paint.” What are the various powerful forces requiring Gabriel’s attention? How do they conflict with each other? How should he prioritize these important components of his life and identity?
9. How are the three stolen paintings Gabriel finds at Jack Bradshaw’s home in Lake Como—Parmigianino’s *The Holy Family*, Renoir’s *Young Women in the Country*, and Klimt’s *Portrait of a Woman*—relevant to the characters and plot of the novel?
10. Discuss the different members of Gabriel’s team. Which ones do you relate to and why? What makes Eli Lavon such a brilliant “*ayin*, a tracker and surveillance artist”? What might this skill set have in common with his love of archaeology?
11. Discuss what you know and have learned about the political situation in Syria. Consider the father and son who came to rule Syria in such a brutal way. In what ways were they similar and different? What might explain how leaders can gain such power, even when harming their own citizens?
12. Bella Navot explains that, despite massive wealth, much of the Arab world was illiterate, and that Arabs, “once pioneers in the fields of mathematics and geometry had fallen woefully

behind the developed world in scientific and technological research.” Why is this? What’s the relationship between education and social or political stability?

13. What is Jihan Nawaz’s unique biography? How does she understand and demonstrate her complex identity? What does it mean that she is “a child of Hama”?
14. What particular qualities and motivations make Jihan Nawaz a viable and valuable asset for Gabriel and the Office? What are the risks of involving her?
15. What explains the important relationship between Jihan and Ingrid Roth? What of their connection seems real, despite Dina’s fraudulent identity?
16. Jihan explains that “Mr. al-Siddiqi started to get very nervous” when “fifteen boys from Daraa painted graffiti on the wall of a school.” Why was an act of vandalism such a threatening gesture to him and to the ruler of Syria?
17. What is the small unit referred to as “the Minyan”? What are the implications of such a group regarding the technological age and the future of warfare?
18. Discuss the importance of social media and privacy. Why is it that, “in the online age, it [is] more important to live out loud than to live with dignity”? What are the psychological, social, and political implications and risks of placing seemingly trivial personal information on the web?
19. Why do you think Gabriel decides to forfeit \$8.2 billion for Jihan’s safe return? What is the importance of human life in the story?
20. Discuss the theme of redemption. Asked by General Cesare Ferrari if he believes in redemption, Gabriel says, “I’m a restorer.” What does he mean? What is the nature of redemption? In what ways might various characters throughout *The Heist* seek it? Which of them has achieved it?