

David Wang
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What Movies are Made of

Gustav Graves is the latest villain to meet his match in James Bond's newest movie "Die Another Day." The plot featured a North Korean bent on ultimate riches and power through the trading of African conflict diamonds. But, it seems that the latest drama in Antwerp, the diamond trading capital of the world, had the capability of dwarfing this blockbuster. Discovered on February 17th, 2003, 123 of 160 vaults in Antwerp's Diamond Center were broken into and looted. The discoverer, Fuehrer, said opening the vaults was "like a hallucination." What were the odds? How did it happen? Who did it? How were they caught? Perhaps most importantly, how did the system fail?

80 % of all uncut diamonds are traded through Antwerp. These diamonds include every color, shape and size, from every place in the world, and may even include smuggled diamonds from the Congo and Sierra Leone. So, when it comes to their storage and protection, the diamonds aren't the only thing at stake, so is the reputation of a city. To protect this stronghold of diamonds at the city's major trading hub, the Diamond Center is a world class security system. The system is no Ocean's Eleven, but is definitely very close. The 160 vaults are sealed 2 stories below ground behind 30 centimeter thick blast proof doors. There are 24 hour multi-angled surveillance cameras and guards. There are only 2 ways to get in and out, through a subterranean parking garage and through the building itself. To get it you are required to have a card swipe as well as fill out sets of forms declaring purpose. To say 'Getting in' is hard would be an understatement. Yet, the robbers pulled off something papers have been calling "Mission Very Impossible."

The value of the missing diamonds is estimated at 100 + million US dollars. The last time such a heist occurred was in 1994 when 2 men robbed 5 vaults for a total of US 4.55 million. So how did they get past such a secure system?

Uncut diamonds come from every part of the world and in their raw state are almost untraceable. As a result, the only real way to trade before the cutting is by trust. Deals are secured with handshakes and oral agreements. Sometime in November 2000, Leonardo Notarbartolo, a dark haired Italian man with a criminal record rented out office space at the trading center, a common practice for businesses with valuables to deal. No one knew him in Antwerp, and in a center accustomed to trust, not background searches, he was allowed in. It is suspected that through some con artist skills and keen observation he, his friend, and both their wives managed to learn how to access or deactivate all the pertinent security systems in the vault area. Tied with paying off a guard, their path to diamond theft history was thus assured. On the weekend of February 15th-16th, tennis star Venus Williams was slated to compete in final matches for the diamond studded 1 million dollar trophy from the Diamond Games. As a result of such an event, rotating guards were reduced to one and only one entry point was open. Through bribing this guard, taping over all the surveillance cameras, and then replacing all the incriminating tapes with older copies, they covered their tracks. For such a complicated security system, it seems like the critical failure was human. Whether it is the human interest in sports, the lack of dedication to a security job, or the reliance on trust, it is obvious a human factor contributed to the failure. For an robbery so many people though should be

attributed to a failure of technology through the ingenuity of a few it seems this accident wasn't so 'Normal.' Through some conning, a little under 2 years of dedication, the robbers circumvented the security.

It ends up the four robbers were caught around March 1st, when police happened to discover a bag containing plans for the heist carelessly thrown out a car's window onto the side of a highway. This ironic act of carelessness in such a complex plan sealed their fates (yet another human failure). Police continued to gather evidence and immediately arrested Notarbartolo and accomplice Antonio Faletti when they showed up at the Diamond Center. In another human failure, an inspection of a vacuum cleaner bag in what was otherwise a cleared out apartment contained a stray diamond that verified their guilt.

Trial dates have yet to be set, the diamonds still to be found, but for this story, the failure was certainly human. Perhaps the weakest link in any complex system is the man NOT the machine.