

Expert Witness

How realistic are heist movies?

To find out, we assembled a team of convicted armed robbers to watch five crime thrillers and compare key scenes to the real thing. The results are shocking

1 Putting the gang together

MOVIE Reservoir Dogs

SCENE Los Angeles crime boss Joe Cabot assembles a team of professionals who've never met before and assigns aliases such as Mr Pink, Mr Brown and Mr White.

Dave Courtney It's far better for your confidence if your team are all good friends but how many are in prison today down to misguided loyalty? I estimate over half of them.

Joe Loya If you're going to risk being sent to prison then you need to know the people you're working with, or you'll have no understanding of how they'll behave in a tight spot. Not knowing someone's name is not anonymity. They know what you look like and the work you do, so they can still turn you in.

Terry Smith Prior to the "supergrass" era of the late '70s it was commonplace for a respected organiser to form a team from armed robbers from all across the country. After the supergrass era, British prisons were full of slack-jawed armed robbers serving chunks of bird down to poor judgement. This mistrust compelled robbers to work in family groups.

REALITY RATING: 7/10



On Vision
Reservoir Dogs
£1.99

2 The Job



© Warner Bros

On Vision
Heist
£1.99

MOVIE Heist

SCENE Robber Joe Moore (Gene Hackman) subdues a jewellery store's staff when his crew burst in wearing masks and brandishing weapons.

Joe Loya There was a slew of real-life takeover bank robberies right after the movie *Heist*, with everyone made to lie down so the thieves could get straight to the money. But passing a note is still the most common method in the States, followed by telling the cashier "Give me the money or I'll blow your head off!" I used notes for my first two robberies, then realised they were a distraction.

Dave Courtney To subdue the room by intimidation is a tried and tested method that's even used by the police. Bully boy tactics disorientate victims and make them more cooperative, so it would work on some jobs. On others, a letter passed over the counter would be the solution. Preferably with a photograph of their family tied up in a garage.

Terry Smith From experience, it is not necessary to use excessive violence during an armed robbery as having a handgun shoved in your face by a masked robber is usually enough.

REALITY RATING: 10/10



© Warner Bros 1972

On Vision
The Getaway
£1.99

3 The Getaway

MOVIE The Getaway

SCENE Bank robber Carter McCoy (Steve McQueen) uses timed explosives to create diversions as he roars away from the bank in a high-powered escape vehicle.

Dave Courtney In movies, it's always better to leave the scene with shrieking tyres in a hail of bullets, but in reality it is far more professional to leave completely unnoticed, drawing no attention to yourself.

Terry Smith There's no point in robbing the Bank of England if you can't get home, so no escape route, no robbery. Most robbers use a secluded footbridge to break chase continuity, giving them a chance to switch transport. In the movies, a chase is essential. In reality, the perfect getaway is much more sedate.

Joe Loya In the States, guys who do million dollar jobs will always have a getaway car. Getting away is the most difficult part, and the most thrilling. People think the robbery's the hard part but it's easier than the getaway. You only have a little bit of time before the cops get your description. In the US, banks are told to just give you the money and avoid a shoot-out by letting you walk away, because the FBI catch 97 per cent of bank robbers. So we just keep on doing it until we get caught.

REALITY RATING: 5/10

“Getting away is the most difficult part, and the most thrilling”

5 Doing Time

MOVIE *Escape From Alcatraz*

SCENE Every Alcatraz inmate finds a reason to stay hopeful. Doc spends his days painting, old Litmus keeps a pet mouse and Frank Morris (Clint Eastwood) dreams of swimming across the bay to freedom.

Dave Courtney I hated every second of every prison I was ever in. There is no such thing as a normal life as you are locked away from your loved ones, and the guilt of causing your loved ones so much suffering and hardship never leaves you. Purely for your self esteem, you act like prison doesn't affect you but the truth is that prison hurts.

Joe Loya I did time in a maximum security penitentiary, which is an entirely different world because everybody there is dangerous to some degree. But if you run with a group, and if you know how to survive, how to respect other men and how to get respect for yourself then at maximum penitentiary level, it's really all about economics. It's about making money, for example through gambling.

Terry Smith As the old adage proclaims, “there's no glamour in the slammer!” There is nothing normal about prison life. It is a highly policed and scrutinised environment that produces occasional outbursts of abnormal behaviour, and violence. Aged 23, I was sentenced to 15 years for an armed robbery. Two years later, I escaped from Wormwood Scrubs and lived in Central London for two years before being recaptured and given another 16 years. My saviours from the terrible ravages of long term imprisonment were the love of my family, education and the gym.

REALITY RATING: 8/10



On Vision
Escape From Alcatraz
£1.99

Who's Who?

Say “Leave it ahhh!” to our expert team of ex-criminals

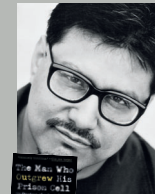


TERRY SMITH

Following his escape from a prison van in 1984, bank robber Terry became the most wanted man in Britain. He is now a crime advisor and published author.



Nil Desperandum: Never Despair
Apex Publishing, rrp £7.99



JOE LOYA

Dubbed the ‘Beirut Bandit’, Joe robbed banks in southern California and admits to the 24 stick-ups that the FBI know about. He now writes books and plays.



The Man Who Outgrew His Prison Cell
HarperCollins, rrp £6.39



Dave Courtney

During a lifetime of debt collecting and prison time, Dave, 48, has been shot, stabbed and had his nose bitten off. He organised the security at Ronnie Kray's funeral.



Dave Courtney's Heroes and Villains
Virgin Books, rrp £14.99

What Have We Learned?

- It's better to keep things in the family, unless your family rat on you.
- A gun in the hand is worth ten to twelve in Wormwood Scrubs.
- Stealing is easy. Making a getaway is the hard part.
- Criminals tend not to be an honest or trustworthy bunch of people.
- Serving porridge isn't as much fun as watching *Porridge*. Or eating porridge.

© Polygram Filmed Entertainment

4 Honour among thieves?

MOVIE *Fargo*

SCENE Kidnapper Gaear Grimsrud (Peter Stormare) neither likes nor trusts his partner Carl Showalter (Steve Buscemi), so he feeds him into a wood chipper once they've got the ransom money.

Joe Loya If you're in the world of sophisticated, vicious criminals, you're really screwed, because you don't even have to snitch to get stabbed in the back. *Goodfellas* is based on the true story of a big cash robbery. As the cops got closer, people started turning up dead because they were a liability, even though they didn't snitch.

Terry Smith The unwritten underworld code of honour has been eroded by paid informants. I was once set up by two informants, one a friend of mine. I was once lured into an armed police roadblock with a firearm planted in my vehicle and, if I hadn't stopped, I wouldn't be writing this now. The informants in this ultimately botched plot knows the score. They have become lepers and deserve all the grief they get.

REALITY RATING: 6/10

On Vision
Fargo
£1.99

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PICS: Moviestore Collection