

Brothers in alleged hotel heist scam appear in court

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Fahed Barbour, 19, (left) and his brother Riad, 28.

AT FIRST, the plan looked as though it had worked.

Three hours after a violent armed robber fled Preston's Olympic Hotel with more than \$100,000 cash, police were publicly calling for witnesses to the burglary.

They said security cameras had captured a balaclava-clad man assaulting a lone security guard with a pistol as he threatened patrons and demanded cash in the early hours of January 12.

But as revealed in *The Age* on Saturday, police soon found out the alleged robber, Riad Barbour, and the security guard, Fahed Barbour, were in fact brothers.

The Melbourne Magistrates Court heard yesterday that Fahed, 19, was working at the hotel under Riad's name and security guard licence.

Detective Senior Constable Anthoula Moutis told the court the pair allegedly hid their takings along with Fahed's passport in a safe at their sister's St Albans home.

Senior Constable Moutis said security footage showed Fahed had taken a phone call outside the hotel in the 10 minutes leading up to the heist.

He also ensured a glass door, that only he can open after 1am, could be entered by his brother when the robbery occurred about 3am, she said.

"They've orchestrated it together ... (Fahed) was in a position of trust when he was working at the venue. There were eight patrons at the venue who were terrorised."

The pair, both from St Albans, faced court yesterday on charges of armed robbery, assault, theft and aggravated burglary. Riad was also charged with possessing a small amount of the drug ice.

Defence lawyer for both men, George Balot, said Fahed deserved to be released on bail because his brother Riad, 28, said Fahed was not "a willing participant" in the robbery.

But Senior Constable Moutis said Riad had made "full and frank" confessions to police that implicated his brother.

"He said he had discussed committing an armed robbery with his brother at the venue," she told the court.

Shocked by the disclosure, Mr Balot argued that Fahed was a young man with no criminal history who could face up to two years in custody before possibly standing trial for the offences.

Magistrate Louis Hill agreed to grant Fahed bail after his sister, Racha Khouri, offered a \$2000 surety. Fahed was released on the condition he report to police three times a week and not apply for a security guard licence.

"I'm not sure he'll have much luck with that now anyway," Mr Hill said before remanding Riad in custody.

The pair will appear in court again on May 14.