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a handful of men palming a few diamonds. They didn't realise a second camera was watching from a different viewpoint.

The watchers are themselves watched by monitored cameras to ensure they haven't been paid to turn a blind eye to such activities. And from a secret location the watchers who watch

the watchers are also being watched.

Every imaginable way of stealing diamonds has been tried. Security man Tiene Nel, 44, was in his office near the gate one day when he noticed a pigeon acting strangely. The bird had flopped on the car-port roof outside looking utterly exhausted. When Nel climbed up to catch it the bird fluttered a few metres and then landed tiredly on another roof. The DDs gave chase, saw it land on the roof of a house in Oranjemund then disappear into a trap door. Inside, they found the pigeon in a loft, on its back a rucksack stuffed with 63 gems.

One of the weirdest stories was of two thieves who cut their way through the fence but got lost in the fog. The DDs chased the thieves but lost their tracks, then lost themselves. Next day, 50 kilometres out, other detectives searching the desert in a Land Rover for the lost diamond-runners and lost agents suddenly



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' Ashipali said.
a large video cam-

era on a tripod 200 metres away.
"Whatever you do, don't pick any-
thing up. The diamond detectives
are watching every move. If you do
something unexpected they'll send
a squad."

The gravel sucked from the
bedrock is sorted by a series of thun-
dering crushers, vibrating sieves and
whirling drums. About 99.7 per cent
is quickly discarded because it's too
big, too small or not heavy enough to
be diamonds. The tiny fraction re-
maining, called super-concentrate, is
sealed in huge trucks like armoured
tankers and transported to the cen-
tral recovery plant.

There, behind whorls of razor-
wire and watched by cameras,
powerful magnets remove anything
magnetic. What's left is then drop-
ped through an x-ray beam in which
diamonds and some other particles
flare like disco lights. An optic lens
detects this glow and triggers a gun
that fires a spurt of air at just the
right moment to deflect the particles
into a different bin. Now only .0015
per cent is left, or a little over 1.5 kilo-
grams out of 100 tons.

Entering through triple inter-
locked doors in walls 45 centimetres
thick, I was in the dim, hushed, blue-
carpeted haven of the sorting house.
Watched by three security agents,
nine women, wearing smart red and
black uniforms like flight attendants
— but with every pocket sewn up —
were hunched over brightly lit boxes
made of glass.

In every box a thin layer of the

super-super-concentrated ore was
fed over a vibrating tray. With her
hand in a leather glove sealed in the
glass, a sorter could pick up diamonds
with tweezers, yet was unable to
touch them with her fingers. One
stone in one or two thousand, flaring
brilliantly in the halogen light, was
deftly picked out and flicked into a
bin. "A diamond winks at you like
a living thing," says Hennie Kruger,
in charge.

At the end of this day the result is
spread out under lights behind ar-
moured glass: a shallow bowl of
frosted, gleaming stones about the
size of a modest helping of breakfast
cereal — 2 400 carats of quality dia-
monds worth millions.

Upon my departure I was x-rayed,
and my camera searched by a tech-
nician. Two DDs inspected the seams

of my wallet and my fingernails.
"Did you enjoy the visit, sir?" one
asked. We chatted, but the man was
not listening to my words. Instead,
he watched my mouth, checking that
I could talk and didn't have gems
hidden under my tongue.

Back in London I returned to the
dealer who had shown me the glit-
tering gem. After weeks of patient
cutting and polishing by craftsmen
nearly two-thirds of the stone had
disappeared. What was left seemed
to have trapped and concentrated
all the dazzle of sun, sea and surf
on the Diamond Coast. What would
the 11.9-carat gem be worth?

"Fifty-thousand dollars (about
R300 000) a carat or more," the deal-
er said. "But if a rich woman were to
fall in love with it, who knows?"

NAUTICAL NOTES



Like many girls of her age, my 14-year-old
daughter was mesmerised by the movie *Titanic*.
When she came home crying after seeing it, I
asked her what part she found so sad.

"I'm not crying about the movie," she said in
between sobs. "I'm crying because Leonardo DiCaprio doesn't even
know I exist!"

— LAUREL BOWEN

My niece's drama class was discussing *Titanic*. While the girls were
quick to relate their sadness about the tragic epic, none of the boys
would venture a response.

The teacher then singled out a boy sitting at the back of the
class. "John," she asked him, "didn't the movie have the same effect
on you?"

"No, it didn't," John replied. "I don't get 'emotion sickness.'"

— CYNTHIA WINN