

FLAWLESS

INSIDE THE LARGEST
DIAMOND HEIST IN HISTORY

SCOTT ANDREW SELBY
and GREG CAMPBELL

author of
Blood Diamonds

FLAWLESS

FLAWLESS
INSIDE THE LARGEST
DIAMOND HEIST IN HISTORY
SCOTT ANDREW SELBY
and **GREG CAMPBELL**



New York / London
www.sterlingpublishing.com

STERLING and the distinctive Sterling logo are registered trademarks of Sterling Publishing Co., Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Selby, Scott Andrew.

Flawless: inside the largest diamond heist in history / by Scott Andrew Selby and Greg Campbell.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4027-6651-0

1. Robbery--Belgium--Antwerp--Case studies. 2. Jewelry theft--Belgium--Antwerp--Case studies. 3. Diamond industry and trade--Belgium--Antwerp. I. Campbell, Greg. II.

Title.

HV6665.B422003 S45 2010

364.16'28736230949322--dc22

2009040766

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Published by Sterling Publishing Co., Inc.
387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016
© 2010 by Scott Andrew Selby and Greg Campbell
Distributed in Canada by Sterling Publishing
c/o Canadian Manda Group, 165 Dufferin Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6K 3H6
Distributed in the United Kingdom by GMC Distribution Services
Castle Place, 166 High Street, Lewes, East Sussex, England BN7 1XU
Distributed in Australia by Capricorn Link (Australia) Pty. Ltd.
P.O. Box 704, Windsor, NSW 2756, Australia

Manufactured in the United States of America
All rights reserved

Sterling ISBN 978-1-4027-6651-0

For information about custom editions, special sales, premium and
corporate purchases, please contact Sterling Special Sales
Department at 800-805-5489 or specialsales@sterlingpublishing.com.

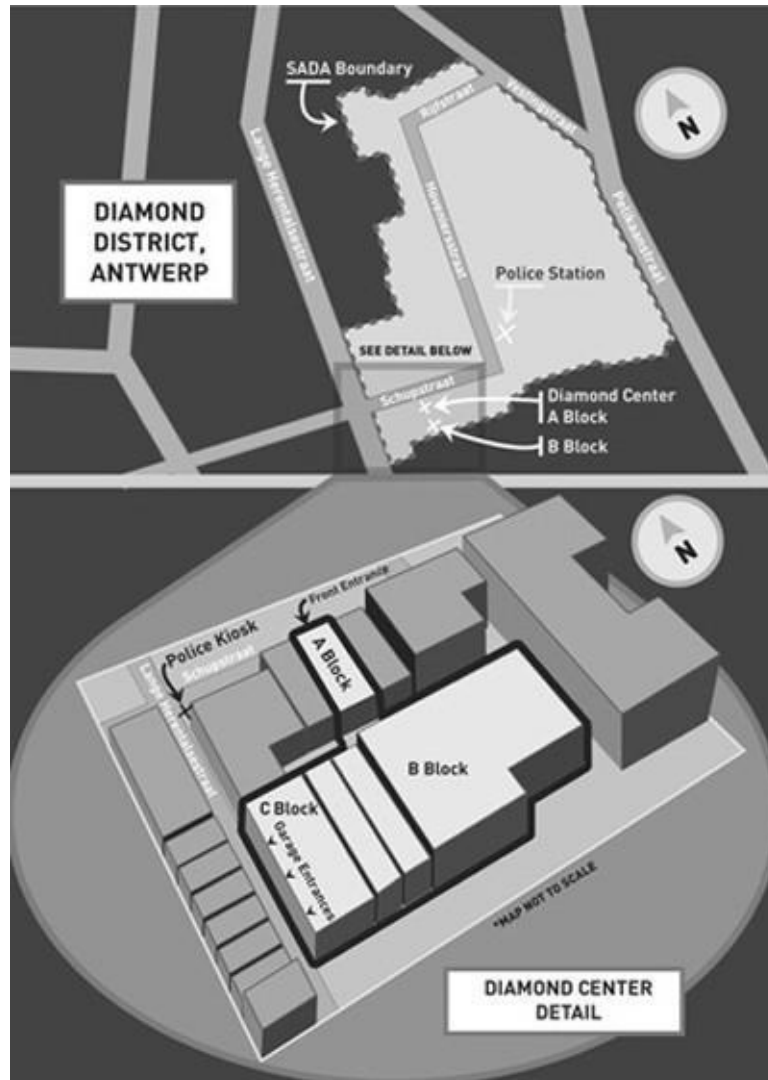
For Sweden:
The Land of Wild Strawberries and Dalahästar

—SCOTT ANDREW SELBY

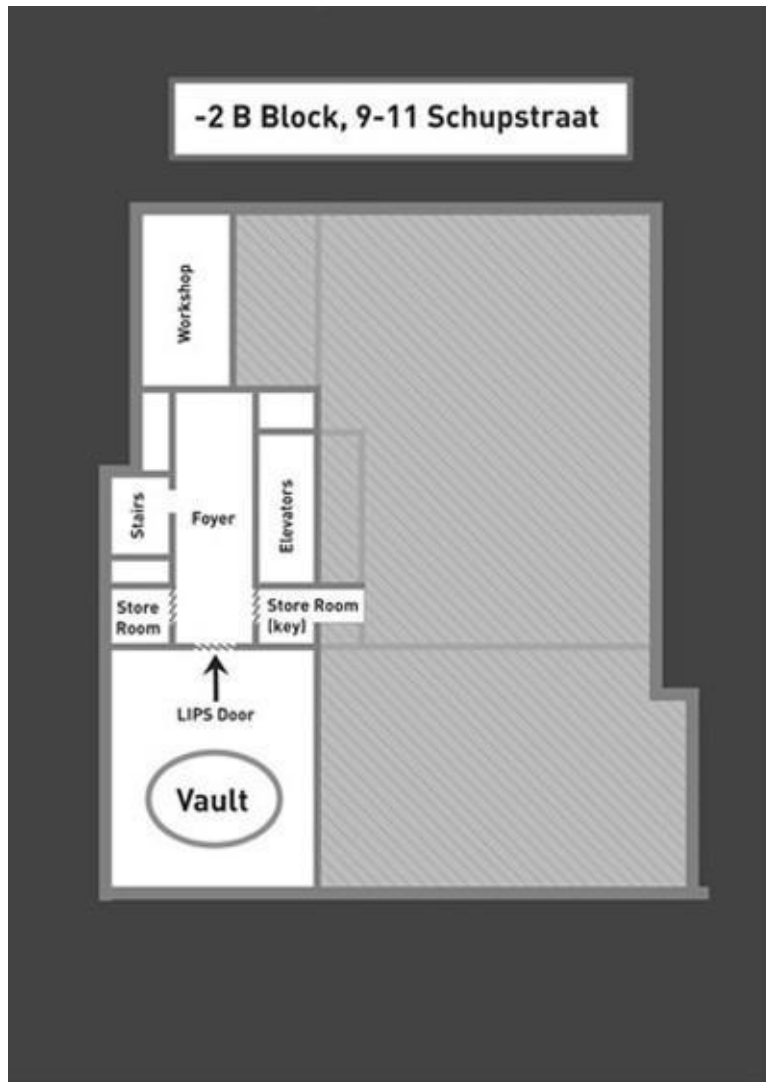
For Rebecca and Turner

—GREG CAMPBELL

Map of the Diamond District



Map of the Vault



“Let us not be too particular. It is better to have old second-hand diamonds than none at all.”

—Mark Twain

CONTENTS

[A Note from the Authors](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter One: The Trojan Horse](#)

[Chapter Two: The School of Turin](#)

[Chapter Three: Probing Missions](#)

[Chapter Four: Where the Diamonds Are](#)

[Chapter Five: The Plan](#)

[Chapter Six: Safeguards](#)

[Chapter Seven: My Stolen Valentine](#)

[Chapter Eight: The Heist of the Century](#)

[Chapter Nine: One Man's Trash Is Another Man's Treasure](#)

[Chapter Ten: Been Caught Stealing](#)

[Chapter Eleven: Checkmate](#)

[Chapter Twelve: The Trial](#)

[Chapter Thirteen: The Loot](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Joint Acknowledgments](#)

[Appendix](#)

[Selected Bibliography](#)

[Notes](#)

[Index](#)

[About the Authors](#)

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

Researching and reporting on the 2003 Antwerp Diamond Center heist presented unique challenges. Most significantly, Belgium's justice system is not tilted in favor of public disclosure. Court records, police reports, and other documents are not readily available in most instances, and it is illegal for police detectives to discuss their investigations with journalists. This is the only criminal case in which detectives were permitted to break with that protocol.

The story in these pages was assembled from many sources in several countries. Key documents were discovered in a variety of places, as if collected during a scavenger hunt, and interviews with important characters took place in locales ranging from seedy public parks and taverns to ultramodern prisons and ritzy diamond offices. Assembling this book has been much like assembling a puzzle, the pieces of which were found throughout Europe, sometimes in unlikely places. What emerged was not only a spectacular story about the heist of the century, but also a wide array of conflicting details, divergent opinions, and incongruous theories.

Most facts about the diamond heist are clear and indisputable. Others are less so. Even some detectives disagree about the precise course of events. We strove to present the most accurate representation of the crime as possible through deduction, logic, common sense, and triangulation of facts from reliable sources. Where there is a dispute as to what happened, it is noted in the text or in the endnotes.

With a crime such as this—one that produced equal parts awe and conjecture to the degree that it has achieved mythical proportions—it's fitting that there remains some mystery as to precisely how it was pulled off. Only a small group of men know for sure, and to date not one of them has provided a full and credible explanation, if they've spoken about it at all.

Scott Andrew Selby and Greg Campbell
October 2009

PROLOGUE

Ali Baba expected to find only a dark and obscure cave; and was much astonished at seeing a large, spacious, well-lighted and vaulted room . . . He observed in it a large quantity of provisions, numerous bales of rich merchandise, piled up, silk stuffs and brocades, rich and valuable carpets, and besides all this, great quantities of money, both silver and gold, some in heaps and some in large leather bags . . . He took up at several times as much as he could carry, and when he had got together what he thought sufficient for loading his three asses, he went.

—*The Arabian Nights*

The white-tiled floor of the vault was littered with diamonds, pearls, emeralds, rubies, gold, and silver. Empty velvet-lined jewelry cases, cardboard cigar boxes, and tin-clasped metal containers lay amid sparkling gemstones of every imaginable cut, color, clarity, and carat. There were ancient heirlooms, gilded bond notes, a Rolex watch, and a brick of solid gold heavy enough to stub toes. Loose stones rolled and bounced like marbles as the detectives picked through the debris, their low gasps and whistles of amazement echoing softly in the bright underground chamber. Detective Patrick Peys thought that if he were to shovel it all up, pour it into any one of the empty and discarded containers scattered about, he would have enough wealth to finance a decadent retirement not only for himself but also for the five other detectives in his unit of specialized diamond-crime investigators.

Like everyone else who descended to the bottom floor of the Antwerp Diamond Center that day—Monday, February 17, 2003—Peys needed some time to process the enormity of what he saw. He was no stranger to audacious crimes committed—or at least attempted—in Antwerp’s high-security Diamond District, but he’d never seen anything like this.

By almost any measure, the safe room two floors underground was as impenetrable a fortress as any to be found in the tightly protected Diamond District. Its walls of brushed-metal safe deposit boxes, which stood pillaged of an amount of treasure yet to be calculated, were inside a room equipped with a light sensor, a motion detector, and an infrared heat detector. Each of the safe deposit boxes had been locked with a key and a three-letter combination known only to its owner, yet more than half of them now stood open and empty. The room itself was secured with a foot-thick, double-locked, bombproof steel door armed with a magnetic alarm, as well as a locked, gated inner door that could only be opened with a buzzer from the control booth on the main floor. Both of those doors stood wide open that morning, undamaged.

These physical barriers were only the capstone of the vault’s security. Over the weekend, when the crime occurred, the building had been sealed with heavy, rolling metal barriers that covered locked plate glass doors at the main entrance and heavy

mechanical vehicle arms at the garage entrance. Closed-circuit television cameras monitored the building's entrances, corridors, and elevators as well as the antechamber to the vault, the small foyer that the elevators opened into. The building itself was situated in the heart of one of the most secure square miles on Earth, within what insurance investigators called the Secure Antwerp Diamond Area, a three-block canyon of gray glass-and-concrete buildings as well defended against thieves as Fort Knox. The district was protected with retractable vehicle barriers at either end to prevent cars from entering—or leaving—and was blanketed from every possible angle by a multitude of video cameras. Those cameras were monitored around the clock by a dedicated, heavily armed police force whose sole job was to prevent theft. In fact, there was a police security booth only forty yards from the Diamond Center's front entrance and, in the other direction, a full-service police station just around the corner.

In the Diamond Center's main corridor two stories above the vault, panic gripped tenants who enumerated the contents of their safe deposit boxes to police officers and insurance investigators. One dealer lost a million dollars in cash alone. A woman who had inherited her husband's box and its contents upon his death found herself suddenly destitute; the large gemstones and irreplaceable heirlooms left to her by her husband were meant to finance her remaining years, and now they were gone.

Peys looked down at the piles of wealth and debris scattered across the floor. What was rolling under his feet—those gems and jewels, those scattered and discarded riches, the individual treasures of the building's tenants who had stored them in the vault under the reasonable assumption that they would be safer here than in any bank—were the items the thieves had left behind. They had robbed and ransacked more than they could carry.

The detective was momentarily overwhelmed by the scale of the heist. Someone had overcome all of these security measures and made off with an untold fortune of diamonds, jewelry, precious metals, and cash without tripping a single alarm or injuring anyone. Peys didn't say it out loud—not at the moment, anyway—but he couldn't help but be awed by the skill required for such a heist.

That thought was quickly followed by another, darker realization: whoever had pulled off this seemingly perfect crime would be impossible to find.

Chapter One

THE TROJAN HORSE

Money isn't everything. There's also diamonds.

—Proverb

Leonardo Notarbartolo set the world's greatest diamond heist into motion on a cold gray autumn day in 2000 with a smile and a polite “merci beau-coup,” as building manager Julie Boost granted him free reign of the place he planned to rob.

As far as she knew, Boost had simply signed a new tenant and filled another vacancy in the tower of offices at the Diamond Center, the largest office building inside Antwerp's storied Diamond Square Mile. The blue-eyed Italian was disarmingly charming. He said he was a diamond merchant interested in renting an office in the diamond capital of the world to supply his local retail stores in Turin, Italy, and his jewelry design business in Valenza. From what Boost could see, he'd be a perfectly adequate tenant.

In fact, Notarbartolo didn't plan to buy a single stone in Antwerp; he hoped to steal as many as he could carry.

Notarbartolo was prepared for whatever interrogation the building's manager might have prepared for him. He was armed with official-looking documents and glossy brochures describing his modest chain of jewelry stores in Turin. In his attaché case, he carried examples of his handcrafted jewelry manufactured in Valenza—shiny bracelets, necklaces, and diamond rings that he'd designed himself. He was prepared to explain that his business was going so well, particularly on the manufacturing side, that it made sense to open an office in Antwerp, where 80 percent of all diamonds bought and sold throughout the world changed hands. Anyone who was serious about trading in diamonds did business in Antwerp—and, by extension, so too did anyone who was serious about stealing them.

If Notarbartolo aroused any suspicions during Boost's first meeting with him, he allayed them by employing the most effective tools at his disposal: charm and good looks. At forty-eight, Notarbartolo was handsome, although he carried a few extra pounds and his dark hair was thinning. With his open and expressive face, he could evoke in complete strangers a warm feeling of brotherhood and kinship the moment the tiny lines around his mouth crinkled into a captivating smile. He acted as if everyone around him was an old and treasured friend. He had perfected the ability to melt defenses and subvert suspicion. And just as important, he had the skill to make you forget him within minutes—he was engaging, but only exactly as engaging as he

needed to be for the task at hand. He didn't want to create a lasting impression; for his purposes, it was better to be quickly forgotten. This was precisely why he had been chosen for this part of the job.

After Boost and Notarbartolo concluded their introductions, they embarked on a tour of the facility. As they strolled through the halls, Boost pitched the office building as a smart choice for a merchant like Notarbartolo. At the equivalent of about \$500 a month, the rent was competitive. Smack in the heart of the Diamond District, the building was conveniently located within steps of any business or service one might require, including three diamond quality–certification businesses, an array of cutters and polishers, supply stores that sold everything from loupes to grinding wheels, the country's import/export agency, and, of course, the wholesalers themselves. Belgium recorded tens of billions of dollars of transactions for both rough and polished diamonds every year; in the course of just an average day, some 200,000 carats were traded, representing a value of about \$200 million. Practically every decent-sized stone ever mined made its way at some point through the Diamond District's three city streets. Many of those diamonds—hundreds of millions of dollars' worth—circulated among the offices at the Diamond Center.

Boost was a prim and petite woman, her short blonde hair done in an almost retro-looking no-nonsense poodle cut. She toyed with the eyeglasses hanging around her neck on a long gold chain as she recited the building's amenities. None of it was news to Notarbartolo; he already knew everything she was selling him on, and he didn't care at all about such details as the affordable rent. While he was in fact an Italian jeweler, it was cover for his true vocation: Notarbartolo was a renowned thief in Italy embarking on the most daring scam of his colorful career. As the tour wound through the building's hallways, he was far more interested in the building's security measures than its proximity to the conveniences of the diamond industry. He'd already started compiling a mental list of the things he observed long before Boost pointed them out.

The most obvious antitheft measure was the building's video surveillance system. There had been no attempt to conceal the cameras positioned in the hallways; quite the opposite, they were made as obvious as possible to relay the message to anyone walking around that they were being watched. Notarbartolo had already seen the security control room filled with monitors displaying images of tenants coming and going—he and Boost passed it in the main corridor as they began their tour—but he couldn't tell with a passing glance what sort of system it was. Did the cameras record digital images on a computer hard drive or onto videotape? The difference was critical, and it was just one of the many things he planned on learning with his newly acquired inside access.

They took the elevator to the fifth floor, Boost jingling a set of keys in her hand. They turned onto a narrow hallway with doors on both sides; these were private offices. Since each tenant had his own preference of video surveillance, the walls were festooned with different models of cameras that craned overhead like huge insects, each aimed at a doorway. These weren't so much antitheft measures as they were a means for the office occupant to see who was knocking at the door before deciding to let them in or not.

Boost unlocked door number 516, one of the few that didn't have a camera, and motioned Notarbartolo inside. The office was quite plain, furnished with just a desk, a

worktable, some cabinets, and a few chairs. Fluorescent light tubes flickered overhead, just like in the hallways, and the floor was covered with flat gray industrial carpeting. A bank of windows overlooked a gravel alleyway and some overgrown vacant lots behind the building. Tenants on the other side of the hallway enjoyed the better view of the Diamond District and Antwerp's famous skyline, dominated by the gothic cathedral that lorded over the sixteenth-century market square. But Notarbartolo didn't mind his subpar view. The office was just part of the ruse, a place to kill time between reconnaissance missions to the vault, the heart of the building where its tenants stored hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of diamonds, gold, cash, and jewels.

Finding the office more than satisfactory for his purpose, Notarbartolo was led back to the elevator, where Boost pushed the button for floor -2, two levels underground. When the doors slid open, Notarbartolo was struck by how bright the vault foyer was. Fluorescent bulbs lit the white walls and white tile floor, lending the space the appearance of an antiseptic operating room. A large white Siemens video camera was slung from the ceiling; the lighting in the foyer provided it with a television-studio-quality image of the small room.

They exited the elevator and turned left. At the end of the small room, a heavy vault door stood open into the foyer. Unlike in the movies, where vault doors are the color of handsome brushed chrome, this was painted a flat rust-colored maroon and it stood out under the stark lighting. A secondary steel-gated door barred entry to the safe room itself.

Boost rattled off the vault's security features as they walked to the gate and peered through the bars into the safe room, but she wasn't telling Notarbartolo anything he couldn't see for himself with his specially attuned eyes. He saw that vault door was made by the Dutch company LIPS, and was among the sturdiest ever constructed. It was at least a foot thick and made of iron and steel.

The big vault door was open during business hours, Boost explained, but the day gate was always closed and locked. In order to get inside the vault, one had to buzz the control room on the main floor by using the intercom on the right side of the doorway. A guard would check the video monitor and, when he recognized the tenant, he would press a button that unlocked the gate. Boost demonstrated how it worked as she and Notarbartolo turned and stared into the shark's eye of the video camera. There was a loud click from the gate. She pushed it open, and they stepped inside.

The low-ceilinged safe room was an almost perfect square about three times the size of the foyer, and just as brightly lit with rows of overhead fluorescent tubes. It looked deceptively empty, but Notarbartolo knew that the honeycomb of 189 brushed-steel safe deposit boxes covering the walls from floor to ceiling was filled with immense wealth. Each safe deposit box had a keyhole and three golden dials; tenants needed both a metal key and an alphabetic combination of their choosing to access their treasures.

Notarbartolo noted that the safe room was equipped with a combination motion detector/infrared sensor and a light detector, all of which were in plain sight. Even if thieves could get through the vault door, they wouldn't be able to move, emit body heat, or turn on the lights—much less crack almost two hundred safes inside the room—without setting off alarms.

Every night at 7:00 p.m., the tenants' treasures were sealed inside when one of the

building's two caretakers locked the LIPS door. The door stayed locked until 7:00 a.m. the following morning. On weekends, the vault remained closed from Friday night to Monday morning. There were no exceptions.

There were more than locks keeping this room safe. The vault door was armed with a magnetic alarm that, like the other sensors inside the room, was connected to an offsite security company. A magnet the size of a brick was bolted to the door itself. When the door was closed, it connected magnetically with another that was bolted to the doorjamb. Opening the door would separate the magnets and break the magnetic field, triggering the alarm; the security company would immediately notify the police that a break-in was in progress.

There were human defenses to be avoided as well. One of the two caretakers, known as concierges, was always on duty around the clock. Both lived in private apartments in the office towers. Their presence and their work schedules weren't so much security measures—they also acted as twenty-four-hour-per-day assistants who opened garage doors for tenants needing to get into the building at odd hours. The diamond industry is international, after all, and there are times when a dealer has to do business with Hong Kong even when it's the middle of the night in Europe. Even though little more than glorified after-hours doormen, the concierges nevertheless had important responsibilities: They were the ones who locked and unlocked the vault door every weekday. They both knew the combination; they both had access to the key.



And so, with a flourish of pen strokes, Notarbartolo infiltrated the Diamond Center. As the police would later say, he became officially “operational” the moment he signed his real name on a lease agreement and a safe deposit box rental form. He signed as the proprietor of Damoros Preziosi, a front company that would never conduct a single legitimate diamond transaction. He sealed the deal with a three-month cash advance payment for both. Boost handed Notarbartolo three keys: one to his new office, one to his safe deposit box, and a microchipped badge-card to get through the turnstiles at the front entrance.

The Diamond Center hadn't required a reference check, a criminal background check, or proof that his company was registered with the Belgian government to export commercial goods. It was stunningly easy for Notarbartolo to insinuate himself where he didn't belong using just his charm and a few brochures. Still, walking out the front door with the keys in his pocket, he was aware that he couldn't yet let his guard down. Exiting the building didn't end his security concerns; if anything, it heightened them.

While the Diamond Center's 24/7 surveillance and antitheft measures were impressive, what made the building practically impenetrable was its location within the secure zone of the Antwerp Diamond District. This area, also known as the Diamond Square Mile, left nothing to chance when it came to securing its diamonds and the merchants who traded them. If a person had any doubts about the area's level of security, they would likely be dissolved in one visit, as its security precautions were both extensive and obvious.

The district itself was composed of three short streets connected end-to-end at 90-

degree angles creating the shape of a stiff S. The streets dated back centuries. They were old and narrow, a hard-angled ravine of steep concrete and glass office buildings. These three blocks were home to thousands of businesses that served the diamond industry in some way—banks, currency exchanges, supply stores, and four members-only bourses, which served as private diamond-trading cooperatives responsible for most of the diamond transactions that occurred throughout the world.

The Antwerp diamond industry's headquarters, which at the time was called the Diamond High Council (the Hoge Raad voor Diamant, known as the HRD), was located here, as was the Belgian government's diamond import/export agency. Brinks, the American armored car company, had a building here. The value of the diamonds in the pocket of a single person walking by was often enough to comfortably equip anyone for a life of luxury.

As a result of this concentrated wealth, the area's obsession with security bordered on paranoia. The three streets—Schupstraat, Hoveniersstraat, and Rijnstraat—were closed to almost all vehicle traffic. Each end of the district, at the tips of Schupstraat and Rijnstraat, was protected with a space-age anti-vehicle system composed of fourteen knee-high, foot-wide, steel cylinders that sprouted from the streets to form a wide oval, like a modern interpretation of Stonehenge. It was impossible to ram through this barricade with anything less than a military tank.

Only approved vehicles could get through, and arduously at that. Police officers at the Schupstraat entrance triggered a mechanism that caused the outside of the oval to retract into the ground, the great cylinders sliding down like pins inside a lock when a key is inserted. As the vehicle moved forward, the cylinders reemerged, trapping it for a moment inside the oval. Then the cylinders composing the inside arc of the oval slid down and the vehicle could drive into the Diamond District.

This anti-vehicle system had been implemented after Palestinian terrorists detonated a car bomb outside the ancient Portuguese synagogue on Hoveniersstraat in 1981, killing three and injuring more than a hundred. Since then, the barricades had served the dual purpose of protecting the district's substantial Jewish population and, as an added benefit, causing any gangs of thieves to scrap plans that involved driving up to their target in the hope of making a quick getaway.

Equally daunting, if not more so, was the district's aggressive use of closed-circuit television cameras (CCTVs) to provide round-the-clock eye-in-the-sky surveillance of every inch of the Diamond Square Mile. Dozens of shoebox-shaped cameras surveyed the area with their wide black eyes shrouded by metal hoods. They perched on the street corners, on overhangs, and on windowsills like sentinel gargoyles, sprouting cables, high-wattage floodlights, and stout brackets anchoring them to the walls. Some cameras were mounted ten stories high for global overviews, while others were positioned just ten feet off the ground for close-ups of everyone coming and going through doors that opened onto the Diamond District.

The majority of the cameras were privately owned and operated by building and business owners. In scores of security control rooms throughout the district, guards watched monitors that broadcast footage from every conceivable angle. As with the cameras inside the Diamond Center, the placement of these cameras was overt, to serve as a reminder to anyone coming or going that they were being filmed, watched, and recorded by someone. The white plastic casings of many cameras were smeared

with pigeon droppings, but that didn't dampen the impact they had on visitors.

Video was also fed to the district's dedicated platoon of specialized diamond police, who had their own cameras connected to joysticks and zoom lenses to follow the trail of anyone who raised their suspicion. The police also provided a physical presence by patrolling the streets in teams of two, and at two stations: one on Schupstraat next to the vehicle barrier and the other on Hoveniersstraat, a few paces from the synagogue. Uniformed officers were supplemented by colleagues in plain clothes who could easily be overlooked amid the throng of diamond traders circulating through the streets.

The overall effect of these security measures was an in-your-face display of armed, protected, and monitored fortifications that, over the years, had disheartened some of the world's most infamous criminals. No less notorious a crook than Richard "The Iceman" Kuklinski, Mafia boss John Gotti's personal hit man, had passed on a plot to pull a job in the Diamond District. He needed only one look around to see that security was simply too daunting.

"Tight as a nun's ass," he told his associates.



Notarbartolo might well have been thinking the same thing. But when he awoke on the day he was first going to use his new keys, he must have been buoyed by the knowledge that the initial part of the complicated—and, at that stage, still nebulous—plot to rob the Diamond Center had gone off exceptionally well. He had nearly unrestricted access to the building he planned to rob, as Julie Boost hadn't batted an eye at anything he'd told her. If she had any lingering doubts after he'd left her office, he was confident his story would hold up if she decided to check it out. He did, in fact, own three small jewelry stores in Turin, each of which did legitimate by-the-books business. Additionally, a call to Valenza, where his manufacturing business was located, would confirm he was well known among jewelers there. Notarbartolo was actually quite proud of his jewelry designs.

The only hitch would be if Boost called the police and mentioned his name. His track record with law enforcement in Turin wasn't so clean; among the detectives who investigated organized crime in the city he called home, his name was synonymous with theft. Considering the ease with which the transaction for his new office had been conducted, however, it was hard to imagine Boost would bother.

Notarbartolo's day began a few blocks from the Diamond Square Mile, in a small and dingy one-bedroom apartment that was, compared to his stately home near Turin, woefully second-rate. The walls were peach-colored and grimy, like a kindergarten classroom gone to seed. The floors, originally tiled with white laminate squares, were now so well trod that they appeared gray. The apartment came furnished with a mishmash of outdated black vinyl couches, painted plywood tables, a faded reddish rug, and a sagging mattress on a single bed. Like many of his countrymen, Notarbartolo treasured his meals, and it's not hard to imagine his disappointment in the cramped and Spartan kitchen. There was only enough room for a college dormitory-sized refrigerator and a tiny microwave that bore the scars of heavy use by the previous tenants. The stove and the dishwasher looked as if they'd been salvaged from a soup kitchen. It was fortunate he didn't plan on doing much entertaining.

The apartment on the seventh floor of Charlottalei 33 did have its advantages. There was a nice view onto the broad street out front that, in warmer months, was shaded with the leaves of maple trees planted in long rows in its green medians. The half mile to the Diamond Center took only about ten minutes to walk. The apartment's main draw, though, was its anonymity: Notarbartolo paid his rent in cash and his agreement with the landlord involved only a handshake, no paperwork. Part of his assignment was keeping as low a profile as possible; the tiny one-bedroom with its scuffed tiles and drippy faucets served that purpose perfectly.

While getting ready, Notarbartolo considered his wardrobe. Again, balance was key. Everything about his appearance needed to be both appropriate and forgettable. A stroll through the Diamond District showed a wide diversity of styles, from crisply attired Indians wearing sharp Armani suits with shiny leather shoes to Hasidic Jews in long black jackets, dark pants, white shirts, and old fashioned brimmed hats. There were also dreadlocked messengers in T-shirts and jeans, as well as a smattering of badly dressed tourists gawking at all the security cameras and police. In the end, Notarbartolo sought the middle ground, completing his ensemble with an overcoat and his attaché case.

The elevator in the apartment building was ridiculously small. Notarbartolo's bulky 5-foot-11-inch frame nearly filled the car. After it discharged him into a tiny lobby, Notarbartolo walked through the security door, past a bank of post boxes, and exited into the brisk air on Charlottalei. He was in character from the moment he stepped outside, a humble Italian jeweler on his way to work, just a tiny cog in the machinery of the multibillion dollar international diamond industry, a simple merchant among the hundreds who bought and sold diamonds in Antwerp.

Though he would soon become an expert in the little universe between his apartment and his office at the Diamond Center, Notarbartolo was still a stranger to the city during this morning walk on his first official day. Turning right outside the building, he strolled to the end of the street, where its neighborhood charm was left at the curb of a busy intersection. If he were to turn right from here, it was a short walk on Plantin en Moretuslei to the Delhaize grocery store, which was blessed with a decent selection of Italian meats, cheeses, and wine. If he turned left, he could stroll through Stadspark and admire its small groves of trees and its little manmade pond. Instead of turning, he walked straight ahead, past an old brick building across the intersection which was fitted with a modern blue and white illuminated sign that read *Politie*, which meant "police." Notarbartolo must have enjoyed the subversive thrill that came from walking by the local police station on his way to the Diamond District.

Beyond the police station hung a business sign with a familiar name: Fichet, the famous British safe manufacturer. Among locksmiths and safecrackers, the brand held an esteemed reputation, one Notarbartolo knew well. If you wanted to keep your valuables safe, Fichet was a godsend; if you were trying to steal those valuables, it was a curse. If there was any silver lining to the obstacles he faced, it was that the vault door in the Diamond Center wasn't a Fichet, although it was small consolation. LIPS vaults were among the best in the world, up there with other well-respected manufacturers like Tann and Sargent & Greenleaf. The Fichet store displayed vault doors, safes, and examples of bulletproof glass in its window, a signal to pedestrians that they were close to the Diamond District. It was also a sign for Notarbartolo to turn

right on the next avenue.

The moment he turned the corner onto the narrow boulevard, Notarbartolo appeared on the Diamond Square Mile's CCTV network, albeit as a dot in the background. If he were in a car, he could only go another block before being stopped by the security cylinders blocking Schupstraat that prevented unauthorized vehicles from continuing straight ahead. On foot, Notarbartolo simply walked through the barriers and past the police substation, a small enclosed booth filled with video monitors and, presumably, a small arsenal of weapons and ammunition.

In passing the security cylinders, Notarbartolo had entered an invisible shell of safety and security. Insurance investigators had a name for it, the Secure Antwerp Diamond Area, or SADA. The SADA was defined by a hard line drawn around all the buildings facing Schupstraat, Hoveniersstraat, and Rijnstraat. Diamond businesses outside that boundary on adjacent streets comprised what was known in insurance lingo as the ADA, the Antwerp Diamond Area. This area included a long row of glittering retail diamond shops for tourists on Pelikaanstraat, which abutted the SADA. There were still plenty of cameras in the ADA, but there were more cars and fewer cops; therefore, insurance premiums were generally higher for diamond businesses in the ADA than in the SADA.

As a rule, diamond dealers kept their goods inside the SADA, the three-block bubble of electronic surveillance and crack-proof vault doors. There was no hesitation when they needed to carry diamonds across the streets of the SADA to have them evaluated, polished, or sold. The merchants simply put them in their pocket and walked out the door. Or, if they wanted a little extra reassurance, they carried their goods in briefcases handcuffed to their wrists with high-tensile-strength steel chains. It was astounding to consider the wealth being toted from building to building in passing backpacks, attaché cases, and courier bags.

Considering the staggering value of the diamonds people carried—a small handful can be worth tens of millions of dollars—it was easy to conclude that diamonds were handled casually, almost recklessly, on the streets of the district. While most transactions took place indoors behind several layers of security, the streets were important meeting places for spontaneous wheeling and dealing; it was a testament to the diamond brokers' confidence in the Big Brother surveillance of a myriad of CCTV cameras and a squad of cops to discourage theft attempts. It provided them with the sort of psychic comfort needed to be able to produce from a coat pocket a paper parcel filled with millions of dollars' worth of diamonds while chatting with a colleague during a cigarette break.

Even on days when the Belgian sky was overcast, some of the diamonds being admired on the district's street corners were large enough to sparkle like miniature flashbulbs from twenty yards away. What was most amazing was not their beauty or their jaw-dropping value, but how unceremoniously they were unwrapped and passed from one unarmed merchant to another, right there in broad daylight in the middle of a busy street filled with strangers. The diamond dealers may have been offering each other sticks of gum for all the drama these displays seemed to generate.

A few paces beyond the security bubble, though, out into the ADA, this *laissez-faire* attitude evaporated. The feeling of exposure—to thieves, muggers, con artists, even to the possibility of getting hit by a car while carrying millions of dollars' worth of