

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Waving a gun, a motorcycle helmet-wearing bandit ordered wide-eyed gamblers and dealers back from a Bellagio craps table, and quickly stashed at least \$1.5 million in casino chips into a bag.

As he fled, casino security had a choice: Let the armed robber escape, or get into a dangerous shootout.

In the end, the bandit casually jogged out of the posh resort — every step captured by surveillance cameras, and broadcast later around the world. He disappeared into the neon light of the Las Vegas Strip.

"He had a gun. You just don't want that guy to fire that gun," said David Schwartz, director of the Center for Gaming Research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and a former casino security guard.

"Which is a worse headline? '\$1.5 Million Stolen from Casino'? or 'Patrons Killed in Casino Firefight'?"

A day after the brazen heist, police were trying to locate the mysterious bandit while they kept watch for anyone trying to cash big-denomination chips, from \$100 to \$25,000, like the ones stolen.

Experts and police say, for all the risk, the robber may be staring at colorful, but worthless chips.

Police Lt. Clinton Nichols said the chips aren't cash, with no monetary value unless they're taken back to the Bellagio.

Chips are unique to casino properties and are generally not interchangeable, although state regulations let casino companies redeem sister properties' chips with some restrictions.

Gordon Absher, spokesman for Bellagio owner MGM Resorts International, wouldn't say whether MGM Resorts properties are among Las Vegas casinos that embed radio frequency devices inside the tokens.

Schwartz said the stolen chips could also be hard to redeem in an era of anti-terrorism currency exchange laws.

"If you even transact one \$25,000 chip, you're over a \$10,000 federal currency reporting limit, and you have to provide identification," he said. "And if you try to structure a transaction to avoid reporting, that'll alert the feds anyway."

Las Vegas police say detectives are following promising leads, and hope someone may be able to recognize the robber's helmet and jumpsuit from video and photos broadcast on television and the Internet.

Nichols said police haven't found the white-striped Shoei helmet or the black sport motorcycle, and said detectives were tracking pranksters posting Internet offers to sell casino chips for pennies on the dollar.

"They may think it's funny," Nichols said, "but we have to check every one of them out."

Police say there are usually fewer than 10 casino robberies a year in Las Vegas — fewer still on the Strip itself. So far this year, there have been 10 citywide, Nichols said.

Schwartz said the quick and low-tech nature of Tuesday's robbery would be very hard to prevent.

Casino's choice: Let bandit flee or start shootout - TMCnet

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 18 December 2010 15:31 -

Police say it took less than three minutes for the robber to pull off the heist.

The bandit entered a casino entrance from Flamingo Road, strode fewer than 500 feet to a craps table, brandished the handgun at the 10 to 12 patrons and three or four dealers with chips piled on the green felt, scooped up the loot and ran.

The bandit "walked in with his helmet on, the table was very close," police Officer Barbara Morgan said. "He pulled the gun out, told the patrons to get back, took the chips, put them in a bag on his waist and turned and jogged out the door."

Casino security officers didn't confront the robber, but a ceiling security video camera followed his path out the door. Morgan said a 911 call was placed to police while the man was still in the casino. He was gone by the time police arrived.

"He's got a gun. He steals the chips and leaves, rather than taking hostages. You have to think tactically," she said.

Related Images:

[Powered by WizardRSS](#) | [Work At Home Jobs](#)

Source: http://news.google.com/news/url?sa=t&fd=R&usg=AFQjCNE_vbcpnFJKnsN1DiPna9OubUHLqw&url=http://topnews360.tmcnet.com/topics/associated-press/articles/2010/12/18/127943-casinos-choice-let-bandit-flee-start-shootout.htm