

## Las Vegas robber loses gamble - Los Angeles Times

Written by Administrator  
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The heist was as brief as the spin of a roulette wheel, as dramatic as a Hollywood caper.

While much of Las Vegas slumbered Tuesday, a gunman made off with \$1.5 million in casino chips from the opulent Bellagio hotel and casino. What followed was something of a metaphor for this luminous gambling town.

There was hype. Lots of it. And romantic notions of a real-life "Ocean's Eleven," in which a crack team of thieves plots to rip off the Bellagio and two other casinos on the Las Vegas Strip.

Blame the dazzle surrounding the armed robbery on a view of Sin City that's been partly fueled by Tinseltown: That with millions of tourists betting billions of dollars each year, some of that cash is ripe for the taking.

But as is often the case with Vegas and its reputation, the reality is far different from the spin.

In truth, the motorcycle bandit likely sped off with the same amount of winnings as most Vegas low-rollers — next to nothing.

The predominant reaction here: What a fool.

Should the thief try to cash the chips — in particular those valued at \$25,000 (yes, some people use them) — he'd probably end up behind bars. Casinos would likely track such a high denomination, possibly with radio-frequency identification technology that works much like a bar code.

"He made off with pieces of plastic that probably cost the casino 70 cents each," said Robert Del Rossi, a Las Vegas gaming consultant.

At first blush, casino floors appear to be easy marks. They are behemoth warrens of poker

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tables and slot machines and restaurants and lounges. Gamblers are focused on their cards or their vodka tonics. A patron in motorcycle garb looks no more out of place than one dressed as Elvis.

And Las Vegas casinos have suffered several high-profile thefts over the years. Nearly all of the plunder was cash.

In 1993, a pair of armed robbers made off with one of the largest bounties — \$2.95 million — from an armored car outside the down-market Circus Circus hotel. One robber turned herself in after more than dozen years in hiding, but authorities failed to hunt down her partner and his windfall.

Now, said Willy Allison, a Las Vegas security consultant, casino security teams are often too understaffed to properly wander the casino and monitor "eye in the sky" cameras, particularly since the recession forced layoffs.

"They have 2,000 cameras on the floor, but cameras don't have minds, do they?" he said.

Still, such an elaborate high-tech heist as the one portrayed in "Ocean's Eleven" is unlikely. So says security expert Ken Braunstein, who also served as a consultant for the [George Clooney](#) movie. "It was fun to watch, but nothing in that movie could happen," Braunstein said.

Low-tech casino schemes are rare as well.

Gambling halls are packed with potential witnesses. Cameras often capture a robber's every step, from *porte-cochere* to craps table. Before convicting [O.J. Simpson](#) in the 2007 armed robbery of two sports memorabilia dealers, Las Vegas jurors watched tape of him and his crew wandering the Palace Station hotel.

The Bellagio theft was the 10th this year, Las Vegas police said. Its perpetrator was probably

also responsible for another robbery, in which \$20,000 was pilfered from the Suncoast Casino cage during a poker tournament Dec. 9.

In the most recent case, the bandit parked his black sport motorcycle outside a Bellagio valet area about 3:50 a.m. Tuesday and scurried into the sparsely populated casino. About 6 feet tall and 220 pounds, the man had his face mostly hidden by a white Shoei helmet. On his hands were black gloves.

He drew a gun, barked at gamblers to step back from a craps table and dumped chips ranging in denomination from \$100 to \$25,000 into a bag on his waist. He sprinted off.

Security guards didn't give chase, and with good reason, said David Schwartz, director of the Center for Gaming Research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

"Which is a worse headline?" asked Schwartz, a former casino security guard. "'\$1.5 million stolen from the Bellagio in chips'? Or 'Three innocent bystanders dead in gun battle'?"

While heavy on brazenness, the crime will probably be light on payoff, experts said.

A chip from one hotel, for the most part, can't be swapped with those from other properties, and police will likely scour the Internet for peddlers of high-dollar chips. Also, Nevada judges have little tolerance for casino-related crimes.

"It's not going to be a big deal at the other end, and he's not very smart," security expert Braunstein said.

Even silver screen thief Danny Ocean ended up, at least briefly, in the slammer.

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