

“The Great Diamond Heist Cross-up”

A short-form film treatment of a

A Robin Templar Caper

Number five in a series of six

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“THE GREAT DIAMOND HEIST CROSS-UP”

Inspired by a true incident

BACKGROUND:

The Antwerp Diamond Heist, dubbed the "heist of the century", was a theft of loose diamonds, gold, and other jewelry valued at more than \$100 million. The heist took place during the weekend of February 15–16, 2003, in the Antwerp Diamond Centre, located in the centre of the gem district in Antwerp, Belgium. The Antwerp centre heist was the largest diamond heist in history until surpassed by the Schiphol Airport diamond heist on 25 February 2005 and estimated at €109 million (\$118 million).

ROBBERY DETAILS:

The vault that housed the diamonds is situated two floors below the Diamond Centre. It was protected by multiple security mechanisms, including a lock with 100 million possible combinations, infrared heat detectors, a seismic sensor, Doppler radar, and a magnetic field. The diamond centre itself had a private security force.

Leonardo Notarbartolo had rented a sparsely furnished office for approximately 25,000 Belgian francs (\$700) per month in the diamond centre two and a half years prior to the robbery. It included a safe deposit box located in the vault beneath the building. It also included a tenant ID card that gave him 24-hour access to the building. There, he posed as an Italian diamond merchant in order to gain credibility. After the robbery, Notarbartolo and his team stole the security footage to conceal their identities. More than 123 out of 160 safe-deposit boxes were forced open, each of which was made of steel and copper and had both a key lock and combination lock. The theft is believed to have been carried out by a five-man team led by Notarbartolo.

Notarbartolo was found guilty of orchestrating the heist. He is considered to be the leader of a ring of Italian thieves called "La Scuola di Torino" (The School of Turin), who carried out the crime. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison, but has since been released on parole.

Notarbartolo claimed in an interview with *Wired* magazine that a diamond merchant hired them for the heist. He claims that they actually stole approximately €18 million (\$20 million) worth of loot, and that the robbery was part of an insurance fraud.

The diamonds remain unrecovered.

The Great Brussels Airport Diamond Heist

On 18 February 2013, eight masked gunmen in two cars with markings stole approximately US\$ 50 million (€38 million, GB£33 million) worth of diamonds from a Swiss-bound Fokker 100 operated by Helvetic Airways on the apron at Brussels Airport, Belgium, just before 20:00 CET. The heist was accomplished without a shot being fired.

ROBBERY DETAILS:

The robbers hid in a construction site outside the airport prior to the robbery. They were armed with AK-47 type rifles and dressed as police officers. Entering the airport through a hole they created in the airport security fence, the robbers drove on the property with two vehicles, a Mercedes van and an Audi, both of which were black with flashing blue police lights. They drove straight to the airplane where the gems were being transferred from a armored van, which had driven from, onto the wiss Flight LX789, which was bound for.

The time period between the loading procedure and the moment the plane started to move to take off would only have lasted "15 minutes" according to Caroline De Wolf, a spokeswoman for the Antwerp World Diamond Centre. De Wolf stated that the window for opportunity was so small that the perpetrators must have known ahead of time about the transfer procedures and timing.

The robbers stopped the plane and then brandished their guns, stopping the pilots and transport security. The Brussels prosecutors' office described the weapons used as "like Kalashnikovs" most likely the Galil. The robbers never dropped their weapons. The robbers loaded 130 bags into their cars and drove off, but left behind some gems in their hurry.

The whole robbery took about 20 minutes. The robbery did not appear to disturb any of the passengers. In fact, the passengers did not know that anything had happened until they were told to disembark because the flight had been cancelled. The van believed to be used in the robbery was later found abandoned and burned.

Several arrests were made on May 8, 2013 during raids in Belgium. About 200 police officers searched 40 apartments, mostly in Brussels, and secured some of the haul. On July 4, Marc Bertoldi, the principal suspect, was extradited from France to Belgium.

Is there a connection between the two robberies? That will be something Robin and his merry band will determine at a later date. Right now they are focused on the Leonardo Notarbartolo caper.

THE ORIGINAL HEIST

Details That Came Out Later:

It was February 16, 2003 — a clear, frozen Sunday evening in Belgium. Notarbartolo took the E19 motorway out of Antwerp. In the passenger seat, a man known as Speedy fidgeted nervously, damp with sweat. Notarbartolo punched it, and his rented Peugeot 307 sped south toward Brussels. They hadn't slept in two days.

Speedy scanned the traffic behind them in the side-view mirror and maintained a tense silence. Notarbartolo had worked with him for 30 years—they were childhood buddies—but he knew that his friend had a habit of coming apart at the end of a job. The others on the team hadn't wanted Speedy in on this one—they said he was a liability. Notarbartolo could see their point, but out of loyalty, he defended his friend. Speedy could handle it, he said.

And he had. They had executed the plan perfectly: no alarms, no police, no problems. The heist wouldn't be discovered until guards checked the vault on Monday morning. The rest of the team was already driving back to Italy with the gems. They'd rendezvous outside Milan to divvy it all up. There was no reason to worry. Notarbartolo and Speedy just had to burn the incriminating evidence sitting in a garbage bag in the backseat.

Notarbartolo pulled off the highway and turned onto a dirt road that led into a dense thicket. The spot wasn't visible from the highway, though the headlights of passing cars fractured through the trees. Notarbartolo told Speedy to stay put and got out to scout the area.

He passed a rusty, dilapidated gate that looked like it hadn't been touched since the Second World War. It was hard to see in the dark, but the spot seemed abandoned. He decided to burn the stuff near a shed beside a small pond and headed back to the car.

When he got there, he couldn't believe what he was seeing. Speedy had lost it. The contents of the garbage bag was strewn amongst the trees. Speedy was stomping through the mud, hurling paper into the underbrush. Spools of videotape clung to the branches like streamers on a Christmas tree. Israeli and Indian currency skittered past a

half-eaten salami sandwich. The mud around the car was flecked with dozens of tiny, glittering diamonds. It would take hours to gather everything up and burn it.

"I think someone's coming," Speedy said, looking panicked.

Notarbartolo glared at him. The forest was quiet except for the occasional sound of a car or truck on the highway. It was even possible to hear the faint gurgling of a small stream. Speedy was breathing fast and shallow—the man was clearly in the midst of a full-blown panic attack.

"Get back in the car," Notarbartolo ordered. They were leaving. Nobody would ever find the stuff here. The job was done.

Patrick Peys and Agim De Bruycker arrived at the Diamond Center the next morning. They had just received a frantic call: The vault had been compromised. The subterranean chamber was supposed to be one of the most secure safes in the world. Now the foot-thick steel door was ajar, and more than 100 of the 189 safe-deposit boxes had been busted open. Peys and De Bruycker were stunned. The floor was strewn with wads of cash and velvet-lined boxes. Peys stepped on a diamond-encrusted bracelet. It appeared that the thieves had so much loot, they simply couldn't carry it all away.

Peys and De Bruycker lead the Diamond Squad, the world's only specialized diamond police. Their beat: the labyrinthine Antwerp Diamond District. Eighty percent of the world's rough diamonds pass through this three-square-block area, which is under 24-hour police surveillance and monitored by 63 video cameras. About \$3 billion worth of gem sales were reported here in 2003, but that's not counting a hidden world of handshake deals and off-ledger transactions. Business relationships follow the ancient family and religious traditions of the district's dominant Jewish and Indian dealers, known as *diamantaires*. In 2000, the Belgian government realized it would require a special type of cop to keep an eye on things and formed the squad. Peys and De Bruycker were the first hires.

De Bruycker called headquarters, asking for a nationwide alert: The Antwerp Diamond Center had been brazenly robbed. Then he dialed Securilink, the vault's alarm company.

"What is the status of the alarm?" he asked.

"Fully functional," the operator said, checking the signals coming in from the Diamond Center. "The vault is secure."

"Then how is it that the door is wide open and I'm standing inside the vault?" De Bruycker demanded, glancing at the devastation all around him.

He hung up and looked at Peys. They were up against a rare breed of criminal.

About 18 months earlier, in the summer of 2001, Leonardo Notarbartolo sipped an espresso at a café on Hoveniersstraat, the diamond district's main street. It was a cramped, narrow place with a half-dozen small tables, but from the corner by the window

Notarbartolo could look out on the epicenter of the world's diamond trade. During business hours, Hasidic men wearing broad-brimmed hats hurried past with satchels locked to their wrists. Armored cars idled tensely while burly couriers with handguns wheeled away small black suitcases. There were Africans in bright blue suits, Indian merchants

wearing loupes around their necks, and bald Armenians with reading glasses pushed up on their mottled heads.

Billions of dollars in diamonds pass by the café's window. During the day, they travel

from office to office in briefcases, coat pockets, and off-the-shelf rollies. At night, all those gems are locked up in safes and underground vaults. It's one of the densest concentrations of wealth in the world.

It's also a thief's paradise. In 2000, Notarbartolo rented a small office in the Diamond Center, one of the area's largest buildings. He presented himself as a gem importer based in Turin, Italy, and scheduled meetings with numerous dealers. He bought small stones, paid cash, dressed well, and cheerfully mangled the French language. The dealers probably never knew that they had just welcomed one of the world's best jewel thieves into their circle.

By his own account, Notarbartolo had pulled off dozens of major robberies by 2000. It wasn't just about the money anymore. He stole because he was born to be a thief. He still remembers every detail of his first robbery. It was 1958—he was 6. His mother had sent him out for milk, and he came back with 5,000 lira—about \$8. The milkman had been asleep, and young Leo rifled through his drawers. His mother beat him, but it didn't matter. He had found his calling.

In elementary school, he filched money from his teachers. As a teenager, he stole cars and learned to pick locks. In his twenties, he devoted himself to the study of people, tracking jewelry salesmen around Italy for weeks just to understand their habits. In his thirties, he began to assemble teams of thieves, each with their own specialty. He knew lock-picking experts, alarm aces, safecrackers, guys who could tunnel under anything, and a man who could scale the sleek exteriors of office buildings. Each job brought a different mix of thieves into play. Most, including Notarbartolo, lived in or near Turin, and the group came to be known as the School of Turin.

Notarbartolo's specialty was charm. Acting the part of the jolly jeweler, he was invited into offices, workshops, and even vault rooms to inspect merchandise. He would buy a few stones and then, a week or a month later, steal the target's entire stock in the middle of the night.

Antwerp provided a wealth of opportunity and a good place to fence hot property. A diamond necklace stolen in Italy could be dismantled and its individual gems sold for cash in Antwerp. He came to town about twice a month, stayed a few days at a small apartment near the Diamond District, then drove home to his wife and kids in the foothills of the Alps.

When he had stolen goods to sell, he dealt with only a few trusted buyers. Now, as he finished his espresso, one of them—a Jewish dealer—came in and sat down to chat.

"Actually, I want to talk to you about something a little unusual," the dealer said casually. "Maybe we could walk a little?"

They headed out, and once they were clear of the district, the dealer picked up the conversation. His tone had changed however. The casualness was gone.

"I'd like to hire you for a robbery," he said. "A big robbery."

The agreement was straightforward. For an initial payment of 100,000 euros, Notararolo would answer a simple question: Could the vault in the Antwerp Diamond Center be robbed?

He was pretty sure the answer was no. He was a tenant in the building and rented a safe-deposit box in the vault to secure his own stash. He viewed it as the safest place to keep valuables in Antwerp. But for 100,000 euros, he was happy to photograph the place and show the dealer how daunting it really was.

So he strolled into the Diamond District with a pen poking out of his breast pocket. At a glance, it looked like a simple highlighter, but the cap contained a miniaturized digital camera capable of storing 100 high-resolution images. Photography is strictly limited in the district, but nobody noticed Notarbartolo's pencam.

He began his reconnaissance at the police surveillance booth on the Schupstraat, a street leading into the center of the district. Behind the booth's bulletproof glass, two officers monitored the area. The three main blocks of the district bristled with video cameras: Every inch of street and sky appeared to be under watch. The booth also contained the controls for the retractable steel cylinders that are deployed to prevent vehicular access to the district. As Notarbartolo walked past, he began taking pictures.

He headed toward the Diamond Center itself, a gray, 14-story, fortresslike building on the south end of the district. It had a private security force that operated a nerve center located at the entrance. Access was blocked by metal turnstiles, and visitors were questioned by guards. Notarbartolo flashed his tenant ID card and breezed through. His camera captured crisp images of everything.

He took the elevator, descending two floors underground to a small, claustrophobic room—the vault antechamber. A 3-ton steel vault door dominated the far wall. It alone had six layers of security. There was a combination wheel with numbers from 0 to 99. To enter, four numbers had to be dialed, and the digits could be seen only through a small lens on the top of the wheel. There were 100 million possible combinations.

Power tools wouldn't do the trick. The door was rated to withstand 12 hours of nonstop drilling. Of course, the first vibrations of a drill bit would set off the embedded seismic alarm anyway.

The door was monitored by a pair of abutting metal plates, one on the door itself and one on the wall just to the right. When armed, the plates formed a magnetic field. If the door were opened, the field would break, triggering an alarm. To disarm the field, a code had to be typed into a nearby keypad. Finally, the lock required an almost-impossible-to-duplicate foot-long key.

During business hours, the door was actually left open, leaving only a steel grate to prevent access. But Notarbartolo had no intention of muscling his way in when people were around and then shooting his way out. Any break-in would have to be done at night, after the guards had locked down the vault, emptied the building, and shuttered the entrances with steel roll-gates. During those quiet midnight hours, nobody patrolled the interior—the guards trusted their technological defenses.

Notarbartolo pressed a buzzer on the steel grate. A guard upstairs glanced at the video-feed, recognized Notarbartolo, and remotely unlocked the steel grate. Notarbartolo stepped inside the vault.

It was silent—he was surrounded by thick concrete walls. The place was outfitted with motion, heat, and light detectors. A security camera transmitted his movements to the guard station, and the feed was recorded on videotape. The safe-deposit boxes themselves were made of steel and copper and required a key and combination to open. Each box had 17,576 possible combinations.

Notarbartolo went through the motions of opening and closing his box and then walked out. The vault was one of the hardest targets he'd ever seen.

Notarbartolo was born in Palermo, Sicily, and members of his extended family have long been dogged by accusations of Mafia connections. Those accusations reached a crescendo when anti-Mafia police arrested Notarbartolo's cousin Benedetto Capizzi, claiming he was about to become the new leader of the Sicilian Mafia. Notarbartolo claims the Italian authorities traveled to Belgium soon after the heist to question him about Capizzi's possible role in the robbery. If there is an organized-crime link, Notarbartolo might be inventing a story about the Jewish diamond dealer to distract attention from what really happened.

Notarbartolo scoffs at this idea and insists that his cousin had nothing to do with the heist. The reality, Notarbartolo says, is that he thought the vault was impregnable. He didn't believe it could be robbed until the dealer went to extraordinary lengths to prove him wrong.

It took five months for the diamond dealer to call back after Notarbartolo told him the heist was impossible. He had even given him the photographs to prove it. Notarbartolo thought that would be the end of it, but now the dealer wanted to meet at an address outside Antwerp. When Notarbartolo arrived, the dealer was waiting for him in front of an abandoned warehouse.

"I want to introduce you to some people," he said, unlocking the battered front door.

Inside, a massive structure was covered with black plastic tarps. The dealer pulled back a corner and they ducked underneath.

At first, Notarbartolo was confused. He seemed to be standing in the vault antechamber. To his left, he saw the vault door. He was inside an exact replica of the Diamond Center's vault level. Everything was the same. As far as Notarbartolo could tell, the

dealer had reconstructed it based on the photographs he had provided. Notarbartolo felt like he had stepped into a movie.

Inside the fake vault, three Italians were having a quiet conversation. They stopped talking when they saw the dealer and Notarbartolo. The dealer introduced them, though Notarbartolo refuses to reveal their names, referring to them only by nicknames.

The Genius specialized in alarm systems. According to the dealer, he could disable any kind of alarm.

"You can disable this?" Notarbartolo asked, pointing at the replica vault.

"I can disable most of it," the Genius said with a smile. "You're going to have to do one or two things yourself, though."

The tall, muscular man was the Monster. He was called that because he was monstrously good at everything he did. He was an expert lock picker, electrician, mechanic, and driver and had enormous physical strength. Everybody was a little scared of him, which was another reason for the nickname.

The King of Keys was a quiet older man. His age set him apart from the others—he looked like somebody's grandfather. The diamond dealer said that the wizened locksmith was among the best key forgers in the world. One of his contributions would be to duplicate the nearly impossible-to-duplicate foot-long vault key.

"Just get me a clear video of it," the man told Notarbartolo. "I'll do the rest."

"That's not so easy," Notarbartolo pointed out.

The King of Keys shrugged. That wasn't his problem.

"Don't worry," the Genius said. "I'll help."

In September 2002, a guard stepped up to the vault door and began to spin the combination wheel. It was 7 am. He was right on schedule.

Directly above his head and invisible behind the glare of a recessed light, a fingertip-sized video camera captured his every move. With each spin, the combination came to rest on a number. A small antenna broadcast the image. Nearby, in a storage room beside the vault, an ordinary-looking red fire extinguisher was strapped to the wall. The

extinguisher was fully functional, but a watertight compartment inside housed electronics that picked up and recorded the video signal.

When the guard finished dialing the combination, he inserted the vault's key. The video camera recorded a sharp image of it before it disappeared inside the keyhole.

He spun the handle, and the vault door swung open.

Thursday morning, February 13, 2003. Two days before the heist. The *thud-thud-thud* of a police helicopter beat over a convoy of police cars escorting an armored truck through the heart of Antwerp. They blew past posters of Venus Williams—she was due in town to compete in the Proximus Diamond Games tennis tournament.

The escorts bristled with firepower. They belonged to a special diamond-delivery protection unit, and each cop carried a fully automatic weapon. Their cargo: De Beers' monthly shipment of diamonds, worth millions.

De Beers is the world's largest diamond-mining company. In 2003, it controlled 55 percent of the global diamond supply and operated mines in South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana, among others. The rough, unpolished gems were flown to London, where they were divided and placed in 120 boxes—one for each official De Beers distributor, many of which were headquartered in Antwerp.

Every month, Antwerp's share of the boxes was flown into Belgium and transferred to a Brinks armored truck. Once the truck's doors slammed shut, the convoy sped away, sirens wailing. The vehicles rocketed past the guard gate at the entrance of the district, and the giant metal cylinders rose out of the ground behind them, blocking any further automotive access.

The armed escorts fanned out on foot around the armored truck to form a perimeter. No one was allowed near the vehicle. The doors swung open, and the boxes were quickly carried through an unremarkable entrance in the middle of the block. It was payday. The Diamond District was flush.

Notarbartolo was buzzed into the vault the next day, Friday, February 14—the day before the robbery. He was alone. In his jacket pocket, he carried a can of women's hair spray.

A security camera recorded his movements—police would later watch the footage—but the guard had gotten used to the Italian's frequent visits and wasn't paying attention. Notarbartolo stepped away from the safe-deposit boxes and pulled out the aerosol can. With a quick, practiced circular movement, he covered the combined heat/motion sensor with a thin coat of transparent, oily mist.

The vault was momentarily filled with the smell of a woman's hair.

It was a simple but effective hack: The oily film would temporarily insulate the sensor from fluctuations in the room's temperature, and the alarm went off only if it sensed both heat and motion.

Still, it was hard to guess how long the trick would work. Once the Monster was in the vault, he had to install the sensor bypass before his body heat penetrated the film. He might have five minutes—he might have less. Nobody knew for sure.

Venus Williams smashed the ball crosscourt with a yelp, overwhelming her leggy Slovakian opponent. It was Saturday night, and Williams was dominating the semifinals of

the Diamond Games, an event that hyped Antwerp's predominant position in the gem world. Many of the city's diamantaires watched as Williams beat down the Slovak and moved one step closer to winning a tennis racket encrusted with nearly \$1 million worth of stones.

Across town, the Diamond District was deserted. Notarbartolo drove his rented gray Peugeot 307 past the city's soot-covered central train station and turned onto Pelikaanstraat, a road that skirted the district. He pulled to the curb, and the Monster, the Genius, the King of Keys, and Speedy stepped out carrying large duffel bags. The King of Keys picked the lock on a run-down office building, and they disappeared through the door. It was a little past midnight.

The Genius led them out the rear of the building into a private garden that abutted the back of the Diamond Center. It was one of the few places in the district that wasn't under video surveillance. Using a ladder he had previously hidden there, the Genius climbed up to a small terrace on the second floor. A heat-sensing infrared detector monitored the terrace, but he approached it slowly from behind a large, homemade polyester shield. The low thermal conductivity of the polyester blocked his body heat from reaching the sensor. He placed the shield directly in front of the detector, preventing it from sensing anything.

The balcony was now safe. While the rest of the team scrambled up, the Genius disabled an alarm sensor on one of the balcony's windows. One by one, the thieves climbed through the window, dropped into a stairwell, and descended to the darkened vault antechamber. They covered the security cameras with black plastic bags and flipped on the lights. The vault door stood imposingly before them. The building was quiet—no alarms had been triggered. The police never determined how the men had entered the building.

The Genius pulled a custom-made slab of rigid aluminum out of his bag and affixed heavy-duty double-sided tape to one side. He stuck it on the two plates that regulated the magnetic field on the right side of the vault door and unscrewed their bolts. The magnetic plates were now loose, but the sticky aluminum held them together, allowing the Genius to pivot them out of the way and tape them to the antechamber wall. The plates were still side by side and active—the magnetic field never wavered—but they no longer monitored the door. Some 30 hours later, the authorities would marvel at the ingenuity.

Next, the King of Keys played out a hunch. In Notarbartolo's videos, the guard usually visited a utility room just before opening the vault. When the thieves searched the room, they found a major security lapse: The original vault key was hanging inside.

The King of Keys grabbed the original. There was no point in letting the safe manufacturers know that their precious key could be copied, and the police still don't know that a duplicate was made.

The King of Keys slotted the original in the keyhole and waited while the Genius dialed in the combination they had gleaned from the video. A moment later, the Genius nodded. The Monster turned off the lights—they didn't want to trigger the light detector in the vault when the door opened. In the darkness, the King of Keys turned the key and spun a four-pronged handle. The bolts that secured the door retracted and it swung heavily open.

Speedy ran up the stairwell. It was his job to stay in touch with Notarbartolo, but there was no cell phone reception down in the vault. Upstairs, he got a signal and dialed his old friend.

"We're in," he said and hung up.

Notarbartolo put his phone back on the dashboard. He was sitting in the Peugeot and could see the front of the Diamond Center a block and a half away. His police scanner was quiet. He took a sip of cold coffee and waited.

In the antechamber, the King of Keys deftly picked the lock on the metal grate. He shuffled backward as the Monster propped the grate open with two cans of paint he found in the storeroom. Like the rest of the team, the Monster wore plastic gloves—the police would find no prints on the cans. It was now up to him to disable the remaining systems.

The Monster oriented himself in the darkness at the vault entrance. The only sound was the steady breathing of the others behind him. His body was already projecting heat into the vault—the hair spray on the infrared sensor wouldn't last. Every second he was there would raise the ambient temperature. He had to move quickly but keep his heart rate low.

As he'd practiced in the warehouse, he strode exactly 11 steps into the middle of the room, reached for the ceiling, and pushed back a panel. He felt the security system's main inbound and outbound wires. An automatic electric pulse constantly shot into the room and back out along these wires. If any of the sensors were tripped, the circuit would break. When a pulse shot into the room, it expected an answer. If it didn't get one, it activated the alarm.

With his hands over his head, the Monster used a tool to strip the plastic coating off the wires. It was a delicate task. One slip could cut through, instantly breaking the circuit and tripping the alarm.

The police would later discover stripped wires in the ceiling and guess that the thieves considered cutting them, only to lose their nerve. But the Monster knew exactly what he was doing. Once the copper wires were exposed, he clipped a new, pre-cut piece of wire between the inbound and outbound cables. This bridge rerouted the incoming electric pulse over to the outbound wire before the signal reached the sensors. It no longer mattered what happened further down the line. The sensors were out of the loop. It was now safe for the others to enter.

Still, the men were cautious. They blinded the heat/motion detector with a Styrofoam box, covered the light detector with tape, and then set to work. The King of Keys unloaded a homemade, hand-cranked drill and fitted it with a thin shaft of metal. He jammed the shaft into one of the locks and cranked for about three minutes—until the lock broke, snapping open the box.

The guys took turns yanking the contents out. Since they had memorized the layout of the vault in the replica, they worked in the dark, turning on their flashlights only for split seconds—enough to position the drill over the next box.

But in those muffled flashes, they could glimpse their duffel bags overflowing with gold bars, millions in Israeli, Swiss, American, European, and British currencies, and leather satchels that contained the mother lode: rough and polished diamonds. They resisted the urge to examine their haul; they were running out of time.

By 5:30 am, they had opened 109 boxes. A tamped-down giddiness pervaded the dark vault, but they had to stop. The streets would fill with people soon, and they needed to transfer their bags into Notarbartolo's car. Speedy relayed the message to him. They were coming out.

It took almost an hour for the team to haul the bags up the stairs, pass by the infrared sensor, lower the loot down the ladder, and gather in the hallway of the decrepit office building. Notarbartolo idled at the curb while on the phone with Speedy. A bus came and went, and then the street was empty.

"Now," he hissed.

In the predawn half-light, the four men raced out of the building. They jammed the bags in the car, slammed the doors, and headed off on foot for Notarbartolo's apartment. He put the car in gear and slowly pulled away.

In half an hour, they were huddled around the bags in the apartment. The Monster unzipped one and pulled out a leather satchel. It was time to celebrate.

He opened the satchel and looked up, bewildered. It was empty.

He took out another. It was also empty. A wave of anxiety swept the room. They unzipped all the other duffel bags and rifled through the satchels. More often than not, there was nothing in them.

Something had gone wrong. The diamonds should have been there.

"We've been set up," Notarbartolo said.

Notarbartolo stepped into a scalding-hot shower while the others made salami sandwiches in the kitchen. He needed some clarity—the fatigue was weighing on him. In the weeks preceding the heist, he had seen many of the satchels in the offices of the diamantaires, and they were always filled with inventory. He expected the total take to exceed \$100 million. Now they were looking at a fraction of that—probably about \$20 million.

Notarbartolo reflected on his interactions with the diamond dealer, and a thought flashed through his mind: Maybe the dealer wasn't operating alone. If he tipped off a group of his fellow merchants, they could have pulled their inventory out of the vault before the heist. Each could then claim that their gems were stolen and collect the insurance while secretly keeping their stones. Most had safes in their offices—they could have simply kept the stock there. Notarbartolo realized that the heist he had spent so much time planning might have actually been part of an elaborate insurance scam.

He shut off the water. A half hour earlier he was a king. Now he felt like a pawn.

Speedy and Notarbartolo were on the E19 heading out of Antwerp. It was 6 o'clock on Sunday evening. Notarbartolo settled in for the 10-hour drive back to Turin. The garbage bag filled with incriminating evidence sat in the backseat. Notarbartolo planned to stop in France and burn it, leaving no trace of the crime.

But Speedy was having trouble. His face was ashen, and his eyes darted madly at the cars around them. Finally, after only 20 minutes on the road, he snapped.

"I can't do the drive," he said.

The guy was melting down. Notarbartolo told him to take it easy. He'd drop him at the train station in Brussels if that's what he wanted. It might actually be nicer to do the trip without his friend driving him crazy.

"We can't take the garbage into Brussels," Speedy stammered. The city was crawling with cops—maybe they would be looking for them. They couldn't run the risk. They had to drop the bag immediately.

"Pull off up here," he said abruptly from the passenger seat.

"This is a ridiculous time to be having a panic attack," Notarbartolo muttered.

"Just pull off," his friend snapped.

Notarbartolo took the exit and surveyed the darkened surroundings.

"There's a dirt road," Speedy said, peering into a forest. "It'll be perfect."

August Van Camp likes weasels. The 59-year-old retired Belgian grocer had two—he called them Mickey and Minnie—and he enjoyed sending them down holes in the forest. Typically, a rabbit came rocketing out the other end. It was a lot of fun.

In 1998, he bought a narrow strip of forest alongside the E19 motorway. It was about a five-minute drive from his house, and if you ignored the sound of cars hurtling past at 80 miles an hour, it was a pretty 12 acres of trees with a gurgling stream. There were also a lot of holes with rabbits in them.

But because it adjoined the highway, Van Camp found a lot of garbage. The local teenagers once decided to have a party there and burned down a little hut he'd built. It made him fume with anger.

When he found garbage, he phoned the police, who had gotten used to his calls. A typical conversation:

"The kids have made a mess on my land again."

"I am sorry to hear that, Mr. Van Camp."

"I demand that you send someone to investigate."

"We will pass along your request."

Van Camp rarely heard back.

While hunting one morning—Monday, February 17, to be exact—Van Camp was incensed to find yet another pile of junk in the underbrush. After a flash of pique that made him puff out his cheeks, throw up his arms, and wonder what the world was coming to, he knelt down and glared at the refuse. He wanted to be able to describe to the cops what he had to put up with. There was videotape strewn all over the place. A wine bottle rested near a half-eaten salami sandwich. There were also some white envelopes printed with the words DIAMOND CENTER, ANTWERP. Van Camp's irritation increased.

"Kids," he grumbled.

At home, he punched in the number for the police and asked to lodge a complaint. The officer listened as Van Camp tallied the mess. When Van Camp mentioned Diamond Center envelopes, the officer broke in. "What was that?" he said.

"Antwerp Diamond Center envelopes," Van Camp sputtered.

This time, the police came running.

By mid-afternoon, a half-dozen detectives swarmed the forest, painstakingly gathering the garbage and collecting stray gems. Van Camp watched with satisfaction. The police were finally treating his litter situation with the proper respect.

Within hours, the trash began to fill the evidence room at the Diamond Squad headquarters in Antwerp. A member of the squad bent over the clear plastic bags, looking for immediate clues. A pile of torn paper seemed promising. It didn't take long to reassemble the pieces like a jigsaw puzzle. It was an invoice for a low-light video surveillance system. The buyer: Leonardo Notarbartolo.

Back at Van Camp's property, another detective knelt among the thorny brambles and peered at a small, jagged piece of paper poking out of the mud. He carefully lifted it free and held it up to the light.

It was a business card that bore the address and phone number of Elio D'Onorio, an Italian electronics expert tied to a series of robberies. Notarbartolo has consistently refused to identify his accomplices, but all evidence indicates that D'Onorio is the Genius.

The lab techs also bagged a half-eaten salami sandwich. They found Antipasto Italiano salami packaging nearby and sent it along to Diamond Squad headquarters.

Four days later, the detectives executed a search warrant on the apartment Notarbartolo rented in Antwerp. In a cupboard, they found a receipt from a local grocery store for Antipasto Italiano salami. The receipt had a time-stamp.

A detective drove to the grocery and asked the manager to rewind his closed-circuit television to 12:56 pm on Thursday, February 13. When the video came to a halt and snapped into focus, there was an image of a tall, muscular Italian purchasing salami. His name: Ferdinando Finotto—the man most likely to be the Monster.

On Monday — about 36 hours after the job was completed—the team of thieves reassembled at a bar in Adro, Italy, a small town about 50 miles northeast of Milan. They had agreed to meet the diamond dealer there and divide the loot. The dealer would get a third for financing the operation and putting the team together. The others would split the rest. They had anticipated a haul in the tens of millions each. Now they were looking at roughly \$3 million per man. It was still a lot of money, but they couldn't help feeling they'd been played. Everybody had a lot of questions for the dealer.

Hour after hour, he didn't arrive. Notarbartolo was already uneasy about what had happened in the forest. He knew he had made a mistake—he should have turned around after he dropped off Speedy at the train station and gone back to burn the garbage. It was an embarrassing oversight, but what really irked him was that he had vouched for his friend, and the guy had cracked.

They waited at the bar until closing, drinking espressos and then beer. The dealer never showed.

On Thursday night, Notarbartolo ate dinner with his family at home outside of Turin. He tried to pretend that everything was normal. As usual, his 3-year-old granddaughter played with his cell phone and made him laugh. He momentarily forgot his worries.

His biggest problem was that he needed to go back to Belgium; the rental car was due in Antwerp the next day. The plan had always been to return it and show his face at the Diamond Center. That way, if the cops were looking for tenants who'd disappeared, he wouldn't be on the list. It would also give him an opportunity to clean his apartment more thoroughly. He told his family that he'd be leaving early the next morning. His wife decided to come along; she hadn't seen much of him lately. They could even have a nice dinner party with some friends from the Netherlands.

The next morning, as the Notarbartolos blew through the Swiss Alps, the police surrounded their home in Italy. Acting on the surveillance-system invoice discovered on Van Camp's land, the Belgian diamond detectives had asked the Italian police to search Notarbartolo's house. His 24-year-old son, Marco, was there and refused to open the front door. He frantically dialed his father's cell phone while the police smashed the door open.

In Notarbartolo's jacket pocket, his phone flashed but made no sound. His granddaughter had accidentally turned off the ringer the night before. Marco called his mother's phone—it was turned off. He tried his dad's phone repeatedly. It just rang and rang.

Unaware, Notarbartolo sped toward Antwerp.

As Notarbartolo drove back to Belgium, Peys and De Bruycker wondered whether they'd ever catch the thieves. They could be anywhere by now: Brazil, Thailand, Russia. It never occurred to the detectives that one of the robbers would walk right back into the district.

But that's exactly what Notarbartolo did. While one of his friends from the Netherlands waited on the street outside the Diamond Center, Notarbartolo waved at the security guard and dropped in to collect his mail. The guard knew that the police were investigating Notarbartolo and phoned the building manager, who immediately called the detectives.

When the police arrived, they found Notarbartolo chatting with the building manager and began peppering him with questions. The friend took off as Notarbartolo stalled for time, pretending to have trouble understanding French and claiming that he couldn't remember the exact address of his own apartment. He just knew how to walk there.

"Let's go then," Peys said and loaded the Italian into a car.

Eventually, Notarbartolo pointed out the apartment.

As the police car pulled to the curb, Notarbartolo's wife and the friends who'd come for dinner stepped out of the building. They were loaded down with bags and one carried a rolled-up carpet. Another minute and they would have been gone.

The police took everyone into custody.

The bags contained critical evidence. The police dug out a series of prepaid SIM cards that were linked to cell phones used almost exclusively to call three Italians: Elio D'Onorio, aka the Genius; Ferdinando Finotto, alias the Monster; and the person most likely to be Speedy, an anxious, paranoid man named Pietro Tavano, a longtime associate of Notarbartolo's. On the night of the heist, a cell tower in the Diamond District logged the presence of all three, plus Notarbartolo. During that time, Tavano stayed in constant contact with Notarbartolo.

The day Notarbartolo was arrested, Italian police broke open the safe at his home in Turin. They found 17 polished diamonds attached to certificates that the Belgian diamond detectives traced back to the vault. More gems were vacuumed out of the rolled-up carpet from Notarbartolo's Antwerp apartment.

The Belgian courts came down hard. They found Notarbartolo guilty of orchestrating the heist and sentenced him to 10 years.

With the cell phone records and the peculiarly precise salami sandwich evidence, the Belgian detectives persuaded French police to raid the home of Finotto's girlfriend on the French Riviera. They retrieved marked \$100 bills that the detectives say belonged to one of the Diamond Center victims. Legal proceedings dragged on, but Finotto was finally arrested in Italy in November 2007 and is serving a five-year sentence there.

When questioned by police in Italy, D'Onorio admitted that he had installed security cameras in Notarbartolo's office but denied any involvement in the crime. Nonetheless, his DNA was found on some adhesive tape left in the vault. He was extradited to Belgium in November 2007 to begin a five-year sentence.

The high-strung Pietro Tavano is serving a five-year sentence in Italy for the crime. He has refused to allow his attorney to make any statements on his behalf.

A fifth thief has never been identified, though police know of his existence via cell phone records and DNA traces. The King of Keys was never apprehended.

Was \$100 million stolen as the police estimate, or just \$20 million as Notarbartolo insists? Does it make sense that the heist was part of a larger insurance scam or is Notarbartolo's story a decoy to throw suspicion on others? Perhaps Notarbartolo's cousin, the Mafia don, was behind the whole thing. Whatever the truth, where is the loot now?

The murky nature of the diamond trade makes it difficult to get clear answers. For instance, detective De Bruycker says that three-quarters of the business is done under the table. Since there were roughly \$25 million in legitimate claims at the time of the heist, he calculated that at least another \$75 million in goods was stolen. That brought the total value of the heist to about \$100 million.

If Notarbartolo's insurance scam theory is correct, it went down like this: The dealers who were in on it removed their goods—both legal and illegal—from the vault before the heist and then filed claims on the legitimate gems. Denice Oliver, the adjuster who in-

investigated the robbery for insurers, calls this the "double whammy"—these dealers would have gotten the insurance payouts and kept their stock. The \$20 million found by the thieves belonged to traders not in on the scam.

Or: There was no insurance scam. The thieves actually found \$100 million in the vault and Notarbartolo has spun a story to cloud the true origins of the heist.

Regardless of which theory is correct, there is agreement that the thieves got away with millions that were never recovered. Notarbartolo refuses to talk about what happened to the goods, adding that it is something best discussed once he is out of prison.

In the meantime, his share may very well be waiting for him, hidden somewhere in the foothills of the Italian Alps.

LITERARY MATERIAL HISTORY

A previous attempt at making the diamond heist story into a feature film:

J.J. Abrams hired prolific screenwriter Phil Alden to write a feature film screenplay, based upon the material. When writer-producer-director Dennis F. Stevens contacted his sources inside the Abrams organization, he was told that both the Alden script and the project had been shelved; not surprising when you consider Abrams' approach to the material, which was merely a docudrama of the robbery itself and not the aftermath. Our approach will be much different, dealing mostly with the aftermath.

Stevens, who until recently taught the two-semester graduate screenwriting courses (Cinema 520 and 530) at BYU- Provo, suggests the material is perfect for adaptation to the "Robin and the Las Vegas Cross-up" mini TV series. It would be the fifth film in the series.

Whereas J.J. Abrams took his source material from the *Wired Magazine* article, our source material will come from court records and the reminiscences and files of Denice A. Oliver (Oliver Insurance Services), the adjuster who investigated the robbery for the insurers.

The two investigators representing the insurance companies taking the loss are a composite of several such investigators whose names in our story are fictional; as is Ms. Oliver's portrayal of herself in our story which took place after first meeting Jonathan Moore. Everything up until then is factually based.

THE GREAT DIAMOND HEIST CROSS-UP

PRELIMINARY FILM TREATMENT

Our fictional version of this fact based story begins when DENICE OLIVER and the two insurance investigators, NICOLE ROBINSON and DALE COX, show up at the San Francisco Financial District offices of Universal Imports, asking for JONATHAN MOORE, a distinguished African American, grey haired man in his early 60s, who happens to be the CFO of this distinguished international company.

Jonathan can guess why they're there. He's been through this before. Nevertheless, he patiently lets them say their piece. He doesn't have to urge them to get to the point, since he has already guessed what the point is.

As Denice A. Oliver (a real person) and the three insurance investigators make their case, Jonathan cannot help focusing on the attractive light skinned black beauty, Nicole who, despite her 45 years of age, he surmised would still be a sensation in a Playboy photo shoot.

The two women and Dale Cox are giving Jonathan the background, as they know it, into an Antwerp diamond heist that took place at the Diamond Center, in 2003.

As the three take turns giving Jonathan the background of what many call the "heist of the century," WE SHOW film footage, some STOCK, of what the three are describing. Some of the descriptions come from the herein above section entitled: "Details that came out Later."

After spending 20 minutes IN REAL TIME watching select DVD news footage screened on Jonathan's 40 inch flat screen HD TV, including that featuring the trial of the so-called Italian mastermind, Leonardo Notarbartolo, the three investigators finally ready to get to the point of their visit. Jonathan, however beats them to it.

"The way I see it," Jonathan inserts, "is that you're here, telling me all this, because you want me to retrieve the missing loot for you."

The three insurance investigators smile, sheepishly.

"My only question is who recommended me to you?"

It's Nicole who begins the explanation. "A few of the stolen cut and polished diamonds showed up at various Las Vegas pawn shops. Since they all carried the GIA laser engraved registry numbers, and were pawned, not sold, the pawn shop owners merely determined that they were not conflict, or *blood* diamonds before paying out two-thirds their retail value."

It's Dale Cox who finishes the narrative. "When the diamonds weren't redeemed, the pawn shop owners ran a check on the registry numbers, and contacted Clark County Sheriff Douglas Gillespie. Sheriff Gillespie then contacted Interpol, who in turn contacted Nicole and me."

Nicole picks up the narrative from there; which narrative is being reenacted in a SERIES of FLASHBACK SCENES. "Dale and I went Vegas hoping to get some kind of lead on who pawned the diamonds but ran into a dead end."

Jonathan cuts to the chase. "So it was Sheriff Gillespie who suggested you pay me a visit?" Again, the three sheepish smiles.

Once the three French investigators have left the premises of Universal Imports, Jonathan is on his *burn*, prepaid cellular phone.

At his Carmel Highlands estate, located on a secluded bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the estate's owner, Harry Fletcher, who sometimes goes by the name of ROBIN TEMPLAR, is in his hangar performing maintenance on his helicopter when his own prepaid cellular PHONE RINGS. (NOTE: 4800 square foot designer house and adjacent hangar actually exist).

Robin answers, "Templar!"

Jonathan Moore, of course, is on the other end, calling from his San Francisco Financial District office. "Robin, I think I've found our next caper...and it's a big one; the biggest we've ever attempted."

Our story takes off from there as Jonathan and Templar put together their team and go after the unrecovered loot from the great Belgium diamond heist.

Many questions arise. First how many of the past team members will Jonathan and Templar be able to entice to come back for this...perhaps the final caper? And secondly, how many team members will survive when the bad guys get wind that they are being pursued by the mysterious and resourceful Robin Templar.

In San Francisco, aboard Jonathan's 102 foot twin mast schooner "Sweet Charity," moored at the San Francisco Marina, Robin Templar (AKA Harry Fletcher) and Jonathan Moore (no aliases) are contemplating the team members they will need to find and retrieve the stolen loot possibly scammed from the insurance companies.

The problem is that with one or two exceptions, the team as been scattered and are busy doing their own thing. These exceptions are, of course, CHARDONNAY Rogers who's known by the San Diego Police Department as the highly regarded Detective Sergeant Marianne Morrison, and Sean Easton, who when on a caper goes by the name Douglas SHINAMAN.

It's hard to figure the attractive "Chardonnay." She obviously has some Hispanic or Mediterranean blood in her and if one had to guess it would be that her true age is probably from mid twenties to early thirties; but that's a guess.

Don't be captivated by the disarming Irish brogue of Douglas Shinaman. He can open any lock or safe with an ease that even Harry Houdini would envy. When not on a caper, Shinaman goes by the name of Sean Easton and is the sole owner of a number of multiplex cinemas in the Southern California area.

The only team member ever to do time as a result of working one of Robin Templar's capers, Louis "Duke" Osgard – who goes by the name of Patrick PALMER when working a caper – is the owner of a very successful chain of sports bars in the states of Georgia and Florida. He's also married to a gorgeous Navy JAG officer who keeps him on a short leash. He will be the most difficult one to recruit back into the fold, since his wife will have to approve.

Another recruit to Templar's previous team is San Francisco police inspector David Morgan who, like Jonathan Moore, has no nom de Guerre and has always worked a caper as himself. But David recently inherited a classified second growth (Deuxièmes crus) winery in Bordeaux's wine rich Pauillac designated district and together with is wife, the former Lieutenant Bridget Picard of the National Police's Judiciaire, is well on his way to monumental success. Like "Duke" Osgard, David MORGAN could only come aboard with his wife's blessing.

With former Judiciaire Lieutenant Picard looking after the winery, David joins the team, often consulting with his wife on French legal procedures for the benefit of the team as a whole.

And then there's the team's computer expert, the sexy Kazakhstan, Rayana Kakhimov, who currently lives in Kazakhstan and works for the Central Asian Spaceport Cosmodrome. RAYANA has pulled two capers working with Jonathan and Robin Templar's team and made a lot of money doing so. For this reason, it might be difficult to recruit her.

For that matter, everyone working a Robin Templar caper has made beaucoup bucks and this could become a factor in recruitment. They just might not be hungry enough to once again go in harm's way.

Jonathan explains to Templar the fee agreement he worked out with the three insurance investigators. "I asked for twenty percent, they offered five and we settled for ten; expenses off-the-top, of course. If they knew of our lavish life styles, they would never have gone for that part of the deal."

Templar smiles. I'm sure our various charities will be most pleased. ...So how much do you think is still missing?"

"Denice Oliver, the original investigator, estimates as much as eighty million," Jonathan reflects.

"No sense going after the actual thieves," Templar surmises. "The ones we need to investigate are the dealers who put in the highest insurance claims."

Jonathan concurs, then adds, "For years I've dreamed of robbing the Antwerp Diamond Center, but I just couldn't persuade you to trust me that it could be done and that I had a full proof way of pulling it off. My approach was somewhat different from Notarbartolo's, but just as effective if not more so."

Templar reminisces, "In those days, our motives were good but our methods were not. Thankfully, we've evolved."

Jonathan nods agreement.

The three week search for the missing diamonds will take Robin Templar and his team to the world's diamond centers and beyond; South Africa, Tel Aviv, Russia, London, Switzerland, New York City, and, of course, Antwerp itself will be visited by Robin Templar's team in attempting to retrieve the stolen loot.

And, of course, once the corrupt diamond dealers get word that they're being pursued by Robin Templar and his team, all bets are off. The corrupt dealers have only one choice...to eliminate Templar and his team from the face of the earth. And, of course, they have the money in which to accomplish their objective.

As the team fights for its life, life's lessons are learned.

In the beginning the teams' approach to their capers was admittedly wrong, even though their overall objective was noble. Now that they're working for themselves, the heart seems to have gone from what the team was trying to accomplish in the beginning; that is, helping the disadvantaged. Have they now become mere mercenaries...guns for hire?

Whether or not this loss of moral objective will destroy the team remains to be seen as they fight for their physical existence.

PRODUCTION NOTE: There is some contemplation among Robin's merry band that if successful in recovering a significant amount of the stolen diamonds from Antwerp center, that they would then go after the eight masked gunmen who stole \$50 million worth of diamonds taken in the "The Great Diamond Heist Cross-up II." Naturally, should this occur, the two diamond caper films would be filmed simultaneously.

Coming next: The final episode, part six, of the cross-up TV and book series, "The Great Diamond Heist Cross-up II"

END