

Fictional dramas in popular media aim to engage the audience through suspenseful and action-filled story telling. In doing so, often the storylines and characters in these dramas drift wildly from the reality upon which they are based. These disconnects from reality for the sake of the story can lead to popular misconceptions. In the interest of fostering greater understanding of how your local law enforcement agencies actually work, we will be looking at 5 common misconceptions of law enforcement in popular culture.

#1. **Miranda Warnings.** We've all witnessed that familiar scene unfold on the screen when the police finally catch the criminal, handcuff him, and instantly start reciting out a Miranda warning. Popular media would have us believe if cops don't instantly read you your Miranda rights, your arrest is invalid. This is completely inaccurate. In *Miranda v. Arizona*, the US Supreme Court stated that when a suspect who is in custody is questioned, that suspect must first be advised of their constitutional rights. In the real world, Miranda rights are read to detained suspects prior to any questioning. That may happen at the scene of an arrest, in an interview room, or in the jail depending upon how the officer elects to pursue the investigation. In Minnesota, our state supreme court has placed upon officers the requirement that, whenever practical, custodial questioning be recorded. This requirement is better accomplished in a controlled setting with good recording equipment rather than a random place a suspect is found and arrested. For these reasons, the reading of Miranda rights almost never occurs as the person is taken into custody.

#2. "Can you enhance that?" What would a good crime drama be without the studious crime technician who is able to miraculously take a blurry photo and, through computer wizardry, make it suddenly appear clear and focused. This is complete fantasy. I can tell you from experience, when you begin with a blurry and out of focus photograph you end up with a blurry, out of focus, and pixilated photograph when you try to "enhance" it. There are some tools that can change aspects of the photo to incrementally increase the clarity of the image, however nothing near the magnitude of what is shown in popular media.

#3. **Going in alone.** Crime dramas build suspense by putting main characters in situations filled with danger. Often, these characters pursue criminals alone or perhaps with one partner. Typically, this is the point in the story where the suspect effects an escape out the window or backdoor or when the suspect captures the main character. In reality, a chief goal of all law enforcement agencies is to reduce the danger and unpredictability of any situation. Law enforcement carefully plans searches and arrest attempts, covering escape routes and ensuring adequate personnel are present to keep officers or others from harm.

#4. A person can't be reported missing for the first 48 hours. What could build suspense in the audience more than knowing a criminal's victim is in terrible danger while the police stubbornly refuse to do anything about it for 48 hours. While this is a popular trope in crime dramas, it has no basis in the law. In Minnesota, there is no waiting period to report someone missing. Minnesota law is clear that anyone may report a missing person at any time to any law enforcement agency. Especially in cases where the missing person may be endangered, a law enforcement response within those first few hours is crucial to increase the likelihood of finding the person safe.

#5. The impossible marksmanship of the main character. Ever since the early days of film when cowboys and marshals rode across the big screen, movie and television writers have imagined stories where the main character, wielding only their trusty handgun, diffuses a potentially deadly

confrontation by shooting a gun out of the criminal's hand or perhaps intentionally wounding the criminal in an arm or a leg. Handguns, by design, are short range personal defense tools and not capable of the pinpoint accuracy of long guns. Law enforcement officers are trained to target the center mass of a threat in deadly force encounters because doing so will provide the greatest probability of ending the deadly threat requiring such force. Achieving accurate placement of rounds from a handgun takes hours of practice and is difficult under normal circumstances, much less under the intense circumstances present during a deadly force encounter. Striking an object whose profile is no larger than a hockey puck or a human limb that is moving around in the heat of an encounter is an extraordinary skill and a dangerous expectation for deadly force encounters.

For those who enjoy a good crime drama, please don't think I am trying to persuade you otherwise. Fictional stories are a great source of entertainment. My caution is to understand they are only entertainment and many of the elements of the story differ wildly from the realities of law enforcement. For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.