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Batman bandit 'not joking'

Masked man pulls gun on shop owners

By Vanessa Phillips

The owners of a new Nelson party shop "froze in fear" yesterday when they realised a man wearing a Batman mask standing before them brandishing a gun was no practical joker.

A man with a full-facial black Batman mask walked into Creative Occasions in Alton St, at 12.55pm, and demanded money after pulling out a silver pistol from behind himself.

He walked out of the shop again, empty-handed, after co-owners Kevin and Glenys Johnston simply stared open-mouthed in silence.

Creative Occasions has only been open a week. It hires and sells party decorations and also decorates events such as weddings and Christmas celebrations.

"I started walking toward him, thinking 'he's got a Batman mask, he just wants to buy some party decorations'," Mr Johnston said.

"He pulled the slide on the gun and said 'get the money out of your till and stand away from me'," he said.

"In a party shop where theme parties are part of what we do it was just like 'someone's really getting into the swing of things'," Mrs Johnston said.

"The mask had pointy ears and everything. Then the pistol came out and we thought again. We just froze in fear," she said.

But the couple foiled the masked man by just staring at him, too stunned and scared to follow instructions.

He said 'oh, forget it then'," Mr Johnston said.

The man walked out of the shop and despite having a painful broken toe, Mr Johnston chased him.

The culprit hesitated outside the shop next door before running up to the corner, along Nile St, and sprinting down an alleyway to the back of a fish and chip shop in the block - where he had left a mountain bike. The man pulled off his mask and made his getaway on the bicycle through the Nelson Polytechnic campus.

Nelson police describe the man as having an olive complexion, aged between 18 and 20, of medium build, 1.7m tall, with short straight black hair, pimples on his face and wearing a checked blue and white shirt, faded light blue jeans and black shiny basketball-type boots.



Kevin Johnston

The pistol was silver, similar in shape to a Luger, with a form of workable action. Police said there was nothing to suggest it was a toy gun, although it did have some plastic parts on it.

The mountain bike was light in colour and had a helmet on the right side handle bar.

The man was probably in the shop for about a minute, Mrs Johnston said, although it felt "like and eternity".

"His eyes looked incredibly intense. You feel fear and then you get the shakes," she said.

"I'm still in shock but this is a minor setback, we're here to stay and looking forward to serving the people of this district in a slightly different manner than yesterday," Mr Johnston said.

Other shopkeepers had noticed the man before the attempted armed robbery, hanging around the block of shops, Mrs Johnston said. He had been yelling and swearing, which caused two of the shopkeepers to lock their doors in suspicion, she said.

Police wanted to hear from anyone who could help identify the man or who was near the Alton St - Nile St intersection at the time of the holdup.